

Reevaluating Slum Terminology: An Epistemological Critique of Urban Informality Ideas

Gecekondu Terminolojisinin Yeniden Değerlendirilmesi: Kentsel Gayriresmîlik Fikirlerinin Epistemolojik Eleştirisi

Rahman TAFAHOMI



Department of Architecture and Design, School of Architecture and Built Environment, College of Science and Technology, The University of Rwanda, Kigali, Rwanda



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Sorumlu Yazar/Corresponding author:
Rahman Tafahomi

E-mail: tafahomi@gmail.com,
rtafahomi@ur.ac.rw

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to examine the meaning, application, and effects of the term ‘slum’ in urban planning and development plans to discover the purposes behind this meaning. The problem is located in the extensively use the term without paying deep attention to the impression of the term as a negative prejudgment. Content analysis, logical argument, and interpretation techniques were applied in this research to analyze the genesis, publicizing, and advocating the meaning of the word technically. The results of research reveal that the meaning of the term slum was extracted from words with negative meanings and impressions to legitimize slum demolishing. Epistemological analysis reveals that the meaning of the ‘slum’ was centralized by operational centers to orient the attention to some physical improvement as upgrading rather than the solution. Despite the upgrading policies, the percentage of slum dwellers has increased. This study attained three trends in the definition of slum: formalists with orientation to physical specifications, pragmatists with a focus on operations and actions, and critical studies who endeavor in exposing the problems based on social and economic factors in the context. In conclusion, the slum phenomena spotlight broader development deficiencies in urban planning regarding the limitation of social and economic opportunities for public rather than the physical specifications of houses or areas.

Keywords: Slum, Epistemology, Meaning, Application, Critical Analysis, urban informality, critical urbanism, urban governance

ÖZ

Bu makale, kentsel planlama ve kalkınmada ‘gecekondu’ teriminin anlamını, uygulamasını ve etkilerini inceleyerek anlamların ardındaki amaçları keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Sorun, terimin olumsuz bir önyargı olarak izlenimine derin bir dikkat gösterilmeden aşırı kullanılmasında yatmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, kelimenin anlamının teknik olarak doğuşunu, duyurulmasını ve savunulmasını analiz etmek için içerik analizi, mantıksal argüman ve yorumlama teknikleri uygulanmıştır. Bulgular, gecekondu teriminin anlamının, gecekondu yıkımını meşrulaştırmak için olumsuz anlamlara ve izlenimlere sahip kelimelerden çıkarıldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Epistemolojik analiz, ‘gecekondu’ anlamının, çözümünden ziyade iyileştirme olarak bazı basit iyileştirmelere dikkat çekmek için operasyonel merkezler tarafından merkezleştirildiğini ortaya koymaktadır. İyileştirme politikalarına rağmen gecekondu sakinlerinin yüzdesi artmıştır. Bu çalışma gecekondu tanımında üç eğilime ulaştı: fiziksel özelliklere dikkat eden biçimciler, operasyonlara ve eylemlere odaklanan pragmatistler ve terimin sorunlarını ve gerçek anlamını ortaya koymaya çalışan eleştirel çalışmalar. Sonuç olarak, gecekondu olgusu evlerin veya alanların fiziksel özelliklerinden ziyade kentsel alanlardaki daha geniş gelişme eksikliklerine ışık tutuyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gecekondu, Epistemoloji, Anlam, Uygulama, Eleştirel Analiz, kentsel gayriresmîlik, eleştirel kentselcilik, kentsel yönetim

Introduction

Webster’s online dictionary reveals that the word “Slum” was applied as a noun in 1825 and as a verb in 1884 in literature (Webster, 2024). Webster mentions the etymology of the word as “Unknown”. The Online Dictionary about the “word history and origin” of slum mentions “1805-15; compare earlier argot slum room; origin obscure” (Dictionary, 2024). The Online Etymology Dictionary suggested that the term originated from a “back-room” with a low quality to live in the slang language of the people in the East End of London (OED, 2024). Seemingly, this meaning has been generalized from “back-room” to other areas, such as streets, districts, and even people who lived in such areas

over time. Although the source of the application of the term was unclear in the scientific literature, apparently emergence of the term was at the same time as the industrialization and the first movement of modernism in the 19th century. It is not just a coincidence time for slum areas and industrialization in cities to come together. However, regardless of the time, the term slum encompasses an epistemological meaning that has been known and understood by the public.

The definitions for the slum areas have been harmonized through official literature, particularly UN-Habitat. For example, the document that was supposed to define the slum area mentioned “since it first appeared in the 1820s” (UN-Habitat, 2007). However, it is not clear whether the document refers to the term slum or a specific slum area as a physical element in a specific location. The document referred to some specifications for a slum area, such as “low-income settlements”, “poor human living conditions”, “heavily populated urban area”, and “characterized by substandard housing and squalor”. These keywords are not analytical, philosophical, or epistemological. These specifications also do not demonstrate a deep insight into the critiques mentioned about informality and slum living. For example, Robinson (2014) criticized that poverty and informality have been inseparable components of the global south development, and Schmid (2008) highlighted that the social and political power produce both formal and informal parts of cities. Seemingly, listing the specifications of phenomena refers to technicalizing a matter rather than philosophizing.

