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Planning Cities in Africa

Current Issues and Future Prospects of Urban Governance and Planning

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Chapter 4
Revisiting Stokes' *Theory of Slums*: Towards Decolonised Housing Concepts from the Global South

Raffael Beier

Abstract Recently, large-scale housing programmes have experienced a revival in many countries of the Global South. They are criticised for their top-down, standardised, and supply-driven nature, which hardly meets people's demands. At the heart of the problem lies the concept of "material decency"—a normative and shelter-centric notion of housing, inspired by colonial planning and developmentalist thought. Many African housing programmes confuse "material decency" with the demand-driven, bottom-up concept, of adequate housing. Following this, the stigmatisation of auto-constructed neighbourhoods prevails and housing is primarily reduced to a question of material shelter. Adding to significant contributions about the need for southern perspectives on urban planning, this chapter offers an alternative entry point by revisiting Stokes' *A Theory of Slums* published in 1962. Interestingly, Stokes' theory did not deal with housing directly but focused on "slum" dwellers' socioeconomic integration and structural factors of exclusion. I argue to re-interpret Stokes' notion of barriers to social escalation as a structural discrimination of "slum" dwellers. Such stigmatisation may be read as a major reason behind the proliferation of so-called slums. Based on the author's fieldwork in Morocco and additional literature, the aim is to deconstruct the role of "material decency" and to offer pathways towards decolonised housing concepts from the Global South. For this purpose, the chapter suggests five cornerstones of adequate housing, namely subjectivity, non-materiality, flexibility, contextuality, and choice.

Keywords Decolonisation · Adequate housing · Housing theory · Informal settlements · Post-development

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4.1 Development, Materiality, and the Stigma of "Slums"

I would like to start by retelling a brief conversation that took place in the narrow alleys of an informal settlement (*bidonville*) in one of Casablanca's working-class neighbourhoods. While I was interviewing a middle-aged housewife in front of her house, her young neighbour joined the conversation. When she heard that the housewife was feeling positive about a potential resettlement, she interrupted and said to her: "Look! Your house is out of concrete. We have wooden window frames and the house is even nicely painted in blue. What else do you want?" She responded: "I don't want to live in a *bidonville* anymore! I want to live like everybody else!".

This brief encounter highlights that informal settlements in many parts of the world represent more than just *physical* neighbourhoods with more or less precarious living conditions. These settlements exist as *social* constructs (Arabindoo 2011; Gilbert 2007; Jones 2011). They carry a stigma of otherness, backwardness, and poverty—to mention only some facets. While people that live in apartments may be seen as "developed", "modern", and "urban", informal settlement dwellers are not—even if they live in houses that share all the characteristics of *ordinary* houses (Beier 2020; Cavalcanti 2014).

By pointing out the concrete, wooden window frames, and painted walls, the young girl reminded her neighbour of the incremental developments that have transformed her neighbourhood over time. "Concrete" represents a central material feature of what Moroccans call *maisons en dur*, which literally translates as "houses built out of solid materials". As in other contexts, "concrete" relates to respected status and recognised urban citizenship (Gastrow 2017; Choplin 2020). "Window frames" are an element that other informal settlement dwellers with less developed houses frequently wished for—something distinctive that only comes at the end of an incremental construction process. Finally, she made reference to "painted walls" as an additional façade element that is an improvement to the material standards of *maisons en dur*. Referring to these basic, local status symbols, the conversation makes implicit the neighbourhood's established, basic infrastructure, such as sanitation, basic waste management, formal electricity, and running water inside the house. Notwithstanding decades of incremental development, for her neighbour instead it was clear that a *barraka*, a pejorative but frequent term for autoconstructed houses in Morocco, would never become a *maison en dur*—even if it looks the same. Decades of empty promises of resettlement, discrimination, and humiliation had given her the feeling of being a second-class citizen.

