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Katie Gower

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Compassionate revanchism, homelessness, and the divided local state: the case of Spokane, WA

Katie Gower

Department of Political Science & Public Policy, Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA, USA

ABSTRACT

This study deepens our understanding of compassionate revanchism in the spatial management of homelessness in a relatively understudied, midsize city: Spokane, WA. Spokane has observed consistently increasing levels of homelessness in recent years and has been vastly understudied as a site of homelessness compared to larger American cities. This study investigates the internal workings of the City of Spokane in its efforts to solve its worsening homelessness crisis and presents a critical discourse analysis of compassionate revanchism in the process. Spokane's homelessness practices mirror the contradictory trend of persistent revanchist approaches coupled with increased funding to systems of care experienced in other cities. But a deeper analysis reveals a sharp internal conflict within the local state in Spokane, especially between the Mayor's Office, the City Council and other local state agencies. This conflict reflects a stark divide within the homelessness discourse regarding its primary causes and applicable solutions and demonstrates that local governments are not the singular actors that are frequently portrayed in the literature. In the process, compassionate revanchism is revealed to be indicative of a more complicated internal division within local government (between starkly opposing narratives regarding homelessness) as much as it is a singular ambivalent policy approach.

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Introduction

Homelessness and homeless policy in the United States (US) has transformed significantly over the past fifty years. The contemporary understanding of homelessness as a critical social problem did not emerge until the 1980s, when the impacts of economic recession, deindustrialization, and the defunding of welfare systems increased visible homelessness in urban areas and led to substantial media and activist attention (Rochefort & Cobb, 1992; Wolch & Dear, 1993). As rates of homelessness worsened so did the number of policies intended to address it. Initial approaches involved the creation of "continuum of care" models and large-scale federal legislation such as the McKinney-Vento Act of 1987, but soon pre-existing welfare-state policies and practices succumbed to an influx of neoliberal-informed "anti-homeless" policies (e.g. sit and lie ordinances,

CONTACT Katie Gower kgower@ewu.edu

anti-panhandling laws, enhanced policing, encampment sweeps) in the 1990s (Mitchell, 2011).

Such policies focused on individual responsibility and criminalization and have been characterized as distinctly punitive, a core element of what Smith (1996) identified as the "revanchist city" in the 1990s. Smith (1996) used the term "revanchism" to conceptualize this shift in policy and practice as part of a *vengeful* retaking of central city spaces by elites, best symbolized by processes of gentrification (also see Slater, 2017; Smith, 2002). This punitive approach to homelessness, and the resentment against the poor and people of color it embodies (Giles, 2017), continued into the 2000s (Aalbers, 2010; Amster, 2008; Beckett & Herbert, 2010; Gowan, 2010; Mitchell, 2011). The literature on the revanchist city in critical urban studies is now well documented (see Clarke & Parsell, 2020; Lawton, 2018).

Decades of revanchist homeless policies, however, have done little to diminish rates of homelessness in US cities, and in a post-Great Recession climate of reduced government budgets, governing actors and elected officials have been forced to reevaluate their approach (Peck, 2012). Although revanchism and its policies continue (see Anderson et al., 2024; Langegger & Koester, 2017; Robinson, 2019), common portrayals of the unhoused promoted by civic leaders and mainstream media have become more humanized (Brown, 2017; Wilson & Sternberg, 2012). This discursive shift has translated into more progressive, or "compassionate," policy approaches which appear notably ambivalent or even contradictory in their mixing of persistent criminalization with increased funding of robust systems of care, e.g. shelters and rehabilitative services (Clarke & Parsell, 2020; DeVerteuil, 2014, 2019; Herring, 2014; Herring & Lutz, 2015; Lopez, 2020).

This inconsistency led to calls (see DeVerteuil, 2014, 2019; Murphy, 2009) for research that investigated the complexity of this emergent "compassionate revanchism," an expression that characterizes the conflicting contours of contemporary homeless policy and practice (Hennigan & Speer, 2019; Margier, 2021). An example would be the increasing tolerance of encampments of unhoused people as long as they are peripherally located with respect to prime spaces of development (Przybylinski, 2020). While this tolerance may appear compassionate it is a stance that nonetheless remains firmly neoliberal and supportive of revanchist capitalist interests because encampments of self-governing unhoused people effectively relieve the local state of its social welfare responsibilities (Herring & Lutz, 2015; Sparks, 2012) while simultaneously removing them from downtowns and gentrifying neighborhoods.

Similarly, increasing shelter space may appear compassionate on the surface. Yet, due to the *Martin v. Boise* ruling of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in 2018 that prevents police from arresting and moving unhoused people sleeping in public spaces when shelters are full, the addition of shelter beds is what allows city government to continue their punitive practices (Hennigan & Speer, 2019; Herring, 2019, 2021). This approach also functions to seclude unhoused people into shelters (Hennigan & Speer, 2019; Herring, 2014), rendering their presence less visible (and, thus, less threatening) to consumer traffic and businesses. It works to legitimate encampment clean-ups as well by giving the following ultimatum: if we build the shelter capacity and provide the supportive resources you cannot continue to live on the street (Herring, 2019; Margier, 2021).

Much of the scholarship regarding compassionate revanchism portrays the local state as a singular actor that is operating in a concerted (if confused or inconsistent) fashion. This scholarship also tends to be biased towards a relatively over-studied and limited cohort of large US cities, such as Seattle (Anderson & Arms, 2023; Beckett & Herbert, 2010; Giles, 2017; Herring & Lutz, 2015; Sparks, 2010, 2012, 2017), Portland (Przybylinski, 2020; Margier, 2021; Anderson et al., 2022); Los Angeles (DeVerteuil, 2015; Stuart, 2016), and San Francisco (Gowan, 2010; Herring, 2019; Lopez, 2020; Murphy, 2009) on the West Coast. Following DeVerteuil (2014), to what extent is such a targeted focus limiting our knowledge of homelessness and homeless management? And how do the politics of compassionate revanchism manifest more widely in less-studied urban contexts? This study responds to these queries by deepening our understanding of the complex character of compassionate revanchism and unpacking the internal political fault lines of the local state in one under-studied, middle-sized U.S. city: Spokane, WA.

