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The Social Reproduction of Climate Securitization in Disaster Recovery Contexts

By

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THESIS

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Table of Contents

1. Acknowledgements.....	iii
2. Abstract.....	iv
3. Introduction.....	1
4. Literature Review.....	4
5. Methodology.....	17
6. Data Analysis.....	19
7. Theory Application to Results.....	31
8. Conclusion.....	36
9. Bibliography.....	39

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This thesis, as with much that I do, is dedicated to the memory of Marco Waaland.

Abstract

Disaster recovery is an increasingly important field of study; with the rise of extreme weather events due to climate change, it is important we understand how processes of disaster recovery impact local communities in the short and long term. The legacy of how the military has framed resilience and the ‘all-hazard’ disaster response has created an approach of *climate securitization*, which can lead to cities and public spaces becoming increasingly insulated and surveilled. One such disaster event, the Camp Fire that burned through several Northern California towns in 2018, exemplifies an individual disaster that sits in a nested hierarchy of the larger, compounding disasters of securitization, neoliberalism and climate change. Through select stakeholder interviews and document analysis of local ordinances and political action groups, this thesis explores the recovery process and aftermath that took place in Chico, CA, and proposes several processes that occur at the local level that socially reproduce climate securitization. These processes could indicate that a disaster response is becoming securitized, which include the vilification of a marginalized community, a culture of surveillance, increased police budget and presence and heightened control over public space. These processes have troubling implications for vulnerable populations and highlight the need for increased attention to inclusive disaster planning in climate change contexts.

Introduction

From November 8, 2018 to November 25, 2018, the Camp Fire burned through 153,336 acres of Northern California, destroying the towns of Paradise and Concow and deeply impacting the communities of Magalia and Butte Creek Canyon. It was the deadliest wildfire in California history (CALFIRE, 2019), and during the disaster's peak, displaced 50,000 people (Anguiano, 2020). Thousands of disaster victims, made homeless overnight, sought refuge in the closest city to the impacted areas, Chico, California. Many of those victims stayed in Chico during the fires and remained there during the aftermath, around 10,000 resettling there permanently. While the initial response to the fires by the community of Chico was praised as positive and neighborly, over the months and years since the disaster, Chico has experienced what I am observing as local processes that socially reproduce *climate securitization*. This has manifested in an ideologically conservative, government-sanctioned response to insulating the community from a perceived danger of public safety threats- a culture of surveillance, vilifying and criminalizing being unhoused, increasing police presence and budgets, and tightening control over public spaces through emergency ordinances.

The Camp Fire ("the Fire"), as with many disasters, has raised questions about the temporality of disaster, the nebulous issue of when disaster begins and ends. Additionally, the Camp Fire, particularly in the context of the American West's longer and more destructive wildfire seasons, exemplifies an individual disaster that sits in a nested hierarchy of the larger, compounding disasters of capitalism, neoliberalism and climate change. Chico serves as a compelling case study because, even with its conservative local government, it has public consensus that climate change is occurring due to the experience of the Camp Fire. This public

consensus allows for the analysis of a securitized response to what is framed as a climate-related disaster in the community.

For this work, I hope to uncover the story of what happened in Chico in the aftermath of the Camp Fire, through select stakeholder interviews and document analysis, as it provides a local example of how climate disaster response and long-term recovery impacts local politics and community ethos. My guiding research question for this thesis is: how do we identify processes that lead to climate securitization in post-disaster/climate contexts, and in what ways can response efforts reinforce the securitization of communities? This research question emerged out of concern over emergent exclusionary responses to climate change, and is grounded in the literature and context discussed in the following paragraphs.

We're in a time of dual crises: the political crisis of failing Western democracies and the environmental crisis of climate change (Forchtner, 2019). Around the globe, there is a resurgence of far-right and neo-fascist movements, many of which espouse eco-fascist ideology. Eco-fascism, sometimes referred to as *ecological fascism* and *environmental fascism*, as defined by Huq and Mochida (2018) is, "the assumption that nature should be unconditionally opened up for extraction in order to serve the needs of 'citizens,' i.e. members of a white nationalist state that is economically organized around principles of state-backed capitalism" (p. 5). Eco-fascism, which has its foundation in the political ideology of fascism, is born out of the fascist characteristics of palingenetic myth and populist ultra-nationalism- the idea that revolution can spark a kind of national rebirth, a "regeneration after a *phase of crisis or decline*" (Griffin, 1991, p. 32, emphasis added).

Within the context of these ideologically authoritarian movements, there have been parallel efforts by governments to securitize assets and communities against the threat of climate

change impacts. As Katie Peters (2018) summarizes, “[a]t the heart of the securitization thesis is the idea that an issue can transcend conventional politics and be labeled as an ‘existential threat’ to state and society, and framed in ways that, if accepted, can be used to legitimize ‘emergency action’” (p. S198). This emergency action, in the climate change context, can have different outcomes depending on the political and social context it is taken in, but has been critiqued for prioritizing national security over human or environmental security (Barnett, 2003; Dalby, 2013, 2009; McDonald, 2013), with some scholars like Huq and Mochida (2018) labeling the U.S. policy focus on economic environmentalism and climate security as environmental fascism.

For those in the disciplines of urban planning, community development and geography, this has sparked research to understand how communities should be reacting and responding to these changing global and local conditions. The urgency for understanding the emergent movement of ‘climate securitization’ in the context of climate change comes as many local governments grapple with increased threats of climate-induced natural disasters, many lacking the resources and expertise to do so. Given the rising trend of eco-fascism sparked by a wave of authoritarian politics occurring parallel to rising climate-induced disasters, it is essential we uncover how climate securitization is manifesting in our local communities if we are to create equitable climate change adaptation and disaster response and recovery.

My work builds off of research done in the areas of political ecology, disaster capitalism, climate urbanism, critical military studies and design theory by exploring how climate securitization manifests in communities post-climate disaster, as these theories, in their different approaches, all seek to understand what happens amidst chaos. For my thesis, they come together to help examine the fallout disaster creates- the gray area in which decision-making is done amidst rapidly changing conditions and unpredictable behavior (from impacted communities and

the environment). They also help me to connect together how the different political, economic and social contexts of disaster impact each other.

Literature Review

The literature that forms the foundation for this work are from the disciplines of political ecology, climate urbanism, critical military studies and design theory, and will be overviewed below. The application of this theory to my case study will be discussed in my analysis section.

Modern Manifestations of Fascism

To understand the relationship between disaster, climate change and increasing political polarization in local communities, I researched the connections between extremism, disaster and political ecology. While fascism is an extreme political phenomenon to focus on in the context of this thesis, I believe it is justified given the wave of far-right nationalism we're experiencing in this country and globally. Additionally, this thesis project was born out of a concern that as climate change disasters increase, government and community response to those disasters will in turn become increasingly extreme. Fascism has long ties with environmentalism & issues of the environment. Nazi Germany was born out of German eco-fascism in the 1920's, Jorian Jenks, a central figure in the UK fascist movement, began the organic movement in the 1930's and the American environmental movement born out of the Roosevelt Era was staunchly racist and ethno-national (Fortchner, 2019). The following articles are divided up into three "buckets": 1.) Theoretical and Historical Perspectives; 2.) Aesthetics; and 3.) Crisis. There will be several different terms used throughout to describe what are essentially the collected contemporary

manifestations of fascism. This includes: the US alt-right (the “alt-lite”), the European far-right, post-fascism, neo-fascism and populism. Each of these terms are used in the context of how the author of a specific article employs them, as there’s a large academic landscape working on issues of contemporary fascism, and many scholars haven’t settled or agreed on a term that best describes the new fascist movements across the globe (though Takamichi Sakurai (2021) makes a very compelling argument for why Traverso’s (2019) “post-fascism” should be used). While it can seem like kibitzing over terminology might make scholarly works lose sight of the pressing matter of addressing these growing movements, it is important to understand and find differences between the historical form of fascism and contemporary fascist movements. Both differ in several important ways and will also, by nature, require us to adjust our strategy of how to defeat them. The scholarly debate on what parties or movements should or should not be called “fascism” indicates a reluctance for scholars to employ the term, as to not lessen the seriousness of the term. However, this thesis takes the approach that in hindsight to WWII, we now understand the existence of growing fascist movements beginning as early as the 1920s (Holmes, 2019) and, as Sakurai (2021) points out, we’re grappling with a new fascism that has seeped into contemporary liberal democratic contexts.

