

(IN)JUSTICE ON THE STREETS:
THE LONG HOUSING CRISIS IN HUNGARY
FROM ABOVE AND BELOW

by

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Abstract

(IN)JUSTICE ON THE STREETS:
RESPONSES TO THE LONG HOUSING CRISIS IN HUNGARY
FROM ABOVE AND BELOW
by
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Hungary today is the only country in the world that has encoded in its constitution the possibility of penalizing homelessness in public spaces. The intensity of criminalization of homelessness in recent years has given rise to a tug-of-war between the ruling party and grassroots activists. This dissertation explores the politics of homelessness in Budapest from three interlocking perspectives, drawing on primary historical sources, social science literature in English and Hungarian, the secondary analysis of a participatory action research project as well as the author's experiences as a housing rights activist. It will first examine how the state has addressed homelessness as the most extreme manifestation of a severe lack of affordable housing, or "housing poverty," throughout the 20th century. While the dissertation sheds light on a number of attempts by the state to intervene, it ultimately demonstrates public authorities' failure to appropriately address the prolonged housing crisis. Second, the dissertation illuminates the role of grassroots efforts in shaping public responses to housing poverty and homelessness from the early 1900s to the present. Revealing a long and largely unknown history of citizen activism for housing and dignity, the dissertation

points out the fragmented nature of these struggles and argues for the need to develop more sustained strategic organizing to achieve housing justice.

Thirdly, the dissertation discusses the role of social scientists in advancing progressive social transformation, especially in the field of housing rights, by examining ethnography from below and participatory action research as two different, but equally valuable approaches to engaged social science. In a broader context, while the dissertation identifies moral exclusion as the cultural-ideological underpinning of penal approaches to poverty, it argues that the radical rise of the criminal paradigm is a symptom of a larger social, political and economic crisis of the post-socialist Hungarian state. In terms of new directions, the dissertation identifies the current dominant social construction of homelessness as a major hindrance to challenging the dominant paradigm of management and criminalization. As a result, it argues that a radical redefinition of homelessness is necessary to address housing inadequacy in a just, inclusive and sustainable way.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction: housing and homelessness in Hungary

On March 7, 2013, some 70 people occupied the headquarters of the Hungarian ruling party *Fidesz*.¹ Among the protestors were university students, members of the LGBTQ movement, human rights activists and homeless and housed members of *The City is for All*, a grassroots homeless advocacy group. Participants of the sit-in protested against the 4th modification of the constitution (now called the Fundamental Law), which would limit the autonomy of universities and the rights of university students, restrict the definition of family to marriage and parental relationships, reserve the right of the state to define legitimate religions, allow local governments to ban homeless people from certain parts of a municipality and limit the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court. At a more general level, protestors stood up against the large-scale authoritarian turn in Hungarian politics since the election of *Fidesz* in 2010.

This sit-in was embedded in a growing grassroots mobilization since 2010, which included more traditional street protests with tens of thousands of participants as well as the more intensive use of civil disobedience and direct action. The activists of *A Város Mindenkié* (The City is for All, AVM) had been instrumental in re-introducing civil disobedience as a legitimate and effective form of public protest in their campaign against the radical rise in the criminalization of homelessness. Undoubtedly, the sit-in at the party headquarters had the highest stakes thus far and was probably the most disruptive in terms of its impact on political processes. The nonviolent protestors were met with a vicious reaction: instead of calling the police to intervene (the police who came to the premises were sent away by party officials),

¹ The original name of the party was *Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége* (The Coalition of Young Democrats), today it is *Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség* (Hungarian Civic Coalition) Today, it defines itself as a conservative party. It was founded in 1988 by some of the younger members of the democratic opposition (mostly university students) as a liberal, anti-communist party and played an important role in facilitating the regime change. In 2010, it won two-thirds majority in the Hungarian Parliament and has embarked on a major reconfiguration of the political, legal and economic system.

the *Fidesz* employees physically struggled with protestors, thugs were brought in to keep them out of the building and counter-protestors surrounded the building and intimidated participants. Later, the ruling party initiated a criminal procedure against the protestors for the breach of peace, claiming that they were violent and dangerous.

1. The criminalization of homelessness and the long crisis in Hungarian society

Since 2010, Hungarian politics has taken a massive authoritarian turn characterized by a markedly anti-poor social restructuring. After a sweeping victory in 2010, *Fidesz* does not face any meaningful political opposition in the national Parliament and also dominates local municipalities. The ruling party has introduced a new and very controversial constitution, which was passed without any meaningful public participation. It has also introduced a host of undemocratic measures including ones that curtail the freedom of the press and the freedom of religion, while also challenging the independence of the Hungarian National Bank and the Constitutional Court.

The current political regime is based on a politics of revenge. With the 4th modification of the constitution, the ruling party took most of the policies that had been contested either legally (often by the Constitutional Court itself) or politically since it came to power, and turned them into fundamental law (Scheppele, 2013). By cementing these policies into the constitution, not even the Constitutional Court is able to challenge them. In fact, while the Constitutional Court has not always been particularly progressive, it is the only state body that provided some checks on the hegemony of *Fidesz*. Now, with its jurisdiction curtailed and almost all of its previous decisions overridden, it also became the victim of revanchist politics.

In addition to a legal and political overhaul, many anti-poor measures were introduced under *Fidesz*'s first term. While the new constitution watered down many of the social

commitments of the state, a strict program of workfare was introduced that keeps people in poverty, severe cutbacks were implemented on social benefits and the Labor Code was reformed in a way that significantly weakens workers' rights, among others. At the same time, *Fidesz* has pursued an active politics of class that aims to strengthen local capitalists by redistributing state money to them as well as a loyal middle and upper class by solidifying a flat income tax, raising the VAT and providing tax credits that mostly benefit wealthier Hungarians. There has also been a strong class bias in developing state responses to the mortgage crisis induced partly by the financial recession.

Taken together, the current economic regime in Hungary seems to be a belated, but archetypal example of a neoliberal overhaul combined with radical conservative and nationalist politics. In fact, the promotion of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2005), the development of a loyal capitalist class and the right-wing political turn all closely resemble the Thatcherism and Reaganism of the 1980s. However, it is important to remain cautious with such generalizations. Emphasizing a path-dependent analysis of neoliberalism, Brenner and Theodore (2002) insist that "actually existing neoliberalism" is always more complex and complicated than neoliberal ideology. They also suggest that the local historical, economic and political context should always be taken into consideration before making blanket statements (such as the above) about a country's neoliberal course. In this sense, even if the current Hungarian regime is exceptionally authoritarian and economically oppressive, it is important to recognize that the crisis of Hungarian society did not begin in 2010.

From a broader perspective, however, this crisis is embedded in the long history of Eastern Europe as neither an imitation of the West, nor a unique formation that stands on its own, but a region deeply embedded in global processes while also producing its own social and political responses (Bodnár, 2001). As a country on the semi-periphery of global capitalism (see Wallerstein, 1997), Hungary has been in a long and relatively unsuccessful

struggle to meet both domestic social needs and outside economic and political expectations. Due to a precarious and complicated political geography, the country has rarely been able to fully control its own political, social or economic development. For centuries, it was incorporated into larger and more powerful political entities including the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empires, and later the Soviet Union.² The rigid hierarchical social structure inherited from feudalism changed very slowly and survived well into the 20th century. In fact, the state socialist experiment in the second half of the century was the most ambitious attempt at social and economic modernization of Hungarian society. While the experiment was relatively successful in a number of areas, it failed utterly in others, including the annihilation of democracy and organic social solidarity. In more recent history, the roots of the current situation are to be found in the transition from a state socialist command economy to market capitalism the late 1980s. As such, today's crisis is a specifically post-socialist one.³

The history of *Fidesz* and its current politics are deeply embedded in both the crisis of (post-)socialism and that of neoliberalism. On the one hand, the founders of *Fidesz* were part of the semi-legal democratic opposition that advocated for more political liberties under state socialism and played an important role in facilitating the transition from state socialism to capitalism. Today, however, their authoritarian policies are in many ways similar to those of the state socialist regime, where oppression was sold as emancipation, impoverishment as enrichment and the formalities of participation as substantial democracy. On the other hand, the growing emphasis on the penalization of poverty and the criminalization of homelessness is an open admission of the inability of the capitalist state to deal with these issues effectively. In this sense, current policies around homelessness are about much more than the lack of housing: they condense and crystallize many of the internal contradictions of post-socialist

² Hungary was not a member of the Soviet Union, but was part of its sphere of influence politically and economically from the end of the Second World War to 1989, and Soviet troops were stationed in Hungary from 1944 to 1991.

³ In this dissertation, I use the term post-socialism descriptively, to refer to the social conditions after the fall of the state socialist regimes backed by the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990.

Hungarian society. In fact, as the dissertation argues, the criminalization of homelessness is the symptom of a deeper political and economic crisis, triggered by the collapse of state socialism and Hungary's precarious integration into the world system of capitalism in the late 1980s.

2. Ending homelessness: the state, the grassroots and social sciences

The socio-spatial exclusion and criminalization of people living in public spaces is a powerful trend in many cities all over the world. While according to Doherty et al. (2008), these processes are less pervasive in Europe than in the US, Hungary stands out with a recent surge in anti-homeless practices and policies both locally and nationally. This dissertation explores the role of the Hungarian state in the production and prevention of homelessness as a form of extreme poverty, and attempts to explain why criminalization has become a particularly strong state response in recent years. It also examines the grassroots efforts – often marginalized in Hungarian academic analyses – that throughout Hungarian history have pushed the state to address the severe inadequacy of available housing in the country. Finally, based on my personal experiences as a housing rights activist, the dissertation discusses the various roles that engaged social scientists can and should play in the process of both resistance and organizing.

The dissertation is part of a larger project that began more than 10 years ago as I became involved with housing issues as a researcher and activist. In this sense, it is both a synthesis of my past experiences and reflections and a proposal for new directions -- my own and for the communities in which I am involved. My long-term goal is to contribute to the development of democratic grassroots power that can bring about positive changes in Hungarian society and end poverty and homelessness. In this long-term effort I have played various roles. As a researcher, I have tried to uncover how Hungarian society relates to

homelessness and how homeless people experience and respond to their social condition. I was also actively involved first in the work of *Man on the Street*, a volunteer network for housing rights, and then in *The City is for All*, which organizes homeless people for housing rights and dignity. Finally, I have taken up the role of a public intellectual by communicating with the general public about my findings and experiences through public appearances, political education and academic and popular publications.

This dissertation is structured around three main themes: the role of the state, of grassroots activism, and of engaged social science in bringing about progressive social change. I argue that each of these actors plays a major role in ensuring that a society can meet its members' needs. The state has the power to structure society through large-scale public policy and the allocation and redistribution of resources and services. While the state can be appropriated for hegemonic tendencies and used as a vehicle for oppression, state intervention is key to a more just and equal society. Grassroots activism, on the other hand, is essential to ensure that the state serves the needs of all members of a society, not only its most privileged sections. It represents a source of both inspiration for and control over the actions of the state. Social scientists (and intellectuals in general) have a key role to play in shaping both state policy and contributing to the work of grassroots movements. By offering knowledge and analysis that aims to transform rather than preserve the status quo, social scientists can contribute to both an understanding of the current situation and the ways in which it can be transformed through just and sustainable actions.

The role of the state. From a historical standpoint, the Hungarian state's relationship to housing reflects the highly fragmented and cyclical nature of the country's history. In fact, the degree of the state's involvement in the production or prevention of homelessness has varied depending on the dominant political ideology, the power of the grassroots and the prevailing socioeconomic structure. The only period where the state engaged in a sustained effort to

address the housing crisis was under state socialism. However, even this increased commitment could not eliminate the problem and also went hand in hand with large-scale criminalization. Today, while criminalization is very intense, there is no public commitment to housing and the state's primary activity is the management of homelessness. In other words, while inadequate housing could be addressed by a more equal distribution of resources, the state rejects this responsibility, thus contributing to the dispossession of its citizens.

The role of the grassroots. The state can only fulfill its public functions effectively and fairly if citizens keep a measure of sufficient control through their active participation and by continuously pushing its boundaries via more radical means. Despite the democratization process after 1989, citizens have relatively little voice in formal politics and public policy beyond voting every four years. This is not only a result of Hungary's precarious geopolitical position – which makes it exposed and dependent on external political and economic forces – but also because of the delayed social modernization of the country in the first half of the 20th century, the long years of formalized and token participation under state socialism and the elite-led and managed nature of the democratic transition.

Today, citizens do not always feel that politics belongs to them, and often lack the individual and collective skills to make their voices heard effectively in the public arena. At the same time, right wing extremism is on the rise and seems to be much more embedded in civil society. The poor are especially powerless when it comes to influencing decisions that affect their lives and are often attracted to radical right-wing ideology. It is obvious that large-scale, long-term and democratic social change is not possible without sustained and transformative grassroots involvement that represents progressive values and has a broad

social base. This is why, in addition to improving the general democratic habitus⁴ in Hungary, the political emancipation of poor citizens must become a priority.

Historical consciousness is part of the democratic habitus that is essential for the reclamation of democratic processes and the reassertion of social justice. Awareness of past movements, their successes as well as failures, offers many useful lessons, inspires our work and contributes in many other ways to current struggles. There are few systematic historiographies that discuss Hungarian social movements (for a few exceptions, see Papp, 2012 on the Hungarian populist movement; Schlett, 1982 on the history of the Hungarian social democratic movement; and Farkas, 1968 on the history of agrarian socialist movements in Hungary),⁵ and citizens' actions around housing are hardly ever explored in traditional historiography. In this dissertation, I attempt to highlight some of these struggles through historical narrative, uncovering the role that citizen pressure has played in solving mass homelessness and housing inadequacy.

The two most important efforts – the tenants' movement during the capitalist transformation of Budapest in the 1910s, and the homeless protests around the regime change in 1989 and 1990 – illustrate that both spontaneous and organized movements are able to achieve important concessions from the state. They also demonstrate that individual advocacy is not enough and that broad participation as well as the use of more disruptive tactics lead to greater citizen power and a larger social impact. At the same time, these examples also show the historical absence of cross-class alliances and indicate the need for contemporary movements such as *The City is for All* to ensure that marginalized citizens are not

⁴ I use this term borrowed from Bourdieu (1984) not to denote class differences, but to describe a set of embodied dispositions and practices that foster democratic engagement and interaction that are perceived as a “natural” part of everyday life. My use of this term is similar to the process of democratization explained by Lukács (1988) as a process of – using Lenin's terminology – “getting used to” and internalizing an essentially (self)critical stance that is characterized by an active and open public dialogue, a continuous reflection on dominant social relations, and the ability to coexist in peace without the external force of the state (p. 78).

⁵ The workers' movement and the various communist movements had been a part of official historiography under state socialism, which is a significant exception. Unfortunately, however, these works are often permeated by the political biases of the ruling regime and are hardly accessible to today's readers because of their often arcane language.

marginalized in social movements either. Fostering homeless people's political agency is essential to challenging systematic marginalization and criminalization. Drawing on the concept and practices of the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1996), this project is deeply committed to reclaiming homeless people's civic, political and social citizenship (Marshall & Bottomore, 1987) and empowering them to take collective action on their own behalf.

The role of social sciences. While producing theory through research is extremely useful, social scientists also have a responsibility to engage actively with the compelling social problems they study. In this dissertation, I explore the ways in which social scientists can be of use to the struggle for social change through research, reflection and other practices. I also discuss the dilemmas they may face and offer some potentially productive approaches to addressing them. On the other hand, this dissertation is an experiment in producing knowledge based on both experiential knowledge (see Scott, 1998) and social science as I attempt to combine my experiences as an activist working daily with homeless and housed activists, with the knowledge I have gained as a researcher through collecting and systematizing data and using theory to reflect on the world. As the participatory action research *Justice on the Streets* reveals, these two types of knowledge do not contradict but complement each other. Both are necessary to produce an account of homelessness that is potentially useful for both the activist and academic domains.

3. Untangling homelessness: definitions and dimensions

In October 2012, Hurricane Sandy hit New York City with unprecedented force. According to news reports, the storm left ten to forty thousand people homeless or needing help with housing (Barron, Lipton & Rivera, 2012). City, state and federal agencies made great efforts to provide temporary accommodation for those displaced by the storm and deliver aid to those who needed urgent repairs. Even if public measures were severely

criticized as lagging and inadequate, there was an undeniable sense of urgency to respond to the disaster. Some of the solutions offered were quite creative. For example, in tune with his long-time belief in public-private partnerships, the mayor of New York announced a project in collaboration with a commercial room rental website that offered to put up victims of the hurricane for free (Pepitone, 2012).

After the hurricane hit, the public was shocked by the sheer number of people who needed immediate help. However, these numbers appear in a different light if we are reminded that every night more than 50,000 people sleep in the city's shelters and on the streets (Markee, 2012). For years, the homeless-led advocacy organization *Picture the Homeless* (PTH) has called attention to the contradiction that vacant real estate is kept off the market mostly for speculative reasons, while homeless people are warehoused in shelters that offer no meaningful exit out of their situation (Picture the Homeless, 2007). However, the city government has been resistant even to the idea of taking regular stock of vacant properties in New York, let alone utilizing them for housing the homeless. The farther we get from Sandy's destructive force in time, the more the sense of urgency surrounding the situation of its victims wanes, regardless of whether or not it has been resolved. The same is true for the many individuals and families languishing in the shelter system and on the street: even if solutions remain temporary, the sense of urgency is long gone and homelessness fades into the slow churning of city and state bureaucracies, tucked away in the back of most people's minds.

Natural disasters are not alone in causing mass homelessness. In 2010 alone there were more than 43 million forcibly displaced people worldwide (the vast majority of them in Africa and Asia), including 27 million internally displaced persons who became homeless due to a conflict or disaster in their own countries, and 15 million refugees and 983,000 asylum-seekers (Refugees, n.d.) who have asked for help in a country other than their own. In 2009,

over 8 million people had been stuck in refugee camps for more than 10 years (World Refugee Survey, 2009) without any possibility of work, freedom of movement or a permanent home (Smith, n.d.).

The above examples illustrate the scope of the problem described as “homelessness” around the world. While keeping this global dimension in mind, this dissertation will examine one segment of this: urban homelessness in Eastern Europe, more specifically in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. In this context, homelessness is not the result of a natural disaster, but the product of structural and institutional forces embedded in the country’s social, economic and political structures.

Peter Marcuse (1988) identifies five major historical patterns of homelessness: the non-industrial and early-industrial patterns, homelessness under colonial exploitation, the mature industrial pattern and the pattern of deindustrialization. While it is impossible to neatly separate these historical trends or apply them universally, this categorization indicates the differences between the most important social, political and economic components causing homelessness under different historical conditions. At the same time, each pattern produces its own image of “the homeless,” which shapes both the dominant public discourse and societal responses to it.

While some of the forces that produce homelessness are similar all over the world, including speculative housing markets and the lack of broad social support systems, there are important contextual and geographical differences. In the Global North, it is mostly a host of structural factors that keep existing housing inaccessible to those who need it. In the Global South, by contrast, homelessness is closely associated with an acute shortage of housing (Tipple & Speak, 2006). Homelessness also tends to “look” different in different parts of the world. In India and many countries of Africa, masses of people literally live on the streets. In Latin America, self-help housing makes up a significant portion of the urban housing stock.

These are all very different from the more scattered patterns of rough sleeping⁶ and the warehousing of people in shelters in the North. The more hidden aspects of inadequate housing such as the lack of heating, proper ventilation or other infrastructure are widely present in both the North and the South, but are usually larger in scale in the latter.

In post-colonial countries, the emergence of mass homelessness is due partly to skewed development during colonial exploitation (Marcuse, 1988) and partly to the restructuring of the global labor market. While both of these have triggered massive rural-urban migration, cities have not been able to house the army of newcomers because of an inadequate supply of low-cost housing and infrastructure. In the developed countries of the North, the current pattern of homelessness is the outcome of deindustrialization and the shift to a service-based economy, which has led to the proliferation of low-wage and poverty-level jobs. Global economic restructuring, the decline of the welfare state and large-scale cutbacks on affordable housing (Blau, 1992) all led to the re-emergence of mass homelessness in the 1980s, with many individuals and families becoming unable to meet their housing expenses.

In Eastern Europe, the social structures, processes and policy responses regarding homelessness both mirror and deviate from trends in the Global North. On the one hand, similarities abound in the historical development of housing policy. For example, the shift from a *laissez-faire* view of housing to a greater emphasis on state intervention took place in both the United States and the Western and Eastern parts of Europe around the same time – between the 1910s and the 1930s – and resulted in more centralized social and housing policies. Large public investments in housing from the 1950s to the 1970s led to “the projects” in the United States, the *HLM* in France and the *lakótelep* in Hungary, which are surprisingly similar in both their intent and architecture despite their different ideological and economic contexts. The decline of public housing also took place simultaneously in the late

⁶ Throughout this dissertation, I will use rough sleeping (a British term), street homelessness, sleeping in public spaces or sleeping on the street interchangeably to denote the same phenomenon.

1970s and early 1980s as spending on housing and other social programs was cut due to neoliberal restructuring in the West and the decline of state socialism in the East. The ideologies and tools used to criminalize homelessness also have many common threads. For example, the premises, intentions and conclusions of Rudy Giuliani's 1994 program "Reclaiming the Public Spaces of New York," which lay the foundations for zero tolerance policing in New York, were clearly echoed in a study commissioned by the mayor of Budapest in 2002 titled "Free space! Encounters in Budapest. The revitalization of heavily used public spaces in Budapest," which was the basis for "cleansing" some central spaces of Budapest from homeless people.

On the other hand, Eastern Europe exposes the fragmented nature of the Global North, as in certain respects Hungary bears a closer resemblance to the United States than to the rest of Europe. For example, the state's almost total abandonment of housing as a public asset and the increasing trend towards criminalization after the collapse of state socialism are much more similar to what happened in the US since the 1980s, than to the slowly eroding welfare capitalism of Western Europe. A study by FEANTSA (2012) about homeless and housing policies in Europe shows a clear divide between countries in the Western and Eastern parts of the continent. Eastern European countries are very consistent in their lack of comprehensive housing strategies and policies as well as their focus on the management of homelessness. By contrast, despite the global neoliberal turn, Western European countries continue to invest more in the provision of housing as a long-term and sustainable public good (FEANTSA, 2012). In this respect, Eastern Europe is more similar to the radical decline of housing subsidies in the United States than its Western European counterparts.

The term "homeless," or *hajléktalan* in Hungarian, has become so vague that at times it thwarts rather than helps define the real problem at hand. Peter Marin's (1987) observation about homelessness in the United States can be applied to Hungary as well:

the trouble begins with the word “homeless.” It has become such an abstraction, and is applied to so many different kinds of people, with so many different histories and problems, that it is almost meaningless. Homelessness, in itself, is nothing more than a condition visited upon men and women (and, increasingly, children) as the final stage of a variety of problems about which the word “homelessness” tells us almost nothing. Or, to put it another way, it is a catch basin into which pour all of the people disenfranchised or marginalized or scared off by processes beyond their control, those which lie close to the heart of American life. (p. 40)

The definition of homelessness is both a conceptual issue and a political one: different definitions not only suggest the scope of the problem differently, but also the necessary, potential and desirable responses to it (Lipsky & Smith, 1989). Defining homelessness narrowly – as people sleeping rough and/or in shelters – is favored by government officials and service providers as it reduces the size of the affected population to those who are most visible and/or use existing services (Blau, 1992). Broader definitions call attention to the root causes of homelessness and include the less visible manifestations of housing poverty such as substandard living conditions, overcrowded apartments, insecure tenancy and evictions.

This dissertation draws on two international frameworks to define homelessness as an extreme form of inadequate housing. The first was developed by the United Nations and serves as the basis for both a more structural analysis and broader political demands on the state. The second definition, developed by the European FEANTSA, is more limited in both scope and ambition, but also more operational and thus more useful for making specific policy demands.

a. Adequate housing in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights established the “right to adequate housing” as a basic human right in 1966.⁷ In 1991, the UN worked out a thorough definition of “adequate housing” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1991) and in 2000 the position of UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing was established to monitor the implementation of this right in UN member states. The United Nations defines adequate housing according to seven dimensions.

First, the *legal security of tenure* refers to protection against “forced eviction, harassment and other threats” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1991). While in Hungary evictions are regulated by law and the squatters of apartments have to be granted due process (which does not always happen), self-constructed homes are often bulldozed without any legal procedure or prior warning. This means that in Budapest alone at least a thousand people who have established their homes in self-made shacks are in constant danger of being forcefully evicted. In addition, because most private apartment rentals are established without a formal contract, tenants in private apartments are extremely vulnerable to harassment and abuse by landlords.

Second, the *availability of services and infrastructure* such as water, sanitation and energy are also essential for adequate housing. While the majority of dwellings in Hungary are equipped with basic services such as piped water and a toilet, the poorest households continue to live in substandard conditions (Habitat for Humanity Magyarország, 2012). In particular, segregated Roma⁸ settlements often do not have regular garbage pickup or proper sanitation. In the village of Sajókaza, for example, almost a thousand Roma people use four

⁷ Definitions that approach homelessness beyond its most visible manifestations (sleeping in public spaces) include terms like shelter poverty (Stone, 2004), poverty housing (Duncan, 2005), housing poverty (Habitat for Humanity Magyarország, 2012), being underhoused (Marcus, 2006) and the lack of adequate shelter or housing.

⁸ In this paper, I use Roma and Gypsy interchangeably in line with both anthropological traditions and everyday practices by Roma/Gypsy Hungarians.

public faucets to access water daily (Ádám, 2013). Access to heating is also an issue: almost 11% of Hungarians live in households that cannot heat their apartments properly (Habitat for Humanity Magyarország, 2012, p. 4).

The third aspect is *affordability*. For a housing unit to be considered affordable, “personal or household financial costs associated with housing should be at such a level that the attainment and satisfaction of other basic needs are not threatened or compromised” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1991). In 2006-2007, Hungarian households spent an average of 25% of their income on housing, which is very high considering that current standards of affordability place the cutoff at 30% (Habitat for Humanity Magyarország, 2012, p. 8). In 2010, 40% of respondents considered their housing costs burdensome and 53% occasionally burdensome (Misétics, 2013, p. 40), which indicates that covering housing-related expenses is a challenge for the majority of Hungarians.

Fourth, *habitability* refers to the physical conditions of housing in terms of its size and ability to protect its residents from natural forces and other threats to health. On the one hand, this is closely linked to the dire lack of services in some of the poorest and most segregated settlements in Hungary. On the other, the ratio of hypothermic deaths is exceptionally high in Hungary (Koltai, 2013, p. 2). In 2011, 230 people froze to death; following a consistent trend, the majority of hypothermic deaths occurred at home as residents froze to death due to the lack of adequate heating (Koltai, 2013, p. 3).

Fifth, *accessibility* refers to the fact that disadvantaged groups such as the elderly, children, the physically disabled, the terminally ill and HIV-positive individuals among others should be provided access to adequate housing as a priority. In Hungary, the proportion of social housing⁹ is so low (less than 3% of the entire housing stock) that applications greatly exceed the number of available units. As a result, even if in theory families and individuals

⁹ In this dissertation, I will use the terms “social housing,” “public housing” and “publicly owned housing” interchangeably.

who grew up in foster care get priority in social housing applications, only a fraction of these eligible applicants ever get access to publicly subsidized housing, let alone single individuals or the elderly.

Sixth, the *location of housing* is also an important factor: “adequate housing must be in a location which allows access to employment options, health-care services, schools, child-care centres and other social facilities” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1991). In Hungary, around 300,000 people live in segregated settlements where poverty is concentrated and where there is hardly any access to quality services (Habitat for Humanity Magyarország, 2012, p. 20). In the Northeast of the country, the unemployment rate reaches 90% in some villages (see Matkovich, 2010). In these places, public transportation is often limited, which makes it even more difficult for local residents to find work outside the village.

Cultural adequacy is the last dimension in the UN definition of adequate housing: “The way housing is constructed, the building materials used and the policies supporting these must appropriately enable the expression of cultural identity and diversity of housing.” In Hungary, this issue is most significant with the Roma population, who often face conflict with both their neighbors and local municipalities because of issues related to housing. For example, because of a different pattern of intra-group solidarity in times of need and the importance of the extended family, Roma families are often accused of illegally overcrowding social housing units. In addition, these families are often punished as their children tend to play in the common courtyard or on the street, transgressing dominant social rules regarding the separation of public and private spaces. These conflicts are rarely settled in a way that accommodates the social and cultural needs of the Roma, and often end up in evictions.

In all, the United Nations definition of adequate housing is useful because of its emphasis on the complexity of housing as a physical, social, economic and cultural issue. In addition, the UN considers housing a social asset and includes the provision of adequate

housing among the responsibilities of the state. In short, the UN defines housing as the basis of full citizenship: “The human right to adequate housing, which is thus derived from the right to an adequate standard of living, is of central importance for the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1991). In this way, this definition is not only useful from an ideological perspective, but also because it is legally binding for countries that ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as Hungary did in 1974.

b. The European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion

The second definition this dissertation uses is the European Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) developed by FEANTSA, a European umbrella organization of homeless services providers. This definition operationalizes the UN criteria in a way that is useful for the purposes of social work and policy-making (FEANTSA, 2012, p. 12).

According to this typology, homelessness and housing exclusion have three domains: physical, legal and social (FEANTSA, 2012, p. 11). Based on these domains, two main categories of inadequate housing are established: *homelessness*, which includes the sub-categories of rooflessness and houselessness, and *housing exclusion*, which entails insecure and inadequate housing. Of course, it is impossible to clearly separate all the categories as they often overlap, and individuals and families move in and out of them over relatively short periods of time. However, they give an idea of the range of conditions in which homelessness can manifest itself.

Within the larger category of homelessness, *rooflessness* is characterized by a lack of security in all three domains: there is no roof over one’s head, no legal title to the exclusive use of space and no private space for personal relations. In Hungary, those who sleep rough,

in overnight shelters (where a person is entitled to stay for one night at a time) or in places that are not meant for human habitation such as caves, basements, airshafts etc. belong to this category. *Houselessness* refers to the condition when someone has a place to live, but no legal title for their exclusive possession (not necessarily ownership!) and no private space for social relations. Included in this category are people living in temporary shelters (which provide longer placements) and other institutions such as reception centers for refugees, foster care homes and prisons.

In the larger context of housing exclusion in ETHOS, *insecure housing* refers to living arrangements in acceptable physical conditions, but without the total security of tenure. Squatting, permanent couch-surfing, staying with friends and relatives or subletting without a contract all belong to this category. Those threatened with eviction and the victims of domestic violence also experience housing exclusion in the form of insecure housing. *Inadequate housing* refers, among other things, to living conditions that do not meet basic sanitation or infrastructural needs. Examples include apartments without a proper bathroom, overcrowded apartments and self-built shacks (see Habitat for Humanity Magyarország, 2012).

c. Homelessness as symbolic and material exclusion

Homelessness – in both its more and less visible forms – is produced and maintained by a combination of exclusionary processes, both symbolic and material. As such, it is deeply implicated in the five faces of oppression identified by Iris Marion Young (1990, p. 48-63) as exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

Exploitation. Even if most homeless people are not engaged in official wage relations, their labor is exploited in several ways. For example, many homeless people make a living as day laborers where they work for very little money and without any legal or social guarantees

(A Város Mindenkié, 2013, p. 15). Those who are active in the recycling industries also get exploited. Collecting metal and other recyclables is a difficult trade as it requires an intimate knowledge of the environment as well as physical strength. While recyclers get very little money for their goods considering the effort they put into collecting them, the large companies that buy them make huge profits by re-selling and processing the same materials.

Marginalization. Young (1990) defines marginalization as a condition that emerges when a “whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination” (p. 53). In today’s Hungary, homeless people are deeply mired in this condition as they are marginalized through moral, administrative and spatial means and suffer multiple forms of discrimination. In a 2005 study in Budapest, almost half of all respondents thought that homeless people were in the worst situation among those listed in the survey including people with disabilities, the elderly and the unemployed (Studio Metropolitana & Double Decker, 2005, p. 10). Homeless people are also aware of the negative public attitudes towards them. According to A Város Mindenkié (2013, p. 16), 50% of homeless people think that non-homeless people associate external and negative things with them such as a bad smell, dirtiness etc. In the same survey, close to 40% of respondents thought that deviant behavior such as alcoholism, theft and drug abuse is associated with homelessness. One-fifth mentioned internal negative features such as laziness, stupidity and loneliness. Stigmatization has devastating effects on homeless people’s relationship to “mainstream” society and each other and plays an important role in preserving this social condition.

Powerlessness. While Young (1990) defines powerlessness mostly in terms of the difference between professionals and nonprofessionals in representing their interests (p. 56-58), the lack of political power outside the context of work is a significant aspect of being poor and homeless. Powerlessness defines homelessness at both the personal and social

levels. Homeless people are placed in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the state (when they apply for welfare for example), the institutions that “serve” them (e.g. homeless shelters or soup kitchens) as well as the professionals who help them (e.g. social workers). In all these cases, they have to prove that they deserve help, support or services. If they want to get essential services, they often have to abide by rules perceived as humiliating or patronizing (A Város Mindenkié, 2013). However, because of their dependency on these services, homeless people rarely engage in self-advocacy and even if they do, it is almost always on an individual basis and never collectively.

Cultural imperialism. According to Young (1990), “to experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other” (p. 59). The lack of opportunity for self-definition is one of the most painful forms of symbolic oppression that homeless people face. Often categorized as ultimate losers by their own fault, homeless people are most often portrayed in negative and humiliating terms by the media and public discourse. As discussed in Chapter 4 on the rise of criminalization, the construction of the figure of the “homeless criminal” served as a way to justify the tougher treatment of street homelessness by the authorities.

Physical violence. The fifth form of oppression that homeless people are exposed to is physical violence. Domestic violence often plays a significant role in female homelessness and homeless people, regardless of their gender, are frequent targets of both hate crimes (such as setting their shacks on fire, urinating on them or beating them up) and petty crimes (such as theft or provocation). Unfortunately, homeless people are also victimized by each other. In addition, as revealed by A Város Mindenkié (2013), homeless people are also the target of physical and verbal abuse by the authorities.

d. Who are the homeless, after all?

In light of the above, “homeless” has a range of meanings: from people living in public spaces to those living in a home, but struggling to maintain it properly. In this dissertation, questions of terminology are also complicated by language: in Hungarian *hajléktalan* means “without shelter,” while *otthonatlan* means “without home.” While the two words are sometimes used interchangeably, *otthonatlan* refers to a broader group of people – those who do not have a proper home, including in the psychological sense of being “at home” – and *hajléktalan* is narrower in scope. In the following, I will focus on the use of *hajléktalan* (translated as homeless) as a form of self-identification as well as an ascription.

In its original sense, *hajléktalan* is a descriptive term that refers to the loss of housing. The Social Law provides two different definitions of homelessness. On the one hand, a homeless person is someone without a permanent address, unless this address is a homeless shelter. On the other, a person is considered homeless if they spend their nights in public or in a nonresidential place. Beyond legalese, people who have experienced homelessness also tend to use it a descriptive term as they identify the loss of secure housing in their life history (“I became homeless in 1999 after my divorce”). However, beyond these specific uses, the term is rarely used as a neutral descriptor of a person’s housing situation and is often loaded with a host of socially produced meanings.

Hajléktalan is often used as pejorative term and has come close to becoming a racial slur (see Chapter 3). Homeless-talk (*hajléktalanozás*) refers to the practice of making demeaning statements about “the homeless” while ascribing certain negative behaviors and characteristics to them as innate.¹⁰ Recently, this practice has gone mainstream thanks to the public statements of some prominent politicians including the minister of interior and the mayor of Budapest. In this context, while general statements are made, homelessness is

¹⁰ As such, it resembles Gypsy-talk, which refers to the practice of disparaging Roma individuals and communities solely based on their assumed ethnic characteristics.

reduced to the phenomenon of street dwelling and associated with the features perceived as typical for “the homeless” such as a shabby look, a beard or being drunk. In fact, both because of their visibility and their designation as the “typical homeless,” people who live in public spaces are often used by the media to stand in for “the homeless” in general.

At the same time, for many people, their identity as homeless is formed by the services they use. If someone lives in a shelter or spends a big part of their day in a drop-in center, they become homeless by association. In fact, one of the reasons why those who have recently lost their housing are reluctant to use “homeless services” is to avoid the kind of stigma that it carries (which also often becomes internalized). The social services system also produces homeless identity by running segregated services (see Chapters 3 and 6) and requiring proof of one’s homelessness to access certain benefits (e.g. the free reproduction of personal documents). In all, while homelessness simply refers to the fact of not having proper housing, it has acquired a much more complex set of meanings and those who are faced with this situation have to grapple with a host of socially produced meanings as they navigate the social, political and interpersonal worlds.

The heavy load carried by the term *hajléktalan* is one of the greatest challenges to constructing social consensus around viable solutions to homelessness. In other words, to be able to address it properly, homelessness has to be stripped of its current political, cultural and social stigma without losing its most fundamental meaning – the lack of a secure home. At the same time, it is also important avoid overgeneralization: homelessness does not describe all forms of housing difficulties and should not be used as an all-encompassing term.

In this dissertation, I will use “homeless” as a descriptive term for those who live on the street or in shelters and refer to those who struggle with housing issues as the “housing poor.” While focusing on urban homelessness and the most vulnerable populations experiencing housing poverty such as squatters and the residents of informal settlements, I

also examine more general housing policies to understand overall trends in state attitudes and subsidies. At the same time, I will not address difficulties related to the ownership or acquisition of housing as private property such as mortgage default and foreclosures. Undoubtedly, these issues pose important questions regarding affordability and security of tenure and have recently affected large parts of Hungarian society and need to be studied extensively. However, they fall outside the scope of my work as I focus on the most extreme manifestations of housing poverty. Finally, while I make some occasional references to the housing conditions of poor, especially Roma people living in segregated settlements in rural areas, the focus of this work remains on homelessness and inadequate housing in urban settings, especially in the capital city, Budapest.

4. Methodology and structure of the work

This dissertation examines policies regarding housing and homelessness from both above and below – from the perspective of the state and from the point of the grassroots. To understand the state, I examine local and national policies and regulations as well as the everyday practices of state representatives. To understand the grassroots, I analyze the actions of people who do not have access to adequate housing, from individual resistance to collective movements. While the dissertation covers a relatively broad time span from the end of the 19th century up to the present, geographically it focuses on the city of Budapest, which is the capital and the only city in Hungary with metropolitan characteristics.¹¹ Methodologically, I have drawn on a variety of primary and secondary sources as well as qualitative and quantitative methods to build my arguments. The dissertation has three main parts: the history

¹¹ Out of Hungary's total population of almost 10 million, Budapest is home to about one-fifth of its residents (close to 2 million people) and together with its metropolitan area, it is home to up to 2.5 million people (Population Reference Bureau, 2011). The next largest city, Debrecen, has around 200 thousand residents, or one tenth of the population of Budapest. In all, even if it is atypical in many ways, as the country's political and economic center with the largest urbanized population, Budapest provides a good case study to examine how mass urban homelessness has been produced, prevented or managed by the local and the national states through the Hungary's history.

of the state and the current upsurge of criminalization, the history of grassroots organizing for housing and resistance against criminalization, and the role of research and the social sciences in supporting social movements.

In the first part of the dissertation I focus on the Hungarian state's relationship to housing and homelessness in a historical perspective. Chapter 2 discusses the ways in which the Hungarian state has dealt with poverty and homelessness from the middle of the nineteenth to the end of the twentieth century. I highlight the cyclical nature of the state's intervention and retraction to alleviate housing poverty. Paying particular attention to processes of de-housing at both the public and individual levels, I also analyze the ideological and moral underpinnings of social, housing and criminal approaches to poverty and homelessness. In Chapter 3, I examine the growing trend of criminalization as a state response to homelessness and the reasons why criminalization has become so systematic since 2010. By placing this trend in a larger historical context, I explain it as the outcome of both the historical process of moral exclusion experienced by poor people and the social and political crisis that post-socialist Hungary is currently experiencing.

In order to understand the history of the Hungarian state's relationship to homelessness, I use secondary sources about social and housing policy as well as some primary sources such as newspaper clippings and archival materials. For the analysis of the rising criminalization of homelessness since the regime change, I draw on primary sources such as media reports and secondary sources such as scholarly articles. The research I had completed for my master's thesis between 2002 and 2006, which focused on the social and cultural construction of cleanliness through an anti-homeless campaign in Budapest, was also a useful source of information for this segment of the dissertation.

In the second part of the dissertation, I focus on producing a critical history of grassroots movements around housing along with an account of contemporary efforts at advocacy. In

Chapter 4, I discuss grassroots movements that developed around issues of housing and homelessness throughout the 20th century, highlighting efforts that pushed for state intervention and assessing the success of these efforts in terms of their vision, scale of mobilization, and social impact. This chapter demonstrates the historical significance of the grassroots in pushing the modern state to fulfill its social functions. In Chapter 5, I unfold the history of homeless resistance since 1989/1990 by focusing on efforts that mobilize homeless people themselves including the street newspaper *Fedél Nélkül* (Without a Roof) and the advocacy group *The City is for All*.

Given that the history of poor people's activism in Hungary is hardly documented, it was not easy to find sources for this part of my work. To unfold the history of grassroots activism in the field of housing, I combed through the scholarly literature on social and housing policy for any references to resistance or organizing. I also used first-hand accounts as well as archival news reports, op-eds and memoirs. To reconstruct the events of the homeless protests in 1989 and 1990, the most significant moment of homeless activism in recent decades, I used mostly first-hand accounts such as a contemporary documentary film, interviews with participants and press reports. While I was not able to talk to any homeless participants in person, I conducted informal interviews with social workers who had been at the protests. Regarding contemporary struggles for the right to housing, I use my own experiences as an activist as well as the works produced by activists, organizations and scholars as primary data.

The third part of the dissertation is concerned with the role of social sciences in advancing the goals of grassroots social movements. In Chapter 6, I reflect on this issue by drawing on my personal experiences with *Man on the Street*, an informal organization that fought for housing rights between 2004 and 2008, and *Justice on the Streets*, a participatory action research launched in 2011 by *The City is for All* about discrimination against street

homeless people. In this section, I discuss the similarities and differences between ethnography from below and participatory action research and assess the transformative potential of both approaches.

The chapter on research and activism draws on two personal experiences in *Man on the Street* and *The City is for All*. In *Man on the Street*, I was a participant (observer), while *Justice on the Streets* used both qualitative (interviews, personal experiences) and quantitative (survey) methods to collect data about discrimination. For this analysis, I relied on my personal experiences, and the research reports produced by *The City is for All*, and my personal observations during the research process as well as the transcripts of interviews with members of the PAR team completed by a Hungarian anthropologist.

I close the dissertation by reflecting on how the social construction of homelessness by the state and social services is itself a hindrance to challenging the dominant paradigms of management and criminalization. I argue that a radical redefinition of homelessness is necessary to address housing inadequacy at the appropriate scale. In the end, I lay out some further directions for action and reflection in the areas of public policy, research and activism in order to stop the reproduction of homelessness and ensure that everyone has a secure home that allows them to exercise their social membership to the fullest.

Chapter 2.

“You would always dwell!”¹²

A historical overview of state responses to homelessness in Hungary

Large-scale housing poverty and its most extreme manifestation, homelessness, have remained largely unsolved throughout Hungarian history. While social, economic and political forces together have contributed to enduring and gaping social inequalities and a skewed distribution of social resources, at certain moments in history the state took a more active role in addressing these pressing social issues. The Hungarian state’s changing cycles of (dis)engagement with social inequality, poverty and redistribution were reflected in alternating phases of investment and disinvestment in affordable housing. Focusing on urban housing, notable periods of more significant public commitment included the 1910s and 1920s when both the municipality of Budapest and the national state invested in construction of new rental and emergency housing, the period of state socialism, especially after the 1956 Revolution when housing became a source of political legitimacy, and the early 2000s when the national state heavily subsidized mortgages for home ownership. While the times that the state more actively supported people experiencing homelessness mostly correspond to the same historical periods, housing for the very poor has never been high on the agenda and solutions to homelessness have always been associated with temporary and second-class solutions.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the dominant ways in which the Hungarian state has addressed housing poverty historically, focusing on the period from the end of the 19th through the twentieth century. While exploring the political, economic and social forces behind the cycles of engagement and retraction, I focus on the state’s responses in three main areas: social policy, housing policy and criminal justice/policing. My main concern is to

¹² Quote by Otilia Solt (n.d.b), the founder of SZETA (see Chapter 4), making a tongue-in-cheek reference to the attitude of municipalities towards homeless people and squatters.

understand why a particular combination of these approaches became prominent at specific historical conjunctures.

1. Poverty under feudalism

As a system of relations based on land ownership, feudalism was the dominant form of social and economic relations in medieval Europe. While feudalism was not at all the same in Western and Eastern Europe, its rigid social hierarchy lasted much longer in the Eastern part of the continent. As capitalism was unfolding in the West in the 15th century, feudal relations remained embedded in Eastern Europe for centuries thereafter. In Hungary, the introduction of “second serfdom” – marked by strict restrictions on the free movement of serfs following the peasant uprising of 1514 – resulted in a very rigid social and legal system reinforcing landowner dominance (Tarján, n.d.). In the 19th century, the slow transformation of feudalism accelerated as civil liberties were enhanced and serfs were liberated after the 1848/1849 Revolution. At the same time, feudalistic relations of hierarchy and property remained a hallmark of Hungarian society well into the 20th century. As Péter Veres (1948), a prominent socialist politician observed: “In Hungary, when capitalism came upon us, feudalism did not go away either” (p. 10).

Social attitudes towards poverty are intimately tied to dominant social and economic relations as well as to the moral convictions and norms of a society. In pre-industrial Europe, caring for the poor was primarily the responsibility of the family or the local community. From the middle ages, the Catholic Church played an increasingly important role all over Europe, Hungary included, in supporting marginalized members of society such as the poor, the elderly and orphans (Kocsis, A., 2009, p. 12). While giving alms is considered a spiritual act in Christianity, the question as to whether or not the recipient is deserving of the alms has always been of great concern. As a result, the prohibition against giving alms to a person who

is either able to work, behaves aggressively or is likely to spend the money on alcohol (Hámori, n.d.), was at the root of many institutional responses to poverty.

The ability to engage in productive labor became a decisive factor in determining what kind of help someone deserved from society (Castel, 2003) and the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor has guided institutional responses to poverty for centuries. In feudal Europe, the deserving poor (the sick, the old and the physically frail) were not considered responsible for their situation and were seen as deserving of (unconditional) social support to survive. The undeserving poor – those responsible for their own situation – were considered as being both suspicious and dangerous. In this vein, from the middle ages on, beggars and vagrants deemed capable of work had to be placed under social control and moral reform.

a. The rise of capitalism and structural homelessness in Western Europe

The advance of capitalism – primarily rooted in the wealth amassed through colonization – led to tectonic changes in the structure of Western European societies. In fact, one of the most significant social outcomes of this shift was the appearance of mass homelessness and landlessness. At the same time, the criminalization of poverty also emerged almost simultaneously as a response to the social crisis that followed large-scale economic transformation. Social and legal developments in England are a case in point.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, the enclosure of the commons by local landlords and yeoman (mostly to raise sheep for textile production) forced English peasants off the land, leading to a huge increase in rural and urban poverty (McNally, 1990). While many people stayed in the countryside to engage in wage labor, masses of landless peasants tried to avoid starvation and grinding poverty by escaping to towns. As the ruling elite perceived the eruption of visible mass poverty as a major threat to social order, a series of laws – later

labeled “bloody legislation” by Marx ([1867] 1992) – were passed beginning in 1495. These ordered the cruel punishment of beggars and vagrants with forced labor, whipping or even execution.

For a long time, the English ruling classes used these harsh laws as the primary means of enforcing the newly emerging social order of capitalist production. However, with the stabilization of the social and economic system, a somewhat different approach emerged to dealing with poverty. Around a century after the “bloody laws,” the first Poor Laws were passed. The Poor Laws were intended to manage the social crisis while preserving social inequalities and making way for capitalism. Combining social and penal responses, the laws determined who among the poor deserved social services. The “deserving poor” were then offered various forms of support like outdoor relief, while hospitals and workhouses were supposed to integrate them into society. The undeserving poor, mostly beggars and vagrants, were treated as criminals to be expelled and/or incarcerated. In all, the Poor Laws represented one of the first examples of “social policy” that used both social and criminal institutions to deal systematically with the surplus populations produced by the rise of private property and capital accumulation.

As wage labor became the dominant form of employment in capitalist Europe, the association between the ability to work and entitlement to social aid was further reinforced (Castel, 2003). By the middle of the 19th century, the workhouse became the most typical state response to homelessness and poverty all over Europe (Kiss, 2012, p. 102). In general, the workhouse was based on the conviction that poverty was a (source of) crime and that able-bodied poor people had to be reformed through forced labor. In certain cases, however, even the deserving/undeserving dichotomy was suspended. According to the 1834 English Poor Law, for example, poor people could only get public support if they went to a workhouse. In

this sense, the workhouse became a forced labor institution where people committed themselves voluntarily.

b. The slow transformation of Hungarian society

In Hungary, the appearance of mass urban poverty was also partly rooted in the changing social relationship to land. The process was much slower than in the West, as the capitalist transition started only in the 19th century. Among other things, the liberation of serfs in 1848 marked the end of second serfdom. However, as this liberation was not accompanied by land reform, a large part of the rural population lost all access to land and the majority remained in the hands of the aristocracy and the church. This extremely unequal distribution of land played an important role in slowing the disintegration of feudal social hierarchy, and also caused further impoverishment. As the conditions for landless peasants deteriorated, many migrated to cities to work in emerging industries. Rural-to-urban migration swelled both the industrial workforce and the numbers of urban poor.

As part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867-1918), the Hungarian state's responses to homelessness ranged from selective empathy to regulation and punishment. On the one hand, social care for the poor was institutionalized through local laws based on the deserving/undeserving dichotomy. By the end of the nineteenth century, public welfare was codified as a right for those unable to work or sustain themselves. Begging was reserved for the deserving poor: a beggar's permit issued by the local municipality was actually one form of public welfare. Importantly, social welfare was tied to place of residence, as local municipalities had to take care only of "their own." On the other hand, poverty was also considered a public safety issue and unauthorized begging and vagrancy were highly

regulated.¹³ In 1881 Budapest passed a local law that allowed the police to arrest vagrants, beggars and anyone else deemed dangerous to public safety. Those who did not have work or a place to stay could be detained in a jail or a workhouse (Kiss, 2012, p. 138).¹⁴

2. “Happy times of peace:” From the Austro-Hungarian Compromise to the First World War

After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, which reestablished the sovereignty of Hungary,¹⁵ the country started to develop rapidly in many respects. Politically, the period between 1867 and 1914 was marked by the development of the modern Hungarian state. While democratization was an important feature of this era, the forced assimilation of minorities, who in the mid-1800s still outnumbered Hungarian-speakers, and serious limitations on the franchise, with less than 10% of the population eligible to vote, indicated the limited nature of political changes. Economically, the country experienced significant development: while agriculture retained its leading role in the economy, industrial production became increasingly important (Hanák, 1975, p. 350). At the same time, the distribution of land ownership remained extremely unequal and continued to reflect feudal relations.¹⁶ Socially, this period is characterized by the rise of the bourgeoisie and the appearance of a massive rural and urban proletariat. In a cultural sense, there was a growing divide between

¹³ Nomadic Gypsies were particularly affected by these laws. In the 18th century, there were many efforts to forcibly settle and assimilate them: the traditional trades and activities of Gypsies were criminalized and their children were often taken to state homes to “civilize” them (Kiss, 2012, p. 176).

