
Population Inflation and Urban Invasion

Despite man's unprecedented progress in industry, education, and the sciences, the simple refuge affording privacy and protection against the elements is still beyond the reach of most members of the human race. The unevenness of man's advance from the lower species is best illustrated in his struggle for shelter. Here, more than in any other aspect of living, people of more primitive cultures have shown a greater capacity for coping with nature's challenges than urban man.

One reason for this lag is the population surge that has more than doubled the world's numbers in a century. Thanks to modern medicine, sanitation, and food production, the years are being extended for an ever-increasing number of people who once would have died before they could proliferate. A population that remained virtually steady during the first eighteen hundred years of Christendom is rising by fifty to sixty million annually. Less than forty years hence, an estimated six to seven billion people will somehow have to be housed, fed, and clothed.¹

With the frittered farmlands no longer yielding enough food for the growing number of mouths, and with escape to frontier countries shut off, the cities within each country have become the most obvious prospect for distributing the human surplus.² The first problem for the peo-

¹ United Nations Population Commission, *World Population Situation and Prospects*, memorandum submitted by the Secretary-General, December 22, 1958, p. 2.

² Between 1900 and 1950, the population living in cities of 100,000 or more in Asia rose from an estimated 19.4 million to 105.6 million (a gain of 444 per cent), and in Africa from 1.1 million to 10.2 million (a gain of 827 per cent). World

ple who swarm into the cities is to get a roof over their heads; land and housing are therefore assuming a new importance in the struggle for subsistence.

LAND AND HOUSING IN THE NEW URBAN SCENE

Ever since the dawn of civilization, man's effort to keep alive has been involved with the land. He has looked to the land for his food and clothing, and for the space to cook, wash, spend his leisure time, and sleep. Land has played an important part in the building of his house too, for from it he has extracted the mud, stones, wood, grass, or bamboo that he could put together with his own hands. The enclosure he managed to erect met his simple needs, i.e., a place for mating, a repository for his few possessions, and a protection against weather. He had access to the field and to sunshine, proximity to work and family, and the relatively ample space in which to move about.

As masses of people head cityward today, they find the land staked out into small lots, to be bought or rented. Even if they can buy the land, they no longer can build homes with their own tools and talents. Nor have they the time to build. In many instances their meager diet provides them with too little energy after their daily exertions and their long, tiring journeys from work.³ Materials must now be bought from manufacturers or middlemen. Moreover, laws prescribe how and where people can build. To buy or rent a home, there must be a constant flow of money from a steady job. In short, the house has become a commodity, like bread. The individual no longer initiates or controls its production and, worse still, is seldom able to buy or rent what he needs.⁴

population living in cities with 20,000 or more inhabitants mounted from about 21.7 million in 1800 to 502.2 million in 1950, expanding 23 times in 150 years, while the total world population expanded about 2.6 times in the same period. In 1800, 2.4 per cent of the world's population lived in urban centers of 20,000 or more; in 1950, 20.9 per cent. From United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Report on the World Social Situation* (New York, 1957), Ch. VII. See also United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Report on the World Social Situation* (New York, April 1961).

³ In India, for example, the calorie intake in the mid-1950's was 1700, while the estimated requirements were 2250; in the Philippines, 1960 as against 2230; and in French North Africa, 1920 as against 2430. Douglas H. K. Lee, *Climate and Economic Development in the Tropics* (New York: Harper, 1957).

⁴ From rough data, the estimate has been made that only about 10 to 30 per cent of urban households in Asia had incomes of the \$50 to \$70 per month required in the mid-1950's to support a house costing \$1000, the rental or purchase cost of which would be about \$10 a month. See United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Financing of Housing and Community Improvement Programmes* (New York, March 7, 1955), pp. 17, 18.

