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A REVIEW ON GLOBAL HOMELESSNESS: AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND THE PHENOMENON IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

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This paper examines global perspectives on homelessness and contributes to scientific knowledge in this area. The work is motivated by my academic and research background particularly my doctoral dissertation. It examines the concept, nature and theories of homelessness from a global perspective to create an understanding of the phenomenon in the Nigerian context. The study reflects the conceptual complexity of homelessness in the light of the criteria that are used to define adequate housing worldwide. It reflects different theoretical dimensions of the study of homelessness including homelessness as a personal pathology, homelessness as a structural dysfunctionality and homelessness as a combination of both. It emphasises the importance of field, recognition and structuration theories in understanding homelessness. It also highlights the importance of the five structures of ‘relational model’ and ‘critical realism’ in understanding the mechanism of the emergence of homelessness in Nigeria and concludes with some relevant facts and findings.

The study examines homelessness in global and local contexts to examine the conceptualisation and theoretical framework of homelessness along with related findings in a multifaceted sense to understand the phenomenon from different perspectives. The literature is reviewed considering the relevant conceptual background, applied theories, arguments and relevant findings. The study reveals the conceptual and theoretical diversity and reflects on the complexity, heterogeneity and dynamics of the phenomenon around the globe. The conceptual diversity of the phenomenon is a factor of the dynamic theoretical frameworks. They range from personal pathologies to structural dysfunctionalities to new orthodox and critical realism. In Nigeria, the problem is more structurally influenced than personally influenced. The duality of agency in structuration theory, the (4) model structure and the field of structural relations expand the understanding of the causes of homelessness in Nigeria. The problem of homelessness involves an interplay between complex factors including housing related problems, developmental, policy issues, socio-economic issues, human rights issues, religio-cultural ideologies, abject poverty, gross insecurity and natural disasters.

KEYWORDS:

extreme poverty, homeless, insurgencies, internally displaced, rough sleepers, street children

THE GLOBAL AND LOCAL CONCEPT OF HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is a prevalent phenomenon across the globe and has become a topical issue of concern and the subject of scholarly discussion in Europe, America, Australia, Asia, Africa, and the world over. Over the years, many research papers and conferences have been devoted to the investigation and evaluation of homelessness. Even now, studies are being undertaken to establish a clear understanding of the nature and meaning of the phenomenon in order to address the problem of homelessness more effectively across the globe. Many factors have contributed to the rise of homelessness around the world, but there is no generalised definition of the phenomenon, as meanings are ascribable to it based on the contextual understanding of those studying, discussing, or experiencing homelessness. The main cause of homelessness is not clear. Studies have shown that the phenomenon may be due to personal pathologies or structural dysfunctions, or caused by both.¹ Homelessness is a complex phenomenon and may be either a factor or a consequence of extreme poverty, unemployment, migration and housing deficits and eviction among other things. It may be politically, socio-economically and structurally motivated. The concept of homelessness is a difficult phenomenon to grasp, which has been given different meanings and definitions from the different perspectives of those studying it.

The nature of the phenomenon of homelessness is not stable and unchanging, but instead dynamic or non-static, as noted by Fitzpatrick (1999). Moreover, it is a phenomenon which has been interpreted in a variety of ways, as different people attribute different meaning to it.² There is no generalised definition of the term and the defining criteria for homelessness in developed regions such as the EU, United States, the U.K., Canada and Australia may not serve the same purpose in understanding the phenomenon if they were applied in most developing countries in Asia and Africa.³ The reason for this is not difficult to grasp. Most countries in Asia and Africa are still in their developing phases in comparison to the advanced countries in the EU and North America where the social policy systems are well established.

In the EU, for instance, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) laid down a standard in 1999 for defining an adequate home as a place which satisfies the physical, legal and social needs of the household. Based on this standard, the ETHOS framework was developed in 2005, which distinguishes between 4 main categorisations of homelessness including rooflessness, houselessness, living in insecure housing and living in inadequate housing which became the definitive departure point for many European countries when addressing the problem.⁴

Moreover, the Institute of Global Homelessness IGH (2015) assembled a committee of scholars including Volker Busch-Geertsema, Dennis Culhane and Suzanne Fitzpatrick

¹ PLEACE 2016: 20–21.

² SPRINGER 2000: 478–479.

³ TIPPLE–SPEAK 2006; 2009.

⁴ PLEACE et al. 2011: 13–14.

who, in cognisance of their scholarly experience in the field of homelessness, were given the responsibility for drafting a framework for a global definition of the phenomenon. According to this committee, three areas are important in ascertaining whether a person or persons lack 'access to minimally adequate housing': the 'security domain,' the 'physical domain' and the 'social domain'. In this framework, a lack in any of the three domains indicates such a lack.⁵

Interestingly, both the FEANTSA criteria for defining homelessness and those of the institute of global homelessness do not remove the need for the contextualisation of homelessness; as the definition of homelessness among the developed countries still varies based on their national policies, social economic structure and political system among other things. It is clear, however, that the so-called social, legal and physical standard in the case of FEANTSA criteria for defining homelessness or the physical, social and security criteria in the case of the institute for global definition of homelessness do not fully reflect the need for the contextualisation of the phenomenon.

