

UDC: 364.682.42-787.2:303.442.23(495.622)

Valia Kravva (Greece)
Democritus University of Thrace
Department of History and Ethnology
e-mail: valia.kravva@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-5692-0864>

ETHNOGRAPHY AT THE MARGINS: SOCIAL POLICY AND SOLIDARITY-SCAPES IN A NORTHERN GREEK CITY

Abstract: Homelessness is often treated as a traumatic situation, an inescapable condition, the ultimate deprivation of humanity and sociality. Homeless people experience bare lives, lives deprived of human qualities, and a non-ending traumatic situation. My ethnographic fieldwork focuses on the multiple homeless strategies, such as how these people organize their everyday lives at the dormitory and domesticate the undomesticated space to create bearable, meaningful lives. Emotionalizing and appropriating space will be examined as mechanisms employed to achieve stability, security, and stable identities. The emergence of solidarity acquires a pivotal role in the discussion that follows. As such, mutual understanding and acceptance are vital notions explored in the article that lead to a more holistic, less biased, and more dynamic understanding of the homeless situation.

Keywords: homelessness, social policy, welfare scapes, solidarity scapes, ethnographic involvement, empathetic understanding, emotions, affectivity

Introduction

Thessaloniki, located in Northern Greece, is a Balkan city becoming an important tourist destination. At the same time, this city encloses deep economic and social inequalities and asymmetries related to the ongoing globalization processes. 2015 I conducted five months of fieldwork focusing on municipal welfare structures such as soup kitchens and food banks. From February 2017 to January 2019, I conducted ethnographic research on homelessness; the primary locus of my research was the municipal dormitory for homeless people. It is evident that Thessaloniki is striving to be recognized as a modern, Western European city: gentrification projects, old neighborhoods under reconstruction, a metro under construction, bicycles, several eco-friendly means of transport, and an Airbnb invasion- all signs of our times. Moreover, of course, many tourists, Europeans, Americans, and, in the last years, Israelis have visited Thessaloniki to see the “Sephardic mother of Israel” and walk in the streets that used to be full of Jews before the Second World War.

The dormitory for homeless people is situated in Sfageia, a relatively impoverished area of the city and, at the same time, an area with conflicting dynamics and space inequalities: one can find in the main street the old railway station where the Jews were forcibly deported to the concentration camps in 1943. You can also see the intense gentrification plans being implemented, such as the construction of large shopping malls, banks, car showrooms, private colleges, and a luxurious five-star hotel called MET, which is, interestingly, the only one in the city. The atmosphere is entirely different if one tries to walk in the small streets opposite the hotel, where you see deserted nightclubs, brothels, and the dormitory for the homeless. Puzzled and bewildered tourists who live at the five-star hotel MET walk in the neighborhood and come into contact with the two faces of Thessaloniki, the modernized tourist city but also the city of “unwanted” and “wasted” lives” of the homeless. Homelessness, in most cases, is not only visible but experienced via the senses; homeless people smell differently, walk differently, dress differently, and occupy space in different ways. This paper attempts to problematize the dynamics of homelessness and reflect anthropologically upon the situation of non-place, no home. Theories of modernity -as the ultimate consuming reality- are going to be discussed as the necessary pre-conditions for the creation of “unwanted,” “wasted,” and “non-fitting” lives. The intense modernization processes inevitably affect the functioning and adequacy of welfare structures that seem to be found in a deep internal crisis: the neo-liberal rhetoric of the “Big ill State” is leading to inadequate welfare policies and mal-structuring of welfare-scapes especially in countries of the European South, such as Greece, which have undergone economic severe crises during the last fifteen years. In the case of Greece, the so-called “economic crisis” was officially mentioned by the Prime Minister in 2009. This resulted in receiving economic support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union. Throughout all these years, several measures were implemented in Greece, especially cut-downs in salaries and pensions, which led to uncontrolled inflation. The systematic efforts of the IMF and the EU to control and shrink the public sector – which was held responsible for the economic crisis- resulted in the weakening of welfare structures and the malfunctioning of welfare institutions.

