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‘Values’ as a tool for conceptualising homelessness in the Global South

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Abstract

Much of our conceptual understanding of homelessness is derived from studies underpinned by ideas and definitions developed in, and for, the industrialised world. It appears inadequate to help us address the growing phenomenon of homelessness in the Global South. Moreover, with a few exceptions literature on homelessness in the Global South tends to present good empirical understanding but to shy away from reconceptualising. We need, therefore, to build a new conceptual framework through which to understand homelessness in the Global South.

Drawing on empirical research, this paper explores homelessness in the Global South through the window of ‘values’. It does so in an attempt to understand why some people fall foul of the major social, political and economic changes which are perceived to be the driving force behind homelessness while others do not. It also seeks to make some sense of why homelessness and homeless people are perceived differently in different locations.

Introduction

This work focuses on homelessness in the Global South in a context of urban and economic policy which increasingly marginalises the poor from urban arenas and retreats from addressing poverty directly. It argues that we need to find new ways to conceptualise the phenomenon of homelessness, if we are to try to reduce and prevent it, and it offers one conceptual viewpoint based on the role of ‘values’ in causing, and conditioning our understanding of, homelessness. The work is underpinned by the belief that there *are* fundamental, structural causes of homelessness which must be acknowledged. However these are not experienced equally by all. While political and economic change sweeping the

Global South is frequently associated with homelessness, the work argues that it is the values which underpin and are embedded within these changes, and the individual's and household's position in relation to these, which determine vulnerability to homelessness.

Countries of the Global South are experiencing an uncomfortable tectonic shift as governments seek to espouse a set of globally recognised values appropriate to the plate on which the neo-liberal, free market economy operates. In many countries, only a small group of people appear to be benefitting immediately from the new economic opportunities and are comfortable with the resulting culture-quake. At the same time, the majority of the population lives out everyday life on a plate of traditional values and informal opportunities. It is this tectonic shift of values which is exacerbating homelessness. The specific aim of this work is to explore the way in which political and socio-cultural values act to subjectively interpret and manipulate both structural causes to, and experience of, homelessness in the Global South.

Need for a re-conceptualisation of homelessness for the Global South

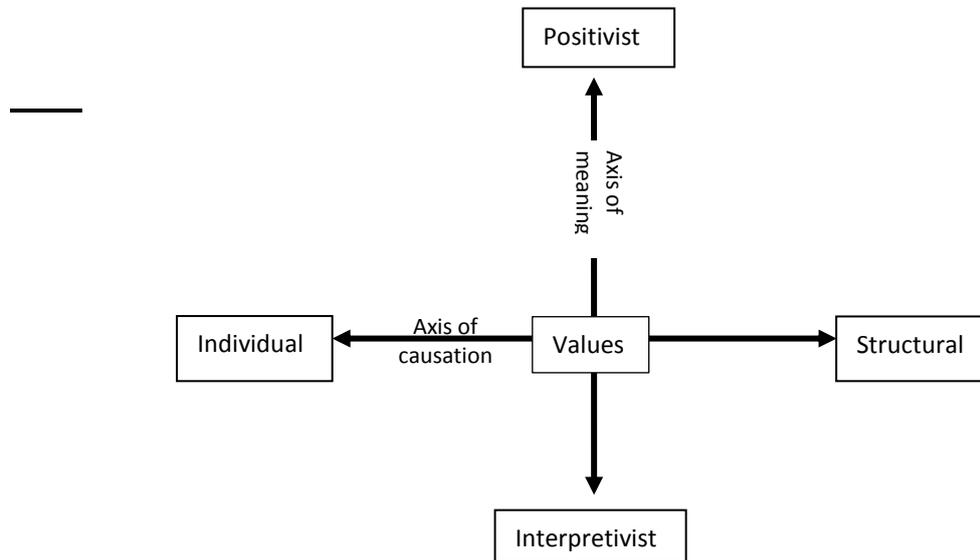
There is not room here to fully explore the current conceptual approaches to understanding homelessness (for a valuable explanation see Fitzpatrick 2005). Nevertheless, in explaining the need for a re-conceptualisation, it is important to highlight significant standpoints and why they may not be suitable for the Global South context.