¹⁴ In Hungary, forced labor has been an important element of correctional facilities since the 18th century. The first modern workhouse was set up in 1817 by a private philanthropic association in Pest, which did not (yet) use force to get poor people to work. In 1833, the institution was taken over by the municipality and transformed into a forced workhouse where “those individuals are held who have incriminated themselves by small infractions” (Gyáni, 1999a).

¹⁵ The Compromise codified almost all the demands of the 1848/1849 Revolution, granting Hungary autonomy in almost all matters. Politically, however, the two countries remained in a union and until the First World War continued to have the same king.

¹⁶ In 1900, small landowners who made up almost 50% of the rural population had 5,8% of the land while large landowners, who made up only 0,5% of the rural population owned close to 50% of all the land (Hanák, 1975, p. 352).

the liberal urban bourgeoisie and the more traditional rural population, as well as the aristocracy (Gyáni, 2008).

In this period Budapest became a magnet for both people and capital, and the city's population grew at an unprecedented rate. Seventy percent of the city's population growth was due to rural-urban migration, and by 1910 Budapest had almost one million residents. This made it the eighth most populous city in Europe (Gyáni, 1992, p. 32-33) and the largest in Central-Eastern Europe. The city also experienced its golden age in terms of physical and cultural development. Many migrants came to the city to work on the large-scale public construction projects that turned Budapest into a world class city, with its great avenues and boulevards modeled after Paris and Vienna, the first underground in continental Europe, two major train stations, the Parliament building and the National Opera House.

a. Laissez-faire liberalism and dire housing conditions in the late 19th century

The arrival of the rural masses in the second half of the 19th century created a pressing housing shortage in Budapest. Tens of thousands of people lived in basements and wooden shacks they had built (Kiss, 2012, p. 146). There were dozens of flophouses¹⁷ where migrant workers slept in crowded rooms on the floor or in makeshift beds. Many people who could not find affordable accommodation rented beds¹⁸ or sublet rooms in already overcrowded apartments. In 1870, the total number of bed renters and subletters was around thirty thousand, constituting 15% of the city's total population (Gyáni, 2010, p. 5). Overcrowding was a major problem, with more than 60% of residents living in overcrowded conditions (Ferenczy, [1906] 1992, p. 83). In addition to those living in unhealthy, inadequate, insecure and overcrowded housing, five thousand people were literally homeless (Gyáni, 2010, p. 2).¹⁹

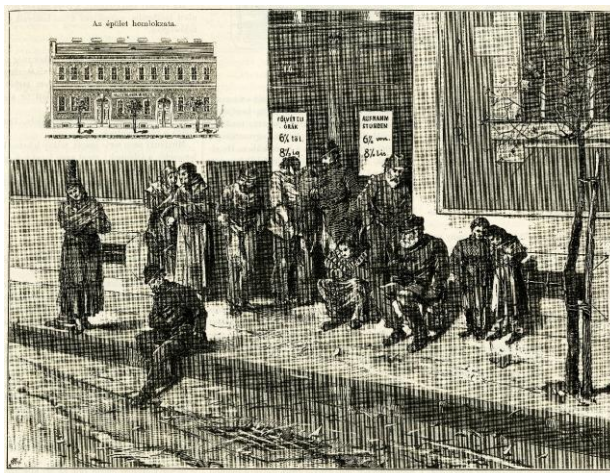
¹⁷ These were called *tömegszállás* or mass housing in Hungarian.

¹⁸ When several people rent one bed and take turns sleeping in it.

¹⁹ In the absence of private spaces at home, many people spent their days in semi-public places. As a result, coffeehouses and other places of hospitality such as restaurants and bars proliferated, gaining Budapest the title

According to the laissez-faire liberal ideology of the time, housing was fundamentally a private issue and the construction or provision of housing was not a municipal responsibility. In 1878, Budapest's public notary echoed the political elite's attitude when he said that public intervention in the housing market „is the right of the authorities as long as public view commands it” (Gyáni, 2010, p. 2). In other words, the city was only interested in housing for representation and not as a basic social necessity.²⁰ At the same time, as housing and health conditions became increasingly dire, the city was forced to acknowledge the situation and take some preliminary – albeit mostly administrative – steps.

A local ordinance from 1884 provides a good overview of the municipality's housing policy. According to the ordinance, the construction of housing for workers was primarily the responsibility of employers. To encourage such projects, the city offered tax exemptions to private companies. To address overcrowding, the city determined minimum spatial requirements for households and issued fines to landlords



1. People standing in line at a homeless shelter in 1886

who broke the law. Similarly, it defined basic standards for basement apartments and banned those that did not meet these criteria (Szabályrendelet-tervezet a fővárosi lakásviszonyok rendezésére, [1884] 1992). In terms of flophouses, the city reserved the right to issue permits, and mass shelters without a permit were liable to a fine. As for caring for the homeless, the

“the city of coffee” (Saly, 2005). Whether coffeehouses were segregated by class and occupation is up to debate (see Saly [n.d.] for an analysis of coffeehouses as a site of social mixing and Gyáni [1999b] about the exclusionary nature of coffeehouses), it is certain that people from various social backgrounds used coffeehouses regularly. As such, they served as early drop-in centers for the less fortunate as well as centers of entertainment and bourgeois political and cultural activity. According to an article from 1907, when coffeehouses were closed at the time of a general strike, the streets of Budapest were filled with desperate people who had nowhere to go (quoted in Pertl, n.d.).

²⁰ Public money was used to support the development of basic infrastructure for private construction and prestige constructions.

city restricted its role to supporting the activities of the *Homeless Shelter Association*, which was formed by a group of private citizens in the mid-1870s. In all, the city did not take any proactive steps to prevent homelessness or provide housing. Instead, its public intervention was restricted to the creation of a relatively strict regulatory environment and some financial support for private initiatives.

The 1886 cholera epidemic is considered a turning point in the municipality's approach to public health and, indirectly, to housing. Throughout the 19th century, Budapest had been often ravaged by cholera and other epidemics. The city's main response to these public health crises was to police and regulate its residents. For example, a special police division was set up to inspect the flophouses and overcrowded apartments that had been identified as centers of disease. At the outbreak of the epidemic, landlords were fined (Umbrai, 2007, p. 9) and residents were routinely evicted (Kiss, 2012, p. 146). However in 1886, when Budapest was ravaged by yet another cholera epidemic, the municipality for the first time offered evictees temporary accommodation in emergency barracks. While the barracks were originally meant to be temporary, the city decided to maintain them after the epidemic was over and even built some more. In this way, these barracks became the first social housing units in Budapest (Umbrai, 2007, p. 10). During the economic recession of the early 1900s, the barracks were used as short-term emergency shelters for unemployed families (Kiss, 2012, p. 156).

b. Public intervention into housing in the early 1900s

The city began to take public responsibility for housing more seriously under the leadership of István Bárczy, who was elected mayor in 1906. Under Bárczy's leadership, the municipality launched a program to build small apartments for workers, resulting in the

construction of more than 5000 rental units and 500 emergency apartments²¹ (Győri & Sass, 2003, p. 8). For temporary housing, a

People's Hostel and a *People's House* were opened by the city. While the former was the contemporary version of a high quality workers' hostel with single rooms, the latter was a social center with accommodation for workers, a soup kitchen, a kindergarten and



2. The People's Hostel on a contemporary postcard

social workshops (Győri & Sass, 2003, p. 14). Although this program did not meet the scale of the housing crisis – in 1911 one third of the city's population continued to live in overcrowded conditions (Gyáni, 1992, p. 71) – it was the first strategic public housing intervention in the history of Budapest.

In this period, the central state also became active in the field of housing, although its role was mostly confined to the development of company housing. While workers were often segregated from the administrative staff and management, 42% of all private and state factories had workers' colonies at the beginning of the 20th century. Although most company housing was in the countryside, the Wekerle-settlement represented an important investment in the vicinity of Budapest. Its construction, financed by the state, began in 1908 and was completed in 1927. In total, it housed twenty thousand state railroad employees (Gyáni, 2010, p. 8), which was an outstanding initiative even at the European level.

Despite some progressive measures in housing policy, homelessness and poverty remained highly criminalized (Kiss, 2012, p. 109). Homeless shelters were frequent targets for police raids and mass arrests, with the first such raid documented as early as 1889. About a decade later, in 1898, a journalist posed the following question about the practice:

²¹ *Szükséglakás* in Hungarian.

Why does [the police chief of Budapest] persecute the homeless, who would only like to buy some calm at the shelters of charity with their hard-earned money and they get locked up in exchange? Why does he arrest manual workers looking for a job in the middle of the day in front of the chambers of industry? Is it such a sin not to have a job? ... We say all of this because today the habitual raid was carried out again, which resulted in the arrest of more than 40 homeless [people]. Since June 27, on altogether four occasions, 500 people were taken from the shelter to jail for 8 to 15 days. (in Dömsödi, 2000)

According to Zimmermann (2011) between the 1890s and 1914, in Budapest alone, 4000 to 8000 people were detained annually under charges such as vagabondage, begging and prostitution (Zimmermann 2011, p. 29).

The year 1913 brought a landmark law in the criminalization of homelessness. Based on the conviction that those who avoid work are the “parasites” of society (Kiss, 2012, p. 128), the “dangerous avoidance of work” was established as a crime. In fact, this was also the first comprehensive national legislation regarding workhouses: those found guilty of this crime were to be committed to a workhouse to improve their morals and



3. Trash pickers in the 1910s in Budapest

behavior. Those who loitered in public or had no stable income or family could also be fined, jailed or committed to a workhouse (Oross, 2001, p. 100). Through this law, the idea that poverty is an individual weakness was codified for decades to come. As nagyiványi Fekete ([1891] 1998), one of the main proponents of the workhouse legislation explained:

the basic tasks of the workhouse are the moral correction of the interns, boosting their religious devotions, and protecting them from falling back into their dangerous way of life through warning, work and discipline. So we do not lock up vagrants and the like to temporarily remove their damage from society, but *to change their character* (emphasis in original) and to turn them into useful workers. In this way, the workhouse has to be a genuinely correctional education facility. (p. 134)

The First World War (1914-1919) halted the short period of development in the field of housing and homeless services. Private and municipal construction came to a halt while immigration from the war-affected areas increased, putting extra pressure on the already insufficient housing stock. The housing shortage was so severe that in 1917 the total number of empty apartments in Budapest was only 251 (Kiss, 2012, p. 161). Soldiers' families unable to pay rent were threatened with eviction. To address the crisis, the state intervened in the housing market, introducing a centrally regulated regime along with a series of moratoria on rent collection and evictions. A new local housing law also gave the city the extraordinary right to move tenants into vacant apartments (Kiss, 2012, p. 161). During the war, the condition of social institutions including the People's Hostel and homeless shelters deteriorated significantly.

3. A period of hope: the Aster Revolution and the Republic of Councils

The period between the First and the Second World Wars was probably the most tumultuous in Hungarian history. On the one hand, the war led to the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Hungary became an independent state. On the other, the Trianon Peace Treaty reduced the size of Hungary to one-third of its former territory and brought on a deep political, social and economic crisis that continued well into the 1920s. In 1918 and 1919, in the midst of a quasi-civil war, different governments were propelled into

power: first the progressive liberals, then the social democrats and finally the communists. While they differed in their ideologies and mode of governance, each of these governments took important steps towards dissolving the remnants of feudalistic social relations, through land reform, the establishment of universal franchise and the radical redistribution of property.

In 1918 Hungary broke away from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during the so-called Aster Revolution and the First Hungarian Republic was formed. The new government was a coalition of social democrats and other progressive forces. Over the five months of its rule, from November 1918 to March 1919, a number of important legal and political reforms were enacted including the expansion of the suffrage, freedom of the press and of association as well as social reforms such as the prohibition of child labor and land reform (which was not realized).

In 1919, the government was taken over by the communists and the country officially became a Republic of Councils (*Tanácsköztársaság*) for a total of 133 days. As a result, even if only for a few months, the former liberal housing and social policies were temporarily replaced by a more egalitarian and centralized approach. In addition to other measures, the government socialized all economic assets including urban apartments (Oláh, 2010). Rent was radically reduced and empty rooms had to be reported to the authorities so that they could be redistributed. While homeless people had priority in getting housing, working class families were moved in with bourgeois households living in large apartments. In all, according to contemporary statistics, 90,000 people were provided housing (Oláh, 2010, p. 151-153). Through these measures, the short-lived communist leadership initiated drastic changes in the distribution of social resources, which triggered fierce opposition by the upper echelons of Hungarian society.

In the end, the communist government – which crushed opposition and started to lose its social base as well – was forced to resign after international troops occupied Hungary. After its defeat, social and legal relations were quickly restored to their previous conditions. In fact, the first policies to be revoked by the new government were those regarding the nationalization and requisition of housing and the practice of cohabitation. Unfortunately, there is no data about the fate of the 90,000 people who had been housed through communist policies. However, as the practice of forced co-habitation was vehemently resisted by the families whose apartments were appropriated, it can be assumed that the vast majority of co-habitations were promptly dissolved. This short – and rather violent²² – attempt to institute a more egalitarian social and housing agenda was followed by two decades of conservative authoritarian rule.

4. The authoritarian turn: The interwar years from 1919 to 1945

After the communist government was toppled in 1919 with the help of foreign troops, a thoroughly right-wing regime grabbed power and remained in office for the next two decades. With various right-wing forces in power at both the national and local levels, the interwar period came to be symbolized by Miklós Horthy, the conservative and fiercely anti-communist governor of Hungary from 1920 to 1944. The assessment of the Horthy-era is still hotly contested by historians and politicians. While some important social reforms were introduced to ensure social legitimacy, the regime greatly diminished democratic participation, oppressed its ideological opponents and consolidated the power of the ruling elite. The nationalist ideology of the time paved the way to institutionalized anti-Semitism in the 1930s and indirectly to the rise of the extreme right in the 1940s.

²² The communist government engaged in excessive violence to maintain its power and take revenge on its enemies, which severely taints the progressive elements of this short communist experiment.

In the Second World War, Hungary formed an alliance with Nazi Germany in the hopes that its former territorial integrity could be restored. In the process, the country's government collaborated in the deportation and mostly death of 600,000 Hungarian Jews. The Budapest ghetto created in 1944 had a population of 40,000. Another 15,000 Jewish Hungarians were under international protection and lived in other ghettos of the city (A Holokauszt Magyarországon, n.d.). The siege of Budapest, which lasted from December 1944 to February 1945, ended with a Soviet victory. On the one hand, this meant that the country was liberated from the rule of the Arrow Cross, the Hungarian Nazi Party. On the other, it opened the way to the physical occupation and political domination of the country by the Soviet Union for the next four decades.

a. Deepening crisis and slow recovery in the 1920s and 1930s

In the 1920s, the lack of housing in Budapest was dramatic. Thousands of people slept in some 50 flophouses (Gyáni, 1992, p. 107) and bed renters and subletters made up 10% of the city's population (Győri & Sass, 2003, p. 36). Hundreds of thousands of refugees from war-torn areas and those parts of the country that were lost through the Trianon Peace Treaty fled to the smaller state of



4. Wagon-dwellers after the First World War

Hungary, most of them to the capital (Borsos, [1929] 1990, p. 129). Given the acute lack of housing, refugees were placed in cargo railroad cars at train stations. Between 1918 and 1924, a total of 350,000 refugees arrived in Hungary (Szűts, 2010, p. 115). In 1921 more than 4000 railroad cars were used to house people throughout the country (Nagy-Csere, 2010, p. 47).

In the 1920s, shantytowns sprang up all over Budapest. The first wave of self-construction began after the regulated housing regime introduced during the war was relaxed. With the majority of the city's population being tenants (83% of the housing stock was rental), thousands of households were in danger of eviction. Later, during the Great Depression, unemployed and evicted individuals and families built their shacks around the settlements established in the early 1920s. In 1931 official estimates put the number of shack dwellers at around eight thousand (Böröcz, 2009, p. 3).

The central government built thousands of barracks and social apartments to provide housing for wagon-dwellers, and evicted shack dwellers (Umbrai, 2007, p. 172). Importantly, many of the refugees were not necessarily poor. In fact, they were mostly middle-class public officials from previously Hungarian areas (Csóti, 2010), who represented an important constituency for the nationalist Horthy-regime. Their appeals for housing vis-à-vis poor people already living in Hungary created considerable social tensions (see Szűts, 2010). On the one hand, moving into emergency barracks was very different from their original middle-class lifestyle, which they greatly resented. On the other, they put an enormous pressure on housing authorities which were not able to meet even domestic needs for decent housing.

Originally, the state intended the emergency barracks as a temporary solution to the housing crisis. However, in the end, many of them stood for decades and turned into some of the worst slums of the city. One of the most notorious of these was the Mária Valéria colony, which was originally built as a military hospital and then turned into an emergency settlement. In 1940, the colony had up to 1800 apartments and was only torn down in the 1960s ("Mária Valéria telep," n.d.).

While municipal housing construction came to an end during and after the First World War, the local government started to pursue a more active housing policy after 1925. From the late 1920s to 1945, the city built around eleven thousand rental and emergency housing units

(Umbrai, 2010, p. 69). The municipality also experimented with new forms of housing support. In 1935, for example, the vacancy rate in Budapest was so high that the city rented vacant private apartments to house homeless people. While this turned out to be a very cost-effective approach, it was terminated when the vacancy rate dropped (Umbrai, 2007, p. 176). Overall, while the city's investment in public housing in the



5. The Mária Valéria colony in the 1920s

1920s and 1930s undoubtedly improved housing conditions, the most important source of new housing construction continued to be the private market and the social housing stock was still far from meeting existing needs.

In terms of services for the homeless, a landmark law in 1932 made local governments responsible for providing emergency housing and shelter to those unable to find adequate accommodation (Kiss, 2012, p. 166). By this time, Budapest had its own homeless shelters along with those of numerous private charities which operated shelters and soup kitchens (Kiss, 2012, p. 170-171). To manage the growing system of services, a central administration created in 1936 became responsible for distributing shelter beds and work for homeless people (homeless people had to work in exchange for shelter). In 1938, from a total population of more than a million, 4534 people were registered as homeless in Budapest (Győri, 1997), which seems definitely lower than the actual number of people without a stable home.

The conservative-authoritarian regime used social policy to curb social unrest and the advance of left-wing political forces. The 1930s and early 1940s were undoubtedly boom years regarding the volume and scope of social policy legislation including land reform, social

security, health care and old-age pensions (Romsics, n.d.). The *National Nation and Family Protection Fund (Országos Nép és Családvédelmi Alap, ONCSA)* is a good illustration of the social and political contradictions of this period. On the one hand, the Fund provided direct aid including housing, land and other resources to more than eighty-four thousand poor families, especially in the countryside (Szikra, 2008, p. 62), which was a major achievement. On the other, in the name of “productive social policy,” the Fund also played an important role in the promotion of a nationalist ideology (the families had to meet strict moral criteria to qualify for aid) and the appropriation and redistribution of Jewish property (Szikra, 2008, p. 52). In fact, the example of ONCSA illustrates how social policy can be used as a double-edged sword to promote both social inclusion and a racist and exclusionary ideology.

b. Emergency measures during and after the Second World War

During the Second World War, Budapest worked in emergency mode. The government introduced a regulated housing regime similar to that in place during the First World War. This, among other things, allowed the city to appropriate apartments for military personnel and public servants (Umbrai, 2007, p. 267). By the end of the war, Budapest was devastated: the Allied Forces bombed the city from the air, while Germany blew up all the bridges. With regards to housing, 4% of the city’s housing stock was destroyed, 17% severely damaged and only 14% remained completely intact (Kocsis, J. B., 2009, p. 85). The state set up emergency shelters for those left without housing (Oross, 2001, p. 110). At the same time, people also took private initiative in solving their housing problems by moving into vacant properties.

In fact, one of the most notable phenomena of the period was the mass occupation of buildings and apartments that had been abandoned by their residents (who, in most cases, had been deported, killed in the war or had fled the country). In a 1945 law, the transitional

government acknowledged these occupations as legal and ordered squatters to report their new residence to the authorities. According to the law, if anyone found an empty apartment, they could file a request to move in, and the authorities had to make a decision within 48 hours (Győri & Gábor, 1990, p. 67). Only those who had been found guilty by the people's court²³ could be evicted from occupied apartments, but even they had to be provided with emergency housing.

In order to consolidate the legal environment, the Coalition government enacted a national law in 1948 that specified the process for state requisition of abandoned housing. Certain groups of people were entitled to request housing, and if their request was approved, the authorities appropriated an apartment for them. Those entitled to file a request were homeless individuals and families, those without adequate housing as well as democratic parties, new public offices and labor unions (Győri & Gábor, 1990, p. 69). If several people applied for the same apartment, the authorities followed a priority list based on the applicants' social circumstances (Győri & Gábor, 1990, p. 71). Formally, the law intended to curb illegal squatting. However, most occupiers received retrospective amnesty. Besides, evictions could be suspended, especially if the evictee could not pay their rent through no fault of their own, in which case the city paid it for them (Győri & Gábor, 1990, p. 70). While this law was still rooted in the spirit of emergency, it had long-term implications for housing policy as it set the pattern for the future requisition and redistribution of housing.

5. Redistribution and inequality under state socialism from 1948 to 1988

In 1948/1949, following the so-called Coalition government in the wake of the Second World War, which included social democrats and communists as well as members of the smallholders' party and the national peasant party, Hungary became a Soviet-controlled

²³ Temporary courts set up after the war to prosecute those accused of war crimes.

socialist command economy. Over the next 40 years, the Hungarian political leadership went through various phases of defining what socialism was and the kinds of policies and practices that corresponded to it. As a result, actually existing socialism ranged from strict Stalinism in the 1940s and mid-1950s through what the Western media labeled “goulash Communism” from the 1960s to the 1970s, to market-friendly initiatives beginning in the 1970s. Which kind of “socialism” prevailed depended on a combination of external pressure from the Soviet Union and the West and internal social and ideological forces.

In terms of social policy, state socialism represented a radical break with the conservative regime of the interwar period and was the first large-scale attempt to restructure Hungary society along a very different class logic. From a social standpoint, the state socialist project in Hungary represents an important project of modernization that got rid of most of the social and economic remnants of the country’s feudal past and accomplished major developments in society in terms of physical infrastructure and redistribution. However, while the redistribution of wealth was a much needed political step, it was embedded in a regime that continued the authoritarian politics of the past (this time, in the name of a different class, the proletariat) and was highly dependent both politically and economically on the imperial power of the Soviet Union. In this way, Soviet-led state socialism in Hungary created a system that turned out to be socially, politically and economically unsustainable.

a. State requisition of housing under the Rákosi regime

From 1949 to 1956, Hungary was under a Stalinist-type dictatorship led by the first secretary of the communist party,²⁴ Mátyás Rákosi. Undeniably the darkest period of state socialist history, these years were characterized by brutal political oppression and economic recession. During this time, general welfare declined and poverty was rampant (Ferge, 2000b,

²⁴ At this time the party was called *Magyar Dolgozók Pártja* (Hungarian Party of Workers).

401). Most social measures did not aim to emancipate citizens, but rather to subjugate them, and many poor people, especially in rural areas, were excluded from health care and other social support. Like other manifestations of poverty, the existence of homelessness was officially denied.

As regards housing, the government engaged in a vigorous campaign of nationalization and regulation.²⁵ It standardized the number and size of rooms to which each person was entitled. If a family's apartment was bigger than allowed, other people were moved in under the label of "cohabitation" (Antal, 1995).²⁶ After the lenient post-war years, the informal occupation of empty apartments was prohibited and the government made seizing existing housing a state monopoly. The landmark 1952 housing law nationalized all rented apartments along with those belonging to "capitalists, other exploiters and those element of the old regime who oppress the people" (Györi & Gábor, 1990, p. 73). While the law mentioned compensation for appropriated apartments, this clause was never put in practice. In addition to requisition, the state also made housing "available" by deporting different social groups such as Hungarian Germans (who were collectively blamed for the horrors of Nazism) as well as aristocrats, capitalists and the public servants of the interwar regime.

Following the nationalization of a large part of the housing stock, a 1953 law regulated the process of requesting apartments. The list of prioritized tenant groups was very specific: those involved in production enjoyed the highest priority, followed by families with many children, and those living in dangerous dwellings (Györi & Gábor, 1990, p. 74). In line with the elitism of the regime, a small circle of people were entitled to more rooms and bigger apartments than average citizens. This privileged group included high-ranking officials, members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and anyone else whose case could be

²⁵ The housing policies of the communist regime were very similar to those introduced under the short reign of the Republic of Councils in 1919 (see Chapter 4).

²⁶ By the end of the 1950s, 36,000 such cohabitations existed all over Hungary (Sindelyes, 2008, p. 53).

justified by a designated political body (Győri & Gábor, 1990, p. 74). These regulations led to much corruption and the use of informal ties to get access to public housing.

b. The Revolution of 1956 and the Kádár-consensus

In the fall of 1956, a popular uprising broke out against the Soviet-controlled regime. The revolutionaries did not want to get rid of socialism as such but fought for more political and economic liberties within a socialist-democratic framework. The Revolution cut across social boundaries: the newly created workers councils (see James, Lee & Chaulieu, 1974, p. 7-19), young people of all classes (Vajda & Eörsi, 2008) and progressive intellectuals all played central roles in active and armed opposition to the totalitarian state. Despite its broad base of popular support, by the end of 1956 the Revolution was brutally suppressed with the help of the Soviet Army, and a huge wave of political retaliation ensued, including mass incarceration and executions.

To appease the revolting population and consolidate economic, political and social life, several reforms were put into effect after 1956 that contributed significantly to the development of the country. As a result of the policy of full employment and improvements in social entitlements such as social security, pensions, healthcare and education, the standard of living rose steadily from 1957 to 1977 (Ferge, 1986). All social groups experienced improvement in most aspects of material well-being.. From a long-term historical perspective, socialism was a major project of modernization of Hungarian society. As historian Ivan T. Berend (2005) explains:

During the four decades of state socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, a real social revolution transformed the previously petrified societies. Caste-like social disparities were eliminated; the peasant majority was pushed into rapidly developing industry and from rural settlements to cities. Urbanization advanced by leaps and

bounds, and at the end of the century 60-70 percent of the population was concentrated in cities. Huge income disparities were eliminated, and altogether, the societies became much more modern than ever before. They were also much more educated: illiteracy, a widespread phenomenon in many countries of the region before, disappeared; elementary and even secondary education, which was elitist and narrow before, exploded and virtually the entire school-age population was enrolled. Higher education accommodated 10-15 percent of those of college age, instead of the previous 1 percent. (p. 413).

However, despite the dominant ideology, there were still gaping inequalities, especially with regards to political power. A small elite concentrated all power in their hands and enjoyed privileges denied to everyone else in society. According to Ferge (2002),

[t]he political ruling class lived in a segregated special world in most East-European 'socialist' countries and hardly used the public goods made available for the people. They were served by guarded, luxury residential areas, separate hospitals, cars with darkened windows, separate rest-houses and separate shops. One could say that they practically excluded themselves "upwards" from the body of the society with whose members they were unable to maintain "civic" relations based on equality. (p. 4)

The state's pledge to constantly improve the standard of living for a majority of the population in return for the lack of political contention is often referred to as the "Kádár-consensus" after the leader of the communist party, who ruled the country from 1956 to 1988.

While the state socialist regime achieved a lot in terms of general welfare and social equality, it did not eliminate (structural) poverty. Among the "underclass" of the socialist regime were unskilled workers who commuted from the countryside to the cities, many of them Gypsies (Solt, 1998b, p. 367). Besides, as Solt (1998a) reported, overcrowding, the lack

of basic infrastructure such as toilets, ill health and the lack of education and skills characterized the situation of poor people living in Budapest in the 1970s.

Despite tangible evidence that poverty had not been eradicated, the socialist state denied its existence (Ferge, 2000b, p. 400). According to the dominant ideology, achieving full employment meant that there were no more social problems to solve (Oross, 2001, p. 110). Along with poverty, homelessness was also officially nonexistent. The only piece of state socialist legislation using the term “homeless” was the 1957 housing law, which referred specifically to the people who lost their apartments in the floods of 1956 or during the Revolution.²⁷ Although there was some research that broke the taboo and looked into the nature of inequality and poverty in Hungarian society (see Ferge, 2002, p. 10), social scientists who studied poverty or raised significant critiques about the shortcoming of the socialist system were often silenced or forced to leave (see Magyar & Pető, 2012).

c. From nationalization to liberalization: housing policy after 1956

Under state socialism, housing was considered a political issue, not an economic one (Szelényi, 1990, p. 37). As large-scale housing policy was a fundamental source of political legitimacy, the state invested significantly in improving housing conditions. To commodify housing, making a profit from the creation of dwellings was not allowed and the provision of housing was considered a form of support for the working-class (Szelényi, 1990, p. 42). After the nationalization of apartment buildings, the construction and distribution of apartments also became a state monopoly.²⁸ From 1956, the state’s response to the lack of adequate housing (and poverty in general) took three main forms: the large-scale distribution of housing by

²⁷ While the law made an exception allowing those who occupied vacant apartments during the uprising to become tenants (Győri & Gábor, 1990, p. 79), the occupation of housing became a serious offense and the state rejected any responsibility for providing accommodation for squatters (Győri & Gábor, 1990, p. 77).

²⁸ This monopoly did not last long as the state recognized the significant role played by private housing construction. For details, see the description of the New Economic Mechanism below.

municipalities; the criminalization of what became categorized as “social deviance” associated with poverty; and institutionalization.

Despite the nationalization of apartments after the Second World War, the acute housing shortage remained an unresolved issue, especially in urban areas. In order to produce more apartments, the government launched a large-scale program to construct and distribute apartments in prefabricated housing estates. From 1960 to 1989 close to 200,000 such apartments were built in Budapest (Csizmady, 2003, p. 61). In Western Europe, similar housing estates were built specifically to house the most socially disadvantaged groups in society. By contrast, in Hungary, as in the rest of Eastern Europe, they were open to a much broader segment of the population (Csizmady, 2003, p. 63). In this way, while many poor families benefited from socialist public housing, it was not specifically aimed at poor people and many middle-class families lived in such arrangements as well. In theory, the newly built housing estates were open to anyone requesting an apartment. However, there was a certain informal hierarchy among them based on reputation, location and the social status of their residents. Geographic location was a strong factor in the social distribution of



6. Remnants of the old Mária Valéria colony with a new socialist housing estate in the background

apartments. Projects on the outskirts of the city often housed poorer residents or those who had been relocated from inferior housing conditions (Csizmady, 2003, p. 64), while centrally located buildings tended to serve a more privileged population. Finally, the process of distributing housing was also wrought with contradictions as the state focused on quantity rather than quality and prioritized political profit over social need in determining who had access to housing.

In general, socialist housing policy realized some extremely significant achievements. In terms of the physical shortage of housing, the plan to build 1 million new housing units over a period of 15 years, from 1960 on, was successfully accomplished (Barta & Vukovich, 1983, p. 214). Between 1971 and 1975, Hungary produced the most new housing units per 1000 people among all socialist countries except the Soviet Union (Ballai, 1983, 86). As a result of intensive state intervention and the closing of the income gap, housing conditions improved significantly for all segments of society. For example, while in 1962 only 19% of the total population lived in apartments equipped with bathrooms, in 1982 this ratio was 64% and the improvement was most marked among semi-skilled and skilled workers and agricultural laborers (Ferge, 2002, p. 21). There was significant improvement in all other aspects of basic infrastructure such as electricity, water and sewage, and average apartment and room sizes also increased (Barta & Vukovich, 1983).

However, despite this undeniable material improvement across the social spectrum, a survey in the 1970s suggested that Hungarians identified housing as their most pressing problem (Szelényi, 1990, 34). What was the reason for this? On the one hand, there was still an acute shortage of urban housing as a result of both immigration and natural population growth (Szelényi, 1990, p. 35). In 1978, for example, there were more than 400,000 requests for public housing on the waiting list (Dániel, 1983, p. 115). On the other, and probably more importantly, housing was not distributed fairly. There was not only a difference between the quality of apartments for the elite and regular citizens, but getting access to public housing was also closely related to social inequalities.

According to Iván Szelényi, “housing becomes a social problem when it contributes to conserving social advantages and amassing social disadvantages” (Szelényi, 1990, p. 41). This was exactly the case in socialist Hungary. First of all, artificially low rents created more demand for housing than the economy was able to supply (Szelényi, 1990, 38). As a result,

there was a competition for publicly-owned apartments. In this competition, upper income residents tended to win out and benefit more from state subsidies. Lower income residents often built their own housing, usually single family homes (Szelényi, 1990, 61). In a way, public and private construction complemented each other in meeting the needs of the population. For example, only 36% of the housing units constructed in the course of the 15-year plan were directly funded by the state. The vast majority of units were privately constructed, often subsidized by the state through cheap loans. However, while people living in public housing only paid a nominal rent regardless of their income and social status, those who lived in their own housing had to cover their expenses at market rates, which was highly unaffordable (Csizmady, 2003, p. 63). As a result, this dual housing system did not eliminate existing social inequalities but often reinforced them.

Another distinctive feature of Hungarian social housing was the extent of ownership rights enjoyed by the tenants of state-owned apartments. Tenancy could be passed on to children and subletting was an informal but tolerated practice. In addition, a second economy emerged where people exchanged state-owned apartments or sold their tenancy to others for cash. According to Pickvance (1994), “this market activity was tolerated by the city council as long as it was notified of the name of the new tenant and certain minimum levels of occupancy were respected” (p. 435). Again, the possibility of such cash and apartment transfers mostly benefited higher income residents, in at least two ways: while they were able to sell their state-owned property for cash, they could also take out a state-sponsored low-interest loan to buy a new apartment.

When it became obvious that state construction could not produce enough cheap housing, the government began to encourage a gradual opening to market-based solutions. In 1968, the New Economic Mechanism introduced changes in the economy, including market-oriented reforms and public support for private investment in housing. From then on, private

construction played an ever larger role in supplementing state housing. State-constructed housing estates were gradually transformed into private property. Many public apartments became cooperatives, which was a socialist form of private property, while others were purchased by their residents with a cheap state-sponsored loan.

In the spirit of market reforms, the housing law of 1971 brought some changes to the municipal housing system as well. Most importantly, the law put an end to the free distribution of housing and required that residents pay a fee for getting a publicly owned apartment. In addition, it introduced a registration system for public housing where, for the first time, the social circumstances of applicants were examined before qualifying for housing (Györi & Gábor, 1990, p. 84). The most visible attempt to differentiate between social housing residents came in 1982, when the categories of “social” and “non-social” public housing were introduced to distinguish between different rent levels in public housing.

d. Selective equality: housing for Roma Hungarians

The Roma – the largest ethnic minority in Hungary with a population of 320,000 in the 1970s (Kemény, 2004) – were an important target group for large-scale social and housing policy under state socialism, albeit with mixed results. With class as the only legitimate marker of historical social difference, socialist ideology was almost totally – and purposefully – blind to the notion of ethnic identity. In 1961, the ethnic and social assimilation of the Roma became official Party policy and the two main areas of assimilation were identified as employment and housing.

From the 1970s to the mid-1980s, employment figures for Roma Hungarians improved significantly. In fact, in 1971, Roma employment was on par with that of the general population: 87% of all employable non-Roma men and 85% of all employable Roma men had a job. At the same time, forcing the Roma into the industrial workforce was achieved at the

expense of the elimination of most of their traditional trades, which often had a disruptive impact on communities. Gypsies also made up a large part of the migrant workforce, which suffered many disadvantages compared to urban workers (Solt, 1998c). Labor migration also had many negative effects on local communities, loosening ties and dissolving families as men stayed in workers' hostel during the week and returned home only for the weekend.

With regards to housing, a program to eradicate segregated Roma settlements was launched in 1965. Among other things, Gypsy households were offered low-interest loans to move into vacant houses in villages or buy so-called Cs-houses where "cs" stands for "*csökkentett értékű*" or reduced value. Cs-houses were small single-family homes without bathrooms, usually built on the periphery of villages. As a result, the houses had little access to basic infrastructure and were very far from being integrated into the local social or geographical fabric. In addition, in 1971 two-thirds of all Roma Hungarians continued to live in segregated settlements



7. A row of cs-houses in 2009

(Havas & Kemény, 1995), mostly in self-built housing with hardly any infrastructure.

The slum eradication program is a good illustration of the socialist state's ambivalent relationship with the Roma. On the one hand, resources were devoted to improving their situation, often significantly when compared to previous conditions. In this sense, state socialism was one of the rare periods in Hungarian history when the large-scale social integration of Roma Hungarians was taken seriously at the political level. On the other hand, these resources often went into facilities inferior to those offered to the non-Roma population. In all, despite significant improvements in material conditions, structural racism remained a hallmark of the regime. While the ethnic identity of Gypsies was officially denied, the

assumption of their social inferiority was inherent in most of the state's interactions with them.

e. Hiding homelessness: worker's hostels, criminalization and institutionalization

Workers' hostels played an important role in the state's housing strategy under state socialism. In 1949, only 15,000 people lived in workers' hostels, while their number reached 208,000 in 1960. After that, the number of hostel residents declined steadily to 140,000 in 1970, 92,000 in 1980 and 56,000 in 1990 (Győri, 1997, p. 3). Run by state companies and local municipalities, workers' hostels reflected many of the contradictions of the socialist state. While the hostels were originally intended as a temporary solution, they often became the permanent residence of marginalized citizens. According to a 1985 survey, 20% of hostel residents did not have any other place to stay and many came from foster care or very poor backgrounds (Oross, 2001, p. 114). Finally, the hostels were of varying quality: some had single or double rooms, while others resembled homeless shelters with dozens of people sleeping in the same room (Horváth, S., 2012, p. 362). In the 1960s, most hostels were extremely overcrowded.

Even if official ideology did not use the term "homeless," workers' hostels bore a very close resemblance to the shelters of the pre-war period in both their social function and operation. In fact, internal police documents in the 1960s made regular references to homeless people, beggars and vagrants. It is clear that the police regularly picked up people from the streets and in most cases took them to workers' hostels (Horváth, S., 2012, p. 363-365). The so-called House of Lords, for example, was officially a workers' hostel, which operated semi-publicly as a homeless shelter throughout state socialism. Previously run by the Salvation Army, it functioned mostly as a shelter for people who had been released from prison and had nowhere else to go (Oross, 2001, p. 111).

Because structural reasons could not be cited for the existence of homelessness, personal deviances were used to explain the lack of a permanent home (Horváth, S., 2012, p. 370). In this framework, the disappearance of homeless people through criminalization and institutionalization was considered an adequate public response. State socialist discourse was strikingly similar to that used under capitalism a few decades earlier: those who do not work are lazy and have to be forced to do so. In practice, people without a permanent home were often deported to correctional facilities, hospitals or



8. A man panhandling in Budapest in the 1960s

psychiatric institutions (Romhányi, 2010). Poor old people – the “deserving poor” in the capitalist paradigm – posed a particular problem. In 1967, the Budapest police chief wrote the following: “We disturb [beggars] by checking their IDs regularly, but what should we do with the old ones who are not able to work?” (Horváth, S., 2012, p. 378). One solution was to commit poor old people to so-called social homes (Horváth, S., 2012, p. 373), which were state-sponsored institutions often situated in isolated rural areas. Alcoholics were sent to work therapy institutions (dr. Buda, n.d., p. 18), which were a combination jail and workhouse. People arrested for loitering or being out of work were charged with “dangerous avoidance of work,” an offence punishable by a fine, compulsory work, short-term detention and/or municipal expulsion. In 1985 alone, 5780 people were arrested for the dangerous avoidance of work (Győri, 2010).

In the 1970s, homelessness started to appear in both popular and academic discourses. Academic reports were concerned with the growing number of poor people (Ferge, 2000b, p. 403), while in popular discourse homelessness was usually associated with the so-called bum problem: shabby-looking young people camping out in public spaces. While the “bum

phenomenon” undeniably had cultural elements (bums are often compared to punks in the West in terms of their musical taste and clothing), poverty was also an important reason for the emergence of youth homelessness. According to a survey from 1980-1985, 30% of young “bums” (*csöves*)²⁹ did not have a home and the proportion of foster care children was very high (Oross, 2001, p. 113). The main state response to the growing number of young people on the streets was intensified police scrutiny and criminalization.

An official study based on interviews with homeless people and drug users published in 1987 gives a rare insight into the ethnography of homelessness under later state socialism (Utasi, 1987). In fact, the profile it provides is surprisingly similar to contemporary trends. According to the report, homeless people used many different places to sleep such as cheap, illegally rented apartments, basements, shacks and parks. In terms of income, most interviewees did not have a regular job, but helped out at different places (e.g. cleaning houses, working in gardens) and did temporary work (especially in construction). Many people were engaged in recycling glass or paper, while others worked in exchange for their housing (Oross, 2001, p. 115).

Despite all the large-scale public programs and significant public investment, inadequate housing and outright homelessness continued to affect many people under state socialism. According to the 1980 census, out of 10.7 million Hungarians, more than 360,000 people did not live in apartments: 191,000 people lived in institutions for children or youth; 92,000 lived in workers’ hostels, barracks or service apartments; 60,000 in work therapy institutions and 33,000 in other social institutions. Around 30,000 people lived in places like huts, railroad cars, caves, storage rooms or garages and estimates placed the number of effectively homeless people at thirty thousand. Altogether, at least 200,000 people lived on the verge of homelessness (Oross, 2001, p. 113).

²⁹ For more on the *csöves*-phenomenon, see Chapter 4.

6. The transition from a command economy to free market capitalism

It would be a mistake to regard 1989 as the starting point of capitalist transformation in Eastern Europe. In fact, the Hungarian government had initiated market-oriented reforms starting in 1968 (under the New Economic Mechanism) and growing economic difficulties accelerated the changes in the 1980s. To prevent financial collapse following the oil crisis of 1979/1980, Hungary applied for membership in the IMF and the World Bank in 1982 (Boughton, 2001, p. 325). In exchange for loans, the IMF required an adjustment program based on fiscal tightening and monetary control that also aimed to foster capitalist transformation.

The 1986 introduction of *perestroika*, a package of political and economic reforms intended to democratize public life and increase economic efficiency in the Soviet Union, was an important sign of the changing political climate. As the Soviet grip over Hungary loosened, political opposition to the state socialist regime was more visible and pronounced. Under both international and domestic pressure, the ruling communist party³⁰ entered into negotiations with the democratic opposition. The result of these negotiations was the Third Hungarian Republic, based on multiparty parliamentary democracy, declared on October 23, 1989, the anniversary of the 1956 Revolution.

While the main structural reason behind the end of state socialism in Hungary was the collapse of the Soviet Union, the nature of the transition of Eastern European command economies to market-based capitalism is often debated. Although there was no standard procedure for all countries in the region: “it is the relationship between different types of democracy and different types of capitalism, rather than the abstractions of democracy and capitalism” (Stark, 1992, p. 49) that determined the nature and course of transition. As Arató (2000) explains, interpretations of the transition range from defining it as a conservative,

³⁰ Since 1956, its official name was *Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt* (Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, MSZMP).

liberal or post-modern revolution through the imitation of Western Europe, to questioning the overall revolutionary nature of 1989. In the case of Hungary, the transition was definitely a top-down change (Bozóki, 2000, p. 463) managed by the political elite and is much better understood as a process than a revolutionary moment. Besides, as Hungary did not represent “pure socialism” before 1989,³¹ the political-economic system that took shape after 1989 was not “pure capitalism” either, as it incorporated many of the institutions, attitudes and practices of the old regime (Stark, 1992).

Thus the assessment of the transition is ambiguous, to say the least. From a mainstream Western perspective, the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe was the victory of democracy and an opportunity for a backward region to catch up. From a more pessimistic point of view, the transition brought

persistently low productivity and repeated crises, ... self-serving Western involvement, ... retrenched forms of servitude and “managed democracy” and ... an undergrowth of rent-seeking and corruption that flourishes within the market environment. (Dale, 2011, p. 1)

There is no doubt that social inequalities were smaller and social rights such as access to health care and education were stronger under state socialism. At the same time, political rights were very weak as all unofficial grassroots activities were banned and voting was a mere formality. In the new capitalist regime, by contrast, political rights such as a multiparty election system, freedom of religion and freedom of the press were reinstated. However, social rights have been greatly curtailed and social inequality significantly heightened.

³¹ See Tamás (2008b) for the argument that it did not represent socialism at all.

a. Social crisis after 1989

The first years of Hungarian capitalism were characterized by an everything-is-up-for-grabs atmosphere. Wealth was radically redistributed through the highly unregulated privatization of public assets, firms, land and housing (Ferge & Tausz, 2002, p. 176). While privatization generated some income for the state, the government diverted 85% of this revenue to repaying international debt – by the 1990s, Hungary had the world’s highest per capita debt (Dale, 2011, p. 11) – and did not invest in the local economy (Hanley, King & Tóth, 2002, p. 146). International financial institutions exerted great pressure to open the country up to foreign direct investment. The European Union, which all post-socialist governments aspired to join,³² also favored privatization by foreign investors (Hanley, King & Tóth, 2002, p. 149). In addition to rampant and mostly unregulated privatization, foreign direct investment was among the highest in the region, making Hungary extremely vulnerable to global economic trends.

Hungarian society paid a huge social and economic price for the transition. The structural adjustment that took place between 1988 and 1995 destroyed more economic assets in Hungary than the Second World War (Tamás, 2008). The introduction of foreign capital, the gradual transition to a service and finance-based economy and the arrival of modern technology rendered existing skills and infrastructure obsolete and many unskilled workers redundant. Between 1989 and 1992, around one third (1.5 million) of all jobs disappeared and declining employment disproportionately affected already socially disadvantaged populations. Mass unemployment led to mass poverty, with both relative and absolute poverty increasing over threefold (Ferge, 2002, p. 15). In addition to the surfacing of previously hidden poverty, the proletariat and socialist-era middle class also experienced large-scale impoverishment

³² Officially, Hungary confirmed its decision to join the EU through a national referendum in 2002 and has been an official member since 2004 (along with 9 other post-socialist countries). However, the Hungarian government started accession negotiations as early as 1994 and the harmonization of legal and economic structures began soon afterwards.

(Szalai, J., 2002). According to Ferge et al. (1995), the biggest losers of the regime change included those who were

low on all types of capital – economic, cultural, social, psychological or other. They were probably never among the best off, but in the former system most of them had gained existential security and some sort of, perhaps token, self-esteem. ... More concretely, among the losers we find the unemployed, ... many of the unskilled or semi-skilled; ... village-dwellers (peasants); families with children, who are losing family benefits and child-care services; and, as a result, some women. (p. 4)

According to Ladányi (2010b), the most significant aspect of post-transition poverty was the formation of an “underclass” made up of permanently unemployed people with no proper access to social security, education and health care. In public discourse, this underclass often becomes highly racialized as the Roma are overrepresented among the poor. The Roma were hit very hard by the consequences of the transition and are often considered the biggest losers of the regime change. For example, after virtually full employment under a certain period of state socialism, only 30% of Roma men were employed in 1995. At the same time, as Ladányi reminds us, most Hungarians affected by deep poverty are not Roma (Ladányi, 2010b, p. 467) and the reproduction of poverty is deeply embedded in the social and economic structures of capitalism. In addition to the entrenchment and racialization of poverty, extreme regional stratification was also a hallmark of post-socialist transformation. With the collapse of state socialist industrial production, certain regions, especially in northeastern Hungary, plunged into persistent poverty, creating segregated enclaves of almost total unemployment and misery.

b. Privatization and the dismantling of socialist housing policy

After 1989, the socialist system of public housing was completely dismantled through large-scale privatization. According to Bodnár (1996), the “privatization of formerly state-owned dwellings [was] the principal means of urban restructuring in the post-state-socialist context” (p. 633). First, the property rights of publicly owned apartments were transferred to local municipalities. However, while the newly created local governments had more power over local matters than their socialist predecessors, their financing did not match the scope of their tasks. One way for local governments to make fast money was to sell public housing through rapid and low-cost privatization (Günther, 2000, p. 25). The 1993 Housing Law also encouraged housing privatization by making it possible for more people to buy their apartments and restricting the municipality’s right *not* to sell an apartment in exchange for raising the purchase price. Most importantly, the law set a deadline of five years for completing privatization at below market rates. This created pressure to purchase apartments as quickly as possible (Bodnár, 1996, p. 622).

While the significance of private housing had grown since the 1970s, the level and speed of post-1989 privatization was unprecedented. From 1989 to 1996, more than 500,000 dwellings were privatized (Günther, 2000, p. 25) and the number of public rental units fell from 1.3 million to 200,000 nationally. In 1980, 25% of all housing in Hungary, and 55% of all housing in Budapest was owned by the state (Günther, 2000, p. 24). By the end of 1996, the share of public housing had decreased to about 5% nationally, and 13% in Budapest (Günther, 2000, p. 26). The apartments that remained in municipal ownership were of very low quality: most of them were located in the worst areas of the city, in poorly maintained buildings and without basic amenities. Because of the problems posed by the apartments that remained in public ownership, municipalities were not interested in preserving or improving them. While revenues from privatization were supposed to be reinvested in public housing,

most districts ignored this regulation and spent the money for other purposes (Günther, 2000, p. 26). As a result, the condition of social housing deteriorated further, and to this day local governments are extremely reluctant to invest in the preservation or improvement of public housing.

Overall, housing privatization turned out to be a very unequal process (Bodnár, 1996, p. 633). For example, since the prices of apartments were set arbitrarily and did not reflect position or quality, it was possible to acquire high quality housing for a fraction of the market price. In general, high-income groups and those favored by the previous regime tended to buy better apartments, while buying apartments in poorly maintained buildings burdened low-income people. Calling it the “gift of privatization,” Dániel (1996) puts it this way:

most new apartment owners got a gift, but not from the state, or the nation but from the other members of society, especially those who already lived in their own homes and did not benefit from state housing subsidies. There is no doubt that they did not give this gift voluntarily but were forced to do so. (p. 212)

One sign indicating the flaws of privatization was when in the late 1990s, some people tried to sell their apartments back to the local government – with little success (Bodnár, 1996).

c. The eruption of mass homelessness around the regime change

In the late 1980s, after decades of silence, the existence of homelessness was beginning to be publicly acknowledged. While a few scholarly and popular articles were published in the 1980s on the residents of workers’ hostels and people living on the margins (see Demszky, 1980), more academic publications started to appear in 1987, which the United Nations had declared the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. In February 1989, the Social Committee for the Homeless³³ was the first civil initiative to call attention to the

³³ *Hajléktalanokért Társadalmi Bizottság* in Hungarian, see Chapter 4.

crisis of homelessness (Oross, 2001, p. 117), which was also becoming more visible to both average citizens and the state. Over the winter of 1989-1990 homeless people engaged in a series of sit-ins and protests to demand work and shelter (see Chapter 4). Alarmed by these events, the government turned empty military and state-owned buildings into temporary accommodations; they thus became the first official homeless shelters in Budapest since the Second World War.