The problem has been complicated, moreover, by the fact that people have been pouring into the cities much faster than the emerging industries can absorb them. Between 1960 and 1970, 200 million people are expected to move into the cities of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.⁵ The ever-growing horde descending upon the cities has intensified and will continue to intensify the demand for housing, and it has heightened the competition for wages to pay for homes. The migrant generally arrives without income or skills and often continues to live on a marginal level for most of his stay. As a result, street sleeping, slums, overcrowding, and squatting have produced a new human predicament in the burgeoning cities. The first three problems are described in this chapter. Squatting is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

STREET SLEEPING

A street sleeper is a mobile squatter without a house. If the climate and the authorities are clement, the street sleeper continues bedding down in the streets until he can find a better cover and the means to pay for it. Others accept the pavement as their established abode.

While there was considerable street sleeping in Europe in the early stages of industrialization, it has been eliminated there except for derelicts and vagrants. But in Calcutta, some 600,000 people sleep in the streets. Census figures for Bombay made public in 1963 showed that 1 in every 66 persons was homeless, while another 77,000 people lived under stairways, in cattle sheds, on landings, or in similar spaces.⁶ Though many workers in the cities can afford to pay for minimum shelter, the means for producing it have not yet been developed. Some people have therefore put up bamboo and burlap lean-tos on the cement walks, where the women cook over smoky fire pots using cow dung as fuel. Ten or more people in India share these tiny bustees. In Hong Kong, it

⁵ Estimates of housing needs are precarious. Descriptions of housing conditions in Asiatic cities may be more informative than statistical estimates, which, even where accurate, obsolesce in a few months. One estimate in 1951 was that from 100 to 150 million rural and urban families in Asia lived in overcrowded, insanitary, and substandard shelter. See United Nations Report of Mission of Experts, *Low Cost Housing in South and South-East Asia* (New York, March 12, 1951), p. 3. Another estimate is that in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, half the population either is homeless or lives under unsafe or grossly overcrowded housing conditions. See United Nations Meeting of Experts, February 7-21, 1962, Working Paper 4, *The Role of Housing and Urban Development in National Development Programs* (New York, 1962), pp. 9, 10.

⁶ Thomas F. Brady, "India's 'Big Town,'" *New York Times*, November 2, 1963. According to the *Manchester Guardian*, December 13, 1963, there were about 1700 adults and 50 children sleeping in the streets of London in 1904, compared with 129 adults on one cold November night in 1963 and 120 on another night in the same year.

has not been unusual for street cleaners to find forsaken carcasses, which they remove on their morning rounds.⁷

In Lagos, Nigeria, a street sleeper will watch a shop at night and keep away other street sleepers in return for the nightly use of a threshold. A few thousand homeless will seek a spot on the piers in the rat-ridden lagoon or scout around for an unguarded space on which to lay a straw mat.

Street sleeping permits no family life, no privacy, no relief from heat, no escape from cold or rain, and no decent means for disposing of human waste. It is the way of the stray animal, the lowest form of urban life.

TYPES OF SLUMS

More commonly workers have swarmed into city slums. The word "slum" is a catchall for poor housing of every kind as well as a label for the environment. The same word denotes a Chicago mansion turned into furnished rooms and a cardboard carton sheltering a human being in Lima.

Because of its inclusiveness, the word too often obscures the vast differences between one type of slum and another. Slums may be either rented or owner-occupied, either legal or illegal. They include cabins, shanties, dens, dugouts, sheds, stalls, and other manifestations of poverty. Some are single-family shelters converted into several smaller compartments; some are one-story and others six-story tenements. Although most slums are in the industrial cities, many are found in mining towns and farm areas. Others line the back alleys of mansions.

Some slums are new and some the abandoned houses of those who have moved up in the economic scale. The new slum is built because it has a use at the price, while the old slum survives because there is nothing cheaper and more serviceable to replace it. The new huts built of scavenged scrap by in-migrants to Asian or South American cities are often worse than the old ones.