Generally, international studies of homelessness concentrate largely on industrialised countries, with limited cases studies of the Global South (e.g., Christian, 2003; Glasser, 1994). What literature there is on homelessness in the Global South not only tends to use definitions and concepts developed for, and in, industrialised countries but also tends to avoid re-conceptualising. This gives the impressions that, while the scale and specific causes may differ, homelessness is *conceptually* similar everywhere. However, in the Global South context, the scale of homelessness, the linking of home to kinship, the role of the extended family, the weaker position of women in society and the different attitudes to ownership all serve to make an industrialised 'northern' understanding inappropriate (Tipple and Speak 2009). Without a good, context specific, conceptual understanding of homelessness in the Global South we run the risk of making the 'problem' fit the current knowledge and available, or acceptable, solutions.

Conceptual approaches to understanding homelessness can be seen to fall along two intersecting axes (fig 1). In one direction, lies an axis focused on causation. Crossing this is

an axis concerned with meaning. This paper suggests that a common factor between these two axes can be found in the role of values within the phenomenon of homelessness. This will be returned to in the conclusions.

Figure 1 The intersecting conceptual axes of homelessness



The causation axis runs between the two broad explanations of the causes of homelessness - ‘individual’ and ‘structural’, which dominated debates for some time. The ‘individual’ or ‘agency’ approach located causes of homelessness either in an individual’s inadequacy, for example learning difficulty or mental health problems, or in their perceived deviant behaviour, such as alcohol or drug abuse (Neale 1997).

In contrast to the individual approach, the structural view placed the responsibility for homelessness outside the control of the homeless person. However, there remains uncertainty over the nature of structural causes. There is a lack of clarity as to whether they are the result of the failure of the housing market to provide adequate, affordable housing, or are underpinned by wider, global economic factors leading to increased poverty and vulnerability (Neale, 1997; Kennett and Marsh, 1999).

The axis of meaning runs from ‘positivist’ approaches, arguing that homelessness can only be understood through the identification of statistically significant measurable factors (Dessler 1999), to ‘interpretivist’ approaches which suggest that homelessness should be understood as a socially constructed concept, rather than the outcome of tangible structural factors.

However, in the Global South, neither conceptual axis holds true. The axis of causation is troubled by two issues. First, at the individual end of the conceptual spectrum, the immense scale and diversity of homelessness makes it unlikely that all those who are homeless have the sort of personal difficulties used to explain homelessness under this approach (Tipple and Speak 2009). Second, the structural view is limited because so many people are potentially affected by the type of structural issues which are perceived to drive homelessness, yet not all become homeless. For example, housing market failure is the rule, rather than the exception (Bernier 2001), governments have been suffering fiscal crises for many decades and extreme poverty is widespread. Poverty and housing system failure, particularly, are perceived as critical factors. However, both Dupont (2000) and Tipple and Speak (2009), argue that not all homeless people are poor, or poorer than their housed counterparts, and not all poor people are homeless. Moreover, despite the visibility of street sleepers in many cities, and the fact that a great proportion of people live in informal housing poor enough to classify its occupants as homeless, Tipple and Speak (2004) argue that not all people experiencing these situations could be said to be homeless.

The constant and intense presence of these structural factors also makes the axis of meaning less than satisfactory in the Global South. While those taking a 'positivist' stance can identify and measure the structural factors, they cannot explain their differing implications for individual or household experiences of homelessness. There may, however, be some value in the interpretivist approach of trying to understand social meaning attached to homelessness. This work might carry that position forward somewhat.

More recently what Pleace (2000) refers to as the 'new orthodoxy' has been adopted as a bridge between 'positivist' view, seeking to identify measurable structural factors to understand homelessness and 'individualist' understanding, which links causes to characteristics of the homeless person. It offers a pragmatic solution to the uneasy fact, noted by Randall and Brown (1999), that not all people succumb to the structural factors in the same way. This 'new orthodoxy' suggests that, while structural factors underlie homelessness, personal factors influence the likelihood of being affected. It avoids the blaming culture of the individual or agency explanations by suggesting that personal difficulties simply make some people more susceptible to the structural factors than others (Pleace 2000). However, it still places emphasis on personal characteristics as the determining factor. While this may work well as a framework for developed countries, the scale of homelessness in the Global South, and the diversity of those who experience it,

suggests that something other than personal difficulties is at play in conditioning vulnerability to structural factors.

