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## **Rethinking the category of “slum”. From Damascus to Yangon, precarious settlements through the prism of urban policies**

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Since slums and precarious settlements have existed, public authorities have been trying to make them disappear and halt their growth. Everywhere, policies, laws, programmes and projects have sought to keep pace of this urbanisation in order to reduce it or integrate it into the formal city. The United Nations took up the issue of “inadequate housing” as early as 1965,<sup>1</sup> and then “slums and uncontrolled settlements” in 1970.<sup>2</sup> As from the 1976 first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, today known as Habitat I, they invited policy makers to recognise this urbanisation, and upgrade, regularise and anticipate it. Since its creation in 1978, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements– now UN-Habitat – has been financing programmes in line with internationally formulated injunctions such as the Millennium Development Goals (2000)<sup>3</sup> and the Sustainable Development Goals (2015).<sup>4</sup>

Yet informal urbanisation has expanded at a faster pace. Policies have sometimes had significant effects, but they have neither cleared these settlements nor halted their growth. Although, according to the United Nations (UN), the proportion of inhabitants in these settlements dropped from 46% to 32% of city populations between 1990 and 2010 – the definition for calculating this has also changed in the meantime –, and although millions of residents in such settlements have seen their situation improve, their absolute number continues to increase and slums are re-appearing in regions where they had disappeared, like in France. Moreover, counting their numbers is no easy task, as each country has its own definition of slums and what is urban. Yet, estimates show that at least a quarter of city dwellers now live in precarious settlements, equivalent to nearly 1 billion people, and that

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution of the General Assembly, 2036 (XX), 7 December 1965.

<sup>2</sup> Resolution of the General Assembly, 2718 (XXV), 15 December 1970.

<sup>3</sup> “Achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers” out of the 800 million identified at the time (MDG 7, target D).

<sup>4</sup> “Upgrade slums” (SDG 11, target 1).

urban populations are set to double by 2030.<sup>5</sup> This means that, now more than ever before, precarious settlements are the urban future for millions of people, and policy makers need to integrate the reality of this growth.

Why have fifty years of national and international interventions not made it possible to eliminate these settlements or halt urbanisation that fails to comply with laws, regulations and standards? In fact, what needs querying are the underlying assumptions of this question. First, the idea that precarious settlements *are* the problem. Of course, they do *pose* problems, above all for their residents, but for many decades they have also been recognised as solutions.<sup>6</sup> Next, the idea that policies intervene in spaces whose existence ontologically preceded them: these settlements are assumed to exist first, and then come the policies to deal with them. Yet, the relationship proves to be more complex. Not only do these settlements constitute the flipside of urban planning and land policies, as they emerge in the spaces where these policies have failings and limitations,<sup>7</sup> but their very existence is the direct consequence of the history of political constructions of categories of the precarious city.

In a critical historical perspective, this article<sup>8</sup> proposes a reflection on what constitutes a “slum”, based on the analysis of interactions between urban policies and the inhabitants who do not comply with their projects and injunctions. The category of “slum” is produced, regulated and perpetuated by legal, regulatory and/or administrative decisions that delineate the spaces to be eliminated according to a vision of what the city should be. In addition, the representations on which these policies are founded are at the root of their limitations. Moreover, the sheer variety of these spaces, deemed by public authorities to be “not urban enough”, obliges the authorities to classify them and reserve different fates for them, while the increasing influence of residents’ organisation is spurring public action to evolve. Finally, a diversity of urban policies is today redefining *de facto* the category of “slum” and encouraging a new way of thinking about the informal city, and more broadly about the urban phenomenon.

## **From slum to precarious neighbourhoods**

Defining what constitutes a slum is a difficult task. *Mocambos*, slums, *favelas*, *colonias*, *bidonvilles*, *kyu kyaw*, *mukhālafāt*, *bastis*, etc.: from sub-standard housing to undesirable settlements, the official definitions of what is generically categorised by international institutions and research as informal, irregular, unregulated or under-integrated settlements,

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<sup>5</sup> UN-Habitat, *Urbanization and Development: Emerging Futures. World Cities Report 2016*, Nairobi, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> John F. C. Turner, *Housing by People. Towards Autonomy in Building Environments*, London, Marion Boyard Books, 1976.

