



**European Observatory on Homelessness:
Thematic Report 2006**

Spain

**Conflict, Homelessness and the Use of Public Space in
Spain**

By Pedro José Cabrera

European Observatory on Homelessness

WG2: Profiles of Homeless people

Conflict, Homelessness and the Use of Public Space in Spain

Pedro José Cabrera
Universidad Comillas, Madrid, Spain
pcabrera@chs.upcomillas.es

Public space is not understood as a single entity, but rather as something with many different interpretations from both a legal and a cultural point of view. It can include areas that go from government administration buildings to the vestibule of an airport, or from a public square to virtual space through which we surf on Internet.

More than just a physical place, public space is a political place. Historically the concept goes back to a place of discussion and debate which was opened in the 18th century in which political affairs, which up until then had been the object of discussions by minorities, by the highest upper class of the aristocracy and the clergy, became the object of debate of all citizens. It is in the framework of a bourgeois city, with the rise of an interested, informed middle class, capable of intervening in discussions where “public space” emerges as a community place where democratic debate and policies could be made (Rabotnikof 2005). Even from its origins, however, this public space was rather restricted to those few representatives of the educated bourgeoisie who then arose. Women and the poorer classes were kept out of public opinion and would only be recognised slowly as qualified protagonists in this public space (Roca 1999:115).

Curiously, the danger today of a return to private management of public concerns is again threatening, as a consequence of the ever more important role placed on restricted groups of experts and lobbyists. The importance of these groups runs parallel with the weakening of public opinion and the lack of democratic participation at all levels. At local and district levels, the management of what is considered public is also becoming more and more conditioned by private interests and the loss of consistency about what is communal and shared.

In this sense, the element which most defines what is public, compared with what we understand as private or individual, may be found in the rules which govern access to spaces considered communal and shared. Public space has been established by a set of norms, historically changeable depending on their origin or source of legitimacy, in the same way that the system of sanctions for certain behaviour, the agents who apply these sanctions and the devices which regulate and organise the appropriate and legitimate use of these spaces, have also been changeable (Low and Smith, 2006:4).

Precisely because of this administrative, controlling tinge that overshadows public space, the anthropologist Manuel Delgado (2004) distinguishes between politicised public space, understood as that which is subject to political institutions – what “means the same as saying that a public space does not belong to the public, but rather to a political order which has been self-appointed with the function of scrutinising and imposing its feelings [so that] public space loses its condition as such, as it is conceived and recognised as the private property of a

centralised political power”-, and the *socialised public space*, i.e. that place of “a permanent, restless nature, active setting for the unexpected, proscenium in which the exceptional is almost normal and framework for a self-regulating society, in which time is spent weaving and un-weaving agreements as well as struggles,” is lost. Opposed to the government pretension of regulating, ordering and precisely defining the characteristics of these public spaces so that the flow of people through them can be clearly directed, so that the official memory can be supported through monuments, statues, and official events, and so that people moving through them can be monitored, watched and controlled, Delgado affirms and vindicates public space as a reality in a permanent state of emergence, the pure expression of the same social urban praxis which, far from determining a specific territory with limits and defined borders, is only an event, a place which “is not a “place”, but a “take place”. A pure happening, whereby public space is that which “only exists when it is used, which is the same as saying when it is *passed through*, as in truth it can only be defined as that: a mere manner of passing through it.”

This aspect of public space which defines it according to its availability for being passed through by everyone and anyone is what makes the question of the homeless having the right to pass through it and move around it so sensitive and important. As we present and analyse in this report the conflicts in which the homeless who use these public spaces for their daily life are involved, we are not only vindicating their right to occupy these spaces, in the face of attempts to privately take over public spaces, but also in some way we are vindicating their presence as “normal” in a space that is essentially versatile and ambiguous, and should continue to be so, a space with a calling to remain chaotic, permanently erupting and in some way, wild, where all conflicts have their place and where all the triumphs and failures of our times can be found, facilitating the most incredible and unexpected encounters.

All this does not mean that we are unaware of the fact that practically every square foot of land in our cities is being used commercially, productively, and that public spaces nowadays are more the exception than the rule. Indeed, even in public spaces it is easy to see how many of their more characteristic elements have been taken over, managed and regulated by privately-owned companies, such as security companies, sub-contractors in charge of cleaning the parks and public gardens, social services out-sourced to companies by the town councils, etc. For these reasons it is more relevant than ever nowadays to ask the old question put by Henri Lefebvre: “Who has a right to the city?”

In this sense the city is the most visible and palpable historical expression of the process of construction of citizenship. The city is the origin and destiny of “the citizens” and, to a large degree, the existence of spaces of free access in its midst is a *sine qua non* condition for the real, practical exercise of this citizenship, a “specific expression of the civil society” that emerges, in the words of Habermas, between the civil society and the State (4).