As a step towards a more appropriate approach to the study of homelessness, some commentators have adopted ‘social constructionism’, which is less concerned with causes and more focussed on understanding the social *meaning* attached to the condition. It suggests that the phenomenon of homelessness can be best understood through an exploration of the social meanings attached to it by different actors and agents (Hutton and Liddiard 1994). It may have some value in a Global South context, where evidence suggest that there is a very diverse social understanding of, and reaction to, homelessness across different cultural contexts (Tipple and Speak 2009; Speak 2004).

The social meaning of homelessness can differ depending on the sub groups of homeless people being considered. Thus, typologies, which seek to differentiate between groups of people who might all be classed as homeless by any given definition, can be helpful. Some typologies are based on a combination of quality of shelter and / or security of tenure (see for example Cooper, 1995; Daly, 1994; Glasser 1994). Given the extent of housing informality and inadequacy in the Global South, such an approach would include the vast majority of people and provide little in the way of a more nuanced understanding (Tipple and Speak 2009).

Hertzberg (1992) include the element of time in her typology, which does bring a valuable dimension to understanding the experience and social interpretation of homelessness. It has some relevance to the Global South context where some people move in and out of homelessness regularly throughout a lifetime while others are homeless for protracted periods. None of these typologies, however, really offer an understanding of the causes of homelessness from which we might build interventions.

More recently, Speak (2004) produced a typology specifically for the Global South, to take account of the complexity of that context. The typology offers three categories of homelessness – supplementary, survival and crisis, based on the reason for the homelessness and its role in the life trajectories of the homeless person. It brings together both a ‘positivist’ approach in seeking to identify empirical regularities as structural ‘drivers’ and an ‘interpretivist’ approach in highlighting that personal circumstances bring meaning to the way in which homelessness is constructed, both within a given culture and by the individual or household experiencing it. In doing so it provides a more nuanced understanding of their

specific situation. However, that work also hinted at the way in which some individuals make value judgements in arriving at decisions about situations which can result in homelessness. For example, those which Speak classifies as ‘supplementary’ homeless have ‘chosen a temporary period of shelterlessness in order to improve their economic situation. In doing so, they make a value judgement about the importance of money over shelter. For the ‘supplementary homeless’ group, that decision is within their control.

Drawing on that typology, this work explores how value might be more central to some of the structural drivers of homelessness which are beyond the control of the individual and highlights the role of values as a common point of reference at the intersection of the causation and meaning axes. It seeks to explore the way in which different and changing values might spawn policy, practice and socio-cultural attitudes which make people more, or less, vulnerable to the same structural factors which underpin homelessness.

Background to the data and ideas

The ideas and data for this paper come from several sources spanning eleven years. The initial empirical research was a DFID funded study of homelessness in nine the Global South, undertaken between 2000 and 2002¹, for which the author was the senior researcher. The DFID study sought to identify the extent, causes, experiences and perceptions of homelessness in different contexts, and the subsequent interventions and response to it. The countries chosen for the study² offered a range of socio-economic, environmental, climatic, political and cultural contexts which might condition those issues. 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.

Data collection and analysis

The work draws greatly on the author’s own ethnographic data gathered in six of the original countries for the DFID study, as well as subsequent data collection in additional countries. The voices of those involved in the study are used to help substantiate the arguments. This ethnographic data was collected in slums and informal settlements, shelters, squats and the

¹ DFID Project No. R7905

² India, Bangladesh, Egypt, China, Peru, Bolivia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Ghana, Indonesia.

locations of pavement dwellers and street sleepers. Data collection methods included observational work, photography, mapping, interviews and oral testimonies with homeless individuals and households living in a range of different accommodation and shelter situations. 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). Building on Glaser and Straus (1967), the original DFID study, and subsequent ongoing research, have taken a grounded theory approach to analysis. Data was explored and analysed using thematic coding to identify emerging patterns and themes. These have been presented in a number of publications (Refs withheld for review).

