In Better Must Come, Matthew D. Marr takes a comparative look at homelessness in two
global cities, Tokyo and Los Angeles. He brings into relief the relation of homelessness to
structural conditions at multiple levels and the vital importance of social resources for facilitating
exit. Drawing on ethnographic data, Marr traces trajectories into and out of homelessness while
depicting in striking detail the ways in which inequalities fueled by economic and ideological
neoliberalism have impacted governance, policy, and communities in each city, thus shaping
experiences and treatment of homelessness. Through analysis of multiple exit stories, Marr’s
work not only identifies a myriad of social, structural, and systemic obstacles that complicate
transition out of homelessness, but also shines a light on the contextual conditions that facilitate
pathways to greater socio-economic security.

Marr’s exploration of processes of exiting homelessness draws from in-depth
longitudinal interviews with 34 informants, 17 each from Tokyo and Los Angeles, who he follows
through and beyond their participation in transitional housing programs. His underlying aim is to
challenge acculturation theories commonly utilized in homelessness studies and ethnographic
research, which advance thinking of homelessness “as an entrenched state, identity, or
culture” (p. 182) that takes hold of people over time. By positing the question “What enables
exit?” and placing the stories of his informants at the heart of his analysis, Marr directs our
attention to how social structures and systemic arrangements promote or hamper exits from
homelessness by tracing individual experiences in navigating state aid, local services, labor and
housing markets, and general interpersonal interactions. He also draws from extensive
secondary literature on social policy, organizational studies, and social tie activation to develop
a highly sophisticated multilevel contextual analysis that plainly illustrates how socio-political
and economic conditions tie into factors shaping individual lives.

The book consists of four parts, each intermixed with exit stories from Tokyo and Los
Angeles, to ground a vigorous comparative analysis of policies, programs, social contexts, and
lived realities. The first part investigates neoliberalism’s “glocalization” in Tokyo and Los
Angeles, and provides a backdrop for understanding how globalization has shaped
homelessness and policy responses in each city through its interface with conditions at global,
national, and local scales. The second part delves into interviewees’ experiences in welfare
programs and labor and housing markets, often marked by exclusionary treatment and ongoing
struggles with precarity. The third part illustrates the instrumental role that social ties play as
interviewees negotiate exit from homelessness through interactions with organizations, family,
and friends. The final part draws on lessons from all previous chapters and both cities to outline
policy implications.
Marr’s work is valuable for the advances it makes in delineating the ways in which neoliberalism, welfare systems, labor markets, support programs, social attitudes, and civic, private, and public sector actors interact at two distinct urban points in the global picture of homelessness. Moreover, his work retains a crisp focus on the interplay between structural and social influences at multiple levels and how these shape long-term trajectories—and possibilities for exit—in individual lives. For example, he details the ways in which informants variously navigate constrained labor and housing markets, utilizing social capital where possible, despite formidable barriers imposed by neoliberal forces, such as increased competition for sinking wages and personal entanglements with the penal state and debt. In a salient analysis of state aid, Marr demonstrates how systematic and street level practices of exclusion at government agencies hinder the universality of universal programs (p. 92) such as Supplemental Security Income in the US and livelihood assistance in Japan, thereby needlessly complicating transitions out of homelessness and even fracturing families or undermining health.

While drawing attention to how exclusionary practices sustain homelessness, Marr pinpoints social ties as a solution, principally those found in social programs and families. In particular, he highlights the critical importance of client-staff ties in organizations, and introduces three key principles—holism, flexibility, and homophily—for developing beneficial relationships that nurture trust and resource mobilization. He defines the first principle, holism, as staff capacity to recognize broader social causes of client circumstances and to subsequently connect clients to essential assistance, as opposed to placing blame on the individual. The second principle, flexibility, refers to staff capacity for considering individual circumstances when overseeing program rules and timelines, and requires openness to adjustment rather than rigid insistence on conformity. The third principle, homophily is presented as the shared background between staff and clients, such as in class, culture, or experience with homelessness, that reduces social distance. Marr gives detailed examples of how organizational client-staff ties are helped or harmed through the lens of each of these principles, while also emphasizing their material and affective impacts on clients. Moreover, he clearly documents how extra-organizational contexts—such as policy and legal restrictions—shape the formation of these ties and, by extension, client opportunity and security in outcomes.

In his conclusion, Marr highlights how neoliberal approaches underlie and exacerbate socio-economic insecurity as experienced by his informants, and then proposes interventions. He specifically directs attention to “persistent structural arrangements” (p. 189) that generate and perpetuate homelessness, because of the limitations they place on the success of supportive programs in facilitating lasting exits. Marr offers a compelling and empirically supported case for the need for broader structural fixes, such as greater regulation of labor and housing markets and expansion of social safety nets. However, he does not draw as fully from his findings as he could. In particular, while his book richly illustrates the power and peril of social contexts in facilitating, or frustrating, exit from homelessness, he considers social forces with less vigor in his conclusion. Thus, for example, his largely structural proposals do not address problems of social and systemic discrimination, which he has shown to affect universality. Also, although he identifies social movements as a positive essential force for
change, he underplays their relevance for the development of multilevel solutions. Greater consideration of the social forces that generate, sustain, and, conversely, offer solutions to homelessness could lead us to conceive of new social and institutional schema, such as for re/defining work and family, to correct exclusionary paradigms that undermine collective human security.

In *Better Must Come*, Marr does not shy from challenging widely-held perceptions of homelessness. He advances a rigorous and graceful analysis of conditions in both cities using clear language, well-defined terms, and concise organization that together render the subject accessible to a wide range of readers, regardless of familiarity with homelessness or related policy in Japan or the US. At the same time, it is a sharp academic work that will interest scholars, policymakers, and practitioners alike. Marr’s resonant message, that “the struggle to transcend homelessness is more central to the experience…than is adaptation” (p. 181), serves as both a notice and warning that acquiescence to the predicament of homelessness may be more prevalent among persons without direct experience, than those who grapple with it.

**Keywords**: homelessness, urban studies, Los Angeles, Tokyo