Although at first sight it may not appear clear, the truth is that the legal statutes

concerning public spaces are crystal clear. Unlike the legal limbos such as Abu Ghraib or Guantanamo, the public spaces that allow the tiny, everyday practice of activities in the lives of free citizens (e.g. using a public library, opening a bank account, chatting freely with a neighbour in a safe, open place) are more necessary today than ever if we wish to continue the historic broadening and widening of citizenship. For these reasons, it is urgent to continue defending the rights to the city of those inhabitants, whether white or black, rich or poor, . . . with homes or homeless.

This is especially true if we keep in mind the stronger and stronger tendency toward private take-over of what was public. More and more there are private districts and estates, with restricted-access streets and a permanent security force to throw out all those who have not been specifically invited in. When the credentials to enter many places that up until very recently were public, open and free have become more demanding and arbitrary – to wear certain brands, to be a certain age or have a certain attitude can be the key which opens or closes the entrance to many “public” establishments, it becomes more and more important to demand a clear, safe statue of access, use and presence in those places that up until now were available for all, including the homeless and excluded. As Low and Smith point out "The control of public space is a central strategy of neo-liberalism" (15). This seems quite clear when we analyse certain projects for urban renewal, where the relocating and removing of the homeless and the services which attend them seem to become the norm, which can only be understood as part of a policy of ownership which requires a change in the type of use of the surrounding public spaces - to push up the capital gains in a real estate market which is enormously sensitive to aesthetic and environmental aspects¹.

Public spaces in Spain

It's been a long time since Spanish cities went through the transition to democracy, when the streets were recovered by citizens and every district, every demonstration, every social or sports event became a chance to make up lost time. Answering the call made in the lyrics sung by Paco Ibañez in the Olympia Room in Paris ("To the street! It's time to walk about in freedom!") at that time the massive presence of citizens in the street gave substance to something that is deeply engrained in the culture and tradition of a southern, Mediterranean country like Spain where each local festival, whether they be the San Fermin running of the bulls in Pamplona in the north or the carnival in Cadiz in the south, have always meant people in the streets and public spaces. Festivals in Spain have always taken place outdoors, in the open air.

¹ En este sentido resulta muy ilustrativo el análisis de la experiencia de renovación urbanística del distrito central de San Diego que presentan Mitchell y Staeheli (2006: 143 y ss.) como expresión del derecho de propiedad entendido como el "derecho a excluir" y su corolario: "el derecho a no ser excluido".

Nevertheless, if the 1980s were the years of the “movida madrileña,” the Madrid movement of people going to and fro to enjoy themselves out of doors and the recreational expansion in the open air, the 1990s brought, along with the tiredness of citizens which converted it into an apathetic, routine occurrence, another type of presence in public spaces which, far from being greeted with joy by everyone, awoke suspicion and apprehension, and even fear and aggressiveness on the part of the average citizen. The spread of the phenomenon known as the “big bottle” where hundreds or thousands of young people meet to drink alcohol outdoors, has become a sort of endemic, unavoidable evil which provokes the anger of the neighbours who live in the surrounding areas and complain of the noise, the dirtiness, and the exhibition they must watch every weekend with a mixture of anger and impotence. Meanwhile, the young people who take part in these massive concentrations say that the expensiveness of the drinks in bars and discotheques and being young with little money and wanting to be together and have fun, are the reasons that explain and justify this new kind of leisure activity.

Along with the “big bottle”, the so-called “blanket hits” have given rise on almost all the pavements to a myriad of sellers of trinkets, illegal copies of music, imitation handbags, etc. What was at first hailed as an opportunity to buy cheaply, has become a serious problem for record companies and for the local police who cannot cope with pursuing the street vendors, requisitioning their goods and trying to dissuade both vendors and purchasers. The social visibility of this phenomenon has been increased by the fact that in many cases the people who try to earn a living this way are undocumented immigrants whose phenotype and physical aspect emphasize their “foreignness” as new arrivals. Many people consider these circumstances enough to make their right to be “in the street” more than doubtful, not only when selling something, but simply when occupying space on the pavement.

These two new phenomena have joined other types of people who traditionally occupied public space in large Spanish cities: street prostitutes and drug dealers. In the case of prostitution in the streets, the panorama has changed dramatically due to the massive arrival of women coming from poor countries in Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America, whereby their stigmatized identity is added to their foreignness, thus reinforcing the connection in the collective imagination of immigration and exclusion. This leads to a questioning of their right to be in the streets and breeds intolerant, racist and xenophobic attitudes.