Slums flourish in many environments. They emerge from marshes, hill-sides, or war ruins in the Philippines; they are built within old forts or on swamps in Puerto Rico and India; and they line the hills in Latin America. Punctuating the cemeteries and the side roads near new apartment houses in Karachi, slums also appear as holes in ancient caves near Rawalpindi and in southern Spain. They abound in the Casbah of Tunis

⁷ Harold Ingrams, *Hong Kong* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Offices, 1952), p. 81. When I was in Hong Kong in 1963, J. F. Fraser, director of housing in the colony, told me that after the massive housing program and the curtailment of illegal immigration, this manifestation of suffering and homelessness is no longer as frequent as before.

and in the resort centers of Havana and the West Indies; they are the thousands of dark single rooms of Ahmedabad, Cawnpore, and Nagpur.

Slum life is not always the symbol of retrogression. It may in fact be the first advance from homelessness into shelter, or the way station on the road from abject poverty to hope. The slum exists because no nation is able to produce adequate housing at a cost that workers can afford. It is the shelter that the industrial age provides for its rank and file. Housing has remained the Cinderella of the Industrial Revolution, and the slum the humble cover to which she has been indefinitely assigned.

WASTE DISPOSAL IN SLUMS

One of the most troublesome aspects of slum life continues to be the simple disposal of human excrement, which may be discharged into a ditch shared by dozens of families or left to decompose between shacks. Skyscrapers may shoot up side by side with colonies of slum dwellers whose only latrine is a rarely cleaned trench shared sometimes by hundreds of families. In the age of the atom, the disposal of human feces remains one of the stubbornly persistent problems of urban man.

Absence of a system for removing excrement from living areas continually exposes the healthy to the contaminated wastes of the ill and the disease carrier. In the crowded urban communities that have mushroomed in recent years, such pollution is accepted as part of the way of life. For example, in Lagos, Nigeria, out of 4759 schoolchildren whose stools were examined, 85 per cent were infected with parasites, roundworm and hookworm being the most common forms. Dysentery and diarrhea accounted for 10.1 per cent of all deaths in 1960. In the same year, 54.5 per cent of all the deaths in Nigeria's capital city occurred among children under five years of age. Although pail collection is common in undeveloped areas, it is far from being the most sanitary form of waste disposal. Yet in many areas even this primitive service is absent or haphazard; often night soil is allowed to accumulate for weeks or months before it is removed. Sometimes it is left to decompose.

OVERCROWDING IN SLUMS

The afflictions of slum living are intensified by crowding and lack of privacy. If there were an adequate supply of urban slums for everyone who needed shelter, their baneful effects might be confined to squalor, darkness, and decrepitude. But the general shortage of slums means that those that exist are also packed with people. "Crowding" in these instances means that the houses are crowded onto almost all available space; it also refers to crowding within the house itself. For example,

the number of people per room in Guatemala averages more than three, compared with a little less than one person per room in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland.⁸

Lack of privacy, exposure to contagion, and social disintegration are only a few of the by-products of a life with almost no room to breathe, ail, or die. In the single-room tenements of Bombay, occupancy in 1948 already ranged from six to nine persons per room with an over-all average of seven, while crowding ten persons into a space 10 by 15 feet was common.⁹ Average floor space per person was about 27 square feet. In such tenements, one occupant could not see another in the dark passages or rooms. Sickly complexions, emaciated bodies, and the drawn faces of the children tell their tale.

In Panama, where shelters bulge at the seams with as many as twenty individuals living in a room 15 by 15 feet, sleeping is done in relays. In Kingston, Jamaica, nine persons occupy tiny huts 6 by 10 feet. In Accra, Ghana, occupancy per single house in 1960 was 19.3 persons; the occupancy was even higher in Kumasi. In Lagos, Nigeria, which has three migrants to every natural birth, as many as eighty people share a small house on a site scheduled for clearance, and even in the fringe areas, sixteen to twenty persons per house is not unusual.

