

Alternative Understandings of Homelessness in Developing Countries



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Introduction

This working paper focuses on urban homelessness in developing countries in a context of urban and economic policies which increasingly distance themselves from the poor and marginalise them from the urban arena. It argues that we need to find new ways to conceptualise the phenomenon of homelessness if we are to try to reduce or prevent it.

In industrialised countries there has been a shift in understanding of homelessness from 'agency' and 'pathology' explanations to 'structural' explanations (Neale 1997). Earlier agency approaches located the causes of homelessness either in an individual's inadequacy, for example, learning difficulty or mental health problems, or in their behaviour, such as alcohol or drug abuse. From the late 1990s the structuralist view was adopted, placing the responsibility for homelessness outside the control of the homeless person and suggests wider structural causes. It has become increasingly dominant in the theoretical debates around homelessness (Neale, 1997; Kennett and Marsh, 1999).

It remains unclear whether these structural factors are a result of the failure of the housing market to provide adequate, affordable housing, or are underpinned by wider, global economic factors. However, in a context where poverty remains a critical and defining issue, it is easy to simply take a structural approach and ascribe homelessness to housing system failure or poverty. In developing countries, formal housing systems fail for all but the very few (see for example Keivani and Werna 2001 a & 2001b; Mukhija 2004) but not all people could be said to be homeless. Moreover, as highlighted by Dupont (2000) and Tipple and Speak (2009), not all homeless people are poor, or poorer than their housed counterparts, and not all poor people are homeless. This work presents a number of ways of understanding homelessness which may help explain this.

The work begins with a brief explanation of the methodological approach and fieldwork method used to collect data. This is followed by a discussion of why we need alternative understandings of homelessness. The work then presents, in brief, five possible ways in which we might conceptualise homelessness in developing countries. Finally, it concludes by suggesting ways in which these conceptualisations might help address homelessness.

Methodology

The empirical work which provided data for this paper comes from several sources and spans ten years. The initial research was a DFID funded study of homelessness in nine

developing countries, undertaken between 2000 and 2002¹ for which the author was the senior researcher. Subsequent to that she has continued to research homelessness and undertake further independent field work in several countries.

The countries chosen for the DFID study offered a range of socio-economic, environmental, climatic, political and cultural contexts which might condition homelessness. For example, the cultural context of Bangladesh provides a backdrop to women's homelessness which is quite different from that of women in Ghana or South Africa. Similarly, the context of rapid, market led growth in China and India presents a different context for migration, and resulting homelessness, than that experienced by migrants in Peru or Zimbabwe.

Definitions

The DFID study, and subsequent research, has adopted a very broad definition of homelessness. It includes people living in many different situations, from abject shelterlessness and street sleeping through to those living in extremely inadequate accommodation, which could be said not to provide the qualities of home. This is in line with the definition developed by the United Nations for the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless in 1987. For that, the United Nations acknowledged that a "homeless" person is not only someone who lives on the street or in a shelter, but can equally be someone whose shelter or housing fails to meet the basic criteria considered essential for health and human and social development. These criteria include security of tenure, protection against bad weather and personal security, as well as access to sanitary facilities and potable water, education, work, and health services.

For the purposes of this work, the term 'developing countries' indicates those countries experiencing rapid population growth, urbanisation of poverty, chronic housing shortages, weak governance and unstable fiscal systems. The countries concerned are largely within Asia, South East Asia, Latin America and Africa, particularly sub Saharan Africa. India and China are, however, more difficult to classify, representing, as they do, both abject poverty and rapid, market led growth and development leading to increasing affluence for

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Peru; Egypt; Ghana; South Africa; Zimbabwe; India; Bangladesh; Indonesia; PR China. Bolivia was initially included but removed owing to poor quality data.

many. However, they are both included here as, despite their economic growth, they continue to struggle with high levels of poverty and homelessness.

Data collection

The ethnographic data which informed this work was collected in slum and informal settlements, shelters, squats and the locations of pavement dwellers and street sleepers. Ethnographic research methods were developed for eliciting the causes and lived experience of varying degrees of homelessness and 'shelterlessness'. These include 'life timeline' discussions, when respondents are asked to work chronologically backwards from the time of the interview, noting their housing and shelter conditions at significant points in the year (Divali, Eid, Harvest, Dia de los muertos etc) and their perceived reasons for those conditions. 'Life timelines' differ from more traditional oral testimonies in that they are more controlled and directed. They encourage the participant to remember specific aspects of their lives, in this case, housing, in a reverse chronological order. In doing so, each memory stimulates a deeper memory of a previous housing situation. The objective was not to identify specifically negative events but to identify the interrelation and interplay of events which resulted in specific housing situations. Similar techniques are used in family therapy sessions (see for example Rousseau 2006).

