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Re-housing Slum Dwellers: A Conceptual Approach of Homes

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ABSTRACT

The United Nation Human Settlement Programme in its 2007's report assures that as long as rapid urbanization, high urban poverty, inequality and wide income discrepancy, insecure tenure, and globalization continue to show no sign of pausing, slums will remain part of the world's urban living condition. A forecasted statistical figure of world population shows a record of two billion people will be living in slummed areas in 2030 (www.forbes.com/2007/06/11, accessed 20/01/2009). This data further indicates, this group of a slightly below 25 % of 8.1 billion populations residing in urban areas in the same year, will show deprivation of at least three among United Nation's five identified living conditions attached to a slum. These include inadequate access to safe water, sanitation and other infrastructure; poor quality of housing; overcrowding; and insecure residential status (UN-Habitat 2007). While current attempts, both at the international and national level, yet place greater focus on developing an immediate strategies and schemes to alleviate and redevelop slum, this paper moves a step forward complimenting the aforementioned endeavours. It thoroughly investigates intrinsic meanings associated to a *home*, an equally fundamental element to both slummed and non-slummed settlements. An insight to these associated and sometime hidden qualities is substantial before efforts to develop a strategic framework in re-housing slum dwellers are commenced. Such an understanding will ultimately enable policy makers and partners to propose not only technical solutions – to eliminate slum –, but sound and socially sustainable approaches in doing so. A further expectation would be for the anticipated schemes resulted from such a procedure to harvest support in their implementations, rather than rejection from the very community (slums) the schemes are dedicated to at the first place.

Keywords: slum; re-house; home; symbolic meanings

*“Home! Sweet home.
Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam.
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home”*
(Quoted from an old but famous song:
Home Sweet Home by Henry Bishop and John Howard Payne)

1. INTRODUCTION

The above quotation expresses an immense gratification homes have to offer. It imparts every reason to long for, to always go back to, and to relish its presence in life. These heartfelt attributes are not necessarily due to mere physical qualities a home has, but deeper qualities associating with numerous contexts, such as, closeness within family members, social circumstances and relationships, lifestyles, beliefs, time, environmental challenges, provision of natural resources, etc. From place to place, these constitute similarities as well as dissimilarities, which subsequently characterize a home being a representation of people who live in it, its time, and its neighbourhood environment. Through time, a series collection of family events, celebrations, incidents often develop into irreplaceable memories, and subsequently enrich unique meanings and qualities correlated to a family home. Taking these circumstances as a contextual background to its discussion, this paper explores in a greater depth, intrinsic significances pertained to homes across different groups of societies. While it definitely appends the role of home being a place for refuge, it further discusses inherent functions, which on one hand may not be the case to homes in certain social groups, but well imbedded by others on the other.

In line with the current attempts in slum redevelopment, this paper propounds a fundamental understanding of a home, an equally primary element to both slummed and non-slummed settlements. An insight to homes' associated and sometime hidden qualities is substantial before efforts to develop a strategic framework in re-housing slum dwellers are commenced. Such an understanding will ultimately enable policy makers and partners to propose not only technical solutions – to eliminate slum –, but sound and socially sustainable approaches. A subsequent expectation would be for the anticipated schemes resulted from this procedure to harvest public support and participation in their implementations, rather than rejection from the very community (slums) the schemes are dedicated to at the first place.

While current attempts, both at the international and national level, yet place greater focus on developing immediate strategies in slum alleviation and then re-housing, this paper moves a step forward complimenting the aforementioned endeavours. This paper argues that while home in general denotes protection from harsh natural conditions and various forms of threats, an understanding as to how this function is accommodated along with other home-associated uses, values, and meanings should be equally counted if

the success is within the prime agenda. It further highlights that each slum is as unique as is the case of a non-slummed neighbourhood. Slum revitalization related efforts cannot be either standardized or broken down into mere technical details, equally implemented throughout cases, but is a simultaneous process, grounded by a thorough understanding on what constitutes homes. When this pace is absent, failure would be an inevitable end.