In-migration into some cities of the Far East has created living conditions without any vestige of privacy or room for motion. In Hong Kong, five or six human beings share cubicles measuring 40 square feet. Density is as high as 2000 persons per acre in one-story hutments in which there is no water, sanitation, or organized system of refuse disposal. Fowl or pigs share some of the huts or the tiny open spaces around them.

In a single shophouse in Singapore, I saw families of six to eight people facing life in airless, windowless rooms 7 by 10 feet, with as many as five children sleeping on the roach-ridden floor beneath the bed. About a third of the occupants in the average shophouse have no window at all; the rest have either one window (which is usually shuttered) or only access to a light shaft. Frequently the occupant uses his rented space not only for sleeping but as a "farm" for growing bean sprouts or as a shop. The illness of a child or a parent means that the whole family must share the discomforts, if not the disease as well. Yet this is the way of life for tens of thousands of people in Singapore and elsewhere.¹⁰

⁸ United Nations, *Technical Assistance Newsletter*, Vol. II, No. 2 (New York, May 1961).

⁹ National Planning Commission of India, *National Housing* (Bombay: Vora & Co., February 1948).

¹⁰ Charles Abrams, Susumu Kobe, and Otto Koenigsberger, *Report for the Government of Singapore*, prepared by an Expert Mission appointed under the United Nations Technical Assistance Programme (min., Singapore, August 1963).

Both Hong Kong and Singapore have undertaken extensive rehousing programs, but the demand for space is so intense and the size of the average household so large that it is not unusual to see five and sometimes as many as ten people sharing one of the new rooms. In Singapore, of 10,125 applications to the Housing and Redevelopment Board, the family size of nearly half was listed as seven persons or more. Many of these families would be assigned single rooms. In Hong Kong's new housing projects, I saw families of ten sharing a single room for their shelter, and often it was also the workshop from which they were trying to eke out a living.

It is virtually impossible, particularly in tropical areas, to keep water clean when it must be carried long distances and retained for hours or days in exposed tubs or cans. Often the water is contaminated at the source. In one slum area I inspected in Kingston, Jamaica, a single tap serves seven hundred persons; in another, occupied by eight thousand people, there was no water at all.

The housing situation is no better in many villages. In fourteen villages of Upper and Lower Egypt, for example, 27.5 per cent of the shelters have no roofs at all. These settlements are usually clusters of cramped, drafty, dark mud huts crowded together to avoid encroaching on the farmland.¹¹ Conditions such as these, coupled with average peasant income of \$11.50 a year per person, accelerate the move to the cities, where the housing conditions are most often worse.

The magnitude of the problem in the underdeveloped world may be gleaned from the fact that more than a billion people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, or roughly half the population of these continents, are homeless or live in housing that is described by the United Nations as a menace to health and an affront to human dignity.¹² Worse still, in almost all the developing areas, housing conditions are steadily deteriorating. Many families pay so much for the privilege of bedding down on a floor or other space that little is left for the bare essentials of life. And as the surge to the cities goes on, the competition for space will become keener, rents will rise further, squatting and overcrowding will increase, and the effort to carry on some semblance of family life will become less and less hopeful.

SOME SOCIAL BY-PRODUCTS

In the more developed areas whose slums might be viewed in Asia as châteaux, overcrowded slums have been found to yield a high juvenile

¹¹ Hassan Fathy, "Rural Self-Help Housing," *International Labor Review*, January 1962.

¹² United Nations, *The United Nations Development Decade, Proposals for Action*, Report of the Secretary-General (New York, 1962).

delinquency rate; high rates of family dependence on public assistance; high proportions of illiteracy; high proportions of employed women; more unemployment, poverty, and divorce; more nonsupport cases and alcoholism; a high incidence of mental disorders and mental deficiency; low marriage rates; a low average educational level; and high residential mobility.