Thus, problematic and contradictory welfare policies will be reflected and placed in a social and political context. Additionally, case studies from my research will be described to provide an ethnographic context through a holistic, bottom-up approach. The article’s primary focus is exploring the notion of solidarity and, in particular, when, how, and in which contexts solidarity issues were raised during my ethnographic research. On the one hand, solidarity was a key to opening up my informants and creating feelings of mutual trust, leading to the much-needed empathetic understanding essential for any field research. On the other hand, homeless people seem to engage in contradictory relations of antagonism and mutual support, ranging from conflicting relations to relations of commonality, understanding, and solidarity. Space and, in particular, homeless spaces are domesticated and invested emotionally via materialities and personal belongings. Thus, multi-layered solidarity relations and affectivities will be described ethnographically and examined theoretically. The aim is to analyze the multi-layered solidarities that seem to play a core role in the ethnographic field described and are to be considered in the context of welfare structures and the concrete case of the municipal dormitory for the homeless.

Modernity, non-consumers, and “human waste.”

Theories of globalization emphasize the increasing manufacture of risks in modern life and the consequent “loss of ontological security” and “existential anxiety,” which result in situations of imbalance and instability on a personal and a social level. Pre-capitalist societies had not developed a concept of risk in the past (Giddens 1999). Risk, a concept created and used in the modern world, is associated with the increased uncertainties of modern life (on a micro and macro level) and future possibilities. In this sense, “risk” has to do with the processes of colonization of time and the idea of “conquering” the future. For example, the Azande and many other African tribes conceptualized and contextualized change differently. For them, misfortune resulted from sorcery, whereas other societies believed that everything that happens is intended by gods and spirits (Giddens 1991). So, in a way, pre-capitalist societies had developed social mechanisms to cope with risk, non-predictability, and social imbalance.

In contrast, modern societies are risky societies *par excellence*, and our modern world is a “runaway world,” a world full of changes and risks (Giddens 1999). Modernity is a culture of generalized risks, and the “protective cocoon” (Giddens 1991) of the modern Self has been seriously threatened. The Self is not a passive entity, but it is reflexively made and remade daily. Therefore, self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavor. In this situation of generalized disorientation and distrust, feelings of personal meaninglessness are created, meaning that life has nothing “real” or “positive” to offer. This becomes the fundamental psychological problem of late modernity. Modernity is thus viewed as liquid (Bauman 2006), unpredictable, and fearful, and in a sense, we are dealing with a series of inescapable fluidities and uncertainties.

However, the above argument can be criticized as over-simplistic and, in a way, an exoticized, romanticized Western stereotypical thinking. All societies coped in the past and today with uncertainties, unpredictability, and insecurity and, therefore, fluidity and change. However, they developed different mechanisms and strategies to deal with risks related to the environment, climate change, food provision, war, political asymmetries, and damaged social relations. As discussed above, the Azande eliminated risky situations by making accusations of magic and sorcery. Risky situations were considered misfortunate events that included change or simply situations that could not be explained otherwise. For example, an accident and weather conditions, or even a nonproductive hunting period could be explained as “things that went wrong” because magic powers influenced them. This is a traditional classification that can be found in many societies all over the world: for example, the accusations of “evil eye” in Balkan societies can be seen as a parallel ideological mechanism in pre-modern societies in order to cope with

risk, thus personal or social threats (illnesses, bad luck, economic predicaments, etc.). Classic anthropological works of the early 20th century emphasize the multiplicity of cultural cosmologies to understand and classify “reality”; according to Malinowskian anthropology, magical thinking is not the opposite of rational thinking since such a binary oppositional scheme is a modern construction *per se*. Magic can be equated symbolically with scientific thinking in modern societies.

Moreover, recent ethnographies on the Azande (Tsekenis 2020) problematize “reality” as a Western notion influenced by colonialism and asymmetrical power relations: Azande is not irrational since magical thinking is not a distortion of reality but a somewhat rational way to explain unfortunate events and construct the Azande cosmology. In addition, ethnographic insights and contemporary discussions of several scientific fields have re-introduced the issue of magical thinking about consumer society: magical thinking is a strategy to cope with increased consumerism and stressful impersonal economic transactions. Marshall Sahlins, Jean Baudrillard, and others stressed that modern consumerism cannot be analyzed mainly within an economic realm. Contemporary consumerism is also symbolically loaded and culturally based; thus, it is rational and irrational. Moreover, modern consumers’ experiences, especially those involving interactions with nature (rivers, forests), such as river-rafting or yoga retreats, mobilize “magical” thinking and acting, such as hope, superstitions, beliefs in mystic codes, and supernatural powers. Engaging with all these modern natural activities presupposes a somewhat dramatized, performative behavior and a kind of transcendence yet a modern, consumerized transcendence. Magical thinking has also been employed in recent discussions that describe modern consumerism as a locus of re-enchantment. For example, shopping malls can be seen as loci of excitement, where consumers are re-encharmed and, therefore, act irrationally to buy endlessly (Ritzer 2010). Modern capitalism (more accurately, “capitalism”) is constantly regenerated via consumers’ enchantment.