In many ways, the street has, for many people, ceased to be a place for collective, democratic gatherings that it was during the 80s, to become, at the beginning of this millennium, a problematic, difficult, conflictive place. The colouristic, diverse explosion of strollers and artists that was found (and is found) on the main street of Barcelona, Las Ramblas, has given way to municipal ordinances forbidding prostitution, aggressive begging and bad citizenship that the local Catalan government put into effect last February. At the same time, in the historic area of Madrid’s night-time fun, there are districts imploring more policemen to control urban gangs and the deterioration of some commercial areas of the centre of the

city has moved some councilmen to ask that the police be given “a *legal instrument*” that would allow them to temporarily move to shelters (even against their will) those beggars, prostitutes and drug addicts who have “taken up living” in public areas which are thus degraded and have “stigmatized” the environment” (*El País*, 1st July 2006). Whether responding or not to objective data, what is certain is that the subjective perception of insecurity and fear has caused a real tension among different groups in many urban areas for the access, use and enjoyment of public spaces, and this is easy to verify.

In all this process of change in social representation in public spaces in large cities, the influence of diverse phenomena can be detected: demographic transformations experienced by old districts that have gone from being occupied by elderly residents to which many newly arrived immigrants with few resources have been added; urban renewal projects which require “clearing up” certain areas as a prerequisite to making a profit from investments in rehabilitation; real estate speculation which makes certain areas of the centre, where the price per square foot has multiplied as a result of the price explosion for housing and shops, particularly interesting; the shortage of public services as a consequence of cuts in public investment in large areas of education, health and leisure, leaving them in the hands of private initiatives; the intervention of the media which have artificially generated opinion based on isolated events which were particularly violent or unusual; the upsurge in individualistic practices which tend towards private home spaces and make the home the main place for leisure, at the same time that it is converted into a fortress with multiple security devices. All this, to be able to survive as a shipwreck in the midst of a tempest, obviously only if you can afford the latest gadgets in alarms, bullet-proof rooms, wide band connections to Internet, cable TV and air conditioning.

This hypertrophied home, separated from public life, capable of incorporating all kinds of consumer pretensions in goods and services, conceived as an island and disconnected from any nearby territory although it is installed in a virtual space of global flows and connections which is the exclusive patrimony of the privileged owners of cyberspace, has its logical corollary in the streets and public spaces which are abandoned, from which some escaped long ago through choice or fear, and which by default have been left to those who have no other choice but to settle there, in a place that serves as a dustbin in which all the residual population who don't know or can't afford a better place to live are put, a multitude coming from all five continents. As Bauman stated, at this time “the cities have been converted into the dump for problems of a worldwide origin” so that “their inhabitants and those who represent them often face an impossible task [. . .] that of finding local solutions for global contradictions.” (2006:23) and have to face the challenge with few, often ridiculously few resources.

In this new city where the nebulous fear of foreigners who have just arrived without anyone inviting them and the anxiety caused by the unknown have produced a breeding ground for all kinds of personal and collective paranoia, interdictory spaces have appeared everywhere, fenced off and designed to isolate and impede

the passage or permanence of those who have been previously defined as adversaries, real or symbolic enemies (see M. Davis 2001). An enormous effort in design, aimed at driving away undesirables, can be seen in the architecture, urban furniture or sign-posting. (see appendix).



Anti-homeless benches, grilles and fences, apparently innocent decorative elements, which nevertheless stop anyone from sitting under a roof or glass canopy, are spreading all over the city, as are the signs which warn you to be alert and on guard, permanently suspicious of any real or imagined danger. Examples include the famous posters in the New York subway (“If you see something, say something”) or the omniscient, all-seeing eye that warns visitors to some middle-class neighbourhoods that all the people living there are watching them.



New York subway



Staten Island (July 2005)

All these perverse dynamics, built around data that are more imagined than real, do nothing other than increase the feeling of insecurity and distrust that translates into what Barman calls *mixophobia*, the fear of mixing with anyone different from

oneself, whether he/she be from another race, another country or another social class. Whereas in the very origin of what the city historically represented in contrast to the homogeneous life of a village, we find the opposite phenomenon, mixophilia, i.e. a delight in the mix and crossbreeding which comes as a consequence of the confluence in the same place of heterogeneous people; a place, the city, where it is possible and unavoidable to meet strangers and live in the liberty of differences.

However, the strategy of fear and distrust tends to work as a self-fulfilling prophecy as it feeds and reinforces the danger of those who are trying to protect themselves, since the segregation and forced distancing from others makes living together more and more difficult for everyone. For this reason, an urban strategy that is the opposite of what is happening nowadays is essential; one that nourishes the opportunities for mixing and interchanging, through the multiplication and “the creation of public spaces which are open and hospitable, to which all kinds of people would come willingly and would have no problem in sharing.” (Bauman 2006:38). This new urban planning is necessary given that the creation of trust is always born from a “fusion of horizons” and this is impossible if previously the same space has not been shared as the only way of giving rise to an experience of shared, communal citizenship.

