

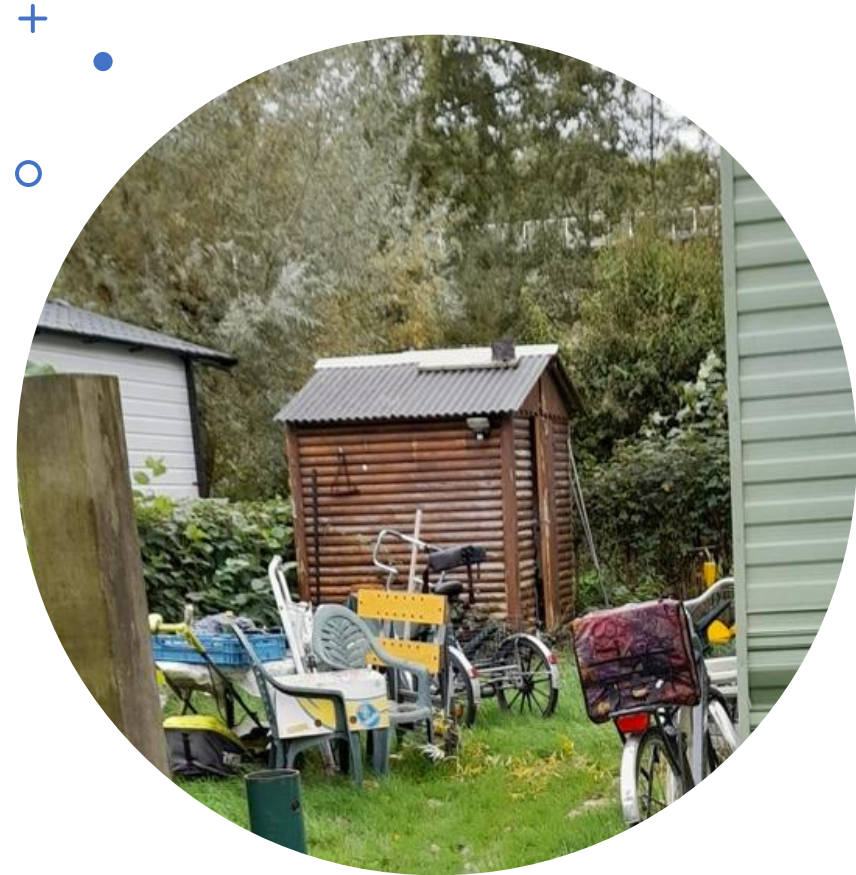
Practices of sanctuary in the context of bordering

PhD trajectory

Part of TRAHOME research project on the trajectories of roofing and homeless people in Belgium (led by Prof. Martin Wagener, Prof. Griet Roets & Prof. Koen Hermans)

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Teo's story



Structure

1. Introduction
2. Literature: theory and research questions
3. Research context and method
4. Results
5. Concluding reflections

1. Introduction

Homelessness and migration

- Homeless counts carried out in 2020 - 2022 in Belgium show that relatively many homeless people are newcomers: between 55% and 20% of the counted population does not have the Belgian nationality
- Observation in the homelessness sector: diversification (based on ethnic-cultural background and nationality) of the population over the past 20 years.
- Literature:
 - Growing awareness that migration is a new structural factor causing homelessness (Hermans et al. 2020)
 - Discrimination on the basis of origin in the housing market (cf. Verhaeghe & De Coninck 2022)
- A mainly urban phenomenon

Precarious residence (1)

Europe's border regime since the 1990's

The homelessness counts also show that there are a significant number of homeless people with a precarious or no residence status: between 70% and 24% of non-Belgians have a temporary or no residence status.

Migrants with a precarious residence status?

- EU and non-EU
- No full-fledged 'citizens' but different types of procedures and residence statuses
- The status determines access to formal social rights (social security, social benefits, access to services and access to participation)

At the crossroads with poverty: increased risk of homelessness

Precarious residence (2)

- Context of tightening national migration legislation *versus* cities which are faced with these people on their territory and have a mandate to curb nuisance and deal with extreme poverty
- EU institutions, civil society and local and regional authorities have made a joint promise to end homelessness in Europe by 2030. If this is taken seriously, they will also have to look at the group of illegalized migrants.

2. Literature: theory and research questions



Sanctuary Practices

1. Sanctuary
2. Sanctuary city (US vs. UK)
3. Zürich as first European example
4. Sanctuary practices (Bauder & Darling 2019) :

“accommodating illegalised migrants and refugees in urban communities.”

Critical Social Work

Research questions:

- How is sanctuary created for illegalized homeless people in a context of borders?
- What do these practices tell us about social justice and the state of the welfare state?

3. Research context and method

Focus on the city of Ghent

1873 homeless people counted in 2020

- 54.5% of homeless people do not have Belgian nationality
- 57.3% of non-Belgians do not have legal residence



Methods

(Participant) observation & informal conversation (2020 – 2023)

- Walking alongside outreach social workers
- Helping out in volunteer initiatives

Semi-structured interviews (2021 – 2023)

- 7 heads of volunteer initiatives
- 2 coordinators
- 8 outreach social workers
- 1 outreach migration officer
- 1 youth worker
- 3 policy makers

4. Results

1. Interventions
2. Actors
3. Nature and logics of the practices

1. Interventions

- Medical Card
- Outreach work and charities for material aid aimed at the homeless
- Shelter



2. Actors

Complex interplay between:

- Volunteers
- Outreach social workers employed by the local government
- Policy makers and civil servants employed by the local government



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BETAALBAARWONEN
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MENSOPSTRAAT

3. Nature and logics of the practices

- Strategies for sanctuary

 - Framing*

 - Forerunners who politicize*

 - Collaborations with migration authorities*

- Absence of legal frame and formal rights

 - Precariousness*

 - Absence of a legal framework*

- Traces of bordering

 - Focus on legal status*

 - Importance of local binding*

5. Concluding reflections

From a social work perspective in which we strive for a dignified existence for everyone in the city, including people with a precarious residence status, local sanctuary practices make a difference in homeless people's lives.

They are practices that we can consider as experiments in solidarity and community, and that can teach us something about the new institutional forms and logics that are emerging, in relation to the wider context to which they are connected.

However,

- these practices are precarious and dependent on a favorable political and societal climate
- cities are limited, faced with injustices which transcend their control e.g. context of international inequality
- territorial redistribution and rights based on citizenship hinder these practices but are also the foundations of the welfare state



To increase support and international solidarity, we need to rewrite the myth of the European welfare state (Bhabra & Holmwood, 2018)

- Connecting the economic with the political and social
- To connect the genesis of the welfare state with the history of colonialism
- Recognize the colonial legacy of differentiated (racialized) citizenship
- To find a humane solution for those who are (voluntarily or forced) mobile

Our distinction between migrants/refugees on one hand and citizens on the other is based on a false version of history, one that draws a distinction between states and colonies whose histories are, in fact, inextricably entwined. We have to understand the contemporary crisis in the context of these connected histories.

- Gurminder Bhambra

Thank you !

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