The multi-dimensional character of the predicaments of modernization and the consequent phenomena such as urban poverty and deprivation have led theorists to go beyond static descriptions of a globalized situation and explore in-depth non-accessibility in social and economic terms. Arjan de Haan (1998) poses the issues of vulnerability and entitlement and uses the notion of “social exclusion” as an alternative. Specific populations seem excluded from civil rights, creating a social and economic imbalance and asymmetrical access. Deprivation is a complex notion: specific populations are enabled to do or not do certain things and are not entitled to social and economic access. The notions of civil society, full citizenship, and the welfare system must be co-examined to have a clear picture of the experience of vulnerability. “Urban poverty,” a term used for the new poor dwelling in cities, had become a significant issue. Geographical and social exclusion are situations of extreme vulnerability. For Ellen Wratten (1995), the urban poor, the new poor, and, to an extent, the chronic poor experience symbolize the state negatively as a haunting, bureaucratic mechanism that attempts to regulate people’s activities without understanding their needs. This results in social stress, generalized distrust, and conflict with state authority.

Modernity, as argued, is viewed as liquid (Bauman 2006), unpredictable, and fearful, and in a sense, we are dealing with a series of fluidities and uncertainties. Modern life inevitably has its outcasts, notably the production of “human waste” or “wasted lives” (Bauman, 2004). According to the above thought-provoking analysis, modernization creates superfluous populations of migrants and refugees who are not wanted and unable to live “viable” lives. If we go back and re-think Douglas’s analysis of pollution and taboo (1966), we could argue that human waste resembles what she called “matter out of place”: growing quantities of human beings who are deprived of adequate means of survival. In this light, the increasing numbers of urban poor, unemployed, and depressed people can be seen as the epitome of human waste and definitely a deviant population, a “matter out of place.” Therefore, we are facing not only a situation of personal risk and anxiety but a generalized and dramatically growing situation of social risk, urban fears, and generalized security fears.

Unemployment can be seen as absolute modern trouble. It is an abnormal condition, an anomaly in modern societies in which “full” members are, above all, classified as producers (Bauman 2004). Full employment is a desirable social condition, its ultimate destination, and the prerequisite for social order and systemic reproduction. Modern societies are societies that honor production and, at the same time, consumption and consumption lifestyles are highly esteemed. In other words, we have moved from the work ethic to the ethic of consumption and a culture of consumerism. People who cannot be classified as producers or consumers immediately constitute a problematic “other,” a misplaced category, and a threat to social balance and progress. Those people are the “new poor” who cannot produce or consume, which significantly affects how poverty is experienced in the modern world.

The post-welfare situation and the crises of the welfare systems

Welfare state retrenchment and severe cutbacks have led to a situation of “permanent austerity” (Starke, 2006), and the whole situation inevitably results in the weakening of the welfare state and an “ill” society. Theorists have argued that there is a diverse Southern model and a Southern type of welfare in countries such as Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. The southern welfare “syndrome” in the Greek case reflects the general crisis the country has experienced in the last few years, almost two decades since the Global Financial crisis. Thus, the welfare system in Greece is quite chaotic and disorganized mainly due to the significant amount of absurd bureaucracy and the low degree of state penetration of the welfare sphere since there are several diverse voices involved, such as the Church, voluntarism, and charity, and also due to the extensive clientelism and patronage mechanisms. This situation leads to the incapacity to build effective, formal, coherent administrative structures.