With skyrocketing housing prices vis-a-vis average wages (see Colburn & Aldern, 2022), Spokane has experienced a significant rise in unhoused people in recent years and the local state is currently grappling with how best to respond to this worsening phenomenon. This study illuminates the complicated intricacies of policy and practice within local government systems, which are anything but unified in homogenous ways. In this process, a more nuanced understanding of compassionate revanchism is offered. Specifically, I reveal a compassionate revanchism in Spokane embodied in part by the collision between devoutly revanchist sentiments among elected leaders and neo-Keynesian policy proposals from local state agencies grounded in starkly opposing understandings of the causes of homelessness. This conflict nuances existing understandings of compassionate revanchism as an inherently ambivalence policy approach rooted in a governing pragmatism subject to decades of neoliberal austerity and restructuring.

This paper, first, reviews the distinction between the individual and structural explanations of homelessness that are embedded within the wider discursive environment on homelessness (and compassionate revanchism in particular). This is followed by the relevant scholarship on compassionate revanchism in critical urban studies. Followed by a brief discussion of methods, I present a critical discourse analysis of primary and secondary data related to the prominent rhetorical themes that underpin the City of Spokane's official homelessness policies and practices. Revealed is a contradiction between official government policies and the implementation of these policies, the result of a local state that not only reflects compassionate revanchist ambivalence, but is also fraught with internal conflict. The paper concludes by discussing the study's implications for future research.

Compassionate revanchism as an (in)coherent policy approach

The individual framing of homelessness emphasizes homelessness as the fault of individual actions and primarily highlights personal responsibility as the core factor determining homelessness. This explanation is rooted in conservative, neoliberal notions of individual behavior as a determinant of economic success (Main, 1998). In short, poor people are to blame for their circumstances which can only be ameliorated by "pulling themselves up by their bootstraps." Mental illness and substance abuse are the most commonly discussed factors (see Chamberlain & Johnson, 2011). However, while these

conditions increase one's vulnerability to losing housing and should be considered critical risk factors, they are not major causes of homelessness. In Spokane County's 2022 Point-in-Time (PIT) analysis, of the 1,575 adults surveyed, 363 (23%) suffered from a substance abuse disorder, and 495 (32%) suffered from some form of mental illness (City of Spokane, 2022a). But 4 percent of the 513,402 people living in Spokane County in 2020 suffered from mental illness, far more than the 495 counted in Spokane County's 2022 PIT count (City of Spokane, 2022a). To explain this necessitates consideration of other factors (i.e. lack of affordable housing) usually ignored in explanations of homelessness that are based on individual behavior.

While recognizing individual risk factors, the structural explanation of homelessness, long peripheralized since the ascendancy of neoliberal hegemony, emphasizes broader, "macro-level" influences that create vulnerability regardless of individual behavior (Lee et al., 2021). The structural explanation emphasizes housing and labor market dynamics as the underlying reasons for all who experience homelessness. The greater the gap between housing costs and wages, the greater the number of people who become vulnerable to losing their housing regardless of their personal circumstances (Blomley, 2009; Colburn & Aldern, 2022).[1] This can be compounded by other economic factors, including loss of employment, the failure of a small business, significant medical expenses, rising rents, etc. (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2011). The more expensive housing is compared to wages, then the less financial capacity one has to effectively react to and recover from these other economic hardships.[2]

In summary, the factors at the root of the structural explanation of homelessness are a lack of adequate and affordable housing, unemployment, the legacy of past racial discrimination, and the lack of social welfare policies. These two perspectives, however, should not be treated as mutually exclusive. There is merit to both perspectives as explanations for homelessness, as Main (1998, pp. 42–43) notes, "Homelessness, like any social phenomenon, is necessarily caused by both individual and structural factors." However, both framings can lead policy in drastically different directions, with the individual framing frequently ignoring the structural determinants. As such, I question to what extent these explanatory narratives (and their ideological underpinnings) factor into the complexity of compassionate revanchism.

The politics of compassionate revanchism

The neoliberal-informed homeless policies that pervaded the 1990s and 2000s have been conceptualized in urban studies research as revanchist in nature (Margier, 2021; DeVerteuil, 2019). As Mitchell (2003, 2011) describes, revanchism followed a long period of robust federal and state policies that attempted to relieve the rising and increasingly visible problem of homelessness with emergency shelters and increased funding, until compassion fatigue regarding the issue set in and local governments could no longer address the issue in an environment of reduced federal funding (also see Gowan, 2010). Thus, the goal became the reduction of the visibility of homelessness, rather than the reduction of the structural factors causing it, which has primarily criminalized the survival activities necessary for unhoused people, such as sleeping and sitting on the street, panhandling, and erecting encampments (Herring & Lutz, 2015; Robinson, 2019). These policies were and remain distinctly revanchist, as their intention is to exclude the

visibly unhoused and push them out of important economic areas such as business improvement districts and downtown centers (Langegger & Koester, 2017; DeVerteuil et al., 2009; Margier, 2021). These policies became prevalent in the 1990s, especially in cities like New York where harsh criminalization tactics were supported by media campaigns discouraging the personal aid of unhoused people (Smith, 1998; DeVerteuil et al., 2009). However, as visible homelessness continued into the 2000s, another shift in homeless policy occurred. Over time, local governments and the media began to reject the narrative of punishment that informed homeless policies during the prior decade. This was embodied by an increasing emphasis on the utilization of shelters and the addressing of structural problems both in discourse and practice. Yet, while compassionate policies did increase, punitive policies have not been reduced. Thus, compassionate revanchism appears as the ambivalent combination of revanchist tactics of exclusion and compassionate tactics of care and support.