The criteria omit the position and understanding of the homeless persons themselves when it were formulated, which raises question marks over the credibility and general dependability of that standard or criteria. Also, the pace of development in advanced regions such as Western Europe, North America and Australia supersede those of most developing countries in Asia and Africa and their standard of living and social political and economic systems are well established and stronger unlike those of their developing counterparts. Thus, even if the criteria really reflected the state of the phenomenon in the developed regions, which is doubtful, it could still be inappropriate as a standard for defining homelessness in developing areas of Asia and Africa where the basic social amenities and infrastructural facilities like water, electricity, internet connection and road networks are still inadequate, yet are not considered serious issues.

One of the aims of a national census held across the EU in 2011 was to gather statistical data on homeless people in the region. The MPHASIS project from 2007–2009 also collected and analysed data on homelessness using the EC guidance of 2005 on defining homelessness. This brought about the classification of the phenomenon into primary and secondary homelessness for the purpose of the national census.⁶

In addition, a Comparative study on Homelessness conducted in the EU by FEANTSA alongside the European Observatory on Homelessness (EOH) recommended using ETHOS and ETHOS Light as a framework for establishing shared understanding and guidance for defining homelessness across the EU.⁷

It is important to underline the fact that this shared understanding will not end the conceptual and definitive variations of the phenomenon in Europe and other parts of the world. The definition and understanding of homelessness is determined and born out of the political and social policies operating in various regions or nations of the world. As

⁵ BUSCH-GEERTSEMA et al. 2016: 124–132.

⁶ BAPTISTA et al. 2012.

⁷ OECD 2017.

a result, the discourses on the phenomenon remain heterogeneous rather than homogenous in nature. Even within the same nation, there are variations in the understanding of the concept by the various agencies addressing homelessness, as in the case of the Australian Bureau of Statistic ABS and the Specialist Homelessness Services SHS, among others.

As a point of fact, none of the criteria are fully suitable for describing homelessness in Africa because many households in Africa in any case lack the basic amenities that could make a home physically, socially and legally suitable for human habitation, while that does not necessarily suffice to define their inhabitants as homeless.⁸ Indeed, Tipple and Speak (2006) note that even though a huge percentage of households in developing countries dwell in ‘inadequate housing’ not all of them are necessarily perceived as undergoing homelessness.⁹ And of course, if any of the FEANTSA (1999) and IGH (2015) criteria were strictly applied as a definitive yardstick for homelessness in Africa, a great percentage of the inhabitants could be unjustly recorded as homeless, because many African countries still face gross shortages of basic amenities like water and stable electricity supply, along with a poor infrastructure among other problems.

In Australia, the conceptualisation of homelessness may be traced to Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1992), who proposed three conceptual categories of the phenomenon namely, primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness.¹⁰ Currently, the two main agencies determining the definition of homelessness across the region are the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). The Australian Bureau of Statistics definition was intended for the purpose of Population Census and Housing, and views homelessness as “the lack of one or more elements that represent home”. In this case, someone is regarded as homeless if he or she has no suitable living alternatives than living in inadequate settings, without a contract, with a short and unextendible tenure of house contract or in living settings where he or she has limited control and access to space for social relations.

On the other hand, the Specialist Homelessness Services, SHS, which spearheads the gathering of the national datasets on various specialist support rendered to homeless and vulnerable Australians defines someone as homeless if he or she lives in a non-conventional, short-term or an emergency accommodation.¹¹

According to U.S. Code Title 42, Chapter 119, Sub-chapter 1, Section 11302, a broad definition is given to the term homelessness. Under this regulation, homelessness involves sleeping rough on the streets, in parks, railway stations or airports; in inhabitable places, under the threat of eviction, without a valid house contract, living in shelters and people who are continuously vulnerable to homelessness due to disabilities and other health conditions, among others.

⁸ LEVINSON-ROSS 2007.

⁹ TIPPLE-SPEAK 2006; 2009.

¹⁰ PAWSON et al. 2018.

¹¹ AIHW 2019.

It is worth noting that the U.S. Code's (1994) definition may have served as a modelling framework for other subsequently crafted definitions of the phenomenon by various agencies and academic institutions in the USA. This is because a critical examination of those contemporary definitions shows probable connections with the USC definitive stance which is also probably the earliest established definition coined for homelessness in that region.

However, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2018 groups Homelessness into 4 main categories: persons who are 'literarily homeless', those at 'imminent risk of homelessness', persons who are 'homeless under federal statutes' and those who ended up homeless because they are 'fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence'. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education also issued a guideline on homelessness which takes into consideration homeless children and youths as well as their challenges, pathways and the processes they encounter within the framework of formal education reception.¹²

In Canada, the definition of homelessness arose from the work of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH), previously known as the Canadian Homelessness Research Network CHRN. In 2012, the COH, in collaboration with leaders from the field of research, practice and policy came up with a definition which views homelessness as "the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it [...] the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination [...] a range of housing and shelter circumstances, with people being without any shelter at one end, and being insecurely housed at the other".¹³

Meanwhile, the definition of homelessness in the U.K. has its roots in the 'Housing Act' (1977) which stipulates 3 main criteria for defining a person as homeless. It also provides a description of the conditions under which a homeless person can be regarded as being in priority need of accommodation and outlines the duties of the housing and local authorities in responding to homelessness or threat of homelessness in their region. Although there was some degree of disparity and a huge similarity in the housing legislation, the Housing Act (1977) was operative in the U.K. for England, Wales and Northern Ireland apart from Scotland; and it lasted until 1996 when it was amended. It was the first major legislation to address homelessness in the U.K. especially across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. According to the text of this Housing Act, homelessness involves both the lack of accommodation as well as the ownership of accommodation officially found to be unreasonable for continual habitation by its bearer.¹⁴

In the amended version, the Housing Act (1996), Annexes B1 and B2 clearly spell out the description and categories of priority need of accommodation by the homeless

¹² USICH 2018.

¹³ GAETZ et al. 2012.

¹⁴ GSS 2019.

or those under the threat of homelessness in a more comprehensive way. Homelessness in the U.K. is classified into 3 major categories: those sleeping rough (on the streets, in garages, walkways and other places not meant for human habitations); statutorily homeless persons (those who are accepted to benefit from the state housing services, shelters and temporary accommodation provided by the local government for people in priority needs of accommodations) and the hidden or unsheltered homeless (those whom either did not register themselves with the homeless institution or/and those who were disqualified from assessing and benefiting from the statutory housing service.¹⁵

In Nigeria, in contrast, there is no national definition of homelessness apart from the conceptualisations formulated by some past scholars and writers in the fields of homelessness and housing. In most cases, the ascribed meanings are linked to or similar to those in ETHOS. In other cases, some scholars are tempted to reduce the conceptual scope of the phenomenon to the so-called developing or third world nations. For instance, in 1989 Olusola Adebola Labeodan published a paper in *Habitat International* which claimed that homelessness is “a phenomenon associated with cities of the Third World, where resources are too limited to supply decent shelter for everyone”.¹⁶ In actual fact, homelessness is a general phenomenon that is not just associated with the cities of the third world or developing countries but is common across the globe, mostly in the urban cities of both the developed and developing countries. Forrest (1999), notes that homelessness has always existed as a phenomenon, and the only new development is how its extent or degree is understood and visualised. Meanwhile, Toro (2007), states that homelessness is now a significant issue of concern in most of the developed nations of the world.¹⁷

On the other hand, some western scholars writing about the African context were quick to ascribe meaning to the phenomenon without clear cognisance or understanding of the cultural settings preceding the problem in the region. For instance, as reflected in the earlier noted position of Tipple and Speak (2006, 2009), a lot of householders especially in the northern parts of Nigeria (a developing country), live in traditional or primitive kinds of homes like huts without electricity, tap water and other basic amenities of formal housing, yet these people are not necessarily poor nor homeless. Informal or primitive housing is very much in use in some remote villages of Nigeria where the villagers’ primary occupations are still peasant agriculture and animal husbandry.

Furthermore, Speak (2019) claims that homelessness in the context of developing countries is mostly associated with the failure of the housing system to provide for the needs of the fast-rising urban population due to the influx of migrants fleeing from rural poverty in rural areas to urban cities. This definition is not only narrow in scope but also reduces the multidimensional nature of the causes of the phenomenon to an inadequate supply of housing in the urban areas. People migrate for various reasons, not necessarily because of ‘rural poverty’ but also for several other reasons like exposure, better social

¹⁵ GSS 2019.

¹⁶ LABEODAN 1989: 75–85.

¹⁷ MINNERY–GREENHALGH 2007: 643.

connections, a change of environment, escaping from imminent violence like terrorism, for job posting, for family reunion and in the hope of a better standard of living, etc.

Rough sleepers or what the CARDO study identified as ‘street homelessness’ may better fit the visualisation or conception of what most Nigerians understand as homelessness. This is because the average Nigerian usually conceives of homeless people as people who are obviously and visibly homeless, e.g. rough sleepers or people sleeping on the streets, under bridges, in uncompleted or dilapidated buildings, or street children, “almajiri kids”, beggars and persons with mental insanity who mostly wander about on the streets.