More traditional methods used included observational work, photography, mapping and interviews with homeless individuals and households living in a range of different accommodation and shelter situations. All interviews with homeless people were informal and semi-structured. They were generally conducted through the interpreter. Interviews were also undertaken with local officials (in Delhi, Bangalore, Dhaka, Lima and Cairo). Additional interviews were conducted with practitioners from NGOs working with homeless people (in Delhi, Bangalore, Dhaka, Lima, Cochabamba and Cairo).

The need for alternative understandings

There are several reasons why alternative understandings of homelessness are needed. First, while valuable in reducing a culture of blame, and refocusing attention on broader political and economic causes of homelessness, the structuralist approach has not brought about a reduction in homelessness in developing countries. If the structuralist approach is to be adopted, we need to develop a conceptual framework within which to understand the fundamental underpinnings of structural causes.

Second, much of our current knowledge of homelessness comes from studies underpinned by values, theories and definitions derived from industrialised countries (see for example Williams and Cheal 2001; Daly 1994; Fitzpatrick and Clapham 1999; Springer 2000; McIntosh and Phillips 2000). International reviews of homelessness concentrate largely on industrialised countries, with limited cases studies of developing countries (see for example Glasser, 1994, Christian, 2003). The homelessness literature there is specifically on developing countries tends not attempt to reconceptualise homelessness for different contexts. Thus, while presenting differences in scale and experience, it assumes that homelessness is conceptually similar everywhere.

Third, homelessness cannot be understood in isolation of the meaning of home, which is a rich, value laden, socially and culturally constructed concept (see for example Despres 1991; Somerville 1992,1997; Thomas and Dittmar 1995; Kellett and Moore 2003; Annison 2000). In contrast to many industrialized countries, an understanding of ‘home’ in much of the developing world is unrelated to the concept of house or shelter but is based on the concept of kin. Security comes, not from ownership and control, but from the rights and responsibilities of kinship (Ellis 2000; Fourie and Schonteich 2001). There is, for example, no word for homelessness in the main Ghanaian languages, reflecting the grounding of the concept of home within a context of traditional extended family responsibility and kinship rights – home is where the family is and quite separate from house or shelter. In many traditional cultures, home is, as Frost (1914), the American poet, puts it, *‘the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in’*.

However, changes to traditional family ties and responsibilities are altering this. There is evidence that, in the face of increasing international migration and economic stress, traditional kinship based ‘home’ may be becoming less accommodating (Foster 2000; Aboderin 2003). The multiple and complex meanings of home, therefore, have clear implications for how we might conceptualise what it means to be without what we consider to be the attributes of home.

Fourth, homelessness is tightly linked to economic, urban and housing policies. These policies are increasingly driven by neo-liberal ideology, resulting in increased levels of homelessness and inappropriate interventions in developing countries. In industrialised countries also, neo-liberal ideology is leading to increasing marketisation of services and a rapid diminution of the welfare state which once protected the vulnerable from

homelessness. These factors are producing what Kennett and Marsh (1999) consider the 'new terrain' of homelessness based on growing vulnerability for all.

At a time when much learning from industrialized countries is guiding policy and practice in developing regions, some scholars suggest that there is a need to bring a 'Southern understanding' to Northern situations. Bollens (2004), for example, argues that the widening gaps appearing in industrialised countries, between the needs and desires of different 'publics' – what he terms a 'fractured public interest' - can be better understood and addressed if we take lessons from countries where such gaps have been the norm. Therefore, in reconceptualising homelessness in developing countries we may be better prepared for the implications of ideological change in other parts of the world, in an era of diminishing state support and provision.

Re-conceptualising Homelessness

Here the paper presents five ways in which homelessness might be reconceptualised. There is not room in this work to expand fully on each. However, the purpose of presenting these five approaches is simply to stimulate debate about how we understand the deepest root causes of homelessness.