In all the discussions I had with the municipality’s social worker, she emphasized that “the Municipality is doing a lot more than originally planned” and is actually “doing the things that the state is obliged to do.” *Kallikratis*, a law for the unification of

municipalities established in 2010, saw the transmission of all welfare national politics from the large prefecture of Macedonia to the Municipality of Thessaloniki. So, at the moment, there is “disorientation,” “too much work to be done,” and a “lack of personnel,” which results in an “inability to cope with the increased social needs.” She kept telling me that her work is vast and that “the state now promotes the collaboration with the NGOs as the only solution.” She stated that this is “due to the economic crisis” and the fact that the state does not have the money to pay for extra employees:

“I believe that volunteering work has to be organized in order to function properly. When you have people with no coordination, volunteering work can be an obstacle and not a real help...Now, because the state has no money, I work in these structures to manage poverty with NGO members, who are not paid directly by the state. They are either paid by the EU or they work on a volunteer basis. OK, the collaboration is good, but it can also be difficult; problems might arise.”

Every time she wanted to introduce me to NGO members, she used to comment:

“They are not very experienced, but they are willing to help...”

In all cases, when NGO social workers were present, she was the one who took over the conversation and interrupted them to add “important” information, often patronizing the whole discussion. Once, she openly admitted that things would have been much more productive if she had been in charge of the NGO workers. Emergency social assistance can be seen as part and parcel of the comfort politics employed by the social services of the Municipality of Thessaloniki in order to manage urban poverty. It involves a daily soup kitchen, which takes place at the local *kenro anoiktis prostasias ilikiomenon* (center for the open protection of the elder), an institution founded during the 80s in Greece when the socialist government of that time inaugurated several social interventions. The other municipal soup kitchen in the city is distributed from the basement of a neoclassic building that belongs to the Church and is coordinated by a representative of the local Church council (*epitropos*) and women of the church charity council (*philoptocho*). The Municipality also distributes free food products in social markets (*koinonika pantopoleia*). Poor families, unemployed, homeless people, and those without any insurance (*aporoι, anergoi, anasfalistoι*) can choose specific food items using a card provided by the Municipality. People are given a card according to their needs, as defined by the social worker, and they are allowed to spend a specific amount of money to get the food items they need.

The Directory of Social Policy of the Municipality of Thessaloniki is situated in a new six-floor building opposite the city railway station in a relatively poor and impoverished area near the center. On the first and second floors, people must wait in long queues, fill out an application form, and give their documents to claim benefits. On the third floor, the health policy department is where doctors examine, vaccinate children, and advise on a healthy and balanced diet. On the fourth floor, the social worker of the department (the only one in the Municipality) has her office, and you can also find the office of the psychologist, where she provides “psychological support” sessions to

individuals who feel depressed or frustrated and ask for advice and help. On the fifth floor is the office of the director of social policy, and finally, on the sixth floor, the vice mayor keeps her office.

On the fifth floor, there is also the municipality's social market, in which members of a local NGO work. One can find a big cloth bank besides food items stored on big wooden shelves like oil, tomato cans, pasta, rice, salt, marmalades, biscuits, etc.. As the people from the NGO explained to me, the EU partly funds this program, and they collaborate with the Municipality of Thessaloniki. The EU provides some money, so NGO members are paid for their work, but it does not cover all expenses. As a municipal employee told me, "the social workers receive the same as the cleaning ladies," which she considered "totally unfair."

Social caring in a post-welfare era is characterized by what is called "the Big Ill State," a situation that results in a "Broken Society," according to Pat Caplan (2016). A society such as the UK has food banks that fail to meet real peoples' needs and give long-term solutions to poverty (Caplan 2017). The general cuts in social services, the lack of personnel, and the official rhetoric of "personal responsibility" render social care and the state's provision fluid, fragile, and, in most cases, dysfunctional and inadequate. So, the growing crisis of the welfare system seems to be deepening more and more, and this situation is experienced and understood as an uncanny present (Knight & Stewart, 2016) and an uncertain future, generating bewilderment, disappointment, and depression. The discussion on postmodern risk society (Beck, 2005) emphasizes the crisis of the welfare state, the constant production of risks, and the rise of a more individualistic society, one that leaves room for the recreation of alternative forms of solidarity (Taylor-Gooby, 2011).

