

An Etymology of Slum Names

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Dharavi – Mumbai

In Nairobi, more than half of the population dwell on 18 per cent of the land. In Dhaka, more than 70 per cent are reduced to living on 20 per cent of the city's land. In Mumbai, 90 per cent stay on 10 per cent of the land; in one of the city's shanty towns, Dharavi, there are reportedly more than 300,000 people per km², which is six times as many as in downtown Manhattan. Seven people normally live in one house, which on the average is 1.8m x 2.4m. There are few places left where people want to live and little space left to occupy.

Makoko – Lagos

According to the municipal authorities this settlement with houses on stilts in Lagos Lagoon is illegal and to be demolished. According to the national authorities it has a long tradition as a fishing village and is to be preserved. I am going to Makoko to visit a floating school being built in the area. The settlement is accessible by canoe from the mainland section of the community. On arrival at the school I ask Segun Omodele, who is in charge of the construction site, about the recent decision by authorities to declare the school illegal and a target for demolition. He is not worried. He says this happens often because the authorities want to clear the land for sale. There is some hope and some fear, depending on who you talk to, that this spectacular floating three-storey school will be an exception to the rule.

Halong Bay – Vietnam

Halong Bay (the bay of the descending dragon) in Vietnam is an archipelago of about 2,000 islands. Only two of them are zoned for legal habitation, so most of the 2,000 residents have opted to live in floating communities. There are several floating villages in this vast archipelago, with dozens of houses in each of them, along with infrastructure, such as schools. Kiosk boats travel everywhere within the archipelago, transporting goods and services (including daily waste from the floating villages). These have attracted more attention from the visiting tourist boats and the Vietnamese authorities, wary of the country's tourism brand, are planning to move these communities to mainland.

Smoky Mountain – Manila

More than one-third of Manila's 12 million inhabitants are living in slums. In the documentary *Manila's Lost Children* (2008), Olivier Delacroix follows some of the children living in one of the world's largest open dumps, "Smoky Mountain". The landfill includes a shanty town with about 3,000 inhabitants, where authorities are completely absent and there is only one international aid organization engaged (it wishes to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals in a notoriously corrupt environment. In Manila, the most densely populated city in the world, it is a punishable offence to be homeless. Children, who make up a large percentage of those without formal residence, are hiding as best they can. Those who are caught end up in municipal detention centres, where they sleep in shifts, and in cramped quarters without mattresses or blankets. They are provided two bowls of rice a day, and no access to health care or education. They are usually released back into the streets, only to be detained again.

Mafrouza – Alexandria

In ancient times Mafrouza was one of the largest cemeteries in the Mediterranean region. In the 1970s, people began moving there from the south: 10,000 people came to live informally in the graves above and below ground. The cemetery was the subject of a documentary film, *Mafrouza – Oh la nuit*, by Emmanuelle Demoris (2007). The area has now been cleared by the city authorities and the residents moved to new housing 20km outside the city centre. The jobs, however, are still in the central region and the former cemetery residents find themselves using one-third of their wages, and a large part of their time, commuting. Mafrouza was just one such settlement; another, City of the Dead (Qarafa) in Cairo is a cemetery where an estimated one million people occupy "grave houses". The actual graves are used as tables or shelves, and clothes lines are hung between headstones.

Baia Mare - Romania

The Mayor of Baia Mare, a city of about 150,000 inhabitants, recently commissioned a wall to be built to separate the area to which the local Roma community had been forcibly relocated from the rest of the city. Shortly after he announced the plan, the Mayor was re-elected in a landslide victory.

Kibera – Nairobi

One of the world's largest slum communities, with about one million inhabitants, Kibera is arguably the world's most studied slum, not least because the headquarters of Habitat, the UN housing program, is located in the city. In August 2011, a census claimed that there were only 170,000 people living in Kibera. Representatives of Habitat disputed the claim, saying the Kenyan authorities were deflating the figures to suit the branded image of Nairobi as a centre of high-tech commerce. Yet, a former employee of the UN agency argued that Habitat and other NGOs operating in the area, had inflated the numbers in order to justify their work and to be able to harness more resources and funding.