In addition to structural factors, there were also some more immediate reasons for the eruption of visible homelessness. First, the previous regime's hated practices and regulations of repression were outlawed almost immediately. The "dangerous avoidance of work" was no longer a crime, the Institute for Work Therapy was closed and a partial amnesty was announced in 1989 (Győri, 1997, p. 5). Second, the mass closing of workers' hostels also played an important role in producing street homelessness. As many state-owned factories went bankrupt or were privatized, the number of beds in workers' hostels decreased from sixty thousand to six thousand (S. I., 2005). As a result, thousands of people (mostly men) found themselves without both jobs and places to stay. Third, the withdrawal of housing subsidies led to an increase in rental and housing maintenance costs. The number of families with arrears in rent or utilities grew significantly (Győri, 1995, p. 16) and many households were threatened by eviction or foreclosure. While evictions were considered somewhat unacceptable in the early 1990s, from the second half of the 1990s both local governments and utility companies collected rent and fees more efficiently and were ready to initiate foreclosure and eviction procedures.³⁴ All of these factors, together with the failure of the state to introduce mechanisms to compensate for the effects of the crisis, led to a huge increase in homelessness.

³⁴ In another highly publicized phenomenon, the so-called housing mafia also played a role in stripping people of their homes in the 1990s. This term is used for specific dubious housing deals that take advantage of people's economic instability and ignorance of housing legislation and procedures that are tied to illegal networks specialized in such transactions.

7. Growing poverty and deepening inequality: Hungary since 1989

After the regime change, the Hungarian economy hit rock bottom in all respects, including production, consumption, jobs and wages. To address the financial and economic crisis, a series of austerity measures were introduced in 1995. These brought structural reforms in fiscal policy and foreign trade. Wages in the public sector increased, while funding for child and family support, health care and education was cut (Répássy, 2002). As economic growth picked up after 1996 – which some attribute to the austerity measures and others to a more general global economic upturn – and the country achieved the desired fiscal balance, Hungary became the “poster boy of neoliberal transformation” (Fabry, 2011, p. 203).

However this economic growth did not create more jobs (Ladányi, 2010b, p. 461) and quality of life declined. In 2000, for example, 57% of Hungarians felt they were worse off than in 1988, the last year of state socialism (Ladányi & Szelényi, 2010, p. 469). On a more objective scale: while in 1993, 1% of the population had experienced hunger, in 2000 the ratio had risen to 6% (Ladányi & Szelényi, 2010, p. 469). When Péter Györi (2005a) posed the following question: “should we not go and finally build the column of social rights that is now missing to uphold the market economy?” (p. 3), he pointed to a fundamental contradiction inherent in the capitalist transformation of all of Eastern Europe.³⁵

³⁵ Vanhuysse (2006) points out another important contradiction of the post-socialist Hungarian state: in contrast to other countries, social and welfare spending did not drop dramatically after the regime change. In fact, some social measures such as early-age and disability retirement were introduced to mitigate for the effects of the economic shock and appease the population. While the state sold a huge part of its assets through privatization, it did not automatically shed all of the responsibilities it held under state socialism. In fact, there seems to be a general expectation for the state to “take care” of its residents. In 2007, for example, 50% of the income of an average household came from redistributive sources (including maternity assistance, tax credits, pensions), which indicates an exaggerated dependence on state subsidies, while unemployment and inactivity are high (Szalai, in Bundula, 2007). At the same time, the redistribution of public resources is very unequal and discriminatory and does not help those in poverty become more economically productive. As Szalai (in Bundula, 2007) put it, there are

two different worlds in one country. They are the citizens of the same state, but they are not the citizens of the same life world. There is no exit from the second world of the needy to the other. A structure is building up in front of our eyes, with our participation, where only one half can enter the Westernizing, welfare-state-like system based on the contractual relationship of contributions and entitlements. The life of the other half is based on subjugation, as it is dependent on “our” care. In this country, not all citizens

In the mid-2000s, Eastern Europe experienced economic growth again, largely fueled by the liquidity of global banks (Dale & Hardy, 2011, p. 252). The availability of cheap money brought with it both comforts and problems. Economic and quality of life indicators improved, but at the cost of huge increases in both national and personal debt.

Regarding national debt; after declining from a peak in the early 1990s to around 50% of the GDP, Hungary's debt rose again to 80% by 2010 (Hungary National Debt, n.d.). At the same time, individuals took out mortgages and loans in foreign currencies that seemed favorable because of good exchange rates. By 2010 close to 2 million Hungarians held such loans on a variety of goods including housing and household items (Dale & Hardy, 2011, p. 252).

Due to the large degree of indebtedness and the vulnerability of Hungary's economy to foreign capital, the global financial crisis of 2008 caused a huge economic downturn (Dale & Hardy, 2011, p. 253). To prevent financial collapse, the government took out further loans from the IMF and the EU, both requiring strict austerity measures.

In addition to the decline of the national economy, the crisis also impacted private debt. Exchange rates went through the roof and people were unable to make regular payments. According to Dale and Hardy (2011), "lending to ordinary people in Central Eastern Europe in foreign currencies was analogous to lending to poor people in the USA – the 'sub-prime market' – where banks lent to people irrespective of whether they could repay" (p. 252). In the midst of the crisis – when the official unemployment rate reached 10% – 10 to 15% of foreign currency loans were liable to default (Dale, 2011, p. 253) and 20% of all households experienced delays in paying mortgage installments due to financial difficulties (Misetics, 2013, p. 41).

are alike. They do not differ based on the quality of life, but according to the above principles. This double norm is institutionalized and the walls of the ghetto are built around it.

a. Poverty and homelessness under “new capitalism”

In today’s Hungary, poverty has become one of the most pressing social issues. The number of people living below the subsistence minimum³⁶ is estimated at 3.7 million, or nearly 40% of the population (Ónody-Molnár, 2012). And more than 1 million people, or 12% of the population, live below the poverty line³⁷ (Ferge, 2012).

Housing poverty affects millions of people. In 2011, Hungarian households spent an average of 25.2% of their income on housing, which is very high considering that 30% is used as the cutoff for affordability. The number of people living in substandard and extremely overcrowded conditions is 1.5 million. In 2012, 413,000 households had arrears exceeding three months in utilities (Hegedüs & Horváth, 2013, p. 47) and tens of thousands have been in danger of eviction because of their mortgage default. In 2011, overall household debt

in Hungary was the sixth largest in the European Union (Habitat for Humanity Magyarország, 2012, p. 3).

In addition, 300,000 people live in communities where poverty and unemployment are highly concentrated.³⁸ Around 50% of Roma citizens live in racially segregated areas with inferior infrastructure (Habitat for Humanity Magyarország, 2012, p. 22). One million people



9. Homelessness in Budapest in the 1990s

³⁶ The living wage or “subsistence minimum” refers to the calculation of the minimum income that is necessary to maintain a modest quality of life according to current social standards. The Central Statistical Bureau has calculated the subsistence minimum in Hungary since 1991 on the basis of a household’s food basket (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 2012).

³⁷ This is an official EU measure, which sets the line of poverty at about 32,000 HUF (\$145) a month/person.

³⁸ In current Hungarian terminology, *szegregátum* (or segregated area) is used to describe areas where half of adult residents have no more than 8 years of education, have no income, the majority of the apartments are not privately owned and more than half of the residents get social assistance (Szalai, A., 2010). Ghettoization refers to the high concentration of people of Roma origin where 60% of all schoolage children are considered Roma.

cannot heat their homes properly and the occurrence of cold-related deaths is ten times higher than in other developed countries (Habitat for Humanity Magyarország, 2012, p. 10).

It is difficult to say exactly how many people are directly affected by homelessness in Hungary today (for the difficulty of estimating the homeless population, see Dávid & Snijders, 2002). The number of “effectively homeless people” or those who live on the street or in shelters is at least 25-30,000 (Győri, 2005c; Matalin, 2010). According to estimates, every year around 100,000 people are affected by homelessness, including more than 29,000 people who were registered as long-term clients in the homeless shelter system, more than 42,000 individuals who used homeless services at least once in 2010 and those who live with family or friends out of necessity (“A magyarok egy százaléka,” 2012). In Budapest (population close to two million) at least 3,000 live in public spaces and some 6,000 people sleep in various institutional settings such as night shelters, temporary shelters and homeless hospitals.

The populations most likely to become homeless include young people growing up in foster care, the un- and underemployed, former prison inmates, people with mental health or substance abuse issues (Győri, 1995), and the victims of domestic violence (Buzás & Hoffmann, 2010). While the majority of homeless people are men between the ages of 38 and 44 (Győri & Maróthy, 2008, p.16), the proportion of homeless women rose from 10% to 25-30% since the regime change (Buzás & Hoffmann 2010).

In terms of ethnicity, 20% of the respondents in a 2004 survey were reported to have been called a Gypsy (Lengyel, 2005),³⁹ which is much higher than the proportion of Roma Hungarians in the general population (5 to 10%). In general, the educational levels of homeless people are not very different from the average population. However, many people

³⁹ As no ethnic registration is allowed, this is one indicator used to determine someone’s ethnicity in Hungary.

are trained in obsolete professions and young homeless people tend to have low qualifications (Győri & Maróthy, 2008, p.17).

b. Post-socialist housing policy

Under state socialism, the relationship of Hungarians to the state was determined by their social class, occupation and political position. A large part of the economy, including housing, was nationalized, and private property was officially considered secondary to socialized or state property.⁴⁰ After the regime change, property relations were radically transformed and this also changed the relationship between citizens and the state, giving rise to the paradigm of propertied citizenship (Roy, 2003, p. 464). While property is not the only factor in marking the edges of social exclusion – many poor people live in their own homes, while not everyone who rents an apartment is necessarily poor – private property is central to full social membership.

Housing rights in Hungary are weak compared to those in other European Union countries. Even though the Parliament has ratified many international documents such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child that oblige the state to provide housing, in 2000 the Constitutional Court declared that the right to housing cannot be derived from the Hungarian Constitution (see Kardos, 2001).

The ratification of the European Social Charta in 1999 illustrates the ruling elite's general attitude towards social rights. Out of the 98 paragraphs of the Charta, Hungary only adopted those 60 that corresponded to already existing obligations and refused to expand the scope of social rights. Among the clauses not included were the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion and the right to housing (Vojtonovszki, 2010, p. 27). A 2013

⁴⁰ In practice, the relationship to private property was much more contradictory as the majority of housing was owned by private citizens and the ruling elite also tried to accumulate as much private property as possible (see Majtényi, 2009). After the 1970s, more private activities were either tolerated or even allowed and encouraged.

modification of the new constitution makes an important reference to decent housing as something the state *attempts* to provide for everyone. However, there are no laws or ordinances that correspond to this theoretical and rather weak declaration.

As of today, Hungary has no comprehensive national housing strategy and the social housing policies in place tend to be both limited and/or temporary. For example, the amount of the monthly housing subsidy for low-income households is so low that it does not cover even basic housing expenses. The winter moratorium on evictions suspends all court-ordered evictions between December 1 and March 1, but does not apply to squatters who tend to come from the most marginalized populations. Finally, the ratio of social housing is one of the lowest in Europe: while the proportion of social housing in the majority of Western-European countries is between 15 and 25% (Hegedüs, 2006), in Hungary it makes up less than 3% of the total housing stock (Hegedüs & Horváth, 2013, p. 25).⁴¹

At the same time, social housing residents are extremely vulnerable and their situation is becoming increasingly precarious. In 2003 the income of public housing tenants was 26% less than those living in their own apartments. Public housing residents also have a 3-4 times probability of living with someone who is unemployed (Hegedüs, 2009, p. 3). While the ratio of public housing almost halved from 2000 to 2010, the amount of debt amassed by social housing residents during the same period tripled. On the one hand, this is because municipally owned apartments mainly housed low-income residents after the regime change. On the other, because local governments raised rents exponentially over the past decades, whether tenants were able to afford them or not (Györi, 2011).

Popular support for public and affordable housing is not only limited, but also very unevenly distributed. In fact, between 2000 and 2004⁴², the only period characterized by a

⁴¹ Many other Eastern European countries have a similarly low proportion of social housing (see Missetics, 2013, p. 57).

⁴² The policies were initiated by the first *Fidesz* government and continued until about the mid-term of the Socialist government, when they were gradually terminated.

proactive housing policy, state subsidies favored the acquisition of private property and supported the more privileged sections of society. In this period, household debt management became a compulsory service in municipalities of a certain size. Two separate programs to build public housing and to renovate old prefabricated housing estates were launched, and eligibility for standard housing maintenance support was expanded. Had they been properly implemented, these programs would have significantly supported lower income people struggling with housing problems. However, most initiatives were limited in scope or never materialized.⁴³

Among all the new programs, the state-sponsored subsidies for mortgage loans turned out to be the best financed and most far-reaching. In 2005, for example, close to 240 billion HUF (\$870 million) of public money supported private housing (e.g. the construction of new housing, renovation of old units and subsidized interest on mortgages), and only 12 billion HUF (\$43 million) for standard housing maintenance support (Győri & Maróthy, 2008, p. 20), which tends to support lower-income people and those living in social housing. In this period, a total of 60% of all state subsidies for housing went to the upper 20% of the population (Hegedüs, 2009).

The Hungarian government's reaction to the financial crisis of 2008 was also strongly biased towards the middle and upper-middle class in terms of preventing evictions and foreclosures. For example, a temporary moratorium on all evictions was introduced between the spring of 2010 and the summer of 2011. From April 2011, however, the moratorium was restricted to those who would be evicted due to mortgage default and no longer applied to those who were in danger because of arrears in utilities or rent (which continues to affect hundreds of thousands of people). The government also worked out a special scheme that

⁴³ While the number of recipients of the monthly housing subsidy grew from a hundred and fifty to around three hundred thousand in three years, the amount received remains extremely small. The scope of household debt management services remains limited to this day. The program to renovate housing estates took off, but was halted after a while, while the social housing program hardly took off (Hegedüs, 2009).

allowed foreign currency mortgages to be refinanced or repaid at a fixed exchange rate. This major support benefitted mainly those who had savings or could borrow money from family members, but was off-limits to families struggling to survive from one day to the other. Finally, the government established a national agency to buy up the apartments of socially disadvantaged families with children who were defaulting on their mortgage, so that they could stay in their apartments as long-term tenants with reasonable conditions. However, the criteria for entering the program were so strict that hardly any families were eligible. As a result, only a couple of thousand requests were filed until the end of 2012 (Nemzeti Eszközkezelő 2.0, 2012), far from the actual number of households which needed such help.⁴⁴

At the same time as the government was supporting the financial recovery of the middle class, the Parliament passed a series of laws restricting support for the most disadvantaged citizens. Among other things, pension entitlements and support for people with disabilities were restricted, workers' rights were curtailed and compulsory workfare became central to the government's welfare policies.⁴⁵ A flat personal income tax (at a rate of 16%) replaced progressive taxation through a law that can only be modified with a two-thirds majority. Studies show that a flat income tax radically increases income inequalities. In fact, in 2011 the income of the wealthiest Hungarians grew, that of middle-income people remained the same, while the income of low-income people declined (Pogátsa, 2012). Overall, in the past few years the Hungarian government has actively engaged in the politics of class: while it has taken many steps to protect and support higher income residents, its measures led to deteriorated living conditions for most low-income Hungarians.

⁴⁴ The strict criteria were somewhat modified in May, 2013, which allowed more households to enter the program. From the beginning of the program to July, 2013, 7300 units were integrated, positively affecting the housing security of around 33,000 people ("Az állam több ezer lakást átvett," 2013). The organization is authorized to take over the ownership of 25,000 units of real estate until 2014 (Hegedüs & Horváth, 2013, p. 9).

⁴⁵ Workfare was introduced under the first *Fidesz* government in 2000 and continued by the socialist-liberal coalition. Under the second *Fidesz* government, it became a central measure in "social policy."

c. The management of homelessness in contemporary Hungary

While the 1989-1990 homeless demonstrations were over relatively quickly, the short-term emergency management of homelessness has remained a permanent feature of the social services system. In the early 1990s, most homeless shelters were opened in the spirit of emergency relief. The very first homeless shelter was in a high school gym, and army barracks and factories were also transformed



10. A soup kitchen in 1993

for this purpose. However following the “homeless crisis,” emergency solutions were institutionalized without addressing the root causes of the problem. For example, the Social Law passed in 1993 had codified the existing system of services, but did not attempt to create more permanent solutions. In essence, the law reinforced the Hungarian state’s treatment of homelessness as a personal emergency and not a structural problem (see Missetics, 2010a).

The year 2002 seemed to be a turning point in the government’s approach to homelessness. A Commissioner for Homelessness was appointed by the Socialist government, which signaled an official recognition of the severity of the problem, and also aimed to streamline and improve publicly funded efforts in the field of homelessness. Officially, the commissioner’s task was to review and recommend legislation regarding homelessness, develop preventive measures (especially in health care services), initiate immediate government intervention when necessary, and develop programs to address homelessness (Állami Számvevőszék, 2006, p. 21). The commissioner had several important achievements in systematizing and coordinating existing services and developing new ones, including an experimental program to support independent living for homeless people (Állami Számvevőszék, 2006). A proposal for the first national strategy to tackle homelessness was

also drafted at the request of the commissioner. Unfortunately, however, the strategy never became official policy and just a few of its recommendations were put into practice.

The position was terminated in 2007, in its fifth year of operation, after the commissioner resigned in protest against the codification of new kinds of low-threshold services, especially the establishment of large tents as homeless shelters. The evaluation of the commissioner's work is up for debate. On the one hand, the creation of the position itself indicated some commitment by the state to address homelessness in a more comprehensive way and the commissioner's work did lead to qualitative improvements in existing services. On the other hand, neither the position, nor the commissioner himself challenged the dominant paradigm that treats homelessness as a problem to be managed rather than prevented. The fact that no new commissioner has been appointed also indicates the continuing political insignificance of the problem.

Today, the main aim of the relatively broad network of drop-in centers, overnight shelters, temporary shelters and street social work is not to prevent homelessness or secure permanent housing but to feed, clothe and temporarily shelter people in crisis. However, even if the management of homelessness is the main purpose of social services, there are still not enough shelter beds to serve all the homeless. Besides, many shelters are in a very poor condition and their bad morale and/or strict rules deter many people from entering. While there are some individual and small-scale initiatives to improve services, there is hardly any hope for general improvement, given the lack of resources and commitment. For example, public financing for homeless and other social services, including child welfare and psychiatric services, has declined continuously since 2006.

In addition to the management of poverty, the criminalization of homelessness is also on the rise in contemporary Hungary. While state socialist policies that criminalized poverty and homelessness were revoked in 1989, the harassment of homeless citizens by uniformed

authorities and less formal efforts to keep them out of sight have continued to this day. The policing of homelessness became more pronounced at the beginning of the 2000s and criminalization as an official policy became especially explicit from 2010. The general move towards criminalization has culminated in the amendment of the Hungarian Constitution with a clause allowing local municipalities to restrict the presence of homeless people in public spaces (for more on this, see Chapter 3).

8. Conclusion

Mass poverty and housing inadequacy have remained pressing problems throughout Hungarian history. National and local state government responses, meanwhile, have exhibited great ideological and political swings throughout the 20th century -- from laissez-faire liberalism through the management and criminalization of poverty to the appropriation of private property and the development of a large-scale public housing program. To this day, no stable and long-term housing policy has been established.

Budapest's municipal politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were dominated by urban boosterism and free market liberalism, and refused to recognize public responsibility for social or housing issues. In the 1910s and 1920s, both the municipality of Budapest and the central state became more actively involved in creating affordable housing and related social institutions. With the onset of the Great Depression, the housing crisis peaked in the 1930s, and thousands of people found shelter in shantytowns and emergency barracks throughout the capital. With working class movements gaining strength, the two decades before the Second World War marked the introduction of a number of important social reforms as right-wing governments aimed to secure political legitimacy.

Under state socialism, housing was treated as a political priority, and after 1956 the government introduced a series of important measures to reduce poverty and social inequality.

While the state ensured large-scale public investment in housing, the distribution of housing was quite unequal and poverty was 'disappeared' and criminalized. The four decades of state socialism represented a radical break with the past. During this period, huge advances were made in addressing adequately the long housing crisis that had affected Budapest and other cities since the end of the 19th century.

Then after 1989, accumulation by dispossession became the driving force of the economy, leading to great polarization and impoverishment. Since the regime change, the most important role of the state has been to facilitate the privatization of public housing and support the acquisition of private property. Today the state is also taking a leading role in the criminalization of both poverty in general, and homelessness in particular.

Housing poverty continues to be among the most critical social problems in contemporary Hungary. Still, there seems to be little real political will on the part of either the national government or local authorities to face it directly. As part of a failing social service system, homeless services can barely treat the symptoms of the housing crisis. Shelters are only a means for "warehousing" the poor (see Hopper, 2003, p. 18) and there are almost no affordable alternatives to market-rate housing. Without any opportunities to exit the system, homeless people are locked into a cycle of stigmatizing care that perpetuates the myth of individual pathologies and reinforces social exclusion. At the same time, the persecution and criminalization of homeless individuals as well as the institutionalization of emergency solutions distract attention and resources from long-term solutions and leave the underlying causes of social injustice intact.

Chapter 3.

“If we don’t push homeless people out, we will end up being pushed out by them.”

Criminalization as state strategy

Since the transition from state socialism to neoliberal capitalism in the late 1980s, Hungary has witnessed a sharp increase in social inequality. Visible homelessness is one of the most significant manifestations of the country’s social transformation. While in the early 1990s, public sentiments about the homeless leaned towards compassion and pity, over the past few years anti-homeless attitudes have hardened. Institutional responses to homelessness have mainly involved emergency solutions and the development of a complex but ineffective system of shelters. Recently the management of homelessness has been coupled with restrictive welfare policies, criminalizing legislation and quality of life campaigns that prioritize “clean” and “safe” public spaces at the expense of basic human needs.

Throughout Hungarian history, the state has always offered a combination of social, housing and criminal responses to homelessness. However, the respective significance of each of these responses waxed and waned according to the dominant social, political and economic conditions at the time. The growing significance of criminalization as a central state strategy is rooted in the social and economic structure and is most often a response to the breakdown of dominant relations of political, social and economic hegemony. At the same time, the legitimacy of criminalization as a central strategy is contingent on the moral exclusion of the group that is being criminalized. In this chapter, I first look at the process of moral exclusion that has made homeless people an easy target for criminalization. Then to an analysis of the political and economic crisis that, since the early 1990s, has led to growing criminalization, reaching an unprecedented level after 2010.

1. Homelessness and moral exclusion

The concepts of the scope of justice and moral community describe how ideas about entitlement and fairness are constructed in society. According to Opatow (2008),

when we include people in our scope of justice, [or moral community] we see considerations of fairness as applying to them, we see them as entitled to resources, and we are willing to make sacrifices to foster their well-being. When we exclude people from the scope of justice, shared moral values and norms do not apply. Instead we can withhold resources from them and oppose efforts that could foster their well-being. (p. 28)

Moral exclusion denotes a cumulative process of various forms of exclusion and can have particularly high stakes at times of social conflict. “Those who are excluded from the scope of justice can seem to be irrelevant nonentities who are expendable and undeserving of fairness and [...] community resources and sacrifices” (Opatow, 2008, p. 28).

The collective definition of the scope of justice is inevitable to constructing a group’s identity. However, who is included in the scope of justice can change with time and is deeply embedded in the social structure. A good illustration of this is the Hungarian government’s reaction to the mortgage crisis in 2008 when the dichotomy of “good” versus “bad” homeless emerged. Those who were in danger of losing their homes because of financial speculation were “good” and thus deserving of public support as opposed to the “bad homeless” who were themselves to blame for their homeless.

As described in Chapter 2, the Hungarian government took a series of steps to help those who were in danger of defaulting on their mortgages, and pumped considerable public funds into their support. At this time, government rhetoric was permeated by references to saving people’s homes under the (in)famous slogan: “we are not leaving anyone behind.”

However, these policies had a clear class character: while they supported the wealthier in reaching financial stability, structural poverty was penalized and criminalized.

Poor people have always been poised on the steep edge of Hungarian society's scope of justice. At certain times, they found themselves just inside, and at others, they have fallen right off. In any case, moral exclusion (or the threat of it) has been used to keep poor people both in their place and out of sight. The symptoms for the moral exclusion of homeless people, as identified by Opatow (1990), are easily recognizable today. These include: derogation, fear of contamination, dehumanization, blaming the victim and self-righteous comparisons (p. 10). The moral exclusion of homeless people is (re)produced through discursive, social, economic, legal, institutional and spatial means among others. In the following, I explore three mechanisms of Hungarian society through which homeless people are placed outside the scope of justice: 1) dehumanization through misrecognition, 2) exclusion from the body politic by administrative means and 3) exclusion from the public sphere through banishment from public spaces.

a. Dehumanization through misrecognition

Defining who belongs to humanity is always in the hands of the dominant social and political groups. If we imagine moral exclusion as a set of concentric circles, dehumanization through misrecognition represents the outer circle by denying membership in humanity, the broadest available community. Traditionally, ethnic groups define themselves as the only representatives of the human race as opposed to the subhuman or abnormal "Other." This is reflected in the differences between how ethnic groups call themselves (endonyms) and how others call them (exonyms). For example, while the endonym Roma means "men" or human beings in Romani, the exonym Gypsy derives from "Egyptian," or stranger. The ancient Greek called everyone who did not speak Greek a "Barbarian," or the speaker of a strange

language, the opposite of a citizen endowed with rights. Such discursive acts play a key part in defining who gets full membership in a group, and can have specific negative consequences for those who fall outside of this category. It is not by accident that the banners of the homeless protestors of 1989 said “We are humans too.” They did not refer to their “Hungarianness” as a basis for social inclusion, but appealed to a more fundamental social bond, the human community.)

In today’s public discourses in Hungary – and many other countries as well –, homeless people are often treated as permanent social outsiders. The four areas of misrecognition identified by Leonard Feldman (2006, p. 92) regarding homeless people in the US are instructive here. First, homeless people are often treated as non-persons that normally housed citizens look through as if they were invisible or, even worse, just piles of garbage. Examples of this non-recognition include statements by decision-makers and citizens referring to homeless people as road blocks that need to be removed. The media’s tendency to illustrate an article or report about homelessness with an image of a faceless person lying on the floor, covered in clothes and surrounded by big shopping bags is also an example of this dehumanization. In these cases, homeless people’s individual identities are erased and their deficiencies highlighted and universalized.

A second form of misrecognition is the view of the homeless as “disruptive subjects,” (Feldman, 2006) who do not deserve compassion because they are responsible for their own plight. For example, the mayor of Budapest made the following statement in the fall of 2010: “Those who break the rules of civility place themselves outside the realm of the law and have to be treated accordingly.”⁴⁶ This statement not only conflates informal norms of decency with formal legislation, but it also implies that for the mayor (and presumably for his intended audience) normative standards of justice no longer apply to homeless people. As a result, they

⁴⁶ István Tarlós on November 5, 2010 in *Mokka* in TV2.

can be treated as criminals even if they have not broken any laws – a typical example of how the scope of justice is socially manipulated.

The third is the treatment of homeless people as helpless victims who have to be kept alive. While the actions of many compassionate citizens are underpinned by this seemingly innocent construction of homelessness, it tends to deny homeless people any social or political identity beyond their biological survival. The selective preoccupation with homelessness during the winter exemplifies the social construction of homeless people as purely biological beings. Every year, as cold weather arrives, homelessness is talked about as if it was a sudden and unexpected natural disaster (see Missetics, 2012a). At this time of year, people are more motivated to engage in charity and this is probably the only time that politicians find homeless people useful for a photo-op as they distribute food to them.

For example, the current mayor of Budapest has made the number of hypothermic deaths a benchmark for assessing his homeless policies. In 2012, he regularly touted the effectiveness of his approach by maintaining that only one person froze to death in the streets of Budapest over the winter of 2011/2012. However, official statistics do not bear out this claim: in 2011, 72 people died of hypothermia in Budapest: 33 people at home, 27 people on the street and 12 people in other places (Udvarhelyi, 2013a), which is not significantly different to decades-long trends.⁴⁷ At the same time, while the mayor makes saving homeless people's actual lives a priority, he squarely rejects any policy proposals that would ensure more permanent solutions: "it is not my job to provide homeless people with housing" (Keresztes & Udvarhelyi, 2012).

⁴⁷ According to Péter Gyóri (2005b), "despite the general improvement in civilization, the number of people who have died because of the cold has grown over the past decades (this may also have something to do with the changes in registration): until the mid 1970s fewer than 50 people froze to death annually, in the second half of the 1970s, the number of people who died because of the cold ranged between 50 and 100, in the 1980s, this number grew to 150 annually. In the 1990s, the number of people who died of hypothermia moved up to 250 annually. The majority of the people (a total of 3692) who died of hypothermia in the past half a century did so after 1990. Most people continue to freeze to death in their own homes (100-150 people annually), many people die in other places (70-100 people annually) and around 50 people freeze to death on the streets [annually]."

The fourth type of misrecognition is the treatment of homeless people as clients with pathologies who should be isolated from the general public in order to be fixed. The operation of the homeless shelter system embodies this approach. Homeless shelters and other services for the homeless tend to occupy marginal positions in the symbolic geography of the city and are almost always placed in stigmatized and remote neighborhoods. In Budapest, the majority of homeless services are concentrated in the 8th district, which is the city's poorest and has the highest concentration of Roma citizens. Grouping homeless services in one location keeps homeless people away from privileged areas, and contained in underserved parts of the city (see Mahs, 2004). In fact, while they are overrepresented in the disadvantaged and poor areas of Budapest, there are virtually no homeless services in the most privileged parts of the city on the Buda side.⁴⁸

Another example of the construction of homeless people as pathological is the widely embraced belief in the need for gradual social integration. Both social professionals and average citizens emphasize the need to re-socialize homeless people through various types of institutional care before they are able live in an apartment on their own. While the concept of Housing First – an approach that immediately places homeless people from the street into housing – is slowly becoming accepted, resistance to seeing homeless people as fully capable home-dwellers is shared by both social workers and decision-makers alike

b. “You are not from here:” administrative exclusion

If we continue to model moral community as a set of concentric circles, the second circle represents the entitlements one gains as a member of the political community. In Hungary, citizenship rights are historically embedded in locality, and place of residence is the basis of many social entitlements. In many cases, this leads to homeless people's exclusion

⁴⁸ Six districts in Budapest host a disproportionate number of shelter beds compared to their share of the total population: four out of the six are among the poorest districts in the city. At the same time, the two richest districts have no homeless shelters at all.

through administrative means. The lack of a proper address makes the lives of many homeless people a misery and results in the denial of essential services despite their formal citizenship.

For centuries, belonging to a *község*, i.e. a local community with some level of autonomy (the name derives from *commune* in Latin) was a major link between citizens and the state. The origins of *község* go back to feudal times, when villages were owned by landholders and led by a judge. With each *község* enjoying some level of local autonomy, they can be considered the forerunners of the administrative system codified in 1886, the local council system introduced in 1950 under state socialism as well as the system of local governments ushered in after 1990. Although their functions have changed depending on the socio-political context at the time, the *község*, the council and the municipality have all represented a social and administrative configuration based on belonging to a specific locality.

In a 1775 order about the regulation of beggars and vagrants, the Hungarian authorities used the *község* to determine where people belonged. All beggars were counted and their belonging determined on the basis of where they were born or where they had engaged in “genuine work” for at least 3 years. If beggars had worked for three years in their current place of residence, they were allowed to stay. If not, they had to return to where they belonged. If they refused to leave, they were arrested, forced to work under difficult circumstances and then ordered to leave again. Those who were able to work but continued to panhandle were jailed. At the same time, those deemed unable to work were placed in poorhouses and cared for by the community (Oross, 2001, p. 94).

By 1886, the *község* was established as the official form of local self-government in Hungary. By establishing this system of registration the modern state was able to keep track of its residents and assets more effectively (see Scott, 1998). Everyone had to be registered with a *község* and no one could be associated with more than one local community. In addition to knowing where people reside, an important part of this project was the settlement

of mobile populations such as beggars, vagrants, the unemployed and Gypsies and their assimilation through education and work. According to an encyclopedia from the early 1900s, these laws were necessary to prevent roaming all over the country from becoming a national danger (Révai Nagy Lexikona, 1910-1935, p. 247).

In this way, locality became a central link to the state and a major determinant of social and other entitlements. Support for the poor was also designated as the responsibility of the local government (Kiss, 2012, p. 139). For example, health care expenses had to be covered by the locality where the patient was originally registered (usually based on the father's place of registration) regardless of where they were living at the time. On the one hand, this was an important achievement as the law ensured access to public support as a right. On the other, it became the basis of exclusion for those who were deemed unproductive. Lack of registration was used as a basis for banishment and beggars, vagrants and the unemployed could be deported back to their original place of registration (for more on the role of *község* in poor relief, see Zimmermann, 2011).

In 1948, the place of original registration (*község*) was replaced by actual residence (*lakóhely*), which made the registration system more logical (Kiss, 2012, p. 144), but kept locality as central to defining citizenship. At the same time, during most of the state socialism period, social welfare was universalized and the local government did not play a significant role in determining entitlements. Still, municipal banishment continued to be a secondary form of punishment for crimes that carried a jail sentence and was often accompanied by the obligation to report to a police station to prove that the convict was away from the prohibited area (Györi, 2010).

While neither deportation nor banishment is legal now, the politics of jurisdiction continues to be important. In fact, post-1990 local governments have often used the local/stranger dichotomy to deny responsibility towards homeless and poor people. After the

system of more empowered local governments was re-introduced, the campaign slogan of the liberal party about “caring municipalities” quickly faded into the background and local governments started to define themselves as entrepreneurs, managing properties and raising funds (see Harvey, 1989; Ladányi, 2010a). Local governments also became increasingly interested in getting rid of “difficult” residents, most notably poor and Roma people. As Ladányi (2010a) put it,

it is not unknown in the history of poor relief that when authorities cannot or do not want to adequately address pressing social problems, they use “the question of jurisdiction” as a way to push the problem away from themselves. Today’s Hungarian system of local governments fulfills this function ideally. Due to the lack of clarity regarding the division of tasks between the local and the central governments, the state is right in saying that taking care of the poorest is a local responsibility, while local governments are also right in saying that the state has not provided them with the appropriate financial resources to carry out this task. (p. 456)

The questions of jurisdiction and locality are among the strongest elements of the anti-homeless rhetoric that emerged in Hungary after 2010. Aladár Horváth (2000) reports that in the 1990s, many local politicians denied any municipal responsibility for re-housing evicted squatters saying that “they are not from the 14th district (or from the 7th), they are from the countryside and we don’t owe anything to them” (Horváth, A., 2000). The current mayor of Budapest also employs a strong localist rhetoric by constantly referring to homeless people as outsiders who swarm the city and abuse its services. In an interview, he said that “it is not the responsibility of the capital to take care of all the homeless in the country who feel like coming to Budapest. ... Budapest should only take care of those who became homeless here” (Keresztes & Udvarhelyi, 2012). In many of his public statements, the mayor of Budapest’s 8th district also contrasted the “local homeless” with outsiders. He vehemently maintained

that the local government will only take care of its “own” homeless and will not support anyone who became homeless somewhere else. In one of his most notorious statements, he even set up a dichotomy between local residents and homeless people: “If we don’t push homeless people out [of the district], they will end up pushing out the locals” (“Interjú Kocsis Máté,” 2011).

The local-stranger dichotomy is also exemplified by a small-scale pilot program that the local mayor developed to balance out his vigorous anti-homeless campaign. The program provides social housing after an undetermined period in a shelter. This is certainly an improvement above existing housing options; however, only the “local homeless” are eligible, which means having an official permanent address in the district for at least 5 years (addresses registered in homeless shelters are not eligible). In practice, this restricts the number of potential applicants to a minimum and reinforces the boundaries between the deserving and undeserving poor through locality.

The preoccupation of the two politicians with poor people migrating to Budapest is to some extent justified by social reality. Social migration from both rural to urban areas and vice versa is a major phenomenon in Hungary (Ladányi, 2010a, p. 457-458). Most people migrate out of necessity and flee regions with extremely high poverty and unemployment rates. Arriving in the capital in hopes of work and housing, many migrants end up on the streets or in shelters. In fact, according to one set of data, two-thirds of those living in public spaces have birth-places outside of the capital (Győri et al., 2004). While some of this migration is induced by other local governments that use both direct and indirect means to force “undesirables” to leave (Ladányi, 2010a), Budapest has always been an important magnet for internal migration. It is clear that instead of addressing the root causes of extreme regional inequality, the mayor’s “solution” to this problem has been to keep poor people out of Budapest and send them back to where they came from. By blaming the countryside for

Budapest's problems, the mayor also categorizes homeless people as permanent outsiders. In essence, as Kawash (1998) argues, local governments use the homeless body not only to obscure their exclusionary and violent practices but also to maintain an imaginary normative public of the "real locals."

The lingering role of local registration as a basis for social inclusion is also reflected in current laws and practices around a citizen's official address. For homeless participants of the 1989-1990 protests, the lack of papers was a huge obstacle (Solt, n.d.a). Without them it was impossible to get a job or access to social services. And as the residents of the rehabilitation home in Budaörs complained in early 1990, those without a permanent address were not able to vote in the first free elections held after 40 years of token democracy (Győri, 1997). For homeless people today, official documents such as the ID card, the address card and the social security card represent a lifeline to state services. As losing these administrative links prevents homeless people from taking part in society as full members, replacing lost documents is for many a daily struggle.

Basic rights such as voting and access to social and health care services as well as important private services are also contingent on a citizen's official address. Because everyone must have an official address, those who do not have a permanent residence can indicate "no address" on their ID cards. In a 2004 survey, more than 40% of all homeless respondents had "no address" as their permanent residence (Győri et al., 2004). In 2012, almost 20,000 people all over Hungary had this kind of address.⁴⁹ In theory, this category allows homeless people to access services without being associated with a specific municipality. For example, special voting districts are set up for those officially with "no address." At the same time, having "no address" is extremely stigmatizing in both the public and the private sphere. It is very difficult to find legal employment with such an address and it

⁴⁹ This data is based on a request for statistical information to the Közigazgatási és Elektronikus Közszolgáltatások Hivatala [The Central Office for Administrative and Electronic Public Services] by *The City is for All*.

also prevents homeless people from using services that require a street address such as opening a bank account, getting a debit card, applying for a driver's license or buying a cell phone.

The contradictions in the official system of registration indicate the dual position that homeless people occupy, being both inside and outside of society. To some extent, they are included: there is a special address category for them and certain services are available without any local affiliation. At the same time, they are not able to participate fully in society and experience almost continuously barriers to full membership. In this way, when the state offers solutions to homelessness that reproduce exclusion, it reinforces the position of homeless people as internal exiles:

Nothing demeans people more than being left on the scrap-heap, neither included in the present nor empowered to take control of their future. Such is the reality of poverty and social exclusion. Such is the life of the internal exile. (Falzon, 2009, p. 4)

c. "This is not your place:" physical exclusion from space

Spaces reflect, organize and embody the categories, priorities and boundaries of a society. As urbanist Michael Sorkin (1999) observed, "the city ... produces citizenship through the repetitive confrontation of citizens with an environment that organizes its prejudices and privileges physically" (p. 7). Space is not simply a reflection of social, political, cultural and economic processes, but also plays a fundamental role in (re)producing them (Lefebvre, [1974] 1991). As the third and most concrete dimension of the concentric circles that mark the scope of justice, homeless people's exclusion is also expressed and reproduced through their physical exclusion from public space.

Homeless people living in spaces that are visible to the public are the most vulnerable to exclusion as their existence transgresses an essential feature of modern bourgeois cities: the

strict boundary between public and private. In this division, the “home” and the “street” represent two mutually exclusive but complementary realms of everyday life (see Gyáni, 1999b). With no access to spaces of their own and denied permission to enter other people’s private spaces (e.g. restaurants, buildings), homeless people can only resort to public spaces for their everyday activities of survival and sociality. In this way, they contest the deeply entrenched boundaries of public and private. As Jeremy Waldron (1991) explains

the streets and the subways, they say, are for commuting from home to office. They are not for sleeping; sleeping is what one does at home. The parks are for recreations like walking and informal ball games, things for which one’s own yard is a little too confined. Parks are not for cooking or urinating, again these are things that one does at home. Since the public and the private are complementary, the activities performed in public are the complement of those performed in private. This complementarity works fine for those who have the benefit of both sorts of places. However, it is disastrous for those who are forced to live their whole lives in common land. (p. 301-302)

Even though homeless people do not own or rent a home, “they are deeply entangled with the regime of property, most notably by being excluded from its benefits” (Blomley, 2009). Official attitudes towards squatting provide a good example of the emergence of a new regime that protects the primacy of private property. According to Matern (1991), evictions were considered politically inappropriate until the 1990s. While the first large-scale eviction of squatters in 1987 was a sign of the coming political and economic changes, there was still a sense of shame around such a drastic measure. In 1994 the legal process of evictions was formalized. This development provided municipalities and private owners with legal tools but also offered some legal protection to squatters compared to earlier haphazard practices. While there were some temporary hesitations in this process,⁵⁰ the criminalization of squatting came

⁵⁰ During the 1990s a few district governments exhibited temporary tolerance and legalized squatters who were already living in their districts. In as late as 2000, an expert group in the Ministry of Social Affairs proposed the

to a peak in 2000, when a new law introduced harsher sentences for squatting and also made it easier for municipalities to implement evictions in the case of squatters. Today there are still no sanctions for the warehousing of property (there are around 40,000 empty apartments, off the market, in Budapest today), while squatting is punishable by a fine up to \$700. In all, while reinforcing the “sanctity” of private property has been a fundamental requirement of the new social, political and economic regime, it has devastating consequences for those not able to get a home through the capitalist housing market.

While for many homeless people the street is a last resort, public spaces are increasingly restricted and regulated. Urban design has become a standard tool used by municipalities, private businesses and residential communities to limit the uses of common spaces. Homeless-proof benches, fences and spikes on ledges and other horizontal surfaces as well as specially designed street furniture prevent people from sitting or lying down. Benches and phone booths have been removed for the same purpose, while curvilinear corners are designed to prevent hiding (Török & Udvarhelyi, 2006). In addition to such violent and exclusionary spaces, authors have pointed out the political implications of urban (re)design: the physical layout of a square, the type of planting, the kinds of street furniture, the decoration as



11. Fence designed to keep (homeless) people away from the ledge of a bank

well as the different proposed activities all determine who feels welcome and who does not (see Low, 1996; Van Deusen, 2002). One example of using design to deter homeless people from gathering is the reconstruction of Blaha Lujza square, the venue of the 1989 homeless sit-in and an important center of sociality and information for various marginalized groups

large-scale legalization of squatting. While the idea got some publicity, it never became practice (Népszava, 2000).

including homeless people, immigrants, punk youth and the unemployed. After a large shopping mall was opened, all benches were removed from the square to prevent people from sitting. According to the rehabilitation plans of the square, it will be reconfigured in a way that facilitates passing through but deters more long-term stay and activities (“Blaha tervei,” 2011).

The privatization of public spaces and the relocation of public functions into private spaces also restrict the uses and users of Budapest’s public spaces. For two decades, the city government has indirectly supported these processes with its laissez-faire policy concerning local development and investment, and by issuing commercial permits for the use of public spaces. With the growing popularity of sidewalk cafés, places of hospitality cover an ever bigger part of pedestrian areas. Entire squares and streets are taken over by private consumption and entertainment controlled by private security guards. For example, the management of Liszt Ferenc square in downtown Budapest has been taken over by the organization of local business owners. As tables and chairs cover almost 100 percent of the square, only those who are able to consume the expensive food or drinks at the bars and restaurants are welcome. Homeless people are not only kept away through prohibitive prices, but also by security guards who often force them to leave the square. In 2012, the local government and business owners were planning to set up a special security force to patrol the square specifically to minimize the presence of homeless people (“Tanácskozás a Liszt Ferenc,” 2012).

The example of Erzsébet square in the heart of Budapest also illustrates the shift to privatization. While the square was originally designed as a no-stepping-on-the-grass zone, citizens have overtaken the park and created a true public forum with an impressive level of social mixing (Udvarhelyi, 2010b). For years, the park was a source of livelihood for homeless people collecting cans and bottles for recycling. When the management of the

underground cultural center that dominates the square was taken over by a new company in 2012, the whole space was reconfigured: almost all the grassy areas were turned into cafés and bars, limiting spaces where non-consumers can stay. Private security guards keep an eye on who uses the square and homeless people are no longer welcome. During the public screenings of the European soccer championship, people deemed unsuitable due to their clothing or behavior were made to leave by the security guards.⁵¹

Policing and stepped-up law enforcement are also used to keep homeless people away from public spaces. Initiatives to chase homeless people out of certain parts of the city abound, including routine activities such as checking IDs and asking people to move on, as well as concentrated police sweeps of streets, squares or entire districts. For example, as a major tourist destination, the Castle district has always been a heavily patrolled area. In the fall of 2012, the municipality bragged about “improving the homeless situation” by arresting more than 100 homeless people over the previous three months and fining them more than \$7,000 for sleeping in public spaces (pp, 2012).

Through these measures, homeless people’s moral exclusion is translated into spatial exclusion. When looking for some safety, street homeless people often seek out marginalized spaces such as riverbanks, spaces under highways and bridges, urban forests, basements and underground pedestrian passages. Talmadge Wright (1997) characterizes such places as “refuse spaces” not only because they represent the unwanted geographies of society, but also because they are “spaces in which one is refused – refused services, refused dignity, refused human rights, refused the basic food, clothing, and shelter and refused medical care” (p. 106). In all, the exclusion of street homeless people from public spaces has devastating consequences.

⁵¹ Source: Facebook post from June, 2012 by Péter Szilágyi, a member of Parliament for LMP.

In a society that proclaims itself democratic, public space is the embodiment of the public sphere (Low, 2000; Mitchell, 2003). Through this lens, participation in public space is a collective performance of citizenship that reflects and defines the relationship among citizens and between citizens and the state. According to Blomley (2000),

the public sphere needs to be grounded in public space - that is, the material location where the social interactions and political activities of the “public” occur. ... It is in public space that the conversations and encounters of public life become physical and real. ... Encounters with people who are like “us” are insufficient grounds for creating a pluralistic public culture. (p. 12-16)

Being in public spaces is a form of social communication as the visible presence of homeless people forces society to pay attention to extreme poverty (see Amster, 2003; Blomley, 2000). Through this lens, begging – an important source of income for homeless and extremely poor people – is not only a desperate attempt to survive, but a public form of asking for support. Forcing homeless people out of city spaces puts them out of sight and takes the burden of responsibility off the shoulders of society at large and its individual members. While removal from public space equals a symbolic removal from the community, it is not only a symbolic issue: when homeless people are not able to access public spaces, they are also distanced from the relationships, contacts, goods and services that ensure their survival.

In a world where spaces are either public or private, banning life-sustaining activities in public space renders homeless people placeless. Samira Kawash (1998) explains the relationship between the expectation for homeless people to disappear from public spaces and broader policies to remove them from sight:

Without a proper place, the homeless body is obliged to become small, to minimize its surface, its extension. Such a demand is reflected in urban policies for “containing” the homeless, which are based on the principle of constriction. If the homeless

population cannot be eliminated or erased, then at least it can be shrunk down, isolated, and contained so that the public need not feel the pressure of its presence. (p. 330)

Categorizing homeless people as being out of place marks the boundaries of community and highlights the centrality of private property in defining citizenship. In discourses of the “revanchist city” (see Smith, 1996), the war to re-conquer city spaces has two sides: the “proper” public on one side and the “improper” intruders on the other. When the argument is made that homeless people must be removed from public spaces to protect the *public interest*, the underlying assumption is that they are not part of that public. In this way, the moral exclusion of homeless people becomes institutionalized as permanent exclusion, which has two consequences. “The homeless” as a category becomes essential to define the boundaries of the community and its prevailing norms. And this exclusion allows the state to deny responsibility for either the production or prevention of extreme housing poverty.

2. The penal state in post-socialist Hungary

Under state socialism, large-scale state investment in social infrastructure was coupled with a repressive political system. The existence of poverty was denied and most forms of social deviance – especially those rooted in poverty – criminalized.

Given that the principle of sharing was the total subjugation to the rule of the party, the recognition of the existence of poverty would have questioned the system at its most crucial point, the totality of rule. It is by no accident that the various symptoms of poverty were not addressed through support programs and classic social policy measures but policing and, in better cases the milder and equally autocratic forms of administrative control. (Szalai, J., 2002, p. 56)

Among the most important markers of the collapse of state socialism as a political system was the repeal of legislation that criminalized social deviances such as loitering, the dangerous avoidance of work and alcoholism.

For a short period in the early 1990s, criminalization was suspended as an inappropriate response to social problems. However, this grace period remained relatively short due to political realities: the post-socialist Hungarian state has demonstrated elements of both the social and the penal state (Wacquant, 2009), depending on the ruling party's politics and economic conditions among others. Overall, the criminalization of poor and marginalized populations has been reinforced by varying degrees by successive governments regardless of their political orientation. While there was a significant increase in 2009 with the introduction of workfare, the penal approach reached its peak after 2010,

a. The emerging criminal paradigm

In a broader context, the mainstreaming of anti-homeless rhetoric and practice is part of a larger trend to regulate and discipline those on the margins of society such as migrants, Roma communities and the unemployed. While the Hungarian state has always been rather hostile to immigrants and refugees, the criminalization of undocumented immigrants tightened up in 2010 (Speer, 2012, p. 11). Before 2010, asylum-seekers and undocumented immigrants who did not ask for asylum belonged to two different systems of law enforcement. While the former were housed in so-called reception centers where they could move relatively freely, the latter were detained in criminal facilities. According to the new law, all undocumented immigrants, including children, were treated as criminals and could be detained for up to a year. As in many other countries, the new immigration law was embedded in a discourse of national security and the threat of international terrorism.⁵²

⁵² Under international pressure, the law was softened for a while, but the incarceration of asylum-seekers was re-codified in 2013.

The Roma have also been disproportionately affected by the growing trend towards criminalization. According to reports by the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Roma people all over Hungary are disproportionately stopped and searched by the police (Kádár et al., 2008). In rural areas, Roma individuals are fined on a daily basis for “crimes” such as collecting wood for heating or riding a bicycle without a bell or a light (see Ivány & Pap, 2012). New welfare rules allow municipalities to create special conditions for the meager welfare benefits that are available. As a result, some local governments have made a clean yard or an orderly house a condition for receiving welfare. In segregated Roma settlements where buildings are in a dismal condition and there is often no garbage collection or sewage system, these rules create an almost automatic basis for rejecting benefits.

The introduction of workfare as a way to regulate the poor has affected the most people. While its precedents can be found as early as 2000 (Paár & Vojtonovszki, 2012, p. 9), the first national welfare program that required work in exchange for welfare was introduced by the Socialist government in 2009. The program called for the creation of thousands of communal work positions such as street cleaning, ditch digging, general repairs etc. Originally touted as a social response to the economic crisis, official discourses emphasized the role of work in social reintegration. (see Vojtonovszki, 2012). However, according to official statistics, only 1 to 5% of those eligible actually engaged in public work and 20 to 40% of them returned to being registered as unemployed (Paár & Vojtonovszki, 2012, p. 10-11). In 2010, the new National Public Employment Program restricted conditions of welfare even more. For example, unemployed welfare recipients cannot turn down any communal job regardless of their qualifications. Only one person per household is eligible to be a public worker at a time and those who are dismissed from public work will not get any welfare for the next 3 years. In 2011, the Prime Minister declared that the workfare program would open the door to middle-class life for 500,000 people (Ónody-Molnár, 2012). However, with a

monthly salary that does not even reach the minimum wage – a full time public worker gets around \$200 a month⁵³ – the program has not come any closer to realizing the Prime Minister’s promise. At the same time, workfare has created a lot of anxiety, insecurity and fear among welfare recipients and is a clear example of how the regulatory role of the state is enhanced through the micromanagement of its citizens.