Slum areas do not exist just in the global south cities; there are such areas in some countries in the global north as well (Ellicott, 2002). Gilbert (2004) warned that informality is going to increase in most cities in the world. In detail, the webpage of the World Bank Development shows that the population living in slum areas is still of great importance. The database points out some countries with high levels of slum areas including Afghanistan 73.3%, Angola 62.6%, Bangladesh 51.9%, Benin 67.9%, Chad 82%, Congo Democratic Republic 78.4%, Ethiopia 64.3%, Guinea-Bissau 60.8%, Liberia 63.9%, Madagascar 67.4%, Mauritania 56%, Mozambique 55%, Myanmar 58%, Pakistan 56%, Sudan 73.7%, and Uganda 54%, alphabetically (WBG, 2024). There is a long list of other countries with less than 50% that highlights the significance of the problem to know and discuss. The UN reported that the number of slum dwellers has increased, although the percentage decreased (UNDESA, 2024). According to the report of the World Bank Group, the level of the population of slum areas in some countries is still high despite the decreasing average rate.

These statistical numbers could support Parrillo (2008), who claimed that 75 percent of people live in crowded slum areas in developing countries. Importantly, the study criticized that all attempts for ‘upgrading’ failed (Mayne, 2023). The importance of the problem is located in the social and political context of the slum areas, making the definition multilayered rather than some physically homogeneous specifications. Peck (2017) mentioned that capitalism resulted in uneven development in the world, where the cities are ideological outputs of the policies (Wachsmuth, 2014).

The UN-Habitat highlighted the main reasons for the slum area as “rapid rural-urban migration”, insecure tenure, and “globalization” (UN-Habitat, 2007). They are not a new set of definitions. However, each set of definitions explains the level of understanding of the phenomena as Wang (2009) extracted from Popper (1959) and Kuhn (1962). In other words, each explanation about the specification and attitude of phenomena reflects our understanding and belief regarding time, space, and built

environment (Tafahomi & Chance, 2023). Accordingly, Sarup (1993) quoted from Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) that the ability of language is to be meaningful for a specific group but not for all. Seemingly, the attempts for the general understanding of slum phenomena do not portray a real image of it, and need to reframe the concept to understand. Titling ‘slum’ from ‘outside’ by those who do not live in the areas resulted in an unclear image of the concept, and still, there are doubts about the meaning of the “slum” (Harris & Vorms, 2017), which requires an epistemological lens.

Epistemology is defined as “the theory of knowledge” (Rescher, 2003, p. 14), “nature of knowledge” (Crumley, 2009, p. 19), or knowledge of knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), that explains the source of cognitions to form any kind of beliefs. The terminology of the epistemology encompasses two words: “episteme,” meaning “knowledge” and “understanding,” and “logy,” meaning “reasoning” and “argument” to prove or explain something. Nonetheless, the epistemology applied in philosophy in describing the varieties of cognitions among people (SEP, 2024). Prigge (2008) claimed that the urban phenomenon is an episteme to study. In the importance of epistemology, Kant claimed that prior knowledge is preceded by ontology (Holzhey & Mudroch, 2005). The process of the realization of knowledge takes place through different tools such as perception, observation, activities, and acknowledgement of others (Rescher, 2003). Each tool refers to the philosophical approach to select a device for knowing (Franz, 1994). Crumley (2009, p. 20) referred to the specific question as an epistemological question that can be quoted as “Do I really know it?”. Hetherington (2012) criticized that epistemology not only explains knowledge but also is formed through a new hypothesis or skepticism about knowledge. Seemingly, skepticism, criticism, and doubtfulness about terms and meanings lead to a new epistemological aspect of constructing knowledge.

For this reason, this paper attempts to draw an epistemological approach to analyze the term slum and the philosophical thoughts behind it based on meanings in the texts and application (Rumfitt, 2007). The paper will review mainstream approaches to the term slums, the predominant policies, and measures like slum clearance and upgrading to explain the current conditions of the policies and implementations in urban areas. It is a critical paper to analyze the conceptual meanings of the term to identify the gaps and consequences of the term in the built environment. Perhaps this paper could spur deep thinkers to start thinking about the concept profoundly, particularly the operational and administrative approaches that have faced this problem for a long time. Despite publishing this paper in an architecture journal, there is a hope to connect philosophical ideas and architectural activities to reshape architecture, urban planning, and design as a philosophical activity rather than a technical task.

In this regard, this research is looking to draw some questions, such as: What is the meaning of slum? When does it genesis? What does it demonstrate as a meaning? What aspects are in the meaning of the term? Who defines it, and who uses it? And did we understand the meaning correctly? To answer the questions, this paper is going to review the meanings of the term, analyze the meaning from different perspectives, and criticize the normative process of the definition of the term slum. So, the study attempts to do an epistemological excavation on the meanings; for this reason, the author invites the readers to follow the logical argument step by step to examine the meaning of slum from an epistemological lens.

Materials and Methods

This section discusses the related methodology, methods and techniques, research process, and data.

Methodology: A major part of studies applied a range of qualitative methods (Given, 2008; Tafahomi, 2022) to analyze meanings and applications of themes, terms, and topics in architecture and urban studies with different techniques such as historical research (Garrić, 2017; Kostof, 1995), content analysis (Crumley, 2009; Drisko & Maschi, 2016; Krippendorff, 2003), logical argument (Franz, 1994; Groat & Wang, 2002), storytelling (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; LeCompte, Dorothy, & Aguilera-Black, 2012), interpretation (Norberg-Schulz, 2019; Mugerauer, 1995; 2014), philosophical (Franz, 1994; Tafahomi, 2022; Wang, 2009), and epistemological research (Tafahomi & Chance, 2023; Wang, 2006). Despite the limitation of in each technique, they help conduct the research in alignment with methodizing and opting for an appropriate approach to addressing the research problem for various research topics (Wang, 2009).

The historical research was applied through an evidence-based approach to discover elements in specific locations to generalize the findings to other places and eras (Given, 2008; Groat & Wang, 2002). However, this style of generalization of the results was criticized fundamentally through postmodern philosophy and epistemology, such as Michael Foucault (1926-1984) through the source of knowledge and Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) based on paradigm shift theories (Tafahomi & Chance, 2023). Nonetheless, this technique was applied commonly in architecture (Kostof, 1995), urban planning (Chiarella, 2005), urban design (APA, 2006; Lang, 2005), landscape architecture (Chisholm, 2018), and other fields such as economy, education, and medicine (Foucault, 1972). The technique started with a wide lens of studies, currently focused on a specific era or location (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982).

