The Unhomely of Homeschooling

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Abstract

Despite increasing global popularity perceptions of homeschooling remain problematic. It resists trends towards mass compulsory education and the promotion of children's rights; it challenges the state's authority to educate citizens; and raises concerns about child protection issues and educational outcomes. Contemporaneously many homeschoolers identify their fears of risks and failings in mainstream schooling as the reason they homeschool. This article explores how discomfort and fear is ingrained within meanings associated with homeschooling often related to its domestic practice. It develops Freud's account of *unheimlich* (the unhomely) as a useful addition to the sociological analysis of the multiple renditions of meaning attached to homeschooling. These include the conflation of homely and unhomely accounts; the significance of anecdotal accounts as a means of restating class biases and racisms; and the ambiguous relationship between family and state. It argues both policymakers and homeschoolers need to acknowledge these ambiguities.

Introduction

Homeschooling is often identified as a problematic form of education because it '*goes against the grain*' (Myers, 2020: 211, emphasis in original) of mainstream, global trends towards compulsory mass schooling (European Commission, 2018; Meyer et al., 1992; UNESCO, 2021). This problematic status has been theorised in relation to pedagogic practice including the structuring of schooldays and educational outcomes (Martin-Chang et al., 2011; Neuman and Guterman, 2016); and sociological perspectives situating homeschooling within broader patterns of inequality, understandings of risk and socio-economic trends including educational privatisation and neoliberalism (Apple,

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2000; Bhopal and Myers, 2018; Musumunu and Mazama, 2015). This article draws upon my research since 2008 (Bhopal and Myers, 2008, 2009, 2016, 2018; Myers, 2015, 2020; Myers and Bhopal, 2018) with a range of different homeschooling families in the UK and the USA including elective homeschoolers, children excluded from schools, affluent and less affluent families, families from different ethnic backgrounds, religious and non-religious families, families with children who have disabilities and children identified as gifted and talented. It argues that while sociological, educational and pedagogical analysis remain valid, they overlook a key feature of homeschooling, which is the sense of *discomfort* it engenders within public, social and media discourse (Bartholet, 2020; Bhopal and Myers, 2016; Dwyer and Peters, 2019; Ross, 2009; Yuracko, 2008). It draws upon Freud's 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche* ('The unhomely'), to suggest his interest in 'the qualities of our feelings' (Freud, 2003: 123) adds to educational and sociological insights. It provides a useful means of unpacking the types of discomfort surrounding homeschooling, which often appear inflated. Freud explains his interest in distinguishing *unheimlich* as a particular type of frightening sensation from other general understandings of fear. Its distinctive aspects include ambiguous and unsettling feelings of discomfort that are difficult to define but readily recognisable. I argue such ambiguous fears or discomfort resonate with perceptions of homeschooling.

Sociology and psychology have maintained their disciplinary differences since the early 20th century despite initial identification of potential alignment and similarities (e.g. Burgess, 1939; Groves, 1916, 1917); and, despite notable sociologists, including Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Talcott Parsons, making links with Freud, leading Bocock (1976: 20) to conclude, 'Freud has remained peripheral to mainstream sociology.' Discussing potential interdisciplinary approaches to understanding *Weltanschauung* (worldview), Freud (1973) highlights the need for more significant sociological insight in terms of the relations between individuals and groups, between races and between classes. However, he concludes that sociology, 'dealing as it does with the behaviour of people in society, cannot be anything but applied psychology' (Freud, 1973: 216)! Identifying 21st-century challenges for sociology, Wallerstein (1999) argued Freud's concepts were collectively well understood and used by sociologists but a remaining challenge of Freud's 'sociology' was the framing of an understanding of rationality in the light of Freudian diagnosis in which irrational behaviours are understood as rational. Homeschooling is an educational practice in which understandings of rationality and irrationality are ambiguously held by different actors (Bhopal and Myers, 2018). Policymakers and educationalists often identify homeschooling as an irrational choice that disrupts children's life chances, while homeschoolers often identify homeschooling as their most rational strategy and consider policymakers as intrusive and driven by irrational beliefs about their family life.

This article develops Freud's account of *unheimlich* (Freud, [1919] 2003) to consider the unsettling role the home plays in homeschooling. Freud acknowledges *Das Unheimliche* falls outside of mainstream psychological approaches; it is not directed at individual diagnosis but rather an 'aesthetic investigation[s]' to explore collectively held 'emotional impulses' (Freud, 2003: 123). His essay unfolds in a convoluted, slightly disjointed fashion to classify what is meant by *unheimlich* as a specific type of frightening emotion using approaches readily recognisable to sociolinguists (a discussion of

unheimlich's etymology), cultural sociologists (analysis of folk-tales) and auto-ethnographers (an account of personal experience). Freud's account of *unheimlich* sits within recognisable sociological endeavours even while maintaining his own disciplinary attachments and writing style.