2. SLUM AND URBAN POVERTY

A comprehensive knowledge on the above issue is in a greater need than ever. As cities continue to grow, complexity of problems associated with urban life are also racing. It challenges urban development, in both developed and more to the developing countries. In comparison between the two, the latter group are likely unwell equipped with proper planning systems, hence tends to suffer worse due to the impacts of the increasing rate of urbanization, widening income discrepancy, insecure tenure, and invading consequences of the globalisation. The United Nation Human Settlement Programme in its 2007's states these are the three main grounds for slums creation. The Report further emphasizes that urban poverty and slums will remain part of the world's urban living condition if there is no serious endeavour to first slow down rural to city migration; second, to bridge gap between the rich and the poor; and third, to decelerate the impact of globalization.

It is forecasted that in 2030 cities around the globe will be inhabited by 8.1 billion people (www.forbes.com/2007/06/11, accessed 20/01/2009). Almost 25 percent of these urban inhabitants will live in slums. Many of them will be deprived of at least three among five living conditions characterizing a slum, as are identified by the United Nation. These include inadequate access to safe water, sanitation and other infrastructure; poor quality of housing; overcrowding; and insecure residential status (UN-Habitat 2007).

This statistical data is further alarming by an inevitable and uncontrolled flow of people from rural to urban areas. Poor living condition of the rural life and lucrative image sparkling from the urban areas have been claimed prime motivations for such a condition. Villagers migrate in search for economic opportunities. Some may succeed in their effort, most however are unlucky to have the chance to reach their dreams. To make matters worse, the latter group is usually those of having no proper education and inadequate skills, major drawbacks from participating in the recent globally competed work force. This often makes living in a highly competitive urban style hard, if not impossible to deal with. This situation leads to insecure low paid works, providing modest access to financial resources that leaves this unfortunate group with no choice, but to live (often) on illegal land – squatters –, and poor neighbourhoods – slums, a could be worse living environment than that left behind.

To many big cities in developing countries, such as Nairobi, Karachi, Mumbai and even Jakarta, slum alleviation program involves high costs that can be a serious burden to national budgets. The process is also tedious and complex to handle. A very command alternative solution, the government and its associated agencies come out with is to re-locate and re-house slum dwellers. While the urgency of such an action may be genuinely initiated, it can also be driven by a lucrative development proposal that requires the site where the slum is located. The latter action is acted in order to either serve public's needs, revenues generation, or provide extra financial incentives to particular government officers involved in the process. Reason to alleviate slum can be therefore as complex as concerning problems the slum area faces itself.

Whichever the case is, this paper is a follow up the commonly proposed solution to re-house slum dwellers in order to improve the quality of urban living environment. It however addresses the question as to how this idea is to be realised. As has been frequently stated earlier, as a home is a fundamental element of the re-housing program, an understanding of home is substantial. The following case is a true reflection of this statement.

We may observe the case of redevelopment scheme proposed by Mumbai's government in India, and its associated partner in their attempt to revitalize Dharavi slum. National Geographic Channel Asia in its program: Megacities:Mumbai, is quoted as saying that almost 60% of this city's population live in slums. While Dharavi was once recorded the world's largest slum before superseded by Orangi Town in Karachi (Pakistan), people who live in this chaotic settlement prefer to stay where they are. Government proposed plan to re-house them in a newly developed settlement has gained a wide public refusal. Assuming this designed neighbourhood will provide the Dharavians dwellers with a 'better' living quality, one may wonder why a rejection is the case. It is claimed, the plan fails to accommodate dwellers' lifestyles. The Dharavian people have for years lived in a very crowded living environment with all kind of activities that not only give them identities but also means for living. They relate to neighbours in certain ways, and run various home industries and businesses. The Dharavians dwellers could not see these behavioural patterns imbedded within the proposed scheme. Besides the concerns of the teeny scale living space provided to each family, the Dharavians people are in deep doubt of the continuity of their laundry, garbage collection related businesses, which are the main source of incomes to most.