Universalist thought born out of the Enlightenment period was applied to nature when the Industrial Revolution made its mark on the environment. This was criticized heavily by far-right thinkers of the day, as opposition to anything universalist in nature has been a cornerstone of conservatism (Forchtner, 2019). For conservative ideologies, the modernist threats of Materialism & Globalization are responsible for climate degradation. Historical revisionism is also an important part of the fascism, and a discourse of “return to a former, more traditional past” is concerned with creating a narrative of a mythical shared past which rewrites history and

the landscapes which they were set in. Forchtner has noted that environmental communication is often an overlooked part of far-right politics, most likely due to how the right is associated with climate denial (Forchtner, 2019). Far-right discourses on the environment turns the natural world into spaces where issues of identity are played out and symbolized; landscapes become “ethnoscapes”, imbued with a mythical past that becomes part of current historical narratives surrounding national and cultural identity (Forchtner, 2019, p. 5). Ideals of “the homeland” derived from the legacy of National Socialism (and German eco-fascism of the 1920s and 30s) create influential aesthetic, symbolic and material meanings for new fascist movements (Forchtner, 2019, p. 9).

One of the important factors to consider when analyzing these newer fascist movements in the Western world is they are occurring in liberal democracies- an important context that separates them from the fascism that arose in the 1920s-1940s (Sakurai, 2021). el-Ojeili (2019) argues that we’re experiencing a “consolidation of a ‘post-fascist constellation’” (p. 1150) that brings together the disparate neo-fascist groups through utopianism. Like Sakurai, el-Ojeili makes the distinction of “post-fascism” in order to distinguish between constituencies which were engaged in fascism during the 1920s-1940s and those engaged with fascism today, and to also connect it closer to late-stage capitalism and postmodernism (Jameson, 1984; el-Ojeili, 2019). Like Fortchner (2019) and Bhatt (2021), el-Ojeili (2019) ties together the many different post-fascist movements with defining features. However, el-Ojeili takes a different approach from Bhatt (2021) who uses “white extinction” as the force that underlies post-fascist movements, and instead uses five core features to tie these groups together ideologically: 1. Organic, transcendent, palingenetic nationalism; 2. Conspiracy theorizing and cleansing; 3. Charismatic authority; 4. Counter-revolution/backlash politics; 5. Militaristic masculinity (2019).

el-Ojeili also explores the post-fascist movement as a type of utopianism, and that academically exploring it as a utopian or dystopian issue gives us a more nuanced approach to understanding how to contest such post-fascist movements. Anthony Ince (2019) has explored the lack of engagement around fascism- and anti-fascism- in the discipline of geography, and argues that there are several existing dimensions within antiracist and anarchist geography that can be used to develop a framework for anti-fascist geography praxis. Ince (2019) notes that the idea of “nation” has been a uniting factor amongst the disparate far-right movements, once which serves as a “project of rebirth and renaissance” (p. 2). This hyper-nationalist focus on *rebirth* could serve as the justification for destruction in a context of the climate change crisis, where crisis serves as a means to an end for the rebirth of a ‘European’ nation/culture/etc. Ince (2019) notes the spatial analysis aspects of geography particularly lends itself to the study of fascism due to the different spatial dimensions the ideology occupies: the “unevenness” of fascist group activities, the spaces fascism tries to claim and the obsession with physical borders, authority and territory (p. 3).

Far-right ideologies often emphasize “the aesthetic idealization” of the nature of their community. Nature, and its flora and fauna, become directly tied to the symbology of “homeland” and its cultural significance for the “reproduction of ‘the people’” (Forchtner, 2019, p. 2). Topics explored in this section relate to the idea of ethnoscapes, the “homeland” and the social construction of whiteness and its relationship to the environment. Chetan Bhatt (2021) argues that the fear of white extinction is a defining feature of the “contemporary Western far-right,” and is what ties together these disparate far-right movements in the US and Europe, despite having fundamental differences between them in ideological beliefs (p. 28). Bhatt underlies the importance of calling “alt-right” and “alt-lite” out for what they are: Neo-Nazi or

racial fascist movements that rely on deceit and dissimulation to “sanitize” their true motives (2021, p. 28). Bhatt (2021) traces the origin of the “white extinction” fear to older fascist movements, which has morphed in name over the years but doesn’t stray from the initial “logic” based in racial eugenics and genocide. Today, many neo-fascist personalities call it “The Great Replacement”, though it’s a thinly veiled concealment of the older, more overtly fascist “white genocide” it mirrors, which was popularized in the 1920s by Germany’s National Socialist movement (Bhatt, 2021, p. 32). Bhatt also discusses the importance of naturalism in new fascist movements, and the conceptualization of man, or individuals, as “enrooted” deeply to society and nation (p. 36). There is an “organic” way civilization is meant to organize, an idea which is usually deployed to justify ethnopluralism- a society in which races are segregated as the “natural” order.

Anna Livia Brand (2022) analyzes the resurgence and growth of the predominantly white neighborhood Lakeview in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina to explore how whiteness “sediments” itself through planning regimes to sustain white geographies. This piece illustrates how, despite the environmental risk associated with low-lying areas in New Orleans post-Katrina, the whiteness of the Lakeview neighborhood insulated it from destruction during the recovery process, whereas predominantly black and brown neighborhoods in low-lying areas were not afforded the same protection (Brand, 2022). Brand’s exploration is an important case study to understanding how whiteness may emerge as an important “insulator” during the climate crisis in terms of which areas are given preferential protection (2022). Whiteness also plays an important factor in current narratives surrounding climate change. Simon Donner (2020) explores the legacy of climate determinism and its current manifestations in the climate change conversation. Climate determinism as defined by Donner is, “the racially motivated notion that

the climate influences human intelligence and societal development,” (para. 3). Donner (2020) traces the origins of climate determinism from the ancient Greek idea of “tropicalism”: that human society thrived at mild temperatures, namely, a Mediterranean climate. This philosophical idea was promoted by thinkers like Aristotle and Hippocrates- through the Enlightenment and even into the early 20th century. This “tropicalism” was deeply anti-black and racist, and while the original form of tropicalism is not published in academic work, its underlying themes continue in research and media that victimizes “climate refugees” in equatorial and southern regions of the globe (Donner, 2020). This victimization removes a sense of authority or autonomy for people from affected areas, and similarly impacts investments for adaptation measures since there is a narrative of these areas being a “lost cause.”