Unheimlich has often been translated as 'uncanny', but more precisely means 'unhomely', as in the antonym of *heimlich* or 'homely'. By exploring semantic links between *unheimlich* and *heimlich* Freud demonstrates how these fold into one another; the feeling of *unheimlich* goes beyond an oppositional relation to homeliness and is rather a repetition, or distorted expression, of the homely. The essay then explores aesthetic examples of *unheimlich* including folktales and anecdotal accounts. These often mirror repetitions of events or subject matter in which the anticipated homely example is projected upon an unhomely equivalent, consequently generating a sensation of being unsettling and frightening. Examples of mismatched repetitions or doubling resonate within accounts of homeschooling as simultaneously both positive and problematic depending on homeschoolers' characteristics and identity. So, for example, affluent, White, Christian families who homeschool are likely to be regarded positively, while a less affluent, Muslim family is more likely to be identified as problematic or dangerous (Bhopal and Myers, 2016; Myers and Bhopal, 2018).

While it might appear the homely:unhomely binary is a too neat, or too obvious, linguistic trapping to map on homeschooling; this binary reflects an overlooked feature of homeschooling, that it is formed and shaped within the intimate geographies of domestic life (Kraftl, 2013). This domesticity conflated with educational practice that usually occurs outside of the home in schools, potentially materialising within discourse suggesting homeschooling is an unsettling or troubling practice. This resonance with Freud's account is further apparent within the prevalence of anecdotal accounts about homeschooling that often provide the backdrop to potentially ambiguous understandings of 'risk' (Beck, 1992; Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982; Lupton, 2013). This article uses Freud's *unheimlich* as a concept that maps beyond psychological analysis as a sociological tool to provide new insights around social understandings of homeschoolers. Following a discussion of the practice of homeschooling, it first explores *unheimlich* in relation to the domestic spaces of homeschoolers' homes and then turns attention to its relevance to broader trends within education.

Homeschooling

There is no universal definition of homeschooling. Murphy (2013: 346) suggests a 'pure version of homeschooling' would be parental funding and regulation of teaching within the home, but notes all these elements may fall within a spectrum of behaviours and locations. This article adopts a broad understanding of, 'the practice of families choosing to wholly or partly educate their children in settings other than schools' (Myers, 2020: 212). Homeschooling is characterised by the heterogeneity of families and a diversity of pedagogic practice; such differences are compounded by differences in the legal status and requirements for homeschoolers in different countries (Bhopal and Myers, 2018; Dwyer and Peters, 2019; Jolly and Matthews, 2020).

Types of homeschoolers include parents making ideological choices from both left/liberal/progressive and right-wing/conservative poles (Stevens, 2001); Christian Evangelical families in the USA who are also often conservatives (Apple, 2000); parents with children with disabilities or special educational needs who feel public schools are under-resourced and not meeting their needs (Maxwell et al., 2018); families who experience bullying, racism or marginalisation within schools (Bhopal and Myers, 2018; Musumunu and Mazama 2015), this includes groups with specific or exceptional experiences such as Gypsies and Travellers[1] who experience racism and marginalisation within schools and have also historically chosen to homeschool in order to pass on social, cultural and economic skills and traditions (D'Arcy, 2014); parents who believe their children are gifted and talented (Jolly and Matthews, 2018); and, more recently, in the UK, families have become homeschoolers as a consequence of schools off-rolling pupils they consider problematic (Children's Commissioner, 2019). This list is not exhaustive but indicates the major schism between homeschooling chosen for ethical or ideological reasons and homeschooling as a consequence of the breakdown of relations between families and schools. Finally, since the impact of global lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic, educational practices consequent on school closures have been labelled as 'homeschooling' (ONS, 2020; Wakefield, 2021).

Legislation specifically affecting homeschoolers tends to fall within three often interlinked domains of legality, practice and regulation (Bhopal and Myers, 2018; Dwyer and Peters, 2019). In Europe homeschooling has always been a legal choice in the UK, Republic of Ireland, France and Scandinavia; while in Germany, Spain and Portugal, it is not allowed except in exceptional cases. In the United States homeschooling is determined by state legislation and remained illegal in most states until 1980, with a gradual easing of restrictions until 1993, when it became legal countrywide (Basham et al., 2007). In the UK there is no requirement for parents to follow the national curriculum or a comparable structured approach to learning, while other European countries such as Denmark and Austria insist parents mirror state education more closely (Petrie, 2001). There are also wide variations in the regulation of homeschoolers. The UK has a notoriously *light touch* approach to regulation as evidenced by the Department for Education's (DfE) inability to provide an accurate number of homeschooled children (Children's Commissioner, 2019; DfE, 2019). In the United States different states are free to require varying types of practice, which is monitored to a greater or lesser extent. Lips and Feinberg (2008) identified 10 states in which there was no monitoring and 25 states where parents were simply required to notify they were homeschooling.