<sup>7</sup> Valérie Clerc, *Les quartiers irréguliers de Beyrouth, une histoire des enjeux fonciers et urbanistiques de la banlieue sud*, Beirut, Presses de l’Ifpo, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Based on examples mainly drawn from research fields in Lebanon, Syria (before 2011), Cambodia, Myanmar and India. Unless indicated otherwise, the studies concerning these five countries are based on the author’s research fields.

slums, *bidonvilles*,<sup>9</sup> or even subaltern urbanism,<sup>10</sup> metropolis nonformal<sup>11</sup> or precarious neighbourhood<sup>12</sup> are always *local* definitions and the growth of these settlements is the result of a localised urban history. Residents, such as Maly in Phnom Penh, for example, rightly speak of living in a “not very *normal*” neighbourhood.<sup>13</sup> Certainly, everywhere, these settlements can be defined as being *outside local institutional standards* (laws, property ownership laws, urban planning rules, plans, etc.). UN-Habitat also defines them relative to urban standards – inadequate housing and basic services – and their marginalisation by the public authorities.<sup>14</sup>

Attributing a generic designation to these precarious urban settlements<sup>15</sup> does not gather them into a uniform category since they cover a wide range of legal, social, real-estate, morphological, land, infrastructural or security situations: from sheltered beggars to the landlord government worker, from a rustic shack to a block of flats, from a web of narrow and densely interwoven streets to a regular road grid, from the squat on public land to the ownership of agricultural land, from the absence of infrastructure to its presence, from the threat of immediate expulsion to temporary security of tenure, from a situation of exceptions to widespread occurrence depending on the city or country (around 90% of city dwellers in Sudan or the Central African Republic<sup>16</sup>). The category is relative, constructed in relation to a specific context. What distinguishes it from the rest of an agglomeration is vague, as formal and informal land and real-estate dynamics are intermingled.<sup>17</sup> This autonomous urbanisation<sup>18</sup> is incremental, meaning that its construction is gradual and reverses the

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<sup>9</sup> Before becoming generic, the terms “*bidonville*” and “slum” denote local situations, as in Morocco, Algeria or France for the first, and in the United Kingdom or India for the second.

<sup>10</sup> Ananya Roy, “Slumdog Cities: Rethinking Subaltern Urbanism”, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Christian Werthmann and Jessica Bridger, *Metropolis Nonformal*, San Francisco, Applied Research and Design Publishing, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Agnès Deboulet (ed.), *Rethinking Precarious Neighborhoods*, Paris, AFD, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Maly, a resident of a so-called “informal” district of Chamkar Mon, Phnom Penh, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> A slum is “a contiguous settlement where the inhabitants are characterized as having *inadequate* housing and basic services. A slum is often *not recognized* and addressed by the public authorities *as an integral* or equal *part of the city*.” (author’s italics). The UN Expert Group Meeting that adopted this definition in 2002 characterised these neighbourhoods through five components: insecure tenure, inadequate access to safe water, inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructure, poor structural quality housing, overcrowding, and insecure tenure” and established criteria to measure these inadequacies (UN-Habitat, *The Challenge of Slums*, London / Sterling, Earthscan, 2003, pp. 10 and 12). Since 2009, the insecure tenure criterion is no longer measured. In 2016, the UN’s *New Urban Agenda* does not refer only to slums but “slums and informal settlements”.

<sup>15</sup> The term “precarious settlements”, which this article uses in preference to “slums” relates at the same time the fragility of dwellings, the social, economic and environmental difficulties and residential insecurity of these neighborhoods. Valérie Clerc, “An outcry against informality. The impact of land on the treatment of precarious settlements, as spaces of political competition” in *Re-thinking Precarious Neighborhoods*, Agnès Deboulet (ed.), Paris, AFD, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> UN-Habitat, *op. cit.*, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Valérie Clerc, “Du formel à l’informel dans la fabrique de la ville, Politiques foncières et marchés immobiliers à Phnom Penh”, *Espaces et Sociétés*, no. 143, ERES, 2010/3.