Moreover, the compassionate elements of homeless management are increasingly recognized as interconnected with practices typically deemed punitive, with numerous studies addressing the role of shelters in the seclusion and marginalization of unhoused people (DeVerteuil, 2014; Herring, 2014; Herring & Lutz, 2015; Hennigan & Speer, 2019; Margier, 2021). In their comparative analysis of Fresno, CA and Phoenix, AZ, Hennigan and Speer (2019) demonstrate that shelters are another means to spatially control and pathologize the homeless. Here, it is argued that shelter systems have been bolstered to create increasingly policed, medicalized, and controlled areas intended to move unhoused people from prime to marginal spaces. Outside of shelters, the homeless are policed and punished, and within shelters they are monitored and controlled. The controlling nature of shelters is often what dissuades unhoused people from entering the shelter system (Sparks, 2010).

Summarizing this contradictory tension, Clifford and Piston (2017, p. 519) note that " … governments pass policies that criminalize homelessness even as they spend substantial amounts trying to lift people out of homelessness, and the public supports these exclusionary policies even as they also support policies intended to aid homeless people." A key insight revealed in this scholarship is that it is possible for these contradictory sentiments to be held by the same individuals (see Hennigan & Speer, 2019; Herring & Lutz, 2015). Those who exhibit compassion and respect for unhoused people often find themselves in positions where they must contend with certain pragmatic necessities, i.e. public safety, sanitation, and security for businesses. Here, punitive policies can be supported by otherwise compassionate people who understand the structural causes, but also understand that people defecating or doing drugs openly on the street is a public health concern.

For instance, as shelter providers compete for funding (Margier, 2023), they are incentivized to avoid empty beds, giving them reason to support punitive policies (e.g. encampment sweeps) that might corral the shelter-resistant into shelters, a structural outcome of neoliberal governmentality rather than any immediate revanchist motivation. Among elected officials, this contradiction can be further explained by the political strategy of appealing to as many potential voters as possible. Mayors and city councils may entirely understand the structural causes of homelessness but are forced to prioritize the preservation of tax revenue in an otherwise resource-starved environment engendered by neoliberal governmentality (i.e. the legacy of the withdrawal of federal funds

to city governments in the 1980s). Prioritizing the tax base also means supporting local businesses that often lobby for revanchist policies (Margier, 2023), conflicting with the local state's other, and more compassionate, social welfare obligations (Anderson et al., 2022). In short, punitive policies are not necessarily always fueled by revanchism (although such motivations do underpin the principles of neoliberal austerity and competitiveness that continue to compel elected leaders and service providers alike).

Another critical element of compassionate revanchism has been the growing toleration of homeless encampments within the cities most impacted by homelessness. Przybylinski (2020) postulates that cities are becoming more tolerant of organized homeless encampments, and in some cases have begun to cooperate with them in a manner that informally designates them as a makeshift shelter system (also see Herring, 2014). The toleration of encampments is a recent policy long in development, especially in cities with organized encampments such as Portland, OR (Przybylinski, 2020) and Seattle, WA (Sparks, 2010).

Much of the work done to secure encampments as legitimate to inhabit has been undertaken by unhoused people themselves. Hennigan and Speer (2019) and Herring and Lutz (2015) demonstrate that the toleration of encampments on the part of local government is motivated by the relief of responsibility that such encampments create. Specifically, encampments are seen as cost-effective solutions insofar as they are autonomous communities that depend little on funding from local government (Herring & Lutz, 2015), which has been particularly important at a time of deepening austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012). Margier (2021) discusses how the management of encampments is often driven by visibility, which correlates with Herring and Lutz's (2015) assessment that encampments in marginal spaces outside of city centers are more tolerated and less policed. Further reflecting this ambivalence are the city officials who desire to help those in encampments by providing them autonomy and resources, while at the same time being compelled to control and monitor them. Elected leaders often try to strike a balance that satisfies both their compassionate and punitive impulses as well as voters on both sides of the aisle (Margier, 2021).

A variety of expressions, such as "coercive care," "compassionate accountability," and "tough love," have been employed to describe the ways in which punitive and compassionate policies complement one another. Here, persons experiencing homelessness are offered shelters and services and in exchange for that compassion they must comply with rules, expectations, and the law (Johnsen & Fitzpatrick, 2010). If a person experiencing homelessness refuses services, they are subjected to punishment (Murphy, 2009). Compassion and criminalization are thus blurred together in contemporary homeless management, as unhoused people are criminalized in public space and ushered into shelter systems that further aim to control them. Indeed, the restrictions imposed on unhoused people both on the streets and in shelters are often more practical than vengeful, such as anti-encampment laws that prevent camping on riverbanks or in protected nature areas which can be as much about protecting wildlife and the environment. Likewise, the exclusion of persons who are not sober from shelters intend to promote safety within shelters, for both staff and residents. However, regardless of the immediate motivation behind such exclusionary policies, for those who are excluded the effect is still quite punitive insofar as they are cast to the margins with little in the

way of other options aside from incarceration or life on the streets with no hope for adequate shelter.