The content analysis technique was applied to study the content of texts, images, languages, and maps to discover themes, topics, and meanings (Krippendorff, 2003; Schreier, 2012). The content analysis was always interlocked with some levels of interpretation, such as hermeneutic and phenomenology (Drisko & Maschi, 2016; Mugerauer, 1995). This technique was widely applied in studies on built environment topics. For example, Lang (2005) studied more than 50 urban design projects to discover similarities among the projects. Carmona (2001) conducted a comparative study through content analysis to highlight the qualities of urban design in housing projects in the UK. Another study applied content analysis to analyze the drawing of the students in the mapping process to highlight the perceptions of the users about topics, objectives, and purposes (Tafahomi & Nadi, 2021).

Logical argument and interpretation of texts, ideas, and theories were applied in many studies as a combination of techniques and theoretical studies (Tafahomi, 2023; 2024). Logical arguments are called as a process of knowing and understanding things and elements (Grimm, 2011). This technique has applied skepticism, criticism, and structuralism approaches to draw new perspectives for ideas (Gomez, 2003). Quante (2010) mentioned that all philosophical and epistemological studies include some aspects of storytelling in their logic. The logical argument is a common and normative approach in many studies (Wang & Ilhan, 2009). However, a major part of the studies preferred to apply analytical, descriptive, and positivist titles for this technique rather than normative (Bicchieri, 2016). The process of logical argumentation is constructed based on

reasoning, explanations, and comparisons (Tafahomi & Chance, 2023).

Research design, process, and data: According to the methodology, this study employed content analysis, interpretation, and logical argument to excavate the meaning of the term slum. The content analysis was applied to discover the meaning of the term in different documents, analyses, and reports on the slum meanings to open a possible understanding of the term. In addition, the logical argument was applied to explain, decode, and reveal the meanings of the term in different approaches, applications, and contexts. The interpretation technique was applied to expand the possible expression and impression of the meaning in texts for the formulation of the word.

The research process followed the following steps. First, this research analyzed the common definitions of the term slum to highlight the values behind the meanings. Second, the research reviewed the terminology, etymology, and semantic aspects of the term slum to expose the meanings. Third, the study examined the philosophical context of the term slum to discover the historical foundations. Fourth, the critiques of the philosophical aspects were discussed. Fifth, the methods of the definitions were analyzed. Sixth and last, an interpretation for the different approaches in the definitions of the term slum was developed.

All the data in the research were extracted and selected from literature and documents due to the topic and the availability of the operational and critical theories to show the contradictions and compatibility over time and content. The operational theories included the UN-Habitat guidelines and governmental reports; the critical theories encompassed the critical review and literature. In this regard, literature was a significant part of the data in this research.

Discussion on the epistemology of Slums

This section discusses possible multilayer analyses of the term slum through the common meanings of the word, technical meaning, historical background, skepticism, and the gap of knowledge about the term.

Insight into common definitions of slums

The Encyclopedia Dictionary for definitions of words such as poverty, shanty town, informal settlement, and low quality of housing referred to the term slum (Evert, 2010). This definition demonstrated all perceptions and beliefs about slums as a common ground. The definition of UN-Habitat was concentrated on the physical form of the slum areas and infrastructure rather than fundamental research on the historical genesis and development. In this way, Mazarro (2018) criticized that there is a trend among administrative departments to reduce slums to physical specifications. Nonetheless, the power and authority of the UN provided the ability to orient the purposes of definitions about the meanings of slum and the generalization to all locations. Table 1 presents not only the definition but also the implicit values.

Table 1 attempts to highlight the values behind each definition. Those definitions lead to actions for contractors, companies, and budgeting the interventions without clear results (Mayne, 2023; Parrillo, 2008). Despite the appearance of the contents, definitions, and keywords, the important aspects of the meanings of a term are located in the hidden values in each definition, which advocate other meanings and perceptions. When there are some terms to represent deficiencies, the

idealistic imagination will lead general readers to imagine the solved problems. However, solving problems refers to the structure of the formulation of the problem. According to Table 1, many values in the table were beyond the ability of dwellers to change the slum areas, there are broader factors in social, economic, and political constraints that lead the world to encounter more slum dwellers. Knowing the meaning requires linguistically analyzing the term.

Table 1. <i>Distribution of Institutes by Periods</i>			
Slum Specifications	References	Opposite meaning	Implicit values of the Meaning
Low-income settlements Poor human living conditions Heavily populated urban area Characterized by substandard housing and squalor	(UN-Habitat, 2006; UN-Habitat, 2007)	High income settlements High quality human living conditions Low density urban areas High quality of housing	Level of income Ability to buy goods and services Urban planning policies Construction quality
Unsustain buildings Social disorganization	Invalid source specified.	Standard buildings Organized society	Construction companies An ideal model for society
Slum Clearance	Invalid source specified.	City without slum	Formalism
Floating population	Invalid source specified.	Control population	Control the society life style
Bad housing quality Bad living quality	Invalid source specified.	High housing quality High living quality	Construction quality Ability to buy goods and services
Low quality of life	(OED, 2024)	High living quality	Ability to buy goods and services
Low quality of housing	(Evert, 2010)	High housing quality	Construction quality

Terminology, etymology, and semantics of the term “slum”

Terminology refers to the boundary of the meaning of a word that determines what aspects of understanding are included or excluded from the meaning. Webster mentioned two aspects of the meaning of the terminology: first, the technical word, and second, a special term in art or science (Webster, 2024). This technical term for a word has tended to be standardized and generalized. For this reason, the terminology of the term slum refers to the general definitions by official centers such as UN-Habitat about the physical specifications of slum areas. This standardizing trend of the definition attempts to technicalize the word as a specific term. Nonetheless, there are critiques on the terminology, such as unclear context and time (Foley & Valenzuela, 1994), reshaping the ethnography studies (Brady, 1994), and unclear boundaries for meanings (Turner, 2006).

