

# Unfree and Unequal: A Butlerian Postulation of the Violence of Homelessness

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## Abstract

In *The Force of Nonviolence* (2020), Judith Butler introduces the notions of “violence”, “nonviolence”, “grievability”, and “vulnerability”. In this paper, Butler’s four notions will be applied to explain how homelessness is a kind of violence that renders certain lives more grievable than others. Unequal grievability means that if the life of a homeless person were to be lost, it would not be recognised as a loss at all. Jeremy Waldron’s *Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom* (1991) is instrumental in illustrating the ungrievability of homeless persons by focusing on his distinction between private and collective property. Addressing this violence of homelessness requires nonviolent action such as banning anti-homeless architecture and working within institutional structures to create a radically egalitarian grievable environment.

## About the author

Zahlé Eloff (she/her) is undertaking her Master of Arts in Philosophy at Stellenbosch University. She is writing her thesis on the injustice of homelessness from the lens of the capability approach. Moral philosophy, political philosophy and bioethics are where her main interests lie for future research. Some of these topics include abortion, female genital mutilation, euthanasia, prison reform and the inequalities in education.

## 1. Introduction

In *The Force of Nonviolence* (2020), Judith Butler makes use of notions such as “violence”, “nonviolence”, “grievability”, and “vulnerability”. Butler (2020: 27) states that nonviolence is not merely the absence of violence, but a collective commitment to rerouting aggression for the purpose of freedom and equality. Nonviolence cannot happen without a commitment to a radical egalitarianism of grievability where all lives are equally valuable (ibid.: 24). Butler problematises the individualistic conception of the self to show that society must be understood as a collective for nonviolence to be comprehensible (Shafick, 2020). They problematise the radical individualism of the state of nature phantasy being taken as fact. We are not perfectly fulfilled, wholly independent, self-interested individuals from the outset, which is what the state of nature phantasy puts forth. Humans are completely interconnected and dependent on each other to live their lives (Butler, 2020: 30). Since we do not exist in a bubble of radical individualism, it must be recognised that our interconnectedness underpins the solidarity and collective action needed for the possibility of the nonviolent rerouting of violence. Only once this individualism is abandoned, can the collective prerogative of nonviolence be successful.

In this paper, I will apply Butler’s ideas to homelessness to illustrate that some lives are valued more than others; some lives are unjustly less “grievable” than others. I will expand on the theory behind violence, nonviolence, grievability, and vulnerability, and apply them to the problem of homelessness. I will argue that homelessness is violent and collective action on a large scale is needed to combat this violence. I discuss different types of violence and how it relates to

homelessness in the Western Cape, South Africa. I aim to show that the unequal grievability of homeless lives emphasise that we live in a society where the lives of homeless persons are less valuable than others.

Moreover, I will draw from Jeremy Waldron’s *Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom* (1991), to show the ungrievability of homeless persons (as well as street persons or panhandlers) by focusing on his distinction between private and collective property. Finally, I will consider the ways in which the devaluation of homeless persons can be combatted with nonviolence. Nonviolence requires the banning of anti-homeless architecture and working within institutional structures to create an environment that is radically egalitarian in its grievability. In an equally grievable environment, everyone has access to facilities where they can exercise their basic bodily functions and human rights freely, regardless of the property that they own.

## 2. Grievability Framed by Violence and Nonviolence

### 2.1. Abandoning the Individualistic Self in the Name of Nonviolence

To understand structural and systemic violence, one must recognise that violence goes beyond the physical or dyadic encounter between two parties (Butler, 2020: 2).<sup>1</sup> Violence can appear more subtly in the language people use, in the legislation that is passed, and in the physical design of architecture meant to exclude. The various forms of violence overlap with and influence each other, for instance, institutional violence may involve the use of linguistic, physical, or legal violence. Institutional structures that label demonstrations which fight for freedom and equality as

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper where I refer to “institutional violence”, I refer to it as a type of “structural violence”. Structural violence is a type of violence that is more subtle because it takes a toll on the body by wearing it down through oppression via the structural conditions of society such as the social, economic, and political systems underpinning it. These structures are set up in a way that

systemically disadvantages certain groups, which is ultimately less visible than physical violence. Physical violence being the type of violence which has the aggression of the physical “blow” between two parties attached in nature (Butler, 2020: 136-138).

violent are themselves enacting violence.<sup>2</sup> Misusing language to justify the existing violence that caused demonstrations in the first place is an example of institutional and linguistic violence. Furthermore, state violence emerges when these demonstrations are met with imprisonment, killing, or injury (Butler, 2020: 4).