Beyond measures to control marginalized populations, a number of broader legislative changes have also contributed to growing criminalization. On the one hand, the 2010 amendment to the Criminal Code introduced the “three strikes” rule, which calls for ever more severe punishments including life in prison for repeated offenses of certain crimes. The 2010 amendment to the Law on Infractions introduced stricter sentences for youth offenders and crimes against property. While minors could not be incarcerated earlier, the amendment allows a maximum of 45 days in jail. The new law also extended detention to more categories of offenses; raised fines for crimes against property such as breach of domicile; and allowed jail time for minor offenses such as petty theft. In 2012, the new Law on Petty Offenses also introduced the “three strikes” rule: each time someone commits a violation, they must receive a harsher sentence, regardless of the type of offense.

Increased legislative criminalization led to a concerted effort to expand the prison system as well. The international criticism of overcrowded Hungarian prisons, which used to hold 30% more inmates than their capacity, offered an excellent opportunity for the government to justify the modernization of existing prisons and the construction of new ones. Besides, as the Minister of Interior declared, new facilities were needed because existing prisons were not able to accommodate the growing number of prisoners due to the new immigration law and the amendments to the Criminal Code and the Law on Infractions (“Pintér elkezdte bővíteni,” 2010). Overall, the governments’ logic seems to have been a

⁵³ In 2013, the net minimum wage for an employee without children is around \$290.

simple one of supply and demand: the state produces more inmates through legislative change, which in turn makes it necessary to invest in prisons instead of other social infrastructure.

Government representatives have justified stricter sentences with the fact that many people get away with crimes, especially crimes against property, without due punishment. They argued that with the new law, discovery of such cases will be faster and more efficient. To justify the amendments, they also pointed to the growing number of crimes committed by young people and minors, the explosion of brutal and violent crimes, and the proliferation of crimes against property (“Kártérítésre kötelezik a tolvajt,” 2009). However, it seems that government officials consistently ignore official crime statistics. While the incidence of crime rose sharply after the regime change, the number of crimes has either declined or stayed the same over the last few years. In 2009 most criminal categories were at their lowest since 1990, while crimes against property declined and both the number of youth offenders and the proportion of violent crimes have been stable for years (Igazságügyi és Rendészeti Minisztérium Statisztikai és Elemző Osztály, 2010). All this seems eerily similar to what happened in California in the 1990s, which embarked on one of the largest prison-building projects in history: “crime went up, crime came down; we cracked down” (Gilmore, 2007, p. 20).

b. The criminalization of homelessness

“We criminalize the behavior of people we want to get rid of” – attorney Soffiyah Elijah’s statement at a discussion about the penalization of poverty in the United States resonates world-wide and throughout history.⁵⁴ While in the US the criminalization of homelessness picked up in the 1980s, these processes have been less pervasive in Europe. At

⁵⁴ “Poverty, Punishment, and Resistance,” at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, October 24, 2012 with Soffiyah Elijah, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Gunja SenGupta and Cheryl D. Hicks.

the same time, a 2011 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights cited the penalization of poverty as an increasing trend all over the world:

laws, regulations and practices that punish, segregate, control and undermine the autonomy of persons living in poverty ... have been adopted with increasing frequency over the past three decades, intensifying in recent years owing to the economic and financial crises, and now represent a serious threat to the enjoyment of human rights by persons living in poverty. (Secretary-General, 2011, p. 2)

In the midst of this general global tendency to criminalize poverty, Hungary stands out with a recent surge in exclusionary policies against homeless people.

When it comes to public attitudes towards homelessness, Hungarians have gradually lost the compassion that was somewhat more typical around the time of regime change and the first homeless demonstrations (see Chapter 4). Without adequate policy responses, homelessness has been normalized as a natural part of the capitalist political economy, followed by increasing compassion fatigue (see Blau, 1992). The lack of solidarity and growing impatience with homeless people – and with other marginalized groups such as the Roma – is also rooted in the tremendous social insecurity experienced on a daily basis by many Hungarians. According to sociologist Elemér Hankiss, social mobility in Hungary today is lower than it was in the 1930s (see Kósa, 2009). According to Opatow (1990), danger, conflict and stress shrink the boundaries of the moral community, which also decreases social concern for fairness. In addition, in order to establish the image of a respectable social status and alleviate their social anxieties, people tend to distance themselves from groups and individuals perceived to be worse off than themselves. As a result of these mechanisms, contemporary public discourse tends to blame homeless individuals rather than ineffective societal and state responses for not being able to keep up with the demands of the new regime.

The general impatience with mass homelessness is observable in public opinion. In the media, coverage and discussion about homelessness oscillate between frustration at the sight of people living on the street and a patronizing pity for them. At the same time, the media tends to present cases where homeless individuals are allegedly involved in a gruesome crime, thus demonizing all homeless people (see “A hajléktalan ember nem bűnöző,” 2013). Anti-homeless hate speech is not infrequent among average citizens and politicians. Negative attitudes towards the homeless have become so prevalent and conspicuous that in 2005 the Ombudsperson for Civil Rights publicly condemned both specific practices of social exclusion and the general indifference towards homelessness as a civil rights issue (Borza, 2009).

At the political level, homeless people on the streets have always been the object of official hostility. However in the 1990s, police officers and public space supervisors tended to rely more on sheer force or selective enforcement than on official anti-homeless legislation. Beginning in the 2000s, exclusion became more explicit and formalized. In 2002, for example, Budapest’s mayor introduced the first city-wide program to “clean” the city’s major underground passages from “graffiti, illegal vendors and homeless people” (Török & Udvarhelyi, 2006). The shift in policy is obvious if we consider that under state socialism the now mayor was in fact a member of the progressive opposition (including SZETA) and had published one of the first sociological accounts of homelessness (Demszky, 1980) when it was still largely a taboo topic. While it was a major turning point for the mayor to resort to force with regards to homeless people in public spaces, the clean-up program was only partially successful due to the lack of political will and financial resources, as well as foot-dragging by social workers.

The targeting of poor and homeless people through criminalization picked up in the early to mid-2000s when municipalities started passing anti-rummaging ordinances on a large

scale.⁵⁵ The first ordinances that limited the spatial and temporal scope of silent panhandling were passed in 2005. By 2011, there were at least 40 local ordinances that restricted silent begging and rummaging through garbage.⁵⁶ Some municipalities have also banned camping or “setting up domicile” in public space. In 2009, the mayor of the 11th district declared homeless-free zones where homeless people would not be allowed to stay. Based on a document dated 2012 (see A Város Mindenkié, 2012), but most likely originating from 2009, the district’s office supervising public space created three kinds of zones: one where homeless people were not allowed, another where their presence was tolerated, and a third where they were allowed temporarily. The zones corresponded to specific streets, and uniformed officers were instructed as to the level of law enforcement that should be pursued. In the ‘no-homeless’ zones near schools, public institutions, churches and health institutions, all possible legal means were to be used to keep homeless people away. In the tolerated zone, homeless people were allowed during the day but not at night. In the third zone, they were allowed to sleep at night too.⁵⁷ While these zones were never consistently enforced, their endorsement by a local mayor signaled a shift to more explicit means of public control. In all, despite the wide variety of exclusionary policies and practices, in the early 2000s anti-homeless efforts were mostly ad hoc and not (yet) systematic (Török & Udvarhelyi, 2006).

In the wake of these precedents, the systematic criminalization of homelessness became official policy with the election of the right-wing *Fidesz* in both the national and local governments in 2010. One of the first measures of the city’s newly elected mayor – whose role model was Rudy Giuliani – was to launch the “public spaces clean-up program” abandoned by the previous liberal mayor. Thus in November 2010, the new mayor ordered all homeless people to vacate major underground pedestrian passages until December 15. He

⁵⁵ According to Misetics (forthcoming), these ordinances were primarily aimed at Roma citizens who picked through garbage to ensure their livelihoods.

⁵⁶ In its 166/B/2011 decision, the Constitutional Court declared that the prohibition of rummaging through garbage in unconstitutional and eliminated all such local ordinances in 2011.

⁵⁷ For a very similar proposal in the United States, see Ellickson (1996).

warned that if anyone stayed on, they would be forcibly removed by the authorities. The mayor's program was met with mixed reactions. While *The City is for All* mobilized against it and homeless services providers struggled to provide shelter for those being evicted, the mayor's initiative was supported by many residents of Budapest who had grown tired of seeing people sleeping on the streets. In the meantime, the city set up so-called survival spots as alternatives to the underground passages where homeless people could spend the night in a "street-like environment" – allegedly without harassment.⁵⁸

At the national level, the first specifically anti-homeless legislation was passed in September 2010. The modification of the Law on Constructions defined seven legitimate ways of using public space – including leisure and protest – and allowed local municipalities to ban any other activities that would obstruct the appropriate use of public space. When the bill was first introduced, its explanation emphasized the presence of homeless people as one form of obstruction that municipalities could ban. While the wording was later removed (most probably as a reaction to the pressure created by *The City is for All* through the media and mobilization), the intent of the law remained the same: to create a legal framework in which anti-homeless ordinances could be enacted by municipalities.⁵⁹

At the local level, the capital was the first to seize this opportunity: in April 2011, the mayor initiated a local law banning living in public spaces throughout the city. Those in violation could be fined up to \$250. However the law did not specify what was meant by "living in public spaces," thus leaving the interpretation up to the discretion of the authorities. While the mayor made the solution of the "homeless problem" a focal point of his first few months in office, the anti-homeless campaign peaked in the 8th district, where a referendum

⁵⁸ Source: Letter by Dr. György Pető, the head of the Budapest Public Space Supervising Authority to Anna Bende, an activist with *The City is for All* on December 9, 2010.

⁵⁹ For a more detailed description of the activities of *The City is for All* against this wave of criminalization, see Chapter 5.

was held in September 2011.⁶⁰ Local citizens were asked whether or not they agreed with the local prohibition of picking through garbage and a ban on living in public spaces. Even though the referendum was actually not valid (as only 16% of eligible voters attended), the local mayor used it to legitimize a public order campaign launched against homeless people. Over the ensuing months, hundreds of the homeless were detained in an office opened specifically for this purpose, for crimes such as: living in public spaces; urinating in public; open consumption of alcohol; picking through garbage; and begging. In just a few months, homeless people were arrested for “sleeping in public” in 800 cases, 600 of which occurred in the 8th district.⁶¹

For large-scale criminalization to be justified, homeless people also had to be turned into actual criminals, through political rhetoric. Following a gruesome murder on the island of Csepel in 2011, the mayor of Budapest and the Minister of Interior engaged in a vigorous campaign of demonization. In the murder case, homeless people living in self-built shacks were implicated, under the influence of a man with a criminal record, in killing and burying their peers. A day after the murders became public, the National Bureau of Investigation stated that “the fact that a series of murders could be committed over the course of months without anyone letting the authorities know is predominantly due to the unregulated lifestyle



12. Image used by many media outlets to illustrate the story about the Csepel murders

that many homeless people pursue without any social control” (Nemzeti Nyomozóiroda, 2011). Using this case as a springboard, the mayor of Budapest started to talk about the

⁶⁰ The 8th district is one of the poorest in Budapest and has a disproportionately high concentration of homeless shelters and drop-in centers in the city.

⁶¹ The statistics are based on a freedom of information request by the *Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ)* for the year 2011.

“radicalization of the homeless” (“Tarlós: radikalizálódnak a hajléktalanok,” 2011) and the threat of “homeless crime” (Tenczer, 2011).⁶²

In the hysteria surrounding the murders in Csepel, homelessness began to be defined less as a social condition, and more as a category encompassing people who possess certain traits, behaviors and moral characteristics. On mainstream television, social experts talked about homelessness as a psychological and social status that needed special treatment (but not housing). Homelessness was ossified as a quasi-racial category and the discourses around homelessness resembled those about the Roma, the largest and most rejected ethnic minority in Hungary. Reports about “homeless colonies” repeated the same tropes about the general viciousness of homeless people, the criminal circles they were involved in, the tons of garbage they have amassed and the aggressive and violent dogs they keep. In an interview on TV, a reporter asked the following question: “how it is possible to get people to commit such crimes?” To this, a criminologist replied:

I must say that it must not have been difficult. When I looked at the pictures about the conditions in which these people lived, my first impression was that they have de facto placed themselves outside the law and outside of social norms. We assume that they must have been alcoholic, too. And this means that they will do anything for alcohol, just like drugs. So it was not difficult to get them to do it ... people who live like that happily commit such crimes. They lose their human standing and the values that generally characterize people who live in a society. They have created a micro-society that has another set of rules, which are obviously in direct opposition to ours.⁶³

⁶² The term “homeless crime” is based on the racist construction “Gypsy crime,” which refers to the alleged criminal tendencies of Roma Hungarians and the crimes though to be typically perpetrated by them. The term has been recently (re)popularized by the extreme right-wing party *Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*.

⁶³ Source: Élve ásta el áldozatait a csepeli gyilkos (2011, August 15). ATV Start. Retrieved from: http://atv.hu/vidiotar/20110815_elve_asta_el_aldozatait_a_csepeli_gyilkos

Statements like these all reinforced the assumption that such gruesome acts are typical of the homeless. They also implied that if homeless people engaged in criminal acts of any kind, it was not because of structural reasons but because of a certain kind of personality.

The Csepel incident offered a perfect pretext for treating homeless people like a group of outlaws. As such, it came closest to a manufactured moral panic. According to Stanley Cohen (1980), a moral panic is in the making when a

condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. (p. 9)

Cohen (1980) emphasizes the role of the media in blowing instances of deviance out of proportion. Even though the murder in Csepel did not develop into a full-blown moral panic, it exhibited most of its features identified by Cohen. The manipulation of the story was an almost perfect example of the process of ideological exploitation, which is “exploitative in the sense that the deviant [in this case the alleged homeless murderers in Csepel] is being used for societally defined ends without any regard to the consequences of this on the deviant himself [sic]” (Cohen, 1980, p. 139). In this sense, the Csepel incident laid the groundwork for further criminalization, now justified by both the tangible and highly symbolic threat posed by the homeless to society.

According to Cohen (1980), when a moral panic emerges, it triggers a series of demonstrations of societal control culture such as a stepped-up deployment of the police and even legislative change (p. 133), which were all true for the Csepel case. For example, in order to create a database of all the homeless colonies, police officers visited all known shack

settlements in Budapest, took pictures of their locations and created a comprehensive GIS map so that they can track them (“Rendőrok ellenőrzik,” 2011). For months, the police checked on these settlements more intensively than before. In addition, later that year, the Minister of Interior declared a war on people who panhandled, sold street newspapers or washed windshields at traffic lights. Following his order, hundreds of people were arrested for such “crimes.”

In addition to legislation and stepped-up enforcement, the development of a special kind of social-correctional institution was also part of the political push towards criminalization. In February 2011, a joint internal letter by the Ministry of Human Resources and the Ministry of Interior was leaked. The letter contained their joint plan to reduce visible homelessness in public spaces by setting up correctional facilities that also provide hygienic facilities, food and social information. According to the letter, these institutions would

serve as a detention center for infractions, especially for those who do not want to use social service at their own will. By nature, these ... are not social institutions as those cannot be used for arrest and detention and people cannot be forced to use them. (Buzás, 2011)

Today, no such institution is operating yet, which may partly be the result of *The City is for All's* active mobilization and partly the resistance of homeless service providers and the police.⁶⁴ However, at the end of 2011 two new homeless shelters were opened in Budapest with funding from the Ministry of Interior where a police station and short-term jail were designed to be part of both buildings. While the police stations are in operation today, the jail cells are not being used for their original purpose. Nevertheless, there exists a physical possibility to turn these two social institutions relatively easily into detention centers.

⁶⁴ There may have been some legal issues, too, as current laws do not allow the mixing of social and criminal functions in the same building. However, with two-thirds majority in the Parliament, the current government could have gone ahead by proposing a new law that made such an institution possible. In the end, however, it seems that it may have been deemed too costly both politically and in practice to push ahead with the plan.

The culmination of the anti-homeless campaign came in December 2011 when the Parliament passed a law that replaced all existing local ordinances and made “residing in public spaces” illegal all over the country. The crime was punishable by a fine of up to \$300 and 60 days in jail for anyone who repeatedly committed it within 6 months. While less formal practices abound all over Europe, this was the first national law making street homelessness a crime. Despite intensive local and international protest (see Chapter 5), the law went into effect on April 15, 2012.

In a surprising turn of events, the Constitutional Court in November 2012 declared the anti-homeless law unconstitutional and annulled it. According to the court, the law lacked any constitutional basis and was overly vague. Importantly, the court stated that the real intention of the law was not to protect public order but to punish homeless people and force them to use social services. As the court pointed out, the presence of homeless people in public spaces does not cause any damage to other people and no one can be punished for not having a home and having to live in public spaces.⁶⁵ The court explicitly declared homelessness a social and not a criminal issue. The Constitutional Court’s decision was a major victory for social professionals and grassroots groups that had protested against the law since its inception.⁶⁶

Despite – or probably because of – the Court’s decision, the criminalization of homelessness remained high on the agenda of the *Fidesz* government. In fact, out of the fifteen judges of the Constitutional Court, the four who added dissenting opinions to the decision had all been appointed by the current governing party. In addition, the main proponents of anti-homeless legislation, including the mayor of the 8th district, the mayor of Budapest and the Minister of Interior, were quick to denounce the court’s decision. In addition to calling the decision irrational, most of the ruling party’s communication was focused on the fact that without the law, “masses of people will be living in public spaces

⁶⁵ Constitutional Court decision no. 38/2012. (XI. 14.)

⁶⁶ On the significance of the Court’s decision as a moral statement that draws up a progressive social vision, see Dósa, 2012.

again” and that it will be impossible to prevent people from “dying on the streets from hypothermia” (see for example “Tarlós hajléktalaninváziótól tart,” 2012).

While the government’s response to the decision of the Constitutional Court was predictable, it contained a new actor, more powerful than any of the previous ones. The Prime Minister – who had not expressed an opinion about the topic before – immediately condemned the ruling, and announced that the prohibition of street homelessness would be included in the constitution (which the Court will not be able to override).⁶⁷ Not long afterwards, a modification of the constitution was introduced in the Parliament, which would make it possible for local municipalities to restrict living in public spaces.⁶⁸ As *Fidesz* holds the two-thirds majority necessary to modify the constitution, the proposal was passed on March 11, 2013. In this way, the possibility of criminalizing homelessness was enshrined in the highest law of the land. Together with the opening of homeless shelters that could be used as detention facilities, Hungary has never been so close to reinventing the 19th century penal approach to outlawing and containing homelessness without offering any real solutions to it.

3. Conclusion: criminalization as a response to crisis

The regulation of poverty and the criminalization of homelessness have been a permanent and growing trend in contemporary Hungarian society. However, since 2010, the efforts at all levels of the states to morally, politically and socially exclude poor people in general and homeless people in particular have become more systematic than ever before. The developments of the past few years represent the culmination of a paradigm shift in the way the Hungarian state deals with “surplus” populations. In a way, it has returned to the high

⁶⁷ The role of the Constitutional Court is to uphold and protect the constitution. As a result, it is able to decide whether the laws that are passed by Parliament are constitutional or not, but is not empowered to make a judgment about the constitution itself.

⁶⁸ In other words, the constitution itself does not prohibit sleeping on the street, but creates the legal framework for such local and national laws to be passed for a variety of reasons including public security and order or the protection of culture.

level of criminalization under state socialism, but without the massive investment in social infrastructure, and with the reinforcement of a socio-economic structure thriving on inequality and dispossession. Why is this shift culminating right now?

According to Barak and Bohm (1989), the criminalization of homelessness often occurs in reaction to an economic crisis. Exploring the roots of California's phenomenal prison building project, Gilmore (2007) argues that criminalization and mass incarceration are a (failed) response to a fourfold crisis of the capitalist state. In her analysis, she identifies the California "prison fix" as a response to the surplus of land, people, capital, and state capacity. Criminalization and prison building absorbed all these surpluses by channeling people and resources into the criminal justice system. While Hungary in the 2000s is different from California in the 1990s, Gilmore's analysis offers important insights into why large-scale criminalization may have emerged as a state strategy in post-socialist Hungary. The three kinds of surpluses that are undoubtedly at play in Eastern Europe are those of people, capital and state capacity.

With regards to relative surplus populations, Hungary has suffered from large-scale unemployment and "inactivity" since the regime change. Only around 55% of the working-age population is economically active and the official unemployment rate was 7% before and above 10% during the economic crisis. While the state socialist regime provided jobs for unskilled laborers, it is extremely difficult for people with little or no education to find a job (for an in-depth discussion of this problem, see Köllő, 2009). In addition, even if not literally homeless, many Hungarians have experienced serious economic, social and psychological instability as a result of the transition. According to Keynesian economics, one way to address high levels of unemployment is to provide large-scale investment in public works. On the face of it, workfare programs could be such a response. However, as the example of the National Public Employment Program illustrates, the requirement to work without any realistic

prospect for a “real job” turns this logic inside out and it becomes a purely disciplinary device.

The crisis of capital and that of the Hungarian state are intimately linked. The authoritarian, anti-poor and neoconservative turn of the *Fidesz* government is deeply embedded in two decades of neoliberal economic and social policy. With few natural resources, little competitive edge in technology and hardly any international clout, Hungary’s development is based on foreign direct investment and loans (Boda, 2009). In this way, the circulation of global surplus capital has a tangible impact on the everyday life of Hungarians. For example, as explained in Chapter 2, one of the main reasons why so many people defaulted on their mortgages after the financial crisis was the vulnerability of loans to foreign exchange rates and thus to the swings of the global economy.

Since the end of state socialism as a ruling system, the state has played a major role in creating favorable conditions for capital. While Hungary’s social spending is somewhat lower than the EU average (and relatively high in the East-Central European region), state economic investment is significantly higher than in other European countries (Magyar Köztársaság Kormánya, 2008). Since 1990, both left and right wing governments have used the politics of “austerity” to address the almost permanent economic crisis, as well as various forms of public assistance to appease the population. At the same time, since its election in 2010, *Fidesz* has seriously restricted social entitlements, while using public money very purposefully to build its own base of local capitalist support. As a result, the Hungarian state today is not reducing in size. Instead, it is reconfiguring itself to fulfill its role as a facilitator of capital investment and extraction. As sociologist Zsuzsa Ferge (2000a) observed:

the demand for a “minimal state” is a selective one: not all state duties come under attack. It threatens primarily the civilizing and welfare functions which promoted relatively peaceful and relatively integrated national coexistence. The deterioration of

the situation that follows may legitimate the strengthening of the policing functions. These processes may trigger a trend towards decivilization threatening important gains of (western, European) civilization. (p. 3)

Since the late 1980s, Hungarian society has been placed on a straightforward track of integration into the current economic world order. According to Loic Wacquant (2010), neoliberalism is a transnational political project that entails four interconnected institutional logics: economic deregulation; welfare state devolution, retraction, and recomposition; an expansive, intrusive, and proactive penal apparatus; and the cultural trope of individual responsibility (p. 213). While the ideology of neoliberalism is never fully implemented in practice (Brenner & Theodore, 2002) and its realization is much more variegated and messy than in theory (see Bohle & Greskovits, 2007). Hungary has experienced these general trends since the late 1980s.

In terms of economic deregulation, the strict controls of the state socialist regime were lifted, the economy liberalized and most public assets privatized or on the way to privatization. The devolution of the welfare state is evident in the shrinking level of state responsibility for social reproduction such as housing and welfare, the gradual dismantling of the social safety net and the growing regulation of the poor through workfare. The penal apparatus of the country has been expanded through legislation that turns social precariousness into criminality (Wacquant, 2010) and the construction of prisons. Finally, public discourse is saturated by the myth of individual responsibility, best exemplified by the infamous statement of a ruling party MP: “those who have nothing are worth just that much” (“Lázár szerint,” 2011).

While the implementation of neoliberalism as a class project (Harvey, 2009) has been quite successful in Hungary (nurker, 2013), it has bred much discontent. According to a 2009 survey about the transition in Eastern Europe, Hungarians stand out with their disappointment

in the new regime, both politically and economically (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2009). According to the survey,

In Hungary, there is clear frustration with the current state of democracy, despite the public's acceptance of the shift to a multiparty system. More than three-quarters of Hungarians (77%) are dissatisfied with the way democracy is working in their country. ... About nine-in-ten think the country is on the wrong track (91%) and that the economy is in bad shape (94%). Disenchantment with political elites is especially strong in Hungary, where only 38% believe voting gives them a say in politics. ... Hungarians are frustrated by the gap between what they want from democracy – such as a free press, free speech and competitive elections – and what they believe they currently have.

The survey found that “the prevailing view in ... Hungary is that people were better off economically under communism” (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2009). In this context, the Hungarian state, regardless of the political orientation of governing party, has for long been in a crisis of legitimacy.

The shift in the Hungarian state's approach to homelessness bears an uncanny similarity to the crisis of hegemony that led to the moral panic around mugging in Great Britain in the 1970s. According to Hall et al. (1978), the moral panic around mugging was neither about mugging nor about crime, but rather about the breakdown of ruling class hegemony over society. As a result, the ruling class – through the mediation of the state – was forced to find a new way to govern, which led to intensified law and order campaigns. In other words, the moral panic was just a symptom of a deeper historical crisis and used to shift the management of class struggle and the capitalist mode of production from consensual governance to coercion.

The intensification of social control and the penalization and criminalization of poverty signal a much deeper structural crisis that is expressed at the level of policing and legislation. In short, these are all symptom of the Hungarian state's failure to address deep-seated social problems in a meaningful way. In order for the ruling class to carry out the capitalist class project, it needs to engage in more state violence. The criminalization of homelessness is essential to this project: first, the definition of housing as a commodity is essential to the maintenance of the capitalist ethos and second, the moral exclusion of those who are useless for the capitalist economy is an efficient tool for the management of surplus populations. In other words, as the ruling class in Hungary is not willing to address the root causes of structural inequality and poverty, it is using criminalization to secure its continuing legitimacy. In all, the current Hungarian state uses the bodies of poor and marginalized people for both political and economic ends: to obscure its failure to achieve the promises of the regime change and to justify its collaboration in the ongoing process of accumulation by dispossession.

Chapter 4.

“When is the time to act, if not now?”⁶⁹

Organizing for housing rights in Hungary: historical overview

It is a commonly held misconception that traditions of citizen activism are weak in Hungary. In fact, taking a closer look at the country’s history it becomes clear that grassroots action has always played an important role in challenging entrenched social relations and forcing social and economic change. Popular struggles around agriculture, land and rural labor loom large throughout Hungarian history. They span from the 1514 uprising of brutally oppressed peasants to the harvest strikes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁷⁰ With growing industrialization and urbanization, cities became important sites of social struggle. For the emerging socialist movements, housing was a central concern, and the early 1900s was probably the most intensive period of large-scale housing organizing in Hungarian history.

The 1956 Revolution against Stalinist rule marked a pivotal moment of pro-democratic collective action, whose significance was also proven by its bloody suppression by the Soviet Union. Since the regime change, local and national citizen activism and issue-based advocacy have been permanent features of Hungarian democracy. At the same time, today there is little effective grassroots control over political processes, citizenship skills are generally weak, and formal rights are often not translated into practice, especially in the case of socially disadvantaged populations.

There are a number of reasons why grassroots struggles are hardly appreciated in Hungarian history despite their obvious significance. One of them is the lack of systematic documentation, especially when it comes to the movements and actions of poor and

⁶⁹ Quote by a rent striker in the early 1900s (in Kassák, 1983, p. 572).

⁷⁰ While this dissertation is focused on urban struggles, rural efforts at social change are extremely important given the history of Hungary as a predominantly agricultural country (see Veres, 1948; Werner, 1908, p. 317). In fact, the rural-urban divide has been used to oppress and control populations in revolt and divide progressive struggles.

marginalized people.⁷¹ For example, while there is ample information about workers' movements in the early 20th century, we know less about the mobilizations of unemployed workers. The lack of documentation and analysis regarding housing-related struggles is particularly apparent. While some scholarly works on housing conditions and housing policy make references to citizen resistance, most urban historiography focuses on the local or national state and the decisions and actions of the ruling elite.

In this chapter, I provide some insights into grassroots activism around housing and homelessness in Hungary from the early 1900s to the regime change. In order to challenge the invisibility of housing struggles in general and especially the efforts of the most vulnerable populations, I have woven together the bits and pieces of scattered historical data uncovered throughout my research.⁷² In assessing the success of these efforts, I look not only at policy outcomes but also consider that people organizing themselves and setting collective goals are achievements in and of themselves. The main questions guiding the chapter are the following: Who engages in struggle? How broad is their base? Who do they mobilize? What are their demands? Are they affirmative or transformative in their goals and vision? How disruptive are their tactics and methods? What resources are available to them? Do they aim for concessions from the state? Are their needs recognized by the state? Do they achieve formal or informal political representation? Are resources allocated to address the problems they articulate?⁷³

⁷¹ Other reasons may include the nature of Hungarian education, where emphasis is placed on rote memorization of significant historical dates as opposed to the understanding of social forces and political processes, which hollows out most social movements. At the same time, the institutionalization of the history of left movements under state socialism has stigmatized them and often prevents the fruitful analysis of their relevance for the present moment.

⁷² While I drew on some primary sources such as newspaper articles and literary pieces, my research for this chapter is based primarily on secondary sources. In order to put together a comprehensive history of housing movements in Hungary, more in-depth archival research is necessary.

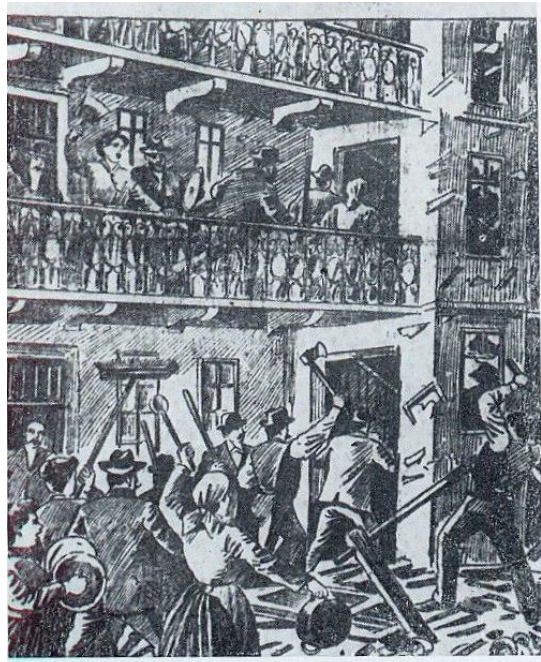
⁷³ In this dissertation, I focus on movement activities by citizens and do not address initiatives that provided services or charity for poor and homeless people. While some more professionalized efforts represent important alternatives to dominant social policy, they fall outside the scope of this work. Examples of such initiatives include the *Hajléktalanok Menhelye Egylet* (Homeless Shelter Association) established in 1876, (see Györi, 2003; Sándor, 2011), the settlement movement in the interwar years (see Hilscher, 1989) as well as the Norm of Eger, which attempted to create a social alternative to begging (see Ferge, 1986). I address unions and political parties to the extent that they got involved with more informal grassroots activities around housing.

1. From disruption to representation: the tenants' movement in Budapest in the early 1900s

The first two decades of the 20th century were a tumultuous period for movement mobilization on the left, and the struggle for decent housing also experienced its most intense period at this time. As noted in Chapter 2, in the early 1900s Budapest was in the midst of a housing crisis. The shortage of housing was unprecedented: in 1900, the ratio of vacant apartments was around 3%. After 1904, the rate dropped to below 1% (László, 1926). The tight housing market led to precarious conditions for tenants. As the practice of rent gouging became widespread, poor families faced extremely high rents (Gyáni, 1992, p. 88). Between 1900 and 1907, rents for small apartments rose by a total of 50% (László, 1926).

In addition to everyday coping strategies such as taking in subletters and bed renters and frequently switching apartments (Gyáni, 1992, p. 83), a tenants' movement also began to take shape. While collective resistance against rent gouging is reported from as early as 1895, large-scale organizing picked up after 1904 (Zimmerman, 2011, p. 59) and tenant mobilization was also supported by the Social Democratic Party, which organized mass meetings to agitate against landlords (Gyáni, 1992, p. 88). Tenants boycotted the renting of vacated apartments and they also started to appeal eviction notices in court, significantly prolonging the procedure, which landlords tried to avoid at all cost. In a 1906 demonstration in Budapest, 40,000 tenants demanded the establishment of an upper limit to rent payments (Zimmerman, 2011, p. 58). From 1907, a series of rent strikes broke out, evicted tenants boycotted buildings known for extremely high rents, and resistance to evictions was increasingly organized (Zimmerman, 2011, p. 59). All of this placed a huge pressure on landlords as the market value of boycotted properties fell significantly.

Lajos Kassák⁷⁴ provides an invaluable account of a rent strike in the early 1900s in a traditionally working class district of Budapest. According to Kassák (1983), this particular rent strike “started as a skirmish among women and developed into a thorough socialist movement” (p. 555). In fact, as he later reports, in addition to the traditionally male-dominated workers’ associations, women played a pivotal role in agitating against high rents and organizing residents. After a period of intensive mobilization (when organizers went from building to building, discussed housing conditions and gathered grievances), residents collectively stopped paying rent. Their aim was to force the owners of their buildings – mostly large banks – to lower the rent and improve the maintenance of the buildings.



13. Illustration of a rent strike in the early 1900s in Budapest

After the second month of the strike, the police was ordered to the premises and forcefully evicted everyone. Because they had nowhere else to go, evicted families set up a temporary camp nearby and refused to leave. After some more serious clashes with the police, the building owners were forced to enter into negotiations and residents moved back into their apartments with some concessions by both parties.

In fact, many rent strikes ended similarly with some kind of compromise or the re-negotiation of the terms of tenancy. In some cases, landlords were forced to sign collective contracts with residents, which regulated the rights and obligations of both parties: they ensured that rents remained at an acceptable level and that the landlord performed their

⁷⁴ Kassák was a factory worker who became a political activist, artist and writer. He was a member of the Social Democratic Party and was involved in the organization of several strikes in the early 1900s. He was a committed leftist and had very complicated, often contentious relationships with communist regimes, both in 1919 and after 1949.

maintenance duties. Many contracts introduced a trustee system where the trustees, many of whom came from the ranks of unionized workers (Gyáni, 1992, p. 90), represented the tenants in all negotiations with the landlord.

Conflicts between landlords and tenants peaked in the early 1910s. In 1910 and 1911, the Social Democratic Party – which had a very progressive housing agenda – organized rent strikes in more than 200 buildings involving more than ten thousand residents. In a few cases, confrontations turned into violence and striking tenants caused some physical damage to a number of buildings. But overall, the strikes were very successful: collective contracts were made in 180 buildings and only 11 evictions took place (Gyáni, 1992, p. 91).

Overall, the tenants' movement had an important role in forcing a public response to the housing crisis. For example, while the tenants' demands to stabilize rents were not met, a new law on tenancy was passed in 1906 that offered some protection from the worst abuses of landlords (Zimmerman, 2011, p. 58). Later, when landlords became more organized and decided to collectively raise rents in 1909 (Gyáni, 1992), many residents refused to pay the higher rent based on exactly these new municipal regulations, which strengthened tenants' rights. Besides, even if reformers such as Mayor Bárczy and others in key positions of the national government played an important role in launching municipal housing construction (see Chapter 2), the pressure from the grassroots contributed significantly to the degree and speed with which it got underway.

The 1910s were characterized by the growing significance of left social movements and the political activism of the working class. In this period, the Social Democratic Party and the labor unions organized one of the largest workers' strikes in Hungarian history. On May 23, 1912, more than 200,000 people took to the streets of Budapest to demand universal suffrage and the Prime Minister's resignation (see Erényi,



14. On “Bloody Thursday” in 1912 hundreds of thousands of workers demanded the right to vote

1952). Although the protest was brutally crushed, the growing influence of the Social Democratic Party was undeniable. By 1917-1918, its mass social base rooted in associations, unions and social movements was able to exert growing pressure on the government (Bódy, 2010, p. 93). In an effort to appease the left, the government ended up initiating a number of pro-poor and pro-worker reforms in the fields of labor rights, food provision and housing.

Despite the lack of formal representation in Parliament, workers gradually gained official representation on many issues including housing. For example, in response to the pressing housing shortage during the First World War, housing authorities were established in 1917 to appropriate vacant apartments or offices. Within these authorities so-called rent committees operated, with both tenants and landlords represented. The Tenants' Association (*Bérlők Egyesülete*), in close alliance with the Social Democratic Party, represented the interests of tenants. The delegate of the social democrats, a union leader, was also a member of the Standing Committee for Housing, which was responsible for long term policy and planning (Bódy, 2010, p. 107).

2. Holding on to housing: shack dwellers in the 1920s and 1930s

Different social groups affected by the housing crisis used various coping strategies. Most people involved in the tenants' movement were organized workers also active in the labor unions. While they struggled to make ends meet, they did not represent the poorest segments of society, and gained some political clout through the social democratic movement. The proliferation of informal settlements and the squatting of land in the 1920s indicated the appearance of a vulnerable group of people whose conditions were much more precarious. Although there is little in-depth information about these communities, they undoubtedly represented an important spontaneous grassroots response to the housing crisis.

The history of *Hangyatelep* (Ants' Colony) illustrates the struggles between shack dwellers, the local municipality and the state (Böröcz, 2009). *Hangyatelep* was an informal settlement in Pesterzsébet, a town on the outskirts of Budapest that existed from the mid-1920s to 1934. The colony, largely made up of wooden shacks, was built on private land, which made it an exception (most shacks were built on municipal property) and also more vulnerable to eviction. Most residents were unemployed or very poor and many of them were Roma (Böröcz, 2009, p. 45-46). As the Great Depression hit, the population of *Hangyatelep* grew exponentially and the settlement ended up housing eight thousand residents.

Despite a series of municipal efforts to evict the entire colony, residents of *Hangyatelep* managed to postpone the destruction of their homes for years. The local government tried to dismantle the colony for the first time in 1929 purportedly because of its bad reputation. However, residents appealed to the regional authorities to stop the municipality's plan and asked for emergency apartments (Böröcz, 2009, p. 47). As they were not offered apartments, their appeal was granted and the evictions suspended. Several years later, in 1931, the municipality got authorization to destroy the settlement. However, this time it decided not to go ahead with the plan for fear that a riot would break out (Böröcz, 2009, p.

55). This indicates that the case of Hangyatelep was not isolated and that during the Great Depression popular resistance represented an important source of power vis-à-vis local authorities. In the end, 5 years after its original plan, the municipality went ahead and destroyed the informal shacks in 1934. While some residents were provided with social support and provisional housing, those who did not receive any help rebuilt their shacks elsewhere (Böröcz, 2009, p. 103), which was not only a common practice at the time, but also a covert form of resistance.

It is very difficult to find information about the internal life of informal settlements. In contemporary accounts, informal and emergency settlements are treated as eyesores and their residents not accorded in-depth – let alone sympathetic – analysis. Shack dwellers were usually portrayed as passive, helpless people living in great material deprivation and moral misery. The statement of a contemporary observer from 1938 seems to be typical of his times: “if someone spends half a day in an emergency settlement, they know that it is not viable for the development of moral creatures” (Szécsi, [1938] 1963, p. 311).

As a refreshing exception, writer Zsigmond Móricz⁷⁵ provides a rather sympathetic portrayal of the shack settlements he visited in person. In a short story about a colony threatened with eviction in 1933, he is obviously impressed with the ingenuity of residents who built houses out of nothing, as well as with their resilience in the face of the most difficult circumstances (Móricz, [1933] 1990). In another, more fictional story, he



15. Slum settlement in the 1930s

writes about the shack dwellers’ various techniques for survival (such as using old tickets to

⁷⁵ Móricz was a significant left-leaning journalist, social critic and writer in the first half of the 19th century. He often addressed issues of poverty and marginalization, especially in rural Hungary, in his works.

take public transportation) as well as about their relationships of support and solidarity (Móricz, [1933] 1987).

In addition to interpersonal or interfamilial ties, religion played an important role in the communal life of informal settlements (Szécsi, 1963, p. 312). Many different religious groups were present in shack-dwelling communities. In fact, one of the great highlights of the history of Hangyatelep was the “mass wedding” organized by the local Catholic church and even attended by the distant relatives of many residents (Böröcz, 2009, p. 78). In his 1933 story, Móricz ([1933] 1990) also describes a religious procession to bless the dwellings of an informal colony. While these activities are not political in nature, they point out the existence of an active communal life inside the “slums.”

Shack settlements represented a potential area of organizing for political movements, too, including the communists. Although it is not clear if they approached self-built informal settlements, one of the local mobilizations of the newly formed Socialist Workers’ Party of Hungary⁷⁶ was an open forum at the Mária Valéria emergency settlement in September 1926. This colony was originally constructed by the state, but quickly turned into a slum and operated much like an informal occupied space in terms of organization and resources. According to a contemporary report, the forum provided an opportunity for people to voice their grievances. As one contemporary account reported, “people [in the slum] live in great misery. They have 8-10 people crowded together in inhumanely small rooms ... There is no school, no doctor and no pharmacy in the settlement” (Történelem, 2010).

As the history of Hangyatelep demonstrates, shack dwellers engaged in multiple forms of resistance and were also ready to defend their homes, if threatened by the authorities. As the main motivation behind the establishment of informal shack settlements was survival, they

⁷⁶ *Magyarországi Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP)* in Hungarian. This was the short-lived legal organization behind the movement of communists that had been banned after the defeat of the Republic of Councils in 1919. While the Social Democratic Party remained a legal organization, it was forced to make so many humiliating compromises to be able to operate that the communists refused to collaborate with them.

did not seem to have any explicitly political goals. Besides, shack dwellers were not involved in the broader movement for housing such as the organization of tenants, and had no direct links with any formal movements or organizations such as the social democrats. Still, their mere presence represented an important challenge to the dominant social and political regime. In addition, according to Gyáni (1992, p. 155), as social conditions were getting worse in the 1930s, the slum residents became more susceptible to radical ideas. In fact, disciplining the masses may well have been one of the main motivations for the authorities' push to eliminate these colonies as soon as possible (Nagy-Csere, 2010, p. 52-53).

3. Making do: resistance and contestations around housing under state socialism

While the forty years of state socialism were characterized by varying levels of political oppression and state interference with everyday life, political participation was institutionalized and there was hardly any room for spontaneous grassroots activism. The Soviet-style dictatorship that emerged after 1948/1949 brutally oppressed all informal and spontaneous activities and did not allow for dissenting voices. However, even as the state attempted to control all aspects of life, people found ways to resist. In the countryside the black market for agricultural products was vibrant and there were a number of important wildcat strikes in key factories (Brown, 2004).

The 1956 Revolution was a response to this brutal oppression and to the dire economic situation of the country. Even though the Revolution was crushed, the former grip of the state had to be loosened and the speed and scale of forced industrialization was moderated. The Party was only able to consolidate its power through a number of concessions. The most important of these was a commitment to continuously raise the standard of living and leave the private lives of citizens relatively free of political control. This consumerist version of

state socialism, unique to Hungary in its scope and scale, was what came to be labeled in the West as “goulash communism.”

Despite the more relaxed politics of the post-1956 socialist state, social participation continued to be highly regulated until the 1980s. Citizen participation in public affairs was organized around officially sanctioned collectives and unions as well as the ruling party’s official youth association, all of which were highly formalized and hierarchical. At the same time, the population resisted political oppression in a number of subtle ways. Passive resistance such as absenteeism was common at the workplace, a vibrant second economy developed around jobs, goods and housing as well as culture (fine arts, music and clothing in particular). Undoubtedly, while all of these subtle forms of resistance gave the ruling elite a headache, they did not shake the hegemony of the communist party (see Brown, 2004).

As housing was a primary source of legitimacy for the post-1956 regime, it was also a relatively highly contested area. However, the vast majority of challenges took place at the individual level in the form of complaints or efforts to use personal and political connections to achieve benefits. Even as the system of distribution of apartments became more standardized in the 1970s, personal and political connections continued to play a significant role in access to housing (especially its location and quality) (Majtényi, 2009, p. 36). The little collective action that existed around housing was geared more towards pressuring the system for more individual wiggle room than reshaping underlying inequalities or challenging favoritism.

Workers who moved into the newly built housing estates engaged in multiple forms of resistance. In the late 1940s, for example, some residents of a Budapest housing estate refused to pay rent because they were not satisfied with their apartments and found out that residents of a nearby estate were allowed to go into arrears. In the socialist context, such acts of refusal amounted to a rent strike (Prakfalvi, 2009). Other instances of resistance included the use of

municipal apartments for unintended purposes (e.g. for raising livestock), refusing to leave an apartment after a worker was laid off, or damaging the apartment as a form of revenge (Prakfalvi, 2009, p. 136-137).

The main concern of public housing residents was proper maintenance. The state-owned property management companies (*Ingatlankezelő Vállalat, IKV* in Hungarian) did not have the funds to implement major improvements and kept maintenance to a minimum. These companies were famous for their slow and inadequate responses to residents' needs and many residents waged daily battles with the company's representatives to get them to fix things. In fact, property management was one of the few "soft" areas of state socialist bureaucracy: citizens had direct access to state representatives through these companies and could advocate for their interests in person (Nagy, 2011). As in so many areas of everyday life, good political connections were especially helpful for getting things done.

Workers' hostels were also among the venues where conflicts between citizens and the state manifested themselves in both tangible and symbolic forms. In 1960, for example, residents of the House of Lords complained about an eviction they thought was unlawful (Horváth, S., 2012). In their letter, residents asked the management to stop the eviction or provide alternative accommodation. They even appealed to the local government for help. In the end, they were allowed to stay on until the entire building was closed down for renovation – then everyone was evicted (Horváth, S., 2012, p. 367). Although many of these incidents were not documented, such small acts of advocacy were certainly abundant.

While squatting is not necessarily an explicitly political act, it represents a challenge to both dominant rules of property and social norms.⁷⁷ The relationship of the socialist state to the occupation of empty property remained ambiguous despite the increasingly strict legislation. Housing occupation under state socialism came in waves that were closely tied to

⁷⁷ See the squatter settlements in the 1920s and 1930s earlier in this chapter.

periods of social upheaval. The first major wave of occupations took place during and right after the Second World War, when people moved into abandoned properties (see Chapter 2). The authorities condoned this practice and the system that came into force in 1953 to regulate the distribution of nationalized apartments partly grew out of the management of these spontaneous occupations.

The second wave of large-scale housing occupations occurred in the midst of the social and political chaos of the 1956 Revolution. Thousands of people moved into apartments that were either abandoned or under construction by the state. Among the people who occupied apartments, many had lived in miserable conditions or had an apartment that was severely damaged during the uprising. Thousands of people who had been made homeless by an earthquake and floods in other parts of the country were also looking for housing in Budapest. Then there were those who had been waiting for an apartment for years and finally decided to take the issue into their own hands (Sindelyes, 2008). In the 13th district of Budapest alone, for example, 1100 apartments were illegally occupied in this period (Eörsi et al., 2006, p. 65). Given the large number of squatters, the state was not able to evict all of them. Instead, in 1957 a law was passed to regulate those who occupied vacant apartments during the 1956 uprising. According to the law, most of them were allowed to become tenants (Györi & Gábor, 1990, p. 79), although some had to pay a fine. The law also aimed to settle the issue of housing occupations for good: squatting was declared a serious offense and the state rejected any further responsibility for providing accommodation for squatters (Györi & Gábor, 1990, p. 77).

The third wave of squatting was a more diffuse trend in the decades after 1956 as poor rural – mostly Roma – families moved to Budapest to find work. In general, the socialist state tried to refrain from evictions and attempted to provide some kind of emergency accommodation for families who were forced to leave these apartments (Matern, n.d.). In the

1980s, however, as economic and social conditions were deteriorating, this taboo became less strict and the state stepped up its efforts to evict squatters. In 1987 for example, 130 Gypsy families were evicted in a concentrated action in one district of Budapest alone (Matern, 1991, p. 50).

The main form of resistance under state socialism was “internal emigration,” a fundamentally antipolitical attitude that expressed opposition to the state by not engaging with it and creating new meanings and forms of communication in private life (Havasréti, 2006). The “bum” (*csöves*) youth subculture that emerged in the 1970s was a typical example of this attitude. Rooted in youth poverty and social disillusionment, bums had no overt political intentions. Similarly to Western punk culture, their main form of resistance was playing and listening to music that was rejected by the system and pursuing a lifestyle that defied dominant norms, such as drug and alcohol consumption. Authorities reacted very aggressively to street youths: bums were a target of police control and constantly at risk of deportation for their “dangerous avoidance of work.” The *csöves* broke taboos with their musical taste, clothing and “antisocial” behavior, but also by openly displaying youth poverty in public. In this way, they posed a serious challenge to the dominant notion that poverty did not exist and that social institutions were working properly in socialist Hungary.⁷⁸ At the same time, the *csöves* were used to justify the criminalization of poverty (see Chapter 3). According to state socialist ideology, wage labor was the basis for full membership in society. Assuming that everyone was able to work if they wanted to, those who refused to work could not expect social entitlements or compassion.

The single most important exception to the more covert and individualized forms of resistance was the Fund to Support the Poor (*Szegényeket Támogató Alap*, SZETA), an

⁷⁸ In a famous speech, Kádár stated the following: “Here unemployment does not threaten people, there is no existential insecurity as in capitalism. Those who want to work will find work, and they will get by. And those lost creatures, who wander around in capitalist countries in the hundreds of thousands, millions, do not exist in Hungary! Here we have the institutions and forums to help people in need.” Source: <http://tartarossz.blogspot.hu/2012/01/szemelvenyek-szocializmusbol-kadar.html>

“independent civic initiative to correct social policy” (Kis & Kőszeg, 1985). The group was founded in 1979 by students of the sociologist István Kemény. Kemény was forced to emigrate after he had publicly talked about the existence of poverty in Hungary. SZETA’s main activity was to help poor people through the donations of private citizens. When SZETA members learned about the problems of particular families or individuals (through the mail or by direct contact), they organized drives among their own families, friends and broader networks to support them financially or otherwise. In this way, its primary significance was to break the regime’s silence around poverty and initiate some grassroots action around it. As the organization was not officially sanctioned by the regime, and many of its members and supporters played an important role in the emerging democratic opposition, SZETA was under constant police surveillance (Kardos, 1998).

With a few notable exceptions, SZETA did not engage in open political confrontation with the ruling elite, nor did it openly challenge the status quo. As one founder put it, “in a democratic society, SZETA with its current goals and methods would remain a totally uninteresting and unknown group” (Kis & Kőszeg, 1985). Still, because of its existence as an autonomous citizens’ initiative that highlighted the imperfections of existing socialism, the group represented an ideological and discursive challenge to the regime and its monolithic public sphere. According to another founder,

SZETA carried strong political meanings from the beginning and created political tension. Its formation was in itself political because in today’s Hungary [in the 1980s] it is a political act to create an organization without permission, outside of official structures, no matter what its goals are. It poses an example that there are unused possibilities of autonomous social activity even within the current tight boundaries. (Kis & Kőszeg, 1985)

While some of its members were involved in the publication of a samizdat journal with articles highly critical of the regime,⁷⁹ SZETA as an organization did not move beyond the basic model of charity. Nevertheless, its significance lies in the fact that it broke the social taboo around poverty, created a forum for the discussion of different kinds of social policy and established an autonomous space for citizen participation and critique.