My interlocutors describe the following steps to access the Department of Social Policy: go through an "interview" with the social worker to decide on "the emergency of their condition" and to be referred. To use the social market, people have to bring several documents, and according to the NGO, members involved, "In some cases, it is tough for those people to collect all these documents, and it is an expense for them even to make photocopies. There is an extra difficulty to have them signed by official authorities". The bureaucratic delays and confusion were something that even municipal employees criticized openly:

"People who proceed and sign applications in this Department create so much confusion; at first, they ask for one thing, and then after three months, they need something else. There are so many signed documents! I don't see the point. Just before, a woman claiming a benefit started screaming in my office! I don't know what to say to her, but do you know anything? She is right!"

One day after I visited the Department of Social Policy, I went to the nearby bus stop. Suddenly, a middle-aged man with long hair and poor clothes started shouting:

"I will burn down Pronoia, this brothel! I have been there many times, and they keep asking me all these stupid documents. 'Your ID card is not enough'. Honestly, all you need is some gas to put fire in this dam place!"

Looking furious and frustrated, he got on a bus and left.

The dormitory for the homeless: solidarity and solidarities

The dormitory for homeless people is situated at the western end of the city, in Sfageia, a relatively poor and devalued area. The area is overcrowded in the morning, but it is considered dangerous in the evening. As described earlier in the article, the whole area is undergoing a process of gentrification: new important administrative buildings like banks, private colleges, shopping malls, municipal offices, and, of course, MET, the five-star Hotel mentioned before. Yet one can feel and taste fear, insecurity, and antitheses all around. All this “development” and modernization inevitably surrounds the dormitory for the homeless, where luxurious, modern buildings are next to dirty, abandoned houses, old factories, garbage on the street, and stinky water from the rain. The smell of inequality creates contradictory smell-scapes and feelings for those who work there or pass by and even for the tourists who live in MET but have no clear picture of the whole area. Homeless situations can be analyzed as a modern dystopia, a dangerous situation, a situation of social and economic exclusion. Homeless people are trapped in a situation in-between, a liminal condition that keeps them out of consumer life and the modern city’s mobility. They are also invisible in that they can be traced only in specific places, like Sfageia, excluded from places of consumerism *par excellence*, such as airports or shopping malls.

Moreover, the homeless are associated with “dangerous smells” and live in places that smell “bad.” Paul Stoller (1989) emphasized the role of the senses in anthropological fieldwork; ethnographic things are tasteful and thus meaningful. His fieldwork among the Songhay people brought up issues of tasteful ethnography and sensual openness.

The municipal dormitory for the homeless hosts up to 70 people, both men and women; there are two rooms where they sleep and a standard room (kitchen and living room). Social workers work by shifts, and there is also a psychologist, a nurse, and a guard for the night. People enter at 7 in the evening and have to leave at 9 o’clock the next morning. Homeless people have to get a certificate from a public hospital (or the doctors without frontiers) that they are not mentally ill and “clean” of any sexually transmitted diseases. Homeless have to disinfect when entering the dormitory, register, and bathe before dinner. Many things can be said as to how monitored the bare lives of the homeless are and to what extent their bodies have to be managed and “dangerous smells” to be erased and disinfected. All the above arguments raise issues of biopolitical regimes and practices that are introduced in order to deal with a “deviant,” unpredictable, and, to a certain degree, unsocialized state of exemption, as indeed, the homeless situation is.

The notion of solidarity has a long tradition in social analysis, from the Durkheimian emphasis on social cohesion at the end of the 19th century to more applied versions of what solidarity means in a post-war world that experiences a series of economic, political, and social crises. According to Rakopoulos (2015), solidarity during the Greek economic crisis was expressed as food activism in the city of Thessaloniki and as a reaction to centralized, formal economic transactions. The situation resulted in an anti-middlemen movement, the development of an informal, localized economy based on local small producers, and the rise of local cooperatives such as BIOSCOOP (with a friendly-environment agenda). For Rakopoulos, the economic crisis in Greece results in “hidden welfare” strategies. Thus, solidarity has emerged as a contested, politicized field that opens up the pervasive nature of reciprocity and informality. In the last years of the severe debt crisis, food activist ideology has become increasingly popular but has not succeeded in persuading many family men and women.

As one of my informants commented:

“All this movement was quite popular last year, but it is not so now. It started as a reaction against the nation, but I don’t think it achieved its initial goals. And at the end of the day, you don’t know if they don’t baptize the Bulgarian potatoes to Greek potatoes! I prefer food exchange among my family; this way, I can be sure of the food I give to my children.”