Homelessness as political tool

Homelessness is a politically sensitive subject. This political nature of homelessness begins with the ways in which we define it. Peressini, McDonald and Hulchanski (1995) suggest that how we define homelessness determines how and who we count. However, if definitions condition *who* we count, they are themselves conditioned by *why* we count. Official enumeration is done to provide data for the development of policies and interventions (Koegel, Burnam and Morton 1996). The approach to enumeration and the definitions which guide it are, inevitably, sensitive to political manipulation and values. As Bollens (2004) notes, differing value systems are increasingly important in debates about resource allocation. Thus, defining can be manipulated to ensure enumeration produces figures acceptable to the political need and values of the definer.

Cooper (1995) suggests that homelessness arises from a government's inability, or unwillingness, to achieve or maintain a policy of social justice. This may be why government definitions in developing countries vary widely (Tipple and Speak 2004). Some government definitions are restrictive; ensuring the number of people caught within them will be lower, thus underplaying the degree to which they might be perceived to

have failed in their duties to uphold the shelter rights of their citizens. Conversely, others can be virtually all encompassing. This can work in favour of those governments seeking international aid and can be used for overtly political purposes, as will be discussed below.

NGOs tend to use the designation more broadly, to include adequacy of shelter, to demonstrate higher numbers of people requiring their support, bringing weight to shelter rights campaigns and justifying funding (Tipple and Speak 2004). However, the definitions and enumeration practices used by some NGOs are themselves politically motivated. Many NGOs walk a tightrope between their constituency and local or national political parties and institutions on which they may rely for support. Moreover, NGOs may need to be seen not to present too much opposition if they wish also to influence political thinking and decision making. For example, Arapoglou (2004) notes that homelessness NGOs in Greece were purposefully excluded from the dialogue about and official support of homeless people. Commentators are increasingly concerned that NGOs, and their programmes, serve neo-liberal policy agendas (see for example Bailey-Smith 2008; Mohan 2002). Thus, their definitions of homelessness might be circumscribed by ideas of deserving and undeserving homeless.

One politically problematic issue, in relation to definitions, is that of how to define those in inadequate accommodation in informal or squatter settlements. To include them radically increase the scale of the homeless problem the government needs to address, suggesting a greater need for housing. However, if they are *not* defined as homeless, it suggests that the government acknowledges that their often rudimentary dwellings, on land they do not own, are homes. In this case, to remove them for economic or political reasons requires that they should be compensated and offered new land and housing.

Another argument suggests that some governments might utilise the definition of homelessness as a means of controlling political opposition. An example of manipulative defining was seen in Zimbabwe in 2005, when the Government embarked on a mass eviction operation known as “Operation Murambatsvina”, or *Operation Restore Order*, to “clean-up” its cities. The operation resulted in the major destruction of homes and businesses in squatter settlements where there was known political opposition. An estimated 700,000 people in cities across the country were made homeless or lost their livelihoods, or both. The UN suggests that around 2.4 million people have been affected in some way (Tibaijuka, 2005). The Government responded to international criticism by saying that they had not made any one homeless as the settlers were already homeless.

This political use of defining can be seen again in the context of vote banking, which is particularly prevalent in India and Bangladesh (Callahan 2000; Lin 1995). In India, for example, communities of homeless street or pavement dwellers in urban areas generally have no right to vote, often being without official identification papers or residency rights in the city. As elections approach, incumbent politicians have been known to designate the settlements as official slums, promising to upgrade them or provide alternative housing if they are re-elected. In re-designating the communities as 'official' slums they take the occupants out of the ranks of the homeless, conferring on them the right to vote and, presumably, eliciting their political support (AAA, 2001). Indeed, definition-making offers considerable room for manoeuvre, action avoidance and political manipulation.

Homelessness can be caused or exacerbated by politically purposeful interventions such as evictions, resettlement and city 'clean up' campaigns, which promote a government's political ideals. Sibley (1995) refers to this as 'spatial purification'. There are concerns that this marginalisation is embedded within a political-discursive process which seeks to make the poor and homeless invisible (Fernandes 2004). For example, in 1999 Metropolitan Corporation of Delhi, citing 'environmental concerns' and 'sustainability' as its rationale, evicted residents of eleven slum clusters from the banks of the Yamuna River. Across Delhi as a whole an estimated 3.5 million people have been evicted in preparation for the Commonwealth Games and towards Delhi's goal of becoming a 'World Class City' by 2021 (Hazard Centre 2005). Bhan (2009) suggests that such evictions can only be understood as a product of the rapidly changing urban politics in India.