There is a breadth of literature on far-right ideologies arising from conflict (Gattinara et al, 2019; Kalyan, 2020). As Forchtner (2019) notes, “A far-right ecology response to climate crisis could include: harsh environmental laws and, at some point in the future, an eco-dictatorship so as to be able to deal with and respond to an accelerating climate change crisis” (p. 8). There is precedent for this: we’ve already seen exclusionary policies play into post-disaster landscapes here in the US; New Orleans post-Katrina and New York post Hurricane Sandy are two salient examples. There is also the issue of weaponization of the far-right climate change discourse based on Malthusian overpopulation concerns, which was cited by several mass shooters in their manifestos, for example, the Christchurch Massacre in New Zealand and the El Paso Massacre in Texas in 2019 (Achenbach, 2019). Rohan Kalyan (2020) uses Narendra Modi’s rise to power in India as a case study to illustrate how authoritarian leaders can use crisis and subsequent media frenzy to create “event-ocentric” power-grabs and reinforce a leaders’ status as a figure of authority during chaos.

Securitization of the Environment

Here in the United States, we are operating in a Western context where general disaster management in the 1970s was born out of the government's preparedness to respond to a nuclear attack; created and managed by the military (Duffield, 2011; Masco, 2009). The discipline of critical military studies has helped to inform the field of climate securitization, particularly research by Hannah Teicher and others (Adger et al., 2009; Barnett & O'Neill, 2010; Barnett & Palutik, 2014). Teicher (2021) explains, "plans and programs carried out on a defense premise embody other risks common to many adaptation projects including prioritizing high value assets over vulnerable populations, prioritizing sensational risks over more pervasive ones, and relying on technocratic solutions," (p. 270). Davoudi argues that the framing of securitization of climate change (*climate securitization*) creates a postpolitics narrative of fear: "The postpolitics of fear call for 'the suspension of democratic safeguards and the uncoupling of checks and balances' (Blühdorn & Welsh, 2007, p. 191) in the name of urgency, emergency, resilience, risk, and security." (Davoudi, 2014, p. 371). Policy responses being framed as a way for governments to protect public safety and security can create consequences for communities, including "spatial stratification, segregation, and injustice" (Teicher & Finklestein, 2018).

"Feeding from each other, risk and security can provoke strong emotions, legitimize extraordinary measures, and lead to practices which are otherwise indefensible. They can create imaginaries of fear which renounce social conflict, foreclose politics, and crowd out descending voices. They can suspend democratic safeguards in the name of urgency, emergency, and resilience." (Davoudi, 2014, p. 372).

The suspension of democratic processes in the name of security, emergency response and resilience, make climate securitization a troubling framing for government response to climate change. This framing, however, is already employed by the United States military industrial complex. The Department of Defense has had an interest in taking climate change adaptation seriously since 2003, after reports from analysts predicted major security risks associated with climate change (Teicher & Finklestein, 2018). The military has been involved in adaptation efforts, partnering with local communities and NGOs alike, driven by what Teicher calls a “climate security agenda”; these efforts have not been without critique from historians and geographers, as the military being involved in urban planning has often led to cities and public spaces becoming increasingly privatized and surveilled (Teicher & Finklestein, 2018; Davis, 1990). The climate securitization approach is a natural consequence of historic resilience framing by the military in the aftermath of World War I.

The dangers of using resiliency framing are discussed in Mark Duffield’s *Total War As Environmental Terror: Linking Liberalism, Resilience, and the Bunker* (2011). Duffield traces the emergence of environmental terror to World War I, when total war was employed by participants to create the “dissolution of the juridical distinctions among governments, armies, and people” where the enemy was not only the troops on the front line, but also the vital infrastructure that held the “environmental lifeworld” of enemy society together, giving rise to environmental terror (Duffield, 2011, p. 757). The use of “morale bombing” in World War I, the process of destroying critical infrastructure in enemy borders, opened up the possibility of retaliation and the same kind of morale bombing happening on the home front. This gave rise to systems of civil defense. During World War II however, Duffield explains, “rather than protecting civilians, however, civil defense during the 1930s was essentially concerned with

controlling the expected civil unrest and the wholesale abandonment of the towns and factories,” (2011, p. 759). Civil defense became preoccupied with *the enemy within*- a civilian population that is abandoned to self-reliance for sake of government continuity during disaster (Duffield, 2011.) This gave rise to the invention of bunker networks, used to insulate critical infrastructure so that governments might continue to exist in the face of total war. The rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s, which allowed for privatization and consumption to flourish, caused the creation of new military technologies and science that began scenario-based “role-playing”, to prepare responses in the event of nuclear attacks (Duffield 2011, p. 760). This game-ifying of war response, in conjunction with the rise of the environmental movement and concerns of civil unrest, led to the expansion of government bodies to develop an “all-hazard” disaster response. As Duffield explains, “coevolving fears of revolution and advances in warfare contain a premonition of the vulnerability of critical infrastructure or, more precisely, the vulnerability of the city.” (Duffield, 2011, p. 759). The existential crisis of climate change, viewed as an “enemy” government needs to respond to and securitize against, is an “expression of environmental terror” (Duffield, 2011, p. 763). The built environment- cities and critical infrastructure- must be securitized, and military strategy to environmental terror has historically been the bunker (Duffield, 2011). In a society and economy where neoliberalism rules, privatization has made it so bunkers become defensible spaces where the elite and government can seal themselves off from threats- including the enemy within.

The popularization of resilience against the existential threat of climate change carries the militaristic connotation that it will create uncertain and unpredictable conditions that creates the need for security. Duffield explains that resilience can actually create a sense of perpetual, ongoing terror: “Rather than a direct confrontation and elimination of the causes of

environmental terror, however, resilience is a defense that relies more on constant adaptation to surrounding uncertainty” (2011, p. 757). Such framing of resilience against environmental terror creates systems of security- surveillance, inspection, police presence- to fortify cities against threats and ensure the continuity of “the spectacle of democracy” and the continuity of government (Duffield, 2011, p. 766). The rise of climate securitization as a response to climate change can be viewed as a legacy of total war and militaristic response to environmental terror, which can be used as justification for strengthening people in power and entities that seek to rely upon “traditional security instruments to manage its consequences” (Brzoska, 2009, p. 144). This can have drastic consequences for those not in the chosen elite. It is not difficult to imagine a world in which frontline¹ communities to climate change become *the enemy within*, excluded from metaphoric and literal bunkers and becoming abandoned to self-reliance, becoming communities the government seeks to defend against.