It would be a mistake, however, to view the slum's impact as the same everywhere, or to see poor housing as the only cause of social abnormality. Although bad housing contributes to juvenile delinquency and crime, its influence may in some cases be mitigated by compensating elements, such as strong parental influences, constructive discipline in the school or community, good associations, and counteracting ethical values. Environment is more than physical environment; it is a combination of physical, social, and personal factors that influence parents and children. Yet the change in a normal boy from rural Puerto Rico when he moves into a slum in New York City is often appalling—despite New York's well-organized educational and social services.

Many aspects of the shelter problem need further study. Though much has been written on slum life in Europe and the United States, less is known about slums in the underdeveloped countries. We understand even less about the effects of overcrowding and of poor housing on the emotions. What, for example, is the child's response to sexual intimacy between adults in a jammed household?

Little is known also of the destruction of human dignity when the home and community in which the family once had a place no longer exist. In the tribal communities or in those in which housing was built as part of a compound, the job of keeping the common grounds clean was often assigned to particular members. In the shift to crowded cities, this responsibility has either been passed on to governments that are unable to cope with it, or has been left to the people themselves. In Africa, for example, the collective accountability of tribal life is being replaced by individuation, self-interest, and self-preservation. The Indian village, which for all its hardships offered community life and access to the open field, has no compensatory alternative in the herding and the disunity of the new urban agglomerations. The working father is no longer near home, and the working mother hurries toward the factory or the crowded marketplace to help pay the landlord. The child, seeing its parents only at evening, quickens to outside forces more readily than ever before. The females left behind in the villages find the opportunities for marriage diminishing as the young males emigrate.

From the earliest days of civilization, man had been able to create a home with his own hands. Now, for the first time, this is no longer within his competence. The hovels he lives in are worse than those he

built when he emerged from the cave. Indeed, the caves still in use are often sounder shelters with better roofs and more privacy than the slums of some Asian cities.

THE STREET, THE NEIGHBORHOOD, AND THE CITY

A large group of houses can make a "neighborhood" if the people who live there bring to it the elements of intimate association and a unity of interest. The neighborhood is a place where children meet and influence each other and where the residents have a feeling of belonging. But often the big city is merely the aggregate of heterogeneous clusters of hovels, plus shops, factories, streets, and public services. This mass of makeshifts in the teeming cities has provided no substitute for the village institutions that bestow relative equality of status, humble as it may be. The new city formations are saturated, impersonal, tentative, and without the mellowed traditions or folkways of the older way of life. Restraints and sanctions are absent, and the lack of living space undermines family discipline by driving the child into the streets.

The inhuman densities inside the shelter might be relieved by adequate space outside, but too often the only outside space is a narrow, rutted path that must provide room for movement of people, the carrying off of waste and rain water, cooking, peddling one's wares, and sometimes space for draft animals as well. Where streets are paved and wide enough, however, the street has assumed some of the functions that the home unit lacks. In Asia, the street is often the mass dining room for the family and the place where one gets his oxygen amid the miscellaneous odors of culinary activity. It is the market, the display room for wares, the social meeting place and the recreational outlet, the source of livelihood for the peddler, the rickshaw or trishaw man, as well as the theater of action in which every child, visitor, tradesman, and hawker among the thousands converging on the street are the players. The street is often convulsive, yet exciting. To share it with the automobile is hard. It is inefficient for its many new tasks, but still vital; it is exasperating, but a way of life—a slumscape of the turbulent cities. Here and in their cubicles, the family demonstrates that remarkable genius of the human species which has been responsible for survival through its centuries of trial.

The growing city, with all its faults, is the crucible in which man's destiny will be determined. The slum may be with us always, and for many people it may be the only escape from famine and stagnation, the temporary anchorage of struggling mankind slowly moving toward something better. But the prospect of something better should be there, however remote.