Where there is capacity to harm others in society, there is capacity for violence. This type of violence is typically instantiated by the institutions that rule society. Acts of racism offer a clear illustration of structural and systemic violence. The use of racial slurs presents as linguistic violence, and laws promoting segregation is a form of legal violence. Any institutional instantiation of acts that Other and marginalise a community is structurally and systematically violent.

When it comes to taking down violence enacted by an institution, it is important to distinguish between the violence of the regime and the nonviolent means of checking that regime (ibid.: 19). Political institutions redirect the nonviolent action of those resisting the violence of the institution in order to justify their use of violence as a response. For example, when people of colour mobilise against racially oppressive institutions, they are met with shooting and physical brutality, as was the case for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The nonviolent protests and calls for a radically egalitarian grievability is redefined as a threat to the security of the state, which justifies the use of violence against the protesters (Butler, 2020: 24).

Violence is often considered as the only way to bring about socio-political change because combatting violence is seemingly most effective when using violence. According to this take, we are justified in using violence for self-defence or as an instrument against

violent regimes (Butler, 2020: 12-13). Self-defence is often used as an example where the use of violence is justified in response to an initial violence because it implies that there is some life that is worth being defended (ibid.: 12). Using the tactic that one should use violence in retaliation for self-preservation or self-defence creates an idea that there can be an exception to the principles of nonviolence where the self can be violently protected as long as they belong to the regime that enacts violence, or rather, facetiously uses violence in the name of self-defence (ibid.: 148).

The notion of self-defence implies inequality because it suggests that there is one group that is worth being violently defended and protected from violence, while another group must experience violence.<sup>3</sup> Self-defence is used to validate using violence instead of nonviolence. However, self-defence is seemingly only justifiable when the life that is being defended is deemed worthy. This leads into the issue of grievability because, as Elsa Dorlin points out, only *some lives* are entitled to self-defence (ibid.: 12). I expand on grievability in section 2.2., but in short, a grievable life is a life that is recognised as valuable and one to be grieved if lost. There are some people who have more recourse to the law in that they are more likely to be believed in court. Some people are slighted by the structural and systemic failures due to there being unequal grievability when it comes to the law acting with an unequal urgency in favour of those who are more grievable. The individualistic privileging of some lives is problematic because nonviolence cannot be achieved unless this privileging is abandoned.

Butler (ibid.: 9-10) states that people refrain from behaving violently to retain personal relationships

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<sup>2</sup> States and structural systems often claim that any acts against authority are violent but that strikes, sit-ins, boycotts, and so on, are nonviolent practises that are being painted as violent (Butler, 2020: 2-3).

<sup>3</sup> When institutions must defend themselves against those who are unarmed and not actively being violent, the tactic is to figure them as violent to justify why they felt threatened enough to use

violence via self-defence. Being figured as violent simply means that the institutions create the imagery that they are a violent kind of person, therefore any violence levied against them is an act of self-defence (Butler, 2020: 4).

because people have an interconnectedness to each other. Butler argues that the individualistic relationship between people is a nonpoint when it comes to violence. Whether the person experiencing violence is someone in one's inner circle, or a stranger, has no relevance. If something is deemed as violent for one, why should it not apply to all? The simple answer is that the standard *should* apply to everyone. The problem with the individualistic view of the self is that it allows for an unequal grievability. Understanding society as interdependent means being concerned with justice-for-everyone, not just justice-for-me. Nonviolence is what ought to be used to eradicate violence and for this to happen, society must be understood as a whole, embedded in interdependence.

The distinction between violence and nonviolence is difficult to navigate but it must be done to reach a postulation of a radically egalitarian grievability. We must engage with it *because of* how the destructive and harmful violence can be (Butler, 2020: 148). The point of nonviolence is to take an ethical and political stance that seeks to resist the violence of the institutions in a way that will not cause more harm.

Nonviolence does not refer to some passive, unaggressive action. Rather, it is an ongoing struggle, a *force* that requires large collective action to be successful. It requires the rerouting of aggression of the violence of the regime to bring about socio-political change. Nonviolence becomes an ethical obligation because we are bound to each other. We know we can destroy the social bonds we have to each other with violence that levies the responsibility on us to refrain from doing so (ibid.). To be successful in combatting violence we need to heed the call of nonviolence which requires that institutions act and ensure that there is a radically egalitarian grievability for its constituents.