Empirical reality

To try and show the degree of conflict which currently exists in Spain in the use of public spaces by the homeless, I am going to use a set of seven interviews carried out with the homeless, some news items which appeared in the press concerning violence suffered by the homeless in the last few months, especially a case which occurred in Barcelona at the end of 2005 and I will present some photos which show the spread of the exclusionist design. Some of the photographs presented in the Appendix were taken by a group of students of Sociology during their academic training in the Research Laboratory which I direct at the Comillas University.

Interviews

During the last few days of the month of June we carried out field work which consisted of seven open-style interviews with people who live in the streets of Madrid, four men and three women. Five of them were contacted through the Open Centre, a municipal centre that remains open 24 hours a day to attend those persons who live in the street and who can't, or don't want, to go to a shelter. We also interviewed two people staying at the shelter run by the San Martin de Porres Foundation who had recently spent a long time on the street. The social-demographic profile of the interviewees is shown in the following table. The names used are not their own so as to preserve their anonymity.

	Sex	Age	Length of	Added problems
--	------------	------------	------------------	-----------------------

			stay on the street	
Manuela	F	70	24 years	Old age
Antonia	F	50	6 months	Mental illness
Abdul	M	50	14 years	Foreigner
Alberto	M	49	Several months	Alcoholism
Manuel	M	34	Several years	Mental Illness/Drugs
Martín	M	48	11 years	Alcoholism
Jacinta	F	45	Several years	Drugs/Prostitution

In general, the interviews were carried out easily although it was difficult to introduce the conflicts found in the street in the conversation, since in many cases the interviewee began by denying having had a conflictive situation as a way to defend him/herself from a possible reproach that might identify him/her as a conflictive or problematic person. Nevertheless, when the interview lasted a bit longer, stories about experiences appeared which showed the tension and violence living outdoors brought with it. Since the small number of interviews did not allow for all the casuistry of aggressions and attacks suffered by the homeless, I will use, besides these seven interviews, a few fragments from interviews obtained in another research project carried out only a few years ago.

The most obvious form of permanent conflict suffered by rough sleepers is that seen in episodes of physical violence in which they are often involved. In spite of the reticence to talk that the interviewees had, almost all of them referred to some violent event,

be it a robbery *“One night, coming back from Embajadores [an area in the south of Madrid], I went down a street where I shouldn’t have gone since it was the exit to a discotheque full of Arabs, the exit to the disco and all of them came out wasted. Two of them came up to me and started to stick their hands in my pockets, me trying to get rid of them. What a disaster! They took my wallet, they took everythin’ off me. But like who is so stupid that at 5:30am they walk down a street crawling with Arabs and by a disco that must be hell and all those Arabs came out loaded and . . .? Well sure, from that day on they make me sick.”* (Manuel), a mugging: *“I’m not scared of being in the street. Nothin’ ever happened to me, ‘cept for that guy that threw me on the ground and dragged me across the ground. And I’ve gotta go to court. But I’m not goin’. Why should I go? I’ve had five or six hearings but I ain’t gone to none. Why? Well – things happen. They don’t give ya nothin’, just a waste o’ time. They don’t defend ya. The police? Good thing I defended meself cuz if I don’t defend meself . . . the street cleaners come along and saw me. I was dragging meself along the street, hadn’t robbed me nor nothin’. It was a guy in the street same as me. An Arab.”* (Manuela, 70), or a fight: *“There’s this guy,*

thirty something, been in the street five days, before he was in a shelter but they give him a week or 12 days, then they don't have room and he been five days on the street and there in XXX park he was sleepin' with his knapsack and four posh kids comes up to 'im at two in the morning and they started kicking 'im, they took his trainers, they took his knapsack. Just for being there. And they left him, with his face and body . . . barefoot. I told him, go to this clinic, and he says "but they took my papers – everything." He says they was young kids, no more than 19 or 20." (Antonio).

In the case of homeless women, the violence inevitably takes one specific form: rape.

- The thing is I had a rough life. I'm embarrassed to talk about it. But cuz of problems and such, I fell into prostitution. It was a short time, now, thank God I'm not. I had a really bad match. It was cuz of drugs, I didn't want to, but . . . And I'm ashamed to say it. I've worked normal like too, aye.

- And, Have you ever been attacked?

- Yeah, It was in the park, I was raped. It was by the Marina [a centre for the homeless], when I came out of the Marina, it was a time I was taking tranquilizers because I was quitting drugs. To stop the drugs, they gave me tranquilizers. I took tablets, whatever, one or two, I didn't realise. It was someone in the street and he raped me. The forensic surgeon saw me and all that. If I had been OK, well I probable would have fought back, but the tranquilizers were really strong. And . . . anyone can do you, you can't defend yourself. Me, with so many pills, I couldn't remember the guy, the only thing the street cleaners saw me and called the police" (Jacinta).