From earliest history, the city has been linked with man's freedoms¹³—a refuge in the days of Cain and Joshua, the hub of a vigorous political life in Greece, the impetus to law in Rome. When man's mind roamed free in Utopian dreams, it was the city that was so often closest to his conception of heaven—the "Celestial City," the "Heavenly City," the "New Jerusalem," the "Holy City," and the "City of God." Moreover, it was the city of trade, commerce, and property that helped undermine serfdom and that ushered in other freedoms in the process. Though industrialization posed a threat in the cities of Europe, more freedoms somehow emerged in cities, and more freedoms survived in them. The story may, if given time, repeat itself even in the cankerous formations of the more recently industrialized areas. For despite its changes and challenges, the city still contains the raw ingredients of freedom. The city still harbors the hope, in an increasingly hazardous and complex society, that the social and economic fluidity which was its historic attribute can be maintained against the chaotic forces that challenge it. It is still the marketplace for goods and ideas, the locus of a contractual society, the mirror for emulation, the meeting place for diversities, the center of culture. In the European cities that once also felt the first shocks of industrialization, parliamentary government ultimately established its political validity, encrusted its precedents with a heavy layer of protective traditions, and constructed the essential devices for minimizing violent changes. Perhaps in the troubled cities of the developing world, the same values too may emerge and grow.

The swelling cities of the East may indeed be reliving some of the history of the Western cities. They have become the haven of the refugee, the hungry, the politically oppressed. The Filipino hinterlanders fleeing the Huks pour into Manila, the Hindus escaping the Moslems head into Old Delhi, and the victims of Chinese communism drift into Hong Kong. When his miserable two acres no longer yield enough grain for the Indian peasant, or the floods drown the Pakistani's meager crop, he moves toward the teeming city. As the desert wind blows over the drought-ridden land, the Arab whips his camel toward the bustling new human settlements.

¹³ The word "freedom" is an abstraction that is symbolic, controversial, and fluctuating in its meanings. It embraces a variety of "freedoms from" and "freedoms to." Without elaborating on its complexities, I have used the word here in a circular sense in which man, given a tolerable environment, has tended to evolve institutions and devices that allow him greater social and economic mobility and a larger variety of personal options. The institutions he helps create in turn tend to fortify such options. The urban scene, I believe, has in the past provided this opportunity better than any other way of life that man has yet devised. The city is also a setting where he has been better able to acquire the knowledge essential to identify more electives, and where he is allowed to strive for their attainment free of unreasonable restraints.

But in too many of the developing cities, the older customs and institutions of value are weakening before the newer ones have taken root. The building of a stable life is thwarted by housing famine and the frustrations of crowded living. Unfortunately, those with the talent and vision to reform the social pattern are rare, and trained civil servants few. Hopes and fears for freedom and opportunity rise and fall with each crisis and with the disillusionments linked with it.

By 1950, one in every five of the world's people lived in cities of more than 20,000. With fifty to sixty million new mouths to feed annually, the push to the city gains impetus. In Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the total population is expected to increase by two fifths in the fifteen years between 1961 and 1975, and urban populations are expected to double. Thus the urban housing stock must be increased four times in that period (without making allowance for dilapidation and decay).¹⁴ The average income per person of only fifty cents a day in 90 per cent of the world's countries has not kept the birth rate from rising. In fact, it is rising more sharply in the very areas that can least afford to accommodate more children. Yet for many, if not ultimately for most, the city is becoming the only alternative to hunger and despair.

With rates of urban growth in Asia 400 per cent higher than in the West, and the movement to the cities only beginning, it is idle to speculate on what might have been the better life. The die has been cast. The irrepressible forces of urbanization are forging ahead, and in the long run there appears to be no other option. The question is only whether human endurance will persist in these settlements until better patterns emerge.

¹⁴ United Nations Meeting of Experts, February 7-21, 1962, Working Paper 4, *The Role of Housing and Urban Development in National Development Programs*, *op. cit.*, p. 9. This figure includes relief of existing shortages.