Etymology refers to the origin, evolution, and meaning of a specific word or term across time and events. This field of linguistics studies how the structure of a word or term was formed, modified, and changed based on the different formats and the application in texts or verbal communication due to the historical context. There is also a problem in this part. Based on the definitions in dictionaries, there are more than three assumed roots for the slum, first, ‘slumber’ with the meaning of sleep and doze (Webster, 2024), and second, ‘slump’ with the meanings of

fall, crash, and recession (Oxford, 2024), the back-room in poor areas of living (OED, 2024), and even other meanings such as dishonest, waste, and mud (Oxford, 2024). The meanings represent negative images as perceptual aspects of the term in the minds of the people. Such negativity has resulted in a reaction to demolish and destroy it. In addition, Crystal (2008) emphasized that etymology faced a fallacy in translating the meaning of words, and there is a need to construct specific words in modern language to explain reality. Seemingly, the term slum is an outdated title for the new generations of the urban phenomenon.

Semantic studies refer to the system of logic and meaningfulness of a word or term in time and location based on sensing and referencing the users to the real image (Flew, 1979) as a sign to signify the meaning (Audi, 2015). Semantics is part of the system of logic and understanding of a word for communication (Crystal, 2008). For example, the word ‘apple’ creates an image from a real apple that we have observed, memorized, and linked with our understanding of reality. Pike (2016) mentioned that modernism tried to neutralize the meaning of slums as a new concept in urban planning. However, evidence demonstrated that the term slum is the result of the deficiencies in public services and recalls an image of a bad, poor, and dirty location with bad people that should be avoided. The semantic meaning of the word includes prejudgment, values, and social segregation, which is called the polarization of meaning in language (Sim, 2013).

Perhaps a philosophical example could open the discussion. There is an interpretation by Heidegger (1889-1976) for ‘building’ in terms of ‘to be in there’ and ‘dwelling’ and ‘dweller’ meanings refer to an intentional action ‘to be’ in a location and ‘to be’ part of the location (Vycinas, 1969). The ‘build’ word implies the creation and allowing to ‘be there’ and ‘to be part of the world’ (Schalow & Denker, 2010). Even the ‘building’ word ‘to be part of the world’ can appear in any aspect of the built environment, even cultivation and landscape (Collins & Selina, 2012). This epistemological interpretation by Heidegger illustrates how the meaning of words is rooted in history and human ontology. This meaningfulness of place and location in the world was also advocated by phenomenologist researchers such as Merleau-Ponty for perceptions (Landes, 2013), Norberg-Schulz for the home (2019), and Relph for places (2007). However, the term slum has negative connotations. In this regard, the meanings of slum represent the context and time of creation of the meanings. To know the word slum’s genesis, meaning, and application correctly requires portraying the era of the genesis of the word in time and context.

The philosophical foundations of the term slum

It is thought that the word slum appeared in 1815-25, and just 40th years later (1853-1870), the first mass action for the replacement of slum areas took place in Paris by Haussmann (Harvey, 2005). This practice took place just 5 years after the publication of the Manifesto by Carl Marx and 8 years after the Labor Condition report by Engels (1820-1895). It is of great importance to know the context of the term slum and the systematic reactions that took place as an urban development model and mechanism in the 18th and 19th centuries. To analyze the action, first, this section should explore the philosophical context of the era.

Such a massive reaction in the urban social group was rooted in the Enlightenment era (Dupre, 2004; Roche, 2000; Tafahomi, 2024). The Renaissance movement freed science and philosophy from the authority of the church in Europe (Fleischacker, 2013).

Following of Renaissance a new movement appeared in Europe named Enlightenment with key thinkers such as Francis Bacon (1561-1626) with empiricism and reasoning, Rene Descartes (1596-1650) with rationalism, methods for philosophy and epistemology, John Locke (1632-1704) with the theory of mind and social contract, Isaac Newton (1642-1726) with laws of nature and physics, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) with idealism, criticism, and skepticism. The Enlightenment movement resulted in demanding the explicit method, evidence, reason, and logic for any thoughts, knowledge, and beliefs (Roche, 2000; Schmidt, 1996). This cluster of thinkers constructed a theoretical foundation for Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) and his follower Karl Marx (1818-1883) to develop ideas about history and the process of understanding based on rationalism (Dupre, 2004).

Hegel was the key figure of modern philosophy (Bristow, 2007; Eddy, 2013). Titles such as Hegelianism and Hegelian school of thought (Fritzman, 2014; Hansen, 2009) refer to his effects on the philosophy, epistemology, phenomenology, interpretation, and dialectic (Pippin, 2010) through criticizing the predecessor philosophers, particularly Kant (Fleischacker, 2013). Hegel's idea about the philosophy of history was constructed based on German Idealism, which referred to the linear process of progress in history to a better situation as an ideal model of life in the future (Inwood, 1999; Magee, 2010). According to Hegelian idealism, the history of thought, humans, and society has been in progress through dialectical movements (Sinnerbrink, 2007). Hegel criticized the transcendental concept of Kant's theory (Thorpe, 2015), but he transformed the concept into the spirit of the time in terms of absolute (Quante, 2010). It means that while there are some backward steps in some sections of history, history always moves toward a better situation (Gron, 2009). The human development process is part of the essence of history, although there are some differentiations among societies due to social, economic, and development conditions (Hansen, 2009). Even wars, famine, or diseases are part of history to shape a better future through the state (Quante, 2010). A fine example of this idealism is *Faust Pome* (1831) by Goethe (1749-1832), which demonstrates the progress, achievements, and success of humans through different forwards and backwards in good and bad decisions. In this logic, all we do leads us forward as ultimate progress in history based on the spirit of the time.