Demographic data on homeschooled children are often incomplete or inaccurate reflecting the decision of some countries (such as the UK) not to collect data, confusion over which activities constitute homeschooling and the unwillingness of some homeschoolers to identify themselves (Kunzman and Gaither, 2020). In the USA, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016) suggests that 1.7 million children, about 3% of the total school population are homeschooled, mostly from affluent White families. The NCES census identified the reasons for choosing homeschooling were often related to dissatisfaction with schools, safety concerns and religious beliefs. The National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), a homeschooling research advocacy group, suggests around 2.5 million children are currently homeschooled in the USA

(Ray, 2020). Black, Latino and Muslim families are increasingly turning to homeschooling (McKeon, 2007; Musumunu and Mazama, 2015). In the UK the DfE (2019) estimated there are 57,600 homeschooled children but noted this figure was potentially growing by as much as 20% per annum. The Children's Commissioner suggested a similar figure of 60,000 children at any one time but possibly 80,000 homeschooled children within a year. Both the DfE and Children's Commissioner note their data are incomplete.

Homeschooling is understood problematically for several reasons including privileging parental over children's rights, a lack of reliable evidence it is an effective form of education and undermining social or collective features of education such as fostering citizenship (Apple, 2000; Bartholet, 2020; Bhopal and Myers, 2018; Dwyer and Peters, 2019). Educational policymakers have repeatedly expressed concern about the lack of data on who homeschools, reasons for homeschooling, how many children are homeschooled and their educational outcomes (Badman, 2009; DfE, 2019; House of Commons Education Committee, 2021). Policymakers have also associated homeschooling indirectly with other social issues including Islamic radicalisation, child abuse and maltreatment (Badman, 2009; Bartholet, 2020; OFSTED, 2016). Both direct educational concerns and broader social issues have informed media content portraying homeschoolers as problematic (Bhopal and Myers, 2018). Often the 'problem' identified with homeschooling partly emerges as unsettling or uncomfortable accounts associated with families' home environment (Badman, 2009; Balls, 2010; Children's Commissioner, 2019; Forrester et al., 2017; Myers and Bhopal, 2018). The remainder of this article explores such discomfort in the context of Freud's account of *unheimlich* as a distinguishable aesthetic form of unsettling fear grounded within the homely.

The Unhomely Home

In *Das Unheimliche*, Freud (1919: 124) argues that despite the divergent approaches he adopts to understand *unheimlich* they, 'lead to the same conclusion – that the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar'. This conclusion is based on two distinct approaches; first, within the semantic meanings of *unheimlich*/*heimlich* and second, within a discussion of folk-tales and anecdotal accounts of the feeling of *unheimlich*.

Discordant Narratives in Which Homeliness and Safety Map onto the Unhomely and Risk

In the initial examination of the semantic root and routes of *unheimlich*, Freud (2003: 134) demonstrates an extensive evidence base across ancient and modern European languages, in which *unheimlich*/unhomely is not just the antonym of *heimlich*/homely, but that the meanings of the two words are subsumed in each other: '*Heimlich* thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*. The uncanny (das Unheimliche, "the unhomely") is in some ways a species of the familiar (das Heimliche, "the homely").' This strategy has a readily identifiable linguistic resonance for those interested in exploring feelings associated with the *home* of homeschooling. While many

homeschoolers readily identify their homes as 'safe spaces' compared with the unsafe space of schools; the state often associates homeschooling with specific fears for children's physical safety because it happens behind closed doors, *within the home* (Badman, 2009; Forrester et al., 2017). The home is associated not with homely, domestic attributes, but with potential dangers including physical risks and abuse, concerns about spiritual well-being, of failing to engage with British Values and being victims of exclusionary practices such as off-rolling (OFSTED, 2016; Spielman, 2018).

In my research (Bhopal and Myers, 2016; Myers, 2020; Myers et al., 2010), Gypsy and Traveller families often identify schools as unsafe spaces both in terms of experiencing racism and bullying, but also the negative impact that exposure to the dominant culture has on their children. These families often provide very homely accounts of the safety engendered within the close communal spaces of Traveller sites, and in the interests of their children's safety (which they identify in terms of physical, cultural and spiritual safety), to be homeschooled (D'arcy, 2014; Myers et al., 2010). By contrast, Local Authorities characterise homeschooling Gypsies and Travellers as potentially creating risks by failing to educate their children and raise safety concerns based on perceptions of physical dangers within Traveller sites. In these narratives Gypsy and Traveller children are exposed to danger (also framed as physical, cultural and spiritual dangers), because of their immersion within their homes.