Other informants commented that the food sold in cooperative supermarkets is “*not at all cheap*,” so there is “*no real point*” in buying food products exclusively from there. Indeed, large supermarket chains can have very competitive prices. It is widely accepted that they offer low-quality food at much lower prices, which is quite tempting for those who cannot afford to spend much. However, the emerging situation is bewildering and complex since many conflicting voices are raised. Rakopoulos (2015) argues that modern society must be seen as a risk society and solidarity as a social dynamic that develops according to the broader social change by enhancing it and taking new, unpredictable directions, thus resulting in new relations. However, modern risks are rendered responsible for the erosion of welfare state solidarity (Taylor-Goody 2011), and more social and economic predicaments have resulted in social polarization, leading to a “decivilizing condition” and a decline in mutual empathy (Rodger 2003).

Going back to my ethnographic research and the focus of this article, one of the issues to be addressed is solidarity, actually solidarities in plural: on the one hand, ethnographic engagement is analyzed as an ethnographic strategy and a means to engage with our informants’ lives. In my case, I was there as a researcher and at the same time as a volunteer, ready to help those people and provide them with clothes, coffee, and tea. After many visits, people felt more and more comfortable with me: they shared their fears, thoughts, and street experiences, and at the same time, they invited me to be part of their everyday life: we played cards, we listened to music, we watched TV. One of my informants, Zoe, kept inviting me to her room to help her put holy icons on the wall and pray together so that “*God will give us strength to go on...*”. As time passed, I felt increasingly engaged, experiencing ethnographic empathy and involvement. What became obvious after my first visit was that scientific detachment is impossible when entering a sensitive

ethnographic field. Solidarity, in my case, was the empathetic understanding experienced that led to increased participation, mutuality, sharing, and feelings of reciprocity. So, the discussion mainly focuses on issues of involvement, empathy, and engagement of the ethnographer. The more I researched, the more involved I felt and found my ethnographic self in relations of solidarity and reciprocity. I was there to help them make their difficult reality a bit easier –or at least I hoped so- I was there to support them by any means, and they were reciprocating by giving me back acceptance and enclosure. According to them:

“You seem to care about us. You seem Okay; we want you here...”

On the other hand, homeless people seem to engage in mutual support and solidarity. My informants had created a powerful bond ranging from antagonism to mutual support and feelings of solidarity. Sharing the same fate often resulted in feelings of exchange and reciprocity. As a result, they created scapes of internal sociality as I call it: they often played cards or watched TV together, and they exchanged their personal belongings, such as tablets or power banks, thus creating a sense of understanding of the similar situation they faced and expressing a sense of togetherness, a sense of commonality and common belonging. They also shared among them the food items they had bought (they are given by the state 100 Euros every month), like biscuits, chocolates, and peanuts. Whenever we played cards together, they always treated me with something to eat, looking proud to be in a position to offer. This creation of internal solidarity scapes was a recurrent theme I discussed in my field diary:

“Caught in the same trap, excluded from the rest of society, homeless people seem to engage in relations of mutual understanding and support. One night, Elias told me: I have some money and bought a tablet and a power bank. I give them to anyone who needs them. Some people here cannot afford to buy such things. Why not share my stuff? It seems quite comforting; we are all victims of the same situation...”

Emotionalizing solidarity: affective solidarity-scapes

Emotions' role is crucial to understanding and conceptualizing the city, citizenship, and space. Emotions shape how the city is experienced by those “in need” and create an emotional canvas, a kind of emotional geography. Homelessness seems to be a chaotic, stigmatized, and unwanted situation. Homeless people experience anger and distrust, and, at the same time, they seem to engage in relations of mutual support and solidarity. However, it appears that this situation is always in question, fluid and fragile. Let us hear their own voices:

“A few hours walking in the city seems a whole month for us... The night passes quickly, something to read, praying. But spending the day is so difficult. We wonder here and there for no reason. Time seems to stop. I hope that one day, we will find our way. We wonder here and there, every day, having nothing to do... Of course, some cafes offer cheap coffee.

Everyone here spends his day in the city walking and wandering until 7 p.m. Then we come here to find some peace, to rest...If you want to know more about our lives, come here to sleep over. Moreover, smell the smelling feet and hear others snoring. Why do we have to put up with all that? It is hypocritical; you know we are also human beings!”