Despite these differences between contexts, the ETHOS roofless category, the EU 2011 census category of ‘primary homelessness’, Mackenzie and Chamberlain’s primary homeless category in Australia and the U.K. and U.S. roofless category are all relevant for understanding the concept of homelessness in Nigeria. Unlike in most of the developed regions, there are no established homeless shelters, temporary accommodation for homeless, homeless institutions or other services providing care for homeless and vulnerable persons in Nigeria. The focus of the developed nations in conceptualising the phenomenon differs from those of the developing countries like Nigeria. Vulnerability to homelessness in Nigeria is exacerbated by the violence and threat of violence in the country, the threat of eviction, natural disasters like floods, extreme poverty, clashes between religio-cultural ideologies, extreme polygamous practices especially in the North and high birth rate with little or no resources to cater for them.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Pawson et al. (2018) in the *Australian Homelessness Monitor* describe ‘homelessness’ as a complex phenomenon which may result from different factors including structural, systemic and individual causes. Referencing the *U.K. Homelessness Monitor* he notes that historically, theoretically and internationally, studies have indicated that the causation of homelessness is complex, and no single factor is exclusively responsible for the phenomenon. Rather, many factors such as individual, interpersonal and structural aspects collectively interact to create or cause homelessness in a society.¹⁸

According to Forest (1999), homelessness is experienced differently by different people. It can be episodic in nature for some persons, whereas it may be a chronic or long-term experience for others. The causes of homelessness are not only important to researchers but also to the policy making community because, apart from helping researchers to establish a clear understanding of the phenomenon, identifying the causes of homelessness also helps policy makers to develop approaches to deal with it.¹⁹

¹⁸ PAWSON et al. 2018: 17.

¹⁹ MINNERY-GREENHALGH 2007: 643.

Many studies and scholars have applied various theories or theoretical approaches to the study of homelessness around the world. Depending on the viewpoint from which they wrote, they develop different understandings and arrive at conclusions regarding the state of homelessness. Smelser and Badie (1994) notes that the sociological study of homelessness could embrace the concept of culture, social interaction, socialisation, social structure, organisation and other aspects. As such, there is disparity in viewpoints both conceptually and theoretically. Some theoretical approaches view homelessness as being caused by individual pathologies, some see it as a structural dysfunction while others conceptualise it as a normal part of a functional society.

Pleace (2016) indicates that there has over the years been a conceptual and theoretical shift with respect to the nature of homelessness and its causes. He emphasises that homelessness had previously been studied in terms of an ‘individual’s pathologies’ where it was attributed to individual qualities or personal traits. It is viewed by others as the product of ‘structural dysfunctions’ including structural problems, systematic errors and a lack of or paucity of social welfare services, among other structural factors. Thereafter, the phenomenon began to be studied using the ‘new orthodoxy’ whereby homelessness is conceptualised with a cognisance both of the personal qualities and the structural orientation of the social system.²⁰

In response, Fitzpatrick (2005) notes that even though the ‘new orthodoxy’ gave a more satisfactory explanation for homelessness than both the ‘personal’ and ‘structural’ frameworks that preceded it, it lacked a proper theoretical grounding. She also criticised positivist approaches which attempt to explain homelessness based on the necessity of its ‘empirical regularity’. She believes that establishing causality should not only be statistically satisfying but must also involve a complete correlation between the causes and the phenomenon. In this vein she argues that the “realist’s pathways approach is more reliable in the sense that it embodies the tendencies to look at different patterns or dimensions to the root of homelessness”.²¹

Meanwhile, constructionists and interpretivists visualise homelessness as a socially constructed phenomenon which can be understood by taking into account the meanings and interpretations every individual arrives at from their own experiences. Auston and Liddiard (1994) recommend that rather than treating phenomena such as homelessness as ‘objective facts’ the focus should be on the meanings and interpretations accorded it by the agents with practical experience of it.²²

However, Jacobs et al. (1999) notes that the conceptual struggle between those who visualise homelessness as a structural problem and those who see it as the result of personal pathologies depends on policy interest. Therefore, the way in which social phenomena such as homelessness are conceptualised and explained has inherent ‘real’ impacts on social policy and influences the level of vulnerability to homelessness. In other words, the

²⁰ PLEACE 2016: 20–21.

²¹ FITZPATRICK 2005: 7–9.

²² FITZPATRICK 2005: 7–9.

discursive status of the phenomenon is based on the meaning ascribed to it by those in authority and which fits their political agenda. It is in cognisance of this that realists as much as interpretivists accept the idea of the social constructionism of homelessness as a socially constructed reality.²³

Many scholars have affirmed the validity of conceptualising and theorising homelessness in a variety of ways. Ritzer (2002) notes that homelessness can be studied from the perspective of social facts, social definition and social behaviours, among others. He added that while treating homelessness as a social fact may form a basis for theories regarding functionality, conflict, and systems, other perspectives such as phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, existentialism and ethnomethodology would better fit a social definition of the phenomenon.

From the above it is important to establish the fact that no theory or theoretical perspective alone can satisfactorily address the issue of homelessness due to the complexity of the phenomenon which reflects its multidimensional, heterogeneous, dynamic and contextual nature. The personal pathology of the victims, the structural dysfunction of a society and the new orthodoxy are all applicable to the discourse of the phenomenon. However, it should be recognised that homelessness is also caused by deficiencies in the choice and implementation of public policy, economic disorientation and socio-cultural imbalance among other things. The nature of the victim, similarly to the debate on homelessness itself is not stable. This dynamicity in concept, experience and nature of the phenomenon is a result of the difficulties of theorising it.