This section has shown that for nonviolence to be successful, we need to acknowledge that the individual conception of the self must be abandoned because it excludes others and instantiates the unequal valuing of some lives over others (Butler, 2020: 46). Nonviolence requires us to realise we are all interdependent<sup>4</sup> on everything and nothing can be more grievable or valued more than something else in a just society. It is an ongoing struggle that requires a constant critique of the institutional failure of allowing exceptions to whose lives may be defended and for whom violence may be levelled against. Henceforth, our attention must briefly turn to grievability, vulnerability, and interdependency to argue for a radically egalitarian grievability.

## 2.2. Ungrievability and Dependency Implies Vulnerability

Butler (2020: 28) states that there is a distinction between those whose lives are worthy of protection from violence and those whose lives are not. This distinction shows that lives worthy of protection from violence are lives that are valuable and worthy of grief or grievability. A grievable life is one that a) is worth being safeguarded or protected, b) knows that their life matters, and its loss would be conceptualised as a loss, c) is a body that is treated as able to live and thrive with minimal precarity, and d) has provisions for flourishing available (Butler, 2020: 58-59). In other words, an ungrievable life is one that is not valued and is not as worthy of the above. Consequently, the impetus for nonviolent action is radically egalitarian grievability. If all lives are seen as equally grievable by the structures and institutions that underpin society, then every life that is lost will be conceptualised as a loss (ibid.: 61).

The notion of being individual and independent from birth is simply untrue. Despite what the state of nature

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<sup>4</sup> Butler has a psychoanalytical and social understanding of interdependency to lay the groundwork for a nonviolence informed by egalitarianism. Butler believes that violence is an attack on the

social bonds that make living possible. In section 2.2., I expand on the social understanding of interdependency.

phantasy postulates, we are all born radically dependent and continue to be dependent throughout our lives. The Hobbesian state of nature phantasy depicts humans as fully developed, individualised beings from the outset. We are not shown how we became individuated within the state of nature phantasy, nor are we shown why conflict, rather than dependency or attachment, is our first passion. Due to being in conflict with each other, a social contract is formed where humans have to refrain from consuming more than they need to mutually cohabitate (Butler, 2020: 32).

Dependency is our first experience in the world, as we are born into the world as needy infants. Additionally, we remain dependent for the entirety of our lives. We are always dependent on something or someone for something or other to get on with our lives (ibid.: 40-41). Butler points to the fact that we are not only dependent on others, but we are dependent on our environment as well. We are dependent on the ground to be able to walk, we are dependent on the plants to provide oxygen, and so on. Moreover, everything else is also dependent on us. Hence, to have a world of radical equality and freedom, we need to recognise this interdependent world we are indubitably submerged in (ibid.: 43-44).

Butler states that dependency implies vulnerability, but they are not the same thing. To be vulnerable is for the thing you were dependent on to disappear. You are dependent on things to live, and when those things are taken away, you are left vulnerable (ibid.: 46). Human beings are extremely dependent on satisfying their bodily functions, like eating, sleeping, and urinating to survive. If one attempts to deprive themselves of carrying out these functions, they will do bodily harm. If one does not eat, they will become weak and starve to death. Similarly, if one does not sleep or excrete, their body will give in by fainting, or their bladder will give in. These are bodily functions we cannot control, and in order to live a healthy, flourishing life we are dependent on access to food, water, places to relieve ourselves, and places to sleep or protect ourselves from the harsh elements (Nussbaum, 1992: 222).

Being dependent is something everyone experiences, but dependency becomes problematic if one becomes vulnerable. Vulnerability would mean not having access to any of the food humans are dependent on to live or a place where one can safely carry out bodily functions. Furthermore, vulnerability extends to one not having fair recourse to the law because of their life being less grievable. Where there is more dependency and vulnerability, there is likely unequal grievability. Unequal grievability increases the need for the mobilisation of nonviolence, as the more ungrievable one is, the more likely that systemic and structural violence will impact them (Butler, 2020: 46).