Whether previously attacked or not, living in the street means in any case, living in tension with the fear of being attacked or beaten. Whether the person has had the experience of being the victim of an attack or not, what is unavoidable is the feeling of helplessness and the panic of being helpless and in danger: *"The thing is it could fucking well be me. Tomorrow, for whatever reason, I don't have nothing and I go to the park to sleep with my knapsack . . . I got a couple of things, a couple papers, maybe a euro or two, not more and on top of everything, they beat me up and leave me half dead or they kill me. Fuck. It's like you're always tense." (Antonio).* Tension that is continually fed by the stories and references that are heard about people who have been attacked while in the street: *"A lot of people in the street, they been stabbed and everything. And they set fire to one who was sleeping in the street, over by Tirso de Molina [an area in the centre]" (Antonia).* Stories that spread among the homeless mouth to mouth or because they hear them in the media.

Last year in Spain there was a savage attack that had enormous repercussions in the media. In Barcelona, three young boys, one of them almost an adolescent, beat a woman who was sleeping in the entrance to a bank where there was a cash

machine. In the end they set her on fire using a flammable liquid they stole from a work site nearby. The woman, María del Rosario Endrinal, died as a result of her burns. Unlike other occasions when the persons attacked or killed in the street received only a brief mention in the press and the crimes committed were finally forgotten or remained unpunished, in this case the security cameras at the bank captured the scene. Because of this, public opinion could see the horrible spectacle of uncalled-for, savage violence, which almost like a game, ended the life of this woman. Many spectators were able to understand the enormous, permanent risk that the homeless run. Furthermore, in this case, because of the huge press coverage, it was possible to find the family of the victim and they took the case to court, where the sentence was quick and exemplary, as the family and the social entities that work with the homeless in Spain had requested. The media reconstruction of what had been the life of a woman who in the past had been attractive, a successful professional, wife and mother, before she had fallen into problems with alcohol and drugs, underlined that what, from the point of view of the attackers, was only a kind of trash or human garbage to be cleaned up and made to disappear because it uglified the district, acquired an entity as a person, with a past, a name and a history and a dignity that no one could take away.

In a society of television viewers, where what is not shown in pictures is the same as not existing, it was necessary to wait to have a video from the bank's security cameras for the citizens as a whole to give importance and credibility to facts that had been denounced by NGOs and had been ignored time and again. We heard a similar case two years ago from a homeless person in Madrid:

"- Those skinheads... they've already sent me to the hospital a couple of times. They broke my ribs . . . I got hit here on the head, here, on the left . . . you know this is the cerebellum. And they hit me with a bat . . . a baseball bat . . . and part of my brain is . . . paralyzed. That was ... at least a year and a half ago more or less.

- And where were you sleeping for them to do that to you?

- This... it happened... where the... the square where... MAPFRE [an insurance company] and...(...) well, here, I was sleeping. Another time... in Chamberí Square, no... in... in Olavides Square... and another time I was...near Chamberí... you know, there's a little park above there, they caught me in the tunnel at the entrance of the apartment buildings and I was sleeping . . . and they beat me ... kicked me. And they had on ... those shoes . . .the ones with the toe . . . of steel . . . you know . . . and they broke three of my ribs.

- Were you alone?

- Alone. Another night they set my sponge mattress on fire . . I had an Arab girl with me and a guy . . .that's dead now . . .He was from Granada like me, Manolo . . . and they left . . . he said . . ."Fatima, let's go get a drink" . . .and he said, "Valentin, you coming? And I said, "No, I've had enough to drink, I don't want any more," and when they come back, thank God they came back soon, the mattress was on fire and I was out cold, sleeping,

near, next to . . . Martinez Campos Street . . . you know where there was a crane before . . . and I was sleepin' reside. Good thing they came back soon, otherwise, like a torch I would 'a burned . . . cuz a person's skin . . .

- Hey . . . that stuff about skinheads is common, isn't it . . .

- When they catch you . . . on weekends, they're dangerous . . .

- Weekends?

- Yeah, during the week . . . nothin' . . . but . . . they already beat me up a couple o' times."

There is also a kind of institutionalised violence that the homeless receive from the police force, gestures which are apparently innocuous but which touch the limits of legality, for example, asking for documentation time and again as a kind of pressure to make the person who is seen as bothersome or an unpleasant presence leave. (*"The police go by. Some times they ask for your identification papers. For example, one night, in a place they went by, they asked for our cards, at night. . . On Princesa St. behind the Melia Hotel. They came by again and again cuz of the problems . . . because the neighbours called, and there were complaints with XXXX [a travel agent's]. There was trouble because they didn't want people being there, and then because someone peed on a car, he was drunk, what an uproar . . . And they called the police. They just said "The next time we're taking even the cardboard boxes" But, yeah, there are complaints from the neighbours. (Antonia).*)

Or another anecdote told by a 49-year-old man:

"- When you were in the street, did you have any run-ins with the police, for example?