4. Economic restructuring and political opening around the regime change

The tragedy of Hungary's democratic transformation in 1989 was that the reclaiming of political rights did not go hand in hand with the reassertion of social rights. Even though the modification of the Constitution that came into effect in 1989 declared Hungary to be a *social market economy*, the shock of structural adjustment and the radical ideological break with state socialism forced by both international capital and domestic constituents ruled out any possibility of realizing it.

Under state socialism, civil and political rights were highly restricted, while social rights such as “the right to work, culture, health care, [and] social services” (Ferge, 2002, p. 5) were enforced by the state. However, there is an important contradiction in the relationship between social and political rights, as pointed out by sociologist Zsuzsa Ferge (2002):

I am not convinced that social *rights* [emphasis in original] may exist without the essential (substantial) assertion of civil and political rights, as they can be guaranteed just by those two other types of rights. In any case social rights are certainly more legitimate, stronger and less easy to repeal if they are claimed and fought for by means of civil rights, and voted democratically for by means of political rights than if they are gifts from above. (p. 5)

⁷⁹ The publication is called *Beszélő*. It was published from 1981 to 1989 as an illegal publication and provided an important forum for the emerging democratic opposition. After the regime change, it became a formal journal that continued to publish articles by mostly liberal and left-leaning authors.

The political changes in the late 1980s created an opening for the assertion of social rights through political participation in democratic processes. Even if Hungary had nothing comparable to the Polish Solidarity movement and state socialism was not toppled by a popular uprising, social mobilization played an important role in the regime's period of crisis. A network of progressive student circles, anti-military initiatives, green movements (Szabó, 1998a, p. 124), samizdat publications and SZETA's anti-poverty work created an important clandestine civil culture in the 1980s. After a long period of suppressed mobilization, these initiatives took center stage during the transformation. Large street protests took place in 1988 and 1989 on the anniversaries of the 1956 and 1848 Revolutions, and the leaders of the underground opposition became key participants in the negotiations that led to the peaceful transition of power. After the collapse of the old regime, hundreds of parties were registered and former opposition groups entered Parliament as the multiparty electoral system was established.

The social demands that were present in the early days of the transition were quickly drowned out. SZETA's case provides a telling example of two typical processes at the time. On the one hand, with the establishment of representative democracy, the reinstatement of civil rights and a generally amicable political climate, grassroots activism turned into the provision and management of services. In 1989 SZETA became a registered association and elected a board to replace the former informal leadership. It also started to receive public funds, which it used, among other things, to open a home for battered women, the first of its kind in Hungary. In this sense, it became a typical service-providing NGO. Importantly, however, despite its formalization, SZETA retained a progressive stance throughout its operation until the mid-1990s: it was a fierce supporter of squatters and its members used direct action to prevent evictions.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ In 1991, for example, SZETA held a demonstration along with other social service organizations in Budapest's 14th district against the eviction of squatter families. Some activists blocked the entrance of the

On the other hand, liberalism as a political ideology that embraced social as well as economic principles vis-à-vis state socialism gradually became an almost purely economic stance. Some original members of SZETA played prominent roles in post-socialist politics as representatives of SZDSZ (*Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége*, Coalition of Free Democrats). For example, Ottila Solt, the group's founder was an MP from 1990 to 1994 and many SZETA members and supporters had important roles in shaping social policy in post-socialist Hungary. However, despite SZETA's presence in mainstream politics, the question of poverty quickly disappeared from public discourse and social policy was not at the forefront of national politics (Bukta, 2004). In practice, social policy was limited to disaster management without any long term or in-depth intervention. Gradually, the ideology of SZDSZ was becoming more restricted to economic liberalism and issues of poverty and inequality did not play a significant role on its political agenda.⁸¹ After several terms as a coalition member in government, the party lost all of its grounding in the progressive left and practically dissolved after the 2010 elections.

5. “We are humans too:” homeless activism around the regime change

The changing social and political climate also induced some drastic changes in the social perception of homelessness and the readiness of homeless people to make demands on the state. In fact, the most turbulent period of Hungarian homeless activism before 2010 took place from the winter of 1989 to the winter of 1990. In three waves of protest, through direct action and negotiations, homeless activists and their supporters forced the government to acknowledge the existence of homelessness and the responsibility of the public to address it.

building and forced the local mayor to negotiate with them. As one participant remembers the scene: “I told them that they should give us the building as it is, and we will not ask for more. We will move in and something will change” (Romhányi, 2010). In the end, the building was turned over to the Maltese Charity Services (*Máltai Szeretetszolgálat*), which has run it as a family shelter ever since.

⁸¹ While the poignant social critique of the early years was lost, religious liberties, gay rights, and equality before the law (especially segregated education) continued to be important topics throughout the party's career.

From 1988, the existence of mass homelessness became a public issue and grassroots responses to poverty also started to take shape. The first civil organization formed specifically around the topic of homelessness was the *Hajléktalanokért Társadalmi Bizottság* (Social Committee for the Homeless) in 1988. The committee grew out of an interaction between sociologist Péter Győri and a workers' hostel resident, Tibor Ungi, who advocated against rising hostel fees (Pikk, 1994, p. 61). According to the committee's founding document,

the people suffering from the lack of housing have difficulties advocating for themselves, and their interests are not represented, [so] we decided to help implement the right to housing and put an end to homelessness in a socially organized manner.

(“Hajléktalanokért” Társadalmi Bizottság Alapítólevele, p. 1)

The committee's aims were to promote research and development in the area of housing and social policy, make policy recommendations, support homeless people's legal protection, and promote social solidarity (“Hajléktalanokért” Társadalmi Bizottság Alapítólevele, p. 2). Later, in the winter of 1989, the committee played a very important role as a facilitator between homeless protestors and the local government. Eventually, it stopped functioning when *Menhely Alapítvány* (Shelter Foundation), the first official homeless services provider in Hungary was created in 1990 with the participation of some of its members.

The first homeless demonstrations started in the winter of 1989, when the state railroad company (MÁV) declared that it would close down all train stations in Budapest at night. Given that by this time, hundreds of homeless people slept in train stations, this move was clearly an attempt to keep homeless people out of MÁV property.

A number of social organizations and some of



16. Homeless people sleeping in a train station in Budapest in 1990

the newly formed political parties protested against this measure and asked the railroad company to reconsider its decision. According to a contemporary observer, the railroad company

used all means necessary to close train stations, even risking that customers will not be able to use waiting areas. They used their own security guards and the police to chase homeless people away. At times, they came to clean the waiting rooms with water hoses. People who were sleeping there had to get up. The railroad workers said that they had to sanitize the room, they had to work there. (Iványi, 1997)

In response to these attacks, on November 28, 1989, homeless people gathered on Blaha Lujza square and started a spontaneous sit-in. They demanded that empty properties of the communist party be turned into emergency housing. The protestors were a mix of people from different train stations including the elderly and “radical youth” (Pikk, 1994, p. 62). According to contemporary accounts, “this was a rather spontaneous demonstration, a collective action without any outside or inside troublemakers. ... The majority of the participants were people with strong characters and great self-confidence” (“Húszéves a Menhely alapítvány,” 2010).

Citizens showed solidarity with the protestors and brought them blankets and food (Romhányi, 2010). Civil society organizations wrote letters to the ministry and the Prime Minister demanding adequate solutions. SZETA and the Social Committee for the Homeless declared that they were ready to run temporary shelters if the government established the necessary conditions. A group called the *Hátrányos Helyzetűek Országos Tanácsa* (National Council for the Socially Disadvantaged) was formed to advocate on behalf of homeless people (“Hátrányos Helyzetűek,” 1989).

The police response to the homeless protests was ambivalent. While police officers were ready to harass people in railroad stations, they were reluctant to use force against the

protestors at Blaha Lujza square. Partly, the police's ambivalence came from its shifting role as the old regime was coming to an end and its heavy reliance on the police to maintain social order was starting to be questioned (Pikk, 1994, p. 62).

There was a lot of anxiety in the air, especially when the riot police entered the underground passage in gear we have never seen before, and blocked the exits. But they did not get any orders to vacate the premises, so suddenly they all left. This is when the authorities decided how to deal with the issue of homelessness – as a policing issue or a social problem. (Romhányi, 2010)

Finally, in an important statement on December 1, the police chief of Budapest declared that homelessness was not a police issue (“A budapesti rendőrfőkapitány,” 1989). As a result, they did not interfere with the protest.

The protest had repercussions in both local and national politics. After four decades of political denial, the Budapest Assembly discussed “temporary solutions to address the situation of the homeless” on November 15⁸² and on November 29 homelessness was on the official agenda of the Council of Ministers (Bényei, 1999). The protestors started negotiations with the local authorities, facilitated by some of their supporters. This is how Péter Győri remembers the negotiations:

I represented them [the homeless protestors], but they were absolutely present. They always had delegates at the meetings. I was only a mediator. In the negotiations, there were always two or three people from the local government, at least two people from among the protestors, and me as a mediator who tried to be an interpreter between the two sides. (“Húszéves a Menhely alapítvány,” 2010)

A few days into the sit-in, the municipality started to offer temporary solutions to address the situation. At first, around 200 homeless people were moved to a temporary shelter

⁸² Source: <http://infoszab.budapest.hu:8080/aki/tva/Tir.aspx?scope=kozgyules&sessionid=3&agendaitemid=19>

in a school gym (“Húszéves a Menhely alapítvány,” 2010). Later in December, a building in Vajdahunyad street was opened to offer placement to homeless people. At first, residents ran the facility on their own, without much outside intervention. Unfortunately, this resulted in a huge chaos and residents were not able to control violence on the premises. Police raids were also frequent. Activists of Shelter Foundation, which had been jointly created by the Budapest local government and civil society organizations including SZETA, were there to help out, but their role was ambiguous. It was not clear who was in charge and for a long time, the building operated mostly as a legal squat. After 9 months of ad hoc operation, the Shelter Foundation decided to close the building for renovation and from then on, they took over the management of the shelter. As one social worker recounts:

We had to take charge, because previously we had very little to do with what was happening there. We closed the doors and whatever they wanted was happening there. Violence and terror were dripping off the walls. According to the daily journals, the ambulance came two or three times a day, but sometimes even more often. People got injured, there were many suicide attempts and we often had to call the ambulance because people were in such bad physical condition that they fainted. (Iványi, 1997)

In this process, both the civil organizations and the homeless people who were involved in the protests experienced a significant status change, as they both started to move into the management model of social services.⁸³ As for the status of homeless people, one contemporary observer put it quite succinctly: “first they moved in as ‘hosts’ or free people among certain boundaries and a few months later, they became clients” (“Húszéves a Menhely alapítvány,” 2010). Activists, on the other hand, turned into social service providers and building managers as they had to develop social infrastructure from scratch. This status

⁸³ For more on the shortcomings of this model, see Chapter 2.

shift predicted a bleak future: social services became highly institutionalized and the alliance between homeless people and their supporters lost its transformative potential.

The second wave of protests started on January 11, 1990. Despite the two shelters that were opened in December, many people still had nowhere to spend their nights. Around 200 people continued to live at the Déli railroad station and decided to launch a strike to demand housing (see Mihályfi, 1994). The protest was joined by András Nagy Bandó, a popular comedian, who held a public gathering at the station on January 21 and declared the foundation of a homeless party called the Front of the Nation's Poor



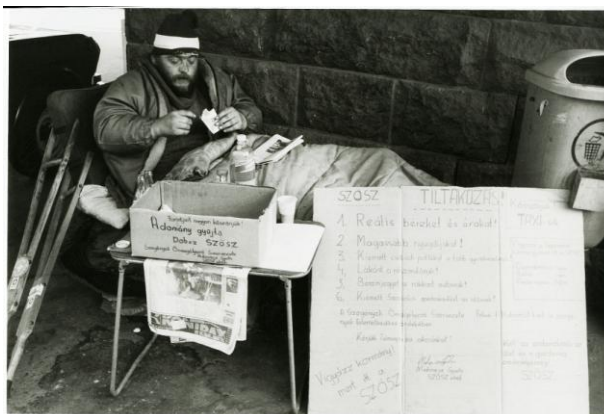
17. "Housing for the needy!" Poster from the Déli railroad station protest

(*Nemzet Szegényeinek Frontja*). The idea was to apply for the money that every new political party was entitled to get and use it to create temporary housing. Although this idea was quickly tabled, the protestors and their supporters negotiated for days with the authorities to arrange for proper accommodation. At the same time, rail workers staged a protest against the homeless sit-in because they were not able to perform their jobs properly ("A Déli pályaudvar," 1990). Under pressure, the authorities first moved the protestors to a youth camp in the hills of Buda, and then to military barracks outside of Budapest, which could host up to 400 people (Romhányi, 2010).

In both the youth camp and what later became the Social Rehabilitation Home, homeless people displayed a rather high level of self-organization. The Poor People's Self-Help Coalition (*Szegények Önsegítő Szövetsége, SZÖSZ*) was responsible for managing the donations arriving at the shelter. According to a contemporary report,

the homeless have created a self-government with the active and invaluable help of András Nagy Bandó. They take care of cleaning, cooking and guarding the place. According to police reports, there haven't been any conflicts with local residents so far ("Németh Miklós válaszlevele," 1990).

From the beginning, two separate staffs were responsible for running the Social Rehabilitation Home: one was the homeless self-government group and the other the municipal staff (Pikk, 1994, p. 70). The assessment of the homeless self-government is quite ambiguous, depending on who tells the story. While municipal staff tended to emphasize chaos, Nagy Bandó was proud that residents took charge. From the city's



18. Hunger strike by the leader of Szegények Önszolgáltató Szövetsége (SZÖSZ) in 1990

perspective, the structure of self-organization was unclear and questions around financial accountability and abuse arose (Pikk, 1994, p. 69). According to Nagy Bandó, the accusations were false and municipal bureaucrats were not ready to adequately handle the situation. In the spring, the comedian left and in September 1990, after many internal conflicts, the shelter became a part of the municipal homeless services system.⁸⁴

The third and final wave of protest took place in the winter of 1990/1991. These actions were much less organized and more successfully repressed. As with the previous two protests, this one also began with a struggle over access to train stations, when the Coalition for the Socially Disadvantaged announced a demonstration at the Déli railroad station from September to December. The demonstration would have served two purposes: to reserve a heated place for those who could not get into municipal shelters, and to create a forum for

⁸⁴ The Social Rehabilitation Home also became a center for experimentation and professional development in the area of social services. For example, they held one of the first conferences on homelessness there in the summer of 1990 ("Tanácskozás a hajléktalanság megelőzéséről," 1990).

public protest against the lack of housing. In the end, however, the police did not give permission for the demonstration (“Nem engedélyezték,” 1990). On November 1, the deadline set by the railroad company to close all stations for the night, homeless people moved to occupy some parts of the Keleti railroad station. In response, rail workers went on strike and demanded that the police remove the homeless (“A Keleti pályaudvar,” 1990). From then on, the police took a leading role in pushing homeless people out of train stations and keeping them away. At the same time, further steps were taken to address the crisis: MÁV offered some of its facilities to be used as shelters (which continue to operate to this day), the city also opened some new shelters and a state secretary for homelessness was appointed to coordinate government measures and policies.

In addition to organized examples of self-advocacy, individual acts of resistance were also frequent around the regime change. In January 1990, a few homeless people decided to demand housing by setting up tents in front of the Parliament. At first, the police acknowledged the camp as a form of protest, but it later dismantled the tents based on local camping ordinances. With the help of András Nagy Bandó, one protestor got a low-quality social apartment (Nagy Bandó, 2009). Another protestor, Csövi (a nickname that is short for “bum”) – who had also participated in the Blaha Lujza square sit-in – was sent to the Social Rehabilitation Home. Csövi refused to go, insisting that he wanted a home and not a temporary bed. He continued the protest for months and was detained several times (-It [Solt Otilia], n.d.).

In all, the 1989-1990 protests represented an unprecedented milestone in the history of grassroots homeless mobilization. Their significance lies in the fact that homeless people forced both local and national authorities to acknowledge the crisis and to devote time, energy and resources to alleviate immediate suffering. However, it also became clear that beyond the servicing of immediate needs there was little political will to address the reality of

homelessness. Thus as soon as the first “solutions” were born, they also became the last: the categories of “homeless” and “shelter” have become so connected that they have been almost impossible to decouple ever since (Misetics, 2010a, p. 36).

6. Struggling for social rights in post-socialist Hungary

SZETA was not the only grassroots organization concerned with issues of poverty and social rights in post-socialist Hungary. The history of the Company of Those Living Under the Subsistence Minimum (*Létminimum Alatt Élők Társasága*, LAÉT) illustrates many of the contradictions of Hungarian civil and political society right after the regime change. LAÉT was founded in 1992 at a time when many people were hit hard by the realities of the political changes: people lost their jobs in droves, factories were closing down and the euphoria over the collapse of socialism was over. Founded in Bicske, a declining suburb of Budapest with high unemployment and poverty rates (Szabó, 1998b, p. 72), LAÉT had firm roots in the working class. The movement rallied around issues of poverty and unemployment and was explicitly opposed to the right-wing politics of the MDF government⁸⁵ formed after the first free elections (Moldova, 2002). In 1992, the group organized a large-scale hunger strike against the increase of the VAT: close to 200 people participated and the action lasted a total of 41 days (Szalai, E., 1993, p. 36). Although in the end the VAT was raised, an exception was made for medications, which represented an important achievement for the movement (Major, 2005). Later, LAÉT started a petition to dismiss the Parliament and declare new elections. The organization managed to collect 100,000 signatures by January 1993, an incredible feat at the time. However, the referendum was not permitted because the Constitutional Court ruled that a mandate of elected Parliamentary representatives cannot be revoked.

⁸⁵ *Magyar Demokrata Fórum* (Hungarian Democratic Forum), the party that gained majority in the first free elections after 1989.

According to Szabó (1998b), LAÉT “intended to be a truly popular movement on a mass scale” (p. 84). It was a significant initiative as it questioned the political elite’s commitment to social issues at a time when the country was undergoing the most painful phases of structural adjustment. The group’s use of anti-institutional tactics (Szabó, 1998b, p. 76) also set it apart from many emerging civil society organizations, which tended to rely on more conventional advocacy and lobbying activities. Even though LAÉT did not have a highly developed organizational structure, the media played an important role in transmitting its message (Szabó, p. 1998b, 78) and its actions resonated with a large portion of society (Szabó, 1998b, p. 92).

The organization’s decline was symptomatic of post-socialist Hungarian civil society. After the failure of the petition drive, the organization splintered into different factions. As a political organization, LAÉT became insignificant. However, in 1993 it was institutionalized as a charitable NGO whose main activity was to collect and distribute donations such as food and clothes. In this way, it did not disrupt the functioning of the state and ended up conforming to the logic of emergency solutions to poverty. Although it is difficult to assess the organization’s social impact, it managed to mobilize a lot of local charity drives. In 2006, it had more than 200 local chapters (Major, 2005). After the death of its leader, the organization went downhill and in 2008 its Budapest headquarters were closed by the local government.

The fact that the collapse of the state socialist regime was due mostly to global economic and political forces had a lasting impact on national social and political conditions. While the transition was politically negotiated between the ruling elite and the leaders of the opposition, economically it was mainly orchestrated by the demands of international investors and organizations. At the same time, poor people had few advocates in mainstream politics. The platforms of Parliamentary parties were not radically different from each other as they

“differentiated themselves around rather symbolic or culturally oriented issues, whilst the real situation was dominated by an underlying consensus on the market economy, on a pro-Western orientation in foreign relations, and on political pluralism” (Szabó, 1998a, p. 126). Poor people’s level of self-organization was low and they did not find any powerful allies in mainstream politics. Even as social inequalities grew and the standard of living sharply declined, no mass movement developed to advocate for social rights. In this way, the political opening of the early 1990s did not bring a reinforcement of social rights, but quite the opposite: the economic exclusion of large segments of the population was closely intertwined with their political marginalization.

7. The Roma: struggling for civil rights and fighting against segregation

Under state socialism, Roma activism was restricted to efforts at gaining recognition as an ethnic minority and pursuing cultural activities. If ethnic conflicts existed, they rarely, if ever, became public. However, the social fermentation around the regime change also created an opportunity for Roma Hungarians to move against their historical maltreatment. The first open ethnic conflict in socialist Hungary took place in Miskolc, an industrial city in the Northeast of Hungary, after the city’s residential relocation plan became public in 1988.

According to the plans of the municipality, the mostly poor Roma residents of downtown Miskolc would be relocated to a newly built settlement of low quality apartments on the city’s periphery. While the plan was touted by the authorities as an attempt to improve the living conditions of the Roma, a local Roma teacher, Aladár Horváth, some Roma residents of the downtown area and progressive allies from Budapest launched an anti-ghetto campaign. This campaign is often considered as the birth of the Roma civil rights movement in Hungary (Ladányi, 2009). While Roma municipal officials supported the relocation plan, the opposition got so much publicity that the city council voted it down. After the civil

victory, members of the campaign founded Phralipe, the first independent Roma organization and Horváth became a Member of Parliament on the slate of SZDSZ.

It is probably no accident that the first instance of Roma political activism was in the field of housing. According to Horváth (2000),

housing offers a precise mirror image of the quality of life. By analyzing the housing problems of the Roma, we understand perfectly the country's social and economic policies as well as the relationship between local and national authorities and minorities.

To address these problems, the Roma Foundation for Civil Rights (*Roma Polgárjogi Alapítvány*, RPA) was founded in 1995 by Gypsy intellectuals as a direct continuation of the anti-ghetto struggles.

While RPA did not mobilize a mass base, the organization fought against ethnic segregation and stood up for the rights of squatters, using a variety of protest techniques including civil disobedience. From 1995 to 1998, RPA spearheaded a fight against segregation in Székesfehérvár, a mid-size city close to Budapest, where the local government wanted to relocate thirteen Roma families to a segregated colony of low-quality housing on the edge of the city. Under powerful civil pressure, the municipality ended up offering the families social housing units in the downtown area. In his evaluation of the campaign, Horváth pointed out the significance of the fact that RPA did not take over state services (as was the case of homeless service providers, for example) but forced the state itself to take meaningful action:

We did not build housing and we did not take over municipal and state functions. Instead, we forced the local government to care for its Roma citizens by offering them no more and no less but exactly the same as the non-Roma poor (Horváth, A., 2000).

RPA also stood up against the eviction of Roma squatters through a combination of legal aid and direct action. After the regime change, the first mass evictions of squatters took place in 1995 and 1997 in the 9th district of Budapest, when more than 200 families – most of them Roma – were evicted from an area slated for large-scale rehabilitation (Horváth, A., 2000).

One of RPA's most important achievements was to get the mayor of Budapest to introduce an informal winter moratorium on evictions years before an enforceable version was enacted as national law in 2003. The origins of this initiative go back to 1999, when RPA clashed with the local government of Budapest's 7th district over the eviction of dozens of Roma squatters. That year, the organization called for a moratorium on the eviction of all families from November to April, regardless of their legal status (Diósi, 2000). The call was supported by many grassroots organizations, the major churches as well as two parliamentary parties (Horváth, A., 2000) and the mayor of Budapest also endorsed it. From then on, until his term was over in 2010, the mayor called on local municipalities to suspend all evictions from November to April.⁸⁶ While rarely officially acknowledging it, most district governments in Budapest have tended to respect the call and do not go ahead with evictions in the winter ("Lejárt a kilakoltatási," 2002).⁸⁷

In all, the work of RPA has been extremely significant in protecting and advancing the rights of the most oppressed social and ethnic group in Hungary. Their activities in the field of housing were crucial in battling segregation and discrimination. Over the years, the organization has acted as a facilitator in around 150 cases of ethnic conflict ("Szitokszó lett," 2010). In 2010 RPA discontinued its previous activities and Horváth announced the organization's transformation into a research and training institute. Today, while initiatives to

⁸⁶ Officially, the mayor of Budapest does not have jurisdiction over the individual district mayors, so this could only be a personal plea with political implications, but did not include any formal obligations.

⁸⁷ There are several differences and overlaps between the informal moratorium in Budapest that started as a tradition in 1999 and the official moratorium enacted in 2003. On the one hand, the national moratorium covers a shorter period (from December 1 to March 1) and it specifically excludes squatters as a protected group, while the Budapest moratorium intends to stop all official evictions during the winter. On the other, the mayor's call mostly intended to prevent evictions from social housing, while the national moratorium refers to all evictions, initiated by either municipalities or private persons.

support the Roma abound, a powerful movement to advocate for the group that is considered the biggest loser of the regime change is still waiting to be born.

8. Tenant organizing after the regime change

After a long period of dormancy, tenant activism revived in the chaotic conditions of post-socialist privatization. First, there were many local initiatives of tenants trying to protect their interests against the local authority. In most cases, their aim was to restore and maintain the quality of their buildings (Győri & Matern, 1997, p. 137). Second, homeowners' associations were formed to create good terms for buying municipal housing. Third, the Tenants' Association, founded in 1988 and formalized in 1989, represented large-scale tenant organizing that engaged in both advocacy and direct support.

In 1990, the family support center in Budapest's 7th district engaged in an intensive project to organize the residents of an area slated for rehabilitation (Gosztonyi, 1995). The plan, which was already in place under socialism, projected the displacement of 400 households, and would have privatized most of the social housing in the area. The social workers of the family support center organized various meetings for the different constituents of the area, two of which became particularly important. The members of *Erzsébetvárosi Szükséglakás Igénylők Köre* (ESZIK, Circle of People Requesting Emergency Apartments in Erzsébetváros) wanted to put pressure on the local government to provide them with social housing. Among other things, ESZIK engaged in participatory action research to document vacant units in the district, which they used to draw up an innovative plan for the distribution of social housing. The plan eventually was presented to the local mayor, who agreed to hand over the management of a number of apartments to the association.

The other group was called *Tetőt a Fejünk Fölé* (Roof Over Our Heads), which organized squatters who wanted to formalize their status or request social housing. The

squatters' group had regular meetings and worked to put pressure on the local government to address their situation. In their founding document, they explained their demands:

We don't want anything else than any other person: a roof over our heads – a safe place that is our home – a dry place in the rain – a warm place in the cold – a place that has both hot and cold water – a place where we can have a private life. ... This was our last resort out of desperation. We have become squatters because we had no other option. (quoted in Gosztonyi, Madlena & Talyigás, 1992)

Unfortunately, the group did not manage to move beyond the initial stage for several reasons. On the one hand, it was difficult for many people to enter the mobilization because of their precarious situation. On the other, as negotiations with the local government progressed and the situation of some members started to be sorted out, people gradually lost interest in organizing. With the formalization procedure, the informality of squatting as a resource was also gradually lost. While the group did not manage to force the municipality to address the situation of squatters en masse, the local government started to use some basic standards for providing apartments on a social basis.

The Tenants' Association (*Lakásbérlők Egyesülete*) had already started to take shape under state socialism as an informal organization. The founding president had been an outspoken advocate of tenants' rights for years and had engaged in a long struggle with the municipal property management company (Győri & Matern, 1997, p. 106). Before 1989, the main aim of members was to get their own buildings properly maintained. They also advocated for tenant self-management, an important concept that never took root at a larger scale.

After the regime change, the association became formalized and advocated for comprehensive local and national housing policies and supported tenants in solving their individual cases. The organization did not engage in mass mobilization, but focused on high-

level legal advocacy (e.g. attacking municipal rent increases at the Constitutional Court), running a legal clinic for tenants (which handled about 1000 cases a year) and advocating for more social housing and better municipal housing management. According to Pickvance (1994), the Tenants' Association was "not a strong demand-making group using unconventional methods, but a service providing organization which [advised] on legislation and [acted] as a partner of government" (p. 444).

Throughout its operation, the organization struggled to be recognized as an official tenant advocate. According to the 1993 law on apartment rentals, local governments had to consult both tenant and landlord organizations before passing a local ordinance on housing. Based on this obligation, the Tenants' Association demanded that local governments not only consult them to fulfill formal requirements, but that their opinion be taken into serious consideration. They also argued for more time to review local housing laws as well as public financial support to sustain the organization.⁸⁸

In contrast to its working class precedents in the early 1900s, tenant organizing in post-socialist Hungary was led by middle-class professionals who had a relatively narrow field of vision. Even though they provided legal support for social housing residents and aimed to reinvigorate municipal housing, the organization did not specifically mobilize social housing residents, the tenant group that became increasingly vulnerable after the regime change. In fact, in the late 1990s, the organization changed its name to the Association of Tenants and Residents (*Lakásbérlők és Lakók Egyesülete*, LABE), which signaled a shift from tenant organizing to a more general focus on property and housing-related rights. In 2000, the organization claimed to have around twenty thousand members nationally, most of whom were owners in condominiums.

⁸⁸ Source: Letter of Lakásbérlők és Lakók Egyesülete/Hungarian Union of Tenants retrieved from: <http://www.ingatlan-online.com/labe02.htm>

By 2005, the organization's main focus became the privatization of public apartments in downtown Budapest, a part of which had been declared a UNESCO World Heritage site. While residents had not been allowed to buy their apartments for a long time, the municipality of the 7th district suddenly sold buildings along the prestigious Andrassy Avenue to foreign real estate investors. In general, this had been a site of intensive gentrification since the early 2000s: old buildings were allowed to decay so that they could be demolished and apartments had been totally remodeled to meet modern market needs. The Tenants' Association, along with other citizens groups, played an important role in exposing the speculative purchase of municipal properties, which also led to the detention of the local mayor.⁸⁹

By 2009, the association's membership had dropped to nine thousand (IB, 2009) and it has shown little public activity since. Three reasons may have contributed to the decline of tenant organizing. First, in a matter of a few years home ownership became the dominant form of housing in Hungary, with public and private rentals making up only 8% of the total housing stock (until the 1980s, around 50% of apartments in Budapest were publicly owned). Second, people who rent on the private housing market tend to do it informally (without a contract), so they have little legal basis for public advocacy. Third, social housing residents tend to be very low income and are quite hard to organize, exactly because of the precariousness of their situation. Organizing them would require the crossing of strict class lines, which has few, if any precedents in Hungary.

9. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to shed light on the history of Hungarian housing policy *from below*, emphasizing the agency and impact of people experiencing housing poverty. According to Piven and Cloward (1979) "protest wells up in response to momentous

⁸⁹ He was detained from 2009 to 2012. In 2012, many, but not all of the charges were dismissed.

changes in the institutional order. It is not created by organizers and leaders” (p. 36). While I would contend that organizers and leaders do play an important role in channeling citizen power in the midst of structural forces, the history of housing-related movements in Hungary attests to the significance of structural change in triggering en masse grassroots action.

Throughout the 20th century, the most broad-ranging – and disruptive – protest activity around housing swelled at crucial junctures of social transition: first from feudalism to capitalism and then from state socialism to new capitalism. During the capitalist transformation of Budapest in the 1910s, the tenants’ movement exerted huge pressure to initiate local and state intervention into housing, which had been previously considered as political and economic nonsense. The homeless protests that erupted in 1989 and 1990 coincided with the regime change and not only highlighted the contradictions of the socialist state, but forced the emerging capitalist one to face up to poverty and homelessness.

At the same time, most citizen action around housing did not mold into a broader collective force but focused on meeting basic needs. In other words, people experiencing poverty tended to engage in various forms of resistance rather than movement building. The most salient examples include the formation of informal settlements in the 1920s and 1930s and the large-scale housing occupations in and following the Second World War and the 1956 Revolution. While all of these exerted significant social pressure on the state to respond to social needs, they did not formulate specific demands or aim to change the relationship between citizens and the state. By contrast, when the state failed to provide basic necessities, citizens engaged in spontaneous collective action and created their own housing.

Finally, the most important lesson I have learned while reaching this chapter is that in contrast to the widely held notion about the political passivity of Hungarians, there is in fact a long history of citizens standing up for social rights and decent housing. While this chapter has started to do justice to grassroots activism for housing justice throughout modern

Hungarian history, much more research is necessary in this regard. Bringing the history of housing activism and resistance to light is an incredible source of learning and inspiration for people who currently experience housing poverty.

Chapter 5.

“Housing, not harassment!”⁹⁰

Challenging exclusion through resistance and organizing today

Today the issues and needs of poor people are hardly represented in the Hungarian Parliament or at any level of decision-making in the country. Since the regime change in 1989, successive governments have been implementing Hungary’s structural adjustment to the world economy with varying levels of intensity and enthusiasm. They rarely made it a point to reduce poverty or social exclusion. Sociologist Júlia Szalai’s (1998) observations from the 1990s still ring true about the marginalization of poverty as a political issue:

The topic of poverty got off the list of serious political questions to be discussed at the moment of the regime change. The reports about the number of people living under the subsistence minimum are hardly different even in their tone from long-term weather reports, and there is little interest in the how and why of poverty; these days the question “why are the poor poor?” is at best posed by the Westerners visiting us. To their question, they get an empty and disarming response: poverty is an inevitable part of the transition from socialism to the market economy, and its growth is closely related to our economic difficulties. This statement has a great deal of truth to it. But for the inquirer, it is not the truth of the statement that carries the most important message but that the response makes it obvious: in this country, poverty is not an “issue.” (p. 55)

One important reason why the authoritarian and anti-poor regime could gain so much power in 2010 – only 22 years after the collapse of state socialism – is that a large part of Hungary’s citizenry has been left behind not only economically, but politically, too (Misetics, 2012b). The marginalization of the needs and perspectives of poor citizens in political

⁹⁰ *Lakhatást, ne zaklatást!* in Hungarian, a famous slogan used by *The City is for All* in its campaign against criminalization.

processes has led to further exclusion, which weakens the overall culture and structure of Hungarian democracy. However, while it is true that successive governments after 1990 have left the poor behind, it is also true that no broad grassroots social movement has emerged to challenge marginalization and disempowerment, resist large-scale dispossession and fight for transformative change. While oppositional grassroots activism has revived since 2010, initiatives tend to be segregated based on class and ethnicity and the movements that have gained traction are usually embedded in the urban middle-class.⁹¹ In terms of issues, most emerging movements have focused on either specific issues of advocacy⁹² or civil liberties, and often ignore an in-depth discussion of structural issues regarding equality and social justice.⁹³

Since the regime change, homeless people have resisted harassment and criminalization using both individual and collective strategies. In the following, I first discuss the difference between affirmative and transformative politics in terms of their potential to challenge underlying social relations and bring about structural change. Then, I provide an overview of the ways in which homeless people living in public spaces today resist socio-spatial exclusion. While individual tactics of resistance do not necessarily undermine existing power relations, they are an important reminder of the agency and humanity of people living without a home.

In the second half of the chapter, I shift my attention from individual tactics to more collective efforts. From the end of the homeless protests in 1989-1990 until around 2005,

⁹¹ Most notably, *Egy millióan a Magyar Sajtószabadságért* (One million for the freedom of the press in Hungary), which has been able to mobilize the largest number of people to its demonstrations.

⁹² The largest issue-based demonstrations have been organized by the unions of police officers, fire-fighters and others involved in public service against restrictions on their pension rights among others. *Hallgatói Hálózat* (Students' Network) has also been very successful in mobilizing high school and university students against tuition hikes and restrictions over the autonomy of students and universities among others.

⁹³ Some exceptions include the mobilizations of people on disability benefits against severe restrictions on social assistance, the mobilizations of Roma Hungarians against racist threats, *The City is for All* (see the discussion later), and the long "marches against hunger" from various places in the countryside to the capital. However, the number of people that these organizations are able to mobilize is far below the capacity of the ones mentioned above.

homeless resistance was mostly confined to community building and small-scale assertions of dignity. Then in the late 2000s, a number of initiatives emerged that formulated a more structural critique of homelessness. However, while this was an important development, they did not make an effort to involve any of the people directly affected by inadequate housing. I finish the chapter by describing *The City is for All*, a grassroots organization launched in 2009. It represents the only existing effort at organizing people experiencing housing poverty, while also challenging existing economic, social and political conditions.

1. Grassroots activism: affirmative and transformative approaches

Different collective responses to social problems lead to different degrees of disruption and social transformation. Nancy Fraser (1995) identifies affirmation and transformation as two main approaches for remedying social injustice.

By affirmative remedies for injustice I mean remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them. By transformative remedies, in contrast, I mean remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework. The nub of the contrast is end-state outcomes versus the processes that produce them. It is not gradual versus apocalyptic change. (p. 82)

To make the distinction clear, Fraser identifies the welfare state as an affirmative and socialism as a transformative response to economic injustice. Whereas the welfare state implements a more equal distribution of resources, it leaves the underlying political-economic structure intact. Socialism, by contrast, would restructure the relations of production and thus the whole economic structure to distribute resources more equally (Fraser, 1995, p. 84).

The difference between affirmative and transformative approaches can also be identified in efforts regarding housing and homelessness. Service delivery and charity efforts

such as donations and distributions of food and clothing embody well-meaning responses to homelessness that exemplify affirmative politics. Such initiatives often start out as grassroots responses to pressing social needs, and then become institutionalized. While both social services and charity play an important role in meeting basic human needs, they do not undermine dominant power relations, and tend to create new relationships of dependency between the client and the service-provider on the one hand and the recipient and the donor on the other.

Legal advocacy and litigation are more systemic, but still affirmative responses to housing deprivation. As law can play a central role in reinforcing the status quo, legal activism is a powerful tool that may trigger large-scale policy change and improvements in the redistribution of public resources. For example, strategic litigation in the 1980s led to the recognition of the right to shelter in New York (Hopper, 2003), which was the basis for developing a large network of services for the homeless. At the same time, legal work has its limits. As the New York case illustrates, changing the law does not necessarily question the underlying social processes that (re)produce homelessness – shelters are not permanent housing and they are often used to warehouse people instead of offering exits out of poverty. Besides, as legal advocacy focuses on the outcome rather than the process, it is always carried out by highly educated professionals and homeless and poor people mostly play the role of passive clients. In this way, litigation and legal advocacy do not necessarily undermine entrenched class relations or empower those without a voice.

In the area of housing, initiatives that challenge the definition of housing as a form of exchange value and prioritize its use value represent transformative politics. The large-scale decommodification of housing under state socialism in Hungary was a case in point. Besides, a transformative approach to relations of property lies behind the development of limited-equity housing cooperatives, too (see Sazama, 2000). In such cooperatives, which have also

existed under capitalist conditions in the United States, for example, the building is in collective ownership and members have a right to use a unit at an affordable price. Then, the introduction of the enforceable right to housing in France in 2007 was a significant first step towards a more transformative approach to housing as a right to which all are entitled (see Loison, 2007). In a more radical strain, a transformative approach lies behind the squatting of land and housing for personal use. While such practices may be considered one-time acts of survival and need to be embedded in a broader strategy to achieve lasting changes, they represent a serious challenge to capitalist logic and emphasize the value of housing to fulfill human needs, as illustrated by the example of *Homes Not Jails* in San Francisco (see Corr, 1999) and informal settlements in South Africa (Kell & Nizza, 2012).

At the same time, transformative politics do not equal a mere restructuring of economic relations. Such an approach is also sensitive to the multidimensional nature of oppression and exclusion. As a result, it is not only about changing economic relations, but also about the transformation of political and cultural ones as well. In the case of housing, challenging homeless people's economic, cultural and political exclusion and claiming equal citizenship for them – both formal and de facto – is an essential aspect of transformative politics.

The socialist experiment in Eastern Europe is one example of a transformative approach gone wrong. The regime aimed to transform property relations by nationalizing apartments and creating a state distribution system of public housing, among other things. However, while this was an important step towards a more transformative politics, the socialist state also created an unequal system of housing distribution by turning housing into a form of reward and cooptation (see Chapter 2). Besides, by stigmatizing and criminalizing those who did not have a job or a home, state socialism conserved some of the very structures of the status quo and was far from complete in transforming underlying social relations.

In his critique of the state socialist regime, Tamás (2008a) pointed out these contradictory features of state socialism by labeling it a period of “state capitalism” where the following social and economic features continued to exist:

commodity production, wage labour, social division of labour, real subsumption of labour to capital, the imperative of accumulation, class rule, exploitation, oppression, enforced conformity, hierarchy and inequality, unpaid housework, and an absolute ban on workers’ protest (all strikes illegal), not to speak of a general interdiction of political expression.

In addition, cultural differences were altogether denied and the recognition of Roma people did not go beyond an often simple-minded valorizing of folklore. In all, the failure of the state socialist experiment implies that if economic socialization is coupled with authoritarian rule and the repression of citizens, it cannot be called truly transformative.

Transformative politics must include the three dimensions of justice identified by Feldman (2006), following in the footsteps of Fraser (1995). In short, cultural recognition (as full human beings, citizens, members of an ethnic groups etc.), redistribution (economic transformation, the distribution of resources such as housing and wages), and political emancipation (participation in grassroots and formal politics) must go hand in hand. In the case of housing struggles, this means not only that homeless people and those struggling with housing issues need to be recognized by the state, but also that they must take a leading role in grassroots movements of emancipation.

To apply Fraser’s typology into specific forms of activism, politicized encampments organized around principles of democracy and housing justice (Feldman, 2006) and movements organizing homeless people on a large scale such as the *Los Angeles Action Network* in Los Angeles and *Picture the Homeless* in New York are examples of transformative politics. While demanding a more equal distribution of resources to challenge

structural inequalities, all of these efforts create a centrality for unhoused people, which stands in sharp contrast to their daily experience of marginalization and invisibility.

Importantly, affirmation and transformation are not only questions of methodology, but represent a more comprehensive concept of social change. On the one hand, this implies that different methods of activism and organizing are not mutually exclusive. Social movements often use a variety of affirmative and transformative methods at the same time. This is illustrated by the great number of community programs, including free breakfast and ambulance, initiated by the Black Panther Party (Black Panther Community Programs, n.d.), which otherwise pursued a very militant politics of transformation. Activist and advocacy methods can complement each other and support various immediate human needs as well as the political needs of a movement. On the other hand, whether grassroots action is transformative does not depend on individual techniques or practices, but on its social and political vision as well as the practices and processes that are implemented to fulfill that vision.

2. Tactics of homeless resistance

Resistance to exclusion is an example of affirmative politics that is an inherent part of the daily repertoire of poor and unhoused people. Tactics such as defying dominant rules of conduct, using spaces for alternative purposes, avoiding contact with the authorities and breaking rules that specifically target poor people all represent important “weapons of the weak” (Scott, 1987) to challenge the smooth reproduction of hegemony. At the same time, while these forms of resistance all carry the seeds of oppositional consciousness (Katz, 2004), they have varying degrees of disruptive intentions and tend to leave the basic structures of power untouched. In contemporary Budapest, individual tactics of the poor and unhoused

include exit, adaptation, persistence (DeVerteuil et al., 2009)⁹⁴, jumping scales (Smith, 1992), the establishment of publicly acceptable identities and the creation of their own voice among others.

'Exit' describes the tactic of keeping out of heavily policed or controlled places (DeVerteuil et al., 2009). In Budapest, when stepped-up enforcement becomes unbearable in a certain place, homeless people seek out other spaces of survival, often only temporarily. As homebuilders, shack dwellers are particularly aware of the importance of avoiding places with a heavy police presence. For example, a homeless family that had been living in the same shack for years decided to move into an abandoned building after they had started receiving daily visits from both the police and public space supervisors, purportedly because of reports by residents. The family made the decision to relocate to avoid further confrontations and secure housing for the family for the upcoming winter.

Adaptation includes passing as a non-homeless person or blending in the crowd (DeVerteuil et al., 2009). Homeless women, for example, use a variety of strategies to meet their needs including negotiating with bathroom attendants and sleeping in libraries (see Casey et al., 2008). In Budapest many homeless people spend their days in shopping malls that have heating and bathrooms, and store their belongings in the lockers of the mall. This technique can only be used by those who do not look stereotypically homeless in terms of their clothing. While security guards sometimes refrain from harassing such regular users of a mall, people who "look homeless" are often asked to leave or are not even allowed to enter to use the bathroom.

Persistence refers to the tactic of holding on to a place despite harassment (DeVerteuil et al., 2009). Both panhandlers and distributors of the street newspaper *Fedél Nélkül* who have a steady clientele tend to return to their regular location even if the authorities send them

⁹⁴ DeVerteuil et al. (2009) build on Snow and Mulcahy's (2001) elaboration and adaptation of Hirschman's (1970) original model of exit, voice and loyalty that described people's reactions to declining organizations.

away repeatedly. During the 2011 anti-homeless campaign in the 8th district, many homeless people refused to leave the district despite repeated arrests and intensive harassment. Also, when people living in tents or shacks are evicted by the authorities, they often return and re-establish their home a few days later in the same or a nearby place.

Neil Smith's (1992) analysis of the "homeless vehicle" as a tool to enhance homeless people's mobility highlights the significance of "jumping scales" as a form of resistance. In Budapest, many homeless people travel to various parts of the city for essential services, which are scattered all over the capital. For example, they have breakfast in one drop-in center, lunch at a soup kitchen and dinner at another drop-in center. In the meantime, they take care of paperwork and store their bags in at least two different places and then travel to sleep at a remote part of the city. While crisscrossing the city can be extremely tedious (especially if someone is unable to store their belongings), it also makes many homeless people more informed about the way the city works (such as the distribution of ticket inspectors on public transportation) and the services available to them. In this way, homeless people's forced mobility can also be a source of power and opportunity.

Homeless people also negotiate their presence through establishing legitimate identities such as vendors or entrepreneurs (see Duneier, 2000). In San Francisco, for example, many homeless men establish a sense of decency and respectability as "pro" recyclers (Gowan, 2010). In New York, homeless men who sell used magazines and books manage to gain rightful presence on the sidewalk through establishing themselves as true entrepreneurs (Duneier, 2000). In Hungary, the distributors of the street newspaper *Fedél Nélkül* are a case in point. Responding to the Minister of Interior's crackdown on street paper distributors, one of these distributors challenged him in the following way:

distributing *Fedél Nélkül* is real hard work. Have you ever walked on the blacktop for many hours in the middle of the summer, under 40 degrees of heat? I would

recommend that the honorable Minister try it for 5 hours a day for 5 days in a row. (Erdősné, 2011)

Voice describes more collective tactics such as the production of discourses that challenge dominant portrayals of homelessness and formulate self-definitions of who “the homeless” are (DeVerteuil et al., 2009). Publications in *Fedél Nélkül* are an important channel for homeless people to create their autonomous voice. While most articles, poems and graphics express individual views and ideas, the regular publication of the paper provides an avenue for a more collective, although highly eclectic voice. In one article (Szappanos, 2005), for example, the author makes a list of the different “types of homeless.” On his list were: the classic homeless, the half or fake homeless, bums, beggars, windshield-washers, junkies, street paper distributors and the old farts. The author analyzed each category based on how they survive on the streets, how they make a living and how they communicate with others. While this article definitely reflects an insider view of “homeless society” and in this sense represents an authentic voice, it is imbued with much self-righteousness and moralizing and makes no effort to critique the social forces that produces homelessness.

At the other end of the spectrum represented by the articles in *Fedél Nélkül* is a tongue-in-cheek letter to the mayor of Budapest:

I need a bench! An ideal bench. It may already be somewhere to be found, but I can't find it and I have been looking for it for long. But we could always make one. If once in a lifetime we would cooperate! I am way past 50 and I have never asked for anything. Really! Pleeease! An ideal bench with a free ticket from the respectable Mr. Mayor. What am I talking about? Only a BENCH in a quiet corner, in an appropriate place. Sunny in the spring and the fall and shady in the summer. Simplicity is good so that I can move it. No wheels necessary. But if we can afford it, let it be! If it rains, I can wheel it under a roof. So the poor thing won't get wet and lasts longer. It should

be made of shingles, if possible, because that is good for my back. There should be no room between the back and the seat, lest I fall in there. The seat should tilt a bit inwards so that I don't fall off the front so many times. I like brown, but it can also be blond. That is all for appearance. (Csábi, 2011)

With its publication in 2011 – in the middle of the “homeless wars” in Budapest (see Chapter 3) – this article is clearly meant to be a sarcastic critique of the anti-homeless declarations of the mayor of Budapest. With its soft and “intelligent” humor, it undermines the view of the homeless often promoted by the mayor of Budapest himself as people who live on the streets for pleasure.

In all these ways, homeless people challenge their dominant portrayal as a weak, deviant and homogenous crowd and present themselves as rational, sensible and sensitive human beings. Tactical resistance, negotiation of presence and voice all directly undermine the widespread dichotomy so succinctly stated by Feldman (2006): “To be ‘truly homeless’ it appears, is to be reduced to bare (and helpless) life. To be ‘falsely homeless,’ one can infer, is to insist upon acting as a thinking, judging, coping person” (p. 72).

3. Reclaiming formal rights through individual advocacy

The ability to enforce one's rights and seek legal remedies against discrimination in the current social and legal system is an important measure of citizenship. In the participatory action research project *Justice on the Streets*, homeless researchers of *The City is for All* completed a questionnaire with almost 400 homeless people that included questions about awareness about and exercise of civil and human rights (for a detailed description of this research, including its methodology and findings, see Chapter 6). In the following, I use the results of this research (A Város Mindenkié, 2013) to describe the realm of individual activism among homeless people.

In their own judgment, 48% of homeless respondents are partly, while 39% are fully aware of their human and civil rights. Those who claimed not to be aware of their rights represent 8%. In terms of putting those rights into practice, 20% of respondents claim not to be able to exercise their civil rights at all, while 44% say they are only able to partly exercise their rights because of their homelessness. Taken together, these figures confirm the assumption that despite the equality of formal rights, homeless people in Hungary today are second-class citizens: even if they are aware of their rights, they are hardly able to exercise them fully. As one homeless respondent summed it up quite succinctly in a conversation: “No money, no rights.”

In order to find out the extent to which homeless people are willing to take up conflict when they feel they have been wronged, the questionnaire inquired about whether respondents have ever filed an official complaint for any of their grievances. The results are: 9% of respondents have filed an official complaint, while 11% claim they have been turned away without proper attention when trying to file a complaint. The proportion of complainants may be a bit higher than expected, but considering the level of discrimination identified by the research (see Chapter 6), it is still extremely low. At the same time, the proportion of people whose complaints were ignored is quite high, which explains why many homeless people think that there is no point in filing a complaint at all. This reflects not only a general mistrust of official authorities and unwillingness to challenge power in Hungarian society, but also a resigned acceptance of second-class citizenship by many homeless people. A final reason for the low level of individual advocacy seems to be that discrimination and degrading treatment have become such an ordinary aspect of homeless people’s lives that many of them barely recognize that it is actually happening to them.

To find out about instances in which homeless people engage in formal procedures of complaint, the *Justice on the Streets* research team collected data about complaints filed

against the occupational groups most frequently mentioned by homeless people as being discriminatory, namely public space supervisors, police officers and ticket inspectors on public transportation. As neither the *Budapest Transportation Authority*, nor any space supervising offices were able to provide relevant data, the two sources of meaningful information were the *Budapest Police Department* and the *Independent Police Complaint Board* (FRTP). Although the number of complaints is in both cases extremely low, they reflect the general trends of harassment and discrimination described earlier (see Chapter 3). Of the six homeless people who filed complaints with the *Budapest Police Department* in 2011, there was one complaint against a discriminatory police procedure, one against police abuse, two against allegedly unlawful detentions (one for playing music on the street) and two against the tone of the police officers in charge. In the first six months of 2012, the *Budapest Police Department* received two complaints from homeless people: one against the behavior of a public space supervisor and one against police abuse.