This small introductory impression emphasises an important starting point for the conceptual reflections put forward by this chapter. Terms such as *bidonville*, *favela*, or *slum* are socially constructed categories that label rather than describe certain neighbourhoods (Beier 2022; ischer 2014; Perlman 2016; Roy 2011; Valladares 2019). Likewise, they constitute the antithesis of what I suggest to call "material decency" (in Morocco, symbolised by *maisons en dur*)—a sociopolitical expectation of how "good" housing should *look* like. "Material decency" is different from a comprehensive understanding of adequate housing (although it tends to be confused with it in housing programmes), referring to a hyperbole of both technical and aesthetic standards and norms in relation to what is not (i.e. informal settlements, "slums", *bidonvilles, barraka*, etc.), rather than what it is (Beier 2021; Meth 2020). However, if society confuses adequate housing with "material decency", a denigrating label of "otherness" is likely to persist even after upgrading initiatives and decades of incremental development (Beier 2022).

Concerning Rio de Janeiro, Valladares (2019) shows impressively how after years of people-led incremental development, as well as state upgrading initiatives, still, *favelas* have remained *favelas*. Even though living conditions have significantly improved, even though brick-and-mortar houses have replaced shacks, eroding obvious differences between the formal city (the "pavement") and the *favela*, and even though they have become flourishing urban neighbourhoods that attract international tourists, the *favela* has not disappeared but persisted (Cavalcanti 2014; Fischer 2014; Jones 2011). Perlman (2005: 10) goes as far as to conclude: "The only remaining distinction between favelas […] and the rest of the city […] is the deeply-rooted stigma that still adheres to them". Even after resettlement away from *favelas* towards new, supposedly "formal" apartment housing, the stigma persists—continuously attached to the relocated *favelados* (Kolling 2019). Similar examples from India and Morocco show, the persistent stigma of the resettled may mingle with the marginalisation of undesired and quickly deteriorating resettlement locations—sometimes already designated as new, vertical "slums" (Beier 2019: 228f; Doshi 2019; Coelho 2016).

Early theories of Mangin (1967),Stokes (1962), and, most influentially, Turner (1968, 1969) saw the "slum" as a phenomenon that would disappear through autoconstruction and economic growth. However, even though all of this seems to have happened, at least to some extent and in some contexts, the opposite is the case—the proliferation of "slums". While some have argued that this is the result of liberal housing markets being incapable to cater for the urban poor (Berner 2016; Buckley et al. 2016; Potts 2020), others referred more to issues related to insecure and informal tenure (Payne et al. 2009; Werlin 1999; Soto 2000). However, the above-mentioned examples suggesting the persistence of "slums" even after state-led upgrading, titling, and resettlement challenge these explanations.

In this chapter, I suggest that it is an exclusionary social mindset backing the concept of "material decency" that lies behind the proliferation of "slums". It is not only because of affordability issues (Potts 2020) and housing policy failure (Berner 2016), but also because of pervasive and persistent stigmatisation of "informality" that "slums" remain. I argue that such stigma-based exclusion has its origins in colonial rule. This means the ongoing relevance of colonial spatial inequalities and building codes but even more the imposition of Western value systems and a hegemonic notion of "development" (Ziai 2013), which build the foundation of "material decency". It is not about denying unacceptable conditions in some autoconstructed neighbourhoods that require intervention according to health and safety standards to ensure adequate housing. Instead, the aim is to create awareness of an exclusionary, developmentalist mindset that prevents close engagement with a contextual, people-centred understanding of what *adequate* housing would mean. In other words, it must be challenged that an inadequately constructed, standardised apartment house at Casablanca's urban margins is implicitly associated with higher social status than a high-end, elaborately developed autoconstructed house in a central *bidonville*.

Therefore, this chapter puts forward the provocative argument that "slums" will only disappear through a profound decolonisation of dominant mindsets and a proactive appreciation of incremental and vernacular forms of housing. Upgrading and resettlement initiatives that do not address underlying architectural and material value systems are likely to just reproduce and reinforce colonial spatial inequalities. Following post-development discourses (Ziai 2013; Escobar 2007) and calls for more Southern urban theory (McFarlane 2008; Robinson 2006; Watson 2009), this is an attempt to think of new pathways towards decolonised housing concepts.