This case emphasizes that admittedly homes in a slum settlement may be of an obvious representation of urban poverties, visibly observed through demonstration of its low physical qualities, the absence of basic infrastructures, and pertaining supporting elements. In consequence, this circumstance is viewed degrading, responsible for negatively contributing to the urban image. Urban planning strategies therefore incline to approach the matter as a mere part of impoverished residential alleviation program, by developing a considered newly un-impoverished housing complexes. Such

approaches are often embedded in an overall scheme detailed by assigned government/urban planning agency at a national level, imposed on every slum encountered throughout the national boundary. This may be an answer at one layer, but a fundamental concern on the accommodation of people's lifestyle, behaviour, social relationship, history into newly developed housing is often considered the last and least if not completely overlooked. The Dharavian case has demonstrated this situation.

A home possesses functions and meanings, which may or may not be universally shared with those of other slummed neighbourhoods. It embraces symbolic values, which go far beyond an apparent function being a mere space for refuge. For these qualities, a home is therefore unique, treated with dignity, deference, and respect. Thus, this kind of understanding is substantial to every attempted endeavour, before decision to re-housing slum dwellers is to be made at all levels. The following section elucidates various distinctive functions, values, and meanings carried by a home across the globe

3. HOME AND ASSOCIATED QUALITIES

“Home is the ultimate paradox: it can be a building, a destination, or a concept. Home at its most elementary is merely a house – a place where we perform functional tasks for ourselves such as washing, cooking and eating, personal hygiene, storing material possessions, investing money, and other activities. But home has purposes beyond the material; it has an historical and spiritual purpose. We say: “Home is where the heart is” – a thought, which opens up a universe of emotion. Here we use the idea of home to signify the place where journeys end; a place we somehow arrive back to, though not necessarily from where we departed from. Despite this, home also connotes the idea of a return – a homecoming of some kind to the same people, whether it is to where a partner resides, to one's children or friends, or to a familiar landscape. Here the connection in our minds moves beyond the functional into the realm of feelings” (Cuthbert 2006, p: 1.)

The above quote illuminates an understanding of home that can be a structure, a place, or even an idea. To the common knowledge however, a home is well perceived in connection to a *house*. The quote stresses universal activities and roles a house accommodate, as well as possible immaterial connotations and uses. The quote brings our understanding of home to a broader level than that of seeing it as simply a place that have a capacity for visible purposes. To this context, this paper classified home into nine different categories, which are explained in detail below.

First, house in relation to nature. This classification implies a fundamental meaning of a house as a “refuge” or “sanctuary.” This is a method to express the meaning of home in connection to the natural world.

Refuge implies a passive attitude and experience: some place to which one can escape, or flee from enemies; a place of security or asylum; a sanctuary or a place where people go for safekeeping. There we can avoid the fear associated with natural forces such as earthquakes, tsunamis or other extreme climatic changes. In this context home reflects attitudes to nature, and as a refuge, is designed to mitigate its worst effects. There is also a significant overlap between humanity's relationship to other peoples and animals, and its attitude to the natural world. While both are extremely material considerations, relationships to nature are also philosophical, religious and spiritual.

Nature on one hand can inflict threats to human existence, it also has been a great inspiration as to how houses have been conceived, designed, and constructed. Variation in climatic and topographic conditions, geographical position, provision of natural building materials, have created ranges of housing design. Examples of this can be observed from Japanese style houses (and garden), stilt house, igloo, mud houses in Africa and Capodoccio Region, cycladic houses, Inca masonry, cave dwellings, and various organic based design in modern architecture periode, such as those by Frank Lloyd Wright.



Figure 1. Rock-Hewn Dwellings, Uchisar, Turkey, Cappadocia Region.