Field theory and homelessness (Lewin and Bourdieu)

The 20th century German psychologist and founder of social psychology, Kurt Lewin (1939) describes field theory as a “method of analysing causal relation and of building scientific constructs”, proposing it as a dynamic model which analyses individual and social behaviours. The idea of field, as coined by Lewin, came from physics and represents the life space in which everything is viewed from the dimension of internal and external environments. He considers individual and group behaviour as a function of people and their environment $[B = f(P, E) = f(LSp)]$.²⁴

Lewin used this theory to explain the developmental gap or space a child faces as he or she grows, progressing from stage to stage in a social world. He notes that the social agent relies on the acceptance or rejection of other social agents within the social world in order to move or relocate from one stage to another, because some subfields are accessible to certain classes of people but not to others.²⁵

²³ FITZPATRICK 2005: 7–9.

²⁴ KAISER–SCHULTZE 2018: 60–65.

²⁵ LEWIN 1939: 868–872.

Hence, the stagnancy, unacceptability, or rejection of social agents in the society may manifest itself in feelings and practical experience of disconnection, relegation, denigration and exclusion from mainstream society. By implication, homeless people and precarious or vulnerable youths in the social field contend with some degree of social exclusion, criminalisation and denigration from other agents in the society. There is no doubt that as a social phenomenon, homelessness is associated with different elements of the social world such as poverty, addiction, conflicts, crime, criminalisation and abuse among other things.

In another vein, Bourdieu (1993) views the world as a relational space where objective relations exist among the social actors. He recognises each subfield within the global space as a distinct field or relational space in itself, each dedicated to a particular activity. As such, each field is an autonomous domain of activity responding to functioning regulations and specific institutions which define the relations between agents, while the political field or the government maintains a close relationship with the individual external to the field.²⁶

Therefore, the interplay of struggle between the dominant and dominated class is inevitable because a network of objective relations or conflicts exist between the social actors and institutions which aim to maintain and enhance their respective stances in the social field. The dominant class is more autonomous and influential with the tendency to exploit the dominated class as it can easily undermine or reverse the regulating principles in the field. The dominant field possesses huge economic and social capital which emboldens and empowers them to influence the political field and together dominate, oppress and subjectify the dominated in the social field.²⁷

Weber (1978) describes power as a reflection of the *chance* that a social actor, social institution or social organisation embodied in order to achieve its wish in a communal engagement against the chances of other actors. Such power could be exercised at the class level, the status group level and the party level. Therefore, the competitions and struggles occurring in the social field are derived from power domination.²⁸

In other words, the rich capitalists possess both the economic capital and a strong social capital which give them the power to write or rewrite the rules in society. Also, through this excessive power, the homeless and other precarious individuals in the field are easily conceptualised, dominated, subjugated, exploited, criminalised, dehumanised and even subjected to national, legal, psychological and institutional discursive elements in society.

No wonder, as Bauman notes, that the category he calls vagabonds (homeless and undercasts) are confined in space with limited chances for mobility and sustainability and are technically and systematically excluded from mainstream society. Indeed, they are considered nuisances and irrelevant to society. Hence, his other category of people, the mobile, empowered 'tourists' easily criminalise and blame them on the basis of the law rather than blaming the system for homelessness. Bauman added that, instead of

²⁶ HILGERS-MANGEZ 2015.

²⁷ BOURDIEU 1993.

²⁸ WEBER 1978.

embracing a welfare program that redistributes income to the underclass, the tourists prefer to fence the homeless off from the system by dismantling the welfare program which represents their hope of survival.²⁹

Recognition theory and homelessness (Honneth)

Axel Honneth argued that social recognition is paramount for peaceful coexistence in society, without which communicative action may not flow freely between social actors in the society. He identified love, rights and solidarity as the social recognition mechanisms that synthesise communicative rationality among actors in the social world. He notes that self-confidence is the product of care, love and the accessibility of physical and emotional needs which in most cases are connected to the family and friends or social networks of youths in their developmental stage.³⁰

By implication, child neglect and abuse during developmental stages affects self-confidence and is one of the main reasons for youth homelessness. The criminalisation of homelessness, inadequate or lack of housing support, as well as the denial of health and social justice to the homeless undermines their human rights and disrespects their humanity. This theory helps explain why homeless youths suffer social exclusion and denigration and examines the possible process of integration available and accessible by the homeless youth in Nigeria. Questions about the prioritisation of inclusive education, effective health coverage, skill development and general empowerment programme for the homeless are considered. Relevant agencies, NGOs and the faith-based institutions will be interviewed to gather relevant information.