As a starting point, the chapter re-reads Stokes' 1962 *Theory of Slums*, which although it coined the famous concepts of "slums of hope" and "slums of despair", has attracted rather limited attention compared to the influential work of Turner (Harris 2003). Unlike Turner, Stokes does not speak about any physical characteristics of "slums" but, instead, focuses on economic integration and structural barriers to social escalation. Building on Stokes' revisited theoretical argument, the chapter reviews large-scale housing programmes in different African countries, focusing on differences between proclaimed "adequate housing" and the programmes' driving concerns about "material decency". Finally, the chapter emphasises the developmentalist foundations of "material decency" and concludes by suggesting five demand-driven cornerstones for future decolonial housing concepts—namely, subjectivity, non-materiality, flexibility, contextuality, and choice.

4.2 Stokes' *Theory of Slums* Revisited

During the mid-twentieth century, social scientists discovered shantytowns and "slums" as research objects—mostly in Latin America (Valladares 2019: 65ff). During these "golden years" of developmentalism and modernisation theory, autoconstructed neighbourhoods were increasingly considered as a developmental problem, symbols of rural backwardness and urban poverty and yet a common target of evictions (Fischer 2014). Scholars like Frankenhoff (1967), Mangin (1967), Stokes (1962) and, most influential, Turner (1967, 1968, 1969), were among the first to challenge the predominant politics of eviction, positioning themselves in favour of in-situ solutions and incremental construction. While these early works shared a basic adherence to modernisation theory, believing that through enhanced and inclusive economic growth, "slums" would naturally disappear, they did not foresee this to happen in the immediate future. Turner (1969: 526) remarked, "slums" would continue to exist "as long as the poor remain poor". Likewise, Mangin (1967: 89) noted: "I heard of very few families returning to the country. The city growth and the squatter settlements are permanent developments".

With these statements, Turner and Mangin point to two common key drivers behind the growth of autoconstructed neighbourhoods: inclusive economic growth and urban population growth (Fox 2014). Both variables are crucial to Stokes' (1962)*Theory of Slums*, which argues "slum formation depends on the rate of in-migration as well as on the rate of integration or absorption of [its dwellers by the urban job market]" (1962: 191). While this central argument is certainly biased towards outdated and simplistic statements on rural-to-urban migration as the main driver of "slum" growth, it can be empirically supported if one replaces "in-migration" with "urban population growth". This acknowledges that much population growth of older precarious neighbourhoods can be explained through natural population growth as well as intra-urban migration. However, more relevant for this chapter is Stokes' (1962: 191) addition that "slum formation depends on the existence of barriers to escalation". The barriers may relate to "abilities" and to what he calls "caste", referring to structural forms of discrimination based on skin colour or religion, among others.

Unlike the architect Turner, the economist Stokes does not focus on the materiality of housing but on socioeconomic integration. Stokes' well-known distinction between slums of "hope" and "despair" is about people's very personal estimations of their chances to be absorbed by the job market and to move up the social ladder (Stokes 1962: 189). At first glance, a theory of "slums" without emphasis on material housing quality, standards, and tenure may seem strange, but, as I will show further below, it may help to counter many governments' adherence to "material decency" in housing policies. A second difference to the work of Turner is that in Stokes' theory "slums" appear to be a phenomenon equally present in both the Global North *and* the Global South. Hence, despite quite a lot of outdated and even racist language, this is a refreshing point of view towards a phenomenon, which has recently become the icon of the "undeveloped" and "chaotic" megacity of the Global South (Gilbert 2007; Huchzermeyer 2011; Roy 2011).

Indeed, Stokes' theory may appear outdated and to some extent inconsistent. For example, when he points to the "spontaneous origin" of "slums" (1962: 188), before later using Victorian row housing in Boston's South End as an example (1962: 192). Likewise, his black-and-white categorisations, as well as his strong belief in the power of economic growth and liberal market forces, are certainly a matter of contestation (Potts 2020). However, core elements of his theory still offer a good point of reflection on today's housing policies. I will highlight three main aspects: the significance of non-physical housing functions, the significance of economic integration, and discriminatory barriers to escalation. Stokes begins with an attempt at a definition of "slums" that already shows his emphasis on non-physical, societal forces.