The securitization of the environment is discussed most explicitly in the discipline of critical military studies, as explored above, though I believe design theory, and the teasing apart of shifting landscapes and temporality, can help us understand the more nuanced impacts changes in the built environment has on physically manifesting climate securitization. It is important to consider militarization within design theory as the built environment strongly impacts how a community functions. During response and recovery efforts in post-disaster contexts, many “moving pieces” of recovery- political efforts, physical rebuilding, community responses (neighborhood coalitions, etc.), environmental responses- come together to form an

¹ I employ the term “frontline” throughout this theses in reference to the vulnerable unhoused community, and use it according to the official definition from the State of California of, “historically marginalized communities that experience the ‘first and worst’ consequences of climate change and other injustices,” including the unhoused population (Strategic Growth Council, 2023). This term is widely used in environmental justice contexts, however, I would like to note that the term “frontline” has some problematic connotations as it’s a historically military term, and therefore can be a loaded term with a complicated legacy. Additionally, “frontline” has a flattening effect- generalizing very diverse communities that experience different forms of vulnerability to climate impacts.

assemblage (Milligan, 2015). This “assemblage of recovery” creates a shifting and dynamic context that deeply impacts how a community changes and moves forward after disaster—including who gets left behind. The article *Landscape Migration* discusses understanding landscapes as not fixed, but as moving, shifting and migrating entities. In this piece, author Brett Milligan posits, “How we represent and model landscapes influences how we perceive and engage with them,” (2015). When we understand our “natural” landscapes as shifting, dynamic entities, we can make a comparison to how we understand our political or social landscapes. The traditional “mechanistic model” of stability and control in design has impacted how recovery happens in post-disaster contexts. As Milligan states, “Landscapes will be reassembled with unknown and potentially disastrous effects” (2015, para. 49) due to climate change; as we see landscapes be reassembled by climate disasters, it is vital we understand how this reassembling impacts the communities within those landscapes. It is during this reassembly period in the aftermath of disaster that communities are most vulnerable to design that can harm, control or oppress them, particularly if that reassembly is done by a government or planning entity with a securitizing approach. Panarchy theory’s ouroboros of creative destruction and renewal can help to further critique the military approach to resilience and its constant adaptation to surrounding uncertainty; the plurality of multiple, semi-stable states that landscapes can exist in are unable to reach equilibrium when something intervenes to disrupt the process. This intervention, a rigid response to disaster recovery for example through employment of a “mechanistic model” of stability and control (Milligan, 2015), can act to disrupt what could be a flexible recovery panarchy.

In a disaster context, it is important we understand the temporality of infrastructure. Pulling from Arjun Appandurai’s work as described by Akhil Gupta in *The Future in Ruins*

(2018): “infrastructures tell us about aspirations, anticipations, and imaginations of the future: what people think their society should be like, what they want it to be like, and what kind of statement they wish to make about that vision of the future” (Gupta, 2018, p. 63). This understanding of infrastructure, as being a direct representation of the future and what kind of future a community wants, has interesting implications when applied to the disaster response and recovery context. Particularly when temporary infrastructure that is used as a quick- or “band-aid”- solution during disaster recovery is made permanent. Past research around disaster recovery indicates that low-income communities and communities of color, our “frontline communities”, are most impacted by disasters (and climate change in general) (Klein, 2007).

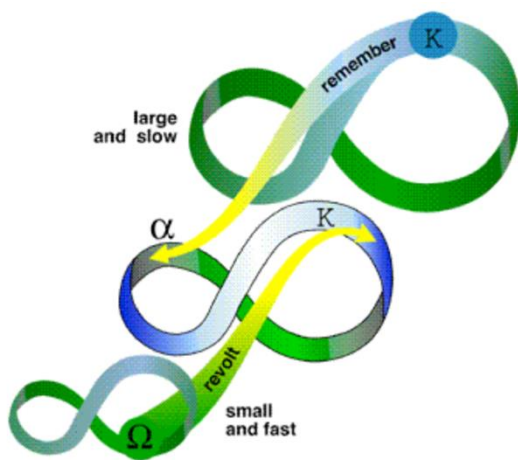


Figure 1 (Gunderson & Holling, 2002)

Another concept from design theory that is useful in understanding temporalities of disaster is panarchy theory, which explores adaptive cycles in an interlinking hierarchy- a kind of complex, multi-layered ouroboros. The Panarchy Diagram (Gunderson & Holling, 2002, Figure 1) details four entropic stages of: exploitation, conservation, release, and reorganization, and illustrates the

relationship between the “large and slow” scale and “small and fast” scale of system dynamics. Brett Miligan (2015) has applied panarchy theory to shifting landscapes, and noted “as panarchy theory demonstrates landscape’s intrinsic mobilities and elasticities, asserting that there is not one but multiple possible semi-stable states for any given landscape, arrived at through diverse processes of ‘creative destruction and renewal.’” (para. 36). Panarchy can help us understand how landscapes become unstable when large and slow changes become large and fast. Large-

scale climate disasters like wildfire happen quickly- in the case of the Camp Fire, almost overnight. This instability is troubling, especially when connected with disaster capitalism and the concept of environmental terror; it is in the instability of landscapes that human interventions seek to control and regain stability with potentially inequitable impacts.

The associated disciplines of disaster capitalism and climate urbanism- bodies of research that explores how “fast policies” in response to climate adaptation or disaster recovery lead to exclusionary outcomes in communities through speculative financial intervention (Klein, 2007; Chu, 2020; Chu et al., 2017; Long & Rice, 2019; Shi, 2020) also help to inform my thesis. In the wake of disasters, both natural and human induced, scholars have observed that the event can be followed by the implementation of exclusionary policies and programs that further deepen historical political and economic disparities. Author Naomi Klein aptly named this phenomenon “disaster capitalism”, which she explains as, “Every time a new crisis hits- even when the crisis itself is the direct by-product of free-market ideology- the fear and disorientation that follow are harnessed for radical social and economic re-engineering” (Klein, 2007). This kind of exclusionary response to disaster “cascade and compound” historical or emerging forms of social, economic and political inequality in communities, particularly for communities of color and low-income communities. Similarly, scholars working in the field of climate security studies note that existing conditions like poverty and poor governance will compound existing pressures in localities that experience the impacts of climate change (Smith & Vivekananda, 2007, p. 3). Examples of this phenomena in the United States could be witnessed in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy (Klein, 2007).

All of the works discussed above, despite their different disciplines of research, all help to analyze and explain how changes occur in times of disaster. During periods of destruction and

subsequent renewal, design theory helps us to understand the reassembly of landscapes and communities, and the temporalities in which these processes happen. Climate urbanism and disaster capitalism focuses on intervention after disaster and the “clean canvas” upon which interveners can create their vision for what they want the community to look like. The political ecology of fascism similarly explores the regeneration of society proponents of this ideology hope for after a period of crisis, and critical military and security studies provide insight into the historic legacy of disaster response, and the lasting consequences of total war.

Methodology

For this thesis, I used a combination of qualitative methodology (interviews and document analysis) to explore my research question. Using Creswell and Creswell (2007) to guide my research process, I will be using qualitative interviews and documents to collect my data, which I then used in my narrative analysis technique.

My interview protocol was semistructured interviews of 4 individuals that are long-term residents of Chico who held both official and unofficial roles during the Camp Fire recovery. As the Camp Fire was a traumatic event, for both impacted communities and Chico, the interview protocol went through Internal Review Board (IRB) review at UC Davis to ensure the interview process was handled sensitively and confidentially. IRB review ensures that the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in research conducted at UC Davis are protected, and follow federal regulations. Each interviewee filled out a consent form and were able to opt in or out of confidentiality, and the interviews were audiotaped (with the consent of the participant) and then

transcribed. Interviewees were also made aware that at any point they could choose to not answer a question or end the interview at any time. Interview questions included:

1. How long have you been a resident of Chico?
2. Can you describe what role you had during the Camp Fire and in the immediate aftermath?
3. What, from your perspective, happened in Chico after the Camp fire in 2018?
4. How were disaster victims initially treated by the community?
 1. Follow up: how did this attitude shift (if at all) in the following months and years?
5. In your perspective, how were people experiencing homelessness treated by the community before the fire?
 1. Follow up: how are they treated now after the fire?
6. What happened to the Chico City Council after the fires?
 1. Follow up: was this surprising to you?
7. How, if at all, has the political culture of Chico changed since the fires?