Structuration theory and homelessness (Giddens)

Giddens (1991) notes that the trajectory of individuals' self-formation goes through various psychological processes throughout their lives. The fear of ontological insecurity leads to anxiety and self-emptiness, especially in the modern world. The (mis-)developments in body and self become obvious among agents during social interactions with other agents and this social interaction may display the weaknesses of agents with lower self-esteem. He subsequently recommends structuration theory as a way of understanding the routinised and recursive engagements that take place in the agent and agency relationship in modern society and how these practices shape the agent and agency modus operandi over time. During these encounters, the agent's motivation, rationalisation and reflexive monitoring of actions are put to work. The agent unconsciously follows the directives of some

²⁹ As cited in ABRAHAMSON 2004: 171–179.

³⁰ HONNETH 1992: 187–201.

unacknowledged structures or conditions and as such, the excesses of an agent's actions could provoke some form of 'unintended consequences' for the agents. In other words, agents in this form of relations possess discursive, unconscious and practical knowledge about their existential experiences and ontological anxieties in the modern world. This stock of potential information can be extracted from agents through the mechanism of trust.³¹

In case of the homeless youths in Nigeria, their discursive narratives reflect biographical information as well as the habitus that influenced their current state of homelessness and, more importantly, their own conceptualisation of that experience. However, their practical consciousness may include the practices of reflexive monitoring and the adjustments of their actions in respect to other agents and the agencies monitoring their actions. In this conception, the homeless youths are the agents while family, community, NGOs and other social institutions dealing with the young homeless persons comprise some of the relevant agencies of study in this regard. Therefore, structuration theory could help to empirically understand the perceptions of the social actors based on the narratives they themselves make out of their own unconscious and practical consciousness of the situations which they encountered before, during and after homelessness. Such narratives are also reflective of the psychological, socio-economical and physical (mis-)developments or general life inadequacies embodied in the practical and emotional experiences they encountered through homelessness. The duality of the structure and knowledgeability of agents helps to account for the circumstantial engagements which impart the social state of the agents in society.

In accordance with the critical realist approach to causation, Fitzpatrick (2005) identifies four levels of structure on which homelessness could occur, namely, the economic, housing, patriarchal and interpersonal levels as well as the individual level. She believes that activities and actions such as class struggle, stratification, poverty, exclusion, housing shortage, domestic violence, child neglect, substance abuse and low self-esteem that are inherent in these structures have the potential to generate or create homelessness in a society.³²

By implication, the field, recognition and structuration theories may help in the understanding and conceptualising of the complexity and interrelatedness of the structures which either influence or create homelessness, especially in Nigerian society. However, owing to the variations of the concept, nature and context of the phenomenon, it may be necessary to develop a modified framework that really reflects the society of Nigeria today. In view of that, there is need for a conceptual model which can capture the state of complexity and interrelatedness of the structures that create and reproduce homelessness in Nigeria. As such, a 'relational field of structures' may be an accurate way of conceptualising the state of homelessness in Nigeria as it reflects most of the key structures that interact in Nigerian society to generate homelessness.

³¹ GIDDENS 1984: 1-3.

³² FITZPATRICK 2005: 15.

The relational model includes five main structures: namely, policy, actional, reactional, vulnerable and probable consequence. The first two structures operate at the macro level while the other three operate at the micro level. The rationale behind this is that at the policy level the governments have the potential to determine a socio-economic policy that reflects the interests of the people. At the actional level, an inclusive socio-economic policy may or may not be put into practice. At the reactional level, failures at the preceding levels could result in high illiteracy, high birth rate, abject poverty, gross abuse, violence and high IDPS (Internally Displaced Persons). At the vulnerable levels, youths and children may become street-involved, sleeping rough and fending for themselves. At the final level, homeless youths have the potential to easily be recruited for crime, violence, terrorism and even genocide.

RELATED FACTS AND FINDINGS

Globally 100 million people are homeless and 1.6 billion lack secure housing, while there are 150 million street children worldwide.³³ However, no national statistics have been collected on child and youth homelessness in Nigeria apart from the data recorded in 2007 by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). Although precise figures are lacking, youth homelessness is quite common in Nigeria especially in urban cities across the country. Aside from poverty, some other contributory factors identified as pathways into homelessness include urbanisation, natural disasters, conflicts and violence, children being street involved, peer influence, youthful exploration, eviction, addiction, religio-cultural ideology and systematic failures. A large percentage of Nigerians are homeless, the majority of whom are young people.³⁴

About 52% of the total population of Nigeria (209 million) live in cities, while 43% Nigerians (89 million) live in abject poverty with young people aged 10–29 making up 42% (35 million) of this figure. The majority of them live in the northeast and northwest of the country.³⁵ 24.4 million Nigerians are homeless, 8.6 million orphaned children sleep rough in markets, bridges and railway stations and may account for the over 10.5 million Nigerian children who are not in formal education. About 1.5 million children are homeless in the northeast region of the country alone, while another 3 million kids are unable to attend school in the same region. Moreover, about 1.3 million children have fled their homes in the northeast of the country due to the insurgency. Most of these children wander about on the street during school hours fending for themselves; some return home while others spend the nights on the street. Between 2005–2020, about 1 million people were forced out of their homes with or without prior notice of eviction.³⁶

³³ MAGYAR 2019.