### 3. The Ungrievability and Unfreedom of Homelessness

#### 3.1. Grievability and Dependency: The Homed and Homeless Self

For political philosopher, Jeremy Waldron, to be homeless is to be unfree because homeless people are subjected to an extensive set of restrictions that are not imposed on *everyone* in society (Waldron, 1991: 302). In *Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom* (1991), Waldron argues that homelessness is a problem of justice that concerns freedom. He states that homelessness is itself unjust and problematic because there are some who are granted the freedom to exist on an entirely different level compared to others based on the property they keep. I find that Waldron's problematisation of prioritising one group's needs over another's links to Butler's notion of "grievability". If the rights and dignity of the homeless populous can be dismissed as an issue that is not pressing enough to retaliate against, then it is conceivable that the loss of their lives is likely to go unnoticed far more than that of the homed person. Therefore, creating an unequal grievability between the lives of homeless and homed people.

To illustrate an earlier point about grievability relating to the interconnectedness of people, imagine a scenario where your parent requires institutional

intervention, such as them being mugged. Those in power ignore their plight simply because they are deemed as a nuisance or as not worth the effort to uphold justice. If your parent experiences this non-person treatment, it would surely inspire a fit of rage. Why, then, is it appropriate to have a fit of rage in this instance and not in instances where homeless people are treated as non-persons? If the answer is because a parent has a direct relation to you, then there is clearly an inequality in the worthiness of the lives being defended (Butler, 2020: 11). In this sense, homeless lives are unarguably less valued and ungrievable because homeless people are not privy to same rage regarding how they are treated. Moreover, there is a lack of community relationships that will render the loss of a homeless life one that will be mourned by the community, which further emphasises the difference in grievability between the homed and homeless self.

In the context of homelessness, the homeless community do not fit the description of a grievable life worth safeguarding because they are already framed within a myriad of stereotypes that diminish their grievability. Homeless people are often described as “violent”, “addicted”, or as having a slew of mental illnesses to blame for their homelessness (Phelan, Link, Moore & Stueve, 1997: 325). Framing the homeless person in this way, not only reinforces these stereotypes, but creates grounds for people to assume that homeless people are to blame for their living situation. The danger with this is that it frames homelessness as something that does not happen to just anyone. The truth is homelessness comes about for many reasons, some of which may have to do with poor life choices. However, homelessness also arises due to natural disaster, or due to socio-economic factors like a crashing economy that forces one into poverty (ibid.: 325).

If one is in a position of extreme vulnerability, it seems that their grievability dwindles into a phantom grievability. This is because being in a vulnerable situation comes as a result of having unequal grievability. To reiterate, grievability is the idea that a life that is lost would be mourned or grieved. It would be a loss that

is felt by others in society. If a life of a group that is less grievable was to be lost, the loss is not acknowledged or raged over. A grievable life is one that is believed to require safeguarding and protection from any violence, because it is a life that is seen as worthy (Butler, 2020: 58). However, Butler (ibid.: 7) acknowledges that the lives of people who are less grievable, tend to be people belonging to marginalised or minority groups. These groups tend to be the recipients of structural violence because of the lack of equal grievability.

It is worth noting, the homeless community are far more vulnerable because they do not have equal access to the things human beings are dependent on for survival. Homeless people do not have food streaming in, places to safely take refuge from the harsh elements, or spaces to literally sleep and pee within jurisdiction of the law. For this reason, there is an inequality to the dependency that a homeless person has in comparison with a homed person. Homeless people are thus the most vulnerable in society as they are dependent on things for survival that are largely unavailable specifically to them.

As dependent beings *a priori*, the inequality and unfreedom that homeless people face leaves them disproportionately vulnerable as compared to homed people. In the next section, I instantiate this claim by showing that Waldron’s postulation of property rule, he makes it clear that homeless people are entirely dependent on others as well as common property to live. This level of radical dependency makes them vulnerable, which is illustrated through the fact that their ability to access a place where they can exercise their basic bodily functions is always at the mercy of others (Waldron, 1991: 299). I will now turn my attention to private and collective property rule to illustrate the unfreedom homeless people face.

### 3.2. Private and Collective Property Rule

Waldron (1991: 297) ties homelessness and the unfreedom thereof to property rules which are the rules according to which people have the right to in/exclude others from using certain types of property. The mere

fact that anyone may make such decisions suggests there are some who get to decide which people are *permitted* to do certain things or exist in certain places. Hence, suggesting certain opinions are valued more than others and more importantly, certain lives are valued more than others. The lives of people who permit others to occupy a space is held at a higher level of importance than those who need permission.