<sup>18</sup> John F. C. Turner, *op. cit.* and Valérie Clerc, Laure Criqui and Guillaume Josse “Urbanisation autonome, pour une autre action urbaine sur les quartiers précaires”, *Metropolitiques*, 7 December 2017.

successive phases of a planned city – occupation, construction, infrastructure, land titles, land divisions, urban plan. Many residents, however, do not participate in this process and have simply bought a dwelling that they could afford. Stigmatised as the dark, poor and insalubrious side of the city, this autonomous urbanisation has been widely documented over the last fifty years as dynamic, mixed, heterogeneous, evolving, dense and diverse, even potentially sustainable and adaptable to climate change.<sup>19</sup>

### **Urban planning and land policies are the underlying drivers of this category**

Precarious settlements are rooted in the public action that creates this category. Urban planning already existed in the Bronze Age,<sup>20</sup> but it developed in the 19th century as a struggle against urban insalubrity and the desire for an orderly spatial organisation of urban areas.<sup>21</sup> Since then, widely disseminated hygienist and functionalist theories of progressive urban planning<sup>22</sup> have placed unsanitary and dilapidated constructions among the housing to be eradicated, in both the Global South and Global North. Precarious neighbourhoods and buildings are identified as urban categories to be eliminated or transformed. In 1938, under the influence of an elite concerned with modernity, the city of Recife organised Brazil's first major campaign to eradicate the *mocambos*, the traditional self-built rustic shacks which had until then been viewed as a normal feature of the urban landscape, but thereafter associated with under-development, disease and high mortality rates.<sup>23</sup> Planning and policies (laws, standards, regulations, plans, programmes, projects) imposed rules. In doing so, they defined the contours of the neighbourhoods that did not comply with the rules to try to make them fit the urban, social and spatial standards. As progressive urban planning organised spaces to accommodate the 20<sup>th</sup> century's high urban growth, they stigmatised and brought precarity to whole swathes of the cities.

At local level, the contours of these neighbourhoods can change in line with the evolution of official definitions, giving them legal or illegal status. This was the case in Syria, for instance, with the definition of buildings “in violation” (*mukhālafāt*). Law 44 of 1960, which required the destruction of buildings that were built outside the limits of master plans or on state land, “degrade the landscape” or risked collapse (characteristics assessed by a technical committee), was modified by the laws of 2003 and 2008, which added the criteria of violating the master plan and building in expropriated and non-constructible zones – the ugliness criterion was dropped in 2008. In Cambodia, in the absence of town planning regulations, land had been

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<sup>19</sup> Valérie Clerc, “Du changement climatique aux quartiers informels durables : une nouvelle vision stratégique pour les villes du Sud ?”, *Cahier des IFRE*, no. 1, November 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Corinne Castel and Sébastien Gondet, “Prospection géophysique à al-Rawda et urbanisme en Syrie au Bronze ancien”, *Paléorient*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Ildelfons Cerdà, *Teoría general de la urbanización*, 1867.

<sup>22</sup> Françoise Choay, *L'urbanisme, utopies et réalités. Une anthologie*, Paris, Seuil, 1965.

<sup>23</sup> Brodwin Fischer, “A Century in the Present Tense, Crisis, Politics, and the Intellectual History of Brazil's Informal Cities”, in Brodwin Fischer, Brian McCann and Javier Aureyo (eds), *Cities from Scratch: Poverty and Informality in Urban Latin America*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2014.

redistributed as private property between 1989 and 2001, following the periods of Khmer Rouge collectivisation (1975–1979) and Vietnamese socialist occupation (1979–1989). This led to the resurgence of informal settlements in places where the most recent arrivals settled on land that had in the meantime been banned from private ownership (roadsides, river banks, public land). Categorisation may also depend on a simple political decision supported by local technical administrations, such as the 2017 decision of the Yangon Region Government (Myanmar) to count all *kyu kyaw* (slum) households and identify them by attributing to them a smart card with a QR code. The decision instructed the decentralised local authorities and the party's local sections to select those dwellings to which the application forms for the smart card were to be distributed.

