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**Book review:**

Robinson, D. (2024) Review of: Migrant homelessness and the crimmigration control system: By Regina Serpa, Routledge, London, 2023, 134 pp, £125 (hbk), £35.99 (ebk), ISBN: 9781032206325. Housing Studies, 39 (9). pp. 2421-2423. ISSN: 0267-3037

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Serpa, R. (2023) *Migrant homelessness and the crimmigration control system*. London: Routledge. ISBN 9781032206325. 134 Pages. Published May 8, 2023 by Routledge.

David Robinson

Over the last 50 years, researchers have sought to better understand the causes and experiences of homelessness and challenge policy and politics to prevent homelessness. For much of this time, discussion and debate was dominated by two competing explanations. One viewed homelessness as a social problem rooted in the failings or deficits of the individual. The other viewed homelessness as a housing problem that reflected wider social processes. More recently, research has sought to bridge this structure-agency divide, recognising that homelessness is the consequence of a combination of individual, social and structural factors. Regina Serpa situates analysis of migrant homelessness within this 'new orthodoxy', drawing upon original empirical data generated through fieldwork conducted over a seven year period in the UK and USA to explore how these forces interact to render particular groups more vulnerable to homelessness.

There are three essential parts to the book, following a brief introductory chapter that sets out the context, justifies the focus and summarises the methodology of the study. Part 1 outlines the framework that guides the study. Critical realism and the deployment of a biographical approach are presented as offering a series of distinctive benefits when it comes to understanding the confluence of individual, social and structural factors informing migrant homelessness situations and experiences. Part 1 also introduces a key theoretical frame that is used to interpret migrant homelessness; crimmigration. According to Serpa, crimmigration refers to how "the border of nations reaches inward, beyond territorial boundaries and deep into civil society to produce constraint and 'advanced' marginality amongst migrant groups" (p.33). The blurring of immigration and criminal law in the UK and USA is explained as resulting in a crimmigration control system that subjects migrants to distinctive additional constraints that are critical to understanding experiences of homelessness.

Part 2 represents the empirical core of the book. Drivers of migration, the constraints imposed by housing legislation and exacerbated by immigration policy and migrant experiences of securing housing are explored across three chapters. Discussion draws extensively on data generated through 70 qualitative interviews with Eastern European migrants in Edinburgh (UK), Latin American migrants in Boston (USA) and immigration and housing professionals in both countries. These chapters are rich in data, with quotes extensively utilised to illustrate, evidence and illuminate. Across these chapters, Serpa makes three important contributions.

First, foundational to Serpa's approach is a commitment to challenge the dehumanising of migrants within contemporary political and popular narratives and related demonisation that has served to legitimise active discrimination by policy and practice. Refusing to view homeless migrants as undeserving, second class citizens, recognising their agency and placing their personal stories at the heart of analysis and discussion, this book provides an alternative framing that recognises the contributions of migrants and argues persuasively for the extension of social citizenship rights.

Second, this study ventures beyond the theoretical focus of previous studies to expose actual existing systems, processes and experiences of crimmigration. Chapter 4 provides a detailed review of the legal framework, policy architecture and practice of crimmigration. Focusing on the nexus of

housing and homelessness policies, the welfare system and immigration policies, analysis reveals how systems of crimmigration in the UK and USA generate complexity and impose constraints on the rights and opportunities of migrants, limit access to housing and promote homelessness. Particularly interesting here are the insights provided into the attitudes and actions of various parties within civil society involved in 'bordering practices'. As well as revealing mechanisms through which migrants are disproportionately disadvantaged and exposed to homelessness, first-hand accounts of service managers and frontline staff reveal how local agencies and individual workers respond creatively to circumvent barriers and exercise discretion in a bid to actively assist homeless migrants. In short, Serpa reveals how progressive local practices can frustrate (as well as support) more punitive government frameworks and policies.

Chapter 5 focuses on the experiences of migrants navigating this complexity and trying to secure access to housing. Through a focus on individual agency and action, it reveals how the co-opting of various policy fields beyond immigration to serve the 'migration control project' has resulted in increased exclusion, precarity and homelessness. The active decision-making of migrants in relation to housing is explored through the concept of housing sacrifice, which serves to focus attention on the difficult choices people have to make between housing and other competing priorities. Attuned to the importance of research recognising the agency of individuals even within the most constrained of circumstances, discussion reveals and explores diversity and difference in situations and experiences of migrant homelessness.

Third, analysis takes us on a journey through the different phases of the migration process. Rather than focusing on arrival and resettlement in isolation, the experiences preceding migration are considered through a life story approach that explores the accounts of men and women who have moved across borders. Taking this long-view proves valuable in helping us to better understand the aspirations, priorities and choices of people before they set off on the migrant journey, the forces driving migration, and responses to the challenges encountered following resettlement. In Chapter 3 we are introduced to the pre-migration lives of people whose arrival stories are explored in subsequent chapters. A distinction is drawn between migration as survival, migration as freedom and migration as opportunity. These circumstances and explanations for migration subsequently emerge as key in understanding the constraints and trade-offs that become apparent within resettlement experiences.

Part 3 of the book takes the form of a conclusion that draws together and reflects upon key lessons to be drawn from the study. These are numerous, but I would spotlight three that serve to recommend this book to an audience beyond merely those with a particular interest in migrant homelessness or crimmigration. First, this book provides lucid insight into the complex interactions between the housing system and other social structures, including legal frameworks, public policy, welfare services and the labour market. In doing so, it powerfully illustrates why homelessness is not only a problem for housing policy. Second, it challenges generalising narratives that presume people and places are passive recipients of national or global processes of change. A variety of conditions exist at the local level reflecting distinct local histories of politics and policy, production and consumption. These variations in context inevitably affect local outcomes associated with broad processes of change. This point is well illustrated by the variable actions of local agencies engaging with homeless migrants and the extent to which some individuals and organisations within the two case studies actively sought out opportunities to exercise alternative values and principles when engaging with homelessness migrants. Third, the book introduces the interesting heuristic device of 'housing sacrifice', which has the potential to aid efforts to understand the prioritising of housing in

relation to other social and economic goals, as well as the prioritising of different dimensions of the composite good that is housing.

*Migrant Homelessness and the Crimmigration Control System* is an impressive, well-written and insightful empirical and conceptual contribution to scholarship at the intersection of housing, homelessness and immigration. It provides detailed analysis that serves to illustrate how housing is integrated into a complex system of management and control that serves to actively marginalise. The focus is on the experiences of migrants within this system, but there are important lessons here about the means and mechanisms through which insecurity and precarity might be produced for other groups at the bottom of the class structure.