

Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice

I. Everyone Wants to Help the Homeless Kids but...

Only if they look sad.

Only if they're "really" homeless.

Only if they come with thank you letters and tax deductions.

Only if they can tweet about it.

Only if the kids are small and cute
hopeless, damaged and innocent.

Only if they stay children forever

because once they grow up, they become responsible for their trauma
and that doesn't make for a good fundraising campaign.

The Afterword

The theme of the deserving poor runs deep through this poem. In my experience working at an organization that serves families living in homeless shelters, I often have observed conflicting attitudes towards supporting those experiencing homelessness, depending on the age of the client. Folks tend to be eager to serve kids, perhaps due to their perceived "innocence"; however, parents are often viewed as "deserving" of their situation, rather than deserving of support. This poem also questions the sincerity and motivations of those that get involved in "helping," and highlights the deficit perspective some may have when working with this population.

II. I am From

I am from streetlights come on and it's time to go inside,
grandparents watching Caso Cerrado,

mom's car here to pick me up.

I am from tires in the garage that my grandpa will take to the garage
this weekend,

burnt peppers in the kitchen,

Friday car rides to garage sales.

I am from 6 o'clock means Wito is playing la guitarra in the basement,

Wita is praying from her room,

I am watching Selena for the 100th time.

I am from Tala, Mexico.

A place I have only formally met once but have known my whole life.

I am from un Español muy rural, cheese makers,

cheese makers,

nurses without degrees,

entrepreneurs,

and musicians.

I am from whitewashed with the Latinos,

too ethnic to be understood by the whites.

I am from Catholic school has people thinking I'm rich,

but being Latina on a college campus must mean I am

a PEOPLE scholar.

I am from you confuse people with your racial ambiguity

pero mi gente me pide ayuda en Español.

III. This Place

This place is hidden

as if to say

ignore us

do not come here

no one needs to know.

This place is an unlocked door
a sign in sheet for volunteers
a record of those that can come
and go as they please.

This place is a home
between homes
between jobs
between families
between schools
for some,
between shelters.

This place is someone's 9-5 job
someone's dream job
someone's grad school credential
someone's good deed
someone's photo op for their company fundraiser
someone's experiential learning opportunity.

This place shouldn't exist because there should be a place with many
places
with individual doors,
not individual beds,
that provide a place
that can truly be home.

Afterword

This poem is about the homeless shelter that I work at. I often think about what the space means for different people—especially the residents and staff.

Author Biography

ALEX GALVÁN is a first-year clinical Extended Evening Program (EEP) student at the University of Chicago Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice. Alex currently works full-time at Chicago HOPES

for Kids as the Outreach and Family Engagement Administrator and she is doing her field placement at the Hyde Park Refugee Project. Alex is pursuing the School Social Work program of study where she hopes to combine her passions for writing, narrative therapy, community activism, and working with youth.