- No, well...the second night I did. Since I was sleeping on a bench in the park there, in my district, well they called me and they said – because they probably thought I was drunk or drugged or something – and I woke up and said "yeah?" "What are you doing here?" and I said, "well nothing, resting a bit" And o' course I lied because they said "Where do you live?" and I said "Well, right near here, but since . . ." I don't know that I told them . . . that I was waiting for my dad or some fib like that. Because I couldn't tell them anything else, o' course, they saw I wasn't drunk or drugged or nothing . . . I was dressed OK. I always try, being out in the street and all, to dress as well as I can. You can see." (Antonio)

The fine line that separates a more or less scruffy appearance can be the one that marks the more or less energetic action by the police: *"It was the third day I think and they said what was I doing, and I said "nothing, just resting a little" "don't you have any place to go?" and I said "Well, no. The truth is I don't." And they said "Well you can't stay here because this is a public park and I don't know what and they're going to water it . . ." And they threw me out, they threw me out and said I couldn't be there. And I had to go. It must have been five or six in the morning. So then . . . I just walked around."*

In any case, what appears to be an open, free space, also has its hidden rules which are easily broken, almost without knowing it, by those who do not limit their use to what is conventional in public places.

“It’s the same a lot of Sundays when I’m here in San Isidro Park, well since I don’t have nothin’ to do, well, I just sit here and maybe I have a book and if I don’t have a book . . . well the police car goes by two or three times, but inside the park. They stare at me the first time, the second and the third, one of them gets out of the car and he says to me “What are you doing?” And I say “well nothing, just here” He says “Your papers.” I says, “Yes, Sir”. He goes back to the car, looks at the papers . . . “ OK Thank you.” It was four or five in the afternoon. They didn’t tell me anything else.

- Have they asked for your papers many times?

- Around here, yeah. More than once. Maybe because I spend four or five hours sitting on a bench. Just for that. The other day they said, “What are you doing here?” “Well nothing, just waiting for a friend” He says to me, “Well you’ve been here . . .” He told how long and everything. I said, “Well, yeah, but my cell phone, I’m out of money on it and I’m waiting to see if my friend calls me, or to see what happened to him.” He says, “OK, Have a good day.” I say, “Thank you.”

Even though none of our interviewees told us any case of police brutality, the beatings by security guards do not appear to be isolated cases: *“I know people that have had problems with security guards and the like. For instance, for not having any money and jumping the gate to the underground, people do that, and the guards catch him and instead of throwing him out, well they throw him out and hit him up side the head a couple times. Take out their nightstick and hit ‘im in the kidneys or the back. There was a mate that they tried to take his wallet, someone in the street, it got messed up and they broke his wrist and whatever. Thank God nothing has happened to me so far. I don’t know if it’s cuz I’m more careful, the way I dress and how I look, but . . .”* Paradoxically, our informer had worked in the past as a private security guard and can now see, from the other side, what his previous behaviour had been like. For example, he remembered his experience as a security guard in a large supermarket when a person came in whose appearance showed he was living in the street: *“I had instructions to shadow him, you know, watch him and not lose sight of him. And then, if he left your zone, tell the guy from the next zone to follow him and shadow him. I always worked in XXX and everybody who came in like that, we had orders to throw him out, to not let him in. That for starters. Me, I had to do it cuz I had no choice, but one day this guy just wanted to stay out of the rain . . . a shame. But they weren’t even allowed outside on the pavement under the roof, even if they weren’t on the pavement, we had to make them leave. O’ course I see myself . . . Because that area was easy to see for the people passing by, to give a good impression, nothin’ more than that. And that oh! That drove me crazy, but I had to do it.”* (Antonio).

There is a more subtle kind of violence, however, that doesn't require blows, nor even words to be felt and break the resistance and the morale of the homeless. This conflict only requires a certain kind of look, just with a look it is possible to tell someone "this is not your place. Shove off." As Alberto says: *"In the street, some days I just can't shave or change my shirt, well I remember, maybe going into a shop and since I hadn't shaved and that, well they look you up and down. And you notice that, and it hurts. It hurts a lot. Inside, morally and psychologically. I remember that I walked into a shop and there were four or five women, I said "Good morning" and they turned away, they looked at me with this expression of nausea and disgust. I wasn't shaved and maybe my shirt was dirty, or maybe my trousers, but . . . come on . . . and I left and said "Goodbye." And I wasn't even hungry then and didn't feel like doing anything. I mean it hits you hard and me, it left me feeling bad. And then you think, you start to think things that you know aren't normal, but at that moment, you understand? You want to break something or maybe even kill yourself, I mean even that extreme, to quit altogether . . ."* (Antonio) Sometimes the greatest violence is in a tiny, everyday, almost intranscendental gesture, something as simple as a glance, which nevertheless can unchain an enormous amount of destruction in the person that receives it and feels it as a judgement, an unappealable and unjust sentence.