Since its launch in 2008, the *Independent Police Complaint Board* (FRPT) received very few complaints from homeless people. However, two of these are significant in that they address the most common cases of police misconduct experienced by homeless people, which rarely if ever make it to the complaints procedure. In a 2010 case, a homeless man was accused by the police of bike theft, was handcuffed and detained for a long time. The investigation revealed that the police officers bathed the complainant in a humiliating manner and also breached the rules regarding meals during detention. According to the report,

The complainant was taken to the cell wearing underwear and socks. While detained, he was taken to the garage of the police department where he had to undress and was sprayed with cold water out of a hose. He was given a bar of soap to get cleaned up.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ FRPT Resolution No. 349/2010 April 30, p. 2.

The board ruled that the actions of the police repeatedly violated the complainant's right to fair proceedings, personal freedom and human dignity, and that the police officers were in breach of the prohibition on inhumane and degrading treatment. In a 2012 case, a distributor of *Fedél Nélkül* was detained for hours for a traffic violation. According to the report of the *Independent Police Complaint Board*,

The complainant considered the police action prejudiced, motivated by his homeless status. He claims to be aware of instructions directing that “the homeless have to be detained and kept in jail.” In his point of view, his detention was completely unjustified – taking him to the police headquarters had neither a point nor a legal basis. He believes that the action against him was infringing on the principle of equal treatment.⁹⁶

While the board did not establish discrimination, it did find the length of the restriction of personal freedom disproportionate. As distributing *Fedél Nélkül* is in itself not an infraction (see Csurika, 2011), the police often use traffic violations as a pretext to fine, detain and deter homeless people engaged in this activity. However, as the FRPT decision indicates, it is very difficult to prove selective enforcement and discrimination in such a case, as the police meet all the formal requirements in their jurisdiction.

4. Asserting dignity: scattered efforts of activism from 1990 through the mid-2000s

After the regime change, as former opposition groups became formalized, “activism and protest became an integral part of civic culture” (Szabó, 1998a, p. 130) in Hungary. New civil society groups emerged around a number of issues including immigrants' rights and ethnic minorities. Cultural and civic organizations were founded to pursue autonomous activities that had not been allowed in the previous regime. Newly emerging movements

⁹⁶ FRPT Resolution No. 113/2012 March 21, p. 2.

tended to be issue-oriented and did not articulate broader political demands. According to Pickvance (1994), post-1989 governments did not see protest groups as threats to be repressed, but as partners with whom compromises could be reached (p. 448). This was partly a result of the personal connections of newly emerging power-holders to former opposition movements and partly to the malleable nature of the emerging political structure.

Today, many civil society organizations are professionalized and not involved in the political arena. As Mimi Larsson (2004) observed:

the bulk of [Hungarian] NGOs do not address or articulate political or social issues and, especially smaller NGOs, tend to pursue a highly “de-politicized” approach. ... NGOs generally do not try to challenge policy makers directly and only rarely concern themselves with legislation or political programs. ... [P]roblems are solved for the individual (group) on the local level, but the overall structures of inequality remain unchallenged.

Three of the reasons for this political apathy in the professional civil sector include the dependence of NGOs on state funding, which often paralyzes their advocacy potentials; the demonization of politics as a legitimate arena of advocacy (see Udvarhelyi, 2013b); and the lack of individual and collective skills in organizing and democratic praxis.

Regarding collective action around homelessness, the communities born out of necessity in 1989-1990 disintegrated quickly and were not able to organize themselves further. The two most important attempts at homeless self-organization at the Vajdahunyad shelter and the Social Rehabilitation Home did not survive due to both personal and structural reasons (see Chapter 4). While protestors demanded long-term solutions to their situation, the opening of the first temporary shelters neutralized their efforts (see Solt, 1997). As Győri explains:

As the homeless people who organized these protests ... became clients, they also became more vulnerable. Today they stand in line for food and for the overnight shelter. At the beginning, they did not stand in line – they thought that those buildings belonged to them. Afterwards, experts took over the management of shelters and they became clients who had to obey house rules. This has had a great impact on their situation up until today. I see very helpless people for whom it becomes more and more natural that they stand in line and ask or beg for something they either get or they do not.⁹⁷

While, as explained in Chapter 4, civil society played a very important role in supporting the struggles of homeless people around the time of regime change, supporters were transforming from activists to professionals. At the beginning, average citizens, social professionals, budding political parties and grassroots organizations all advocated for the homeless. With time, however, social professionals gradually took over leadership from homeless people, and the civil society organizations that grew out of the 1989 protests turned into social service providers. In 1991, there were close to 2000 shelter beds in Budapest as well as many soup kitchens, street social workers and a social information center among others (Győri, 1997, p. 6). These were all essential services that helped homeless people survive from one day to the next and navigate official bureaucracies. At the same time, as social work became more institutionalized, professionals were faced with the dilemma of whether to support homeless self-organization or push homeless people into more institutional contexts. As some professionals who had been involved from the beginning put it, “social helpers chose the latter and we still don’t know what would have happened if...” (Bényei et al., 1999, p. 8).

⁹⁷ Interview with Péter Győri in the video titled “Lázadókból meghunyászkodott sorbanállók” (November 14, 2011). Retrieved from http://index.indavideo.hu/video/Husz_eve_volt_eloszor_hajlektalan_demonstracio

After the first turbulent years of protest, civil participation in the field of housing was thus increasingly limited to the distribution of food and clothes by charity organizations and the management of services funded by the state and local governments. There was also a long period of silence in homeless self-advocacy after 1990. This silence could be explained by the fact that the immediate needs of homeless people were being met and advocacy work was therefore not so urgent anymore. On the other hand, silence was not confined to homeless people and their supporters. From the early 1990s, poverty issues as a whole became marginalized by mainstream politics. According to Júlia Szalai (1998),

This is not an innocent silence, but one determined by interests: as long as poverty remains a technical question of redistribution, the problem of who controls state (or in the end power) is not raised – nevertheless, we can't really say anything of significance about poverty without talking about sharing power. In other words, the silence is the silence of the status quo, and we should be afraid of this if we have concerns about the stabilization of the institutions of liberal democracy, or more precisely about the slow rearrangement of autocratic relations.⁹⁸ (p. 56)

It took about ten years after the protests in 1989 for new homeless-led initiatives to emerge. At the same time, most of these were short-lived and did not manage or even attempt to influence public policy. In 1997 an association called *Hajléktalanok a Hajléktalanokért Kulturális és Érdekvédelmi Egyesület* (Homeless for the Homeless Cultural and Advocacy Association) was formed by ten residents of an abstinence shelter with the support of a social worker. The main aim of the group was to improve the lives of its members by creating community feeling and looking for more sustainable solutions to homelessness. Its primary activity was the running of a self-help club for abstinent homeless people.⁹⁹ The

⁹⁸ This warning from 1998 rings sadly true today, after the radical authoritarian turn of Hungarian politics in 2010.

⁹⁹ Hajléktalanok a Hajléktalanokért Kulturális és Érdekvédelmi Egyesület – Célok. Retrieved from: <http://hhe.atw.hu/celok.htm>

organization's rhetoric was mainly focused on educating homeless people, showing them how they could spend their free time in a useful way, interacting with other homeless and housed people and improving their self-esteem. The group operated for several years and its membership was constantly growing. It had 20 members in 1999, 30 in 2000, 40 adults and 12 children in 2001 and 57 members in 2002, the last active year of the association.¹⁰⁰

The organization's most lasting legacy was the erection in one of the Budapest's public cemeteries of a memorial for homeless victims of the harsh winter of 1998/1999.¹⁰¹

For a few years, an annual memorial service was held by the members of the association.

After many years of neglect, the ritual was reinstated almost a decade later by *The City is for All*, in 2012. In addition, the association

organized cultural events, and members

helped each other out with advice and contacts regarding employment and housing. In 2002, the organization started collecting signatures for a petition that demanded improved and more flexible conditions in the shelter system as well as the development of more permanent solutions to housing.¹⁰² While it is not completely clear to whom the petition was addressed, by the end of 2002, they managed to collect 500 signatures ("Több, mint 500 aláírást," 2002). They also developed a plan for a model program combining employment opportunities with housing, and applied for several grants, although with little success. When after several years this plan was not realized, the association seems to have stopped functioning.



19. Memorial created by *Hajléktalanok a Hajléktalanokért* as it stands today

¹⁰⁰ Hajléktalanok a Hajléktalanokért Kulturális és Érdekvédelmi Egyesület – Alapelvek. Retrieved from: <http://hhe.atw.hu/alapelvek.htm>

¹⁰¹ Hajléktalanok a Hajléktalanokért Kulturális és Érdekvédelmi Egyesület – Alapelvek. Retrieved from: <http://hhe.atw.hu/alapelvek.htm>

¹⁰² Hajléktalanok a Hajléktalanokért Kulturális és Érdekvédelmi Egyesület – Petíció. <http://hhe.atw.hu/peticio.htm>

Another organization called *Hajléktalanok Érdekvédelmi Konföderációja* (Advocacy Confederation of the Homeless) was founded in 2004 by a homeless man in Eger. Based on contemporary press reports, the organization's founder wanted to put pressure on the government to tackle homelessness and go beyond establishing the position of the Commissioner for the Homeless ("Hajléktalanok közhasznú," 2004). The organization aimed to engage in both advocacy and direct aid to homeless people. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that the organization continued operating after its initial announcement. However, the appearance of this (and probably other similar but less publicized) organizations that aimed to organize the homeless indicate both a growing structural need for such activities and the lack of human and material resources to properly maintain them.

In addition to the foundation of the homeless services system, the most lasting legacy of the 1989-1990 homeless protests was the street newspaper *Fedél Nélkül*. This paper was founded in 1993 by Tibor Ungi, a homeless man active in the 1989 protests, to counterbalance the marginalization of the topic of homelessness in the mainstream press. Today, the paper is published by the Shelter Foundation and features almost exclusively works by homeless journalists and artists. Over the years, the paper has become a hub for cultivating artistic talent among poor people, especially in graphic design, poetry and writing, and it has also played an important role in community development. In addition, the distribution of the paper is an important source of both income and dignity for those who cannot find work on the formal labor market. Today, vendors have to adhere to a strict set of rules and those who do not respect these may have their licenses temporarily revoked.

The significance of the paper's legacy is indicated by the contestations that took place over it. In 1999 there was a split among the editors of the paper and a group of homeless men decided to launch a new street newspaper as the *Új* (or New) *Fedél Nélkül*. For a while, the new paper was independently published, but in 2004 it came under the auspices of a

foundation called Future for the Homeless, established by the (formerly) homeless editors of the paper. When the Foundation was established, its main aim was to rent rooms in workers' hostels as shelter for the homeless. As both the Foundation's leadership and its working style were different from more established service providers, it has always had a contentious relationship with other social organization who did not consider it either transparent or professional enough.¹⁰³ Today, the shelters established by the organization are in operation under a different name. *Új Fedél Nélkül* is still in publication and edited by some of the same people as earlier. It has a much more simple design than the "old" *Fedél Nélkül* and mostly features jokes as well as poems and short stories by non-homeless artists.

Art and creativity have been important source of motivation to bring together homeless people and their supporters. In 2006 the *Vagyunk Egyesület* (We Exist Association) was founded as one of the first initiatives to support poor and homeless artists. It provided a space for homeless artists, many of them associated with *Fedél Nélkül*, to interact, form a community and promote their artwork. They organize exhibitions and auctions at various locations in the city. While the organization is supported by the Shelter Foundation, its members are all homeless and the board is also elected from among them. While *Vagyunk* has been one of the more successful attempts in this field, unfortunately, it still mobilizes only a small group of homeless artists. At the same time, even if the organization has no explicit political goals and it does not aim to disrupt structural forces of oppression, it provides important rewards for homeless members and does a great deal to restore the humanity of homeless people in the eyes of the public.

Between 1990 and 2005, no large-scale organization existed in Hungary with a more radical vision for housing, and disruptive tactics only appeared in individual acts of rebellion. For example, in 2005 when the mayor of Budapest held a press conference to praise his

¹⁰³ In fact, the immediate reason for the resignation of the Commissioner for Homelessness in 2007 was when the Foundation's formerly homeless director proposed to add tents as a form of shelter to the Social Law and it was adopted by the Parliament.

campaign to clean up underground pedestrian passages, two homeless men interrupted the event. Later, they were removed by the police (“Hajléktalanok zavarták,” 2005). Another example was the desperate attempt of a man living with his wife and 12 children in a one-bedroom substandard apartment in Pécs in 2007. To call attention to his situation, the man and his son embarked on a trip of almost two hundred kilometers on foot from Pécs to the Ministry for Social Affairs in Budapest to demand better housing. According to news reports, they were contacted by the municipal clerk of Pécs about 8 kilometers from the city, who promised them acceptable alternative housing (Ungár, 2007).

As users of social services, homeless shelters and service institutions could be an area for homeless people to engage in advocacy to improve conditions. However, most aspects of democratic functioning seem to be absent from social services. Homeless people complain about the paternalistic system of social care that often treats them like children or animals (see Ámon, 2013). In general, the social services system allows hardly any meaningful input from the people whom it services. In many homeless shelters residents’ assemblies are a mere formality, where house rules are read out loud and clients who advocate for themselves or others are often marginalized by the management. As a result, instead of providing a forum for individual and collective empowerment and solidarity, social services tend to perpetuate the disempowerment of homeless people as individuals and their fragmentation as a social group.

On the other hand, with decreasing resources and growing emphasis on the criminalization of homelessness, social service providers have even less power than before.¹⁰⁴ As a result of the lack of effective collective advocacy, social service providers and social workers are in a painful grind to keep their ethical principles while also maintaining access to

¹⁰⁴ The providers of homeless services had a relatively strong representation when the position of the Commissioner for Homelessness was in place (see Chapter 1).

resources in an increasingly authoritarian political environment (see, for example, their reluctant participation in some of the public space clean-up campaigns).

5. Middle-class critiques of capitalism

Around the time of the regime change, activist discourses in the area of housing rights tended to focus on more systemic solutions such as demanding work and housing. Then, for some 15 years, efforts became mostly individualized, with collective initiatives focused on personal improvement and self-help. By the early 2000s, enthusiasm over the end of state socialism had worn off and the new capitalist system spurred radical critiques against neoliberalism. The global justice movement that surfaced dramatically at the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle also had repercussions in Eastern Europe (see Gagyi, 2009). By the middle of the 2000s, both a more structural critique of capitalism and a challenge to the primacy of private property re-surfaced in some groups within the Hungarian alterglobalist movements. In addition to their systemic critique of capitalism, a common feature of these initiatives was their class bias, as participants were overwhelmingly middle-class youth or university students.

Centrum Csoport (Centrum Group) was one of the autonomous groups that emerged in the early 2000s with a strong anti-capitalist and alterglobalist agenda. Based on DIY traditions, the group wanted to embed alterglobalist and anarchist ideology and practices in everyday life and emphasized horizontality in its organization (Gagyi, 2009). While there were a number of previous attempts at setting up cultural squats both during and after the regime change (see Ember, 2004), *Centrum* played an important role in promoting the occupation of vacant property as a form of social critique. In order to create an autonomous community and art space, the group first occupied a former socialist department store in 2004 and created a temporary cultural space. In 2005, they occupied a building owned by the

municipality of the 7th district of Budapest. After their eviction, the local government turned the building into a homeless shelter, which only operated for a couple of years,¹⁰⁵ but was undoubtedly a smart public relations move.

The forty people on trial for the occupation only received a written warning and the judge explicitly stated that their actions were not dangerous to society.¹⁰⁶ After a failed attempt at creating a covert squat, the group eventually broke up in 2006.



20. Occupation by Centrum Csoport in 2005

Squatting in housing and on land by poor and dispossessed families has a relatively long history in Budapest (see Chapters 2 and 4). In the late 1990s, for example, the number of people squatting apartments was estimated between 6 and 15,000 nationally (“Parlamenti lobbi,” 2000). However, despite their relatively large numbers, squatters did not form a movement or become politicized unless their case was exposed by legal advocates such as the RPA (see Chapter 4). With its emphasis on squatting as social critique, *Centrum Csoport* could have bridged the divide between political squatting and occupation out of necessity (Corr, 1999). Unfortunately, the group did not attempt this, and its members had virtually no contact with the thousands of poor squatters in Budapest.

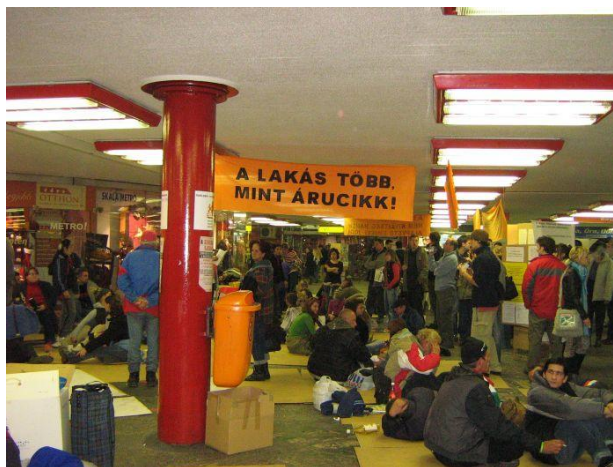
By the 2000s, it was obvious that the social services system – itself under constant threat by neoliberal policies – was unable to deal with the massive social problems of post-socialist Hungary. Faced with the overwhelming presence of homeless people in the streets and the impression that professional social work was not enough to address the social crisis, *Az Utca Embere (Man on the Street)* was founded by the Humanist Movement in 2004.

¹⁰⁵ In 2007, it was moved to a different part of the district.

¹⁰⁶ In a way, this trial set a precedent for many more such politically motivated occupations to come – in each case, the court confirmed that even if such acts were against the law, they were not dangerous to society (see A Város Mindenkié (2013, May 31).

Emphasizing grassroots organizing and often engaging in direct action (Udvarhelyi & Nagy, 2008), the group's mostly young middle-class members fought for appropriate social responses to homelessness and reaffirmed social values such as solidarity, empathy, human rights and participation.

While the group organized more conventional public events such as discussions, exhibitions or rallies around the topic of the right to housing, it engaged in more radical actions to prevent evictions, and - disrupted the Budapest general assembly when it was about to vote on radical cuts to social spending. By all accounts, the group's most successful event was the annual Night of Solidarity, which combined all aspects of the group's work. It gave an opportunity for ordinary people to express their concern and demand a permanent solution to homelessness while also providing direct assistance to homeless



21. Annual Night of Solidarity in 2006

people such as food and clothing and a safe place to spend the night. One of the most important aspects of the all-night vigil was that housing rights activists and homeless people could communicate with each other directly. The following is a homeless participant's account from 2005:

We were lying and sitting around on the ground on blankets and other pieces of clothes. There were a number of non-homeless people, too, who wanted to show their solidarity with us, for which I would like to thank them. There was also a very sad exhibition about homelessness. Nevertheless, there was great understanding between homeless and housed people during the demonstration. The atmosphere was really

nice and there was a lot of laughter. *Man on the Street* and *Food not Bombs*¹⁰⁷ offered hot tea and bread, which felt fantastic. Meanwhile, music was playing. Some of us among the homeless read short stories from *Twilight Zone*, the recently published anthology of homeless writers. People were coming and going. But many of them stopped to listen. I saw surprise and wonder on many faces as people realized that our poems and short stories were wonderful and true and expressed deep feelings, desires and tragedies. ... Many people could learn from these kids who see in us not the homeless, but the Human being; these kids are not disgusted with us and do not stand kilometers away when we talk to each other. (Elzer, 2005)

While *Man on the Street* ceased its activities in 2008, it represented an important example of grassroots organizing for housing rights. On the one hand, the group was successful at raising awareness about homelessness as an unresolved social and housing issue and entered the right to housing into public discourse. It also introduced issues, values and forms of resistance that had been previously marginalized. On the other, the original mission of creating a mass movement failed and despite its radical rhetoric, *Man on the Street* did not break with the status quo: homeless people remained the object of middle-class activism and did not become active subjects in the process of social transformation.

6. *The City is for All*: an experiment in cross-class organizing

After *Man on the Street* broke up, some of its activists (including the author) started to look for a different way to fight for housing rights. *Picture the Homeless*, a homeless-led advocacy group in New York provided an inspiring example of a very different approach by mobilizing homeless people to become community leaders. Based on the philosophy of the

¹⁰⁷ Food Not Bombs was originally founded in the United States in the 1980s to protest nuclear armament and military spending. Since then, it has many local versions all over the world with varying levels of political engagement. Food Not Bombs Budapest (*Fegyver Helyett Kenyér*) was launched in the mid-2000s and has operated on and off ever since. The group distributes vegetarian food to poor and homeless people.

“right to the city” and an urge to move beyond segregated middle-class activism, the idea of a new organization was conceived. In the end, *A Város Mindenkié* was founded in 2009 by housed activists from *Man on the Street* and the homeless and formerly homeless people they had recruited for a training with *Picture the Homeless*.¹⁰⁸

The name of the group – *A Város Mindenkié* – is based on the Hungarian translation of the “right to the city,” which is also the essence of its guiding vision. According to Lefebvre ([1970] 2003), exercising the right to the city means that urban residents are able to participate in the process of imagining and shaping the city as a shared work whose primary aim is to serve its residents’ needs. The creation of equitable and just cities requires democratic urban planning and policymaking as well as an economy of solidarity that pays particular attention to the needs of marginalized and vulnerable residents. As David Harvey (2003) put it:

[t]he right to the city is not merely a right of access to what already exists, but a right to change it after our heart’s desire... [T]he right to remake ourselves by creating a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality is one of the most precious of all human rights...The creation of a new urban commons, a public sphere of active democratic participation, requires that we roll back that huge wave of privatization that has been the mantra of a destructive neoliberalism. We must imagine a more inclusive, even if continuously fractious, city based not only upon a different ordering of rights but upon different political-economic practices. If our urban world has been imagined and made then it can be re-imagined and re-made. The inalienable right to the city is worth fighting for. (p. 939-941)

¹⁰⁸ The idea of founding an organization in Budapest based on the model of *Picture the Homeless* originated with the present author as I saw observed PTH’s work during my studies in New York. However, having raised funds to bring PTH to Budapest to train homeless people and their allies in methods of organizing and activism, the project has been realized by a larger team of activists.

For *The City is for All* – as for Harvey (2008) – the right to the city is not an individual, but a collective right. It is a right to centrality for those currently excluded and abandoned by mainstream politics and policies. While focusing on the theory and practice of cross-class solidarity, AVM is also developing a democratic habitus among people used to being treated as second-class citizens. In addition to fighting for legislative and policy change, the production of alternative discourses, identities and knowledge that subvert the status quo is central to the group's work.

The City is for All is open to anyone experiencing housing poverty and it organizes its activities around three main areas: social housing, social services and street homelessness. The group runs a campaign against the warehousing of vacant apartments and has been involved in direct action to prevent the eviction of social housing residents and shack dwellers. In the area of homeless services, AVM organizes advocacy workshops and creates consultation forums for social service users and providers to challenge the paternalistic logic of the shelter system. Finally, in addition to distributing know-your-rights booklets among homeless people, the group also operates a weekly free legal clinic on a public square in Budapest for people struggling with housing problems.

The City is for All has been instrumental in fighting against the growing criminalization of homelessness since 2010, when the government's plan to detain street homeless people first became public. In addition to demonstrations, petitions, lobbying and negotiations with elected representatives as well as public forums, the group engaged in more disruptive actions as well. In April 2011,



22. Sit-in at the office of the mayor of the 8th district in 2011

AVM disrupted the meeting of the general assembly of Budapest to protest the enactment of

the first local ban on sleeping in public spaces. Then, in the fall of 2011, when the local government of the 8th district started a large-scale anti-homeless campaign, AVM organized a 24-hour watch group in front of the short-term arrest office that had been created specifically to arrest homeless people for violations such as public urination, begging, rummaging through garbage and sleeping in public spaces. Finally, in November 2011 several members of the group staged a sit-in at office of the mayor of the 8th district, who was also one of the sponsors of the national law that made street homelessness illegal, to demand the repeal of the legislation. Thirty protestors were arrested and later found guilty of resisting police action. However, as the judge decided that their actions were not dangerous to society, most were let go with a written warning.

As the group played a central role in calling public attention to the growing criminalization of homelessness, it considered the Constitutional Court's decision in November 2012 to strike down the law that made homelessness illegal a moral success (see Chapter 3). While the Court listed legal arguments against the law, it also made important ethical statements and proclaimed that homelessness could only be addressed as a social issue and never as a criminal one. As the Prime Minister declared that the law would nevertheless be included in the constitution, the group stepped up its efforts through mobilization, awareness raising and open letters in early 2013. Members of AVM also participated in one of the most serious civil disobedience actions of the past few decades when around 70 protestors occupied part of the ruling party's headquarters in March, 2013. This sit-in also led to the escalation of the struggle against the 4th modification of the Fundamental Law, which had an adverse effect on many other social groups besides the homeless.¹⁰⁹ Unfortunately, their efforts were not successful and the Parliament ratified the modification.

¹⁰⁹ The 4th modification of the Fundamental Law included the possibility of a university contract that would mandate state-funded students to work in Hungary after graduation; the elimination of the financial management autonomy of universities; the exclusion of life partners without children and same-sex couples from the definition of family; the possibility of limitations on the freedom of speech; a limitation on fair elections; the

In its methods and tactics, *The City is for All* is a hybrid formation that combines the practices and philosophies of citizen activism, community organizing and popular education.

While the group grew out of *Man on the Street*, its middle-class founders made a conscious decision to move beyond both the patronizing attitude of social services and the universalizing activism of middle-class right-to-housing movements (see Missetics, 2009; Udvarhelyi, 2010a). The group emphasizes cross-class alliances and there is a



23. “We are not asking for free housing:”
Demonstration for the right to housing in 2012

strong sense that the issue of homelessness belongs to all members of society regardless of their class. At the same time, one of the main goals of *The City is for All* is to empower homeless and poor people to become involved in the decisions that directly affect them. While demanding that politicians and service providers take the slogan “Don’t talk about us, talk with us” seriously, AVM also makes the development of homeless leadership a priority. Even though the group is open to housed activists, it prioritizes the recruitment and empowerment of homeless people and strives to minimize the control of non-homeless members.

As the membership of *Man on the Street* was rather homogeneous, social status did not play a significant role in determining power relations. Most members of the group not only had similar educational backgrounds but were also well-versed in middle-class activist lingo. Symbolic power within the group lay with those who were more active or had been members for longer. In *The City is for All*, the situation is vastly different. In this group, people with little or no education cooperate with those holding graduate degrees (at times

further limitation on judicial independence; a regulation that would damage the separation of Church and State, and discrimination among religions; the nullification of 22 years of decisions handed down by the Constitutional Court; and the fact that the government majority can write whatever it wishes into the Fundamental Law because future amendments cannot be reviewed by the Constitutional Court from a substantive point of view.

from famous universities abroad). As a result, AVM's work is based on the intensive crossing of cultural, social, economic and ethnic boundaries. Recognizing that these gaps will never be bridged through compassion, the group has developed a number of mechanisms to equalize power differences. In this group, it is not only homeless people who are expected to change – as in social work based on case management, for example – but everyone who is involved regardless of their social status.

AVM's work is a daily exercise for all of its members in active solidarity and collective emancipation. With around 80% of its members having experienced homelessness or housing poverty, the group provides a model and a training ground for democratic practices and cross-class cooperation. Of course, this work starts out with very unequal relationships. Allies¹¹⁰ tend to be more highly educated, have much better social connections, stable family backgrounds, a job or some steady source of income, and higher levels of self-confidence. Homeless activists live in very precarious situations and most of them have lower educational levels and virtually no family or social network to support them. In order to undermine class hierarchy, the group has created an organizing process and working structure that uses the advantages of allies to the benefit of the whole group, while minimizing their possibilities of control and empowering homeless members to take charge.

Through its internal organization, *The City is for All* is modeling a more equitable public sphere. One aspect of this is mutual education. In order to valorize all forms of knowledge, homeless people and allies take turns educating each other. For example, while allies hold workshops around topics such as civil disobedience or feminism, volunteer lawyers are required to take part in a training held by homeless activists, and more seasoned homeless activists are in charge of mentoring and training new members. At the heart of this work is the conviction that homeless people can only fight their status as secondary citizens if they regain

¹¹⁰ This is the terms used in the group to denote members who are not homeless.

their dignity and self-respect. In this sense, education and personal improvement are key to political empowerment. As one homeless activist put it:

One of the tasks of *The City is for All* is to change the perspectives of homeless people. ... We need to install self-confidence in people, mobilize them in their own issues, because only we can change our public image. (quoted in Udvarhelyi, 2010a)

AVM has no appointed leaders and all decisions are made collectively. Decisions that affect the whole group can only be made at the weekly meetings where everyone is able to participate and decisions have to be reached through consensus. Facilitation techniques are used to minimize the influence of more powerful members such as allies over homeless activists, men over women and old over new members. As a result of these processes, AVM's work is not only slower, but also more thorough and consistent. The point of this kind of "slow politics" (Kienast, 2010) is to ensure substantive rather than numeric representation, encourage meaningful participation and avoid the creation of an elite within the group.

Despite all the efforts at equalization, the power balance between homeless members and allies is far from perfect and AVM still has many contradictions to work out. For example, even if numerically fewer, allies have many more things at their disposal such as skills and material and social resources. A big challenge is that homeless people tend to respect allies more than they respect each other.



24. A homeless activist of *The City is for All* talking to the largest commercial TV station in Hungary

Besides, disruptions in the personal lives of homeless activists can interrupt their activism and render it totally meaningless for the moment. While many allies pursue an academic or professional career that benefits from their activism, many long-time homeless members still

do not have a regular job or a home. Finally, homeless activists have a hard time using their activist skills outside of the group as they tend to be marginalized in movements that do not know how to interact with people of a different class. In a way, the group's work is largely a labor of imagination, especially when it comes to cross-class solidarity and active cooperation: first, it expands the realm of the possible by imagining that hegemonic social relations can be undermined, then it gradually moves into the space it has thus created and fills it up with meaning and praxis.

Given its radical break with previous models of advocacy, AVM has triggered ambivalent reactions from both the social services system and the mainstream media. While representatives of the social services system often acknowledge the value of the group's work, they closely guard their professional boundaries. They tend to welcome organizing by homeless people as long as it is about the development of community and creativity. But communication becomes more difficult when homeless people demand to have an equal say in decisions that are considered in the realm of service providers. For example, when AVM raised the issue of keeping drop-in centers open for the weekend, one social worker indicated in an online forum that "it may happen that the interests of service providers and the interests of homeless people do not match." While this statement brings up serious issues regarding today's homeless services system, it also exposes the underlying reasons for the idea that is so often espoused by social service providers that it is "impossible" for homeless people to have a real influence on either the social services system or broader social policy.

Drawing the media's attention to homeless people as representatives of AVM has not been easy. When the group was formed, journalists wanted to make "real" interviews with non-homeless activists, adding homeless members only as interesting color. At the beginning, almost all the reports about AVM's actions had a non-homeless activist explain their goals

and demands, while a homeless person gave a one-liner about the hardships of life on the street. At the time of its foundation, one journalist accused the group's housed members of fooling homeless people ((szécsi), 2009), while another commentator accused them of displaying a few token homeless people to justify their own leadership. While neither accusation was true, it became clear to the group that certain rules had to be followed to ensure that homeless members were adequately represented in the media. Today, only homeless members can represent the group in public. If a non-homeless activist appears in public, they can only do so together with a homeless member. Those who appear in the media are thoroughly prepared, as it can often be a damaging experience and may backfire for those who are not used to that kind of attention. On many occasions, the group has had to fight hard to convince journalists and conference organizers to accept homeless members as legitimate interviewees or spokespeople. In all, the group forces the media (and other professionals) to provide a voice for homeless people by consistently keeping to its principles.

This strategy also aims to deconstruct the dominant dichotomy of social scientists as experts and homeless people as examples who buttress the expert argument. An incident that happened almost one year after AVM was formed illustrates this point. A homeless activist was interviewed on the radio about a demonstration the following day, and the interviewer's first question was not about the goals of the action, but about how long he has been homeless. By focusing on the spokesperson's personal story and not the values or political content of the event he represented, the journalist's question exemplified the deep-seated perception that the most important characteristic of a homeless person is their homelessness. The same homeless activist, Géza Bene, put it this way:

After my first public appearance in the media, a homeless man asked me: "How much did you get for it?" But today they say: "You said it right" or "You weren't tough enough" or "Was it live or recorded?" Part of this is that we have learnt how to handle

the media. We respond briefly, we do not put our personality in the foreground but we try to convey a message, an event or our goals. We don't get scared by a journalist, a bureaucrat, or a public figure. We try to get as prepared for these encounters as possible. (quoted in Udvarhelyi, 2010a, p. 59)

It is important to note that AVM is not the only grassroots group that is active in the field of housing rights. In addition to lobbying and policy work by a few professionalized organizations such as *Habitat for Humanity* and legal advocacy against criminalization by the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (*Társaság a Szabadságjogokért*), there are a number of other grassroots initiatives that address topics around housing and homelessness. Most existing housing groups promote the rights of those holding defaulting mortgages due to the financial crisis through lobbying, legal advocacy and at times grassroots mobilization. Besides, the *Magyar Szociális Fórum* (Hungarian Social Forum), which does not have a mass base but has an effective representation in the media, mostly pursues the topic of hypothermic deaths and evictions. The *Koppány Csoport* (Koppány Group), named after an ancient Hungarian hero, is a right-wing nationalist group that fights against evictions using civil disobedience and radical direct action.

While the presence of these groups is not negligible, at the moment, *The City is for All* is the only grassroots housing organization in Hungary that advances a transformative social justice agenda while simultaneously challenging the economic, social, cultural and political aspects of homelessness. By organizing those directly affected by housing poverty and engaging in a variety of tactics from legal advocacy to civil disobedience, *The City is for All* is key to the development of a viable and contentious housing movement that puts those directly affected by inadequate housing at the center and goes beyond service delivery and issue-based protest.

7. Conclusion

As David Wagner (1993) observes, homeless people are usually portrayed as politically disempowered, hard to organize and victims rather than conscious actors on the social scene. In Hungary, there are hardly any academic works about the political activity of homeless people or their engagement with the public sphere. Wagner's (1993) observations about American academia are equally true for the Hungarian scene: "The virtual absence from the literature of accounts of militant or politically conscious homeless people may reflect the tendency of researchers to study the poor at the point of maximum disempowerment" (p. 544). In Hungary, similarly to the United States, most research about homelessness takes place at soup kitchens, shelters, or on the street and most works describe the various ways in which homeless people struggle to survive.

In sharp contrast to the dominant portrayal of homeless people as needy victims, this chapter has demonstrated that activism for homeless and housing rights has gone through various cycles of protest since the late 1980s. The two most significant cycles of homeless activism in terms of both mobilization and transformative potential were the 1989-1990 protests and the organizing work of *The City is for All* since 2009. Additionally, although not directly political in nature, *Fedél Nélkül* has been very successful in nurturing community among the homeless and poor people, while also providing a solid platform for developing their voices and artistic talent.

The 1989-1990 protests and the work of *The City is for All* have both many similarities and differences. While the 1989-1990 protests were a spontaneous eruption of frustration and anger by homeless people resulting from the structural crisis at the end of state socialism, *The City is for All* grew out of a middle-class frustration with the capitalist system, and is based on intensive and long-term organizing and strategic action. Cross-class alliances have played important roles in both of these cycles, albeit in different ways. In 1989-1990, allies entered

the scenes as supporters of a homeless-led struggle and their role was to sustain resistance and channel the demands of protestors. Later, however, many middle-class allies became professional helpers in the institutions they had fought for together. In the case of *The City is for All*, allies initiated the formation of the group and had a strong influence on its inclusive and democratic ideology and practice. As the group is progressing, however, the role of allies is slowly diminishing and homeless members play increasingly central roles.

While both the 1989-1990 protests and the struggles of *The City is for All* can be defined as examples of displaced class struggle (Harvey, 1985), they are different in the extent to which they embody affirmative or transformative approaches. The 1989-1990 protests started out with the fundamental demand for work and housing and for the recognition of homeless people as equal human beings. In this sense, the protests started out with a radically transformative vision. However, these radical demands were relatively quickly neutralized by the state as the authorities provided temporary shelters to protestors. Due to the historical and social circumstances of its foundation, *The City is for All* is much more conscious about cultivating a transformative vision and praxis. With its demands for housing as opposed to shelter as a fundamental solution to homelessness and its embodied critique of the marginalization of poor people at all levels of decision making, it is probably the most radically transformative housing movement that has existed since the tenant movement of the early 1910s.

Finally, together with its radical approach to homeless activism, there are a number of conceptual, ethical, political and methodological dilemmas and questions that *The City is for All* needs to disentangle in its ongoing efforts to mobilize for social change. How can we advocate for people to get off the streets while also fighting for the right to be in public space? How can we avoid dehumanizing those who live in public spaces while arguing for the political and moral impossibility of living on the streets? How do we work with an

exploitative and unjust economic and political system while simultaneously working to change it fundamentally? How do we protect marginal existences such as squatting or illegal encampments without locking homeless people into poverty? How do we fight against criminalization without getting bogged down in legal and bureaucratic struggles? How do we make sure that a social movement produces power to act on behalf of the people it advocates for, while avoiding to create relationships of domination and inequality like the creation of a homeless elite? How do we effectively link personal and collective experiences with the political economy of criminalization and the role of the state? How do we link conceptual analysis with effective strategies of short and long term organizing? How do we integrate research, ongoing inquiry and self-reflection as a strategic tool into social movements? How do we create a common identity for collective advocacy and organizing for housing rights without validating the existence of homelessness? What is the relationship between left and right-wing activists for housing? Do they have to and are they able bridge ideological boundaries to fight for common goals? Is strengthening homeless and poor people's identities as homeless and poor helpful or obstructing the general aim of emancipation? The need to find answers to these challenging and at the same time inspiring questions will undoubtedly guide the development of the homeless/housing movement in Hungary for the next few years to come.

Chapter 6.

“I am using my brain again.”

Reclaiming citizenship through research: lessons and contradictions

“The point is to change it” goes Marx’s famous tenet in his 1845 *Theses on Feuerbach* about the need for social scientists to move beyond the documentation of social life and directly contribute to efforts of social transformation. While this statement makes total sense to me today as a PhD student in New York, it would have had little relevance to me as a student of anthropology in the early 2000s in Hungary – had it ever been brought up (which it was not). While I embraced the moral obligation to do something about social injustice relatively early as I was engaging in research about homelessness, how such an intervention could or should be rooted in social science was far from self-evident. Since 2004, I have embarked on a journey to understand and experiment with the ways in which I can contribute to social change as a social scientist. One of the most important and life-changing lessons of this journey has been that the reassertion of substantive citizenship (see Holston, 1999) by both social scientists and the people whose lives and social position they investigate is at the core of engaged intellectual practice. In other words, using the tools, methods and ideas of the social sciences to challenge oppression is only possible after the radical reclaiming of the subjectivity of all of us as active and valuable members of our social and political communities.

Socially engaged research takes shape in many hybrid forms in between theory, practice, activism and scholarship. In the following, I explore different ways in which engaged social science can intervene into social processes through collaboration with social movements and activists, and assess their transformative potential. First, I provide an overview of the right to research as a theoretical, ethical and political framework for engaged scholarship. Then, instead of trying to define the exact boundaries of research, I reflect on the

ways in which research – taken out of a positivist context – can be used to advance the goals of social movements. I take a deeper look at two examples of social science intervention based on my personal experiences with two distinct forms of collaboration between activists and scholars: ethnography from below and participatory action research. In order to understand how a democratic research practice takes shape on the ground, I examine the participatory action research *Justice on the Streets* and discuss the theoretical and political consequences of 'deep participation' in terms of the development of critical consciousness, issues of power and control, and the possibilities of bridging across deeply engrained social inequalities.

1. The right to research

Research, in the broadest sense of the term, has always been integral to the work of social movements. Digging up and analyzing information, documenting events, processes and experiences, making links between ideas and developing solutions are all part of the cycles of action and reflection that characterize grassroots action. In this context, research can take many different forms, from applied projects by academics through participatory action research, to inquiry by social movement activists themselves. It may also draw on a variety of methods including photography, filmmaking, interviewing, oral histories and archival work.

Engaging in critical inquiry is a form of political participation. Regardless of social status, critical reflection on social conditions leads to a more conscious engagement with the public sphere and a fuller practice of citizenship. Using research strategically can upset entrenched power and social relations, influence decision-making and interrupt the reproduction of social life as “business as usual.” Producing knowledge about existing and possible social conditions has the potential to raise critical consciousness, bring

disenfranchised social groups to the political and ideological center and establish a basis for further claims and action.

The question of who has control over the production of social space and social life is intimately tied to the ways in which social control and exclusion are negotiated and justified. This is why the production of knowledge, access to information and the power of interpretation all play a central role in struggles over citizenship. The concept of the right to research (Appadurai, 2006) is not only useful in understanding the relationship between power and knowledge but also helps to develop counter-hegemonic practice.

The right to research is based on the understanding that scientific practices are socially constructed and research is embedded in relations of power. As Latour and Woolgar (1979) observe, scientific facts are socially constructed through academic protocols, rituals, hierarchies, tenure and publications among others. At the same time, educational institutions are structured to reproduce existing social inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Many of the institutions of academia that define knowledge and the appropriate ways to acquire it tend to be patronizing and hegemonic (Appadurai, 2000, p. 9-10).

One way to contest hegemony over the production of knowledge is to democratize research and question the social processes that make it an exclusive privilege. To liberate research from the confines of academia, Appadurai (2006) defines research as

the capacity to make disciplined inquiries into those things we need to know, but do not know yet. All human beings are, in this sense, researchers, since all human beings make decisions that require them to make systematic forays beyond their current knowledge horizons. (p. 167)

Echoing Gramsci's (1970) argument that every person is an intellectual in their own right, the right to research recognizes that both research in particular – the systematic analysis of

individual and collective experience through the gathering of data – and intellectual activity in general belong to everybody and not only to a small and privileged portion of society.

If research is a means of democratic participation, the right to research means “the right to the tools through which every citizen can systematically increase that stock of knowledge which they consider most vital to their survival as human beings and to their claims as citizens” (Appadurai, 2006, p. 168). In this regard, research takes place in many different places and is carried out by a wide variety of people for a range of purposes. As István Petrák, a homeless researcher in *Justice on the Streets* put it: “After all, everyone is engaged in research throughout their life – we do research about our partners or about our workplace.” Or, as Ansley and Gaventa (1997) articulate: “At the heart of the problem of linking research and democracy is not only the question, ‘Whose voices are strengthened by university research?’ but also ‘Who participates in research in the first place?’” (p. 47).

In a political sense, the right to research includes the right to information and the right to experiment with new ways of knowing. From this perspective, doing research is not a privilege but an attitude and practice whose standards of rigor may be very different from those enforced in the dominant spaces of academia. If research can be done by everyone, then everyone may be both a subject and object of inquiry. In this way, the conventional dichotomy between marginalized people who are studied and academic researchers who study them is seriously challenged.

While the need to document, understand and expose oppressive social conditions is at the heart of all efforts to reclaim the right to research, it can be exercised in many different ways (Udvarhelyi, 2011). In the following, I look at two different approaches to reclaiming the right to research that challenge inequalities in the production of knowledge and in the larger socio-economic context: ethnography from below and participatory action research.

a. Ethnography from below

From 2002 through 2006, I was involved in a research project with my fellow researcher, Ágnes Török, which studied the exclusion of homeless people from public spaces in Budapest. Although we were not aware of this at the time, our collaborative project could best be characterized as ethnography from below. According to Lyon-Callos and Hyatt (2003), this kind of research reveals the operation of global processes at the local level:

One goal of ethnography from below is to collaborate with activists by using our work to unmask both the material and ideological effects of neoliberalism, not as abstractions but as a very real set of interventions into local settings. ... [O]ne contribution of our ethnographic work is to make visible the concrete programs and policies that have been used to create a single narrative in which poverty and inequality are made to seem the natural and inevitable upshots of evolutionary processes, rather than the conscious and planned outcomes of a very deliberate set of human interventions. (p. 177-178)

Although the political implications of our research were not totally clear to us when we undertook the project, what we did know was that we wanted to make our inquiry as socially relevant and “useful” as possible. After compiling a list of the social issues confronting Budapest at the time, we picked an article from a local newspaper that reported on a new program of the municipality to “rid underground pedestrian passages of illegal vendors, graffiti and homeless people” (“Tiltakoznak a hajléktalanellátók,” 2002). This topic not only promised to involve a complex web of cultural and social issues, we were sure that it also had important social justice implications.

In addition to a series of in-depth observations in underground pedestrian passages, the research drew on a series of semi-structured interviews with officials of the Budapest municipality, the municipal cleaning company and the public space supervising office,

homeless service providers, social workers, homeless people, informal street vendors, as well as pedestrian users of underground passages. We picked the interviewees based on a list of stakeholders that we identified through media reports and our initial, more informal conversations about the city's project. We also analyzed media representations of the newly emerging anti-homeless policies and of homeless people in general over a span of about two years. In addition we analyzed policy documents and memos produced by city hall and other organizations involved in the project.

As we went deeper into our research, we found out more and more about the various ways in which public measures and policies were used to push homeless people out of sight, not only violating their dignity as citizens and human beings, but in some cases endangering their very survival. It became clear that by this exclusion and removal from public spaces, society punishes homeless people for things that are not the cause, but rather the result of their social exclusion. For example, homeless people are blamed for sleeping in public spaces even when there are no meaningful alternatives for affordable housing, and they are stigmatized for urinating in public when they do not have access either to a home with a private bathroom or free public toilets, which are largely absent in Budapest.

Through our interpretation of the data, we could identify and understand a number of seemingly isolated spatial policies and practices as part of a larger pattern. We wanted to determine whether these led to the systematic socio-spatial exclusion and marginalization of homeless citizens. In the end, we concluded that the social exclusion of homeless people through spatial means was not yet embraced as official municipal policy, but that it was indeed becoming increasingly systematic (Török & Udvarhelyi, 2006). We also understood that these processes had been part of the neoliberal transformation of the country after the collapse of state socialism and were not unique to Hungary. .

Through our interviews with city officials and analysis of policy documents, we found out that the program to “clean” city streets of undesirables was carried out with the assumption that “this is what decent residents want.” Officials always referred to complaints by residents as the basis for these actions. In other words, the various programs aimed at shunning homeless people from public places were carried out in the name of Budapest's residents, which included the two researchers. This awareness brought with it an immense responsibility for us, as both citizens and researchers. Not sharing these insights with the general public – in whose name the cleansing projects were carried out – would have felt like tacit collaboration in these acts of oppression.

This was the point where we understood that writing a research report (a Master's thesis in our case) and presenting our findings at conferences and other academic forums would not reflect the severity of the situation. With few precedents in Hungarian anthropology and little guidance from our academic community as to how we should go about achieving a broader impact, we drew up a plan for public outreach about midway through the project. This included a list of news outlets that might be interested in publishing our findings. In the end, we published an article on the Budapest municipality's proposed ban on begging in both a liberal weekly paper (Udvarhelyi & Török, 2005) and *Fedél Nélkül* (Udvarhelyi, 2005). On the other hand, we also started to look for organizations supporting homeless people that could make use of our research results.

Until this point, our research bore all the features of conventional ethnography, with some effort to reach out to a broader audience. However, the turning point came in 2004 when we got to know *Man on the Street* through their annual event, the Night of Solidarity. The group seemed to be potentially fertile ground for putting our research findings to good use. The Night of Solidarity addressed many of the same issues we identified in our research, including the significance of public spaces in a democratic society and the assertion of

homeless people's right to exist in our common spaces. In addition, the organization's goal to change social attitudes towards homelessness instead of doing conventional charity work or providing social services also fit our focus on the connections between middle-class attitudes and public policy. Finally, the organizing principles of *Man on the Street* based on openness, inclusion and participation (see Chapter 5) provided a good opportunity for us to combine anthropology with human rights activism.

When our research was completed, our idea was to hand our findings over to the members of *Man on the Street* for their use and purposes. However, it soon turned out that it was not enough to just "share our research results." Social movements do not just take a research report and act on it. *Man on the Street* had its own agenda and methodology and asking its members to simply read our paper would not necessarily mean the integration of its implications into their work. It became clear that if our ethnography was going to have any broader social impact, a shared understanding of the findings had to be developed along with a collaborative process of developing action in line with the organization's overall goals. In the end, I decided to join the group and this is how I became a scholar-activist.

After I got involved in *Man on the Street* and got to know its operation and principles, I encouraged the group to engage actively with some of the issues identified in our research. For example, the criminalization of begging as a form of socio-spatial exclusion was a key observation of our research. When an anti-begging ordinance was proposed in Budapest in 2005, the research provided was used as a resource to formulate both the group's position and specific actions on the issue. Also, the study exposed the increasingly widespread practice of local authorities installing anti-sitting and anti-sleeping street furniture to keep homeless people away from public spaces. Based on this information, several direct actions were organized to remove metal bars that had been mounted on benches to prevent sleeping on them. The group also brought the issue to the attention of the Ombudsperson for Civil Rights,

who publicly condemned such practices as a violation of the right to dignity (see Borza, 2009). Since then, these metal bars became the logo of the Ombudsperson's long-term advocacy project about the rights of homeless people entitled "Dignity without Barriers" (*Méltóság Korlátok Nélkül* in Hungarian). In a broader context, the different variations of anti-sitting and anti-lying furniture are a very tangible embodiment of the structural violence inflicted on homeless people. Even if the attempts to remove some of these bars could not stop the installation of such furniture all over Budapest, they were a clear challenge to the inscription of violence into urban space.

The example of *Man on the Street* illustrates how more conventional anthropological research can support and inform grassroots social action. On the one hand, the group benefited from the concrete and sensitive analysis of socio-spatial exclusion offered by anthropologists as well as the international and historical comparisons systematically compiled in the preceding research. Anthropology also offered a rich vocabulary for the group to conceptualize certain problems such as criminalization, socio-spatial exclusion and stigmatization. On the other hand, a well-established grassroots group provided a stable framework for action and political analysis for the research, advanced organizing skills, a community of committed people and most importantly, a broader vision for social change. It was through the fluid circulation of ideas, passions and practices between the activist and academic realms that eventually brought our research to life. It was a mutually beneficial process: while the findings provided a stable base of knowledge and a frame of reference for grassroots activism, activism made it possible for social science to contribute to progressive work towards social change.