These oppositional accounts, often framed in ambiguous language, begin to demonstrate a conflation of meaning of the homely and unhomely in relation to domestic arrangements much like the doubling processes described by Freud. Freud reinforces the argument about language in his later analysis of folktales and anecdotes, in which repetitions of similar but different events, often signal moments that trigger feelings on *unheimlich*. These are discussed more fully in the following section, but it is worth noting how historic racist stereotyping (including by state actors) of Gypsies and Travellers draws upon recurrent folklore tropes that they are a dangerous, unsettling alien 'other' within local landscapes resembling Simmel's figure of the Stranger (Myers, 2015; Simmel, 1971). Freud's account of *unheimlich* is useful to understand how the language of policymakers ascribes a particular sense of risk and discomfort to the domestic lives of Gypsy homeschoolers that mirrors longstanding folklore of Gypsies as dangerous and alien. The domestic homeliness of the Gypsy homeschooler is reimagined as an unsettling, unsafe environment by drawing on these (racist) fears.

Safety and Risk: The Role of Anecdotal Discourse in Framing Narratives of Homeschooling

Freud's second strategy, the exploration of folk-tales and anecdotal accounts repeats the argument of the linguistic conflation of *heimlich* and *unheimlich*; but in physical settings such as unsettling accounts of confusions between animate and inanimate bodies and *doppelgangers*. These repetitions or doublings constitute a similar ambiguous sense of fear by layering discordant but seemingly related experiences into recognisable patterns of discomfort. He establishes a counter-intuitive close relationship between the unhomely and the homely within a range of feelings associated with being 'local, native, domestic; (feeling) at home' (Freud, 2003: 159, note 2) and 'belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, dear and intimate' (Freud, 2003: 126). Understanding homeschooling as

'social action' (Weber, 2009), as both practice and discourse, in which meanings about homeschooling are moulded, conflates the homely ideal of parents bonding with and loving their children with fears of an unhomely monstrous 'other' (readily signalled in terms of race and class).

These conflated accounts or narratives in which both homeliness and unhomeliness merge within homeschooling discourses, mirror Freud's second strategy to identify specific discomforts and fears connotated by *unheimlich*. He collates a range of examples of objects, persons and situations that evoke feelings of *unheimlich* in order to identify hidden patterns or similarities. In particular he draws upon literary examples and personal anecdotes to emphasise the unsettling nature of fears that return to, or are doubles of, the homely. The resonance of Freud's essay rests on the credibility the reader is willing to place in the anecdotal and literary accounts that support his claims, which might otherwise appear as a rather academic account of the development of language (Fisher, 2016).

The anecdotal nature of this approach resonates closely with accounts of homeschooling on a number of counts. First, official and government accounts invariably highlight the difficulties of evidencing reliable data because of issues of privacy and lack of regulation (Children's Commissioner, 2019; DfE, 2019). Similar concerns are widely identified in much academic work, which often relies on small-scale data-sets (Bhopal and Myers, 2018; Kunzman and Gaither, 2020; Murphy, 2012). Finally, media accounts are often either anecdotal 'lifestyle' stories or sensationalised accounts of individual tragedies (Bhopal and Myers, 2016).

Media accounts often link issues of safety to homes and homelife, often framed around classed and racial stereotypes of homeschoolers. Impoverished or working-class homeschoolers, characterised as inept or failing families, living 'off-grid' beyond the reach of Local Authorities provide a focus for homeschooling tragedies (Forrester et al., 2017; Morris, 2016). It is notable that the remit of the first serious review of homeschooling in the UK, included 'safeguarding' and investigating, 'suggestions that home education could be used as a "cover" for child abuse' (Badman, 2009: np). That review was triggered by a high-profile tragedy in which a homeschooled child, Khyra Ishaq, was starved to death by abusive parents (Bhopal and Myers, 2016). In Wales, the death of Dylan Seabridge, of the preventable disease of scurvy, resulted in similar inquiry (Forrester et al., 2017). Charges of wilful neglect against the parents were dropped by the Crown Prosecution Service on the ground they were unfit to stand trial. Media coverage of the couple invariably included photographs portraying them as outlandish, eccentrics and they were dubbed the 'Scurvy 2' by the *Sun* newspaper (Beal, 2013: 4). In the Welsh example, homeschooling was understood as one element by which families with unusual lifestyles are able to remain *off-grid* or 'completely off the radar' (Children's Commissioner, 2019: 14). In the United States, Raymond and Vanessa Jackson in New Jersey were identified as 'monsters' and their home referred to as 'Hell House', after it emerged their adopted and homeschooled children were severely malnourished. As in the Dylan Seabridge tragedy there appears to be evidence the Jacksons were inadequate parents rather than malicious; but their narrative sits within a discourse in which they are identified as monstrous and other. In all three examples the narrative triggers both a substantial media outcry and also revaluations of safeguarding and homeschooling practice by the state.