³⁴ Borgen Project 2020; Global Homelessness Statistics s. a.

³⁵ Worldometer s. a.

³⁶ Borgen Project 2020.

In 2018, 613,000 people were displaced due to natural disasters, while 541,000 people were displaced due to conflicts and violence. At the end of same year, an IDMC report claimed that there were a total of 2,216,000 internally displaced persons across Nigeria.³⁷ The impacts of natural disasters, especially floods, in destroying lives, properties and rendering people displaced in the country cannot be overemphasised. The Borgen Project (2020) highlighted that the Disaster Management Agency reported that flood in Nigeria caused by both the River Benue and River Niger overflowing in 2018 killed about 200 people and rendered over 285,000 persons homeless. In support of this claim, Abubakar Kende (the then Secretary General of the Nigerian Red Cross) notes that apart from destroying towns and villages, the flood also damaged crops and livestock.³⁸

In addition, a report published in July 2019 by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) indicates that people were fleeing their homes every week in the Northeast because of the threat of insurgence. Moreover, the number of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) increased by about 17% between 2018 and 2019 alone, while about 180,000 persons in Bornu desperately needed shelter to protect them from the outbreak of cholera. It also found that 53% and 51% of the total refugees in the country belong to the priority group of women and children respectively.³⁹

Owing to the increasing rate of child and youth homelessness worldwide, Lonnie et al. (2016) conducted a Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of the causes of child and youth homelessness in 24 countries (developed and developing), to identify and understand the causes and reasons for the increase of this problem. Nigeria was one of the 24 countries featured in this systematic review. The review found that poverty was the major cause of child and youth homelessness among the 24 countries investigated, with other causes including abuse, family conflicts, delinquency and psychosocial problems.⁴⁰

Fitzpatrick (2000) studied “pathways of young people through homelessness” in Glasgow and found that unemployment, poverty and family conflict were the most common causes of or pathways into homelessness. She believed that the youths who were the subject of the research had been structurally marginalised and socially deprived of the basic standard of living. She determined that unemployment was the major factor responsible for homelessness among the studied group.⁴¹

Van Laere et al. (2009) conducted a study in Amsterdam on the “pathways into homelessness” which indicates that among the total participants (120), eviction (38%) and relationship problems (35%) were the most frequently reported reasons why the people included in the study became homeless.⁴²

³⁷ IDMC 2019.

³⁸ Borgen Project 2020; Street Child s. a.; Firstpost 2018.

³⁹ NRC 2020.

⁴⁰ EMBLETON et al. 2016: 435–444.

⁴¹ FITZPATRICK 2000: 134–135.

⁴² VAN LAERE et al. 2009: 1–9.

Pathways into homelessness, as noted by Anderson (2001) may include influences like relationship problems or the loss of a loved one. It is noteworthy that some scholars have used different terminologies at different points in time to refer to the pathways of homeless persons. For instance, the Australians, Mackenzie and Chamberlain (2003), used ‘homeless career’ whereas Robinson (2003) used the term ‘trajectory’, both of which suggest that becoming homeless may be a gradual process and reflect the dynamic nature of the life paths of the homeless persons.⁴³

It is important to establish that the use of the pathways approach to understanding homelessness, came to the fore due to the rising conceptual shift from the traditional (static) view of the nature of the phenomenon, to a view that acknowledges its dynamic nature. Fitzpatrick (2000) also stressed that the experience of homeless persons is multidimensional and has episodic phases and therefore should be better visualised holistically rather than conceptualised as a static or permanent experience. Anderson and Tulloch (2000), define ‘homelessness pathway’ as an individual or household’s routes into and out of homelessness with their inherent experience throughout the experience of homelessness until they are securely housed.⁴⁴

In 2014 a study was carried out by a Nigerian sociologist and scholar, Patrick A. Edewor on the topic “Homeless Children and Youths in Lagos, Nigeria” in which a total of 447 children and youths were surveyed in Lagos using purposeful sampling techniques and the snowball method. The findings show that the homeless children and youths in Lagos were mostly males, comprising 84% of the total individuals survey and that their age ranged from 15 to 19. A large majority, 97% were from the Yoruba ethnicity. 54% were Muslims and 40% were Christians while the rest belonged to the Traditional Religion. About 68.1% cited financial problems or poverty as the reason for them not being at school. 92.4% were not in school at the time of the study, while about 88.1% of them indicated an interest in returning to school.⁴⁵

Zakir et al. (2014) conducted a study on a category of 300 young homeless people (known as *almajiris*) aged 8–14 in Kaduna, Nigeria and found that 80% lacked formal education and 99% ate on the street. Hansen (2016) reports that an informant, Sahu Sani, (an attorney and human right advocate) referred to ‘*almajiri*’ as vulnerable children, many of whom end up as extremists or become involved in crime due to inadequate parental care. Children known by the term “*Almajiri*”, originating from the Arabic word “*almuhajir*” (an emigrant in search of religious knowledge) form huge part of street children in northeast. They engage in begging on the street under the direction of their *mallams* (Muslim religious teachers).⁴⁶

⁴³ MINNERY–GREENHALGH 2007: 641–655.