A few words about definitions

There is a serious lack of consensus on a definition of 'homelessness', especially in respect of the relationship between 'shelter' and 'home'. Williams and Cheal (2001) suggest there may be no such thing as 'homelessness' and ask if it is in any way different from inadequate shelter. Dupont (1998) deliberately avoids the use of the term 'homeless' because it adds the loss of familial roots to a lack of shelter.

In its declaration on the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, The United Nations (1982) 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.

This work is predicated on that broad UN definition above. It adopts this approach in recognition of the fact that many squatters and informal settlers live in abjectly poor and insecure conditions for protracted periods and some street sleepers and ostensibly shelterless people actually do have social networks and homes in other locations to which they can and do return (Dupont 1998; Tipple and Speak 2009; Speak 2004).

For the purposes of this work, the term 'the Global South', indicates those countries experiencing rapid population growth, urbanisation and 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, however, are more difficult to classify, representing as they do rapid,

market led growth and development and expansion of the formal housing market, juxtaposed with entrenched poverty, homelessness and spreading informal development. It is this very contradictory development scenario which makes them worthy of inclusion in this work.

Homelessness as value driven phenomenon

This work now explores the way in which multiple, and often conflicting, values can be seen as a direct cause of homelessness, or to condition both the experience of it and interventions to address it. The positivist approach to understanding homelessness seeks to identify a clear, measurable ‘regularity’ within the causal factors (Jacobs, Kemeny and Manzi 1999, Fitzpatrick 2005). However, empirical evidence from fieldwork in the Global South raises questions about why ostensibly very similar people are affected differently by the same structural factors. Many of the perceived structural causes of homelessness - housing market failure, poverty and economic change or political conflict are themselves the products of value systems and beliefs. However, here we see that it is the interpretation or manipulation of those value systems and beliefs, in relation to different groups or individuals, which dictates vulnerability to homelessness.

Political and economic values as a cause of homelessness

The relationship between political or economic values and homelessness is not new. It has its origins in the control of land, housing and population movement by colonial governments, which sought to use housing as a mechanism for controlling indigenous populations during the development of their cities (Parnell and Mabin 1995). Political control continues in many countries by postcolonial governments. It was seen most starkly 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. The UN suggests that around 2.4 million people were affected in some way (Tibaijuka, 2005). However, the squatter settlements affected were those where there was strong opposition to Mugabe’s ruling party. The key conditioning factor in whether or not a household was affected was their political values. The Government response to international criticism, of what was clearly an act based on political values, was to argue that the settlers were already homeless by virtue of the informality of their settlements, emphasising the lack of value it placed on the ‘sweat equity’ and community building evident in the settlements. Moreover, in erecting an ‘agenda screen’ of

‘environmental improvement’ as the rationale for the demolitions, it chose to use globally recognised values as justification. Adger et al (2001:683) have also noted this ‘cherry picking’ of dominant values within discourse to justify official actions:

‘since global discourses are often based on shared myths and blueprints of the world, the political prescriptions flowing from them are often inappropriate for local realities.’

What happened in Zimbabwe was an extreme, if localised, example of political values causing mass homelessness behind a screen of justifiable action. A more subtle but possibly more significant example, however, can be seen in cities across the Global South, where the increasingly globalised values inherent in neo-liberal political and economic policy are displacing the urban poor (see for example Marcuse and Kempen 2000; Durand-Lasserve and Royston 2002; Berner 2001).

Macro-economic change and individual or household poverty are frequently perceived structural causes of homelessness. However, many people benefit from such change, as witnessed by the rise of educated middle classes in India and China, for example. The problem is not the economic change itself but the way in which the values embedded within dominant neo-liberal ideologies which propagate it are interpreted. These values, including weakening of the state intervention and prioritising individual responsibility, strengthening of the private sector, marketisation and capital investment, form the basis of the modernisation agendas and economic and physical development policies of Southern governments (see for example, Payne 2001; Mukhija 2001, Sibley 1995).