The space of the home is consistently used to evidence the potential for harm for poorer families because homeschooling happens *behind closed doors* and beyond the state's normal regulation and surveillance of schools. However, contemporaneous to the narratives of monstrous or failing poor families, the lifestyle sections of Sunday newspapers regularly feature idealised accounts of successful White middle-class homeschoolers (Bhopal and Myers, 2018; Myers, 2020). Their homes and domestic lives are portrayed as loving, safe and secure spaces, in which families flourish and share in 'bespoke' educational adventures (Odone, 2018: 23). Often the home is identified as an accessible form of capital, readily funding homeschooling that sounds suspiciously akin to an extended holiday (Adamo, 2015). The contrasting portrayals of some homeschoolers' homes as homely and safe while others are unhomely and dangerous mirrors the discordant similarities in Freud's exemplars of *unheimlich*. They appear grounded within a homeschooling discourse in which White, middle-class people are associated with normative behaviours and divergent characteristics are associated with being a problematic other (Hall, 2019).

Freud's *unheimlich* provides a sociological tool to understand how anecdotal accounts embrace social biases towards race and class by attaching to them recognisable but ill-defined feelings of discomfort and fear about their practice. The nomenclature of 'homeschooling' has to consolidate a wide range of divergent practice and also divergent meanings of what is understood by homeschooling. My earlier definition adopted a broad brush approach, useful in identifying lots of different individuals who self-identify or are identified as homeschoolers, but also conflating conflicting experiences of homeschooling.

Addressing dissimilar understandings of what constitutes homeschooling is made more complicated because the conflicting accounts (from the perspectives of all conflicted parties) are often ambiguous. This is highlighted in families' investment in the privacy of their homes. That materialisation of privacy viewed by the state or an unsympathetic media outlet equates to potential risks demanding action. The importance of privacy for many homeschoolers often exceeds the value attached to that privacy by the gaze of the state or the media. The state in particular identifies the home of homeschooling in a narrow fashion; being out of sight means families potentially can cause a number of harms it has an interest in preventing (e.g. child abuse or Islamic radicalisation). Calls for homeschoolers to be more transparent and allow the state access to the home to monitor educational practice have been robustly resisted by homeschoolers (Bartholet, 2020; Bhopal and Myers, 2018; Dwyer and Peters, 2019; Huseman, 2015).

An 'Evil Eye': State Surveillance of Homeschooling

The relationship between the state as a regulator of education and anecdotal interest in lifestyles also brings into play another of Freud's motifs of *unheimlich* in the sense of the surveillance or watchfulness experienced by homeschoolers. Freud (2003: 147) suggests, 'anyone who possesses something precious, but fragile, is afraid of the envy of others, to the extent that he projects on to them the envy he would have felt in their place. Such emotions are betrayed by looks.' The intrusion, or potential for intrusion, of the state as a regulator of homeschoolers' family authority is not the effective, organisational threat suggested by a Foucauldian (2012) all-seeing eye exerting disciplinary power; but rather something more emotionally charged, an 'evil eye' (Freud, 2003: 146). While the

state might more usually regulate in such a disciplinary fashion, this is not practical because homeschoolers are not visible; their practice is not surveilled. With some irony, the state's weakness potentially creates greater discomfort for homeschoolers, becoming afflicted by an imagined form of surveillance.

The state's perception of risk and homeschooling is immediately compromised because it cannot be mitigated by monitoring behaviours within the home (unlike in schools). Risk is notably problematic because it relies on perceiving future possibilities (Beck, 1992; Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982; Lupton, 2013) and consequently is difficult to quantify. Even systematic approaches favoured by policymakers, such as Cost Benefit Analysis are potentially skewed by a range of subjectivities (Fischhoff, 2015) including ethical judgements and assessments of other risks such as shifts in public mood. It is a sphere in which individual choices may collide with collectively held cultural values (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982). For homeschoolers evidence of *their* being perceived by the state as a risk is consistently evidenced in attempts to legislate for the regulation of homeschooling that includes home inspections (DfE, 2019; Dwyer and Peters, 2019). Risk underpins discourse about the character and practice of homeschooling: the risks of schooling identified by homeschoolers (including poor educational outcomes, racism, bullying and inadequate resourcing), as a reason for choosing homeschooling while the state identifies risk in relation to the practice itself (Bhopal and Myers, 2018; Myers, 2020).