This scholarship also tends to portray local government as a singular actor with concerted motivations (even if ambivalent). However, a deeper look into the local state in the context of Spokane, WA demonstrates that there is substantial internal conflict and friction with respect to homeless policy. At least in this article's case study, the local government is being pulled in two different policy directions: one side prioritizes more revanchist policies and practices while the other is critical of these practices and is attempting to move away from neoliberal-informed policy traditions. Yet, while both are impacted by the more pragmatic necessities recognized above, as I reveal below, both sides are also starkly divided along political and ideological lines. The study chronicles this conflict and, in the process, extends and nuances our knowledge of compassionate revanchism by further unpacking the seemingly ambivalent tension that marks its variegated and complex manifestations. In this process, the study also answers DeVerteuil's (2014) call for more studies that examine the complexities of homelessness governance within smaller and less-studied urban areas like Spokane, WA.

Methodology

In what follows, I present a critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2003) of the conflicting explanatory narratives that mark the discursive environment related to Spokane's official homelessness policies and practices. The primary objects of analysis in CDA are the prominent rhetorical themes, policies, and practices that are dialectally related to the broader discursive structures which mirror and communicate a society's stratified and hegemonic ideological conditions. In this context, I configure the individual and structural perspectives as carriers of broader revanchist beliefs on the one hand, and compassionate, caring sensibilities on the other, respectively. In doing so, the study deepens our understanding of the discursive and political dynamics of compassionate revanchism. A more nuanced understanding of the local state is revealed in a way that, I suggest, illuminates and complicates prevailing conceptions of compassionate revanchism as a(n) (in)coherent policy approach.

Evidence is drawn from a wider study on homelessness in Spokane, WA, and includes a mix of qualitative data: local news media, policy documents, statistical data, interviews with public figures conducted by journalists, and public events and symposia related to homelessness in Spokane. The analysis is presented in the form of a constructive narrative (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Fairclough, 2003) demonstrating the local political dynamics and contradictions within the local state related to homelessness and homeless policy in Spokane.

Spokane's crisis of housing affordability and homelessness

In accordance with national trends, homelessness became a public concern for Spokane in the 1980s. Since then, homelessness in Spokane has been more episodic than persistent, but there has been a notable spike within the past six years (see Figure 1). Both the median home sale price and rents in Spokane have increased substantially within the past two years. In particular, there has been a 94% reduction in housing supply since 2010, a

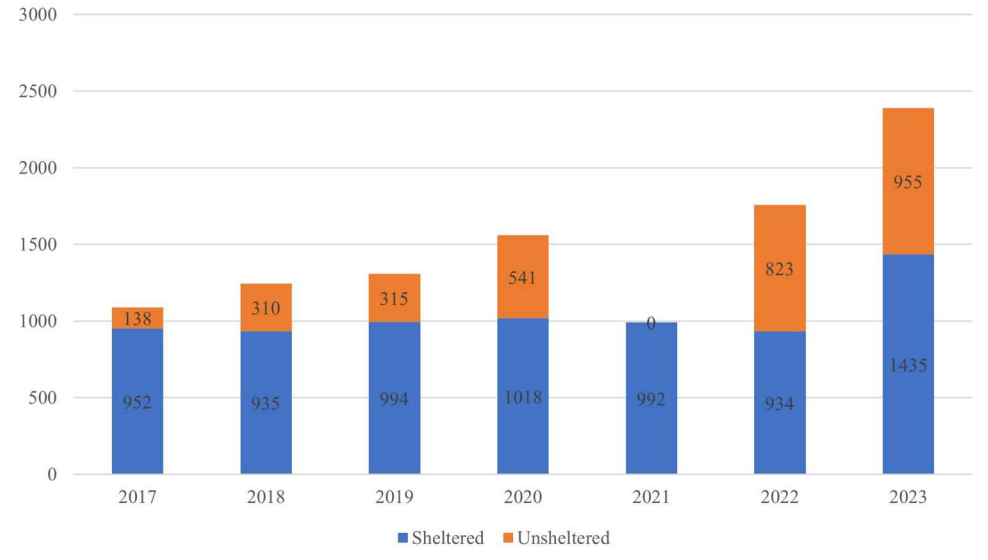

Figure 1. Spokane County Point-in-Time Homeless Count by Sheltered and Unsheltered Persons, from 2017 to 2023.

doubling of the median sales price since 2015, and plummeting vacancy rates to below 1 percent in 2020 (Spokane Association of REALTORS, 2021, p. 2; City of Spokane, 2022a).

The City of Spokane's homelessness problem has been a concern in the local community due to both its increase in numbers and its highly visible nature. Downtown Spokane is the major area of concern as it is where unhoused people are most prevalent and visible (Brown, 2017). It is both a concern for the citizens of Spokane, downtown businesses, and local government agencies. The City has made great efforts to address homelessness, as outlined in the City's 5-Year Strategic Plans. Its coordinated efforts through the Continuum of Care (CoC) board and allotment of aid allocated to shelters, non-profits, and other programs intended to help the homeless population are also noteworthy. However, this issue has only worsened, and continues to be an issue of contention in the region. Spokane's homelessness policy demonstrates a mid-sized city's efforts to grapple with what is often labeled as a homeless crisis, and its efforts are both defined by its official policies and its day-to-day practices.

The 2015–2020 Strategic Plan to End Homelessness determined two main factors as the root causes of homelessness in Spokane. Firstly, poverty is noted as a prevalent cause, and secondly, the lack of jobs with living wages impacts the ability of many to afford adequate housing. As the plan states, "Clearly the cost of housing and the income of households works against a family's ability to maintain stable housing" (City of Spokane, 2015, p. 13). The plan also provides the following information on a survey of homeless adults citing their reasons for their homelessness: Lack of income (26%), lost their job (16%), lack of affordable housing (15%), family conflict (14%), eviction (13%), drug abuse (12%), mental health problem (12%), physical disability (9%), alcohol abuse (9%), or moved (9%) (City of Spokane, 2015, p. 13).

