Mahito Hayashi (2023)

Rescaling Urban Poverty: Homelessness, State Restructuring and City Politics in Japan

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This book analyses the exclusion of homeless people from public spaces that results from class antagonism between the housing class and people experiencing homelessness. It does so by focusing on sociocultural actions that condition the survival of people experiencing homelessness and are set by policymakers, police officers, housed citizens, the homeless, and activists/volunteers. The analysis is firmly positioned within the debate on state rescaling put forward by advocates of regulation theory. The influence of state rescaling on the exclusion of people experiencing homelessness is observed through three avenues: the national state, public spaces, and urban social movements.

The methodology applied in this book is called 'regulationist ethnography' (p.45) by Hayashi, which requires the researcher to act as both a theorist and an ethnographer. Empirical data were collected from 2001 to 2009 in two municipalities in Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan: Yokohama City, which houses the Kotobuki district, one of Japan's largest day labourer districts, and Hiratsuka City, an outlying city with a large homeless population. This study focuses on two time periods: the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, when state rescaling occurred as a reaction to the increase in people experiencing homelessness in and around inner cities, and the 1990s to the 2000s, when state rescaling occurred as a reaction to the emergence of large numbers of people experiencing homelessness over a wide geographical area.

Hayashi argues that during the post-war growth period, nationalised spaces of poverty regulation emerged "as a national scaffolding for societalisation that made possible the unification of class divided society into a (slightly more) cohesive locus for capitalist civilisation" (p.258). However, when spaces of 'privacy' within public spaces that were created by people experiencing homelessness emerged, they became a major disruption of this societalisation, prompting new regulatory codes to reserve various public spaces for the housing class. Hayashi also emphasises that people experiencing homelessness are active actors in the reworking process of public spaces. He demonstrates that through placemaking, places for pro-homeless and homeless-supporting work can be created; through communing,

urban use values can be opened up to support the lives of people experiencing homelessness; and through translating, social movements can be broadened beyond the historical niches of poverty.

These arguments are developed in four parts: part one introduces the theoretical framework and sets it in the context of Japan. The national state is recast as a developmental state that channelled resources toward economic development, while its underdeveloped welfare state enabled the persistence of 'working poor'. The developmental state also affected public spaces, which were mainly managed and regulated by neighbourhood associations formed by housed citizens. This by a hyperconformist societalisation shaped environment proved to be a difficult ground for homeless activism; therefore, it usually blossomed only in the inner cities.

Part two turns to the national state by tracing the history of nationalised spaces of poverty regulation in post-war Japan. It focuses on crises and the regulatory dynamics they trigger, which are characterised by a considerable degree of power of the developmental state. This is followed by a discussion of the rescaling of public spaces using ethnographic evidence from Hiratsuka City. It focuses on the antagonistic interests of the housing class and people experiencing homelessness that emerge in the form of new regulations for public spaces and attempts of people experiencing homelessness to give themselves a 'prohegemonic' appearance to continue living in them. Subsequently, the analysis is expanded to the recycling businesses done by people experiencing homelessness to earn a living. It discusses the emergence of new regulations to prohibit and criminalise these recycling businesses and the failed attempts by social movements to challenge them. Hayashi concludes that these new regulations seek to preserve the hegemonic housing class against desocietalising tensions caused by people experiencing homelessness in public spaces.

Part three discusses the counter-regulatory geographies of social movements. In the beginning, it employs the concept of habitat to analyse the different groups that engage with homelessness and their placemaking activities in Yokohama City's day labourer district, Kotobuki. There, the weakened disciplinary grip of urban regulation allows social movements to divorce, declass, and autonomise themselves from the hegemonic class. Next, through the concept of commoning the issue of people experiencing homelessness's right to the city is discussed. People experiencing homelessness managed to gain new access to urban use values that had been circumscribed to the housing class by destabilising and changing their rules, norms, and forms. The necessary repertoires of commoning cultivated by the activists in Kotobuki developed together with the rescaling of regulatory spaces. Finally, the analysis is broadened by shifting the focus to social movements in outlying cities newly affected by homelessness. Through the concepts of brokerage

and translation, it demonstrates how the strategies and language of placemaking and commoning that originated in Kotobuki influence social movements in these outlying cities. Activists managed to modify and translate the inherited sociocultures of local Christian churches and extend Kotobuki's human and nonhuman resources to new cities.