Homelessness as non-citizenship

Citizenship has been used as a concept to understand homelessness (see for example, Kawash 1998; Roy 2003; Arnold 2004; Feldman 2004). However, bound up as it is with notions of rights and responsibilities, the concept of citizenship suggests ideas of deserving and undeserving, re-evoking the agency explanation. In industrialised countries, the negative association between homelessness and 'poor citizenship' has been growing since the 1990s. In the UK, Tony Blair, while Prime Minister, and his predecessor John Major, both made the association between homeless people and what might be termed 'anti-citizenship' (Lister 1999). Both associated it with begging and

vagrancy, and thus with a failure of the homeless person to uphold their responsibilities as good, law abiding and working citizens.

This association is evident in developing countries also, where both political and public perceptions of homeless people are almost entirely negative. Speak and Tipple (2006) argue that these negative perceptions are frequently false. In particular, homeless people are perceived to be without that which is required to be part of society, and by implication, a good citizen. This is often reflected in the language and labelling used to describe them. For example, in the Indonesian language the term '*tunawisma*', derived from old-Javanese, literally means 'no (*tuna*) house (*wisma*)'. Yayasan Humana (an NGO working in Jakarta) believes that the word '*tuna*' was adopted by Suharto's New Order government, during its three decades of rule, 'specifically for the purposes of evaluating the under-classes by means of what they lack'. Thus, sex-workers are called *tunasusila* ('no morals'). Similarly, in Bangladesh one term used is *sharbohara*. Broadly meaning 'utter destitute' it come from *sharbo* meaning 'all' and *hara* meaning 'the state of not having' (Speak and Tipple2006). The epithet is often used to associate the homeless person with anti-government or communist groups.

One of the most obvious things that homeless people are perceived to be without, sometimes wrongly, is property. In discussing what she calls the '*paradigm of propertied citizenship*' evident in America, Roy (2003) posits that it signifies an acceptable way of being and of conforming to a system of values and norms which are articulated, in part, thorough capital investment in property. Drawing on Kawash (1998:329) she argues that the homeless are seen as '*... the "constitutive outside" of propertied citizenship*' (Roy 2003:464). Kawash suggests that:

"... war on the homeless" must also be seen as a mechanism for constituting and securing a public, establishing the boundaries of inclusion, and producing an abject body against which the proper, public body of the citizen can stand (Kawash 1998:325)"

It might be argued that women's significantly greater vulnerability to homelessness in several countries is a result of their inferior citizenship status, as demonstrated by their lack of property rights (see for example, Speak 2004; Tibajuka 2005).

A fundamental legal right of citizenship must surely to be counted. However, in some places, homeless sex workers are not even enumerated. In Bangladesh, for example,

Begum (1997) found only an unlikely four cases of prostitution within a sample of 505 homeless females; while Mamun (2001) deliberately avoided interviewing prostitutes and beggars. Gajik-Veljanoski and Stewart (2007) note that homeless girls and women are more likely to fall victim to traffickers. Having been trafficked, or found their way into prostitution by other means, women are more vulnerable to homelessness as they are often perceived as having no value or standing as citizens and may not be accepted back into the community (Richardson, Poudel and Lauire 2009; Poudel 2010; Blenchet 1996).

Children's homelessness can similarly be linked to their own lack of formal citizenship in many countries which denies them property rights. If orphaned, they can lose any rights to their family home or land, rendering them homeless. This is particularly problematic in Sub-Saharan Africa, where HIV/AIDS and war have taken so many lives in recent decades (Ghosh and Kalipeni 2004). Children's inferior citizenship is further linked to homelessness in the extent to which street children are criminalized and how readily authorities in many countries incarcerate or 'remove' them from the streets (El Baz 1996; Rizzini and Lusk, 1995; Panter-Brick 2003).

If lack of citizenship makes people more vulnerable to homelessness, becoming homeless can lead to a loss of proof of citizenship, as homeless people struggle to keep their few belongings (Plaatjies 1999). In some countries, proof of citizenship, in the form of identity papers is vital in accessing housing and protecting against homelessness. In Delhi, for example, those evicted from slums on the banks of the Yamuna River will not be allocated a plot in a relocation colony without formal identity papers, proving their term of residency in the city (Hazard Centre 2005; Bhan 2009). Similarly, in Indonesia, the identification card '*kartu tanda penduduk*' (KTP) cannot be given unless the individual has an official, permanent abode. However, such an abode is not available to those without the KTP. Thus the millions of homeless people without KTP may not marry or register their children's births or access basic services such as housing or education (Winayanti 2004). In this we see a paradox - while housing might generally be thought of as a fundamental right of the citizen, what we see in some cases is citizenship as the right of the housed.