Second, a house in relation to defence. The concept of house as defense looks at house as a safeguard from harms brought by living things, including other human beings. This concept is primal and remains with us today. Home as defense is also dictated by climate, geography and nature. This view has been discussed in house in relation to nature. Many forms of house have been a representation of efforts to defend the dwellers (or part of them) from outside living forces considered harmful or undesirable. Let say from the hunter gather society we acknowledge that fears of being attacked have encouraged people to locate their houses on the area outreached by harmful living creatures considered either harmful or inflicting undesired effect.

Historical development of human dwelling also demonstrates that well-fenced houses are very common (Oliver 1975). Besides the presence of guards, most of existing palaces are surrounded by high gates claimed necessary for safety reason. The Inca (Peru) located their thatched huts on a 2800 m above sea level site in the sacred-Peruvian Andes, in order to protect their settlement from Spanish invasion in 1532. A hilltop location is also a favored location. It offers safety as well as a threatening impact to

potential enemy as it elevates the whole settlement. This is true to the case of the San Gimignano settlement, Tuscany, Italy. The location of Cliff dwellings of the Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado is another prime representation of settlement for defence. It is located under an overhang in proximity to the top of a canyon wall. Looking at defence from a different angle, a house in a Moslem society is designed to protect female members of the society not to be seen by outsiders (Michell 2003). Houses are designed with terraces and balconies in ways that allow women to see events occurring outside their houses, but invisible to outsiders.



Figure 2. Cliff Dwelling of the Mesa Verde



Figure 3. Buckingham Palace

Third, a house in relation to cloister. The word “cloister” has a variety of possible connotations. On one occasion, it immediately conjures up the idea of courtyard and the geometry of the square. On different occasion it implies something hidden, secretive, protected, internal, and private. In formal terms, the cloister or courtyard represents the square at the domestic level, but there is also a direct analogy with the square at the city level. The ‘pempatan agung’ pattern (intersection), one of Balinese urban design principle dedicates a special site for public square at one corner of the intersection. This continues into practice at the household level. Traditional houses in the Balinese mainland area are designed with courtyard as their orientation. The role of courtyard is profound in this society, either for social or ritual purpose, even up to the resent time. Courtyard is also a prominent to siheyuan (hutong), Chinese traditional houses. Unlike the case of the Bali people, Chinese people have long left traditional type of dwellings opting for flat in a high-rise apartment



Figure 4. Alhambra Palace, Spain



Figure 5. Stoa of Attalos, Athens, Greece

A great example of the old type houses famous for its Lion Square is the Alhambra Palace, Spain. The square has a lion fountain constructed on top of twelve marble lions. It connects three rooms all together: hall of the Two Sisters; the Hall of the Abencerrajes; and the Hall of the Kings. The existence of cloister is not isolated to houses. Many great building of the past accommodate courtyard within. The St. Peter Square in Rome, the Stoa of Attalos (Athens, Greece), and many universities orientate their activities into courtyards.

Fourth, a house in relation to beliefs. In this category the existence of home concerns with the connection between humanity and the invisible world in its many resemblances. The function of home under this classification encompasses everything from organized religion and animistic beliefs, to the worlds of black magic or voodoo. Home as representation of beliefs focuses on safeguarding occupants from unseen forces, the manifestation of gods, and ceremonies in their worship or offerings to appease them. Overall, these practices seek to maintain equilibrium within the home, where health, wealth and happiness are commonly held aspirations. Also important is the position of home as a place where family beliefs are nourished. This notion incorporates believing in some kind of god in the form of organized religion, existence after death, particular ideologies and practices in life, as well as the power accorded to individuals within society such as those of seer, jro taksu, shaman, witchdoctor, medicine man or priest.