Despite the sets of revolutionary ideas by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to change the world, they reconstructed the Hegelian dialectical idea and developed it into the history of social classes. They worked out a dialectical mechanism to transform the structure of society from a low quality to an ideal condition as a permanent law (Smith, 2010). The philosophical ideas were based on a linear system of progress in history that would result in an ideal society. They believed in dialectical situations to lead and transform the social, economic, and political foundations (Russell, 2004) regarding the philosophy of history, as predecessors such as Hume, Kant, and Hegel mentioned. In the earlier Marxist theory, poverty and wealth were necessary parts of dialectical history to accelerate historical movements for a better world. In this idea, when poverty is increased by both economic and social systems, the dialectical movement will be inevitable (Warburton, 2011). They believed in social action to boost the speed of history, which was formulated in the Manifesto published in 1848. Hegel and Marx acknowledged the role of key figures as facilitators in social and historical changes. However, Hegel emphasized self-consciousness through master-slave relationships in the process of historical change, but Marx advocated social class awareness.

According to the evidence, the first systematic study on the living conditions of the labor class was conducted by Engels in the UK (Green, 2008). He surveyed the areas based on his observation, documentation, and collected data to draw a picture of the Victorian cities and labor conditions. He applied the modern approach in philosophy to research on the topic based on positivism, evidence, method, and data. He wrote the book between 1842 and 1844, and it was published in 1845 and republished in 1877 to draw a new perspective on the specific cluster of society at that time. According to his work, industrialization did not result in better conditions for the labor class in the UK. According to his study, a major part of this labor class was combined with immigrants from villages who explored decent life conditions in the industrial zones (Hunt, 2009). His study referred to life in Europe rather than just the UK.

Based on the linear and progressive path in the philosophy of history in the 19th century, the first systematic and massive reaction to the slum areas took place in Paris in 1853, under the leadership of Georges-Eugene Haussmann (1809-1891), the Mayor, in terms of "renovation of Paris". Despite starting in 1853, the project was continued by other project managers until 1925 (Underhill, 2022). The main target of the project was to demolish the slum areas in Paris. The project targeted other objectives such as the construction of boulevards, new streets, removal the unhealthy areas, construction of squares, parks, and open spaces, and sets of governmental buildings (Harvey, 1985) based on the neoclassicism style of architecture under the predominate influence of Beaux Art (Griffin, 2022). Nonetheless, many photographs and drawings from the targeted areas illustrated that the living conditions in those areas, such as "aérer, unifier, et embellir", were much better than many slum areas in other cities. The term *Hussmannization* was coined in terms of a system for urban redevelopment under a specific philosophical approach. In this frame of thought, the elite believed that they knew, acted, and responded to the philosophy of history to develop the urban areas through the linear process of history toward the ideal form of society. This is an example of the assumption about the big-scale architecture to change the world by design (Lukasz, 2011).

The logic behind the relocation, displacement, removal, and cleaning of the slum areas for almost one century was the linear process of history to an ideal society based on the internal power of history as a progressive phenomenon due to the philosophy of history that was formulated by Hegel and advocated by Marx. In this theory, the administrative, political, and designer are the leaders who can change the path of history, can predict, make decisions, and generalize the results everywhere. Due to this theory, there were "Slum Clearance" policies in many countries for decades. However, all attempts to demolish slum areas failed (Mayne, 2023), and on the contrary, the number of slum dwellers is increasing (Parrillo, 2008).

In this regard, the linear progress path in history faced critiques from new generations of philosophers such as Carl Popper (1902-1994), Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996), Michael Foucault (1926-1984), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), and so on that have been part of the new era of critical thinkers after WWII that called as post-structuralism and Frankfurt schools of thought.

Critiques on the philosophy of history and the progressive path

The destruction of a major part of civilizations, cultural values, and theoretical beliefs in WWII challenged all schools of thought through criticism. Popper criticized the Newtonian theory for the construction of laws based on natural science in philosophy, knowledge, and thought (Proudfoot & Lacey, 2010).

He mentioned that theories are temporal statements due to the structure of the logic and agreements among users over periods of time. The theories cannot be approved, but they can be falsified through criticism. Popper claimed that all theories in science are logical propositions that can work until there is no contradicting evidence; if there is one, the falsification of the theory takes place. Therefore, there is no constant law in science, and so everything is a conventional agreement among people.

Kuhn also developed his theory based on a nonlinear way of progress in the history of science. His theory criticized the purpose-based progress in history in terms of the predominant spirit of the time that was advocated by Hegel and Marx. He argued that there are movements and replacements between clusters of theories in history due to time and place. This process of agreements and application of a new set of theories was entitled by him as “paradigm shift”. Despite clusters of meanings for paradigm (Tafahomi & Chance, 2023), Kuhn conceptualized a paradigm as a set of assumptions, beliefs, agreements, and applications of theories (Kuhn, 1962) based on ‘constructivism’ (Devitt, 2007) in specific times and locations among scientists. Paradigms are not easily replaced, but rather through revolutionary movements and challenges. The main reason for the replacement of paradigms was mentioned as a failure of existing theories to explain or solve problems. In this case, there is a significant shift from the existing paradigm to a new paradigm. The new paradigm fundamentally changes the sets of methods, approaches, and values among the users in a scientific field. Not all paradigms were progressive but regressive.