My analysis protocol used quotes to help provide evidence and tell the story of what happened in Chico, CA in the aftermath of the Camp Fire. Concurrently, I produced a document analysis of all relevant local ordinances passed by the City Council since the Fire and reviewed both the local political action campaign (PAC) Citizens for a Safe Chico and the Chico First Facebook pages, looking at their messaging and use of language to analyze their influence on city council and community politics.

Data Analysis

The Camp Fire Impact on Chico, CA- The Micro-level Story

Chico, California lies in Butte County in Northern California, in the upper part of the Sacramento Valley. It is the most populous city in and the seat of Butte County, with a population of 101,475 as of the 2020 Census, reflecting an almost 15,000 person increase from the 2010 Census (US Census, 2020). The city of Chico is known as the home to California State University, Chico (Chico State), and for its urban parks, including Bidwell Park, one of the largest urban parks in the United States (Trust for Public Land, 2007). The city has a strong identity tied to being known as a college town, and Chico State and the City of Chico have marketed the city for its many opportunities for recreation, green space and bikeability (CSU Chico, 2023). The population of Chico is 77.1% white, with a household median income of \$60,507 and 21.9% of the population is living in poverty (US Census, 2020). Due to the presence of Chico State, the city of Chico has a high number of residents between the ages of 18-30, with the largest population age group being 20-24 (UC Census, 2020). Chico, like many California cities, was experiencing a housing crisis in 2018. The City Council has previously found that, “the City of Chico is experiencing a housing crisis, and a severe lack of rental housing, particularly rental housing that is affordable to lower and moderate-income residents,” (Chico Municipal Code, 2018). According to one interviewee, Butte County, the county that both Paradise and Chico are within, had previously been growing at negative percentages (Interviewee 2).

This is the setting that displaced residents of Paradise fled to on November 8, 2018 when the Camp Fire began, which killed 85 people and destroyed 18,804 structures over the course of

17 days. The fire was started by a PG&E power transmission line in a difficult to reach area above Poe Dam. As the fire was contained, thousands of disaster victims flooded into Chico, the closest and largest city to the impacted communities. A makeshift encampment formed in an abandoned lot next to Walmart, with an additional ten shelters that were run by the Red Cross, and many Chico residents who had friends or family in Paradise and the foothill communities opened their homes to let them stay. Hotel vouchers were also given out by FEMA. However, an outbreak of the norovirus struck nine of the ten Red Cross shelters, and according to interviewees, due to this outbreak, many of those displaced chose to camp in cars instead to protect themselves against falling ill (Thomas, 2018).

On November 16, 2018, eight days after the start of the Fire, those staying in the encampment in the Walmart parking lot were asked to leave, causing confusion for those staying there. The City of Chico, FEMA and the Red Cross all denied giving the order for those to leave, however the Red Cross did agree with the order as a rainstorm was due to hit the area (Johnson, 2018). Many victims staying in the area did not know where they were going to go after the order was given, facing pressure from Walmart, whose employees began posting signs asking for those left to leave (Caiola, 2018). The encampment ended up staying open until December 1, 2018 when it was officially closed and the lot fenced off. The City told those staying at the encampment they had the option to relocate to one of the shelters in town or leave the area. The remaining shelters in town stayed open for victims until January 31, 2019 when the last one was closed, two months after the disaster began (Bizjak, 2019). At the time, 600 people were staying in the emergency shelters, many reportedly infirm and elderly, with no friends or family in the immediate area (Bizjak, 2019). The closure of this last shelter put the responsibility of sheltering these displaced individuals on the City of Chico and local shelter organizations, which had very

little beds available and established rules around how long individuals could stay (Bizjak, 2019). It is here that a years-long recovery process within an ongoing housing crisis started, with a local government that became increasingly resistant to creating shelter for displaced victims of the Camp Fire, blurring the lines between disaster victim and unhoused community member.

No disaster happens in a vacuum. The current political and social conditions of our world all but guarantee that disasters are going to create cascading and compounding impacts for the community and surrounding communities they happen in. Firstly, interviewees all noted the immediate crowdedness from the influx of Paradise residents that were displaced from their homes. At the peak of the Fire's aftermath, 50,000 people had been displaced from the impacted communities in the Sierra Nevada foothills, and 10,000 of that number resettled in Chico, CA, a town that at the time had a population of 110,000 people (Anguiano, 2020). According to the Department of Transportation (DOT), Chico's population grew by almost 20,000 between 2018 and 2019 (DOT, 2019). For Chico residents, this explosion of population was immediately felt- "the main noticeable thing was the crowdedness, it was apparent that we'd had a big shift in population" (Interviewee 4). This increase in population, virtually overnight, was initially met positively by the Chico community. One interviewee noted, "the [Chico] community was just give, give, give... there was a complete sense of solidarity and openness" (Interviewee 1). However, the city infrastructure of Chico was not set up to accommodate that kind of population growth, and had noticeable impacts on transportation (interviewees emphasized a large increase in traffic), housing and public space; "no one in the county was prepared for such a major disaster with so many homeless" (Interviewee 2). Overtime these impacts, compounded with already existing housing and infrastructure challenges and a newly elected conservative city

council in Chico, led the community² and City of Chico to approach responding to and recovering from the disaster in increasingly securitized ways through the vilification of homelessness and securitization of life through a lens of “public safety”- surveillance, increased police presence and budget and heightened control over public space.

Vilification of Homelessness

While the Camp Fire disaster victims were initially met with open arms by the Chico community, interviewees noted that over time, in the months and years following the Fire, there was a shift in community attitudes towards people experiencing homelessness. To understand more fully why this occurred, interviewees were asked a series of questions regarding how the community responded to and treated disaster victims and the attitudes towards people experiencing homelessness pre and post Fire. For context, the underlying lack of housing stock in Chico and many Paradise residents that were already precariously housed primed the community for a large increase in community-members experiencing homelessness in Chico. Before the Camp Fire, Paradise served as an affordable housing area in Butte County, particularly in comparison to Chico.

During my interviews, I learned that many Paradise residents were able to work in Chico and then commute back up the hill to Paradise where they were able to afford rent, or for some, a mortgage. Prior to the Camp Fire, according to one interviewee, housing for many Paradise residents was already tenuous:

² It is important to highlight that Chico is a community filled with many different people from different backgrounds, and though at times referred to as simply, “the community”, it does not intend to imply that all Chico residents have the same attitudes or took the same actions. This thesis draws attention to notable trends that took place amongst the community by some residents.

“There’s probably a lot of people falling through the cracks... that seems to be a recurrent theme...how vulnerable so many of the people are that were living in the fire footprint... they were living in that area because they didn’t have a lot of resources and a lot of them were older, and there was kind of a quasi-homeless situation of family members living by hook or by crook with older family members who might have a pension check but not a lot of resources. [This] seems to be one of the reasons why you see the homeless population increase here.” (Interviewee 1).

This confluence of smaller disasters- within the context of the larger Camp Fire disaster- illustrates the “cascading and compounding” nature of climate disaster, and creates the foundation for shifting attitudes in the community towards homelessness during the recovery period.

According to interviews, this shift began with the influx of resources to the area. In the days and months after the Fire hit, donations poured into Chico: “a tsunami of clothes” (Interviewee 1) and “food- almost too much” (Interviewee 3) were brought to the community by surrounding neighboring communities and volunteers. It is in this context a rumor developed amongst some in the community as they attempted to distinguish between a disaster survivor or someone that was unhoused prior to the Fire. Interviewees noted that a common concern for some Chico residents was “people that aren’t really survivors taking advantage of resources from people that are actually survivors,” (Interviewee 1) and another interviewee noted that “what happens overtime is that people start questioning ‘are these survivors or are these people taking advantage?’” (Interviewee 3). In addition to the shock of residents experiencing historic

population growth overnight- this rumor was able to take root in the community due to historic pervasive attitudes towards people experiencing homelessness in Chico.