The 2022 Point-in-Time Count also surveyed homeless individuals about the causes of their homelessness, and overwhelmingly the top response was a lack of affordable

housing (City of Spokane, 2022a). These reasons align with the structural perspective on the causes of homelessness, which should inform what the primary solutions should be: jobs that provide a living wage and an adequate supply of housing affordable to those most vulnerable. The recently published Homelessness Plan 2.0, endorsed by Mayor Nadine Woodward, continues the narratives within the 2015–2020 plan, naming emergency housing, services, and increasing housing inventory as part of its overarching strategy, and emphasizes the need to address "underlying causes" (City of Spokane, 2022b).

Spokane has developed its homeless services and resources substantially in recent years. Much like other cities, Spokane's homelessness response is complicated and tied to several different organizations, contracts, and budgets. Diving into the City of Spokane's published budget records reveals several programs dedicated to aiding the unhoused population, including the housing assistance program, emergency rental assistance, the CoC, and several different housing-related grants (City of Spokane, 2020; City of Spokane, 2023a): "Spokane's homelessness spending has nearly tripled over the last five years. In 2018, the city spent $9.7 million, followed by $14.1 million in 2019, $19.1 million in 2020 and $18.9 million in 2021 and last year's $26 million. For context, Spokane has a $1.2 billion budget" (Tiernan, 2023). The increase in funding for these programs has led to the further development of the shelter system, including the newest shelter, the Trent Resource and Assistance Center (TRAC). Spokane's Resources Pocket Guide currently lists a total of 12 shelters, 7 of which are low-barrier (City of Spokane, 2023b; City of Spokane, 2023c). Although Spokane's financial dedication to addressing homelessness has grown more robust, the number of unhoused people has only increased (see Figure 1).

Compassionate revanchism in Spokane

Spokane's structural policies and practices

The City of Spokane's official policy acknowledges that no one should experience homelessness, and if one does experience homelessness, it should be brief and never occur again. The city's core beliefs also emphasize homelessness as a human rights issue (also see Przybylinski, 2020). Specifically, Spokane's policy labels housing as a human right, and that regardless if one is housed or unhoused, everyone deserves dignity and respect. This portrayal starkly contrasts with Woodward's rhetorical platform and practices.

Overall, in official policy releases and documents, the City appears to accept and propagate structural explanations for homelessness like affordable housing and financial vulnerability. Moreover, it seemingly rejects the individual narrative that homelessness is a choice or entirely the result of cultural pathologic behavior. However, referencing the City of Spokane as the author of these documents would imply the local state is acting as a singular actor, which masks a deeper conflict which strikes at the core of the discrepancy between policy and practice as I reveal below.

The City's policy framework focuses on the availability of affordable housing and housing-first policies. Housing-first policies are an extension of harm reduction policies that intend to rehabilitate and provide services for unhoused people no matter their circumstances. Objective Two of the 2015–2020 Strategic Plan to End Homelessness

identifies the support of affordable housing subsidies, the expansion of affordable rental units, and the implementation of a system-wide housing-first philosophy as sub-objectives (City of Spokane, 2015). These goals reflect the understanding of homelessness as caused by a lack of affordable housing, thereby aligning the City's policy with the structural perspective. Through the collaborative effort of several City departments and officials, the City of Spokane published its Housing Action Plan in 2021, which also prioritizes increasing affordable housing and reducing factors that cause displacement (City of Spokane, 2021a).

As of July 2022, the City of Spokane has also made temporary changes to zoning laws that will allow more duplexes, triplexes, and fourplexes, as well as changes to accessory dwelling unit rules (Mason, 2022a; Mason, 2022b), following the recognition by city officials that building codes and restricted land access have contributed to the lack of affordable housing in Spokane. These policies promoted in official local government documentation and by select government officials demonstrate at least a partial recognition of the structural factors that create homelessness. However, while this recognition has emphasized structural solutions, the City of Spokane has been unable to contribute enough resources to solve the housing crisis. Moreover, the housing crisis is worsening in tandem with increasing homeless numbers. The City will need to further prioritize affordable housing for those coming out of homelessness as well as those at risk due to rising housing prices.

The City's official policy also provides ample policy guidelines on the creation, administration, and importance of shelters. For instance, the Spokane Municipal Code Section 18.05.030 states that all night-by-night emergency shelters must be low-barrier. Low-barrier shelters do not require certain conditions for entry. As listed within the code, unhoused people cannot be excluded from low-barrier shelters for being low-income or no-income, having a poor financial history, having a poor rental history, involvement with the criminal justice system, substance use, a history of victimization, disability, lacking poor U.S. residency status, or lacking "housing readiness" (City of Spokane, 2021a). High-barrier shelters, by contrast, often require certain conditions for entry. These conditions are often sobriety, entry into services, or a clean criminal record. While some of these barriers are practical insofar as they work to ensure a safe environment for shelter residents and staff, they are also a determinant of deservingness, especially if there are no other options for those excluded by these restrictions. In short, many policies and city documents recognize that shelters are part of a larger effort to permanently house unhoused people.

Spokane's individual policies and practices

Despite the City's recognition of the structural perspective in its policy documents, its persistent enactment and enforcement of anti-homeless laws that criminalize the act of being homeless demonstrates something else in practice. The City continues to make efforts to remove the homeless from public spaces despite the often-detrimental impacts of these efforts on this already vulnerable population. This is done through two methods: criminalization and clean-up policies. These policies are often a result of NIMBY pressure from business owners, residents, and sometimes even service providers in areas with a large visible homeless population, and often ignore the interests of persons

experiencing homelessness. As stated in the 2021 Regional 5-Year Homeless Housing Plan Annual Report:

> The community has been concerned by those experiencing homelessness setting up encampments, particularly in the downtown core. Local businesses have expressed frustration that this activity negatively impacts economic activity, and service providers have raised concerns about the health and safety of people who are staying in encampments (City of Spokane, 2022c, p. 3).