Figure 6. Courtyard
in Balinese Houses



Figure 7. Family Shrine in
Balinese Houses

In some societies, houses have specific space for various worships, either those dedicate to ancestors, God, or even idolized person, such as national heroes, movie stars or world famous singers. The Thai people usually have a space in the house where they can put a picture of their King. To some extents, house as a place to worship involves offering and its preparation, which may also require a specific room for related activities. All of these are reflected in distinctive division of space as well as how each is presented concurrently with other manifesting spatial roles the house has. Again, houses in Thailand preserve space for a statue of Buddha. This space can be a tiny part of the wall inside the house to hang Christ's symbolic cross for those who believe in Christianity. To Moslem families, they will have a common room enough to accommodate family pray, five times daily. The Balinese people also have specific zone in their traditional dwellings in which family shrine is located. For this purpose, the house is valued with respect, protected with certain degree of holiness.

Fifth, a house in relation to journey. From the early stage of our social development of nomadic lifestyle has been part of it (Blainey 1983). To this, a house is where the journey reaches to an end, or where a rest and refuge was required and necessary. It followed where people movement is heading for various reasons. In fact, the house as journey has had a long history, from the trading caravans of the Great Silk Route to the space capsules that NASA has sent to the moon. While the nomad is central to our idea of home as an experience of movement, the concept also has many variations.

The Bambendjelle tribe, Makao, Democratic Republic of Congo do traveling in search for food (Rudofsky 1964). The Australian Aborigines people maintain a nomadic lifestyle guided by their 'dream time.' They build temporary shelter whenever necessary; they sleep roofed by the sky otherwise. The Bedouin (Morocco) 'the inhabitants of the dessert' keep their journey through the dessert accompanied by their tents. The Native Americans, Great Plains, United States of America travel with their tepee.

This is a distinctive type of tents constructed by ten poles, covered by animal skins, with hole on top to allow fire cooking and smoke circulation.



Figure 8. Native Americans Teepee, United States of America

Thus, the house for journey leaves footprints on the earth as its dwellers do. This related association of home has not stopped by the current global era, but it is still in practice by some communities.

Sixth, a house in relation to art. Throughout history, home for people in every single geographical, topographic, and climatic condition has always had symbolic manifestations. The reason for this is obvious. People live not only in the material world of their own physical requirements, but also in environments where societies express their collective history, beliefs, aspirations, emotions, the exhibition of power and authority, and even fears and tribulations. Through various social development stages, human kinds often express these immaterial aspects of life through arts (Rykwert 1982). Paintings, sculptures, potteries, carvings are all part of the products resulted out of expression of feelings, creativity, and talents. As house is central to human existence on earth, it can be seen as a product of creative attempts of a designing, decorating, and finishing process, necessary in order to construct home, which is beautiful, artistic, and a pleasant place to live in. On different occasion, a house can also be a home to all kind of art forms that subsequently enhance its artistic values. This is not necessarily to say the presence of beauty is a monopoly to wealthy dwellings only. It exists at every level of society, in its various forms and manifestations, and definitely comes with appreciation indeed.

Seventh, a house in relation to façade. Façade can have various meanings (Katz 1994, Eisenman 1999). It derives from French language which mean "front." It however also implies different meaning of "false" or

“illusory.” Façade to the context of home is used to describe the front of a house, usually facing the street. The idea of something “false” also applies to houses, since a facade usually does not contain much information on things happening inside. The facade is one surface of the house that can be seen from the street the street. This also raises an interesting conundrum for architects, namely whether or not facades come into the realm of what we call “architecture” since only one surface is usually designed, and it is normally part of a continuous frontage stretching the entire length of a street.



Figure 9. Balinese Façade



Figure 10. Façade of a Hutong in Beijing

Some societies consider it important to have a well-represented front side houses: an enriching element to the neighborhood, not only to those who live in, but also to the surrounding environments (Cardwell 1971, Marcus 1993, Kiang 1999). To a slum area, a façade may exist in a different physical quality compared to that of a non-slummed residences. Many native Balinese settlements, such as those of the Pengelipuran and Tenganan village forms a unique façade representing lines of front-side houses that are organized in accordance to linear pattern. On the other hand, hutong in Beijing, China, which is a pathway formed by lines of traditional residences (shiheyuan) shows a line of the back walls of actual courtyard houses within.