The kind of engaged social science described here reclaims the democratic right to research by using systematic inquiry for the benefit of grassroots organizations and causes. However, this kind of engagement also requires the reclamation of an even more fundamental

right: the political agency of the researcher. Active participation in a grassroots organization such as *Man on the Street* makes it necessary for social scientists to move beyond the mere recognition of their privileged status and reclaim the substance of their own citizenship. In this way, they have to break with the hegemonic notion of a “neutral science” and the expectation that the researcher will remain “objective,” and also develop a critical and sustainable praxis of social and academic engagement (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). This is especially difficult in socio-cultural contexts such as contemporary Hungary where anthropology does not have a strong public presence and where people who get into “politics” are often viewed with suspicion. In this way, reclaiming the right to engaged research requires that researchers reclaim their status as citizens not only by actively inhabiting the social and political spaces available to them, but also by venturing to create new ones through collaboration with actors outside of academia.

b. Participatory action research

Another way to subvert conventional research practice and reclaim the right to research is participatory action research (PAR). PAR provides “a space for questioning exclusionary practices and social inequities” (Cahill, 2004, p. 273) and transforms research from “the gaze of the privileged” into a tool for social change. As a methodology, PAR gained significance in Latin America, Africa and Asia in the 1970s as a form of inquiry where “ordinary, underprivileged people ... collectively investigate their own reality, by themselves or in partnership with friendly outsiders, take action of their own to advance their lives, and reflect on their ongoing experience” (Rahman, 2008, p. 49). Born out of a combination of Marxist theory, critical pedagogy, action research and feminist critiques of the structures of dominance, PAR radically changes the ways in which knowledge is produced and puts research at the service of social transformation.

PAR's philosophy of social change is rooted in Paulo Freire's ([1970] 2007) critical pedagogy, which poses a direct challenge to the reproduction of marginalization and privilege by mainstream education as well as the hierarchical relationships embedded in conventional academic (research) practice. Defining social transformation as a pedagogical process, Freire maintained that marginalized groups have to undertake a process of radical self-humanization by understanding and subverting the structural roots of oppression. Freire's theory of social change is important because of its focus on process and methodology – how social transformation is achieved is just as important as its actual outcome – and the recognition that marginalized groups have to participate actively in changing the social conditions that oppress them.

PAR aims to connect personal experiences with the broader context of structural inequalities through the co-construction of the research process and the development of critical consciousness. Critical consciousness or

conscientization refers to the process by which members of oppressed groups cultivate abilities to perceive and deconstruct the prevailing ideologies and practices that veil inequalities as legitimate and how they progressively work to change the conditions of their lives through action aimed at restructuring hierarchal power relations. (Guishard, 2009, p. 89)

In other words, critical consciousness is not a mental state, but the catalyst for critical reflection and practice.

While Freire dismissed reflection for its own sake, Kurt Lewin (1946) advocated against research for purely academic purposes: “research that produces nothing but books will not suffice” (p. 35). Looking specifically at intergroup relations between minority and majority populations, Lewin maintained that it is not enough to use research to understand social relations; it also has to contribute to improving them. For research to be an effective

tool for social change, it cannot take place only in the isolated setting of the university but must be embedded in the practice of social movements and organizations. PAR brings together the commitment of social movements, their members' experience and expertise and scholars skilled in the craft of research with access to the resources and privileges of academia. By establishing a democratic and critical process of knowledge production, PAR is able to produce results that are both theoretically significant and politically transformative.

Since the 1980s, participatory action research has become popular in many different social, political, disciplinary and geographical contexts. At the same time, both participation as a concept and PAR as a methodology have been integrated and often co-opted by mainstream institutions (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Especially in the field of international development, agencies have adopted participation as a central concept since the early 1990s. In the Freirian sense, participation means social transformation through the empowerment of marginalized groups to challenge oppressive political, cultural and economic structures. However, in the neoliberal discourse of development, "participation" has come to mean the development of civil society, whose primary role is to numb the violent effects of structural adjustment and substitute for the decreasing presence of the state in the delivery of social services (Leal, 2007). In this context, participatory action research is often used to create the *appearance* of participation without any real impact.

Deeply rooted in critical theories of knowledge and social change, participatory action research is not just an inclusive methodology, but a political and theoretical stance. In order to distinguish their practice from technical versions of PAR that do not challenge and may even reinforce the status quo, radical practitioners define "critical PAR" as research that is embedded in a framework of social justice. As Torre et al. (2012) point out, critical participatory action research does not have specific guidelines about how to conduct research.

Rather ... critical participatory researchers are bound by a set of critical and participatory commitments ... with a principled purpose of working against unjust, oppressive structures. ... [C]ritical participatory projects are crafted toward *Impact Validity*, anticipating from the start how to produce evidence that can be mobilized for change (p. 175-181)

In short, critical PAR aims to collect information, offer a critique of the status quo, encourage individual and collective learning, dismiss stereotypes and prejudices while also realizing concrete actions and building community.

PAR creates a space for theorizing by those who are dehumanized and silenced by hegemonic institutions such as academia, the media and social services and plays a critical role in challenging dominant discourses of personal blame and failure. PAR can be instrumental in the creation of counterpublics or “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, needs” (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). While counterpublics may exist in relative autonomy from dominant public discourses, they are not (and should not be) isolated from mainstream arenas of public participation, as they work to change prevailing social relations. In fact, critical PAR aims to simultaneously produce alternative spaces and forms of knowledge, influence mainstream conceptions and practices and avoid co-optation. In all, with its commitment to “speaking back to power,” PAR is a tool to produce the cultural or discursive power necessary for viable political representation (see Gramsci, 1971).

As a political alliance between formally trained researchers and those directly affected, PAR can be used in different contexts including public policy, academia and social movements (Denis & Lomas, 2003). In Nicaragua, for example, the movement against domestic violence used conventional and participatory action research together with large-scale mobilization to push for legislative change that resulted in passing a national domestic

violence act (Ellsberg, et al., 1997). In a project titled *Polling for Justice* (see Fox & Fine, forthcoming; Torre et al., 2012), youth researchers looked at the experiences of New York City young people with schools, the police and health care. Having examined the real-life consequences of large-scale policies, the project's findings were disseminated through a number of channels including a public performance, op-ed pieces, public hearings and collaboration with community groups. In Hungary, where it is a little known approach, PAR was at the heart of a comprehensive research and community development project in a rural community that led to a community planning and development process, several training courses as well as initiatives to support the livelihoods of Roma residents (see Bodorkós & Pataki, 2009).

2. *Justice on the Streets: participatory action research about discrimination against homeless people*¹¹¹

A main feature of the modern state is to count, document and categorize its people, land and assets (Scott, 1998). In this way, research and documentation are important forms of state control that can also be turned into technologies of exclusion. In today's Hungary, registering a permanent address and having a social security and a tax number are not only ways for the state to document its population, but also essential links to the full exercise of citizenship. According to a study, for example, homeless people spend an average of almost 4 hours a day traveling, taking care of paperwork or standing in line for various services (Győri, 2006, p. 14) in an effort to keep up essential social links. Street social workers have to document each encounter they have with a homeless person and a new law stipulates that every time a homeless individual uses a social service, their social security number has to be

¹¹¹ This chapter is based on my personal experiences as an activist in *The City is for All* and a researcher in *Justice on the Streets*, the report produced by the research team and translated into English (A Város Mindenkié, 2013). All first-hand quotations in this section were originally published in the research report, unless otherwise noted.

registered. Finally, homeless people are documented not only through the registration of their personal data, but also through GIS maps compiled by the police and public space supervisors (“Rendőrk ellenőrzik,” 2011).

Through all these channels, the Hungarian state gathers a lot of information about homeless people. By contrast, homeless people know a lot less about the state. While users of social services often have an intricate knowledge about how to get things done, they rarely have a broader understanding of the state apparatus. This lack of a broader knowledge not only makes them vulnerable, but also creates a feeling of isolation as they navigate state bureaucracy and the social services system. In addition, it is very hard to question the treatment and procedures of bureaucrats without knowing the rules and laws that regulate them. At the same time, the state – through its representatives such as municipal workers or police officers – sends powerful messages to homeless people about themselves, their social position and the kinds of things they deserve or they do not. These messages are part of the collective lies (see Martín-Baró, 1994) that are socially and politically constructed about various groups to keep them under social control.

Justice on the Streets, a participatory action research project undertaken by homeless and housed members of *The City is for All* in 2011 and 2012, was an attempt to bridge this huge inequality in knowledge and power between homeless people and the state. Similar to projects as diverse as Ignacio Martín-Baró’s (1994) survey on Salvadorian life in the 1980s and the Morris Justice Project on stop-and-frisk practices in the contemporary Bronx,¹¹² *Justice on the Streets* documented the behavior of the state from the perspective of one of the most marginalized social groups, and the ways in which the state does or does not serve its homeless citizens.

¹¹² See The Public Science Project at <http://www.publicscienceproject.org/research/projects/the-morris-justice-project/>.

For years, AVM tried to document how the authorities abuse their power in dealing with street homeless people. In 2010, the group put out a call for case studies about the violation of homeless people's rights. The cases submitted by social workers attested not only to the fact that homeless people are often harassed, but also that they are not aware either of their own, or of the authorities' rights and responsibilities. At the same time, it also became obvious that anecdotal evidence was not enough to draw general conclusions and pursue substantial changes in either policy or practice. Given the absence of comprehensive studies about this topic, the group decided to launch its own research project, *Justice on the Streets*, to collect data about the harassment of street homeless people by the authorities.

The aim of the *Justice on the Streets* was to examine the ways and extent to which street homeless people in Budapest are discriminated against by representatives of the state. Besides collecting data, the project sought to challenge the political and intellectual exclusion of homeless people from discussions about criminalization and homelessness by empowering them as the key agents of change. Through systematic inquiry at different scales (Fine, 2006), the project wanted to raise critical consciousness among homeless people, produce strategic knowledge and build power for effective self-advocacy at the individual and collective levels.

Jenny Cameron (2007, p. 207) distinguishes three basic types of PAR: liberatory projects where research done with marginalized groups aims to transform people's everyday lives; researching *for* institutions where research aims to identify issues and produce recommendations for organizations to respond to; and researching *with* institutions where representatives from dominant institutions such as policy or decision-makers participate as co-researchers in order to generate institutional commitment and willingness to act on findings. *Justice on the Streets* can be characterized as a liberatory project in that it was carried out by those directly affected by harassment and also aimed to use research results to change existing social conditions. At the same time, it was also done *for* a grassroots group, *The City is for*

All, in order to identify issues and propose recommendations about how to change an adverse situation.

Justice on the Streets was coordinated by four AVM activists, two of whom are housed with training in the social sciences (the author was one of them) and two long-time homeless members. After a few failed attempts at recruitment, we decided to offer a small stipend and managed to bring together a team of 18 researchers by September, 2011.¹¹³ We started out with a four-day intensive training where the team learnt about various aspect of PAR including qualitative and quantitative approaches. After the training, the research team met for three hours a week and collected data in between weekly meetings. The research lasted about a year from the fall of 2011 to the fall of 2012, while actions based on the findings continued well into 2013.

Using a deductive process, the research team came to agree on the following main research question: “Do roofless people in Budapest experience discrimination by representatives of the state and if yes, in what forms and to what extent?”¹¹⁴ To answer this question, we drew on four main sources of data. First, the personal experiences of homeless researchers regarding discrimination were discussed and documented throughout the project. Second, the team developed a questionnaire that included questions about stereotypes and personal experiences of direct and indirect discrimination as well as individual advocacy.¹¹⁵ Close to 400 homeless people responded to the questionnaire at various locations including

¹¹³ By the end of the project in October, 2012 we had 11 homeless researchers, most of them from the original team.

¹¹⁴ We defined “roofless” as those who live in one-night shelters, on the street, in self-built shacks or other places not meant for human habitation such as empty buildings and caves. We included those who slept in one-night shelters because they are only allowed to enter in the evening and have to spend most of their day in public spaces or drop-in centers. In addition, as one-night shelters only offer a nightly contract, people are always at risk of not getting in because of limited capacities. Overall, our target group consisted of at least 5,000 people in Budapest, 2,000 of whom sleep in one-night shelters and 3,000 in other places. For the purposes of our study, we defined the “representatives of the state” as those who perform a public duty or get their salary from the central or a local government including uniformed officers, administrators and health care professionals.

¹¹⁵ The questionnaire, which we developed collectively over a couple of months, included 40 questions grouped into the following categories: general descriptive questions; the social perception of homeless people; general opinion about discrimination; first-hand experiences of discrimination; the behavior of uniformed authorities; and personal experiences and opinion regarding advocacy and civil rights.

drop-in centers, public spaces and food lines.¹¹⁶ Third, in order to support our statistics with qualitative data, we completed 18 interviews with professionals working with homeless people or having an impact on their lives, including social workers, police officers, public space supervisors, ticket inspectors on public transportation, health care professionals, administrators in the social services and elected representatives.¹¹⁷ Finally, secondary data included statistics about encounters between police officers and homeless people gathered by the police as well as about complaints filed against police officers and public space supervisors.

The research produced important data about prejudices and stereotypes regarding homeless people, the formal and informal manifestations of discrimination as well as civic consciousness and individual advocacy among homeless people. Regarding direct discrimination, the vast majority (83%) of survey respondents thought that homeless people experience discrimination and a similarly high proportion (75%) of respondents had first-hand experiences of direct discrimination. Non-homeless civilians such as passers-by, youth and passengers on mass transportation as well as public space supervisors and police officers were mentioned as the groups that discriminate against homeless people the most often. At the same time, in response to a more concrete question, a shocking 57% of respondents reported to have been treated in a humiliating manner, most often by public space supervisors, police officers and non-homeless civilians.

¹¹⁶ The sample has been established as quasi-representative of the homeless population of Budapest if compared to the results of the February 2012 “homeless survey.” Respondents in our survey had been homeless for an average of 7 years; half of them were homeless for less than 5 years, while 24% had lived on the street for more than 10 years at the time of the survey. This reflects the general trend that homelessness is not a temporary situation, but has become a long-term condition for many people in Hungary (Dávid et al., 2005). Over half of the respondents slept in one-night shelters and one fifth of them on the street. 29% slept in abandoned building, shacks, tents and other places. In terms of income, 30% of respondents had income from some kind of recycling activity (e.g. paper, plastic, cans etc.), 18% from occasional or regular work and 15% of the research subjects claimed to have no income.

¹¹⁷ We picked the interviewees using our personal and professional contacts as well as snowball sampling. We analyzed the completed interviews using a collective technique of iterative content analysis. First, we selected those parts of the interviews that were relevant for the topic of discrimination and then organized them according to various themes such as “systemic issues,” “individual discrimination” and “solutions.” After all the parts were categorized in this way, we discussed each and established trends and drew general conclusions.

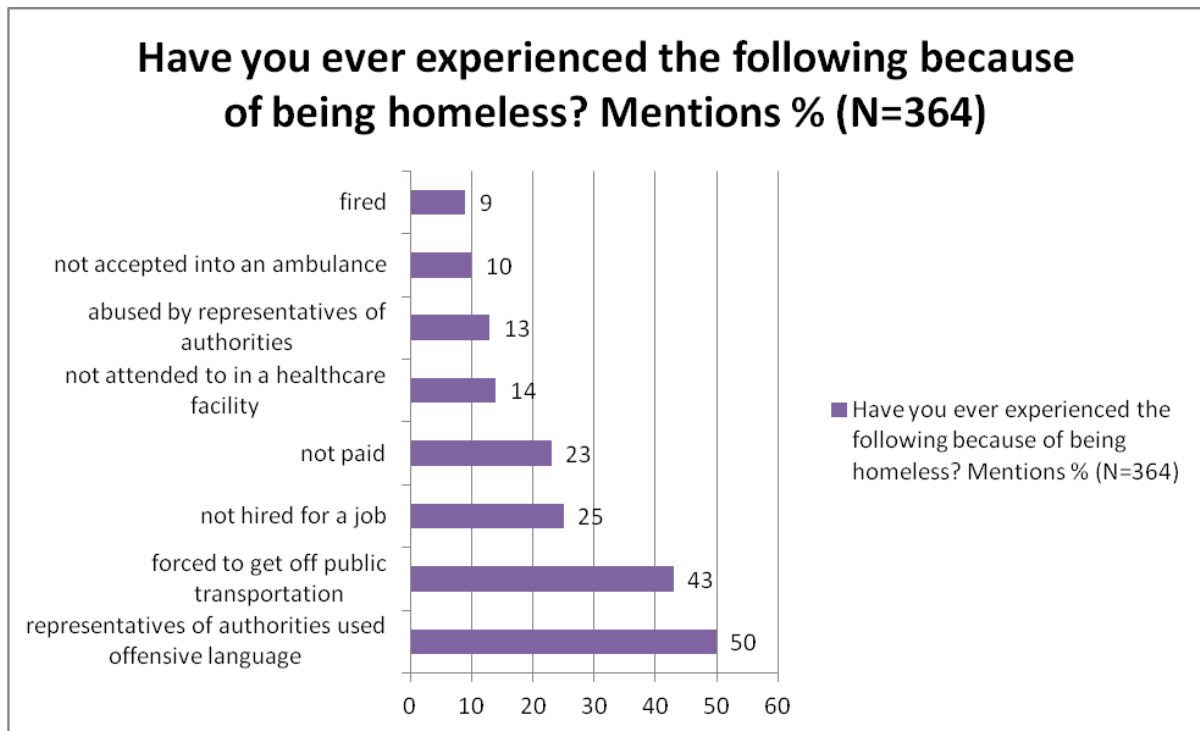


Table 1. Have you ever experienced the following because of being homeless... Mentions % (N=364)

Homeless respondents identified public transportation as the arena where they experience the most discrimination. Forty-three percent of respondents said that they had been forced to get off a public transport vehicle such as bus or a tram because they did not have a valid ticket, broke the rules of conduct (e.g. traveling in dirty clothes or taking a larger bag are prohibited) or simply for being homeless. The issue of public transportation highlights the relationship between the first-hand experience of discrimination and structural exclusion. Informal conversations with respondents and homeless people in other venues revealed that many homeless people regard the fact of being forced out of public transportation as a form of discrimination in itself. While they are aware that traveling without a valid ticket or a pass is in breach of official rules, from their point of view, the fact that they do not have a ticket is rooted in the same condition as their homelessness: extreme poverty. In this way, the moment that they are expelled from the bus or the tram for the lack of a valid ticket, their structural exclusion is translated into concrete terms. In this way, it is not necessarily exclusion from public transportation in the absence of a valid ticket that qualifies as discrimination, but the

fact that most homeless people cannot afford to use public transportation to satisfy their most basic needs.

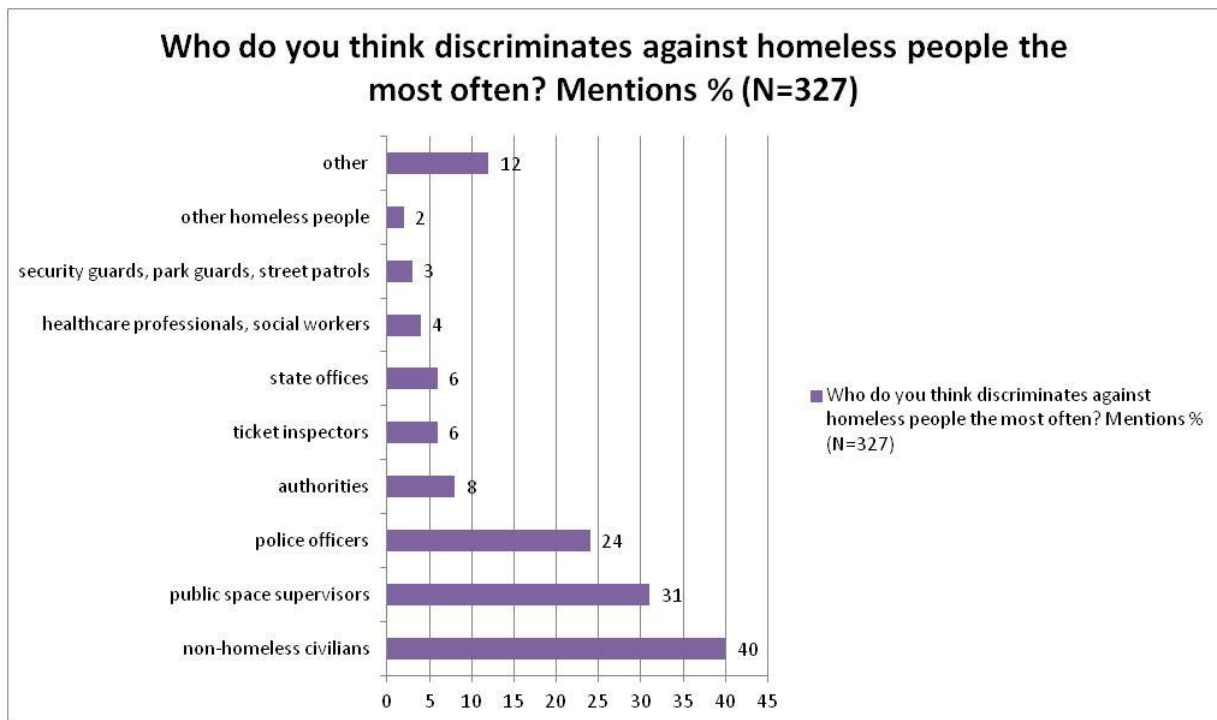


Table 2. Who do you think discriminates against homeless people the most often? Mentions % (N=327)

After public transportation, discrimination by the uniformed authorities was reported to be the most frequent. Uniformed officers discriminated against almost half of the homeless respondents and had talked to 50% of them in a demeaning way. This finding has also been confirmed by an interview with public space supervisors who talked about “using a stronger tone” when a homeless person refuses to leave after repeated requests. Altogether, only 26% of homeless respondents felt that uniformed authorities treated them as equal citizens. As many as 13% of homeless respondents reported to have been physically abused by the authorities.

However, many respondents also identified uniformed authorities as sources of help. Almost one quarter of the respondents had received support from public space supervisors or police officers in the form of food, money or information, which was also confirmed by the official statistics provided by the Budapest police headquarters about the interaction between

police officers and homeless people.¹¹⁸ Interestingly, respondents identified leniency on the part of authorities as a specific form of help. For example, public space supervisors often give homeless people a verbal warning instead of a formal punishment for an infraction such as rummaging through garbage. This practice has also been confirmed in an interview with a public space supervisor: “How would I fine a homeless individual? Where would they get the money from? This makes no sense.”

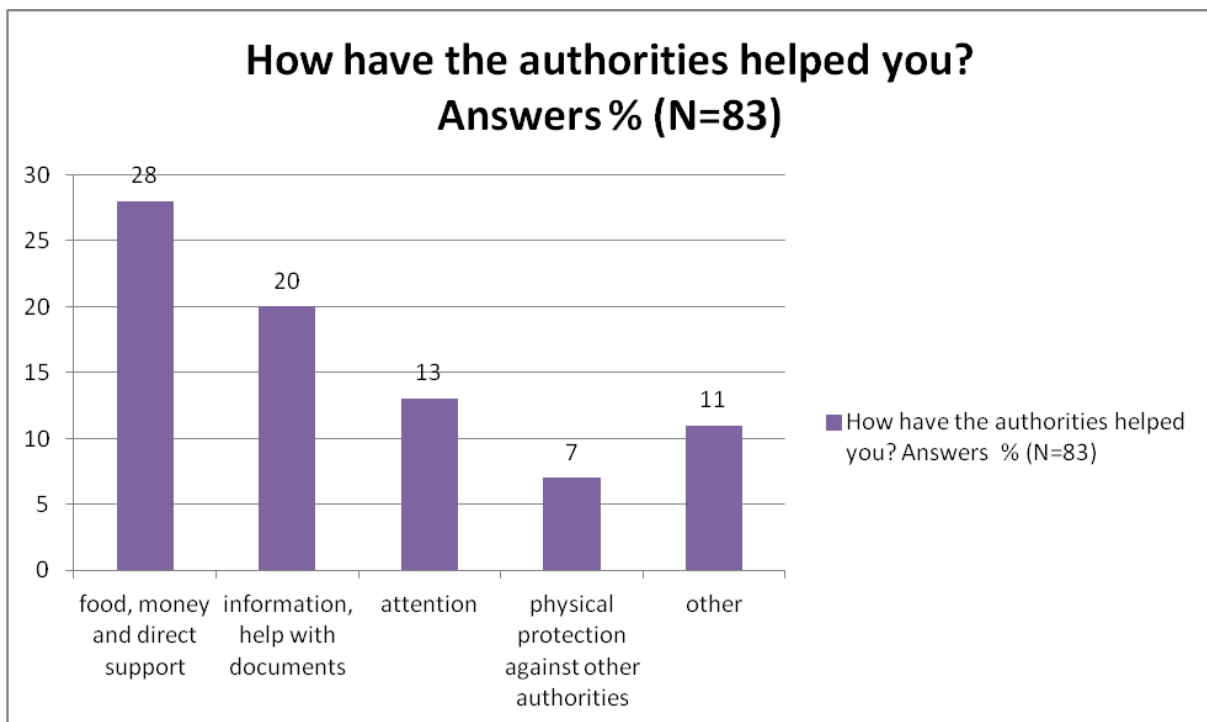


Table 3. How have the authorities helped you? Answers % (N=83)

Because of their dependence on certain social services that are often spatially concentrated as well as their heavy use of public spaces, homeless people are especially exposed to police harassment. In fact, being stopped for an ID check is the main source of tension between police officers and homeless people. While ethnic profiling in Hungary is relatively well-documented,¹¹⁹ the targeting of homeless people has not been confirmed by any previous studies. In this way, the research team of *Justice on the Streets* has been the first

¹¹⁸ These charts were provided to *The City is for All* under a freedom of information request in 2010.

¹¹⁹ The chances of Roma Hungarians being checked by the police is three times their proportion in the general population (Kádár et al., 2008). In an analysis of official police data the Hungarian Helsinki Committee found that Roma cyclists in the Northeast of Hungary were disproportionately stopped and fined by the police for such minor infractions as not having lights or a bell on the bicycle (Ivány & Pap, 2012).

to provide statistical evidence for the existence of class-based profiling. In other words, the Hungarian police seem to specifically target people who look poor for their ID checks. Fifty-nine percent of homeless respondents were checked by the police over a one-month period and more than one third of them were stopped more than four times.¹²⁰ These findings confirm not only the long-held subjective perception of homeless researchers and activists, but also the fact that despite formal equality before the law, the lack of housing leads to increased control, supervision and harassment for pursuing life-sustaining activities.

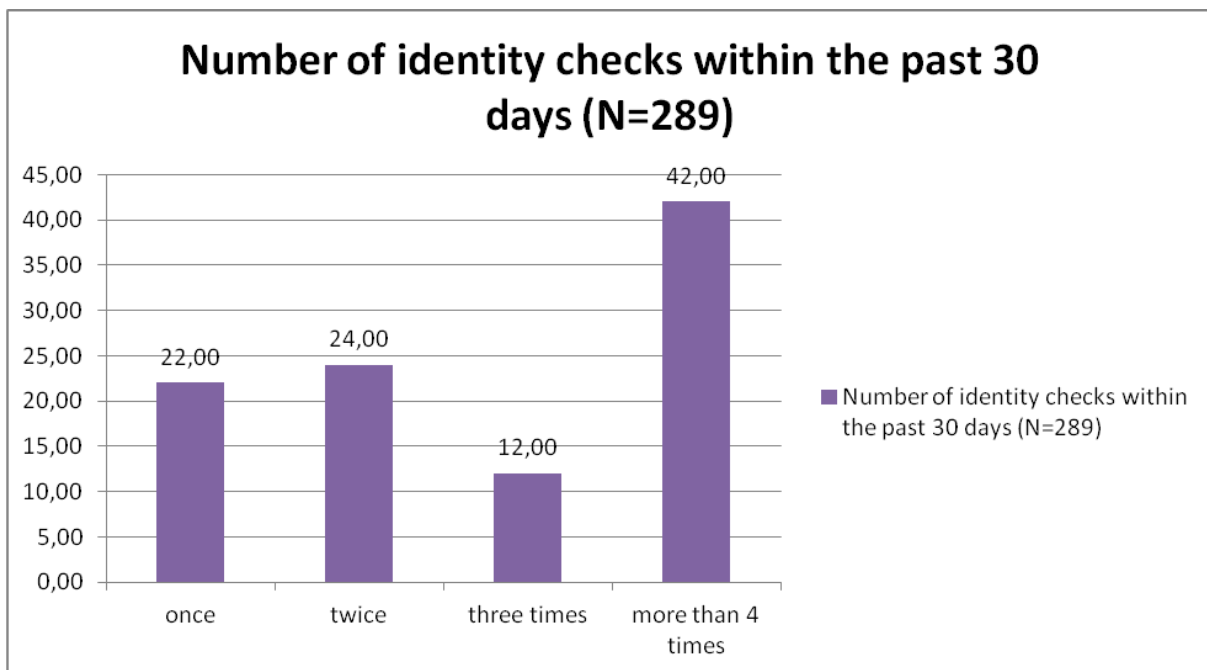


Table 4. Number of identity checks within the past 30 days (N=289)

While the *Justice on the Streets* questionnaire measured direct discrimination, the interviews conducted with professionals working with homeless people also revealed indirect discrimination and systemic issues. First of all, many interviewees identified homelessness as a state of social exclusion itself, a stigmatized condition that is almost impossible to leave behind. As one social worker put it, “Not having any money in your pocket, having an empty stomach, and not having a place to lie down at night – in my worldview this is discriminatory in itself.” In addition to this general sense of exclusion, the interviews pointed out four

¹²⁰ Homeless men seem to be much more exposed, with 63% of them checked in a 30-day period as opposed to “only” 47% of homeless women.

concrete areas where the social services system discriminates against homeless people including labor support, welfare, health care and social housing.

The segregation of homeless people in public services is the most concrete manifestation of indirect discrimination. There are two public agencies in Budapest that treat homeless people in a segregated manner, which are often described as discriminatory by both professionals and homeless people: the unemployment center for those “without an address” and the municipality’s homeless welfare office. In certain cases, the existence of an institution dealing with only one particular segment of the population could be justified by the special needs of its clients (such as special offices for veterans in the United States). However, administrators working in these two segregated offices in Budapest do not receive any special training, and do not offer any extra services. As one municipal worker stated: “It is in itself discriminatory to have the homeless separated as if they had some infectious disease. What’s so different about giving them welfare? Why do they have to be segregated?”

Universal health care is the most ambivalent area of public services from the point of view of homeless people. Of all homeless respondents in the *Justice on the Streets* survey, 25% said they have experienced discrimination in social and health care facilities. Fourteen percent of the respondents were not attended to in a hospital, and 10% were not taken by the ambulance when necessary. At the same time, homeless people also mentioned several positive experiences, especially when doctors and nurses made extra efforts to provide them with appropriate care. According to the head of a homeless health care facility: “Some people are really sweet patients and nurses love them. When they find out that they are homeless, they give them all the left-over food and they find them nice pajamas.”

The Hungarian health care system is in a critical condition and the lack of resources is a serious source of frustration for both health care professionals and their clients. These difficulties are exacerbated for homeless people, as health care institutions are not always able

to provide them with the care they need. In recognition of this, a parallel (and in many ways inferior) system of health care has been developed exclusively for homeless patients. Homeless health care centers have three main functions: first, to prepare homeless people for the regular health care system through parasite removal, cleanup and nutrition; second, to take them in after a hospital discharges them and sends them “home”; and third, to provide basic medical services and referrals for those who do not have a proper address and are thus not eligible for regular health care. While these institutions undoubtedly save lives by providing safe havens for homeless people, they also point out the inability and often reluctance of existing health care services to serve everyone’s needs equally.

The existence of segregated facilities for the homeless is a good example of the politics of marginal space (Larsen, 2004), which is

an ambiguous phenomenon. On the one hand, the politics of marginal space could be interpreted as a politics of displacement or of neglect. On the other hand, it could be seen as a response to a need of differentiated social integration – that is a particularistic policy approach towards those who do not, cannot or are unwilling to fit within a universal or normalising social policy approach. The politics of marginal space can be seen as recognition of marginal people's special needs and lifestyles. However, it can easily turn out to be a politics of displacement or of neglect if this recognition is not complemented by a willingness to provide the necessary space and resources to accommodate and provide for these people. (p. 206)

The separate hospitals, the segregated labor and welfare offices as well as the special address category (see Chapter 3) have all been developed to ensure the survival of homeless people as physical bodies and in certain cases as (second-class) citizens. In most cases, separate social institutions for the homeless do not represent special attention to the needs of their clients, but rather reflect a politics of neglect. The fact that many homeless people choose to go to a

“homeless doctor” instead of a general practitioner because they are afraid of discrimination illustrates the extent to which marginality and second-class citizenship has been internalized. In this way, these marginal spaces do not work to undermine social inequality but, instead, reproduce the status quo.

Finally, professionals interviewed by *Justice on the Streets* researchers have also identified social housing as an area of discrimination. This is particularly paradoxical as social housing could be one of the few permanent exits out of homelessness. However, because of the extremely limited availability of social housing units and the local municipalities’ efforts to attract higher class tenants, the calls for social housing applications often set criteria of eligibility that are difficult or impossible for poor people to meet (e.g. a certain number of years of official residence in the district, the obligation to renovate or the pre-payment of rent for several months or even years). In this way, instead of addressing the structural inequalities of the housing market, the current system of social housing tends to reinforce social inequalities.

3. The production of radical knowledge in *Justice on the Streets*

The concept of 'deep participation' describes the collective process of reflection and knowledge production in PAR.¹²¹ For different authors, the concept means slightly different things. In Billies (2010) deep participation refers to the fact that all researchers are involved in all aspects of the research from conception through data collection to analysis and action, while critical consciousness is raised. In Francisco (2010), it is used to describe a situation where it is not only those who suffer directly from oppression who share their knowledge and experiences but everyone, including academically trained researchers. In Torre et al. (2008),

¹²¹ At times, it is used to describe a kind of practice that is in contrast to “PAR light” or certain forms of participatory research where collaboration is an important element, but does not permeate all aspects of research. One example of PAR light is the setting up advisory boards to craft questions, oversee the research and reflect on research results.

the depth of participation refers to interactions and transformations across social status. In the following, I analyze the unfolding of deep participation in *Justice on the Streets* from the perspective of critical consciousness, the dynamics of participation and the deconstruction of power and inequality.

a. Raising critical consciousness

PAR creates a space where participants can explore their personal experiences, connect them with those of others who are in a similar situation and uncover the roots of their oppressions. In this way, while valorizing the personal experiences of co-researchers, PAR aims to connect these with the broader context of structural inequalities by developing critical consciousness. Fine and Ruglis (2009) discuss the ways in which circuits of dispossession become embodied experiences of shame and failure in high school students of color. In fact, the same is true for homeless people who suffer from the consequences of neoliberal policies that slash social housing and welfare, but are socialized to see themselves as the sources of failure and dysfunction.

Developing a critical understanding of social experiences in a structural context allows people to see themselves and their difficulties in a way that empowers rather than oppresses them. With the help of systematic inquiry, disenfranchised groups are able to produce (self)representations that go against dominant discourses, which are not only stigmatizing, but often also paralyzing. By building strategic knowledge and politicizing participants, critical consciousness helps to build power to confront injustice at the individual and collective levels. In *Justice on the Streets*, critical consciousness was developed through systematic inquiry at different scales: while the unit of data collection was the local and personal, the unit of analysis was always systemic (Fine, 2006). In this project, the development of critical

consciousness included an analysis of oppression and inequality and an ability to both see oneself and act as a capable agent of change.

Except for the two homeless activists who were involved from the very beginning of the project, homeless researchers had not been involved in any activism before joining the *Justice on the Streets* team. Most of them were totally unfamiliar with the work of AVM and they joined the project either out of curiosity, to occupy their free time or because of the small but steady source of income provided by the project. Importantly, as many of the homeless researchers had some education beyond elementary school, the intellectual challenge posed by the project was also appreciated by them. As Jenő Keresztes, one of the researchers with personal experiences of homelessness stated in an interview, echoing what co-researchers often voiced at meetings: “my brain started to work again.”¹²²

As it became clear from the findings of the research, homeless people’s acute awareness of negative social attitudes towards them determines not only their relationship with mainstream society, but also their self-esteem and their relationships with each other. As one homeless respondent stated: “There is negative discrimination against homeless people by homeless people themselves.” According to a longitudinal study from 1998 to 2000, homeless people disproportionately suffer from the insults of their homeless peers (Dávid et al., 2005, p. 99). Besides, differentiating “decent homeless people” from “bums” (*csöves*)¹²³ is often used by both homeless and housed people to indicate social distinctions. Some measures of such distinction include physical cleanliness, alcohol consumption, lifestyle, residence and general appearance. A comment on the Facebook page of *The City is for All* in response to a post about police harassment in March, 2013 attests to a widespread attitude among homeless people:

¹²² Excerpt from a series of unpublished interviews were completed by Barbara Erős, a student of cultural anthropology at the University of Miskolc in July and August of 2012.

¹²³ For the historical roots and implications of this term, see Chapter 4.

those [homeless people] get checked by the police who are scruffy and untidy! I understand the police, and I am a homey, too. Why don't they check me? ... I would add that there are many criminal elements among the homeless. Most probably because of their circumstances. But those who have nothing to hide, do not experience ID checks as a burden. You should understand that as poverty is growing, there will also be higher crime! So it is useful to filter the suspicious elements.¹²⁴

The internalization of prejudices leads to a lot of suspicion among homeless people towards each other and this is also one of the biggest obstacles that *The City is for All* has to overcome in its efforts to organize homeless people and foster active solidarity among them.

Despite the lack of adequate housing, many “homeless” researchers did not identify as such. In fact, one of the frequently used coping strategies for unhoused people is to distance themselves from the socially constructed image of “the homeless.” The stance of Jenő Keresztes reflects this view:

Homelessness is a process: it starts from somewhere and then it leads to a confusion of identity, giving up certain human things. This is what defines people who are homeless. Everybody has some goal or task that goes beyond survival, but the homeless person's consciousness narrows down to sustaining themselves: eating, drinking and sleeping. Self-esteem disappears and they want to live from one day to the next. Maybe this is more difficult for those who are more educated [as he himself is]. Homelessness does not mean sleeping on a bench in a park; it is a state of mind.¹²⁵

By rejecting the label “homeless,” many unhoused people reject exactly this state of mind and the lack of social perspectives it implies.

While the rejection of homelessness as an identity is helpful to maintaining self-esteem, this attitude tends to overlook the structural roots of homelessness and focuses on its

¹²⁴ Source: <https://www.facebook.com/AVarosMindenkie/posts/408472605915792>

¹²⁵ Excerpt from a series of unpublished interviews completed by Barbara Erős in July and August of 2012.

psychological aspects. As a result, the development of critical consciousness has to start with gaining a positive identity that is not articulated against the deficiencies of others. It is very difficult to establish solidarity with others without a positive sense of being in the world.

Zsuzsa Kovács¹²⁶, another homeless researcher, echoed these feelings when she said that

I have always had self-confidence, but in certain cases the feedback I got diminished it. Being beaten at home destroys your self-confidence and you need time to get out of it. This research process was very useful for that: the group, the training, the fact that I was with people, I had things to do and I had a goal. I wasn't on the street to find out what I was going to do in the next 5 minutes but I was there with a goal. This was good.¹²⁷

For homeless co-researchers, conversations with people in similar situations indicated that they are not alone in their predicament and that there is something systemic about their experiences. The research also helped them recognize the humanity of other homeless people. Again, in the words of Zsuzsa Kovács:

I have never looked down on people just because they lived on the street or because they were homeless. But now that I see this whole thing, I think it is unjust that they sit there and limp around – because it is their legs that suffer this situation first.¹²⁸

Or, as Jenő Keresztes reported about his own change of attitudes regarding other homeless people:

I realized that when people open up, they have a lot of values. The research piqued my interest in people who I would have never talked to otherwise. I have always been a snob. I haven't stopped being one, but I realized that every person has something valuable in them.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ This is a pseudonym, as the researcher did not give permission to use her real name in the dissertation.

¹²⁷ Excerpt from a series of unpublished interviews completed by Barbara Erős in July and August of 2012.

¹²⁸ Excerpt from a series of unpublished interviews completed by Barbara Erős in July and August of 2012.

¹²⁹ Excerpt from a series of unpublished interviews completed by Barbara Erős in July and August of 2012.

In addition to confronting many existing prejudices, the research made it clear that discrimination against homeless people has a structural dimension. István Petrák observed very early on in our conversations that the category of “the homeless” was not a given, but mostly produced through the logic of social services and segregated institutions (see Marcus, 2006). Having been categorized as “homeless,” people without adequate homes often start to think of themselves as being different from (and most often less than) the rest of the population, ones who must make do with “less” and the “worst” of everything. The collective recognition of the social process that produces “homelessness” and the internalized shame and inferiority that often go with it, was an important step in the research process towards conceptualizing homelessness as a social rather than a psychological issue.¹³⁰

Finally, the development of critical consciousness is not limited to a mental state but should also lead to a greater ability to act on one’s own behalf – both individually and as a collective. By learning about their rights as equal citizens and gaining more experience to interact effectively as a team, co-researchers often became more assertive in their everyday communication. As János Jáger put it: “I feel that I have done something for AVM and I have learned that I have a right to different things. ... I learned that through struggle and lobby(ing), you can achieve things.”¹³¹ For several co-researchers, this renewed confidence had very practical consequences as they were able to assert their rights and needs vis-à-vis people in positions of authority such as social workers, administrators and public space supervisors.

b. Participation

Creating a truly collaborative process was one of the main challenges in *Justice on the Streets*. The team worked hard on creating processes that allowed as much participation as

¹³⁰ For more on the social construction of homelessness based on social service institutions, see Chapter 7.

¹³¹ Excerpt from a series of unpublished interviews completed by Barbara Erős in July and August of 2012.

possible, did not marginalize anyone and also helped us to proceed effectively with our work. To ensure procedural justice (see Deutsch, 2000), we followed many of the principles developed in *The City is for All* (see Chapter 5) including the need for everyone to be able to contribute to the work and the discussion, distributing information as widely as possible in the group through announcements and handouts, making sure that discussions only end when there is no more input from participants, allowing enough time for ideas to emerge and making decisions only in person, collectively and through consensus. These were especially crucial given the initial differences in knowledge and experience regarding both activism and research among homeless and housed researchers and older and new members of AVM. From this perspective, our project can be characterized by what Chatterton et al. (2007) call Solidarity Action Research, which goes beyond creating spaces of participation *for* homeless people and ensures that “solidarity and mutuality is worked at, respectful critique and disagreement are vital and should develop in a supportive and progressive way that generates solutions beneficial for the group” (p. 219).

In the vast majority of cases, this strategy of collaboration did work and everyone felt that they could contribute to the process. During the training, the group worked out ethical principles that would guide us throughout the research process. The guidelines included the following:

members of the group do not judge each other but respect each other’s opinions and values. Everyone recognizes their own mistakes and learns from both their own mistakes and each other. It is everyone’s responsibility to contribute to the success of our collective work and motivate other members of the group.

While the guidelines referred more to principles than concrete “rules of behavior,” they provided a framework for our interactions and team members made occasional references to them throughout our conversations.

While not everyone was able to participate in all aspects of the research, everyone participated in some aspects of it. One example is that of Krisztina Horváth,¹³² the youngest of the group, who was very quiet during our group discussions, but turned out to be a superb surveyor: she not only became very confident in administering the questionnaires, but people were also much more willing to answer her than other members of the group. She was also one of the most active researchers when it came to the content analysis of interviews – Krisztina had a very sensitive and acute eye to find the quotes that were most relevant to us and then analyze them according to our own pre-determined categories. By contrast, Gábor Tóth,¹³³ one of the oldest members, was very good at brainstorming about research questions and providing conceptual input, often posing challenging questions as we put together the questionnaire and the interview guides. Several times, he was also selected by the group to present our work in public. At the same time, he was not very successful with completing the questionnaires as he was unsure about how to approach people on the street. Overall, the overwhelming feeling in the group was that the project has been a truly collective process. As Zsuzsa Kovács put it,

we are all equally important. I'm not saying this out of a false modesty. It is not possible for one person to feel that they have shaped the research alone. The whole was the point. I was able to express my opinion freely and my ideas were well received. Everyone contributed in their own ways. It wasn't two or three people who said something and then we said yes, but everyone contributed.¹³⁴

In addition to the overall collaborative nature of the project, three instances stand out from the one-year process when homeless co-researchers made an intervention that significantly impacted the course of the research. The first of these was the exact topic of the research. While AVM originally recruited co-researchers to study the harassment of street

¹³² This is a pseudonym, as the researcher did not give permission to use her real name in the dissertation.

¹³³ This is a pseudonym, as the researcher did not give permission to use his real name in the dissertation.

¹³⁴ Excerpt from a series of unpublished interviews completed by Barbara Erős in July and August of 2012.

homeless people by the authorities, newly recruited co-researchers insisted on expanding the question to include all forms of discrimination. In addition to a division between older and newer members, there was a clear class-based pattern in the focus of interest: homeless researchers were more interested in how they are treated in general, while housed researchers were interested specifically in the behavior of uniformed officers as the agents of criminalization and oppression (see Hartnett & Johnson, 2008). It became clear from our conversations that for many homeless people, harassment and criminalization are only two aspects of their marginalization, even if the most egregious ones. In other words, they are only symptoms of a more general condition of exclusion. As a result, for homeless co-researchers the priority was to challenge their dehumanization and re-establish their full personhood instead of challenging only some aspects of their exclusion such as harassment or criminalization. In the end, as the findings above illustrate, it was this approach that prevailed and the team addressed criminalization in the broader context of discrimination.

Second, while the original team of activists wanted the research to focus almost exclusively on abuses of power by the authorities and highlight homeless people's negative experiences regarding the state, positive experiences came up very early on in the process. As homeless participants of the first recruitment session about the project recounted positive impressions about the authorities along with negative ones, they challenged us to expand our combative activist stance and include a much broader range of experiences. In fact, this is the reason why the question about the ways in which the authorities were of help to respondents was included in the final questionnaire.

The third example of a significant intervention by a homeless researcher is when Ferenc Sándor suggested that we get involved in the annual Homeless Survey, which is conducted by sociologists and homeless service providers. He proposed that we volunteer to administer their questionnaires and use it as a training ground. In the end, we did get involved,

got some training about how to administer and analyze questionnaires and gained important hands-on experiences with completing a survey. These experiences were very useful for the development and completion of our own questionnaires. In addition to gaining some valuable experiences, Ferenc also suggested that we integrate our question about harassment in the Homeless Survey, which would have a much broader scope than our own. After some lobbying, the question we formulated was included, which was only the second time in years that the large-scale survey addressed this question.

The active engagement of homeless researchers was not confined to *Justice on the Streets*, but also extended to participation in a movement for housing rights and the broader public sphere. In a way, the research project provided a good segway for homeless researchers into broader democratic participation. While involvement in these spheres had different levels of intensity, co-researchers became more politically conscious as all of them participated in some of the demonstrations and actions of

The City is for All, most often as participants but at times also as organizers. Some of them also engaged in the broader public sphere by publishing articles on AVM's blog and writing an open letter to a commissioner of the European Union about social rights in Europe. The dissemination of



25. Roundtable discussion about the research results in a homeless shelter in Budapest

research results was an important form of engagement with the broader public sphere: homeless researchers not only educated fellow activists in AVM about the findings, but also held a press conference, appeared on the media several times, and also presented our findings to various audiences including homeless people, social scientists, law students and law enforcement officials.

While meaningful participation is contingent on the efforts of everyone involved, the role of the facilitator (myself in the case of *Justice on the Streets*) is to create the conditions for everyone to be able to participate. On the one hand, this required using various techniques of discussion and analysis so that people with various skills could participate equally and effectively. For example, in order to ensure everyone's participation, we did a lot of preparation and analysis in small groups. While the two housed researchers were part of the discussions in the big group, we did not participate in the small group discussions. As such, small groups served as the arena for more quiet people to speak up and not have to cope with our dominating presence. On the other, creating space for participation also meant the "enforcement" of our basic principles. In certain cases, this meant a conscious retraction by housed activities and a vehement insistence that homeless researchers be more proactive and confident both in and outside the group.

Following in the footsteps of Guishard (2009), I find it important to point out moments of failure and messiness in the research process. In *Justice on the Streets*, one incident in particular pointed out the ways in which social inequality produces authority, which may seriously limit participation. Through a grant won by *The City is for All*, homeless co-researchers got a small weekly stipend (the equivalent of 10 dollars/week). In this way, homeless members of the research team were the only members of AVM who got some financial compensation for their work. It had not been an easy decision for AVM to introduce the stipend, but it seemed necessary to ensure a steady level of participation in the research. Throughout the process, the research team handled money issues with a relative ease and most conflicts were resolved quickly by the group. However, towards the end of the project, the team had to decide what to do with the money that was left over from the stipends of co-researchers who had dropped out earlier. We brainstormed collectively about the possibilities and decided to give it back to AVM. Our only condition was that this money should be spent

on a larger project and not just daily operating expenses. However, as some co-researchers were clearly not happy with this decision, we took up this issue again at the next research meeting. While some homeless researchers were of the opinion that co-researchers should split the money among themselves, the group ended up with the same decision as before: to “give it back” to AVM.

These decisions were reached by the same mechanism of consensus that we had used throughout the research process. However, as it turned out, some co-researchers were still not satisfied with this decision and implied that some participants did not dare to express their real opinions in front of housed researchers. In fact, while they were not alone with this idea, the two housed researchers clearly and vehemently supported the idea that the money belonged to *The City is for All* as a group and that it should not be given to individual researchers. After some bickering (a very rare occasion over the one year that the team had worked together), the two allies decided to leave and let homeless co-researchers decide about the money on their own. In the end, they decided to vote on the issue and came to the same conclusion as before: “give the money back” to *The City is for All*.

Overall, the escalation of this conflict had as much to do with money as with the underlying dynamics of authority and dominance. This instance made it clear that homeless co-researchers were sometimes reluctant to openly contradict the position of allies, including myself, even though they had a clear opinion on an issue. While in general, AVM does not consider voting an effective or fair way of making collective decisions, the fact that homeless researchers decided to break this rule and use it to settle such a crucial issue was an important sign of autonomy in this context. Even if the decision was the same as before, the fact that housed researchers were not present and homeless researchers were on their own to decide how to make an important decision was a difficult but important moment of empowerment. Unfortunately, this incident was not processed thoroughly by the group and left some scars on

most people involved. At the same time, it was an important reminder of the ways in which inequality and oppression are reproduced through the terms of a discussion, language use and social roles among others.

c. Bridging inequality

Participatory action research represents a contact zone where people consciously work together across and against power inequalities (Torre et al., 2008). While such contact zones are infused with implicit tensions and make inequalities both visible and tangible, they are also an opportunity to recognize, deconstruct and transform hierarchies. However, the question inevitably arises as to whether it is possible to co-construct the entire research process when there are such extreme differences in knowledge, access to resources and experience. One of the most important features of critical PAR is to address these dilemmas by actively engaging with them. Acknowledging and interrogating differences in power, knowledge and experience is part of the process of developing critical consciousness. *Justice on the Streets* has revealed many forms and dimensions of inequality at both the micro and macro levels, which we attempted to challenge in a number of ways with varying success.

At the macro level, *Justice on the Streets* is a response to the silence in academic and public discourses of those most affected by homelessness. In academic or professional publications, homeless people almost always appear as the object of help or scrutiny, but rarely if ever as active citizens and thinking subjects. This project created a space for a group of homeless people to develop a public voice and challenge systematic exclusion and marginalization at the discursive level by asking their own questions, collecting data and producing and disseminating their own interpretation of it. At the beginning, most co-researchers were not sure about their own role in research. As István Petrák put it, “I thought that you needed experts for a research and I couldn’t imagine how lay people could do such a

thing.”¹³⁵ Or as Gábor Tóth said, “At the beginning, there were a lot of doubts about whether this was feasible. It was hard to believe that we would have results that can be used as a reference and that it can be done in a professional way.”¹³⁶ However, towards the end of the project, homeless researchers became more confident in their research skills as well as in the relevance of what they had to say. After the publication of the research report, a group of homeless researchers went on a “tour” to present our findings to various audiences including homeless people, the media, university students, other social scientists, public space supervisors and police officers. In this way, the research turned the gaze that is usually directed at homeless people inside out towards those who play an important role in shaping not only their lives, but also the public images that are produced about them: the state, uniformed officers, social workers, health care professional and non-homeless citizens among others.