> Slums differ from the districts in which the lowest stratum of the integrated classes live by failing to conform to the standards which this stratum has set for itself. The distinctive feature of slums is not appearance as such, then, but the relation between the slum and its inhabitants and that neighbourhood and its inhabitants which the city regards as having met minimum liveability standards. (Stokes 1962: 188)

This definition differs strikingly from current technical definitions that rather focus on physical deficiencies and legal tenure (UN-Habitat 2003). While the latter fail to explain why established autoconstructed neighbourhoods after years of incremental development and upgrading remain to be called "slums", Stokes' more constructivist approach offers a different point of view. It emphasises the role of a superordinate city society in setting standards and defining non-integration. Explicitly, this does not just refer to "objective" appearance, but to societal relationships and socially constructed difference and hierarchy. Following from this, the meaning of the term "slum" becomes immaterial, shaped by power imbalances—very similar to Valladares' (2019) notion of the invention of the *favela*.

Then, Stokes (1962: 190) goes on stressing the relevance of the city's job market for people's urban integration and social escalation. He assumes that "slum" dwellers will learn, study, and work to access employment that allows them (or their children) to move up the social ladder—a narrative that is very much present in precarious neighbourhoods (Beier 2019; Owusu et al. 2008). Perlman's (2005) long-term research on inter-generational life trajectories of *favela* residents indeed showed that many children and the majority of grandchildren of initial interviewees had left the *favela* and integrated into the city's "formal" sectors. Others had remained by choice and invested in their houses, which over the course of four decades had considerably consolidated. Thus, precarious neighbourhoods cannot be thought detached from people's aspirations to socioeconomic integration and access to urban job markets. The latter also depends on the potential availability of urban opportunities (jobs, education, etc.) that tend to be severely constrained in contexts of urbanisation without growth (Fox 2014) and unsustainably low wages, making housing largely unaffordable (Potts 2020).

Notwithstanding these general impediments for socioeconomic integration, Stokes (1962: 189) emphasises group-specific barriers. People belonging to what he calls "non-escalator classes" are structurally discriminated against on the job market and may only obtain jobs that do not permit upward mobility. Stokes (1962: 190) thinks about minority groups discriminated against because of skin colour or religion. However, referring to the introductory examples of pervasive global stigmatisation of "slum" dwellers, I suggest considering "slum" dwellers per se as structurally discriminated against. In today's cities, many dwellers of precarious neighbourhoods—whether upgraded, incrementally developed, or resettled—face discrimination based on their address (or lack thereof). An example from my own research in an established informal settlement in Casablanca highlights this. A 30-year-old female teacher shared the following experience:

> After my bachelor, I applied everywhere but I did not even receive a response. After a while, I switched the address on my identity card, using the address of my aunt living in Ain Sebaa [a middle-class neighbourhood). Afterwards, several employers invited me. Of course, it does not prove anything, but come on. (Beier 2019: 160)

Similar testimonies may be found, among others, in the work of Coelho (2012: 54) on resettled "slum" households in Chennai, India, and the work of Owusu et al. (2008: 185) on people living in Nima, Accra, and Kolling (2019: 419) on resettled *favela* residents in Salvador, Brazil. Insights from Kerala, India, show how textile factories systematically pay lower wages to women from "slums" just because of their place of residency (Devika 2016: 203). Thus, in addition to limited job opportunities and a perpetuating housing affordability gap (Potts 2020), structural discrimination on the job market limits the ability of "slum" dwellers to move up the social ladder and, hence, contributes to the persistence of "slums".

