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【英文】

Alan Mayne's book, *Slums: The History of a Global Injustice*, retraces the history of what are commonly called "shantytowns" in an attempt to better understand the reasons for the failure of successive policies carried out throughout the world from the 19th century until today. While shantytowns represented the darker side of industrial cities in the 19th century, since that time, the world's cities, centers for business and finance, have not avoided the emergence of poor communities, nurturing social inequalities. According to a recent United Nations' report, as of the year 2000, more than 200 million people have been able to escape from slum conditions; however, it is estimated that over 900 million will be residing in "slums" worldwide by 2020.

The term "slum," used to name workers' districts located in East London in the 19th century as well as today in Dharavi, situated in the center of Mumbai, does not reflect the differences nor the inherent complexity and diversity of the *favelas* in Brazil, the *barrios* in Latin America, and the *bidonvilles* in France. By studying the term "slum," its circulation from one continent to another, and from one culture to another, Mayne, a specialist in social history, analyzes the emergence and evolution of this concept as well as antipoverty and urban renewal programs. Originating from Cockney, a working-class slang indigenous to London's worker districts, slum has a negative connotation that suggests a world of poverty, entailing violence and epidemics, which is a real affliction for the city. It contributes greatly to nurturing an imaginary state where fear and "the attraction of repulsion" are paradoxically mixed, according to Charles Dickens's words. By the end of the 19th century, philanthropic reformers "confirmed that slums were a real and a terrible presence in urban society" (p. 76) and committed themselves to teaching their inhabitants principles they believed were necessary to improve their daily lives. At the same time, the particularity of slums stirred the curiosity of tourists who came to visit them in London and New York and later on those established in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Such visits reinforced an attachment to a comfortable lifestyle and contributed to accentuating social differences. Far from describing the objective reality of extreme poverty housing, the author argues that the word "slum" is used by politicians, developers, or journalists to justify their destruction, to promote urban renewal programs, and to move inhabitants to modern housing. Major events, such as the Olympic Games or the official visit of a dignitary, become an ideal pretext for masking, or even eradicating, the subworlds that would be a reminder of the undeniable failure of politicians. This is a real war against the slums based on principles such as "unfit neighborhoods," or "unfit for human habitation." Describing neighborhoods where the inhabitants have neither money nor opportunity is part of a conceptual construction. This is a real obstacle in considering the issue of low-income settlements properly and in finding alternative solutions to those usually imposed by politicians. The author states: "Slum is fundamentally a deceitful construct" (p. 8).

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Indeed, an analysis of the word shows that it confines slums to a simple abstraction, while ignoring their diversity, as well as their physical and social complexity. It locks their inhabitants into a fate of social failure and keeps them out of the economic life of the city and that of the region. Social marginalization reinforces religious and ethnic difference and makes slum dwellers the emblematic figures of the Other, often inducing contemptuous, coercive, or paternalistic actions. The term “slum” circulated as of the end of the 19th century in the colonies of the British Empire, particularly in India, where it referred to the living conditions of overpopulated cities, with some colonial connotation. When independence was obtained, the term regained its original meaning with postcolonial programs that spread throughout the world at that time.

A wise observer and historian of poverty in India and South Africa, Mayne unveils the hidden face of urban marginality: the experience to benefit from the site and the spirit of initiative to promote business, often through the creation of microenterprises supported by microcredit. The author recalls one of the most striking initiatives: in 1983, Muhammad Yunus founded the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. Twenty years later, 6.5 million people have had access to loans and have consequently taken part in local economic life. The United Nations’ guidelines, defined in the Millennium Development Goals entitled “Cities without Slums,” recognize the resilience of people where state governance has failed.

Mayne pursues the reflections he began with Tim Murray in their book, *The Archeology of Urban Landscapes: Explorations in Slumland* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). In his opinion, “slums are constructions of imagination” (Alan Mayne, *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities, 1870–1914* [Leicester University Press, 1993, p. 1]), more related to scholars, economists, or politicians who maintain distant or even erroneous stereotypes of reality. The author also seeks to question stereotypes, associated with the term “slum,” that appeared with the first eradication policies carried out in Birmingham as early as 1875 and that are still being promulgated today with Dharavi’s renovation in Mumbai, India.

Mayne tries to differentiate between the representation of slums inspired by the desire to improve them and a more complex reality where inhabitants show resilience and participate in economic life. Improving living conditions no longer means thinking about other people’s lives for them but with them. Mayne’s book, in the line of David Harvey, Joseph Stieglitz, Mike Davis, and more generally, Henri Lefebvre, sheds light on the evolution of social inequalities in urban space.

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