Eighth, a house in relation to function. This classification relates home to its true uses. It values expression of function, and considers either additional or decorative elements less or unnecessary at all. This comes in line with modernist architectural movement of the 20th century, in which Mies van der Rohe was famously quoted as saying ‘less is more’ (Boissiere 1988, Cooper- Marcus 1995, Saito 2003). As we have seen, home has a diversity of functions. In different places and at different times, home has protected humans from nature, other people, gods, and evil spirits. It is a place for celebration and decoration, and a sanctuary for religious observance. At another level, home provides a place to work; make love; sleep or rest; to cook; to provide privacy, warmth or coolness; and perhaps somewhere to take care of washing and personal hygiene. In all of these cases, however,

there are a plethora of ways in which these functions can be both performed and expressed. If we look at the astonishing variety of homes, we cannot even make general assumptions about how these various functions are incorporated, except perhaps in the developed world of today. Even there, huge cultural differences predominate.



Figure 11. Japanese House

The history of humans social development demonstrates, how functionality is reflected within the culture of living. The Aborigine people of Australia build their houses with available resources nature provided them with to accommodate their dream-led movements through the Australian continent. Japanese traditional houses for instance, besides their strong connection to nature, have been long considered very functional, inspiring the emergence of minimalist style in residential design (Isozaki 1983, Jencks 1987, Yutaka 2002).

Nineth, a house in relation to industry. By now, we all come to the terms that the existence of houses is intertwined with human survival. It is an inherent component of our physical, social and psychological well-beings on earth (Stewart 1970). At the same time, this circumstance is inseparable from the attempt to create and maintain continual means for living, which, to the current development, is correlated wealth creation. To this extent, a house has been for long positioned to support the production of wealth in numerous societies. The emergence of home industries is an obvious reflection of the idea. Shop houses exist in many China towns around the world design to combine home and economic activities. The ground floor is usually catered for all kind of trade related businesses, and the upper levels are for home. The case is demonstrated by the city of Penang, Georgetown, Malaysia whose a great collection of conserved shop houses from its past development is thrived (Dal Co and Foster 1998).

To many households in the developing countries, housewives have major roles in extending home's function into basis for various economic attempts. In Indonesia for instance, many home based food productions and catering industries are very common. This is possible as food handling and preparation is not yet industrialised into form of state regulation, in which most home based food production practices are likely to be outlawed. Looking back to the case of Dharavian slum in Mumbai, homes are even turned into the central basis for household incomes. Laundry services, garbage collection and recycling related activities, and pawn centre are among additional functions homes accommodates in this slum. This case is

not isolated to Dharavi slum, but a common practice to many slummed settlements, especially those situated in cities of the developing countries.



Figure 12. Shop Houses in Penang, Malaysia

4. CONCLUSION

Discussions within this paper have demonstrated the complex values and functions a home could be associated with. They are universal souls of home exist in many different communities. While this paper has underlined the importance of all these associated values, it has also highlighted that each is not equally represented. One may be given more emphasis, but considered less (or not at all) important within certain houses of particular societies. At the same time, one value may be imbedded to its maximum presentation, while others are not, in which subsequently implies that their manifestations cannot be observed.

Differences in geographical position, climatic condition, available resources, stages of social development, and social interactions, are all contributing factors to the emergence of diverse residential related values, meanings, and practices. This circumstance has indeed enriched and constituted uniqueness to homes across the globe, both to those situated in slummed or non-slummed settlements. Lining its focus with slum revitalization efforts, this paper draws attention to pivotal requirement in comprehending key values, homes in a targeted slum observe. This is a fundamental step before slum alleviation schemes to be appropriately proposed: ones that fulfil homes' physical qualities as well as prolong their souls (Patterson and Jones 1991, Fiedler and Feierabend 1999, Oshima and Kinoshita 2000). More importantly, this paper emphasizes that when comes to their implementations, the proposed schemes will gain necessary

supports, not only by assigned government agencies, but by households to whom they are dedicated to at the first place.

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