Two campaigns took place in the city that promoted keeping Chico “clean” and “safe”, one was an official City of Chico campaign and the other was a private citizen’s action group. The City public outreach campaign was born out of the “Clean and Safe Initiative” that was announced in 2013, and had a corresponding Facebook page with information about city council meetings and information linking to the Initiative website page on the City website. This campaign was active from 2013 to 2015. The second campaign was a community group named Citizens for a Safe Chico, formed by members of an existing Facebook group called *Chico First* (formed October 10, 2017) that grew into an official Political Action Campaign (PAC) on November 1, 2019 to support “pro-public safety” candidates to the city council. This group became much more active in the wake of the Fire, and in 2019 and 2020, helped to elect several conservative, pro-public safety candidates to city council, flipping control of the city council to a conservative majority. As of 2023, the Facebook page had 10,000 followers. The messaging of this group (outside of posts supporting their chosen candidates and in opposition to the Democrat-slate candidate) focuses on keeping public spaces and parks “clean”, opposing increasing services to those experiencing homelessness without “accountability” measures, promoting a needle ban in the city and supporting increasing the police budget.

In researching all of the social media posts since the creation of the Facebook group, there is a particular focus on language when in reference to unhoused residents: “enabling”, “handouts”, “transience”, “vagrants”, “accountability” and “dangerous” being the most repeated. A 2019 study on barriers to housing among unsheltered homeless adults notes that “70 to 80 percent of homeless persons are from the local area or lived there for a year or longer before

becoming unhoused” (Wusinich et al., 2019). The reframing of people experiencing homelessness as “transient” indicates that those in the Chico community, including members of the City Council that ran with Keep Chico Safe, have compartmentalized the current group of unhoused community members as being separate from the larger, holistic context of the Camp Fire. Interviewees explained that many Paradise renters that didn’t have a safety net or means to purchase in Chico become homeless: “People that had money that came down from the ridge that could buy were fine, but renters had nothing (no provision for them) and folks that lost homes that became homeless were not well received” (Interviewee 2). As one interviewee noted of the existing unhoused community, “the disaster is impacting them too...it was a regional issue” (Interviewee 1). In response to a question regarding how the political culture of Chico changed since the fires, one interviewee noted that it “feels more extreme, feels more polarized. The tenor of things in town feels heightened. There have been more attacks on people that are unhoused. There was a murder of an unhoused person, stories of people shooting pellet guns at tents. It feels more violent and consistent with the national narrative” (Interviewee 4). Another interviewee said in response to the treatment of unhoused people after the Fire, “It’s gotten worse now- before there was a “reason” and they could go ‘oh these people were burned out,’” (Interviewee 1). Also noting the treatment of unhoused people after the Fire, another interviewee recalled, “there were ‘ok and good people’ who were accepted and then there was the existing homeless population... There was a class-based system almost within the homeless of fire victims versus ordinance victims. They [ordinance victims] were made to be the people that cause all of the problems in Chico” (Interviewee 4).

The vilification of homelessness in Chico led to a process of criminalization of homelessness officially through the passage of ordinances that criminalize what Chico deems as

“unsafe criminal behavior” on public property, mostly focused on overnight camping. In 2020, Chico city council passed city ordinance 2557, a lengthy amendment to municipal code covering behavior prohibited in Chico’s parks and waterways. This ordinance banned camping within “any city park or playground” or even present in any Chico Area Park and Recreation district parks, greenways or open spaces during closed hours (11 pm to 5 am). This ordinance allows for police officers to enforce it through citation and arrest. Another ordinance, city ordinance 2546 passed in 2020, allows police officers to impound vehicles and shut down streets that contain “serious and continual criminal activity” of which overnight camping is classified as such (Chico Municipal Code, 2020).

The City of Chico has experienced a series of legal issues with their approach to homelessness in the years since the Camp Fire. In order to legally be able to enforce such regulations, the City of Chico had to provide alternative shelter for people living in the city ordinance enforcement zone. As an emergency solution, the City erected a “shelter” on a vacant airport tarmac during the height of summer, where temperatures often reach 100° (Cahill, 2021). Eight unhoused community members sued the city for the often violent sweepings and forced removal of encampments to the alternate ‘shelter’ site at the airport. Judge Morrison England wrote in an initial ruling “under none of these definitions is the airport site a ‘shelter,’” (Cahill, 2021). The lawsuit, *Warren v. Chico*, was settled in late 2022 as the City opened a pallet shelter site with the ability to house over 350 homeless people. For scale, in July of 2021 there were 571 unsheltered people living in Chico, 31% of whom claimed to have lost their home in the 2018 Camp Fire (Cahill, 2021). Additionally the shelter, which is run by the nonprofit *The Jesus Center*, has had complaints regarding homophobia and not providing adequate services to unhoused residents (Matthey, 2022). However, with the opening of this shelter Chico has been

allowed to resume anti-camping ordinances and sweeps of encampments, the most recent of which took place in January 2023. According to interviewees, the legacy of that suit further soured many in Chico against unhoused community members: “Chico got sued for removing homeless people from parks and people are still angry about it” (Interviewee 1).

The social media activity of Chico Fist and Citizens for a Safe Chico PAC, their influence and participation in local governance, the subsequent emergency ordinances to criminalize homelessness and issues with the municipality in providing adequate shelter for the unhoused community all created a narrative that vilified unhoused community members in Chico. The vilification of the unhoused community in Chico thus created the social and political environment for following processes of securitization to occur.

Securitization of Life

As previously discussed, Chico had a history of housing shortages and citizen groups that formed around “public safety” and “cleanliness”, and the activity of Citizens for a Safe Chico gained traction amongst the community to help elect a 6-1 conservative City Council in 2020 and 2022. The political and governance implications of this can be seen in the creation of a culture of surveillance, increased police budget and presence and heightened control over public space.

Interviewees discussed the creation of what can be described as a culture of surveillance towards people experiencing homelessness. As one interviewee put, “The Facebook groups were really ugly- taking photos of them [unhoused people] and also taking their possessions during ‘park cleanup’ events,” (Interviewee 4). In my review of the Citizens for a Safe Chico and Chico First Facebook groups, I found dozens of posts (n>40) of unhoused community members and their property (or evidence of their property) and indicating the location of the photograph. In

addition to community members posting about encampments on the public Facebook page, this kind of surveillance was codified into local law through the passage of city ordinance 2567, which allows for the removal of personal property if found on public or private property by the City after a posted notice of 24 hours, with additional escalation of enforcement to citation or misdemeanor (Chico Municipal Code, 2020). The creation of laws functions to legitimize a societal norm, and the creation of ordinances making homelessness illegal in Chico serves to solidify surveillance as a community norm, and further empower police and ordinary citizens to surveil their property, their neighborhoods and public spaces to play a role in enforcement of those ordinances.