Homelessness as neo-liberal collateral damage

Much homelessness is driven by poverty. However, the root causes of poverty are complex. Some suspect that chronic poverty in the developing world has its origins in the

neo-liberal, capitalist agendas of the World Bank and IMF and enacted through structural adjustment, trade liberalization and marketisation (see for example van der Hoeven 2000; Cornia et al. 1987, UNRISD 1995, Stewart 1995). Originally set out in what Williamson (1990) called the 'Washington Consensus', Schuurman (2000:10) considers this neo-liberal approach has led to the development of '*a global, exploitative capitalism*'.

The macro-economic policies of developing countries, which aim towards economic growth rather than income distribution and addressing inequity, are now predicated upon the international trade and investment. This pushes up land values such that the peripheral areas of once low value land, on which the poor settled, accrue value that can be exploited for development. Indeed, Mumbai, location of the well documented Dharavi slum settlement, has some of the highest land prices on the planet (Payne 2001; Nijman 2006). Around the world, this has led to millions of urban poor people who have constructed their own informal housing, being evicted and /or relocated to new, even more peripheral locations (Payne 2001; Fernandes 2004; Nijman 2006). Authorities often justify evictions with the utilitarian argument that economic growth will provide the greatest gain for the greatest number in the long run. This remains open to conjecture.

For example, India's Special Economic Zones Programme might stimulate economic development and attract investment in India's booming knowledge economy. However, it has potential negative implications for smaller industries (Gopinath 2009) and for those living on the designated land who are made homeless through eviction (UN Habitat 2007; Ansari 2009). Similarly, in Bangladesh, the drive for export income has led to intensification of prawn farming and mechanisation of textiles production. Bangladeshi companies, both small and large are being squeezed out of the industries by international investors (Ahmed, Demaine and Muir 2008; Ito 2004). This has led to loss of land and livelihood for many rural households (Barraclough and Finger-Stich 1996), who must migrate to the cities in search of work and somewhere to live.

However, signs that poverty and homelessness are not in decline, and may be increasing, stand as evidence that neo-liberal economics are not working for the majority poor (Roy 2009; Datt and Ravallion 2002; Kandeel and Nugent 2000; Adams and Page 2001).

Moreover, following the World Bank's report '*Knowledge for Development*' (World Bank 1999), the focus of development activities across a large proportion of the developing world shifted, from place based poverty alleviation programmes, towards developing an elite, educated work force able to tap into a globalised knowledge economy

(Radhakrishnan 2007). It might be argued that urban policy and resources are now directed towards supporting and retaining these ‘economic saviours’, rather than towards addressing poverty and homelessness.

Concerns about the living and housing conditions of the urban poor are not only abandoned but seen as counter to the goals of this new paradigm (Shatkin 2004). As Madanipour (1998) notes, investments need to be preserved, protected and managed, not to be left open to manipulation or control by the general public. The physical products of these investments – offices, malls and plazas - must also be controlled and protected from activities likely to reduce their capital value or returns in any way. This leads to increasing exclusion of the poor and homeless, whose behavior does not conform to an internationally accepted form of ‘urban normality’ (Atkinson 2003; Merrifield 1996; Yeoh 2005). Thus, evictions and city ‘clean up’ campaigns are driven by what Sibley (1995) calls ‘spatial purification’, it might equally be thought of as ‘behaviour management’. This process is encouraged by the dominant discourses around planning, particularly those on sustainability and economic development. These discourses, and the values embedded within them, might be seen as ‘agenda screens’ from behind which policy makers and practitioners can direct damaging decisions. For example, in 1999 Metropolitan Corporation of Delhi cited ‘environmental concerns’ and ‘sustainability’ as its rationale for a range of projects which have resulted in the eviction of an estimated 3.5 million residents of slum clusters across Delhi (See above). However, there is significant concern that people were evicted in preparation for the Commonwealth Games and towards Delhi’s goal of becoming a ‘World Class City’ by 2021 (Hazard Centre 2005). The resulting homelessness can be thought of as ‘neo-liberal collateral damage.’

