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**Review of *Needed by Nobody: Homelessness and Humanness in Post-Socialist Russia*. Tova Hojdestrand. Reviewed by Sviatlana Smashnaya.**

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Tova Hojdestrand, *Needed by Nobody: Homelessness and Humaneness in Post-Socialist Russia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009. \$59.95 hardcover, \$22.95 paperback.

Homelessness is often discussed from multiple perspectives—as a social condition, as a housing problem, as a private issue, and as a public concern. This book reflects on homelessness from both macro- and micro-perspectives. The author investigates homelessness by using ethnographic research, demonstrating both the social construction of homelessness and the perceptions of homelessness through the prism of culture, norms, and perceptions of this personal and public issue in Post-Socialist Russia.

This book is written in a fascinating manner, honestly portraying that most social problems were “officially nonexistent” in Soviet Russia, where the concept of homelessness was not openly used. Furthermore, the author articulates that homelessness in Russia is not a pure housing problem. Despite the shortage of living spaces, it is the result of a combination of Soviet control policies and socioeconomic transitions toward a market-driven economy in the 1990s. Specifically, the author details how several factors, such as the labor market, industrialization, shortage of housing, migration, and individual factors, contributed to the rise of homelessness in Post-Socialist Russia.

In addition, the research shows that homelessness is both a cause and a result of fractured ties—social, spatial, personal, and economic. The author argues that in spite of the absence of close ties, the homeless often have to establish relations of cooperation, reciprocity, and mutual help with other homeless in order to survive. The book also highlights what it takes “to be human” as an essential part of being needed. It provides examples that being clean (regardless of homeless status), developing friendships and maintaining social capital are essentials of staying human. The author stresses that individual self-worth and a sense of self-respect are also crucial to “feeling human.” Interestingly, the book shows how in Post-Soviet Russia, people who lack social capital are more likely to experience social disadvantages such as loneliness, lack of attachment, chronic housing problems and health concerns, which

result in their inability to successfully adjust in times of economic transformations.

The strength of this book is that it highlights multiple factors that result in homelessness for many people—a shift from a Soviet-style to an open-market economy which caused a drastic increase in poverty, especially among people with mental illness and substance abuse problems or in dysfunctional families. Eloquently, the researcher incorporates personal experiences and reflections, as well as qualitative inquiry, to highlight the subjective perception of the problem through linguistic and cultural idiosyncratic expressions.

On the other hand, there is a need to understand the multiple factors that can potentially cause homelessness based on age, family construction, substance abuse problems, criminal record, policy changes, economic disadvantages, or personal choice. Moreover, the problems of bank and housing fraud are especially important to evaluate in transitional economies. Finally, the argument that violence among generations is one of the causes of homelessness is worth further attention.

In sum, the book stresses the concept of space through the social stratification paradigm and the reality of having limited living space provided by the welfare state and charities to the homeless. The role of social capital and family support are presented as almost the only guaranteed pathways for individuals to remain human and come back to established society. The understanding of the larger context and the conditions that lead to loss of housing in Russia as well as how personal problems affect human dignity are worth further investigation.

*Sviatlana Smashnaya, Boston University*

Robert Fisher, Ed., *The People Shall Rule: ACORN, Community Organizing, and the Struggle for Economic Justice*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009. \$69.95 hardcover, \$27.95 paperback.

In *The People Shall Rule: ACORN, Community Organizing, and the Struggle for Economic Justice*, editor Robert Fisher continues his efforts to advance theory, strategies, and tactics of achieving social justice while providing community