⁴⁴ CLAPHAM 2003: 121–123.

⁴⁵ EDEWOR 2014: 538–541.

⁴⁶ ZAKIR et al. 2014: 128–131; HANSEN 2016: 83–95.

CONCLUSION

There is no general definition of homelessness and the heterogeneity and diverseness of conceptual views of the phenomenon across the globe has implication for policy and national considerations. Moreover, there is no single general cause of homelessness, and no factor is single-handedly responsible for the causation of homelessness in any society. Homelessness is a result of multifaceted factors. Both FEANTSA's criteria and the IGH's standard for defining homelessness are important in conceptualising the phenomenon, but a contextualised approach is more relevant in understanding homelessness in Nigeria. The social, legal, and physical standard of FEANTSA's criteria of home or IGH's physical, social and security criteria for global definition of homelessness do not reflect the African context of homelessness.

The two criteria also left out the personal understanding of homeless persons, which puts into question its credibility and general dependability. Furthermore, the pace of development in advanced regions such as Western Europe, North America and Australia exceeds those of most developing countries in Asia and Africa and the overall standard of living and social political and economic systems in those regions are stronger and, in most cases, better than those of the developing countries in Africa. Therefore, the criteria and standard for having a home, or for homelessness, are more suitable for the western European and North American contexts than for parts of Africa and Asia where societies still battle with basic social amenities and infrastructures like water, electricity, internet connection and road network among other things. Thus, even if the criteria and standards reflect the state of the phenomenon in the developed regions, which is in any case not certain, it would still be inappropriate as a standard for defining homelessness in the developing countries of Asia and Africa.

The non-static or dynamic nature of homelessness may also have influenced the inconsistency of applicable theoretical frameworks in the study of the phenomenon across the globe. Homelessness can be understood from the perspective of a victim's personal pathology or as a product of a society's structural dysfunctionalities, or a combination of the two; the theoretical difficulties that arise are reflected in their applications by scholars, as indicated in this paper. Moreover, it is worth taking into account the importance of field, recognition and structuration theories in interpreting the experiential challenges of homeless persons in a society, who tend to struggle for chances of survival among other agents and agencies in the society. These theories enhance the understanding of the social economic challenges of homeless or vulnerable persons in most societies and could be potentially useful in understanding the generative mechanisms that are embedded in most social structures.

However, the theoretical trail of homelessness is just as dynamic as its conceptual nature. In Nigeria especially, the problem of homelessness is more structurally than personally influenced, as indicated in the facts and findings section of this review where economic poverty, displaced individuals, evictions and lack of social support institutions and poorly established social policy were commonly identified causative factors. The duality

of structuration theory, the recommended four model structures of Fitzpatrick, as well as the 'field of structural relations' proposed by the author could expand our understanding of the causation of homelessness in Nigeria. Moreover, the review of studies indicates that the causal state of homelessness in Nigeria rests upon a cluster of complex factors including housing related problems, developmental, policy, human right, religio-cultural ideologies and social threat among other things.

Some global conceptual ideas can be useful in understanding homelessness in the Nigerian context. For instance, the ETHOS roofless category, the category used in the EU 2011 census of 'primary homelessness', Mackenzie and Chamberlin's primary homeless category in Australia, and the U.K. and U.S. roofless categories are relevant for understanding the concept of homelessness in Nigeria. The concept described in CARDO of 'street homelessness' fits the visualisation or conception of what most Nigerians refer to as homelessness. To an average Nigerian, homeless persons are usually imagined as people who are obviously homeless, e.g. rough sleepers, street children who are on the street, almajiri kids, beggars and persons with mental insanity who mostly wander about on the streets. Such people are conceived of as sleeping on the street, under bridges, in slums, shanties, or in uncompleted or dilapidated buildings.

Unlike in the more developed regions of the world, homeless shelters, temporary accommodation for homeless people, homeless institutions and services support do not officially exist in Nigeria. Also, of course, there are no records of the statutorily homeless as is the case in the U.K. or of homeless under federal statutes as in the case of the U.S. The statistics on homelessness are also questionable because the EU and American defining standards do not reflect the reality of homelessness in the context of Africa. The data may have been overstated due to the unclear definition of the phenomenon. The focus of the developed nations in conceptualising the phenomenon differs from those of the developing countries like Nigeria. Vulnerability to homelessness in Nigeria is well reflected in the threat or occurrence of violence in the country, eviction, natural disasters like floods, extreme poverty, religio-cultural ideologies, extreme polygamous practices especially in the North and the high birth rate with a shortage of resources to cater for children.

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