The space of the home is significant, not just because schools are the most common spaces in which education occurs, but because schools are imbued with the authority of the state to deliver forms of educational practice. Schools are largely obliged to follow aspects of practice and curriculum as determined by the state. A noticeable feature of homeschooling is it places less specific legislative demands on homeschoolers, despite homeschoolers acting independently and contrary to educational practice in schools. There is an ironic doubling in the semantics of homeschooling and schooling in which two apparent opposites are merged: though only in the context of the family home. Outside of the homeschooling home, schooling is both the practice of education in municipal buildings and also the language of schooling. In effect the ambiguities created by homeschooling include the production of activity that only one party considers to be schooling; homeschoolers meanwhile adopt the language while simultaneously rejecting the concept of schooling and its regulatory framing by the state.

Domesticity as Something Both 'Special' and 'Strange'

The unsettling closeness of homeliness and the unhomely, echoes Simmel's (1971) sociological account of migrants characterised as the 'stranger'. Simmel (1971) argues strangers are unsettling because of their constant presence within local settings; their settled proximity makes them disturbing to the natives rather than interesting representations of a distant, exotic otherness. The revelation of their presence and their lack of belonging echoes the revelation of discordant elements in homely settings characterised by Freud's *unheimlich*. More generally, the dislocation of finding 'the strange *within* the familiar, an intermingling of opposites which should not share the same space' (Lipman, 2016: 8, emphasis in original) highlights the home as a site in which such ambiguities can generate heightened discomfort.

Homes are generally, empirically sited within spaces the state has authority over: houses and apartments located on the municipal spaces of streets and estates and so on. Homeschoolers however, despite their geographical location, invoke a different form of authority in relation to their educational practice. Within the various regulatory regimes of homeschooling it is rare for the state to prescribe all aspects of curriculum, timetables or pedagogical approach. Instead, the family is imbued with the types of authority normally determined by the state to determine how their schooling is organised. As an actual geographically delineated space, the home and its inhabitants are, like Simmel's strangers, permanent neighbours living on the same street but as homeschoolers they are representative of a distinct, foreign form of authority.

Kraftl (2013: 437) notes the intimate emotional geographies of home life in which the 'specialness' of domestic spaces 'characterise[s] homeschoolers' experiences, where feelings of intimacy and love are, in large measure, constitutive of what makes homeschooling an "alternative" space to mainstream schools'. Homeschooling materialises as a physically different space within the home as homeschoolers, 'valorised mess, clutter, stuff and disorganisation' (Kraftl, 2013: 443). The presence of intimate, domestic lives provides a focus to learning often within unexpected or unplanned timeframes and a privileging of intimate learning around individual children's needs. Schools meanwhile are 'regulated by routines, drills and detailed organizations of time and space' (Collins and Coleman, 2008: 284); they are institutions that, in a Foucauldian sense, exert disciplinary power. This is significant in terms of differences between the setting and ambience of home and school, but more significantly in terms of pedagogic outcomes. Making the claim that, '*(Social) space is a (social) product*', Lefebvre (1991: 26, emphasis in original) notes that, 'space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power' (1991: 26). A shift from school to home is an inevitable rebalancing of power away from the state towards the family. Apple (2000) demonstrates how this trend mirrors broader political shifts of millennial neoliberals and neoconservatives to actively challenge the state. The observable differences between home and school include not just the spatial layout and clutter or the teaching methods but also a political challenge to the status quo.

While sociological approaches, such as Simmel's stranger, clearly illuminate aspects of homeschoolers' difference; Freud adds understandings of the emotional and unsettling framing of that difference. The final section moves beyond purely domestic settings to consider Freud's usefulness in understanding homeschooling against broader educational trends.

Repression of the Past: Homeschoolers Out of Step with the World, Out of Line with History

Homeschooling causes concern for policymakers and educationalists who take for granted the role of schooling as a fundamental element of children's rights to an education (Dwyer and Peters, 2019). This is widely understood as an unassailable progressive feature of international human rights legislation such as Articles 28 and 29 of the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). It is also a publicly recognisable concern because the global massification of education, with more children attending schools in more countries to a higher age, is largely regarded as a positive indicator of progress (UNESCO, 2016, 2021).