There is a term in legal studies for the empowerment of citizens to enforce the law, a phenomenon called “deputization” (Walsh, 2014). Examples of deputization of citizens has been seen in reaction to immigration control and border enforcement (Walsh, 2014) and recently in Texas, private citizens were empowered to report any person that assists someone who receives abortion services in violation of Texas state Senate Bill 8 (Charo, 2021). There are over dozens



Figure 2

(n>25) of posts on the Chico First Facebook page alone that include photos of unhoused community members' property and shelters. One member posted a video from her Ring door camera of an unhoused community member setting up shelter on their front porch; another provided maps they had made, highlighting areas where

encampments were located and noted that they reported the location of the encampments of Chico Police Department (figure 2).

In the years following the Camp Fire, as discussed above, the community of Chico has emphasized public safety as a priority through their city elections. This has manifested in increased budgets towards public safety entities and measures. As one interviewee put, “People are still very anti-homeless, you can see this in Next Door posts and with elections coming up, you see this in the commentary” (Interviewee 1). The same interviewee also noted, “Here [in Chico] it all comes down to public safety- even the more liberal candidates have weird slogans like ‘stronger Chico’. And then there’s this weird bipartisan support for a tax increase in Chico because it will increase police” (Interviewee 1). In 2021, Chico’s city budget passed 7-0, and roughly 75% of the general fund is allocated for public safety. The Chico police budget has risen 2% from 2020 to \$29,384,972, giving 49% of the Chico City general fund solely to the Police Department (Hanson, 2021). For comparison, 2% of the city budget is allocated for community development. In 2022, the Chico City Council also approved a 5% pay raise each year for three years for police lieutenants and captains (Hutchison, 2022).

The focus on cleanliness and green space- particularly messaging regarding the parks and waterways of Chico- is illustrative of how the environment has been used as a tool of control over shaping discourse surrounding the unhoused community members of Chico. The community, through messaging, has denoted acceptable ways to engage with the greenscape of Chico, i.e. residents swimming, biking, and using the park for picnics. This rhetoric is used as a kind of virtue signaling in contrast to how unhoused community members engage with greenspace, namely for shelter space, and whose presence is classified as “unclean” and

“contaminating”. Most recently, city ordinance 2586 was passed as an urgency ordinance in January 2023. This ordinance amends municipal code to allow police officers to enforce anti-camping measures and other park rules as misdemeanors. In an interview with the local newspaper, the Chico ER, Mayor Andrew Coolidge stated, “I think the community sees this as being a massive priority for this Council. We’re definitely moving more along these lines of cleaning up the community, and doing what we think is best and legally right to do,” (Tuchinsky, 2023). Regionally, the prioritization of cleanliness and safety has influenced the rebuilding efforts in Paradise proper: “they saw the chance to rebuild what people wanted Paradise to look like and saw it as a chance to get rid of poor people. People could get by with very little in Paradise and now they don’t have that resource- people in Paradise want to see if it could come back as something more organized, maybe be a tourist spot” (Interviewee 1). This regional reaction to disaster, besides being indicative of disaster capitalism, captures a concerning attitude towards vulnerable populations and frontline communities in the context of rebuilding and recovery post-disaster. The opportunity to rebuild Paradise as something uninhabitable to economically vulnerable people illustrates a process of securitization through economic exclusion.

The interviews and document analysis performed for this research illustrate the processes that both quickly and gradually securitized life in Chico, through the passage of emergency ordinances to criminalize homelessness, create a culture of surveillance amongst residents and increase allocations of local resources to police. These processes of securitization and vilification of the frontline community in Chico can be understood as a micro-level example to a larger macro-level issues of military resilience framing, neoliberalism and the legacy, and resurgence, of eco-fascist ideology.

Theory Applications to Results- The Macro Story

My analysis into what happened in the aftermath of the Camp Fire in Chico, CA has explored the implications of securitization of life post-disaster, and highlighted the impacts the dominating political ideology of the community had on city policies, and how that securitization permeates other parts of community life. I was interested in looking at the city of Chico as a case study to understand how the larger macro-issue of climate securitization and larger political reactions to disaster manifest at local levels to answer my research question: how do we identify processes that lead to climate securitization in post-disaster/climate contexts, and in what ways can response efforts reinforce the securitization of communities? Chico's response and recovery to the Camp Fire are indicative of a larger movement towards increasingly authoritarian responses to climate disaster through both securitization of life and the employment of scapegoatism against a frontline community. It is through my analysis of changes that happened in Chico, California that I propose the following processes as proxy indicators of climate securitization happening at the local level in post-disaster contexts: 1. surveillance of a frontline community (by police and community members), 2. increased presence of and higher resource allocations to police and 3. increased government control over public space through emergency measures. These indicators are proposed as the social reproductions of climate securitization, as most of literature surrounding climate securitization focuses on changes to the built environment, and the impact the built environment has on the community.

The entropic stages of panarchy (exploitation, conservation, release, and reorganization) are particularly enlightening when applied to Chico, CA and the shifting landscapes spurred by the Camp Fire disaster and recovery causing "small and fast" changes to occur- compounding to

create large and slow shifts that can radically transform communities. This gives us some insight into the temporality of securitization during disaster recovery. For those that study the converging issues of disaster and rising authoritarianism, we can be critical of “small and fast” changes- quick interventions to immediately address issues that arise due to a disaster- as this can create conditions for securitization. Studies of climate urbanism and disaster capitalism warn of fast policies enacted in the wake of disaster, when communities are in often chaotic settings with many moving parts and rapidly changing conditions. As explored in design theory, the shifting conditions landscapes can exist in are unable to reach equilibrium when something intervenes to disrupt the process (Milligan, 2015). In my early observations of the recovery response, Chico’s rigid response to recovery is emblematic of an intervention that disrupts what could be a flexible recovery panarchy. The passage of emergency ordinances and funneling of resources into policing five years after the actual disaster occurred illustrates the conditions of constant uncertainty resilience framing relies upon; that a securitized response to climate disaster can actively reinforce and create an ongoing, perpetual state of emergency in a community while simultaneously denying impacted communities long-term recovery solutions as the disaster is officially designated “over”.

In Chico, “small and fast” changes to the built environment happened through emergency ordinances enacted to securitize both public space and the built environment from perceived “dangers” from people experiencing homelessness. City Council legislative efforts to prioritize control and security, which were enforced by police during the recovery process, appear to shift law enforcement and government towards viewing community members as *the enemy within* (Duffield, 2011). This context of *the enemy within* can be observed in how police- and by extension the community of Chico- treated unhoused community members. Additionally, this

framing of unhoused community members as *the enemy within* was further illustrated through the deputization of private citizens to surveil and report on unhoused community members, both through community norms promoted by Citizens for a Safe Chico and Chico First and through official city Municipal Code. The spatial stratification climate securitization can cause (see Teicher, 2018) was also present in Chico, as demonstrated by the city ordinances discussed above, separating the enemy within- unhoused community members- from the general community, legislating specific spaces that are considered acceptable for them to be and classifying being unhoused as tantamount to criminality.