Is it that this pressure has forced the City to reluctantly compromise its official homeless policy? Not exactly, as many of these practices, following Anderson et al. (2024), have been whole-heartedly endorsed and embraced publicly by the Woodward, often in flagrant opposition to the City Council and other Spokane governmental agencies, the very entities that crafted the policy approaches detailed above. In short, the "City of Spokane" that comes from Woodward's office is very much sympathetic to NIMBY complaints rooted in the individual perspective which represents a jarring juxtaposition against the "City of Spokane" reflected by other offices.

Even before Woodward's election in 2019, Spokane had criminalized a total of 12 behaviors that are often unavoidable for unhoused people, including urinating or defecating in public, sitting and lying in public places, obstruction of sidewalks, and camping in public places (Olsen et al., 2015, pp. 20–21). While not all unhoused people are substance users, the subsection of the population that does are often the most victimized and vulnerable, especially to incarceration. This ordinance only perpetuates the cycle of incarceration for these individuals and criminalizes behaviors they often have no resources to resolve on their own:

> Spokane's story is one of aggressive criminalization. Spokane's municipal code contains numerous instances of overlapping and compound ordinances. Perhaps more than any other case study city, Spokane's policy on homelessness encapsulates all of the problems inherent to criminalization (Olsen et al., 2015, p. 23).

The City's criminalization of homelessness is an ongoing trend that directly contradicts its core belief of treating the homeless with dignity and respect. The conflict noted within the City is additionally internalized within the many public figures and city officials who create and legislate homeless policy. It is not uncommon to encounter individuals who hold both compassionate and revanchist views. One may understand and truly believe that the unhoused deserve respect and compassionate help but one must also make pragmatic decisions that harm and exclude the unhoused with criminalization and dehumanization.

Recent changes to Spokane's sit and lie ordinance recently passed by the City Council and Woodward decrease the space in which unhoused people can legally camp. Within the ordinance, these spaces include all City-owned properties including parks, under Downtown railroad viaducts, anywhere within 35 feet of the Spokane River of Latah Creek, and areas deemed necessary for right of way. Moreover, an initiative, titled Proposition 1, was added to the 2023 electoral ballot to add more extensive camping restrictions to the areas surrounding daycares, childcare facilities, and public and private schools (City of Spokane, 2023d). The proposition passed, with supporters citing the prevalence of drug dealing near encampments several times as a reason for the changes. As the ordinance reads:

> City-owned public lands and properties are generally intended for the safe and sanitary use by the broader public to gather, to move freely and safely about, and to engage in diverse activities all of which are inconsistent with a campground and camping activity the adverse impacts of which include, but are not limited to, unsanitary and/or unsafe conditions (i.e. human and food waste, drug paraphernalia, general litter, fire hazards, etc.) (City of Spokane, 2022c).

While this rationale may seem reasonable and not necessarily punitive, the impact of Proposition 1 on unhoused people is that very few spaces remain in the city where they can exist without committing a crime, especially anywhere near where most homeless services are available (Wohlfiel, 2023). And if such policies are not introduced in tandem with real housing-related solutions then I argue that there is nothing reasonable about Proposition 1, as the result on the unsheltered population is their forcibly prolonged and unnecessary exclusion from public spaces, effectively separating them from services, employment, and increasing the stigma of visible poverty. Couching this policy in ostensibly reasonable justifications occludes what is demonstrably a clear prioritization of housed citizens and business interests over the most marginalized and vulnerable segment of the unhoused population. In this context, this policy can only be interpreted as cold and callous if not outright malicious.

This interpretation is sharpened when considering Woodward's own words. Whilst discussing the restrictions on camping, Woodward publicly stated that, "We make it easy to be homeless. I know that's not a popular thing for some people to hear … this ordinance is not to push people around, but to push people into assistance" (Jahnke, 2022). Woodward cites her intention to use the ordinance to enter people into services, whilst utilizing rhetoric that hints at homelessness as being a voluntary state. What Woodward is implying here is that unhoused people must be coerced into services through exclusionary laws intended to push them into services they may not want, and that remain lacking in proportion to the number of unsheltered homeless individuals in Spokane today. As demonstrated elsewhere by Anderson et al. (2024), Woodward has embraced a flagrantly revanchist platform to strongly push the City to further utilize criminalization as a tool to enter unhoused people into the City's limited services or incarceration, all to reduce the visibility of homelessness and appease downtown business elites.

Under Woodward, the City has expanded policies aimed at removing homeless encampments. A publication on Spokanecity.org written by Communications Director Brian Coddington and close advisor to Woodward, emphasizes the need for clean-ups downtown:

> … work directly with the downtown police precinct to respond to reports of illegal camping and regularly clean hot spots; work with the POD outside of the downtown area; and provide general code enforcement and illegal dumping abatement.

Additionally, the City Council approved an ordinance, Special Budget Ordinance C36076, that funds further and more frequent cleanups in downtown Spokane, including the encampments often found in underpasses and other public property (Community, Housing, and Human Services, 2022). Of course, the City cannot clear encampments without proof of available shelter space for displaced individuals to transition to, but it has been shown that the Spokane Police Department will often do so anyway (Criscione,

2020; Vestal, 2021). This is a violation of *Martin v. Boise* which determined that it is a violation of the Eighth Amendment to enforce city ordinances against sleeping and camping in public spaces when there is no alternative shelter to which unhoused people are to relocate.

In February 2022, the City erected fencing under certain viaducts to reduce the prevalence of homeless encampments (Shanks, 2022). Homeless encampments in Spokane are prevalent under downtown underpasses and viaducts since they provide shelter from the outdoors and are generally safer than the street. The City has routinely made efforts to remove these encampments as part of Woodward's promise to clean up downtown. Woodward promised the expansion of such fencing under other underpasses if the changes deterred camping, and in June of 2022, additional fences under the Sprague and Division underpass appeared after a sizable encampment had settled there (Shanks, 2022).

