

# WOMEN AND HOMELESSNESS: WINNING AND LOSING IN THE WELFARE STATE

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# A short history of homelessness in the UK – 1

- ▣ End of the poor law and the work house in 1948
- ▣ 1948 settlement – ‘residential accommodation for persons who by reason of age, infirmity or any other circumstances are in need of care and attention which is not otherwise available for them, [and] temporary accommodation for persons who are in urgent need thereof, being need arising in circumstances which could not reasonably have been foreseen ...’

# The urge to destigmatise

- ▣ “services to which any member of the community will readily have recourse, without loss of self-respect and without fear of stigma, whenever his (sic) need may arise – services, moreover, which must be administered with human understanding and sympathy.”
- ▣ (Lord Henderson: Hansard 6 April 1948, col 1097)

# A short history of homelessness in the UK - 2

- ▣ Rediscovery of homelessness in the 1960s and 1970s – split households
- ▣ Problem of housing not social services

# Homelessness law

- ❑ Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977
- ❑ Housing Act 1996, Part 7
- ❑ Obstacle Race
- ❑ Duty to house
- ❑ Challengeable by internal review and county court appeal



## Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977

CHAPTER 48

ARRANGEMENT OF SECTIONS

# Priority need

- ▣ a pregnant woman or a person with whom a pregnant woman resides or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- ▣ a person with whom dependent children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- ▣ a person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability or other special reason, or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- ▣ a person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as flood, fire or other disaster.

# Bifurcation of homelessness within welfare

- ▣ “a restatement of the primacy of the claims of families upon the welfare state” (Carr and Hunter, 2008)
- ▣ Those fleeing domestic violence deemed homeless – although problems of application:
  - *Yemshaw v Hounslow LBC* [2011]
- ▣ State as husband – *Brown*
- ▣ Bifurcation of systems: state rights based; state programmatic and voluntary

# The state system

- ▣ Bureaucratised (Cramer, 2005)
- ▣ Women as a special group:
- ▣ “It’s easier to turn a man away. I think we do treat men and women differently, we do more to help a woman be safe.” (Theresa, housing officer, HPU) (Cramer 2005; 741)
- ▣ Distrust of single fathers
- ▣ Holmes-Moorhouse v Richmond-upon-Thames LBC [2009] – treatment of split families

# Explanation

- ▣ “homeless women are treated better because they are the apotheosis of women: dependent, vulnerable and frightened” (Cramer, 2005; 743)
- ▣ Moral community:
- ▣ “The views of the housing officers correspond with a body of literature that identifies women as being closer to the concept of home. The implication of women being more closely identified with the home is that when women are homeless they suffer to a greater extent than men” (Cramer, 2005; 744)
- ▣ Need for women to comply with gender norms

# Limits of the state

- ▣ Restigmatised when attacked from within:
  - Housing Act 1996 – “single parents” jumping the queue – time limit on duty – reversed by New Labour 1997
- ▣ Current amendments – move to permit discharge through the private rented sector

# Outside the legislation

- ▣ Women as less visible – a hidden population
- ▣ Visible homelessness is male
- ▣ Visible homelessness – challenge to private sphere domesticity of women (Watson, 1999)
  - Prostitution
  - Lack of provision
- ▣ Responses to visible homelessness a form of “hard masculinity” – spaces of danger

# Responses

- ▣ those who distanced themselves from recognised spaces of homelessness and from a 'homeless' identity;
- ▣ those existing, as Wardhaugh (1999, 2000) suggests, in the shadows of a street homeless scene;
- ▣ those whose presence on the streets marked them as obviously and visibly 'homeless';
- ▣ and those who, though sharing the spaces of the homeless city with other visibly homeless people, were understood by neither the housed public nor homeless service providers as 'homeless' at all but marked with a quite different identity. (May et al, 2007)

# Conclusions

- ▣ Dividing practices of rights – excludes from embrace of state
- ▣ When state attacks and limits those rights no fall back provision – women hardest hit
- ▣ A feminist project considering the excluded is key to understanding the “hard masculinities”