Against this backdrop homeschooling seems retrogressive. It suggests a return to a less progressive age and ill-suited to advanced western nations. That sense of a return to a place or time that was once familiar resonates within Freud's account of *unheimlich*; of finding something strange, unwelcome perhaps, in a familiar, homely space. One starting point for thinking about homeschooling as a return to the familiar is evident in the history of American education. Public schooling only became the norm in the 1870s; previously the predominant form of education was homeschooling (Basham et al., 2007) reflecting the practicalities of early colonial life. In the 1970s the state's monopolisation of education provision was increasingly challenged by families characterised by divergent political affiliations but sharing an allegiance to values of individual freedoms and collective grassroots political networking (Stevens, 2001, 2003). Left-leaning, liberal 'unschoolers' felt their children's individual interests were not met by the rigid institutional practices of schools (Holt, 1969; Moore and Moore, 1994). Contemporaneously, right-wing, Christian evangelical families felt it was the family's duty and responsibility to educate children (Arai, 2000; Cooper and Sureau, 2007). This long historical view slightly misrepresents the direct comparability of the philosophy and practice of colonial and contemporary homeschoolers (Gaither, 2009; Murphy, 2013). However, for some homeschoolers their choices reflect a deeply felt romanticisation and return to the experiences of the first White European colonisers.

The historic account alone would be an unconvincing line of argument to relate homeschooling to *unheimlich*, but as with Freud's evidence base, it sits among a constellation of potentially discomforting relationships that repeat and reconfigure specific, though often ambiguous, lines of discomfort. It brings with it a new set of ambiguous doubles delineated by political differences but sharing some fundamental values. Many American homeschoolers regard the influence of the state as pernicious, and, harking back to the pre-Independence era, regard the philosophical grounds for choosing homeschooling as a conscious ethical decision to return power to the family and away from the state (Murphy, 2013). The home in these accounts is a private family space in which a traditional, conservative patriarchal worldview embodies authority and responsibility for educating children rests with the head of the household rather than the state.

The conservative/patriarchal investment in homeschooling creates another ambiguous fault-line. A broad swathe of traditional conservatives consider schooling an uncontroversial feature of late-capitalist nations and an economic field ripe for profitable development. Their discomfort might be evidenced in challenges to the overwhelming marketisation of schooling within neoliberal economic strategies (Apple, 2012). Homeschooling potentially challenges the orthodoxies of free market choices because of its intent to return to educational practices more commonly seen prior to the introduction of public schooling. There is a double irony as the neoliberal encroachment of private corporations into public educational economies provokes concern education is no longer a public good on the progressive left; while some traditional conservative families, choose homeschooling to defray the intrusion of the state into their lives (Apple, 2000).

Simultaneously the potential homeschooling might have to redraw relationships between individuals, the state and market economies remains unsettling for many liberals. Instead of signalling the re-emergence of democratic or state control of education, it returns the processes of education into the hands of individuals. Such conservative homeschoolers effectively flatten traditional educational power structures but only because they offer a return to individualism rather than a shared belief in collectivised education.

The UK has witnessed a different development of educational policy with the Education Act (1944) (superseded by the 1996 Education Act), a key element of post-war policy designed to instate more egalitarian forms of citizenship within a reimagined welfare state. For homeschoolers the Education Act (1996) is useful; it requires parents to ensure their children receive a 'suitable' education rather than require they attend school (Education Act, 1996). 'Suitable' in this context has been notoriously difficult to define in a meaningful way. The Education Act is a source of discomfort for policymakers because it grants a legal route to homeschool, despite being envisaged as the means to deliver collective, egalitarian educational opportunities.

As a source of discomfort it only tends to materialise in public discourse around concerns about particular types of homeschoolers. In particular peaking when the state became aware of growing numbers of Muslim homeschoolers coinciding with concern about the global 'war on terror' (Bhopal and Myers, 2018). Anecdotal accounts of families using the legal path of homeschooling as 'cover' to radicalise their children as Islamic fundamentalists (OFSTED, 2015, 2016) appeared to conflate the state's fostering of global fear about Muslims within the local experiences of schools characterised by large Asian populations. Muslim homeschoolers noted their decision to homeschool was often a response to children experiencing racism in which narratives of Islamic extremism were commonplace in playgrounds, classrooms and at the school gates (Bhopal and Myers, 2018; Myers and Bhopal, 2018). Middle-class Muslim parents often adopted the same practices as White middle-class homeschoolers dissatisfied with their experience of schooling. The conflation of global and local narratives of radicalisation and decisions to homeschool suggests parents were acting much like the reflexive global citizens envisaged by Beck (2006). Faced by what appeared to be insurmountable local risks at school they looked beyond the local to manage risk as best they could. For Muslim homeschoolers risk emerges in their children experiencing racism in school, while for policymakers these decisions confirm global risks (Islamic radicalisation) are heightened because normal routes towards citizenship (schooling) are rejected. It adopts a circular function restating the fears of homeschoolers encountering increasingly hostile policy; while policymakers evidence their suspicions of radicalisation in the actions of Muslim homeschoolers' responses to their experience of racism in schools fostered by the policy itself. Freud's *unheimlich*, with its circulation of contrary ideas conflated in a sense of the frightening associated with the home, is paralleled by the homely associations of homeschooling within a global discourse in which Islam poses a threat to western security. While sociological accounts can partially understand homeschoolers acting as reflexive cosmopolitan individuals balancing the difficulties of making good choices in times of global risks (Beck, 1992, 2006), Freud's *unheimlich* is a tool that elucidates the exceptional fears and discontent that emerge around homeschooling.