As part of this, governments have moved away from place based poverty alleviation policies in favour of macroeconomic development to lift their populations out of poverty. This is particularly evident in India, where the country’s economic boom has given rise to major corporate development such as that in the new satellite city of Gurgaon near Delhi or the major business enclaves in Mumbai and Bangalore, which sit in juxtaposition to sites of entrenched poverty and abjectly evident homelessness.

In support of economic development city authorities around the world strive to present the globalised image of the ‘World Class City’, conforming to the largely northern aesthetic and lifestyle values about the look, feel and function of the urban landscape (Madanipour 1998; Atkinson 2005). In this switch of values they exacerbate poverty and homelessness. For example, in 1999 the Metropolitan Corporation of Delhi evicted an estimated 3.5 million

residents of slum clusters across the city in support of their goal of Delhi becoming a ‘World Class City’ by 2021(see for example Ghertner 2011; Hazard Centre 2005).

As cities expand, peripheral locations occupied by the urban poor suddenly became worthy of investment and of interest to developers and planners. Around the world, millions of urban poor people are being evicted or relocated to newer, even more peripheral locations, to release now commercially valuable land for development (Shatkin 2004; Fernandes 2004;). During the field work, cases of urban evictions were particularly common in India, Bangladesh, South Africa, Egypt and Indonesia.

The evicted households from Delhi’s demolished slums were resettled in relocation colonies on the city’s periphery. One such relocation colony, Bhalaswa, can be found 25 Kms from the centre of Delhi. Interviews with households relocated to Bhalaswa highlight that in prioritising the values of modernisation and ‘World Class City’ status, the authorities directly caused or exacerbated homelessness by relocating the people of the slums. Ghertner (2011) notes that another set of values, those embedded within environmental discourse, were hijacked to suit the Municipalities needs and to support these evictions. This is a stance reminiscent of the situation in Zimbabwe discussed above.

For many, their new environment and shelter situation is actually worse than that in the previous city slums. If their original inadequate accommodation could be defined as homelessness, the move has done nothing to address this, as this woman commented:

Charanya:

[we had] ...stayed there for a lot many years. Eleven years and nobody ever complained we made no trouble.... The politicians would come and went and made promises but nothing ever happened, just left us, left us be. It was a poor place but it was good, we had family and friends and there was always work... so close to the city and to Lodi [middle class community] people to help you... I collected rags with my friends and my girls, we got by.

Interviewer: *will you tell me about your house there?*

Charanya:

It was good enough, small...dry even in the rains...cold in winter. My husband and his brother worked on it every year and made it better. We lost it, everything, everything. Here we have nothing here. We had to start again to build a house but

the land was too poor to build and we had nothing to build with, just rags and board. It is getting better but the house is small...the shelter is poor, rain and wind ... it is too cold in winter and the summer it is so dirty here and it smells so bad. I can't make this my home, this will never be home.

Throughout the original research many similar stories of eviction and resettlement were told. In them we see that the values inherent in neoliberal economic development have resulted in increased vulnerability for urban poor people. However, as Sibley (1995) notes, eviction is not simply about the economic value of land. It is also about promoting the new, urban, socio-cultural values of modernity which authorities strive to achieve. The poor do not conform to what is perceived to be an internationally accepted urban behaviour or 'normality' required of citizenship (Madanipour 1998; Fernandes 2004). They are perceived to violate the values of respectable citizenship and must be re-housed, relocated, removed to prioritise the new, urban elite whose values, behaviour and spending power fit the aspiring city's image (Kawash 1998, Madanipour 1998). Their removal from the city, what Sibley (1995) refers to as '*spatial purification*', might equally be seen as prioritising what Roy (2003) terms '*propertied citizenship*'. Drawing on Kawash (1998) she suggests that the homeless are '*... the "constitutive outside" of propertied citizenship*' (Roy 2003:464). They do not uphold the value of capital investment in property.

In this we see that what ultimately makes the urban poor more vulnerable to homelessness is not so much economic change, or resulting poverty. Rather it is a government's prioritising of neo-liberal economic values, which have come to occupy a '*hegemonic position*' within urban policy (Purcell 2009: 142), over concerns for social welfare, human dignity and equitable rights to the city and to adequate shelter for all.