Homelessness as empowerment and opportunity

Thus far homelessness has been presented as negative, and homeless people as being exploited, excluded and marginalised. For many, probably the majority, this is true and homelessness is disempowering, demoralizing, dangerous and beyond their control. Those fleeing violence, war and civil conflict, those made homeless as a result of disaster, those evicted from their homes for political or economic reasons, can all be seen in this light. However, to underestimate the potential empowerment and opportunity which can accompany homelessness, would be to misrepresent it. The relationship between homelessness and empowerment has been explored by others who tend to discuss the

empowerment of the homeless person, especially in demanding support and services (see for example Rosenthal 2000). However, for some the experience of homelessness itself can be empowering (Speak 2004).

It is clear that many people make a conscious decision to accept homelessness in return for a range of balancing benefits. That is not to suggest that it is right that such decisions need to be taken. Nor should their taking them be equated with a 'pathology' of homelessness discussed earlier. Nevertheless, homelessness can free the homeless person from control, persecution or violence, as in the case of those summoning the courage to leave their 'home' and choose homelessness over physical or mental abuse. It can also be economically empowering, enabling people to seek and access employment in the city either for survival or to supplement a basically adequate livelihood (Tipple and Speak 2009).

Within the literature in, and on, industrialised countries, there is an underlying assumption that homelessness is associated with a lack of social ties leading to social exclusion or marginalisation (Edgar, Doherty and Mina-Coull 1999; Glasser 1994). However, often in developing countries, amongst even the most abjectly shelterless, social networks and affiliative bonds are evident. It is not uncommon to find extended households or groups of households living on the streets, or in derelict buildings, and forming social networks. This is especially true in India, Indonesia and some Sub Saharan African countries. They form supportive communities with their own social networks (Speak 2011).

Others, living alone on the streets and with minimal shelter, might appear to be the most isolated and disconnected from society. However, they may be connected through different and complex mechanisms into their extended families or other networks (deHann 1999; Speak 2011). Indeed, it may be exactly the strength of their relational networks and affiliative bonds which leads to homelessness for some, through deeply entrenched kinship responsibilities and intergenerational contracts which underpin rural to urban migration. In some countries, members of a household will be sent to the city to work and remit money to the rural home in return for an eventual greater share of inheritance (deHaan 2002). The initial migration may be funded by the wider household. Their duty, or desire, to remit as much as possible conditions their living accommodation in the city. It is not, therefore, that homelessness disconnects them from social networks. Rather, their connection is the driving force behind their homelessness.

For some, homelessness is driven by poverty but for others it is entered into to supplement an already adequate livelihood. In some cultures, short periods of shelterlessness are planned and cyclical elements of the annual livelihood process. For example, sleeping on the streets and in parks is considered a natural part of the annual migration of people from the high plateau areas of Peru and Bolivia to the cities. Moreover it is seen as a part of young people's and children's development process, as it offers the opportunity for children to gain independence and learn how to earn money in the city (Rafaelli 1997; Tipple and Speak 2009).

To Northern sensitivities, children *of or on* the streets represent the most abject manifestation of the disconnection and danger presented by homelessness. In many cases this holds true in developing countries and the poverty and abuse which some experience on the street must not be underestimated (see for example Ribeiro, Ciampone and Helena 2001; Rizzini 1996; Rizzini and Lusk 1995). Nevertheless, even here we can identify the potential role of homelessness to empower. Children frequently cite familial abuse or poverty as their reason for leaving home to live on the streets. For some, homelessness represents freedom and escape from such abuse and an opportunity to establish new and supportive social networks or a new, surrogate 'family' of others in the same situation (Stephenson 2001, Beazley 2003). Young people sometimes accept homelessness in the city simply as a way of gaining freedom and experience. Their homelessness is not forced but is planned and accepted in return for the new found independence (deHaan 1999).

Homelessness as a value driven phenomenon

The influence of multiple and often conflicting values can be seen in several aspects of homelessness, beginning with the way in which we define and quantify it. Definitions are underpinned by values of the definer. Thus, as discussed earlier, they are subject to political and institutional values. For example, government who value the qualities of modernity might define informal settlers as homeless as it allows greater authority and control over them and the land on which they have settled. Alternatively, those who value the qualities of self help and independence, as embedded in the sweat equity of informal settlers, might exclude them from the ranks of the homeless. This recognizes their efforts and can also reduce any requirement to house them.