Paradoxically, these legal definitions are not always adapted to the urban policies that require them. In Syria, the violations or absence of building permits is defined for *buildings*. For programmes to provide amenities to precarious *neighbourhoods* during the 1980s and 1990s, the administration used the unofficial definition of collective infraction areas (*manāteq al-mukhālafāt al-jāmia*), or anarchical areas (*'ashwā' iyyât*), which group together constructions without permits – excluding comfortable villas. Ill-adapted, even counterproductive, policies based on arrangements and political, territorial or economic land-use strategies help to perpetuate and increase the number of neighbourhoods that they prohibit, producing what Gautam Bhan calls planned illegality – an illegality which “is not outside planning, [but] is part of its logics, conceptions and practices”.<sup>24</sup>

### **From one form of precarity to another – are policies evolving?**

As a result, policies intervene in the areas that they have largely helped to create. They deal with the different forms of precarity that they have superimposed by designating them under one category – insecure tenure and lack of amenities. Precarity per se and the precarity produced by official categorisation are rarely explicitly distinguished in policy documents, which often simply recommend the same exclusion-creating processes with new deadlines. The Syrian law of 2008 allowed for regularisation until that date, but renewed the same prohibitions, adding prison sentences for their violation, including for administrative officials who fail to demolish buildings in violation. This is the paradox of an urban planning system that seeks to use the same toolbox to deal with the city that by definition escapes it. Today, policies sidestep this paradox in three ways: by *re-examining the regulations and standards* that create these dysfunctions, by *distinguishing between different types of precarity* – the city that escapes planning versus insalubrious or dangerous spaces – and above all, beyond the recurrent call for participation, by *integrating the dynamics driven by the residents*.

Is it a question of eliminating precarious spaces or eliminating the precarity of these spaces? Two types of policies are at odds here: displacing the inhabitants to build new projects, or keeping them on site and rehabilitate existing neighbourhoods. Prevailing representations steer the choices made, the foremost representation being the way in which the value of land

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<sup>24</sup> Gautam Bhan, “Planned Illegality, Housing and the ‘Failure’ of Planning in Delhi: 1947–2010”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 48, no. 24, June 2013, p. 61.

is assessed, whether this be in terms of usage value or financial value.<sup>25</sup> Globalisation and the financialisation of real estate have heightened competition for city-centre land and come down in favour of evictions,<sup>26</sup> as does the construction of large-scale infrastructure. Natural disasters (Porto Rico) and war (Syria) are arguments for not rebuilding these destroyed central informal neighbourhoods. Forced evictions are still common and denounced by the international platforms and organisations for the protection of human rights,<sup>27</sup> but the millions of forced evictions of residents have only caused their resettlement elsewhere, in even greater poverty.

Poorly serviced land is sometimes made available, but this precarious situation often persists for a generation. Sites-and-services schemes financed by international institutions in the 1970s (Africa, India) have proved difficult to replicate.<sup>28</sup> The new towns created around Yangon to house 500,000 inhabitants evicted from the slums (1990s) and some resettlement sites in Phnom Penh (2000s), located at the time on agricultural flood-prone and unserviced areas far from places of employment and sociality, have today been assimilated into the urban fabric, but were often initially abandoned as people returned to the city centre. With the objective of “cities without slums”, the eponymous Moroccan programme delivered suburban dwellings for 250,000 households (2004–2015), with a third-party construction partner.<sup>29</sup> At Bangkok and Phnom Penh, land values spurred land-sharing between residents and developers who committed to building dwellings, the sale of which allowed the residents to be rehoused onsite free of charge. Since 2015, the Indian PMAY programme has implemented this formula on a large scale, despite the limits of social inclusion.<sup>30</sup> Finally and more recently, large-scale low-cost housing operations, located in distant peripheral areas or subsidised by the provision of public lands, present an alternative private offer: 3 million dwellings in Brazil (*Minha Casa, Minha Vida* programme, 2008–2014), and 20 million dwellings planned in India (*PMAY Housing for All*, 2015–2022). However, without services, shops or public transport, massive housing developments have been abandoned, as is the case in Mexico.<sup>31</sup> While they offer security and improved construction, all these programmes endeavour to solve the urban question through housing alone, but they often forget the importance of including diverse land uses or neglect the key role of domestic or professional uses of public space in the new neighbourhoods.

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<sup>25</sup> Valérie Clerc, “An outcry against informality. The impact of land on the treatment of precarious settlements, as spaces of political competition”, in Agnès Deboulet (ed.), *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> Valérie Clerc, “A competition for Land, Policies towards Informal Urban Settlements in Cambodia, from regularization to eviction”, in Jean-Clade Bolay, Jérôme Chenal, Yves Predrazzini (ed.) *Learning from the Slums for the Development of Emerging Cities*, New York, Springer, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> UN-Habitat, “Forced Eviction”, *Fact Sheet*, no. 25, United Nations, 2014.