Socio-cultural values as a cause of homelessness

The influence of values on homelessness extends beyond the institutional into the social world. Phillipson (2010) notes that economic growth drives change in social and family values with the consequent impact on intergenerational relationships and extended family support networks (see also Foster 2000). Others have found the same in a range of countries (see for example Beauchemin, 1999; Apt 1999; Aboderin, 2004). This was evident to different degrees across the countries studies. In Ghana, and to a degree in South Africa, for example, it was reported that traditional extended family networks, which once protected

people from homelessness, are diminishing as people migrate or adopt new cultural values. They remain stronger in India and Bangladesh, however.

Nevertheless, in India, which now has the second largest aged population in the world, rapid economic development has given rise to increased migration and new working patterns. As people move in search of work, and more women work outside the home, they are less able to care for their older relatives (Jamuna 1995; Croll 2006). The phenomenon is not restricted to India and homeless older people were encountered in every country of the study, many living alone without support of their families. In Cairo, Egypt, one older man, who lived in a shack in the grounds of a derelict house, noted that his children had all left the country to work in the Gulf States. Asked how he managed to support himself and what his future held he commented:

'I pray to Allah everyday to help me. My family is all gone, I am old now and I can't work. ...people are kind and I live from their kindness. I will die here, I have nowhere else to go.'

Separation, divorce and domestic violence, strong factors in homelessness amongst women in the West, are also major causes of homelessness for women in the Global South (Tibajuka 2005; Menard 2001). This is exacerbated by economic change which is leading to new marriage patterns and increasing family breakdown (Takyi and Broughton 2006), as an increase in women working outside the home is placing stress on relationships (Pyke 1994; Nazli 1995). Despite increasing independent employment many women around the world still cannot easily support themselves and their children in face of marital breakdown. Low pay and the lack of land and property rights are significant factors. However, it is the difference in cultural values, many of which demand the performance of respectability through marriage, and different socio-cultural construction of homelessness, which make unsupported women increasingly vulnerable to homelessness (Nalia 1997; Speak 2005).

Across the countries of the original research the role of social values and the social meaning applied to homelessness was seen to play out differently. The starkest difference was between Asia, especially India, Indonesia and Bangladesh, as opposed to Latin America or Sub Saharan Africa. In the former, homelessness was frequently socially constructed as a moral failing, especially for women. Indeed, the language used to describe homeless people in Bangladesh and Indonesia emphasised this and stigmatised homeless women as lacking morals (Ref withheld for review). In Latin America and South Africa and Ghana, however,

homelessness was constructed somewhat differently, even for lone women, and could be seen as a period of enterprise and personal responsibility.

This difference is expressed well by the cases of Kuldeep and Gloria, which follow. Kuldeep had been living in makeshift shelters for around 18 months with a group of rag pickers in a middle class enclave of Bangalore, India:

When (husband) left me I had to leave the house (husban's parents'). I had nowhere to go... I went to my village... to my parents but they said I should not stay there now that I was a married woman. I should return to my husband's family, they should take me. But they said I could not stay there and his brother made bad suggestions... I came to the city to get away. I had nowhere to go no one will not take me.

(interviewer) What will you do, will you try to go home again?

I can't go, not now, now I have been here too long. People will think I am a low woman (prostitute).

In Peru, however, the social construction of homelessness is somewhat different than that experienced in India by Kuldeep, above. This account, by Gloria, also abandoned by her husband but now living in a very poor squatter settlement on the outskirts of Lima, noted a sense of independence on being able to establish her own home and highlights that difference:

We took some land, [in the desert] near my friend's house and made some walls from board and then some people helped me with a roof. Now we live here, my children, me. We have nothing but I can earn some money selling things, I look after a lady's children and she gives us food. People here have nothing but I feel safe, it's better, we have nothing and I don't know how it will ever get better but they say we will get the land (legal tenure) next year. Maybe then I can build a better house.