There are two types of property rule, according to Waldron: private property rule and collective property rule. In the former, you can point to some individual or legal person that has the power to determine who may use and exclude others from that space. The latter has no pinpointable owner and the rights to use and exclude others falls on officials acting in the name of the entire community, like the police and lawmakers (Waldron, 1991: 297).<sup>5</sup> Collective property rule can be split up further into state property and common property. State property is there for the entire society, but not for public use (police stations, government offices). Common property belongs to everyone, and anyone can use it without needing permission (parks, sidewalks, beaches). No one can exclude others from using common property, unless they are obstructing the collective use of that property for others (ibid.: 297-298).

To do anything – eat, sleep, or even think, one needs to do it *somewhere*. Having access to private property means having a place to just be without being dependent on anyone's permission to be there. It is important to reiterate that while *everyone* in society is dependent on state property, the public do not have access to the use of it. Hence, homed people are dependent on both private property and collective property, and have access to the use of *both* private and common property. Homeless people are entirely dependent on collective property and *only* have access to the use of common

property. Moreover, the common property homeless people have access to are not without rules and regulations. Consequently, homeless people do not have the right to exist anywhere without being utterly dependent on the permissions or rules of others (Waldron, 1991: 299-300).

There are general prohibitions that apply to everyone in private and collective property, for instance: do not kill, steal, or act in harmful ways. There are prohibitions in place to make public spaces beneficial to everyone, such as not obstructing sidewalks, littering, and so on. Then, there are prohibitions on specific actions that may be performed in public: no urinating, no sleeping, and no camping. The third set of restrictions is where the example of the violence of homelessness is most prevalent. These prohibitions on specific actions have certain detrimental implications on the homeless community because they do not have private homes where they are allowed to just be, or to perform these actions (ibid.: 301). Since homeless people are *homeless*, where must they perform these actions?

Moreover, to do anything and to create anything, let alone a life of quality, requires planning (Nine, 2018: 242). If homeless people have nowhere to reasonably exist without infringing on other people's sense of comfort, then how exactly should a homeless person have any manner of improving their situation? It is simple to suggest lemonade be made from lemons when one has a knife to cut the lemon and a jug to fill with lemon juice. However, if there is no knife, and no jug, there can be no lemonade. This analogy is simply putting forth that in the absence of a place to literally *think* without offending someone else's existence because they are smelly, hungry, or sleepy, how can they do anything more than satisfy immediate needs, let

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<sup>5</sup> Note, police and lawmakers in Cape Town and Stellenbosch, South Africa, are often the people responsible for making it difficult for the homeless community to exist anywhere. The police treat the homeless as non-persons and often use physical force,

while lawmakers pass laws that allow the police to enact such treatment, such as prohibitions against the presence of the homeless in the City of Cape Town. See Bradpiece (2021).

alone plan a way forward? How should one plan when their life is lived according to a meal-to-meal basis?

### 3.3. Homelessness Implies Unfreedom

If there are places where a person is not allowed to be without permission, they are not there freely. This in itself is not unjust. However, when there is *nowhere* else to go, then a problem of justice arises. If homeless people are restricted to having access to public spaces (common property), and they rely on the permissions of the authoritative figure at homeless shelters for a place to sleep, then it simply is the case that homeless people are unfree (Waldron, 1991: 301). Unlike homed people, homeless people do not have *anywhere* they can be where they are not at the mercy of someone else's permission. Butler points out that to be grievable we must have a right to equality and freedom. Since homeless people do not have equal access to basic freedom, it shows they are not equally grievable in society. This is because there is a deep-seated inequality in not just the general treatment of homeless people as if they do not exist as human beings, but because their access to basic needs is not met at the same level of those who fall higher on the socio-economic ladder. Butler (2020: 59) eloquently expresses the above sentiment:

The presumption of equal grievability would be not only a conviction or attitude with which another person greets you, but a principle that organizes the social organization of health, food, shelter, employment, sexual life, and civic life.

Furthermore, everyone has basic bodily functions which are out of their control like sleeping, eating, urinating, washing, and menstruating. So, placing restrictions on specific actions in public spaces is violent

towards the homeless community because they have limited access to where they may freely perform these functions. These restrictions violate their basic human right to have access to shelter, food, clean water, and to be a free person ("OHCHR Homelessness and human rights", 2021). If one cannot exercise basic bodily functions and human rights freely, then they are simply unfree (Waldron, 1991: 302).