The archaeology of homelessness and homeless heritage, meaning the material traces of homeless people in the urban setting, are recent fields of study. According to the homeless people in many ethnographic contexts build their own urban strategies and space-making processes strategies to domesticate the undomesticated, to appropriate and in a sense to make the public-private, to own the unknown, to make their own “houses” and organize their living in the city. They want to be at home wherever they find themselves, rest, sleep, spend time, and make their own home. Let’s see some strategies for creating a user-friendly space, domesticated geography as Zimmerman argues with the use of artifacts, materials, and objects to feel “belonging, security, comfort, rest, perhaps love as an attempt by someone without one to make a home albeit one that would be fleeting” (2016: 257).

Looking back at the pictures I took during my research, I realize that space for people in the dormitory was impersonalised and thus unfriendly. This is why homeless people tried to make space more personal and appropriate, thus domesticating the undomesticated. Renee Hirschon described the case of Asia Minor refugees who settled in Yerania, a neighborhood in Piraeus. She used the term “domesticated geography” to discuss the feelings of loss and estrangement that refugees experienced. Many of them brought icons and other objects to create a space that assembled their old spaces, thus domesticating the unknown, unfriendly, impersonal new environment.

Similarly, the dormitory’s rooms were full of personal belongings: sleepers, radios, newspapers, and books. Next to women’s beds, I saw teddy bears and written notes, and on their beds, one could find many stickers with slogans like “*Love forever*”. As they felt more and more comfortable with my presence, Sophia, a middle-aged woman, invited me into her room: “*You must help me to put these stickers on the wall over my bed. They depict the Holy Virgin and our Saints*”. I was thrilled to help her, and after we had finished, she said: “*Now we must pray; you have to pray with me.*” I agreed and felt an invisible interaction of solidarity and mutual sharing was going on. Space was domesticated via materialities, and I was accepted as an “insider,” an equal member of this marginalized culture. It was as if solidarity relations prevailed and made the unfriendly space “our own,” domesticated space.

The ethnographic study of the dormitory for the homeless in Thessaloniki broadens the discussion of liminality and precariousness since we deal with humans at the margins who challenge their marginality and strategically manage their homelessness. Studies on shertization and anti-poverty measures -rather quantitative in general- (Arapoglou, Gounis and Siatista, 2015) agree that homelessness is often treated as a passive human condition to be managed and monitored by “specialists” and deprived, “bare” lives, become deprived of any agency and self-decision. However, an ethnographic examination demystifies stereotypes, reveals the management of this liminal condition by homeless actors themselves, and prioritizes an insider’s approach, thus understanding why and in

which ways homeless actors translate and embody homelessness in order to create viable, bearable, acceptable lives. As argued (Farrington and Robinson, 1999), it is interesting to look closer at people's strategies to cope with insecurity and maintain a stable identity. In other words, the anthropologist is called to examine the homeless rituals of everyday sociability along with the perception of homeless people in terms of time and space.

A never-ending end

The ethnographic study of the dormitory for the homeless in Thessaloniki broadens the discussion on the issue of solidarity. As analyzed in the article, solidarity was a primary ethnographic strategy and, at times, a valuable methodological tool for me as a researcher. On the other hand, solidarity was a strategy among homeless people to achieve more viable lives, create a sense of togetherness, give meaning to their homelessness, and manage their precarious situation. It was undoubtedly a mechanism to create meaningful, bearable lives in a precarious, modern system. After all, homelessness should not be treated as a passive status because homeless actors mobilized several dynamics –solidarities among them- in order to manipulate their risky situation and domesticate their undomesticated experiences.

References

- Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *We Refugees*, www.egs.edu/faculty/agamben/agamben-we-refugees.html, пристапено во ноември 2013.
- Arapoglou, Vassilis, Gounis, Kostas, Siatista Dimitra. 2015. „Revisiting the concept of Shelterisation: Insights from Athens, Greece“. *European Journal of homelessness* 9(2), 137–157.
- Arnould, Eric. 1999. „Making Consumption Magic“. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 28(1), 33–68.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2004. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*. London: Polity Press.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2006. *Liquid Fear*. London: Polity Press.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2007. *Consuming Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beck, Ulrich. 2005. *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.
- Caplan, Pat. 2016. „Big society or broken society? Food banks in the UK“. *Anthropology Today* 32(1), 5–9.
- Caplan, Pat. 2017. „Win-win? Food poverty, food aid and food surplus in the UK today“. *Anthropology Today* 33(3), 17–22.
- De Haan, Arjan. 1998. „Social Exclusion: An Alternative Concept for the Study of Deprivation?“. *IDS Bulletin* 29(1), 10–19.