Part four briefly turns to topics and issues that emerged after the late 2000s. These involve the activist encampment that reframed the discourse on poverty on a national scale during the New Year holidays of 2008/2009, the strengthening of workfarist policies through the introduction of a 'second safety net' and the revision of public assistance in the 2010s, and the impact of the COVID-19 policy on homelessness. Finally, Hayashi emphasises the possibility of loading new meanings and ontologies on political economy concepts to critically reappraise Western concepts, the importance of urban political economy for contemporary research on subalterns, and the influence of urban parameters on contemporary homelessness.

Because of the ethnographic account of a day labourer district in Japan, this book stands alongside several other ethnographies published in English (for instance Fowler, 1996; Stevens, 1997; Gill, 2001). However, it is distinctive in two ways. First, the collection of empirical data is outstanding. On the one hand, ethnographic data was collected about homeless activism in Kotobuki, which discussed a 40-year period. This long time span enables a detailed account of the development of homeless activism in accordance with state rescaling. On the other hand, data from areas outside of Kotobuki in outlying cities was also collected. This allows rare glimpses into the activities and issues of social movements that developed outside of Japan's day labourer districts around the issue of homelessness, but also reveals how they relate to better-established social movements and can profit from their experience.

Second, because of the book's deep engagement with Marxist theory, it claims relevance beyond the literature on day labourer districts and homelessness in Japan. While it contributes particularly to regulation theory, it employs a wide set of theories developed by Western academics. For instance, Brenner's (2004) 'state rescaling', Lefebvre's (1970) 'habitat', and Gramsci's (1992) 'translation' are applied in the analyses. In this sense, it skilfully connects ethnographic findings from Japan with the wider debates initiated by Western academics.

However, this strong focus on Western theory also has a downside: it channels attention away from experiences of homelessness and state rescaling in Japan. One example is the discussion about the Act on Special Measures concerning Assistance in Self-Support of Homeless People, which was enacted in 2002 and led to the opening of self-help assistance centres to cultivate people experiencing homelessness's self-support capabilities and integrate them into the labour market.

By labelling this policy "workfarist program" (p.96) Hayashi gives readers the impression that this is a new approach and in line with the Western literature. However, the policies enacted by municipalities in Japan's day labourer districts have focused already in the past on work support and blurred people experiencing homelessness's access to citizenship and public assistance (Kiener and Mizuuchi, 2018). In this sense, the 2002 Act was in line with policies implemented during the heyday of the developmental state.

Further, the deep commitment of this book to theory-making focuses mainly on how theories that were developed based on Western experience can be adapted to Japan. For instance, when Lefebvre's 'habitat' is conceptualised for the analysis, first a specification based on a literature review is provided, and subsequently attuned to the Japanese context. In this vein, first "spaces of habitat" (p.165) are defined as public spaces that become 'normal' through shared patterns of material-semiotic consumption of the housing class. After that, it is clarified that in Japan, 'spaces of habitat' have a highly unsatisfactory level for the everyday consumption of the housing class, because of the priority the developmental state gave to industrial development. How this specific Japanese experience can improve our understanding of 'habitat' is not discussed. Despite Robinson's (2006) call for a "parochializing [of] Western knowledge" (p.261) is referenced in the book, attempts of meso-level theory making are hardly reflected in the conclusions Hayashi is drawing. By doing so, he missed the precious chance to critically engage with Western theory, which could highlight its limitations or establish competing theoretical approaches.

In particular, this book addresses an audience interested in critical urban and capitalist studies. Issues related to policy, poverty, social movements, and (re)scaling dynamics are discussed in these fields. It can meet the interests of readers from a wide range of disciplines, such as geography, sociology, economics, political science, urban planning, and social work. However, background knowledge is often taken for granted, and the arguments reach a high level of complexity, making this book a demanding read.

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