Homeless people are also the most vulnerable in society because they are the most dependent on the environment and the mercy of others to be able to live. They are the most likely to be exposed and left deposed if restrictions are placed on public spaces, or when institutional acts are implemented without considering the implication on the homeless community. Lack of consideration of how policies implicate the homeless, precisely makes their lives less grievable because there is no safeguarding of their best interests. This ungrievability of the homeless is clear in the violent actions levelled against them on various levels.

## 4. The multi-layered violence of homelessness

Homelessness is violent, especially on an institutional level because it is on this level where all the other violence on homelessness is instantiated. Physical violence is instantiated through physical forced removals and anti-homeless or hostile architecture.<sup>6</sup> Linguistic violence is instantiated through speech acts and signs. Institutional violence occurs through social ignorance like non-person treatment and accepting harmful economic and legal practises.

In Stellenbosch, it is common to witness a security guard chasing a homeless or street person away from a shop or mall. They are excluded from using public

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<sup>6</sup> Anti-homeless architecture refers to the way in which landscapes are designed to ward off anyone from resting in one spot for too long. It is mostly seen in spikes placed along flower beds, the slanting of benches so that a person is unable to lie down, creating uneven and uncomfortable surfaces in areas where there is shelter

from the rain to thwart gathering in those areas. All these are subtle designs targeted at homeless people because homed people have places where they can seek refuge from being exhausted or exposed to the elements, homeless people do not.



spaces, illustrating the disproportionate inequality and unfreedom experienced by the homeless communities. Hostile architecture and social practices are violent against everyone, but it especially affects the homeless communities because it threatens what they are utterly dependent on to live. Consider the following scenario, Sally goes shopping for a long day, but the benches in the malls were removed making it inconvenient for Sally to rest momentarily. Sally has two options: either they go home or to a coffee shop, where they may have to pay to sit. Now, homed persons have somewhere to go, or they can afford to pay to sit. However, the homeless community only have public spaces where they can retreat to. The implementation of hostile architecture as well as social practices like needing to pay to use the bathroom, or to sit down, makes it more challenging for the homeless community to freely exist.

Furthermore, it is almost impossible for a homeless person to exercise their bodily functions and human rights. There are hardly any sanitary ablution blocks that are maintained for the homeless to be able to wash, and there are very few benches or low walls that have not been altered to dissuade the homeless from resting there. Many areas in front of businesses, under bridges, or on walls have been decorated with spikes or rocks to make it uncomfortable and uninviting for people to convene there. For many, this is not a problem because when the weather is poor, or when they are tired, they can just find refuge in their own homes. However, the homeless do not have this option.

Perhaps, we should consider that they should go to homeless shelters, but a lot of the time these spaces are dangerous and homeless people face being assaulted by either the people running the shelters or sometimes others occupying the shelters (Brighten the Corner, 2023). If it is the case that there are acceptable shelters, they are not open for daytime use and the sheer number of homeless people by far surpass the number of beds available in shelters (Waldron, 1991: 300). The Western Cape Government reported that there were 14 000 homeless people in

Cape Town in May 2023, yet only 3500 beds in the City's shelters (Western Cape Government For You, 2023). This shows how steps are not taken at an institutional level to ensure the basic rights of everyone in society are met.

It is worth noting that the failure of institutions to ensure that viable ablution blocks, soup kitchens, and emergency shelter are available to those in a vulnerable position of dire need is unacceptable. This state of affairs can be directly linked to the prevailing beliefs of neoliberal capitalism. Jobe (1999: 410) criticises the idea that the only reason one could be in a situation of precarious vulnerability is due to “[them having] no desire ... to change their lifestyles and do better” since they have become dependent on the State. This view not only ignorantly neglects the fact that people come to be in positions of vulnerability for reasons that surpass moral failure, but it further instigates the governmental defunding of social services that have the potential to offer long-term solutions to the problem. The neoliberal logic of defunding the institutional systems that offer temporary support for these living situations does not mitigate the social and economic consequences of homelessness. Rather, it further creates a situation of vulnerability that results in dependency on the State which prevents the ability to permanently escape homelessness (Naidoo, 2020: 87).