- Douglas, Mary. 1966. *Purity and Danger. An analysis of the concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge.
- Evans-Pritchard, Edward. 1937. *Witchcraft, Oracle and Magic Among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Farrington, Alice, Robinson, Peter. 1999. „Homelessness and Strategies of Identity Maintenance: A participant Observatiopn Study“. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 9, 175–195.
- Fassin, Didier. 2007. „Humanitarianism as a Politics of Life“. *Public Culture* 19(3), 499–520.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. „Questions on Geography“. Bo: C. Gordon (ed.). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972 – 1977*. New York: Pantheon.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1991. *Modernity and Self Identity: Self in the Late Modern Age*. London: Polity Press.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1999. *Runaway Worlds*. London: Profile Books.
- Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Hart, Keith. 2010. *The Human Economy*. London: Polity Press.
- Harvey, David. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. London: Blackwell.
- Kiddey, Rachel, Schofield John. 2011. „Embrace the Margins: Adventures in Archaeology and Homelessness“. *Public Archaeology* 10(1), 4–22.
- Knight, Daniel, Stewart, Charles. 2016. „Ethnographies of Austerity: Temporality, Crisis and Affect in Southern Europe“. *History and Anthropology* 27(1), 1–18.
- Kravva, Vasiliki. 2014. „Politicizing hospitality: The emergency food assistance landscape in Thessaloniki“. *Hospitality & Society* 4(3), 249–274.
- Low, Setha M. 1996. „The Anthropology of Cities: Imagining and Theorizing the City“. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25, 383–409.
- Lyon-Callo, Vincent, Brin, Hayatt. 2003. „The Neoliberal State and the Depoliticization of Poverty: Activist Anthropology and Ethnography from Below“. *Urban Anthropology* 32(2), 175–204.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1954. *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*. New York: Doubleday.
- McCarthy, Lindsey. 2013. „Homelessness and Identity: a critical review of literature and theory“. *People Place & Policy Online* 7(1), 46–58.
- Narotzky, Suzana. 1997. *New directions in economic anthropology*. London: Pluto Press.
- Rakopoulos, Theodore. 2014. „The Crisis seen from below, within and against: from Solidarity Economy to Food Distribution Cooperatives in Greece“. *Dialectical Anthropology* 38(2), 189–207.

- Rakopoulos, Theodore. 2015. „Solidarity’s tensions: Informality, Sociality and the Greek Crisis“. *Social Analysis* (59)3, 85–104.
- Ritzer, George. 2010. *Enchanting a Disenchanted World. Continuity and Change in the Cathedrals of Consumption*. London: Sage.
- Rodger, John. 2003. „Social Solidarity, Welfare and Post-Emotionalism“. *Jnl Soc. Pol.* 32(3), 403–421.
- Rozakou, Katerina. 2012. „The Biopolitics of Hospitality in Greece: Humanitarianism and the Management of Refugees“. *American Ethnologist* 39(3), 562–577.
- Starke, Peter. 2006. „The Politics of Welfare State Retrenchment: A Literature Review“. *Social Policy & Administration* 40(1), 104–120.
- Stoller, Paul. 1989. *The Taste of Ethnographic Things. The Senses in Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Taylor-Goody, Peter. 2011. „Does Risk Society erode welfare state solidarity?“. *Policy & Politics* 39 (2), 147–161.
- Tsekenis, Aimilios. 2020. *Africa and African anthropologies. Colonial and post-colonial ethnographies* (in Greek). Athens: Patakis.
- Wratten, Ellen. 1995. „Conceptualizing Urban Poverty“. *Environment and Urbanization* 7, 11–38.
- Zimmerman, Larry. 2016. „Homeless, home-making, and archaeology: To be at home wherever I find myself“. Bo: M. Billie, T. F. Sorensen (eds.). *Elements of Architecture. Assembling Archaeology, Atmosphere and the performance of building spaces*. Oxfordshire: Routledge, 256–272.