Moreover, the Spokane Police Department has recently increased its issuance of citations for certain ordinances, such as interference with pedestrian traffic, trespassing, and obstructing police: "From Jan. 1 through June 18 in 2019, the city had issued 98 citations for pedestrian interference. Over the same stretch of time in 2021, it had issued 165 such citations, an increase of 68% over 2019" (Shanks, 2021a). The substance use ordinance resulted in 80 citations or arrests in just the first few weeks of its enforcement (Humphreys, 2023).

Compassionate revanchism and inner governmental conflict in Spokane

The conflict within Spokane's local government and the ambivalence inherent in compassionate revanchism are distinctly connected by the structural and individual explanations for homelessness which differentially pervade local government offices. When viewed at the city-scale, Spokane's current policy directions seem consistent with the kind of compassionate revanchism noted elsewhere in the critical urban studies literature. This is especially the case when it comes to the simultaneous expansion of shelters and increasing efforts towards criminalization and clean-up policies. Reflecting the tension within compassionate revanchism, city officials are challenged to both accommodate the needs of the unhoused, promote safety and sanitation, and satisfy public opinion. However, at a deeper, "intra-local state" level, compassionate revanchism, while certainly an ambivalent policy approach in one sense, also represents, in part, a culmination of different local state offices advancing conflicting policy recommendations based on their divergent understandings of the causes of the homeless crisis.

In this context, I argue that compassionate revanchism in Spokane is shaped by the reality that its local government is literally at odds with itself, with some agencies articulating "compassionate" oriented policy proposals informed by the structural perspectives, and others, most notably Woodward's office, articulating a particularly punitive policy approach consistent with a devoutly revanchist position informed by the individual perspective. Indeed, the very notion that "we are making it too easy to be homeless" implies that the homeless are lazy, culturally deficient individuals who need a strong dose of toughness with little love.

Governing officials are beginning to recognize that long-standing revanchist policies create immense backlash from community organizations and activists. As stated in a

Spokesman-Review article, Chris Patterson, a former Woodward administration adviser, said of criminalization tactics: "You can't arrest your way out of it … But you do have to address those who will not abide by the social rule of law" (Vestal, 2022). On the other hand, other officials continue to demonstrate their alliance with revanchism and the individual perspective. Specifically, commentary from former Spokane County Sheriff Ozzie Knezovich regarding the Spokane homeless encampment, Camp Hope, eerily encapsulates this ideological divide, erroneously asserting that the homelessness crisis in Spokane " … has nothing to do with affordable housing, jobs, or the economy, and has everything to do with the ongoing crisis fueled by drug and alcohol abuse, and the concurrent mental health issues associated with such abuse" (cited in Robinson, 2022).

Despite Knezovich's beliefs, there is growing recognition that revanchist practices do not solve what these officials are concerned about: the visibility of homelessness and poverty. Shelters are a useful tool for local governments to both appear to care about unhoused persons and to reduce their visibility, while continuing to spatially manage the movement of unhoused people. The utilization of shelters, combined with the increase in clean-up practices, portrays the intent to reduce the visibility of homelessness, rather than homelessness itself which is evidently not in of itself problematic to Woodward and allies unless it is visible to the rest of the population. This is what underpinned the City's move to close Camp Hope (Hoang, 2023; Washington State Department of Commerce, 2023). Rather than tolerate the encampment as other cities have done, Spokane has opted for a solution that excludes unhoused persons from public spaces while offering services and shifting responsibility for the population from the City to the shelters to eliminate the visibility of homelessness, something that has only worsened because, as we have long known, revanchist homeless policy is an endless mission (DeVerteuil, 2019).

Disagreements between Woodward and the Spokane City Council have created a rift surrounding policy on shelters. In early January of 2022, Woodward's Administration shut down an inclement weather shelter at the Spokane Convention Center, despite space still being needed for emergency shelter during dangerously low temperatures. Spokane Municipal Code 18.05.020 (A)(1) requires that shelter must be provided to those without shelter in cold weather (City of Spokane, 2021b). Additionally, Spokane Municipal Code 18.05.030 (B)(3) prohibits the City from eliminating shelter beds without replacing them (City of Spokane, 2021b). A letter from the Spokane City Council to Woodward claimed that beds were terminated without replacement, and the emergency shelter was shut down despite freezing temperatures, thereby violating the City's own code (Beggs et al., 2022).

The "deserving" and "undeserving" poor is also woven into the contours of Spokane's conflicting political landscape on homelessness. Before the vote on a law that would require the City of Spokane to provide enough shelter space for unhoused people, the differing perspectives between Woodward and former Councilwoman Lori Kinnear on the shelter system demonstrated the larger philosophical divide in regard to the "deserving" and "undeserving." Woodward emphasizes the notion of shelter-resistance and the enabling of bad habits in her discussion of providing shelter, something that Kinnear has rejected (Shanks, 2021b). The same conflict was exhibited in 2019 during the mayoral debate between Woodward and opponent Ben Stuckart. During this debate, Woodward consistently emphasized a divide between those who deserve help and those who do not,

which she distinguished as those with mental health and substance use struggles and those without. She stated:

> We need to make a distinction about [the] homeless who have fallen on hard times, pulling themselves out of poverty … but the other group that we're seeing, especially downtown and the one that's most visible and the one we're hearing more complaints about … are the transients who are addicted (KREM, 2019).

As Stuckart discussed the importance of housing-first policies and ensuring that individuals have their baseline needs met, she expressed concerns that housing-first models enable bad behavior and that behavior should be changed before needs are met (KREM, 2019).

