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Julien Damon here presents a socio-historical and international analysis of the problematic of slums. While this type of habitat represents a public problem in many countries, it also represents a housing solution for many population groups. The author frames his analysis with the following questions: Might we not do better to see the development of informal settlements as a solution, one that could be both economically and environmentally sustainable, rather than a problem? Does the "slum" have a future, despite the very real problems its inhabitants encounter? Last, what can France do with "our slums"? A comparison between developing and developed countries (the latter represented by the situation in France) offers support for the thesis that urban development is different in global North and global South cities, particularly because they show different specific construction and inhabiting processes. The methodology includes a review of the international specialized literature, particularly French, and field visits to India, Latin America, Africa, Europe, and, in France, Calais and Mayotte.

The first chapter, called "The urbanizing and slum-izing of the world", begins with the observation that urbanization continues to increase, driven by demographic growth in developing countries. As the author sees it, this process involves two antagonistic phenomena: urban expansion, which can improve living conditions through optimal resource management; and poor management, which necessarily increases poverty, public health problems and the amount of poor, unsanitary housing. One of the problems involved in responding to the situation is correctly counting the number of slum-dwellers. Some assessments put the figure at one billion – a number that is much more political than scientific. United Nations-Habitat studies do show increased slum dwelling in developing countries from 1990 to 2014. However, country differences in estimation methods limit the usefulness of these findings. At the European Union scale, meanwhile, difficulty in standardizing definitions of inhabiting modes has proved an obstacle to developing tools for accurately defining insalubrious housing. Overall, study data in this area are incomplete and otherwise flawed; they illustrate the difficulty of establishing categories and so of accurately counting the people affected.

Chapter 2 discusses the difficulties of defining this protean type of habitat. Here the author develops a critique of his key term *bidonville* (shantytown, slum). In the 1930s it referred to informal settlements, but it gradually came to designate what was becoming a central phenomenon in developing countries, particularly those of sub-Saharan Africa. Since 2010, the term (or rough equivalents in other languages) has come back into use in France and Europe. Clearly, then, it referred to different realities at the international, national and even local scales. UN-Habitat has now established five criteria to objectify the term "slum": "poor structural quality of housing, overcrowding, inadequate access to safe water, inadequate

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access to sanitation and infrastructure, insecure residential status". These criteria have clarified what household living conditions are like in slums. The UN agency has also specified what informal settlement and inadequate housing are. France's development agency (AFD) has adopted UN terminology, adding the expression *quartier précaire* (precarious neighborhood). It now uses four habitat categories and has also introduced the notions of improving and deteriorating living conditions, as well as the term "*bidonvilisation*" – the development or spreading of slums. The issue of inadequate housing in France's overseas *départements* was what led the AFD to develop a precise typology of housing situations that includes a restrictive definition of *bidonville*.

In the next chapter, "The absorption and return of *bidonvilles* in France", the author first reviews the struggle in the 1960s and 1970s to combat "insalubrious" housing. In 1964, the Debré Law recognized the existence of *bidonvilles* and authorized construction of durable housing on much of the land or lots they occupied. Damon then retraces public policies over the 1980s, all designed to "put an end to *bidonvilles*", drawing on this review to analyze potential public authority actions and reactions to the problem and closing the chapter with a 10-phase "sequence for the production of urban bidonvilles".

Chapter 4 looks in greater detail at slums from three perspectives: spatial, sociodemographic and policy-related. This can be done for several major cities using a selection of socioeconomic and housing quality and environment indicators (though the data are not always complete). Damon then examines slum development in terms of urban conditions using indicators of dispersion, urban network links, distance from urban centers, and whether or not an area is under public authority control. And he compares slums in terms of whether or not they house the majority of the city population, are the result of rural flight, whether the living space is transitory or sustainable, and whether the majority of residents are nationals or foreigners. Last, he stresses the importance of public policies – regardless of whether they address the question of property ownership and recognition thereof or are designed with residents' participation – and the absence of such policies. This section culminates in a crucial question: Is it better to intervene at the scale of the slum or of its inhabitants?

The closing chapter discusses one of the main issues of current research: Are slums sustainable or transitory spaces? Damon shows that studies are not consensual on this point and that taken together they cannot be said to support the conclusion that slums are "an airlock (*sas*) rather than a trap (*nasse*)".

Ultimately, the public problem of slums elicits a considerable number of arguments in favor of stabilization, including, at one extreme, recognizing slum inhabitants as full-fledged citizens and, at the other, dismantling slums to comply with property rights. The author points out the limitations of this binary opposition, as well as the fact that the world's slums are so heterogeneous that the issue cannot be handled at the international scale. This echoes the main criticism: there are no fine distinctions between developed and developing

countries. It would have been interesting to conduct detailed comparisons that clearly show diversity, including intra-country diversity, instead of analyzing all situations in terms of antagonism. Nonetheless, the book spotlights the difficulties involved in comparing slums historically, internationally or locally. The many types of settlements, how long they have been there, the heterogeneity of inhabitants and of public policy responses make comparison a particularly delicate matter. And the author offers us a wide panorama of what the word "slum" refers to, at a time in France when the association and advocacy group sector is mobilizing around the issue of housing rights and therefore in favor of recognizing "illicit encampments" as *bidonvilles*.

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