

Perspectives on home and housing sociology essay

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What is the difference between privacy, privatism and privatisation , and how do these concepts help explain the meaning of the home under late-capitalism?

Introduction

In this essay I will start by giving the meaning of and the difference between privacy, privatism and privatisation. Then I will dwell on the different points of view on home given by researchers. There are many social researchers who tried to explain the meaning of home based on different ideas and theories. I will try to give an overview of the most important theories and then try to relate the three concepts mentioned in the main question to the meaning of home under late-capitalism.

Differences between privacy, privatism and privatisation

When searching for a definition of home it is often described as a haven or refuge. It is represented as a place and/or space where people have shelter and rest (Moore, 1984). This view on home is based on several related ideas like the distinction between public and private, and the inside and outside world (Wardaugh, 1999; Altman and Werner, 1985). The inside is a limited space and represents a comfortable, secure and safe space (Dovey, 1985). The outside however is more diffused and seen as a dangerous space. Here there are different rules of engagement (Mallett, 2004). The other this view of home is the distinction between public and private. As a refuge a private home is a familial realm, different from public space and safe from public investigation and surveillance (Mallett, 2004). The public is associated with work and non-familial relationships. In contrast, the private place of the

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home is seen as a space that offers freedom and control (Darke, 1994) and security (Dovey, 1985). The space provides a context for close, caring relationships (Mallett, 2004). The understanding of home as a distinct private zone is informed by three related concepts (Saunders and Williams, 1988):

Privacy: at home refers to freedom from surveillance and external role expectations

Privatism: is the process whereby people are increasingly withdrawing from communal life and centering or orienting their activities around the home.

Privatization: refers to the shift away from public or state owned housing towards owner occupied housing and privatized consumption.

Different views on home

The literature review by Mallett shows that in the academic literature the concept of home has been understood in different ways. Home has been seen as socio-spatial entity (Saunders and Williams, 1988), a psycho-social entity (Giuliani, 1991), as an emotive space (Giuliani, 1991; Gurney, 2000), or as a connection between these ways (Somerville, 1992, 1997). The common factor in all these theories is that although someone's home is usually located in space, it is not the house itself, or the environment of a neighbourhood or region that gives meaning to home. They may be located, but it is not the location that is 'home'. Instead, the meaning of homes for individuals and groups can be understood as with a social, psychological and emotive meaning (Mallett, 2004). The link between home and place has already been made in social science. The shared opinion among those who discuss place-identity is, " without exception, the home is considered to be the place of greatest personal significance" (Prohansky et al., 1983, 60). Also

Heidegger states that the home is " the key location in which a spiritual unity is formed between humans and things" (McDowell, 1999, 71; Easthope, 2006). And that for Bachelard, home is " a key element in the development of people's sense of themselves as belonging to a place" (McDowell, 1999, 72). The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan coined the term topophilia to describe " the affective bond between people and place". He said that this bond may be stronger for some individuals than for others but can act differently if people are from different cultures (Duncan & Duncan, 2001, 41; Easthope, 2004, 130). Massey goes against the idea of the home as a bounded place of security and retreat. Her statement is that " a large component of the identity of that place called home derived precisely from the fact that it had always in one way or another been open; constructed out of movement, communication, social relations which always stretched beyond it" (Massey, 1992, 14). The home has to be seen as an open place, maintained and developed through the social relations that stretch beyond it. According to the citation, one's home can be understood as a particularly significant kind of place with which, and within which, we experience strong social, psychological and emotive attachments (Mallett, 2004). But some spaces in our houses were never entirely private or restricted. Historical house designs included social spaces where people other than the inhabitants of the house entered, worked or socialized (Hepworth, 1999). Nowadays house designs include open plan or flexible living spaces, separate rooms for parents/children's, and studies or home offices. This evolution contradicts with the definition of home as a private haven or refuge from work and the outside world (Mallett, 2004). A big revolution in the late-capitalism is the