Uros Islands – Peru

On floating islands in Lake Titicaca, nearly 4,000m above sea level, some 1,200 descendants of the Uro people, reside. The Uro have lived in this area since before the time of the Inca and are traditionally hunter/gatherers. Ten years ago the archipelago consisted of 35 floating islands in a shallow part of the lake. In the last 10 years the number of floating islands has nearly doubled, and have become, in some instances, a tourist attraction and thus a main source of income for the Uro. The islands are made of layer upon layer of totora, a type of reed. The inhabitants must constantly replenish the reed stock to avoid seepage and rot. Everything from the houses to furniture and boats are made from totora. It is also burned for heating and eaten. Local government is run by a parliamentary structure and tourism has become a main source of employment.

“who’s leg is that?” (ta’n l’ese?) or “ira” (swamp) in Nigeria

“poor villages” (vijiji) in Kenya

“ghettos” (shawl) in Eritrea

“houses built in moonlight” (tcharacka bet) in Ethiopia

“informal areas” (ashwaiiyat) in Egypt and Syria

“shacks” (imijondolo) or “chicken coop” (UmKhuku) in South Africa

“the location” (malocation) in Zimbabwe

“people settling anywhere” (ma ipa fela) in Botswana

“area for poor people” (mtaa wa maskini) in Zanzibar

“lost cities” (ciudades perdidas) in Mexico

“mushroom settlements” (poblaciones callampas), “marginal settlements” (poblaciones marginales) or
“camps” (campamentos) in Chile

“misery societies” (villas miseria) or “emergency societies” (villas de emergencia) in Argentina

“ranches” (ranchos) in Venezuela

“settlements” (asentamientos) in Guatemala

“invasions” (invasiones) in Ecuador

“communes” (comunas) in Colombia

“young towns” (pueblos jóvenes) or “human settlements” (asentamientos humanos) in Peru

“the precarious” (precarios) in Costa Rica-

“shacks” (chabolas) in Spain

“shantytowns” (kåkstäder) in Sweden

“it happened during night” (gecekondular) in Turkey

“shallows” (or “gutters”) (bassifondi) in Italy

“simulated cities” (bidonvilles) in France and other French speaking countries

“cardboard settlements” (kartosko naselje) in Serbia and Croatia

“barracks” (baraki) in Ukraine

“thicket” (trustsjoba), or “a poky hole of a place” (zocholustie/Захолустье), or “chrustjov-housing” (chrustjovka) or “back of beyond” (glusj/Глушь) in Russia

“slum area” (dzielnica slumsów) in Poland

“misery quarters” (Elendsquartier, Elendsviertel) or “poor quarters” (Armenviertel) in Germany

“non-urban neighbourhood” (mahala) in Romania

“illegal camp” (kachi abadi) in Pakistan

“very poor neighbourhoods” (mehla ryta) in Kurdistan

“filth neighbourhood” (mahalle-ye kasif), “poor neighbourhoods” (mahalle-ye faqirneshtin), “shack districts” (manteqe-ye alonakneshtin) or “neighbourhoods in the outskirts” (mahalle-ye hashiyeneshtin) in Iran

“principally poor district” (mahale fagher neshtin) in Afghanistan

“dirty areas” (kolache pradesha), “dirty settlement” (gallicha wasti), “our settlement” (machi wasti), “ramshackled huts” (jhugi-jhopdi) or “row of huts” (jhopadpatti) in India

“garden” (Watta) or “shanty settlement” (palpath) in Sri Lanka

“homeless people’s settlement” (sukumbashi basti) or “people without shelter” (ukumbashi) in Bangladesh

“town of thin people” (Saimingai), “pauper town” (Hinmingai), “area of bad residences” (Furyô jûtaku chîiki), “illegal occupation” (huho sengkyo), “gang of poor people” (hin min kutsu) or “on-the-road livelihood” (rojo seikatsu) in Japan

“congested community” (chum chon ae at) or “slum” (sa lam) in Thailand

“moon village” (daldongnae), “mountain village” (sandongnae), “settlement without permission” (Muhoga Chongchakji) or “village with cardboard houses” (panjachon) in South Korea

“anarchic settlement” (samnong anatepatai) in Cambodia

“settlement of rat’s houses” (khu nha o chuot), “temporary house” (Nhaa tam bo), “precarious house” (Nhaa lup xup), “house along the river” (Nhaa ven song) in Vietnam

“rights owned by the people” (Hak milik) or “illegal settlement” (kampong liar) in Malaysia

“village in a city” (chéng zhōngcūn), “dirty areas” (zàng luàn dì dìfāng), “alley” (Lòuxiàng) or “slum” (ping min ku) in China

“towns of rough cabins” (shanty towns), “back rooms” (slum) or “informal settlement of people with no legal title” (squatter camps) in the UK and English-speaking countries