4.3 Material Decency Versus Adequate Housing

Since the turn of the millennium, scholars such as Croese et al. (2016) and Buckley et al. (2016) have witnessed a return of standardised housing programmes. Often inspired by the wish to build "slum-free" cities (Huchzermeyer 2011), they mark a disruption from international best practice of participatory in situ upgrading of precarious neighbourhoods. Examples in Africa include the standardised housing provision schemes in Angola (Croese and Pitcher 2019; Gastrow 2017), Ethiopia (Planel and Bridonneau 2017; Keller and Mukudi-Omwami 2017), Morocco (Beier 2019, 2021; Harroud 2019), Rwanda (Nikuze et al. 2019), and South Africa (Charlton 2018a, b; Meth 2020). Contrary to Stokes' *Theory of Slums*, these large-scale housing programmes opt for a shelter-centric approach of urban "integration" that tends to confuse adequate housing with the notion of "material decency".

Although they proclaim the provision of adequate housing, standardised housing programmes are little concerned with the reasons that people settle in informal settlements and their actual advantages and disadvantages for the dwellers (Croese et al. 2016). Instead, they judge and homogenise living conditions from outside while presenting standardised shelter-centric solutions as an undisputable improvement to life in "slums". In this context, Meth (2020: 159) speaks about the rhetorical construction of a hyperbole that "vastly overstates and simplifies the contrasts between formal and informal". Moreover, focusing on the "material decency" of housing ignores the significance of other dwelling functions beyond shelter that make up the concept of adequate housing—including economic, social, and emotional dwelling functions (OHCHR and UN-Habitat 2009; Satterthwaite 2020; Turner 1968). While adequate housing is demand-driven and heterogeneous, "material decency" is a normative concept largely influenced by developmentalist thought and prone to stigmatising assumptions. Like Stokes' definition of "slums", "material decency" is used to construct difference between "formal/integrated" and "informal/non-integrated" urban space. Thereby, "material decency" creates binary forms of inclusion/exclusion, fixed at the neighbourhood level, and strongly related to aesthetics, building norms, and power. In Angola, for example, questions of legality relate to the government's perception of what is aesthetically appropriate. "According to such considerations, essentially, if something looked illegal, it was illegal" (Gastrow 2017: 228). In Morocco, King Mohammed VI (MHPV 2013) sees the demolition of *bidonvilles* and the related construction of social housing as a way to ensure both dignity to poor citizens as well as aesthetic and orderly construction.

Resulting from the common confusion of "material decency" with adequate housing, objectives of standardised housing programmes go far beyond the provision of solidly built housing units. Following what Coelho (2016: 114) refers to as "shelter poverty" (a slum-centric notion of urban poverty framing it as a mere function of housing and services), large-scale housing programmes tend to assume (or rather hope) that "decent" or "formal" housing will reduce poverty and spur various subsequent forms of improvement. In the context of South Africa, state agents and policy makers intend state houses "to provide a platform for further development of the household – improving health, prosperity and education by virtue of providing a stable, safe place to live" (Charlton 2018a: 2171). According to Morocco's King Mohammed VI (2006, in MHPV 2013: 123), decent housing "should allow citizens to [...] live a peaceful and dignified life – fundamental conditions fostering the personal growth of our youth". In Ethiopia, a "code of conduct" for condominium life illustrates "authorities' drive to get new residents to adopt new modern and individual urban mindsets" (Planel and Bridonneau 2017: 37).

However, such high-flying expectations towards the provision of housing are at odds with programmes predominantly concerned with "material decency". They tend to "overstate the socioeconomic positives presumed to be gained with the receipt of formal housing" (Meth 2020: 159). In fact, there exists no theory suggesting that materially decent housing will eventually lead to urban inclusion, reduced monetary poverty, and enhanced personal development. Instead, many state-driven housing projects conflict with the socioeconomic integration of so-called beneficiaries as they relocate them further away from sources of income (Beier 2019; Culwick and Patel 2020; Harroud 2019; Kloosterboer 2019; Meth 2020; Nikuze et al. 2019). Thus, they run counter to Stokes' emphasis on economic dwelling functions and the integrative role of urban job markets.