In the same alignment, Michael Foucault also criticized the predecessors’ assumptions about the philosophy of history. In the “Archaeology of Knowledge”, he rejected the linear concept of progress in history. He logically demonstrated a discontinuity and disconnection in every aspect of history (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). He revealed the process of formulation or construction of a certain knowledge with four fundamental gaps in the epistemological process, including object, modality, statement, and meaning. According to his theory, without harmony among components, the knowledge discourse cannot be achieved. For this reason, there are contradictory descriptions and explanations about the same theme, topic, or issue in science, knowledge, and philosophy. The history of history has shown that historians formulated the history processes regardless of the gaps between those elements through subjectivity (Foucault, 1972; Felluga, 2015). According to this gap, many issues, topics, and problems could not be explained by the current historical methods. The false methods were designed based on evidence in specific times and locations to generalize the results to the whole period and locations. Foucault continued his work to trace the relationships between power and knowledge. He mentioned that the power creates meanings for specific phenomena and controls the meanings of words, objects, and signs. The power produces knowledge and supports academia to produce fields of knowledge that the power could use, apply, and legitimize actions (Foucault, 1980; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). In this critique, the sign for discourse on slum areas was only physical specifications rather than a broader perspective in developing components such as social, economic, and political foundations.

In addition, Derrida criticized the application of the words in the same texts, contents, and documents with the same meaning. He mentioned that the meanings of language are temporal and change due to the context (Derrida, 1981). He revealed that the words have different meanings in the texts and among people. While the words pretend that they are clear for communication, they are not, and there are always some gaps between

understanding the words in different conditions (Jin, 2021). This specification of word, meaning, and application was mentioned by Heidegger first (Sarup, 1993). Derrida emphasized that each word has historical meanings as cultural products that it related to the context of the words and their application in the language, which creates privilege for words to predominate in their meanings. Each word includes chains of related words that show the meaning of the word through effects on the meaning of the original word (Derrida, 2013). For example, for the term slum, there are sets of words to mean the meaning of the slum, such as poverty, economy, income, salary, policies, politics, political, social condition, immigration, insurance, ownership, job security, family, survive, sustainability, stability, actions, house, home, dwelling, settling, location, and so many words to the slum phenomena. According to Derrida, without understanding the meanings of those words, getting the real meaning of slum is not possible.

As a summary, the structure of knowledge about linear, progressive, and purpose-based history toward an ideal form of society has changed through new thinkers who believed that all theories are logical propositions and temporally dependent on a certain time and location. This demonstrates an epistemological gap in the given general definition of the term “slum” in a variety of geographical, political, and social contexts. Furthermore, slum terminology would be useless without knowing the meaning of the chain of words related to this specific term, and people advocating it. Therefore, action-oriented terms such as demolishing, slum clearance, and upgrading reveal the hidden meaning of the term “slum”. This gap was also acknowledged by UN-Habitat (UN-Habitat, 2006).

The epistemological gap in the method

There are studies on the labeling of slums as a wrong concept. For example, King (2023) mentioned that people who live a low quality of life in villages were not called slum dwellers; however, in the city, they were called slum settlers. Harvey (1985) mentioned that urban land was the greatest production of the bourgeoisie in the modern era. It reveals that the application of the slum title has been a purpose-based action to lead the reader to the consequences. Oldfield (2014) criticized that there are many deficiencies in many aspects of political, social, and economic conditions; however, they were not entitled to slum conditions, in opposite, the consequences of those deficiencies in physical forms were called slum areas. In addition, understanding urban phenomena is not just a methodological activity but an epistemological discourse (Brenner & Schmid, 2015).

Studies highlighted that the slum areas have been the consequence of social aspects. For example, job markets, social segregation, immigration, displacement, marginalization, dispossession, deprivation, and many others were interlocked with slum areas historically and geographically (Mayne, 2023; Mazarro, 2018; Schmid, 2008). All these factors are part of the social, economic, and political systems under specific times and locations. For example, there are studies that highlighted informality and formality as inseparable parts of the economic system in many cities. Formality created informality, shadow, semi, and quasi-formality for more interests (AlSayyad, 2004; Roy, 2005; Tafahomi & Nadi, 2021).

The point was located on the definition of the slum areas based on the physical aspects and infrastructure to orient the lens of scholar to the way for short-term actions. Another analysis mentioned that the important aspects of the UN-Habitat have been an “operational definition” for action based on “physical

and legal aspects” (Mazarro, 2018). Despite the two verisimilar aspects, there are multiple layers of driving factors that lead to meanings and aspects. It seems that the problem was located in the epistemological structure of the formulation of the definition based on a structuralist approach.

Structuralism was one of the most common systems of study in the 19th century and was led by French philosopher Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009). This system of cognition and study was initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a linguistic philosopher who attempted to draw common elements in language, message, and structure of sentences. This methodological approach was celebrated by Strauss to study ethnographical and cultural aspects of societies (Given, 2008). In this approach, each structure encompasses elements and components that work together, and to study a structure, it should be divided into elements, subcomponents, and components to facilitate the process of the study. Structuralism focused on the most common elements in each structure to create connections between elements to form a wider understanding of phenomena (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). For example, demographic studies classify people based on their ages, gender, education, and occupation to discover common ground for the analysis of the specifications in a broader picture. However, each of those members of society in the demographic report differs from others based on the psychological, social, economic, and belief foundations. Nonetheless, structuralism has been a common ground for the social survey to find out the common elements in different locations to link them as a unique element with the same structure. Structuralism advocated a binary structure for understanding concepts (Sarup, 1993), something that is in, cannot be out, and something is out, cannot be in, and such as modern-unmodern, romantic-realistic, rational-emotional and so planned settlement-unplanned settlement, formality-informality, slum-developed area, and so on are binary examples of the structuralism.

