

Swept up Lives? Re-Envisioning the Homeless City, Paul Cloke, Jon May and Sarah Jonhsen, Wiley-Blackwell; 2010, 304 pages, ISBN: 978-1-4051-5386-7 (hardback), 978-1-4051-5387-4 (paperback), £60 (hardback), £24.99 (paperback)

Urban marginality is often addressed from a perspective imbued by the discourse of a 'punitive', 'revanchist' or 'postjustice' city. From this analytical vantage point, under a system of neoliberal governance the homeless are swept up and cleared from view. They are coercively placed in hostels and day centres in order to accommodate for the revaluation of prime urban spaces. Such understandings further perceive welfare provision as complicit with the punitive technologies of containment and control under such a system. These theoretical tropes are the point of departure for this new book, by Paul Cloke, Jon May and Sarah Johnsen. *Swept up Lives?* attempts to provide an alternative vision to those that the authors believe have dominated academic debates about homelessness in geography, as well as sociology and urban planning. With a focus on homelessness in the UK, what this book attempts to demonstrate is that there is much more space for tactical re-scripting and resistance to the 'management' and regulation of homeless people's lives than the previous accounts had allowed for. This is something that has, in fact, been addressed in the US context (Deverteuil et al. 2009) but the book has another important focus. It looks closely at welfare provision for the homeless populations - and at the providers themselves - and it questions

whether these cannot be regarded as more than devices that operate in collusion with current structures of governance, regulation and containment.

The book is the end result of several years of in-depth research within the *Homeless Places Project*. This study originally sprang from a desire to better understand the provision and governance of the emergency services that are in place for single homeless people within Britain. Although they have not named them directly, the authors conducted fieldwork in seven British towns and cities. Because they were concerned to move away from the main archetypal cities that have been the focus of much research in preceding years, the authors intentionally look at (relatively) small towns and cities - with nuances aimed to capture the extremities in service provision from a 'high' to the 'low' level. A staggering number of interviews were conducted with staff, volunteers and other informants as well as ninety so-called 'service-users'. However, it is the use of auto-photography which adds to the book's impressive resourcefulness as a key text. For methodological and ethical reasons, the authors decided that the homeless themselves were the most suited to 'capture' the worlds of the 'homeless city' and this provides for some interesting visual insights into the everyday lives of the dispossessed in Britain. It also shines a new light on the interstitial spaces that homeless people use, manoeuvre through and reside in.

The capacity that British homeless people have to challenge the spatial and bodily controls that act upon them is not in itself sufficient to fight what is inevitably the result of very palpable structural problems. That is why I see this new book as a work that needs to be read alongside the interpretations that

follow what the authors have referred to as the "revanchist orthodoxy" (p.7). Indeed, when they explain how important it is to recognise the everyday affective and emotional geographies of homelessness (as well as the geographies of care *for* the homeless), the researchers repeatedly tread with caution and note that *Swept up Lives?* does not set out to 'cancel out' previous frameworks for thinking about the 'homeless city'. Rather, the book offers an opening up of the discussion about homelessness, resistance and service provision that is quite clearly the main achievement that Cloke, May and Johnsen have accomplished.

The authors refute the idea that under neoliberal forms of governance, welfare services and the volunteers and professionals who operate within them are necessarily locked into a system that works hand in hand with the purification of public spaces. Instead, one of the purposes of the book is to bring to the foreground " the potential for resistance to neoliberal governance by organizations and individuals wishing to serve and care for homeless people" (p. 11). On top of this, the authors stress that day centres also offer the possibility for the homeless themselves to temporarily escape the stigma that they suffer daily and sometimes allows them to feel 'normal' again (p.130). Drawing upon theories of affect and performativity that themselves borrow from Erving Goffman's work on impression management, Judith Butler's understanding of how practices enact identities and from Nigel Thrift's work on the non-representational, the authors are successful in their stated aims. They manage to show that the voluntary organisations - and the people who work or volunteer within them - "offer a device through which homeless people are

both served, and that helps foster a broader politics of hope that stands in stark contrast to the politics of revenge or abandonment that allegedly [sic.] characterizes the revanchist, or postjustice, city" (p.251).

Swept up Lives? offers a British perspective that demonstrates the need for a greater understanding of homelessness in different national contexts as well as different geographical scales - and this is explained beautifully in the final two chapters of the book. However, precisely because the authors are in effect responding to theoretical frameworks that have been developed in a US context, *Swept up Lives?* would have greatly benefited from a stronger comparative approach. The analysis of North American situations as regards the 'treatment' of the homeless is only touched upon briefly (pp.148-150). Whilst it's easy to understand the benefits that a British perspective brings to the analysis of homelessness, there are several occasions where the argument would have been better served through comparative understandings.

At a time when it could quite readily be said that 'resistance' as a concept has been made all too woolly and confusing, this book provides us with a crucial clarification of what it means to have agency and of what the capacity to 'resist' actually signifies in practice. This, the book shows, is possible even within vicious urban landscapes that are primarily redefined according to powerful logics of commodification and in which the homeless must be managed if not 'swept away' from view entirely. *Swept up Lives?* lives up to expectations and delivers a well argued and insightful analysis that

progresses established paradigmatic ways of understanding homelessness in the Western world.

Reference:

DeVerteuil, G., Marr, M. and Snow, D. (2009) Any space left? Homeless resistance by place-type in Los Angeles County. *Urban Geography*, 30(6): 633-651.

Paul Kirkness

University of Edinburgh