<sup>28</sup> UN-Habitat, *The Challenge of Slums*, *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> Olivier Toutain, “Financer le relogement des bidonvilles au Maroc”, *ideas4development.org*, 2014.

<https://ideas4development.org/en/involving-third-party-partners-to-finance-rehousing-morocco-slum-dwellers/>

<sup>30</sup> Véronique Dupont, “Un défi majeur des villes indiennes : l'accès à un logement convenable”, *Bulletin de l'Association des géographes français*, no. 94-1, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Catherine Paquette, “Des villes durables dans le Sud : une utopie ? Réflexions à partir de l'Amérique latine” in Caron P. and Chataignier J.-M., *Un défi pour la planète, Les objectifs de développement durable en débat*, IRD, 2017, p.151-161.

On the contrary, upgrading policies recognise this urbanisation and its urban and social fabric. Since the 1970s, projects have abounded, mobilising non-governmental organisations and international institutions, to provide secure land tenure, safe water, drainage, sanitation, electricity, lighting, paved roads. Yet, these also have their limits: complexity, distortions created in the local property market, or delays hindering their wider application. Major achievements have required long-term political action, as in the case of the Kampung Improvement Project in Indonesia, where neighbourhoods housing 5 million people as from 1969 have been serviced; the almost uninterrupted succession since the late 1970s of national programmes to rehabilitate Tunisia's precarious neighbourhoods – including 600,000 inhabitants since 2012; and the policies to provide services to Indian slums between the late 1980s and 2011.<sup>32</sup> Despite major programmes such as those in Peru (1.6 million land titles distributed between 1996 and 2006), regularisation is generally long, costly and induces gentrification and market-driven evictions.<sup>33</sup> Collective property reduces such effects, as in Quito, where 72% of informal settlements were “formalised” between 1978 and 2016 by registering land in the name of neighbourhood associations. These projects require residents' participation, co-financing and involvement of the authorities, as also conceptualised by UN-Habitat's Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme, which states that since 2008 it has helped improve the lives of 22 million people in Africa and the Pacific.<sup>34</sup>

However, while recognising the autonomous city, these programmes persistently produce it by maintaining the process of “irregular settlement then regularisation”. In Mexico, for instance, the regularisation phase begun in 1974 (distribution of 2.5 million land titles over thirty years), the 1992 law on communal lands (*ejidales*) enabled neighbourhoods to be certified under collective ownership, but did not lead to a momentum for people to settle directly in a legal manner.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, slum dwellers in many cities anticipate this by building informal urban structures that can be regularised. Also, past irregularity continues to be a marker – in Delhi, there is a settlement category known as a regularised-unauthorised colony<sup>36</sup>. Finally, security of tenure remains dependent on shifting government objectives. In Rio de Janeiro, the Favela-Bairro rehabilitation policy (1995–2005) succumbed to a fresh wave of evictions for the hosting of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games – 80,000 people evicted in 2015.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Arun Kumar Mishra and Shubagato Dasgupta “Evolution of National Policies for Basic Services, Affordable Housing and Livelihoods for the Urban Poor”, in Prakash Mathur (ed.) *Inclusive Urban Planning – State of the Urban Poor Report 2013*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Valérie Clerc and Virginie Rachmulh, “Les marchés fonciers et immobiliers des quartiers informels à Phnom Penh, Cambodge”, *Coopérer aujourd'hui*, No. 50, GRET, November 2006, and Alain Durand-Lasserve, “Market-driven eviction and displacements: implications for the perpetuation of informal settlements in developing countries” in Huchzermeyer M. and Karam A., *Informal Settlements, a Perpetual Challenge?* Cape Town, UCT Press, 2006, pp. 207-230.

<sup>34</sup> Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP), PSUP Achievements, <https://unhabitat.org/urban-initiatives/initiatives-programmes/participatory-slum-upgrading/>

<sup>35</sup> Jean-François Valette, “Le rôle des organisations sociales dans la régularisation des quartiers illégaux de la périphérie de Mexico”, *Autrepart*, No. 66, 2013/3.