As previously discussed, the system dynamics of the Chico fire exemplify when traditionally large and slow changes become large and fast. The fire happened in a matter of hours, with the population of Chico growing by 10,000 virtually overnight. This kind of rapid change is troubling, especially when connected to environmental terror; it is during times of instability in landscapes that human interventions seek to control and regain stability. These interventions are influenced by our historical tradition of military response approaches to disaster. Stability and control is a lynchpin of military response (Duffield, 2011), and as most of our immediate disaster response in the United States is either directly carried out by military entities (or organizations like the National Guard, FEMA and the Red Cross acting in paramilitary ways). In the United States, we've seen state governors and the federal government mobilize the national guard to sites of disaster. In 2022 alone, "142,000 Guard members responded to wildfires across 19 states, 18,000 to floods across eight states, 12,000 to winter storms across 19 states, 1,700 to tornadoes and 1,000 to severe weather" (Hughes, 2022). The presence of military entities to disaster can have influential impacts on how longer-term response happens in a recovery area. As we see in Chico, the community response to the long-term

impacts of the Fire was to circle around the ideas of stability and control, with efforts to surveil unhoused community members and clear away encampments, control public space and make long-term investments in increasing police budget and presence. The larger context of neoliberalism present in the United States have also allowed for processes of securitization to occur in Chico. Because of the hollowing out of local governance and increased privatization of what has historically been publicly provided services by neoliberalism, citizens in communities increasingly feel the burden of responsibility to act as ‘the state’ (Rose, 1999). This burden further empowers the process of deputization of citizens to enforce chosen societal norms, as seen in the surveillance behavior of Chico residents towards the unhoused community and participation in “cleanup” events that destroyed unhoused community member shelter and property.

Another concerning implication of a securitized response to disaster in climate contexts is the threat of an ideological eco-fascist influence on the social and political aspects of the community. As previously discussed, eco-fascism can be used as a “critical lens” in the fields of planning and geography for analyzing the resurgence of fascism through alt-right movements in the United States (Huq & Mochida, 2018). In many of the Facebook posts, political campaigns surrounding public safety and local ordinances enacted, the issues with unhoused community members and encampments are framed not as public health issues, but as environmental ones. There is a narrative focus on the various public spaces and parks in Chico, particularly Bidwell Park; that the natural greenspaces and waterways are ‘contaminated’ by encampments. Going further than just green gentrification, Chico has prioritized it’s public and green spaces above unhoused community members, serving not only in the vilification of the group, but also indicating that there is a specific aesthetic vision that the community deems acceptably- and

therefor people or things that don't fit into that aesthetic vision are deemed unacceptable. This vision, and creation of processes to execute this vision, have troubling implications for those found unacceptable. As eco-fascism employs nature as a symbology of "homeland" and has significance in the "reproduction of 'the people'" (Forchtner, 2019, p. 2), the ordinances criminalizing homelessness, whether intentionally or unintentionally, have served as an example of how a local government might codify eco-fascist principles into their Municipal Code. This process of vilification of homelessness aided in the unhoused community members becoming a scapegoat for the issues that arose after the Camp Fire.

The use of scapegoatism against a frontline community was present in Chico in the aftermath of the Fire, rising in popularity through rumor as some residents grew tired of the fallout of the disaster impacting their daily life. As patience and attention span wore out, they sought out an explanation for who was responsible for their community changing so quickly and not returning to 'normal' weeks and months after the disaster. As highlighted by one interviewee, "they [ordinance victims] were made to be the people that cause all of the problems in Chico" (Interviewee 4). The existence of this framing amongst community members of Chico have led to this group of unhoused community members to be a scapegoat to the ongoing problems with housing and the capability of the local government to respond to the aftermath of the Camp Fire. The employment of scapegoats is a hallmark of fascism, and in this context, we see the group that was singled out to be a scapegoat was a frontline community to this climate disaster. This raises concern over what responses to further climate disaster could look like in communities, particularly ones that are home to frontline communities and vulnerable populations.

Five years after the Camp Fire, we can begin to see the longer-term outcomes of a community prioritizing securitization as a response to climate disaster and recovery. This case

study raises concerns for other municipalities looking towards planning for climate change scenarios that will include more extreme weather conditions that can bring about disaster. In speaking with the interviewees, most of them were unsurprised that the changes that occurred in Chico happened- which leads me to wonder are there steps municipalities can take to protect their communities against such changes? Or are they inevitable? I believe that under our current social, political and economic conditions, climate securitization and the social processes of it are likely to occur without larger systemic restructuring. However, researchers and planners can look towards the processes of securitization to see if a municipality's response to disaster is reinforcing climate securitization, and then intentionally intervene in these processes by addressing them head on. While these kinds of actions taken by local governments can give researchers an indication of if a disaster response is becoming securitized, the temporality of these changes are uncertain. Each community, though we can draw comparisons between them, is unique and might not follow a similar timeline to Chico; these changes may occur on a faster or slower timeline depending on the makeup of the local governments and community.

Conclusion

The analysis of Chico, California as a case study illustrates the link between disaster response and climate securitization. It serves as an example of what the long-term implications are when a community takes a more securitized response to climate disaster through the observed processes of securitization: surveillance of a frontline community (by police and community members), increased presence of and higher resource allocations to police and increased government control over public space through emergency measures. These processes, the social reproduction of climate securitization, are supported and reinforced by military resilience framing, neoliberalism and the legacy of eco-fascist ideology in the United States.

Additionally, the emergence of the unhoused community as a frontline community in climate disaster contexts is important to highlight as municipalities create planning documents around hazard mitigation, disaster response and climate change. Individual occurrences of climate disaster, like wildfires and floods, cascade and compound already existing disasters occurring within communities- the housing crisis, public health crises, economic crises; disasters within disaster. As communities prepare for climate change, discussions surrounding how measures for the protection of frontline communities need to occur if communities are to have an equitable and inclusive response to disaster. Additionally, as observed in Chico, the temporality of disaster is much longer than traditional disaster responses allow for: the disaster hasn't ended for many in Chico, despite many residents, aid organizations and the State no longer viewing it as a disaster area. The lasting economic, social and political implications reinforce and recreate disaster for impacted communities still experiencing the loss of housing, community and government service.

Other communities, particularly in California and the American West, which will see compounding disasters surrounding wildfire, drought and flooding, should have planning discussions now. Many counties in California are due for updates to their Long-Term Hazard Mitigation Plans, and there is opportunity for municipalities to learn lessons from Chico and directly address the issue of climate securitization in these plans. Planners looking at rebuilding and recovery would benefit from a more flexible, open-ended mode of operation in order to shift the recovery landscape away from securitization. As Chu and Shi (2022) note, “growing nationalism, nativism, and right-wing political movements are escalating the rhetoric of exclusion at the level of borders, national wealth redistribution, and urban resource investments. In this context, equitable adaptation plans must respond not only to past urban and environmental

injustices but also to evolving social polarization” (p. 751-771). As more landscape shifts begin to happen on a large scale and more rapidly due to climate change, Chico serves to illustrate what can happen in other localities that experience climate disaster should policy decisions be driven by a securitization lens- a focus on public safety, control and stability.

This research adds to the growing body of climate securitization research by building upon existing research surrounding defense and climate change planning and climate urbanism, and proposes local indicators of securitization that can be observed at the community level. Much of the research surrounding climate urbanism and securitization focuses on changes to the built environment and the impact that has on communities. This thesis contributes to that literature in a new way, expanding upon the field by zooming in how communities themselves socially reproduce securitization through the proposed processes.

In addition to continued research in the areas of climate securitization and its impact on community planning, further research is needed to understand the long-term impacts of community-wide trauma, and the impact that trauma has on decision-making and the socio-political implications of that trauma. There are many public health implications to this kind of community-wide trauma events, and a need to understand how that trauma impacts a community in order to make sure there are adequate resources available for communities to mitigate any negative short- and long-term impacts. Collaborative research efforts between the disciplines of community development and public health looking into disaster, trauma or the impact of climate securitization on the individual could produce compelling literature.

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³ All referenced City of Chico municipal codes and ordinances can be found at this website.

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