As the provision of "formal" and materially decent housing does not guarantee enhanced economic integration, according to Stokes, neither does it ensure social upward mobility. This is not only due to impeded physical access to employment; it also relates to sustained social barriers. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the stigma of the "slum" may persist even after "formalisation" and the move to new housing. Again, this may relate to the notion of "material decency". However, after housing provision has taken place, it is increasingly people themselves that are blamed for non-conformity with what society defines as "material decency". People-led practices of spatial appropriation—building extensions, commercial use of residential space, or the appropriation of public space, among others—are fuelling once again stigmas around dwellers' putative incapacity to adapt to "modern" urban lifestyles. In the context of Turkey, Erman (2016: 432) found officials of a housing company that implemented a *gecekondu* resettlement "complaining about 'unruly crowds' failing to live a 'civilized' life". Likewise, Charlton (2018a: 2172f) notes,

> Perceived deviations in housing usage [...] spark reactions from within the state which reflect the concern for the appropriate conduct of households [...] rather than a concern for how the house might be deployed to improve life prospects.

Again, adequate housing is confused with an aesthetic focus on "material decency". In fact, many practices of "re-informalisation" of space mirror the inadequateness of a supply-driven provision of standardised housing units (Beier 2021; Charlton 2018a; Erman 2016). Concerning Ethiopia's new condominiums, Kloosterboer (2019: 205f) notes typical challenges for spatial appropriation:

> The organisation of space in relocation areas […] is confronting households with a spatial change that hinders them from continuing to practice their socially and culturally constructed activities in the same way, as they had practiced before.

In addition to people's methods of spatial appropriation, a bad location, the lack of public services (especially waste management), and inadequate, cheap construction that runs counter to notions of "material decency", will lead to a persistence of stigma and various forms of discrimination. After resettlement in Casablanca, a 19-year-old student still felt uncomfortable in writing where she lives on Facebook. Another interviewee mentioned that because of the bad infrastructure, residents still get dirty shoes—an aspect typically associated with shantytown dwellers. Finally, a 22-year-old resident reported that he was rejected when applying for a job at a telecommunications agency in the city centre, as the owner felt that his domicile was too far away, and he could not rely on him should he need someone to work immediately (Beier 2019: 229).

4.4 Western Value Systems Behind Material Decency

The above section has shown that "material decency" drives Africa's mass housing programmes. The focus is not on economic integration and the reduction of social barriers to escalation, as Stokes would have recommended. Instead of looking how to improve housing situations to make them *more* adequate (i.e. through participatory in-situ upgrading), resettlement to standardised housing is merely *assumed* to stimulate poverty reduction, personal growth, and a new "urban" and "modern" mentality. Simultaneously, the programmes sustain stigmas of precarious housing as embodying the opposite of a normative "development" that is expected to emerge from materially decent housing. Such exclusionary mindsets originate from colonial understandings of urban planning and are preserved through uncritical agendas calling for "development" (Huchzermeyer 2011; Robinson 2006; Watson 2009).

Firstly, the focus on "material decency" mirrors aspirations to Western ideas of "good urbanism" that are perceived to represent "development" and "modernity". For example, Gastrow (2017: 225) argues that the aesthetic imaginations of Angola's government "reproduce a long history in African cities of the conflation of specific imaginations of urbanism, usually drawn from Euro-America, with modernity and progress". Often, colonial powers had incorporated these aesthetic imaginations in building codes and regulations, later taken over by many post-independence regimes without much change up until today (Watson 2009: 2260). In addition, urban images have gained in importance for the international competitiveness of urban centres. Visions of “development” and “modernity” circulate globally and transfer aesthetic values through images of economically prosperous cities in the North (Robinson 2006; Watson 2014). Neighbourhoods that do not conform to these aesthetic values are increasingly under threat (Huchzermeyer 2011; Ghertner 2014).

Secondly, housing policies may perceive “material decency” as a form of emancipation from colonial repression and neglect with regards to housing. Thus, overstating the benefits of “formal” housing in South Africa emerges “from the desire to distance the new developmental state from the appalling consequences of apartheid policy, acknowledging that for many, living informally was often the only way to gain an urban foothold during Apartheid” (Meth 2020: 142f). However, seeing “material decency” as an emancipatory distinction from colonially created “informality” does not question colonial norms and values of “decent housing”.