<sup>36</sup> Gautam Bhan, *op. cit.* and <https://www.cprindia.org/sites/default/files/policy-briefs/Categorisation-of-Settlement-in-Delhi.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Janice Perlman, “Re-thinking precarious neighbourhood: concepts and consequences or marginality”, in Agnès Deboulet (ed.), *op. cit.*

## Urban categories being redefined

Unplanned cities have always existed alongside planned cities and not all the neighbourhoods they produce are precarious. However, in less than a century, the incremental city has had less and less legal space for expansion. It has been made illegal in the name of the fight against precarity, the public authorities' need to organise rapid urbanisation and the intrinsically political dimension of urban-planning options. Social movements and critical academic literature call for the deconstruction of these three rationales. The neo-liberalisation of cities has spurred the re-emergence of Marxist theses<sup>38</sup> and the notion of the right to the city,<sup>39</sup> disseminated both internationally in the *New Urban Agenda*<sup>40</sup> and in local associations – as in Yangon, for example. To legitimise the incremental city, some are rejecting the call for “cities without slums”, and demanding rather “cities *with* slums”,<sup>41</sup> viewed as alternative spaces of the counter-culture, rebellion and innovation that are necessary to urbanity<sup>42</sup> and whose informality is seen as harbouring a wealth of urban resources.<sup>43</sup> Avenues are being explored to reconsider regulations and standards, such as the idea of planning the informal<sup>44</sup> or the idea of rethinking ownership in terms of urban land commons for housing.<sup>45</sup>

Lastly, public authorities are seizing the opportunity offered by the growing importance of proactive resident groups in order to take existing dynamics on board. Today, international slum networks, organised into thousands of community-based savings groups, produce knowledge on their neighbourhoods (mapping, self-surveys and enumerations) and fund upgrading projects. This is the case of Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI, 14 million members in 488 cities and 33 countries) and the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR, 1.5 million members) with the Community Architects Network (CAN). They work with local authorities, as in Thailand's national Baan Mankong programme, which has enabled the upgrading of two-thirds of the country's precarious settlements.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, Verso Books, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Henri Lefèvre, *Le droit à la ville*, Paris, Anthropos, 1968; Marianne Morange and Amandine Spire, “Mise en ordre, mise aux normes et droit à la ville : perspectives croisées depuis les villes du Sud”, *Métropoles* [online], no. 21, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Valérie Clerc and Agnès Deboulet, “Quel *Nouvel Agenda urbain* pour les quartiers précaires ? La fabrique des accords internationaux sur l'urbanisation pour la conférence Habitat III”, *Métropoles*, HS2018, 2018 (online) and UN-Habitat, *New Urban Agenda*, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Marie Huchzermeyer, *Cities with “Slums”. From Informal Settlements Eradication to a Right to the City in Africa*, Claremont, UCT Press, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Janice Perlman, *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> Rafael Soares Gonçalves, “L'informalité comme ressources urbaine ? Le cas des favelas de Rio de Janeiro », *EchoGéo* no. 39, January-March 2017.

<sup>44</sup> “Planning for informal settlements?”, Training event at the 2014 World Urban Forum in Medellín.

<sup>45</sup> Claire Simonneau, *Communs fonciers urbains. Étude exploratoire des dispositifs collectifs d'accès et d'usage du sol dans les villes du Sud global*, Paris, “Foncier et développement” technical committee, AFD, MEAE, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> See “Baan Mankong Collective Housing”, on the website [codi.or.th](http://codi.or.th); and the website of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, [achr.net](http://achr.net)

Finally, alongside a reflection on the contours of what constitutes the “precarious settlements” category in research work or popular discourse,<sup>47</sup> this analysis through the prism of urban policies questions the relevance of the reasons for a spatialised semantic separation from the rest of the city. While urban planning still generally seeks to resolve social questions by spatial solutions, if we shift our perspective from the megacities characterised by such precarious settlements towards India’s small incremental cities, which have also long accommodated such settlements, we see that the local authorities are challenging de facto the notion of slum as a spatial category. Instead, they use the official national category of slum to isolate and rebuild the precarious dwellings of households living under the poverty line, whether or not these dwellings are located within areas designated as slums. Moreover India, as in Myanmar, digital tools are now making it possible for policies targeting precarious housing areas to break free from the identification of households by their location – and this is helping to challenge the spatial contours of the category.

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<sup>47</sup> Ananya Roy, *op. cit.*