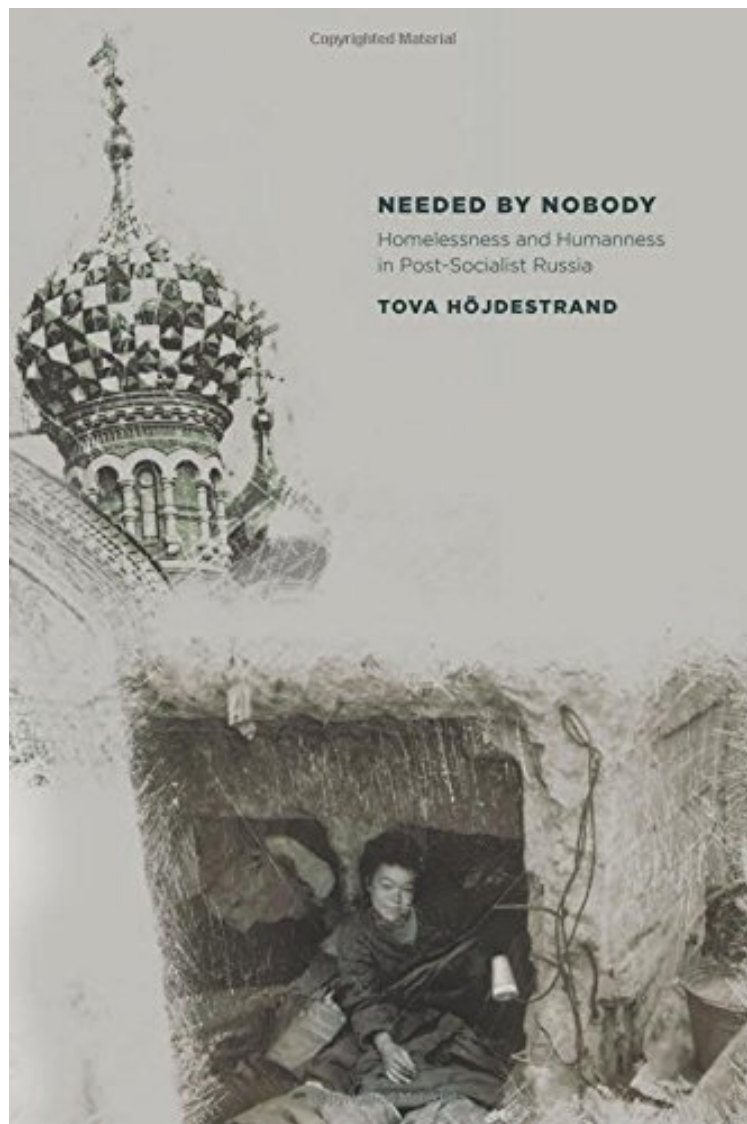


[Library ebook] Needed by Nobody: Homelessness and Humanness in Post-Socialist Russia (Culture and Society after Socialism)

Needed by Nobody: Homelessness and Humanness in Post-Socialist Russia (Culture and Society after Socialism)

Tova Hjdestrand

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Tova Hjdestrand : Needed by Nobody: Homelessness and Humanness in Post-Socialist Russia (Culture and Society after Socialism) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Needed by Nobody: Homelessness and Humanness in Post-Socialist Russia (Culture and Society after

Socialism):

Homelessness became a conspicuous facet of Russian cityscapes only in the 1990s, when the Soviet criminalization of vagrancy and similar offenses was abolished. In spite of the host of social and economic problems confronting Russia in the demise of Soviet power, the social dislocation endured by increasing numbers of people went largely unrecognized by the state. Being homeless carries a special burden in Russia, where a permanent address is the precondition for all civil rights and social benefits and where homelessness is often regarded as a result of laziness and drinking, rather than external factors. In *Needed by Nobody*, the anthropologist Tova Hjdestrand offers a nuanced portrait of homelessness in St. Petersburg. Based on ethnographic work at railway stations, soup kitchens, and other places where the homeless gather, Hjdestrand describes the material and mental world of this marginalized population. They are, she observes, "not needed" in two senses. The state considers them, in effect, as noncitizens. At the same time they stand outside the traditionally intimate social networks that are the real safety net of life in postsocialist Russia. As a result, they are deprived of the prerequisites for dealing with others in ways that they themselves value as "decent" and "human." Hjdestrand investigates processes of social exclusion as well as the remaining "world of waste": things, tasks, and places that are wanted by nobody else and on which "human leftovers" are forced to survive. In this bleak context, Hjdestrand takes up the intimate worlds of the homeless: their social relationships, dirt and cleanliness, and physical appearance. Her interviews with homeless people show that the indigent have a very good idea of what others think of them and that they are liable to reproduce the stigma that is attached to them even as they attempt to negotiate it. This unique and often moving portrait of life on the margins of society in the new Russia ultimately reveals how human dignity may be retained in the absence of its very preconditions.

"*Needed by Nobody* is a wonderful book that has much to contribute to discussions in urban anthropology and sociology, Russian studies, homelessness, alcoholism, and psychology. I have enormous respect for the fieldwork that Tova Hjdestrand conducted for this admirable ethnography. I read every word with great interest." Dale Pesmen, author of *Russia and Soul: An Exploration*. About the Author: Tova Hjdestrand is Lecturer in the Department of Social Anthropology at Stockholm University.