Other forms of violence include signs that prohibit loitering, sleeping, or sitting. Telling homeless people to ‘get a job and contribute to society’ is a form of verbal violence. How can any of those things be done when you need to have access to ablution blocks, transport, being well-rested, and so on, to be presentable enough to qualify for an interview? What about the stereotyping of the homeless as criminal? Where neighbourhood watches or residents in urban areas phone the police on a ‘suspect’ looking character – typically a

male person of colour.<sup>7</sup> These are all steps taken to try and get the homeless presence away because it is a nuisance and uncomfortable. However, the bigger problem is that we need to eradicate homelessness, not merely the presence of homeless people in certain spaces (De Beer & Vally, 2021: 21).

Finally, the actions and legislation that allow for the Othering of the homeless community is violent. The confiscating of tents, and arresting people who are found sleeping in the city, is abominable (Bradpiece, 2021). Considering there is a lack of beds, where must homeless people sleep? Where do they have the right to exist? The short of it, is they have minimal rights, and they are unfree. It is at this institutional level that homelessness is most violent because there is little intervention against trying to temporarily be rid of the problem. It is at an institutional level where there must be large collective action to ensure that all lives in a society are grievable. As it stands, homeless people are not grievable, they are not safeguarded and their lives, if lost, would not be conceptualised as a loss.

Nonviolent measures, informed and guided by radically egalitarian grievability, are necessary to eradicate the violence of homelessness. These measures include banning of anti-homeless architecture, and working within institutional structures to eradicate the inequality that is prevalent in the homeless community. Collective action on a grand scale in order to minimise the number of persons who are homeless is needed, like genuinely implementing projects such as the "Housing First Project". This is where the aim is to ensure that everyone has adequate shelter, regardless of their addictions or the economic contributions they can make. By ensuring the stability of knowing there is a fixed place to sleep, it makes combatting addiction or other areas of issue more realistic and attainable

(Mahboob, 2020). There are places like Finland where homelessness is at an all-time low, merely because emphasis was placed on securing the basic rights of humans to have shelter, food, and water for hygiene and drinking (ibid.).

It is at this level where homeless lives are brought to an equal grievability. This prioritising of homeless lives is a good example of using nonviolence against institutional structures to bring about a radical egalitarian grievability. Therefore, making all lives equally grievable. By taking collective nonviolent action, it allows for the reframing of how homelessness is perceived. I mentioned elsewhere in this article that homelessness is framed in a way that places blame on the persons in that living situation. However, by bringing everyone to a level of equal grievability, and in turn, equal value in the eyes of society, homelessness can be destigmatised. The de-stigmatisation of homelessness will allow people to conceive of homelessness as something that is not a moral failure, nor as a result of harmful stereotypes like substance abuse or criminal activity. Finally, bringing everyone to a level of equal grievability allows us to recognise the Other and have empathy for their positions of vulnerability because we will recognise that their lives are equally worth being safeguarded and protected (Butler, 2020: 138). Everyone ought to be free from being subjected to violence, and this is what an equal grievability demands.

## 5. Conclusion

The above essay illustrated that there is a violence to homelessness by using South Africa as an example. I drew from Butler and Waldron to show that homeless lives are entirely unfree and ungrievable. I illustrated that there were multiple ways in which homelessness

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<sup>7</sup> On this point, there is an underlying assumption that the lives of non-white people are more dangerous or criminal, and thereby less grievable. Historically, some lives have been seen *as lives worth preserving*, while others were (and continue to be) unrecognised

as a life at all. This is due to the "historic-racial schema" that has dehumanised and Othered non-white individuals as a societal nuisance (Butler, 2020: 112).

is violent, and that nonviolence is a promising way to combat the issue. I discussed how the different types of violence relates to homelessness and showed that the inequality of grievability emphasises that the lives of homeless persons are less valuable than others. The importance of abandoning the individualistic view of the self in favour of a collective interdependence for the force of nonviolence was shown. Furthermore, the distinction between private and collective property displayed the inequality and ungrievability of the

homeless as they have no place where they can exercise their bodily functions and human rights freely. Finally, I briefly postulated that nonviolence is needed to overcome this violence by working within institutional structures, taking up the “Housing First” approach, and banning hostile architecture, to create an equally grievable environment where people have access to shelter and facilities to exercise their basic bodily functions and human rights freely.

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