Values can be the driving force behind homelessness. Phillipson (2010) notes that economic change drives change in social values with the consequent impacts on

intergenerational relationships and extended family support networks. In many countries, traditional extended family networks, which once protected people from homelessness, are diminishing (Apt, 1993; Apt 1999; Aboderin, 2004). Migration also means that the traditional support networks are becoming unstable. As people move in search of work they become dislocated from their families and younger people are less able or willing to care for their older relatives (Jamuna 1995; Croll 2006).

Economic change is leading to new marriage patterns, and increasing family breakdown (Salway, Jesmin and Rahman 2005; Takyi and Broughton 2006). In Bangladesh, for example, much as Cain (1978) predicted, economic change is changing social values which once bound households. Women are beginning to work outside the home, placing stress on relationships. Separation, divorce and domestic violence, strong factors in homelessness amongst women in the North, are increasingly a cause of homelessness for women in developing countries (Douki et al 2003; Sikich 2008). However, despite their independent employment, deeply entrenched cultural values mean that women cannot easily support themselves and their children in face of marital breakdown. Low pay, the lack of land and property rights, and cultural values which demand the performance of respectability through marriage, make unsupported women increasingly vulnerable to homelessness (Nalia 1997). Even women who find themselves unsupported through widowhood can fall foul of values surrounding the respectability of lone women. Cultural attitudes to widows mean that they and their children are often turned out of their homes by the deceased man's relatives (Speak 2004; Izumi 2007).

The prioritising of a range of issues, including personal safety, freedom, money or household livelihood, over physical protection of a dwelling, govern much of the opportunity and empowerment to be found in homelessness discussed above. However, the ability to prioritise is itself conditioned by the cultural values within any given context. For example, while young women in Ghana or Bolivia might value the earnings available in the city over the comfort of shelter, cultural values mean that this choice is not available to women in some other countries. Thus, cultural values condition whether or not some people might be able to seek the opportunities or liberation which homelessness can offer. Finally, values are critical in conditioning responses to homelessness by both governments and NGOs. They filter through into a continuum of response manifesting at one end, as evictions and city clean-up campaigns, underpinned by the values of modernity and order. At the other end they manifest as well intentioned, but undermining and disempowering

NGO interventions, which seek to support homeless people in return for behavioural change. This is notable in the case of street children, where many interventions work to institutionalise and control what is perceived as delinquent behaviour (Grundling and Grundling 2005)

International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) may develop interventions based on a value system within one cultural context, which they subsequently seek to use across completely different socio-economic and cultural contexts. Bailey-Smith (2008) explores this, discussing the role of international non-governmental development organisation (INDGOs) based in the UK and USA. He points to concerns about the ‘cosmopolitan subjectivities’ (Bailey Smith and Jenkins 2011) of Northern based INGOs/INGDOs.

Conclusions

There has only been room in this work to outline each of the conceptualisations of homelessness presented above. Further work is needed to expand on each and to set it in a policy context. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt the need to understand the wider structural factors underpinning homelessness. We need to analyse these structural factors more deeply to understand, and predict, how political decisions, economic growth and socio-cultural change, come together to produce a set of structural circumstances which increase people’s vulnerability to homelessness.

Understanding the political nature of homelessness and the role of political values in defining and enumerating homelessness will give a clearer picture of the true extent of homelessness, by enabling us to see through misleading estimates, which vary currently between 100,000,000 and 1 billion.

Recognising the way in which citizenship, or proof of citizenship, can be lost, and the relationship between citizenship and homelessness helps bed the shelter debate even more firmly within the human rights debate. Ensuring people can *prove* their citizenship, through advocacy, is a way to help them access housing and land which might not otherwise be available to them.

Regardless of whether or not neo-liberal economic development is working to reduce poverty in the developing world in the longer term, we must be clear about its immediate impacts on the urban poor. Moreover, recognising the link between people’s status as homeless or otherwise, and the potential to be recompensed for loss of land in the drive for

economic development might bring about a more equitable distribution of development benefits.

Understanding that homeless can be empowering might help us to develop initiative which do not undermine that empowerment and recreate the situations of control and fear which some homeless people have fled. Accepting that not all homeless people are the poorest of the poor, or indeed, that not all shelterless people are homeless, might lead to low cost initiatives, such as secure storage, medical facilities or night shelters, to support those seeking economic or other gain by temporarily sacrificing shelter.

Finally, understanding the role of values in all aspects of homelessness, from causes, to definitions to interventions can help us to take a very broad view of the phenomenon of homelessness which might help us predict the outcomes of political and social change for the numbers of homeless people and their treatment.

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