We must keep in mind that for the homeless, the conflicts in open spaces and public places appear only at the end of a long and painful series of conflicts which have taken place in private spaces, in the home, in the family. So those who have been expelled, thrown out of their homes, either by others or fleeing themselves from unbearable conflicts, are the ones who, when they arrive at that nothing-place which is a park, a bench, an underground station or the entrance to a supermarket, find that they have to leave there too because they are not wanted. What previously perhaps they thought of as an obvious right (the street belongs to everyone, doesn't it?) has become a source of difficulties ("I can't even stay out in the open").

A place, the street, where you can sleep and clean up, becomes an impossible task. (*"Take a bath and clean up, impossible... And to go to the toilet well – any bar. In some bars, yeah, I've had problems, like in that one on the corner . . . once I went and I couldn't hold it and I vomited in the urinals, and I apologised and all . . . but the thing is the "dwarf" like they call him, he won't let me in now. Not even to have a coffee."*), a hostile place, where the slightest opening can be seen as an oasis: *"I was sleepin' where the cash machine is, before the summer, and every night or every two nights, since I've got insomnia and that, I had to go to the hospital, I know the doctors in the Clinic . . . And at 6:00 they open the underground and in you go. In the cash machine place, you can get in if you have a magnetic band, and in some you don't even need that. The one I went to, around Argüelles [northern Madrid district] it was quiet and cosy, I thought "I could stay here bloody fantastic," but I was sick, bottles of 50 tranquilizers I took in five minutes. Since I had the sickness, they didn't have any effect."*

However, especially in these semi-public places, the competition and the right to stay there out of the elements, turns out to be particularly problematic: *"Yeah once a man got really angry with me because he wanted to take Money out and I was in there. I picked up my stuff, I went out, and when I came back, he had left. Since it was summer, you roll up your jacket and you sleep like that, from exhaustion you sleep maybe two or three hours and when you wake up , off to the hospital . . .and there they were up to their eyeballs with me"* (Manuel).

On these occasions, the struggle for space can include the presence of the police who, inevitably defend the rights of the citizen in good standing who wants to use the bank cash machine to withdraw money, not as a place to sleep: *"Me, I've slept in cash machine places. Once they threw me out. The police. A neighbour called, in Getafe [town to the south of Madrid]. I was sleeping and a man who wanted to take money out, I don't know if he got scared or what. He didn't tell me to leave or nothing. He left and called the police. I don't know if he was scared or thought I was going to rob him or take his money or what. He didn't say nothin, just left and called the cops. They told me, "a guy came, a man was going to take money out and he said he was afraid of you, that you'd rob him" and I said, "Why should I rob him, I prefer to beg first." They said I had to leave and so, I left like they said and when they went away, I turned round and went to the bank again. They didn't come back the rest of the night "* (Jacinta).

Ironically, one of the elements that facilitate the entrance to cash machine places in banks is a small instrument provided to everyone by our welfare system: *"I went in cuz I had a card that I found. It worked in all of them. Problem is now I've lost it. But the Social Security Health card, you go up to the door and zip! And you're in"* Although most certainly unplanned by the officials of our welfare system (full of lagoons and holes), it seems a kind of revenge that the homeless themselves have discovered that the national health card which gives access to doctors and the health services, also provides, in an unforeseen and spurious way, a roof over their heads.

Although sometimes there arise problems with the neighbours, in general it is true that the interviewees speak positively about their relationship with their neighbours. In this point an old relationship with the poor that forms part of our local tradition continues to be alive and in practice. For the most part, all the interviewees had received help or support, a situation which is logical since no one can live literally at the mercy of the elements day after day if they do not find at least someone who provides food or clothing. The Spanish tradition of alms and charity paradoxically serves to prolong the homeless' stay in the street, anchoring them at times for years: *"I don't have a fixed place. I go along the pavement, I look for some cardboard when it's getting dark and I go to sleep. I've never had problems with the neighbours. On the contrary, one night I woke up and found a blanket. Someone had covered me up. I've been in the street almost 11 years. "* (Martín). This help from private benefactors leads to closer relationships when the time in the street is prolonged and ends in a relationship of a mutual exchange of