   Individuals taking personal responsibility for educational choices resonates with the language of neoliberal states and marketised educational economies. However, home-schoolers withdraw their economic engagement from these educational markets as well as the cultural investment in the processes that bind states together. The loss of economic investments is possibly insignificant, not least because in a free-market new 'home-schooling economies' will emerge. However, for the state, the investment in marketised educations presupposes consumers freely choosing within *their* economies and within the cultural boundaries of *their* economies. Mass schooling is both a progressive advance and an extension of the social structuring role of education. Marketised mass schooling requires parental buy-in to the culture and identities of its economies, the emergence of families who do not invest, or who disinvest, in such educational economies produces discomforts for both the state and homeschoolers themselves. Reflecting the *unheimlich* a cohort of engaged and committed educators emerge acting outside of the guiding prin-ciples of state education; and at the same time, an unquantifiable cohort of disengaged and uncommitted educators occupy an invisible cultural territory. The state is unable to distinguish between the two because of widely held citizen beliefs in the sacrosanct pri-vacy of the home. At the same time the state is potentially more threatened by the risks of idealised rather than risky homeschoolers doing the best for their children and high-lighting the state's own failings.

Conclusions

There are clear resonances between Freud's account of *unheimlich* and discourse that emerges around homeschooling. Although it happens in different ways, this holds true for homeschoolers and also for policymakers and media accounts. Primarily this reflects the conflation of ambiguous understandings of a range of concepts including homeliness, safety and risk at local, national and global levels. Problematically the ambiguities high-lighted by Freud are difficult grounds on which to draw up effective education policy. Placing discomfort or fear in a policy context, particularly ambiguous emotionally charged unsettling fears, potentially creates ambiguous policy. It goes some way to explaining the historic failings of policymakers to resolve identifiable concerns about homeschooling. Freud seems a useful counter-point to broader sociological work in this process to understand why this is such a difficult process.

   A key argument of this article is the significance the domestic home contributes to understandings of homeschooling. For families it is often the place of safety; however, bounded by conventions of privacy it is also a space in which a heavily regulated, collec-tive activity such as schooling is not anticipated to occur. This collision between state and family is the unstable backdrop against which contradictory arguments about home-schooling are destined to be debated against. This complicates the processes by which other, real and specific problems identified around homeschooling can be understood, including the evidence that many families would prefer their children attend school but have been marginalised out of schooling for a multiplicity of reasons. Often the home-schooler voices that are heard in discourse about homeschooling are those of affluent, predominantly White families who hold greater influence with their politicians and forms of governance. Freud's account of *unheimlich* does not resolve these issues, but it

helps explain the fear and discomfort that consistently underpin debates about home-schooling. The need to hear more marginalised voices in these debates is clear enough; however, it is often the perceptions held about the owners of such marginalised voices that reinforce the processes by which discomfort and fear is created around homeschooling. Too often the potential for understanding better the position of marginalised homeschoolers, in particular homeschoolers who would prefer their children attend schools, is lost among the strength of more privileged voices. One long view of this process is that it is detrimental to all homeschoolers; it fosters the grounds on which unsettling fears of homeschooling are readily mapped over the safe spaces of many families' (rich and poor, marginal and privileged) homes.

While it is arguable that any sociological approach could embrace an understanding of homeschooling's multiple accounts and positions, Freud's reconciliation of the conflation of homeliness and unhomeliness as a particular form of fear or discomfort is a valuable insight within homeschooling. It addresses many different facets of homeschooling in which competing accounts of what is happening are not just contradictory and difficult to explain but are difficult to explain because of the unsettling forms of fear that fill the spaces in which they are understood.

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Note

1. 'Gypsy' and 'Traveller' are ethnonyms for groups of people in Ireland and the UK (often referred to as Roma in Europe), who are often marginalised and encounter extreme hostility and racism.

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