However, although these two women's stories highlight the role of values in different social constructions of homelessness, they have also brought us full circle. We are now back at the point at which we discussed the vulnerability of informal settlers to the shifting political and economic values world. Their loss of traditional familial support networks, which might have kept them from homelessness, comes at a time when states seek, or are encouraged, to withdraw from the provision of shelter. Within neo-liberal ideology there is a greater emphasis on private sector intervention. In the context of housing, in promoting the private

sector over state provision, what is really being espoused is the formal private sector. For much of the Global South no such formal private sector exists for the provision of housing and shelter for the poorest. The urban poor, like Kuldeep and Gloria, construct their dwellings informally, as close to work and services as they are able. In doing so they are upholding the very values of personal responsibility and private capital investment which neo-liberal policies promote.

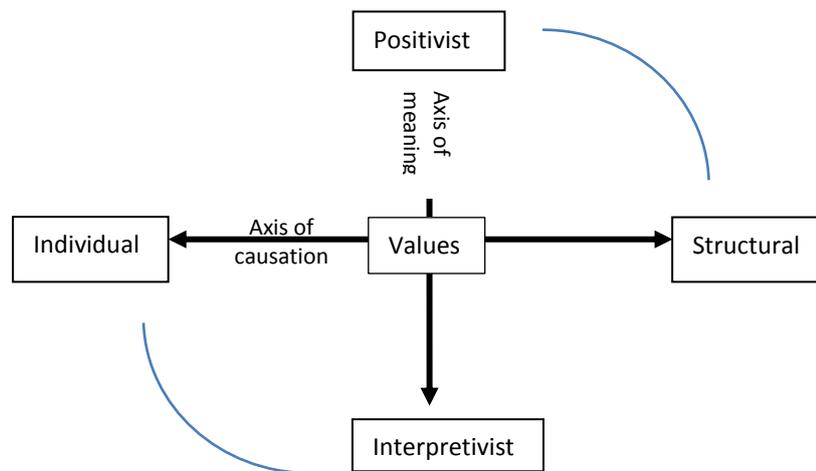
However, they are not seen as champions of the new way. Whether or not Gloria is given legal tenure to the land on which she has acted out personal responsibility is entirely dependent on how the Government perceives and balances a set of values - the value of the land on which she has erected her makeshift shelter against the value of her capital and sweat investment and sense of personal responsibility. Whether or not Kuldeep, and her community of rag pickers are left in peace will depend on how much they are perceived to devalue, in both economic and socio-cultural terms, the new middle class urban landscape.

Conclusions

This work has used the conceptual window of 'values' helps us understand why the same structural factors result in different degrees or experiences of homelessness in different contexts. It is clear that values, whether they are political, economic or cultural, influence the degree to which people in the same practical or financial situation are likely to become homeless. Political values dictated which informal settlers were evicted in Zimbabwe. In India, neo-liberal economic values dictated not only who has access to land but the use of land. Changing socio-cultural values determined Gloria's and Kuldeep's vulnerability to homelessness but also their differing ability to reconstruct a home for their families

Conceptually, values helps us reconcile the somewhat conflicting ideas on the two intersecting axes of 'causation' and 'meaning', by bringing a common factor to both (see fig 2). Values are embedded within economically, politically and socially driven structural causes of homelessness, so required by the positivists. At the same time, as seen in the difference between Gloria and Kuldeep, social values help to explain why some people are more vulnerable than others to those structural causes, particularly through their conditioning of the individual's, household's or societies construction of homelessness.

Figure 2 The intersecting conceptual axes of homelessness



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. If we explore the core values which underpin homelessness, rather than focussing on tangible measurable causes, we may be able to see a commonality between developed and the Global South which will help us predict the shape of things to come. 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.

Many of the political values of marketisation and diminution of state intervention, which have become the guiding principles of urban and economic policy in the Global South, particularly since structural adjustment, are increasingly conditioning life in developed countries. Thus, in reconceptualising homelessness in the Global South we may be better prepared for the implications of ideological change in other parts of the world. Indeed, this paper does not suggest that the fundamental political and economic drivers of homelessness are any different in developing or developed countries, but that the way people and institutions respond to those drivers might be best understood through an exploration of their different values systems.

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