small favours which reinforces and consolidates life in the streets. *"In the street . . . some 14 years in the street. Sleeping lots of places, for example on MXXX St. around there. In a shop on AXXX St, I slept there at the door of the shop. They treated me good, and the day I didn't have anything, the people that work in the shop, they like me, they give me something to eat, even money for vices like cigarettes. Where I slept, there was like a door to a storeroom, in a restaurant, there was a space, well I slept there. In the morning the owner brought me coffee, breakfast. He let me sleep there. I spent three or four years sleeping there. Imagine the trust, when they didn't have change, they gave me 50, 100 euro notes, "here, go get change." Sometimes I take a while because I can't find any. I leave my stuff there, put my knapsack in the shop and go and look for change"* (Abdul, Moroccan). Only in this way is it possible to explain that someone like Manuela has been able to last 24 years living in the street: *"In the street, in Madrid, always there, on XXXX Road. At MXXX [a restaurant] they give me great sandwiches, and chickens and ham and eggs and everything, turnovers, all kinds of stuff. They're Asturians [from the north of Spain] and I'm Galician [another part of the north]. I didn't need anything and the neighbours gave me clothes and things. Everybody loved me. The lady in the tobacconist's gave me food, sandwiches, a scarf, socks. But now this guy has it in for me and I'm here. I slept at the bus stop and next to the shelter too."*

Nevertheless, beyond the stories that try to keep up appearances and the last wisps of personal dignity in the form of good relationships with one or another of the neighbours, the truth is that eventually the bitter confirmation comes out that *"people like us, in the street, they don't want us, that's the truth. For example, once, he doesn't remember because he was drunk, when they brought him here, because they called the health services, a lady complained, "with so much space, why don't you go away? I don't want you under my windows." We were sleeping near them, near her windows, and she wanted to water. Since we was there, we was in her way. And instead of throwing water on me, well, she called the health services, the Samur, and they brought me here."* But this homeless person still finds reasons to justify the reaction of this neighbour: *"It's that it wasn't just two of us, there was a whole bunch of us. At first there were two of us, but then people started to come and eight or nine got together . . . and the neighbours started to complain. During the day, they went away, and then at night they came back. They went to look for scrap iron and then at night they came back to sleep"* (Jacinta).

It is precisely in this closeness, in this contaminating nearness to the excluded person, where good intentions come into crisis, and it becomes difficult to maintain the working agreements that set out the place of each person and the right of the rough sleeper to stay in the street, to make it his home, in the place that one lives: *"People say things, like so-and-so took my mattress and that. For example now Ricardo who is a young guy who got punished with six months of not being allowed in the centre and is sleeping on that stone over there, and yeah I know he has trouble with people and people are aggressive with people they see lying around like that . . . I know for instance that once there was a turd in one of the doorways and he was accused of that and I was around one night, I don't remember why,*

and it was real early or I was punished with being kept out or something and a kid came in from a night out and shit and peed and I realised it hadn't been him and then people leave everything dirty and he has to clean up, because since he's there, everybody blames him. Every time anything happens . . .for example, I have this habit of spitting on the ground and when I sit there with him, he tells me "don't spit on the ground, they're going to think it was me." And sometimes he even gets angry. And we try and keep it as clean as possible. And then the owner opens the door and he tells us that when he opens the shop we can't be there, but at night we can stay" (Manuel). Therefore, their right to become guard dogs at night is recognised as long as they disappear during the day and keep the ground clean, in a symbiotic relationship which is not only not infrequent, but which many times becomes the strategic reason upon which each day the tiny right of the homeless to sleep in the street is renegotiated with the people in the surroundings.

References

- BAUMAN, Zygmunt (2006) *Confianza y temor en la ciudad: Vivir con extranjeros*. Barcelona: Arcadia.
- DAVIS, Mike (2001) *Control urbano: la ecología del miedo. Más allá de Blade Runner*. Barcelona: Virus.
- DELGADO, Manuel (1999) *El animal público: hacia una antropología de los espacios urbanos*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
- DELGADO, Manuel (2006) "De la ciudad concebida a la ciudad practicada" *Archipiélago* (62).
- LOW, Setha and SMITH, Neil (2006) *The politics of public space*. New York: Routledge.
- MITCHELL, D. and STAEHELI, L. A. (2006) "Clean and safe? Property redevelopment, public space, and homelessness in downtown San Diego" in LOW, Setha and SMITH, Neil *The politics of public space*. New York: Routledge.
- RABOTNIKOF, Nora (2005) *En busca de un lugar común: El espacio público en la teoría política contemporánea*. México: UNAM.
- ROCA, José M. (1999) "La prensa y el espacio público", in *Política y comunicación: Conciencia cívica, espacio público y nacionalismo* Publisher by F. ARIEL DEL VAL, V. MORARU, and J. M. ROCA. Madrid: Los libros de La Catarata.