Woodward frequently and explicitly articulates talking points that harken back to the "Guiliani Time" of 1990s New York (Smith, 1998) informed by the neoliberal-guided individual perspective: "Woodward expressed concern that people who are homeless come to Spokane because recreational marijuana is legal in Washington, there are free meal programs in Spokane, it's "easy to get on welfare" and some service providers even hand out free sleeping bags" (Shanks, 2021b). In short, Woodward is apt to find reasons to dehumanize the unhoused and seeks out immorality in one's "choice" to be homeless, reinforcing their purported "undeservingness." There is no room for genuine compassion in this worldview, as Woodward's rhetoric is distinctly revanchist in labeling the undeserving homeless person as freeloading or immoral, thus justifying efforts to punish and remove them from civic spaces.

Indeed, Woodward might be entirely familiar with the validity of the structural perspective, with her revanchism representing a political strategy catering to her constituents and voters. Yet, this strategy wouldn't be successful unless a significant number of Spokane voters did truly believe in and embrace her explicitly revanchist politics. In this context, the divide within Spokane's local state can be interpreted as a reflection of a broader conflict within Spokane in general, at least among the voting public.

Spokane voters had the choice of following a revanchist or compassionate pathway in Woodward or Stuckart, and more people elected revanchism. Belief in the individual perspective is real, especially among voters, and in the end, whether Woodward and/or Knezovich have drunk the Kool-Aid or not is irrelevant as their rhetoric only reinforces the validity of this perspective in the minds of their constituents. While the revanchist rhetoric may be merely strategic, I suggest that in this case, it is more likely that what little reasonable or compassionate language coming from Woodward and allies is a mere strategy to widen her base of voters.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how a mid-sized city addresses homelessness and how inconsistencies in policy and practice formulate during policy implementation. Despite an emphasis on human rights, dignity and respect for both unhoused and housed individuals, the City of Spokane also criminalizes homelessness and makes extensive efforts to remove unhoused people from downtown to pacify certain business interests and voting constituencies. With policies that reflect the structural perspective, and practices that either reflect the individual perspective or ignore structural factors, the experience of

Spokane reveals that compassionate revanchism is not just a phenomenon manifest in larger, well-studied US cities, but is likely a generalized reality marking homelessness management in the United States and beyond.

However, the study also reinterprets compassionate revanchism as not just an ambivalent policy approach. It also manifests as the surface appearance of more deep-seated political turmoil unfolding within and between local state agencies and the unavoidable limitations of a homeless management system structured by neoliberal governmentality. Here, the discursive rift between the structural and individual narratives on the causes of homelessness is revealed as constitutive of the broader discursive environment related to compassionate revanchism. In this context, the study's findings prompt the following question: to what extent is the experience in Spokane distinct as a context-specific case versus representing a deeper reality of compassionate revanchism more broadly?

The overt conflict occurring between the Mayor's Office and the City Council in Spokane demonstrates at the very least divergent political strategies among elected leaders in terms of pandering to their constituencies. But, as I suggest, it potentially demonstrates more foundational disagreements leading to vastly different approaches and perspectives on what homelessness policy in Spokane should look like. While Woodward exhibits a particularly hostile and venomous brand of revanchism aligned with the tenants of the individual perspective, members of the City Council and other government officials demonstrate more of an alignment with the structural perspective by focusing on the implementation of affordable housing rather than temporary and often harmful solutions meant only to address visible homelessness. However, at the time of writing, Nadine Woodward was defeated in her re-election campaign by Democrat Lisa Brown, possibly signaling that overt revanchism is no longer as convincing or politically effective in Spokane.

As Rochefort and Cobb (1992) argue, " … development of homelessness public policy has been hampered by fundamental disagreements over the nature and causes of the problem being addressed" (p. 50). Although this insight was made 30 years ago, I suggest that this dynamic continues to shape homeless policy in Spokane today, a reality that can be obscured when analysis is situated at the broader city-scale. As such, it is problematic to characterize the local state as a singular actor at this scale of analysis. Compassionate revanchism can appear as an ambivalent policy approach because city governments often propagate a unified voice in their myriad policy documents and press releases. However, this unified voice obscures the reality that city governments are much more fragmented by conflicting political orientations which occasionally bubble to the surface in the local media. I suggest that the phenomenon of compassionate revanchism is in part a product of this political and ideological fissure.

This fissure is manifest in Spokane in two general ways: first, it has largely been forged by Woodward and allies to justify expanding and deepening revanchist practices. These tactics reveal visible homelessness (i.e. homeless suffering from mental illness and/or substance use in downtown) as the problem for these actors rather than the existence of homelessness in general. Such tactics have largely failed, a reality that has been well documented in larger US cities that have been combating homeless crises for much longer (DeVerteuil, 2014, 2019). Second, the fissure has been widened by the return of structural perspectives on the causes of homelessness to the center of policy and practice by civil servants guided by a neo-Keynesian politics, long peripheralized since the ascendancy of neoliberal hegemony in the 1980s.

Building off this study, future research should further unpack the nuances of how homeless policy is implemented and how practices informed by policy reflect overarching and conflicting political orientations. Scholarship should more deeply interrogate how both the structural and individual perspectives co-influence policy and practice. Scholarship should also further examine the contours of this "intra-local state" conflict in other US cities and beyond, especially in relation to poverty management policies. Based on this study, it can be hypothesized that many US cities experience this type of internally fractured discourse and particularly in the context of compassionate revanchism.

Notes

1. The size of the social safety net can also determine levels of homelessness.
2. It is also critical to highlight that race, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ status, and those with physical disabilities are disproportionately impacted by homelessness (see Keuroghlian et al., 2014; Ecker et al., 2019).

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