For this reason, the physical specifications of slum areas have been a common picture in the definitions by the operational and administrative departments to specify and limit the issues to some common elements, structures, and systems that could be known through the visual specifications or law classification, such as tenure and legal aspects. This method of definition resulted in a standardization of the definition to generalize the application. Particularly, when the definition is supported by the powers (Foucault, 1980) such as political, operational, and administrative, such as UN-Habitat, the level of consensus on the definitions is increased based on the power of hegemony.

Nonetheless, a new source of criticism on the methods of structuralism targeted the relationships between phenomena and the context. They argued that knowing a word, text, object, or phenomenon is related to the system of power to create knowledge about the object (Foucault, 1980; Roudinesco, 2008). To analyze the object, the system of knowledge should be analyzed. This style of thinking encompasses an epistemological approach to discovering the meaning of objects. This cluster of critical thinkers targeted many consistent concepts in history, such as meaning, class, capital, and history, to challenge the existing theories (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). According to post-structuralism, the methodology for the analysis comes from the character of data, and so methods should be changed in different contexts.

For example, the study mentioned that slum areas and concepts have been related to the immigration from different locations to the cities for jobs and better living conditions based

on industrialization and mass immigration (Carver, 2003) and minority groups who lived in slum areas (Borgatta & Montgomery, 2000). However, the contradictory studies highlighted that African countries followed their patterns of development based on poverty, which resulted in increasing slum areas without industrialization processes (Bryceson, 2014; Buckley & Kallergis, 2014). This contrary cluster of studies emphasized the different meanings of urban phenomena from various perspectives. For instance, studies interpreted living in slum areas with different meanings such as contextual actions, people as infrastructure (Simone, 2004; 2010), meaning of public realm (Sebina & Koma, 2015), adaptation to the condition (Pieterse, 2010), contemporary aspects of cities (Avni & Yiftachel, 2014), and inseparable part of global south (Roy, 2005), and small scale actions (Tafahomi & Nadi, 2021).

In addition, Huchzermeyer (2011) revealed that the naming of the slum areas with other names, such as informal, unplanned, and unofficial settlements, has been an attempt to conceal the character of the areas, such as vibrancy, activities, and social and economic productivity. Oldfield (2014) argued that the slum areas are the result of the economic and political powers to form both formality and informality. For example, there is evidence that shows the budget for development and public services in the rich areas has been more than in poor areas (Sideris & Banerjee, 2007), and even the budget for the upgrading policies was too limited (Tafahomi & Nadi, 2021). It has resulted in the creation of uncertain conditions for the vulnerable groups in urban areas due to the social, economic, and political systems (Avni & Yiftachel, 2014; Simone, 2014).

Oliver (2006) criticized that many definitions we use in architecture and urban studies are wrong and cannot present the right image of the urban form, cultural values, and activities of people. This critique expanded the idea of Derrida in terms of knowing the meanings of words to know the chain of words that defines the meanings (Derrida, 2013; Roudinesco, 2008). The definition of the slum areas based on the official, standardized, and operational systems represents a centralized power to produce knowledge rather than a deep understanding of phenomena. The powers define what is right and wrong (Foucault, 1980; Hillier, 2002). Hetherington (2012) revealed that epistemology is a manmade procedure that could be designed and manipulated, and should make a differentiation between the concept of knowledge and epistemological knowledge.

An interpretation on the epistemological trends

This study discovered three schools of thought on definitions of the term slum, namely formalism, pragmatism, and criticism. First school, the formalist studies focus on the physical specifications to form a standard for all parts of the world. This group of studies has highlighted three major categories, including the buildings, infrastructure, and tenure in the slum areas. In this classification, they emphasize deficiencies of buildings such as instability, low quality of materials, small size of shelters, and crowded houses. Also, such kinds of lists refer to the insufficiencies in infrastructures such as roads, water supply systems, sewage systems, and health. The tenure topic concentrates on the ownership, subdivision of land, and banking system to allocate loans for the landlords.

There are four important problems with this perspective. First, this style of study makes contextual aspects doubtful due to the importance of the values of the forms and shapes rather than the sense for the dwellers. Second, this style follows a predominated standard for their ideal types that rejects

differentiations. Third, this approach tends to technicalize the forms rather than to open epistemological and ontological discourses (Prigge, 2008) in which this idea has facilitated the actions of authoritarians on dwellers of the areas. Fourth, the formalist cannot explain the case of the informality; however, the action-oriented centers use the data for problem solving based on the causality logic (Russell, 2004). In this respect, the study warned about the instrumentalization of knowledge and experts in the urban age with techno-scientific titles (Brenner & Schmid, 2015). Heidegger criticized such definitions as a wrong explanation of things. He pointed out that any person could define a thing; however, it is just a definition. The thing continues its existence out of the definition independently (Han-Pile, 2005). There is no universal definition for a thing. And so, the definition belongs to the definer and nothing else (Espinete, 2021). Merleau-Ponty revealed that the perception of things could differ, but it is dependent on who has the right to advocate it as a truth (Landes, 2013).

Second school, the pragmatist group prefers to advocate some action-oriented terms to deal with the formulated problems as problem-solving actions based on a techno-scientific approach (Bettencourt & West, 2010) rather than theoretical foundations (Brenner & Schmid, 2015). They take into account the problem as a detailed and technical matter to solve (Russell, 2004). For example, the first historical action for slum solution was applied as a “renovation project” and decoration project of Paris by Haussmann in France. Despite demolishing many districts and communities in Paris, the project kept its name as a renovation project. This model of development was repeated in many countries as an ideal model to deal with the slum areas as a technical approach for problem solving. Some radical terms in urban development, such as ‘slum clearance’, could also expose the real meanings behind the actions to delete the slum areas through replacement, relocation, and reconstruction. These groups of projects assembled the actions based on the budgeting through government, aristocrats, the king, or central authority, grounded on mobilizing people from the city to other areas, particularly periphery and suburban areas.