In addition to challenging dominant discourses and representations, macro-level empowerment involved three interrelated processes of political emancipation (see Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). First, regarding the systematic examination of state discrimination against homeless people, the project produced knowledge with the intention to inform public decisions and measures in law enforcement, health care and housing policy. Second, by embedding the research in the work of *The City is for All*, the project enabled individual and collective action against injustice. From the beginning, AVM made no secret of the fact that the research project was an important means to recruit new members into the group. In this way, the research mobilized homeless people to join a group with a strategic agenda to fight against criminalization and for the right to housing. Third, the project set out to change the consciousness of those on the margins of society – homeless people – about themselves as well as about the social, political and economic world by constructing a different kind of

¹³⁵ Excerpt from a series of unpublished interviews completed by Barbara Erős in July and August of 2012.

¹³⁶ Excerpt from a series of unpublished interviews completed by Barbara Erős in July and August of 2012.

subjectivity (that of the researcher and of the activist) and to empower them to take action both individually and collectively.

At the micro level, the existential gap between housed and homeless researchers seems almost impossible to bridge. A good illustration of this was provided by the map of Budapest, which the research team created at the beginning of the training. On the imagined map of the city, everyone had to stand in the place where they lived and explain their circumstances. For homeless researchers, “home” included a bench, an ATM machine, an entrance hall and a squat among others. Engaging in research from these material circumstances cannot be compared with the stable homes equipped with a bathroom, heating and internet where the two housed researchers live.

However, it would be a simplification to reduce inequality among research team members to a dichotomy between being “housed” or “homeless.” Many divisions were created along more general lines of education and socialization. Ally researchers are not only better off materially, but also tend to be more educated, have better social connections and greater self-confidence. Jenő Keresztes made some poignant (and painful) observations about the limits of consensus-based democracy and collaboration.

Those who are more cultured and more intelligent can articulate their opinions better, raise more questions. They present their arguments to the others, who reflect on them, but the intellect of those 4-5 people has the most influence. I know many people who sleep on Gellért hill and if I went there and told them: let’s do research together, they would say: yes, let’s do research together! I would give them ideas, then they would give me their opinions. But in this process, knowledge and intellect will come out sooner or later.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Excerpt from a series of unpublished interviews completed by Barbara Erős in July and August of 2012.

In fact, despite all the efforts to the contrary, homeless activists who possess good verbal skills and present intellectual rigor tend to command more respect in AVM. While this is an important resource and had been acknowledged as such by the group, it can also create unjust hierarchies. In a research project, the significance of these skills is even more pronounced in addition to organizing skills and access to material resources. This is the reason why so much effort went into not only the identification of as many tasks as possible, but also their equal distribution among team members.

Undoubtedly, the structural reasons behind such extreme inequalities cannot be alleviated through a single project. However, once we decide to do research together, efforts have to be made to equalize the playing field as much as possible. Some of the ways we tried to reduce this asymmetry included the provision of the weekly stipend and public transport tickets for research-related trips as well as snacks and drinks during meetings. To bridge differences in access to information and communication skills, we organized a short IT training where each researcher created an email address and learned the basics of how to use a computer. Finally, we always had printed copies of all the notes, minutes and readings from the research meetings and we also projected texts on the wall in large letters to facilitate collective analysis (and help those who do not have the appropriate glasses for their weak vision). While these are rather technical adjustments, they were important in equalizing the playing field and creating the conditions for serious engagement.

In order to foster meaningful and equitable interactions and bridge the differences in education and socialization, the research was developed in an iterative way: we always summarized what had been said before and revisited the same issues on several occasions. We devoted a lot of time to planning and preparing for various tasks, such as learning to use a digital recorder, taking notes, making an interview etc. The success of this approach was

attested to by János Jäger when he made a modest, but far-reaching statement: “When I came here, I didn’t know this language. Now, I can even contribute to the discussions.”

Given that *Justice on the Street* was a hybrid cross-class space, dividing lines are not confined to social class, education or housing situation. For example, the two homeless coordinators had more advanced knowledge about homelessness and criminalization, which placed them more on par with allies than with newly recruited homeless co-researchers. Among the coordinators, our common experiences of activism made it possible to create a truly collaborative process. The division of tasks was based more on experience than social status. During the information and training sessions, homeless and ally coordinators took turns facilitating the discussions. While I was mostly responsible for developing the research agenda, homeless coordinators worked on developing community and sharing knowledge and experience with the newly recruited members. The two homeless coordinators commanded a lot of respect among their homeless peers because of their previous activist work and were considered leaders in the group. In this way, symbolic power lay not exclusively with allies but also with long-time homeless activists. To make use of their experiences while also undermining inequalities, the two homeless coordinators conceived of a mentoring system in order to support co-researchers throughout the research process. While this would have greatly contributed to the project, the two coordinators could not implement it because they dropped out of the project early on for reasons outside the scope of this dissertation.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ After years of activism, the couple had a difficult time reconciling their relationship with membership in *The City is for All*. Mutual rivalry and jealousy led to the intensification of domestic violence against the woman, which the group tried to address, but was not successful. In the end, the male partner was asked to leave the group and the female partner decided to follow him and leave the group as well.

4. Conclusion: lessons for engaged social science in Hungary

With a few notable exceptions (Intézet a Demokratikus Alternatíváért, 2011; Missetics, 2010b), critical research about homelessness has been virtually absent in Hungary. One important reason for this is that the majority of contemporary homelessness-related research is produced by professionals who are involved in the social services system. Despite their best intentions, most institutionally based researchers are constrained in their ability to produce radical critiques of existing systems and practices. The aim of most current research is to improve homeless services by better understanding the populations they serve. While these studies offer important insights, they continue to operate within the dominant paradigm that manages rather than prevents homelessness and treats homeless people as clients rather than citizens.

Because of the lack of radical discourses and systemic critique, social movements have engaged in their own research and theorizing to provide a conceptual basis for their work. My work with both *Man on the Street* and *The City is for All* is best understood in this light. Besides responding to the lack of critical inquiry, both interventions illustrate how people outside of social services and mainstream academic institutions can produce knowledge that contributes to a better understanding of homelessness and the development of effective social responses to it. In this context, both conventional and participatory approaches can be productive and transformative as long as they keep the radical imperative in mind.

Low and Merry (2010) identify six forms of engagement for anthropologists as they use research to advance social goals: sharing and support, teaching and public education, social critique, collaboration, advocacy, and activism (p. 204). In addition to experiencing all six forms of engagement at various stages of my involvement with *Man on the Street* and *The City is for All*, I have also taken up a number of other roles and developed skills beyond the craft of anthropology. In fact, throughout my efforts to apply the methods and perspectives of

anthropology in the service of organizing for housing rights, the most important lesson I have learnt is that my role is never clear-cut and always messy. In the following, I will use my personal example to highlight the dilemmas inherent to some of these roles and to draw more general conclusions about engaged anthropology.¹³⁹

Sharing resources, information and time as well as supporting each other are central elements of any activist community, and are particularly important in a group where people of different social means and positions strive to work together. In *The City is for All*, support takes primarily an intellectual and emotional form. While financial support among members is not uncommon, interdependence in terms of commitment, responsibility, presence and motivation is the glue holding the group together. From the perspective of engaged social science, this long-term and interdependent commitment is what constitutes the major difference between being a member of an activist group and engaging in one-time community projects. As a member of the group, my identity as a social scientist often fades into the background. My role is frequently not to provide scientific depth, but rather to generate individual and collective confidence in the work we do. At the same time, the knowledge I have acquired about social movements as a social scientist has also proven essential to the labor of imagination necessary to create a larger vision and develop strategic action.

“Social critique in its broadest sense refers to anthropological work that uses its methods and theories to uncover power relations and the structures of inequality” (Low and Merry, 2010, p. 208). This is definitely the aspect of engaged anthropology that I identify with the most – and it is also the most challenging. In practice, I have played the role of the social critic wearing two different hats: as a member of AVM (as an organizer and activist) and as a social commentator (mostly through publishing position papers and op-eds, speaking on

¹³⁹ It is important to emphasize that I am not the only ally member in *The City is for All* who is trained in the social sciences including social policy, sociology and social work. In this way, while the experiences of others or their assessment of the dynamics that I describe here may be somewhat different, their presence has provided a wonderful collective opportunity to reflect on our role as engaged social scientists and intellectuals and give each other feedback about our work.

panels and giving interviews). In the group, my role – along with the other social scientists among us – has been to foster and maintain a systemic perspective of our work. However, this approach is not always readily embraced by homeless members. In my experience, many homeless people who have not been involved in collective advocacy do not espouse a structural perspective on homelessness. For example, individual explanations are often provided for both their own situation and that of others and homeless people often sharply criticize each other for their behavior or attitudes. While I tend to see this as “blaming the victim,” many (even seasoned) homeless activists think that I am too naïve and that my vision is clouded by lofty ideals. In fact, while I have not embraced explanations of homelessness that put all the responsibility on the individual, I have definitely learnt not to treat homeless people like “saints,” but to see them as flesh-and-blood people with personal flaws and strengths, just like myself.

Addressing this tension fruitfully and developing a space where various approaches, attitudes and proposals can be discussed and assessed has been central to both my work as an engaged social scientist and for *The City is for All* as a diverse community of activists. On the one hand, the more individualist approach is an important reminder to “big-picture” thinkers like myself not to lose sight of homeless people themselves and their immediate material deprivation in the quest for systemic changes. On the other, it has been a constant challenge for the group to integrate these different perspectives and find the right dynamic between systemic critique, and the imperative to stay close to the ideas, experiences and needs of homeless people. Finding the fine line between forcing ideas onto others and motivating them to think outside of the box requires an extremely open mind and the critical ability to switch perspectives. Education undoubtedly plays an important role in bringing different perspectives together and integrating the structural with the personal. However, while teaching and learning take place across lines of ethnicity, class, gender and education at the informal level,

most formal trainings in AVM are facilitated by allies and aim at developing critical awareness and citizenship skills among homeless activists. In this context, the danger of imposing hegemonic practices and ideologies is always present and it is essential for engaged social scientists to maintain a constant routine of self-critique and always remain open to critique from group members. Overall, the aim is to integrate different perspectives and stances by connecting systemic critique with individual experiences and produce a more comprehensive critique that incorporates systemic elements while also acknowledging individual agency.

One of anthropologists' more traditional roles has been to move between different social and cultural worlds and foster communication. Even if, as an anthropologist, I do not cross any national boundaries, translation and mediation have been central to my work. In *The City is for All*, one of my roles has been to connect the worlds of homeless people and housed citizens – or as homeless people often call them “civilians.” This often requires almost literal translations: learning to speak in a way that people of very different educational backgrounds are able to understand and appreciate, motivating others to do the same, putting situations and behaviors into context for someone who has not interacted with homeless people before and interpreting the motivations of NGOs and social workers for homeless people. It is obvious that many homeless activists are eager to connect to the social world that exists beyond drop-in centers, food lines and welfare offices, which reflects a genuine desire to be integrated and not segregated. Positive reinforcement from housed allies is often an important source of motivation for homeless activists. At times, this leads to the devaluation of relationships with other people experiencing housing poverty and it is not always easy for homeless activists to give each other due respect and recognition. In the worst scenario, this can turn into a competition for recognition by housed allies, which is detrimental to both the group and the process of emancipation. In this context, connecting different social and cultural worlds

becomes a multi-faceted task that includes efforts to help homeless people link not only with non-homeless people, but also with each other in a meaningful and positive way. This requires a combination of skills in community organizing, community development, popular education and social work that go way beyond the abilities and roles conventionally associated with engaged anthropology.

In *Justice on the Streets*, the two worlds that had to be brought into communication were marked by the conventional expectations of academia and a community-based (research) practice. My role was not only to teach homeless researchers about research methods, ethics and analysis (based on my formal education and experiences), but also to ensure that all the different voices and expectations are integrated. It was important that our research meet the basic expectations of the scientific community to ensure credibility. Our aim was not to subvert all practices and ideas of conventional research, but to carry out research in a more grounded, experiential and participatory way.

For example, when devising questions for the survey, we had to keep in mind the standards of validity and reliability, so we sought help from a sociologist who had experience with implementing surveys. We also made sure that our data was processed by a professional statistician with whom we discussed our interests at length. Writing the final report was a combination of individual and collective work and was one of the most challenging aspects of my role as a mediator. While I wrote the final report alone, my writing was based on in-depth and repeated discussions within the group, and the text went through several versions based on collective feedback. As I was writing the report, I was very aware of the need to restrict myself to the ideas and conclusions that we generated collectively and I was very careful not to weave in concepts that were only my personal analysis. In fact, the latter belong to this present dissertation, which also illustrates the multiple and often highly compatible outcomes that participatory action research can generate.

The research team has also initiated face-to-face communication with academic audiences. Thus far this effort has been partially successful: while we have brought our work to mainstream researchers through public presentations in semi-academic settings, we have not yet been invited into academic spaces such as conferences or publications to present our work. It would be important to bring *Justice on the Streets* even closer to academia not only to foster more engaged interactions between community-based and mainstream researchers, but also because this project represents an approach to participatory action research never before implemented in Hungary.

Finally, probably the most important thing that I have learned through my involvement with social movements is that the type of engaged anthropology I pursue is quintessentially a communal endeavor. In other words, as an anthropologist working with a social movement, I have to take responsibility not only for my own projects and interests, but also for the community that I work with. In this sense, I have gone beyond the roles identified by Low and Merry (2010) and have worked hard to maintain and nurture the activist community that is able to put my academic work to practical use. At the same time, working with and for social movements does not mean that engaged intellectuals should be blindly committed and uncritical. Movements are powerful hubs for producing social analysis, and the integration of self-reflection and self-critique into our daily work is inevitable to long-term strategic work. As a result, engaged social scientists should help social movement participants assess their work and constantly improve it. Through research and collective work, the political and social consciousness of all of us undergoes significant changes and engaged social scientists have an important role in supporting this process.

Chapter 7.

Conclusion: implications for policy, research and activism

While the financial recession in 2008 hit Hungary very hard, it only exacerbated the deeper social, political and economic crisis that Hungarian society was already experiencing. After the misguided attempt to create greater social justice during four decades of state socialism, for many people the introduction of democracy and free market capitalism carried the promise of a better society based on more opportunities and liberties. However, after the first heady years, it quickly became clear that similar to so-called existing socialism, the capitalist economy was also unable to provide dignified living conditions for all residents of Hungary. In addition to domestic political and economic difficulties, Hungary is also in an extremely difficult situation from a global perspective. A small country in the middle of Europe with few natural resources, it is extremely vulnerable to global economic forces and its bargaining position is very weak vis-à-vis the more affluent countries of the European Union.

By 2010, the deepening economic crisis was coupled with a sudden turn to the right. While this authoritarian conservative turn is associated with the *Fidesz* government, it signaled a political crisis that had in fact been developing since the end of state socialism. This crisis was triggered both by the failure of the political elite to effectively represent the interests of the country's residents either internationally or domestically, and by the lack of popular control over the government, which is rooted in a deep democratic deficit in the larger population. By resorting to political, legal, economic and symbolic force to ensure their dominance, the Hungarian state under *Fidesz* has increasingly turned against its citizens through political disempowerment, penalization and large-scale dispossession.

While authoritarian tendencies are nothing new in Hungarian history, there is also a long history of progressive political and social thought and a rich tradition of citizen action. In

order for these traditions to regain traction, inclusive and democratic grassroots movements have to become an inevitable force and citizens must feel empowered to reclaim the political sphere for values such as social justice and participation.¹⁴⁰ Although the 1956 Revolution was crushed, it still led to significant improvements in the lives of millions of people through concessions that the government was forced to make. Today, the task before us in Hungary is to push for social change that can bring a much more equal distribution of resources and recognition of diverse social and political identities, while continuously enhancing our political agency as citizens.

1. Homelessness and the politics of housing

As the “social question” is one of the most disturbing issues in Hungarian society that has remained unresolved, the history of policies around housing and homelessness offers a good reflection of the long crisis of Hungarian society. Looking back, while the 1910s were a relatively intense period in terms of social housing construction, this was only enough to alleviate some of the worst aspects of the endemic and critical shortage of housing. In the interwar years, no consistent housing policy was established and the state continued to stay aloof from this issue.

Under state socialism, especially after the 1956 Revolution, provision of housing was the primary tool used to maintain social peace. In this sense, the ideological significance of housing had very tangible material consequences. Housing conditions improved significantly for most segments of the population together with other social indicators such as education, literacy, quality of life, etc. At the same time, the distribution of housing was very unequal and discrimination against Roma people was inherent to the regime. Under state socialism,

¹⁴⁰ Since 2006, the year of violent riots against the ruling Socialist government, the so-called radical right has been very successful in organizing citizens both in terms of setting up organizations that advance nationalistic and often racist goals, such as the Hungarian Guard, and bringing them to the streets in protests on a wide variety of topics including immigration, mortgage fraud and gay rights.

homelessness and poverty officially did not exist and those who were on the street, did not have a job or did not meet social norms were either institutionalized or jailed.

While housing privatization started before the regime change, it took place in the early 1990s at great speed but with little regulation. The proportion of public housing dropped to 6% of the housing stock in Budapest and less than 3% in the entire country as opposed to 50% and 25%, respectively, under state socialism. Privatization was more beneficial for the higher classes and most apartments that remained in public ownership ended up being of the worst quality, with some of the poorest residents of the country. Today, local governments have virtually no legal obligations to maintain social housing for their residents. As a result, most of them want to get rid of as much of this housing stock as possible.

Parallel to the large-scale privatization of housing, homelessness was “discovered” by the general public around time of the regime change. In addition to the more liberal political climate in the late 1980s that allowed social scientists to reveal data about poverty, this was in large part due to the spontaneous homeless demonstrations that took place in Budapest in the winters of 1989 and 1990. In the face of these protests, the state was forced to provide services and lay the foundation for the homeless services system that exists today. Following the short public acknowledgement of the “homeless crisis,” homelessness became a fixture of the urban landscape. Since then, the condition of being without a home has been mostly normalized as a natural part of the capitalist political economy.

Today, the “homeless sheltering industry” (see Lyon-Callo, 2004) in Hungary is part of a large social services system that manages rather than prevents homelessness. As Hopper and Baumhol (1994) contend, homeless shelters – similar to prisons – have become a mechanism to deal with surplus populations. Instead of serving as a bridge between the street and a home, the role of shelters seems to be to “[shunt] off unneeded but potentially troublesome people into various forms of substitute livelihood, thereby neutralizing the threat

they might otherwise pose.” In light of the past 20-plus years of managing homelessness, this approach has proven to be painfully inadequate when it comes to ending or even reducing mass homelessness.

State socialist housing policy had many flaws, but it at least existed and central plans were made about providing housing to the general population. Since the regime change, the Hungarian state has embraced economic neoliberalism, and the predominant view among elected representatives and decision-makers is that housing is a completely private issue. As a result, there is currently no national housing or homeless policy in Hungary and homelessness is usually considered as a personal pathology. As Bálint Missetics (2010a) has pointed out, in the public imagination homeless people “naturally” belong to shelters, just like criminals belong to jails or patients to hospitals.

Despite the prevailing rhetoric that housing is predominantly a private issue, the Hungarian state does differentiate between housing for different social groups, and has openly prioritized aid to the more privileged sections of society. Most subsidized mortgages introduced by the government between 2000 and 2004 supported home ownership for the middle and upper middle class (see Chapter 3). Then as the 2008 financial crisis morphed into a mortgage crisis, the government’s emergency solutions tended to help out the better-off. This pattern of public support for housing reflects the paradigm of propertied citizenship (Roy, 2003). In 2012, the state spent 8 billion HUF (\$36 million) on homeless services and 30 billion (\$136 million) on debt management and standard housing assistance, all of which tended to reach the most vulnerable members of society. However at the same time, it spent 116 billion (\$527 million) on a special program to help the most financially stable mortgage holders and 80 billion (\$363 million) on subsidizing interest on older mortgages (Hegedüs & Horváth, 2013). In all, today the Hungarian state is helping the middle and upper classes to

acquire private property, while homeless and poor people must make do with shelters and extremely low housing subsidies.

Laws that criminalized poverty were among the first to be repealed after the regime change. Of course, this did not mean an end to the harassment of homeless and poor people in public spaces. However, these practices were not formalized until the early to mid-2000s when local government started to shift gears. The scale and intensity of criminalization picked up significantly around 2010. The first peak of this new wave of criminalization was the passing of a law in 2011 that made living in public space an infraction, with a punishment of up to \$700 or imprisonment. After the Constitutional Court found this law unconstitutional, *Fidesz* overrode its decision by amending the constitution, allowing local governments to criminalize street homelessness.

By 2013, the Hungarian state's primary response to mass housing poverty and homelessness has become a combination of management and criminalization. DeVerteuil (2006) defines this dual approach as "poverty management," which includes

specific spatio-temporal arrangements designed to ensure the social order, and is focused on regulating poor people, including the homeless. At the behest of the state, institutions or elites, various poverty management strategies are deployed and embedded within larger rationales of how to best manage the homeless, ranging from more supportive measures (e.g., welfare) to decidedly punitive ones (e.g., incarceration). These strategies also translate into specific spatial sites of control (poverty management settings) that have fluctuated over time. (p. 118)

While this approach is certainly not unique,¹⁴¹ the case of Hungary stands out for at least three reasons: 1) the speed and scale with which criminalization became a central state strategy; 2)

¹⁴¹ In the United States, cutbacks on affordable housing led to the eruption of mass homelessness in the 1980s, which led to both the massive growth of the homeless sheltering industry and criminalizing legislation. In Prague, elected representatives have aired ideas in the press about banning homeless people from the city center and creating a homeless ghetto outside the city (Clifford, 2010). France has been on a long campaign to

the lack of meaningful compensation measures in social or housing policy; and 3) the fact that criminalization is embedded in a larger framework of authoritarian policy.

As Marx ([1867] 1992) points out in his description of the “bloody laws,” the large-scale criminalization of poverty tends to occur in reaction to the structural transformation of the economy. In a similar vein, the criminalization of homelessness in Hungary is the symptom of a much broader crisis of the new capitalist state that has been brewing since its inception in the late 1980s. For the ruling elite, this long-term structural failure also translates into a crisis of legitimacy. Faced with this double bind, the managers of the state use the bodies of poor and marginalized people through demonization and criminalization to obscure their own political and social failure.

2. (De)constructing homelessness

While homelessness is primarily produced by structural forces, its social construction – how the story of homelessness is told – determines the range and types of possibilities that emerge as solutions. In other words, the way homelessness is imagined and explained has serious and long-term implications for the actions that are taken to address it. What is really at stake is demonstrated by the social construction of homelessness in the United States in the late 1980s (Marcus, 2006):

Instead of narrating this synergy of crises [employment, housing, health care, education] as having been caused by its constituent public policy elements and attacking each part with concrete remedies designed to address such broad and holistic concerns as social housing, working class employment, or public health and education [homelessness] was identified with an atomized group of individuals, the homeless, who were designated to receive a new form of totalizing public assistance. (p. 3)

eliminate the shack settlements of Eastern European Roma communities (Amnesty International, 2012) and while the state is making vacant private properties available for use, it has vigorously persecuted squatters.

In Hungary, the way homelessness is constructed has not changed significantly since the early 1990s. The public discourse today continues to be permeated by distorted images of homelessness and poverty, which greatly affect both public opinion and public policy. According to Ferenc Hammer (2000), “the very conditions of poor people are at stake in the ways in which other people talk about them (or they about themselves), and how this ... is influenced, transmitted and created by the media.” In the public mind, the image of “the homeless” has become petrified into the stereotype of the “bearded, dirty man who carries a big bag, smells like alcohol and begs for money.” From the perspective of the state, individuals are to be blamed for their homelessness and the responsibility of the state does not go beyond keeping them alive. They spend too much time in public spaces, disturb others through their appearance and behavior and are also a drain on social services. All of these images are dangerous not only because they are stigmatizing and humiliating, but also because they reduce the problem of homelessness to visually and physically disturbing factors that make it almost impossible to perceive, let alone address, the problem in its complexity.

The socially constructed category of the homeless comes to life primarily through the construction of homeless people as the clients of social services. In tune with the moral exclusion of unhoused people, the homeless services system mostly operates along the logic of institutionalized marginality.

The politics of marginal space may become a relatively cost-effective way of containing, entertaining and conducting marginal people in the local public space instead of developing more comprehensive and coherent programmes to combat social exclusion and create social integration. The politics of marginal space can thus contribute to ensuring the continuing existence of different coexisting spaces, with very large differences in living conditions, within the local ‘community’ as well as between poor and more affluent local communities. (Larsen, 2004, p. 220).

Homeless services constitute a marginal space that not only produces marginal citizens, but also makes this condition contagious. Once someone enters the system, they become “homeless,” which then becomes a stigma very difficult to shed. Designating someone as homeless marks their place in society, how they view themselves and how they should behave and interact with other citizens, and the state.

The social services system is a good example of what is often called the “social” (as opposed to penal) response to homelessness. In the face of growing criminalization, advocates in Hungary call for homelessness to be addressed as a *social* rather than a *criminal* problem. In this context, a social response is constructed as more inclusive, sensitive and humane than incarceration or harassment. However, the construction of homelessness as exclusively a *social* problem can also be problematic as it reduces the scope of the problem and may lead to solutions that regulate rather than emancipate citizens.

The difference between “*szociális*” (social) and “*társadalmi*” (societal)¹⁴² in Hungarian is indicative of this distinction. Even in sympathetic public discourses, homelessness is most often designated as a “social” problem and relatively rarely as a “societal” (i.e. structural) one. The difference may seem subtle, but it is important. While characterizing a phenomenon as a “social problem” indicates that society needs to deal with it, it does not necessarily imply that the problem is rooted in the social structure itself. Rather, it mostly refers to the need to integrate a marginal(ized) group *into* mainstream society, rather than changing the social structure itself so that it works better for everyone.¹⁴³ If homelessness was framed – as it rarely is – as a societal problem, it would not only point much more clearly to its structural roots, but also to the need for more systemic discourses and solutions.

¹⁴² A more appropriate (but also more liberal) translation of the Hungarian *társadalmi* would be “structural,” which also supports my point better.

¹⁴³ This distinction is very similar to the one made by Rezső Hilscher ([1928] 1990) as early as 1928, who made it very clear that a comprehensive social policy, which creates a social safety net for the entire society is more desirable than the “poor policies” of early 20th century Hungary, which provided targeted charity to the poorest to ensure some minimal subsistence.

While constructing homelessness as a social problem tends to bring up discussions about the quality and quantity of social services (see. “the poor person’s economic policy” in Walker & Walker, 2011, p. 56), its construction as a societal problem would inevitably bring the structural aspects of capitalist society into the picture. In other words, treating homelessness as the extreme manifestation of housing poverty would lead to its definition as a housing rather than a “social” problem and induce discussions about the availability and distribution of housing as a social rather than a financial asset. As Doherty et al. (2005) explain:

Characterised as a housing problem, homelessness is most readily explained as an attribute of the failures of the housing market, characterised as a social problem there is a greater, though not inevitable, tendency to ascribe causality to the behavioural realm, thereby cultivating the notion that it is not a societal problem but an individual problem, and consequently not legitimately in the provenance of state concerns. (p. 13)

A poll commissioned by the *Shelter Foundation* (Györi, 2013) illustrates the traps of constructing homelessness as primarily a “social” rather than a housing problem. The poll gauged public attitudes towards public policy responses to homelessness and the results were both encouraging and ambiguous. On the one hand, 69% of respondents said that homeless people should be helped rather than punished and only 2% said that they should be punished rather than helped (26% thought that they should be both helped and punished). However, there was significant ambiguity when it came to more specific questions: 43% of respondents thought that homeless people should be banned from downtown areas and almost 50% believed that living in public spaces should be regulated by law. With regards to specific forms of support, the following statements were listed (the percentage of people who agreed is indicated in parentheses): homeless people should be helped to make a living off their work

(85%); we need more human and social care (80%); it would be useful to create more shelters and increase capacities (78%); homeless people should be forced to use shelters and not sleep on the streets (74%); it would be useful to offer homeless people social housing units of lower quality (64%); some kind of housing support would be useful for homeless people (61%). Overall, it is clear that most people are in favor of social support for the homeless, while not completely objecting to some form of regulation, either. However, it is not at all clear whether Hungarians are ready to engage with homelessness at a societal level.

In fact, the construction of the survey itself is highly problematic: it is so deeply embedded in the construction of homelessness as a social problem that has to be managed by a (separate) system of services that it leaves almost no room for more systemic solutions. The questions about specific forms of “support” such as the use of force, increased shelter capacity and the provisions of lower quality housing reflect the notion that homeless people constitute a somewhat separate group in society that deserves some help, but not necessarily the same as the general population. To illuminate this problem, it would have been interesting to see the percentage of responses to the following question: “If you became homeless, would you want to live in a shelter or an apartment?”

The battle over the definition of homelessness plays a very important role in the current struggle for housing rights in Hungary. In general, decision-makers clearly reject the construction of homelessness as a housing problem, which is illustrated by the dynamics of an interview with the mayor of Budapest completed by *Justice on the Streets* researchers. While the mayor consistently referred to homeless people in the context of public “nuisances” such as peeing, smelling bad and obstructing traffic, the two interviewers kept asking him about the housing solutions he was willing to offer. After some nagging, the mayor’s response was the following:

Even if I don't package my messages nicely and I don't make brownnosing statements that I can't keep, so far I have only given to the homeless. I don't let them be hurt. I build shelters for them and I have given them jobs. And to this you say that I don't do anything because I don't give them housing. (Keresztes & Udvarhelyi, 2012)

The idea that the providing housing to homeless people is close to outrageous and that the solution is to open more shelters also plays a prominent role in all of the public statements of the Hungarian government regarding housing poverty.¹⁴⁴

Why are Hungarian politicians so resistant to recognizing homelessness as a housing issue, along with other more structural issues such as the lack of appropriate health care, education and jobs? Most probably because defining it as a question of housing would not only lift homelessness out of its marginal social context but it would also bring the capitalist relations of property into question. Conceding that homelessness is the result of both a lack of affordable housing and a lack of sufficient income would make it a much broader issue, affecting not just a small and stigmatized minority, but a large part of the population. This would force the government to move beyond the paradigm of poverty management. And it would widen the social base of those engaged in civic advocacy, activism and lobbying, thus increasing grassroots pressure on the government to recognize it as a structural issue. In other words, it is very useful for the government to insist on defining homelessness as an issue of shelter beds and individual deviance. In this way the broader implications of housing poverty are concealed, and those parts of the population that would otherwise see it as their *own* problem are antagonized. By constructing homelessness as a social category that can be managed through a separate set of institutions and meager benefits, the new capitalist state has successfully tucked away both “the homeless” and the “homeless problem.”

¹⁴⁴ Hungarian response to criticism concerning service for the homeless April 4, 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs/news/hungarian-response-to-criticism-concerning-service-for-the-homeless>

Finally, while social responses to homelessness leave the underlying capitalist logic mostly intact, defining it as primarily an issue of housing can bring us closer to defining housing itself as a social asset rather than a commodity. At the minimum, such discussions would inevitably raise questions about the strict separation between private and public property. And, in the long run, may even come close to questioning the sanctity of private property and undermining home ownership as the most prioritized form of dwelling.

In the history of capitalist Hungary, the state suspended the sanctity of housing as a private commodity only in times of great social crisis. Only during the First and Second World Wars did public authorities take vacant private apartments into (temporary) public use to meet pressing social needs. Now that the capitalist state is experiencing another crisis, the ruling elite works hard on reinforcing the division between homeless people and the rest of society, maintaining the ethos of housing as a commodity, dividing different groups affected by housing poverty, and keeping housing out of the realm of public responsibility.

3. Alternatives to poverty management: implications for public policy

There is no doubt that mass housing poverty – of which homelessness is the most extreme manifestation – can be tackled. However, as the history of the Hungarian state's interventions demonstrates, housing is an ideological issue and addressing homelessness requires more than just good policy ideas. In Hungary, the prerequisite for any meaningful action in this regard is fundamental change in all aspects of society. Certainly, the complete decriminalization and de-stigmatization of homelessness along with the re-collectivization of a significant portion of housing are essential first steps. However, without the reestablishment of the rule of law and intensive democratization at all levels of society, any changes will prove to be fleeting. In other words, just as the criminalization of homelessness is a symptom of a broader social and political crisis, solutions to homelessness cannot be isolated from

broader social changes either. Homelessness is not simply a housing issue, but a societal, political and economic one as well – its solution must include fundamental change in all these aspects.

Even if the long-term goal of governments should be the decommodification of housing and a more equitable redistribution of both income and resources, they do not have to embrace socialism to start evening out inequalities (as politicians often imply). In Hungary, as in many other Eastern European countries, there is no physical shortage of housing. However, the available housing is of low quality and the amount of affordable housing falls short of existing social needs (Duncan, 2005). In order to prevent homelessness and alleviate housing poverty, the Hungarian government has to develop a comprehensive strategy that addresses both the shortcomings of the current social services system and the issues of housing quality and affordability.

Policies that help to create more long-term and sustainable housing solutions are widely discussed in both the academic and advocacy literature. Books like *How to House the Homeless* (Ellen & O’Flaherty, 2010) spell out the various steps governments can take to prevent homelessness, re-house those who are already homeless and help people keep their housing on the long run. *Housing First*, a program that currently receives federal funding in the US, integrates permanent housing with high quality and complex social work. Studies about the impact of Housing First prove that placing even the most vulnerable homeless populations directly into permanent supported housing keeps significantly more people off the streets than if they lived in shelters (Tsemberis, et al., 2004).

Housing homeless people rather than sheltering them is also supported by financial logic. The Economic Roundtable in Los Angeles found that housing people instead of keeping them in shelters, in jails or on the street is by far the cheapest option for the public budget.

The typical public cost for residents in supportive housing is \$605 a month. The typical public cost for similar homeless persons is \$2,897, five-times greater than their counterparts that are housed. This remarkable finding shows that practical, tangible public benefits result from providing supportive housing for vulnerable homeless individuals. The stabilizing effect of housing plus supportive care is demonstrated by a 79 percent reduction in public costs for these residents. (Economic Roundtable, 2009, p. 1)

In a practical sense, this means that supported housing is not only better for the people involved (they get to live an autonomous life), for the general public (they do not have to stumble upon homeless people sleeping on the sidewalk), but also for the public budget (it is cheaper).

Not all affordable housing need be publicly funded. Housing cooperatives provide an example of housing that minimizes commodification and is at least partly financed and maintained by social collectives or non-profit organizations. While housing co-ops in the US have evolved into a form of luxury (Low et al., 2012), limited equity cooperatives provide affordability by limiting the price of re-selling one's original membership. The history of working-class cooperatives and experiments in urban homesteading (Hassell, 1996) in New York prove that sweat equity is a good way to create safe and sustainable housing units, keep them in common ownership, and maintain a democratic management structure (Sazama, 2000). Even though the concept of housing cooperatives exists in Hungary today, it refers to cooperative apartments that were built under the later years of state socialism as a covert form of private ownership. Changing current housing laws to allow the development of limited equity housing cooperatives by nonprofit groups or municipalities would be a viable option for housing poor people outside of institutions.

Besides international examples, there is no shortage of domestic proposals for a comprehensive housing policy in Hungary. In the following section, I point out only the most significant of these to illustrate the point that ideas and viable housing options are available. It is the political will to implement them that is totally missing. The recommendation for a national homeless strategy first developed by social service professionals in 2007 continues to serve as an adequate basis for a more comprehensive approach to homelessness. The document, which was never adopted, recommends among other things the reform of the homeless services system with a stronger focus on exit routes, the development of a broad network of social housing and the expansion of the range of housing subsidies (Gyóri & Maróthy, 2008).

In a paper titled “Recommendations for an egalitarian housing policy reform,” Missetics (2013) spells out the need for a national housing strategy and the legal confirmation of the right to housing, as well as ways to prevent housing loss and indebtedness. Importantly, this text addresses housing poverty and homelessness as integrated issues that must be addressed in unison. In this way, while acknowledging the need for shelters as a temporary solution, it avoids the ghettoization of homeless services and the stigmatization of homeless people. This is a very important stand, especially in light of the experience of some Western European countries where homeless services and subsidized housing are organized in such distinct systems that social housing remains out of reach for the most vulnerable (Doherty et al., 2005).

Finally, the Hungarian branch of the international NGO Habitat for Humanity and the Metropolitan Research Institute have launched a joint project to develop a model of social housing agencies as a way to manage private housing for social purposes (Hegedüs & Somogyi, 2013). While the plan does not target homeless people specifically, it addresses the issue of housing poverty in general. Considering the fact that the vast majority of vacant

properties in Hungary are privately owned, this model offers a feasible solution to many of the issues that local municipalities face in managing their own housing stock. The two organizations are working on the implementation of model programs in four municipalities in Hungary (“Félmillió rászoruló magyarnak,” 2013), while lobbying the government to adopt it as a national program.

For any of these specific solutions to take root in Hungary, housing must become a priority issue for society at large. If housing poverty is recognized as a social problem affecting millions of people that needs urgent public response, politicians and decision-makers will be forced to take a stand and deliver some tangible results. However, homeless people alone will not be able place this issue high on the social agenda. As the history of social movements shows, they need allies to carry out this work – a critical mass of citizens who recognize the urgency of the problem and are able to put pressure on both civil society and the state.

4. Homeless movement or housing movement? Implications for activism

While historically the Hungarian state has acted under pressure from a variety of domestic and international forces, grassroots pressure has always had an important role in forcing it to take at least some action regarding housing. Most recently, the 1989-1990 homeless protests created a relatively brief but powerful pressure on the state to devote resources and attention to the issue of homelessness. In a way, homeless people were among the canaries in the mine in a double sense: they signaled not only the breakdown of state socialism, but also predicted one of the most important social problems that remained unresolved in the ensuing years of capitalism.¹⁴⁵ Unfortunately, as advocates became either clients or managers of the emerging social services system, no large-scale movement has

¹⁴⁵ I would like to thank Professor Michelle Fine for pointing this out to me.

emerged out of this effort to pressure the government into a greater commitment to the public provision of housing.

However, the seeds of such a movement do exist today and the task ahead is to sprout and grow them into a grassroots force that can exert significant political and social pressure. With its militant methods and broad vision for social change, *The City is for All* is one of the central actors of such a movement-to-be. At the same time, there are several other organizations representing key constituencies and various tactics and strategies that are also integral to such an effort. Roma organizations have stood up against evictions and housing segregation as well as for improved material conditions in Roma settlements. Organizations that represent the mentally and physically disabled have pushed for deinstitutionalization and the creation of community-based alternatives to total institutionalization. Movements have sprung up to advocate for defaulting mortgage-holders, to resist evictions and litigate against banks. There are also a number of legal, professional and research organizations and individuals committed to housing rights and working to develop more comprehensive social and housing policy.

With so many different constituents and organizations, the challenge ahead is to bring these together and forge a common agenda while also keeping intact the various identities of the different social groups and organizations. There are many differences between the various constituents, including their level of organization as well as ideological stance and methodological approaches. All of these would need to be negotiated to create a common agenda. In terms of identity, differences are more easily recognized than commonalities. For example, even if people with disabilities and homeless people can recognize the common roots of their problems regarding institutionalization, mortgage defaulters and squatters would have a hard time joining the same table, as each group constructs its (political) identity on different – almost opposing – grounds. Also, the groups represent different levels of self-

organization: while some have well established advocates, others are more informal and still others have difficulty organizing themselves at all. There are some ideological divides as well. For example, many organizations that represent mortgage defaulters have a nationalist agenda that has developed in opposition to foreign-owned banks and international capital. In some cases, this turns into more extreme versions of nationalism, which seems irreconcilable with the socially inclusive vision of other housing organizations. Finally, different organizations which prioritize different tactics to achieve their goals, ranging from legal advocacy through lobbying to civil disobedience, at times find it difficult to acknowledge the legitimacy of other methods. While some tentative efforts have been made to forge a common agenda among all these groups – mainly at the initiative of *The City is for All* – there is still a lot of work to be done to bring together the divergent forces that are rather weak and isolated on their own, but could create a stronger front together.

The relationship between social workers, the social services system and their clients is a rather thorny one when it comes to a more unified struggle for housing. While social workers and their homeless clients are mutually dependent on each other, their perceived interests do not always meet. Today, social workers are in charge of a system that many homeless people experience as oppressing and stigmatizing (although also often life-saving).¹⁴⁶ Social workers represent a vital link to essential services, while they also discipline and regulate homeless people. Because of their financial dependence on state resources, the managers of social services are often not in a position to negotiate concessions from the government beyond their own reproduction. In addition, with the exception of some small-scale model programs and some important publications, they have done little to undermine the model of poverty management. The employees of social service agencies are not organized and are usually unable to resist measures imposed on them by either the state or their managers. In turn, as I

¹⁴⁶ See Chapter 6.

have experienced many times through my work in *The City is for All*, social workers feel so vulnerable and oppressed in their workplaces that they do not always appreciate advocacy by homeless people and rarely support it actively.

Despite all these difficulties, there is no reason why a housing movement should not form an alliance with institutionalized social work. Social services institutions could serve as hubs of citizen education, political socialization and collective empowerment, and social workers could advocate for their clients' rights. As the history of the settlement movement in early 20th century Hungary indicates (Hilscher, [1937] 1990), this kind of development requires the simultaneous emancipation of both social workers and their clients from passivity and learned helplessness. Until social workers, social services managers and homeless people stand up more vigorously for a major reform, they will all remain stuck in a system that does work for any of them. In other words, the emancipation of "clients" and "service providers" is inextricably linked. The political emancipation of homeless people goes hand in hand with the need for social professionals to reclaim their citizenship as well.

The tripartite politics of recognition, redistribution and participation (Fraser, 1996; Feldman, 2006) must be at the heart of the emerging housing movement. In other words, in order to achieve major changes in housing policy, people who are homeless must play a central role. Unhoused people experience much more than the lack of housing; being homeless is an experience of physical, social, economic, cultural and political marginalization and exclusion. As a result, achieving structural and policy reforms without the active participation of people who experience homelessness first-hand will only get the job half done. In order to reverse the disempowerment so strongly coded into current social policy, social and economic reforms must go hand in hand with the emancipation of homeless people as political agents. While a homeless movement alone may neither be strong enough nor politically desirable, the empowerment of homeless people as a unique constituency within a

larger housing movement is necessary to alleviate their marginalization and stigmatization both in society at large and among the housing poor.

At the moment, *The City is for All* represents the only political force that is ready to organize homeless people and ensure their involvement in the larger movement for housing. However, the politics of recognition are extremely complex and often fraught with contradictions even within such a group. One important dilemma in the group revolves around the question of how to build a social organization based on the same social category that it aims to deconstruct: homelessness. On the one hand, naming who exactly the group is fighting for is crucial for building a mass base and staking a claim with the state. On the other hand, the group must avoid validating the socially constructed category of “the homeless” as its aim is not to make being homeless appealing or keep people in this condition, but to put an end to it. In this way, the work of the group includes the public redefinition of homelessness, while also supporting those who fall into the socially constructed category of the homeless in redefining themselves.

The concept of “homelessness” has both empowering and disabling qualities for grassroots activism. It is empowering because organizing the homeless means organizing the most marginalized people who are affected by inadequate housing. Taking part in a homeless advocacy group gives those people categorized as homeless a sense of pride and self-esteem, plus an opportunity to redefine themselves in public. While some “homeless activists” avoid this designation and choose alternative identities such as “Roma,” “carpenter” or “unemployed,” others embrace being homeless as a status that allows them to speak from a position of expertise based on first-hand experience.

Activism based on a “homeless” identity also carries some inherent tensions. For example, an unintended consequence of the internal group policy that only homeless activists can represent the group in the media is the reification of the homelessness of AVM activists

as they step out into the public realm. In other words, they have to become representatives of a stigmatized group precisely in order to dispel stereotypes about that same group, and this is not always easy. There are also some dangers in reinforcing homelessness as a positive identity. For example, the group's insistence on homeless people being "experts on homelessness" has sometimes led unhoused members to reject other types of knowledge about homelessness (e.g. law, social work) and claim recognition for their ideas based on the sheer fact of being homeless. Finally, there is also the related risk that some people may not be encouraged to get out of their situation, fearing that they will lose the kind of recognition and positive reinforcement that AVM and the general public provides them as a "homeless activist," once they are no longer homeless.

One way out of this maze of tensions around identity politics is not to "seek recognition of a distinctive group identity," but to "minimize difference via an appeal to inclusion in universal categories" (Feldman, 2008, p. 221). Even while using the designation "homeless advocacy group," *The City is for All* has long defined homelessness more broadly to include almost all forms of inadequate housing and has also recruited people experiencing housing poverty from outside of the shelter system. In addition, the group tends to appeal to universal categories such as "human being" and "Hungarian citizen" in its demands for housing, and it has also started using slogans like "We fight for everyone's housing" to call attention to the more structural nature of the problem. At a more general rhetorical level, the group is working hard to change the social construction of homelessness from a group of deviant individuals into the most extreme form of (housing) poverty.

Another way to address this issue is to replace identity politics with a politics of status. As Fraser explains,

[W]hat requires recognition is not group-specific identity but rather the status of group members as full partners in social interaction. Misrecognition, accordingly, does not

mean the depreciation and deformation of group identity. Rather, it means *social subordination* in the sense of being prevented from *participating as a peer* in social life.” (quoted in Feldman, 2008, p. 225).

In this sense, fighting for the rights of homeless people to be included in political processes as full-fledged citizens is just as much the point of this work as it is to push through the actual policies that can change the distribution of resources. If we apply this perspective to the work of *The City is for All*, the elimination of the social category “homeless” is no longer in conflict with the demand to be included precisely because of one’s homelessness. The point of this work is to deconstruct all aspects of housing deprivation including both political disempowerment and material poverty.

5. Reasserting our role in society. Implications for critical social science

In addition to organizing those who are directly affected by housing poverty and homelessness, the emerging housing movement needs allies who can provide a variety of resources, and social scientists are undoubtedly among them. However, for social scientists in Hungary to be able to engage in mutually valuable and meaningful interactions with social movements, the relationship between academia and social action must be radically altered. On the one hand, social scientists need to reclaim their own citizenship and engage more actively with the public realm. This requires both in-depth changes in the way social sciences are taught, and the recognition that being a public intellectual does not automatically compromise the validity of research or prevent critical analysis. On the other hand, social movements and civil society should be more aware of the utility of the social sciences for their work and hold social scientists accountable. Without strong demands from the grassroots, social scientists will be very slow (and at times even reluctant) to disseminate their knowledge or embed themselves in broader social movements. In the following I list a number of ways in which

social scientists can support housing justice through both public policy reform and grassroots activism and help marginalized communities exercise their right to research.

First, on the policy front, more comprehensive and reliable statistics should be produced about the people who are affected by homelessness and inadequate housing. Because of the uncertainty of current statistics, politicians and decision-makers tend to ignore them or manipulate available indicators to their advantage. In addition to point-in-time statistics that focus on one day of the year to estimate the number of people living in shelters and on the street, research should look into the number of people who experience some form of homelessness over a certain time period. This approach would more precisely mark the scope of the “homeless” problem and would also dispel stereotypes about homelessness as a feature of particular individuals rather than a condition that many people shift in and out of.

Second, there should be more critical studies regarding the social services and specifically about the homeless shelter system. While many current studies aim to improve the practice of social work, few take into consideration the possibility of a more collective and advocacy-based approach. Exploring structures that help the clients of social services get more control over these institutions would decrease their totalizing nature and also support service users in engaging in practices of active citizenship. In addition, critical perspectives should be applied to the power relations permeating client-social worker relationships. More emancipatory practices of social work can only be introduced if professionals understand how governmentality permeates their own work (see Ámon, 2013). Finally, the role of the entire complex system of homeless services in reproducing homelessness should be more closely scrutinized and critically analyzed.

Third, while viable and detailed public policy alternatives are available, more research is necessary to support the large-scale shift from the management of homelessness to an emphasis on permanent housing and long-term solutions. Calculations about the (in)efficiency

of the shelter system should not lead to the reduction of resources directed towards homelessness, but point to how the system could be improved by using the funds in different ways. The work of the Economic Roundtable in Los Angeles mentioned above provides a good model for producing sound evidence in favor of permanent subsidized housing over warehousing in shelters. Importantly, all studies supporting policy change should be made much more accessible to the public in both their language and scope and should not remain limited to a small professional audience.

Fourth, participatory methods should be more actively used in research about both the social services system and public policy. Creating room for the participation of people who are affected by poverty and homelessness in producing knowledge about their condition and possible solutions to it, not only empowers them, but also provides invaluable insights and leads to a more critical examination of social phenomena. In addition, participatory research would also help dissolve the strict division that has developed between “social professionals” and their “clients.” This is in stark contrast to the more cooperative and mutually supportive relationship that characterized the initial struggles around housing in 1989 and 1990.

Fifth, a great deal of historical research is missing concerning the role of both the state and the grassroots in producing public policy regarding housing and homelessness in Hungary. While the policies of the state are much more closely examined, those historical periods and regimes should be further explored in which significant material and intellectual resources were committed to alleviating mass housing poverty. These inquiries would provide important insights for current struggles, in their efforts to understand the political and social dynamics necessary for the radical reorganization of resources. Exploring earlier progressive efforts in this field would also help remove the stigma of publicly supported housing as a state socialist aberration. Re-constructing a narrative that highlights the power of the grassroots in bringing about significant public intervention would only be a powerful tool of organizing,

but would also help the users of social services to develop a sense of ownership and challenge their dominant feelings of subjugation and isolation from welfare institutions.

In general, poor people are almost totally invisible in Hungarian historiography and a broader look at the role of the grassroots in bringing about social reforms is also missing. The documentation and analysis of social movements and grassroots efforts represents the greatest gap in historical research about housing. Among others, archives should be studied closely to unearth and analyze the political activities that took place in shack settlements, informal communities and emergency settlements in the first half of the 20th century; the history of the various tenants' movements should be elaborated; squatting as a form of insurgent citizenship (Holston, 2007) and social resistance should be examined in more detail; and attempts at setting up workers' cooperatives should be explored. Special attention should be paid to the history of activism in Roma communities regarding housing and other issues. Challenging the historical invisibility of poor people's activism would do great service for both public policy and activism as a source of inspiration and learning.

Finally, while I acknowledge that this dissertation barely addresses this issue, the marginalization of rural realities and populations also needs to be challenged. In general, there should be more examination of housing poverty and grassroots activism beyond the capital city. Also, as the proportion of homeless people outside of Budapest grows, current research should also bring these spaces into sharper focus. Historical research should look at rural poverty and housing inadequacy more closely and also explore the histories of Hungarian cities and towns, seeking to identify progressive practices, policies and achievements. The historical analysis of poor people's movements has much to teach us about our work today. The same is true for geography: no matter where poor people live, we still have a lot to learn from them.

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