rise of technology. With inventions like the personal computer, email/internet and the mobile phone work could be done from home (Duncan, 1996). This meant a shift towards privatism. While some experience this as an interference of their private haven, others welcome the flexibility it enables. It also affected the privacy, because with internet and websites like Google.com you can find anything about anybody. Another development and extreme form of privatism is that of the gated communities. It is explained by Manzi & Smith-Bowers (2004) as: " Residential areas with restricted access in which normally public spaces are privatised. They are security developments with designated perimeters, usually walls or fences, and controlled entrances that are intended to prevent penetration by non-residents"(Blakely & Snyder, 1997, 2; Manzi & Smith-Bowers, 2004, 2). The communities therefore are an example of the ultimate of privacy and exclusivity. Therefore gated communities are frequently understood as a form of a sect. They actually would force their group members to stay together and keep strangers outside with radical measures such as high security. Other critics considered that the definition of home too idealized and a romanticized even nostalgic notion of home in contrast to the reality (Wardaugh, 1999). They go against the earlier mentioned view of home as a private haven (Wright, 1993) and point to the percentage of women, children and young people who experience violence and sexual abuse in their own home (Wardaugh, 1999). These people don't have any connection with home or a secure feeling at home. Instead they rather be outside where the danger should have been higher (Dupuis and Thorns, 1998). Another point of view from Wardaugh (1999) goes against the classification of home as haven and

supports a notion that 'counterposes inside with outside space' (Wardaugh, 1999, 96). Consistent with this view privacy is not obliged with the inside of home, but can also be found outside. In comparison: danger, fear and insecurity are not only located in the outside world. She argues that home is not some sacred space of belonging, with fixed and impenetrable walls. It is rather a space of unavoidable 'tensions surrounding the use of domestic spaces' (Sibley, 1995: Wardaugh, 1999). Wardaugh also comes up with the idea that home as a haven in fact creates 'homelessness'. 'Those who are abused and violated within the family are likely to feel "homeless at home" and many subsequently become homeless in an objective sense, in that they escape - or are ejected from - their violent homes' (Wardaugh, 1999, 96 - 97). It is remarkable that many researchers who are against the definition of home as a haven continue to merge home and dwelling and thereby protect a clear line between inside and outside. A more radical view on the meaning of home as space of privacy, a haven from the outside world, is linked to cultural research. Nomads will have other perceptions of home than people from the city. They will go where the water is or the sun sets. These are not private demarcation zones but possessed pieces of land with boundaries, although not visible that must be respected by strangers. Finally we come to privatisation, the shift away from public or state owned housing towards owner occupied housing and privatized consumption. This form is promoted by the Dutch government in order to break the stagnation on the housing market and was already implemented in the housing market of the United Kingdom by Margareth Thatcher. The Right-to-Buy was introduced in 1980 and more than 2.7 million homes have been sold under this scheme (BBC,

2010). But now researcher Dr. van Ham, of the university's Centre for Housing Research, said right-to-buy has had a limited effect on homeowners. He said: " The right-to-buy has given many households access to home ownership, but not to better places". It failed to free up labour with the mobility of right-to-buy homeowners and that they were less likely to move for job-related reasons. However the study showed that the right-to-buy owners wanted to move away, but just weren't able to sell their homes (van Ham, 2010).

Conclusion

The perception of the three concepts: privacy, privatism and privatisation have changed in time due to many factors. One of the greatest factor is of course the technological innovations made after the Second World War. With the arrival of internet privacy has lost its value, but also brought more privatism in the form of working at home. This privatism is sometimes exaggerated when living in so-called gated communities. Finally privatization was found in the Right-to-Buy policy implemented by Margaret Thatcher. Research now shows that the effect of this privatization were the contrary of what they had in mind. The question raised is whether the Dutch government should go on with their homeownership policy or not. Further investigation and the future should answer that question. Interesting is the approach of Thomas Rau, who argues that in the future nobody owns his own home but that all the materials and resources used to built a home are owned by the producers. For example light is bought in hours and you ask Philips not to provide you with the light bulb but only with the amount of

light you need per year. Once again technology and developments will change the meaning of home.

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