There is evidence to indicate that the minds of architects and planners have been engaged with the problematized concepts (Fainstein, 2015) to advocate the pragmatic actions in a market-oriented style (Atkinson, 2009; Slater, 2014). Continuously, the new generation of actions in urban planning has been concentrated on upgrading the slum areas, which Lang (Lang, 2005) mentioned in terms of “plugin” typology in urban design. The upgrading was innovated based on small actions in the slum areas with the local community in terms of participatory design to improve the living conditions in the process of time through loans and limited budgeting by municipalities grounded on the neoliberal economic system. This action-oriented definition allocates a small budget from national or international sources to improve the situation based on the same economic system. In this regard, the critique highlighted that this approach tended to depoliticize urban actions (Gleeson, 2014). In other words, the term upgrading encompasses an ideological consistency to avoid engaging with the social and economic reforms. The critiques of the positivist approach revealed that the purposes of those who define an object are part of the definition. A definer defines the meanings with all assumptions, beliefs, and values (Tafahomi, 2022).

Third school, the critical theoreticians criticize the philosophical and epistemological aspects of the theories and practices regarding knowledge (Lukasz, 2011; Prigge, 2008). This group analyzes the meanings of the term slum, slum areas, and

urban phenomena in their context (Brenner & Schmid, 2015). This group of theoreticians criticizes the meanings of the term and its application in language. For example, Gleeson (2014) highlighted that the urban age with an urban-centric approach created its ideology by repeating old terms, which keep us in the ‘black-boxed’ situation. Derrida (1981) mentioned that language and meaning are made up by users, and the meaning is never identical. Moreover, the structure of the text seems to be stable; however, there is no central meaning for words, and sentences and meaning is outside of the words and sentences. The structure and arrangement of words to explain an idea are rooted in the perceptions, values, and beliefs of the users (Crystal, 2008; Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Drisko & Maschi, 2016). In other words, the application of a word to express the meaning of a thing is rooted in the theory of knowledge about the thing (Wang, 2009). Many words, meanings, and terms are temporal and dependent on the time and location (Rumfitt, 2007; Sarup, 1993). Perhaps, there is an agreement on the meanings, assumptions, and beliefs of certain terms or words; however, there are some paradigms that could be changed, replaced, or demolished by new sets of paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2012). The power and authorities played a significant role in publicizing and generalizing certain theories among the public, scholars, and operators (Foucault, 1980; Hillier, 2002).

The opposite of the centralized definitions, the urban areas are a result of the everyday production and reproduction by people to form space and place based on development-driven factors such as social, economic, and political systems (Lefebvre, 2009; Schmid, 2008). Words such as slum include social, economic, and political equivalents in the perceptions of the general public that were never exposed by the authoritarians (Lukasz, 2011). The space such as slum areas is a social, cultural, and economic production by people to challenge political decisions (Lefebvre, 1991; Prigge, 2008), in which the public space changed based on the interaction between people, activities, space, and thing (Lefebvre, 2010) to reshape the forms and functions based on temporal applications (Tafahomi & Nadi, 2021). The term slum implies the broader problems in development processes rather than poor physical quality in an area. There are many critiques of the urban-centric ideology (Robinson, 2014; Roy, 2009), which challenge the theories as prototypes (Parnell & Robinson, 2012) to generalize the results in other countries (Roy & Ong, 2012). The generalization of the ideology resulted in legitimizing the ‘neoliberalism proposal’ for built environment interventions (Brenner & Schmid, 2015). However, there is no global, general, unique theory on urban phenomena (Mabin, 2014; Peck, 2015; Schmid, 2015).

Conclusion

The term slum signifies a negative image based on the etymological background and its context in the 19th century to represent a low standard of living condition. The meaning targets the dwellers as the problem rather than contextual geopolitical deficiencies. The term slum, with a centralized meaning based on power, has changed the general perspective from the real life of people in cities to purpose-based actions in demolishing or upgrading policies and actions. It advocates specific views without transparent philosophical questions and epistemological discovery, therefore, it is an ideological term to advocate actions. This assumption has resulted in many surface studies, guidelines, and recommendations without fundamental changes. The term ‘slum’ conceals social, economic, and political discriminations. The term wrongly dictates the dwellers as opportunists who intentionally want to live in poor-quality areas. However, living

in slum areas is not a personal selection but a force-driven action. There is a mechanism that pushes people to be part of the marginality.

A centralized definition of the term slum area misleads the public into paying attention to the cases. The main reason for slum areas is located in the social, economic, and political deficiencies rather than the dwellers. People who live in the areas are fighting for the uncertain conditions based on the political problems in the countries. The centralized definitions and actions have changed the orientation from the problem to surface mitigation and vanity projects. Such definitions keep the problem as a central topic for studies, budgeting, and implementations that the problem will never be solved due to shallow studies.

Slum, informal, or unofficial settlements refer to dwellers who have been excluded from the general process of development in countries. These meaningful words celebrate the insufficient social, economic, and political systems that run the cities based on discrimination. Negative labeling has legitimized the authoritarians to deal with phenomena in a similar process to improve the condition rather than solve the problem.

Urban planning, design, and development projects must develop policies and strategies to engage the general public more effectively, improving the quality of social, economic, and political life through new sets of laws and regulations to enhance urban life for users. The people's rights, an active-participatory and inclusive approach in design, could lead to solutions in a democratic and open society for decision-making processes. Otherwise, urban planning will lose its ability to plan cities for a better future, and the result will be dysfunctionality of urban structures and functions.

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