Thus, driven by “material decency”, Africa’s housing programmes manifest Western value systems and planning norms in the name of “development”. At the same time, they denigrate incremental or “informal” construction and, hence, may become blind to improvements outside the norm. Indeed, Stokes’ *Theory of Slums*, as well as recent interventions by Potts (2020), stressing the role of low wages for housing affordability, urge us to look beyond material standards. Instead, “slums” are a result of limited economic integration and structural discrimination that manifests through notions of “material decency”.

Taking these aspects seriously, one might come to the conclusion that some economically well integrated “slums” would have already “disappeared” if there was no structural discrimination based on a vilifying notion of “otherness”. This is the case especially for established communities characterised by owner-occupation and long traditions of incremental improvement—for example, former Karyan Central in Casablanca, the Rocinha in Rio de Janeiro, and Nima in Accra. In other words, it is stigmatisation and discrimination that does not allow us to *recognise* their disappearance, because they are challenging the concept of “development” and related Western value systems behind “material decency”. It is important to highlight that I do not mean *physical* disappearance—a disastrous misunderstanding behind the international slogan *Cities Without Slums* (Arabindoo 2011; Huchzermeyer 2011). Instead, it is about the sustained *social* disappearance of “slums”—something that, as mentioned above, cannot be achieved through resettlement only. To make it even clearer, I return to the example from the very beginning of this essay. Although the house from the older woman conformed to all objective features of a “decent” house—following decades of incremental improvement and economic integration—still, she did not feel accepted as a recognised urban citizen because her neighbourhood looked *different* and was known as a “shantytown”.

4.5 Toward Decolonialised Concepts of Adequate Housing

Following these thoughts, it is essential to develop new, decolonialised concepts of adequate housing that challenge the primacy of "material decency". As such, these concepts must take variegated forms of "adequate housing" seriously and especially their role for economic integration and social upward mobility. Thus, in contrast to the normative top-down imposition of "material decency" that drives mass housing programmes, new housing concepts must be developed from below, starting with an analysis of housing demands (Potts 2020). This is in line with recent work of Satterthwaite (2020: 12), who claimed that "We need a better understanding of what different low-income groups need and prioritise and the choices they make, as well as how these may change over time". With reference to examples from my own fieldwork, both in a shantytown (Er-Rhamna) and at a resettlement site (Nouvelle Lahraouiyine) in Casablanca (Beier 2019), the following five cornerstones of adequate housing demands may pave the way for more demand-driven, and decolonialised housing concepts. They are subjectivity, non-materiality, flexibility, contextuality, and choice.

The first is subjectivity. It must be acknowledged that adequate housing does not mean the same thing for everyone. Borrowing the words from Turner (1968: 355), adequate housing must be understood from the "relationship between man and environment". Therefore, it is naturally a qualitative and, hence, subjective concept that cannot be understood by looking merely at material housing standards. Consequently, it is not surprising that adequate housing may be viewed differently even within the same household. For example, an older woman in Er-Rhamna shared her strong emotional attachment to her house: "I don't want to leave, I am proud of my house! My husband and I built it with our own hands". In contrast, her two young adult daughters were looking forward to potential resettlement, as they felt uncomfortable with the intense social control within the neighbourhood. Thus, it is crucial to acknowledge different housing priorities and not to judge housing conditions in a homogenising way.

Secondly, new housing concepts must stress the non-material dimensions of adequate housing and, thus, break with reductionist understandings of housing as merely physical shelter. Instead, I suggest seeing adequate housing as an inseparable whole comprised of four dimensions—material, economic, social (including political), and emotional dwelling functions. Individuals would associate personal values to each dimension, but for everyone only the togetherness of all four dimensions would make up adequate housing. While this has been long acknowledged by international declarations (OHCHR and UN-Habitat 2009), it is time to make non-material dimensions of adequate housing more explicit. In the sense of Stokes, this would especially mean aspects of socioeconomic integration. Unfortunately, as Koenig (2018: 90f) remarks with reference to West Africa, many housing programmes assume the reconstitution of jobs and urban livelihoods after intra-urban resettlement as unproblematic. Evidence suggests rather the opposite (Beier 2019; Culwick and Patel 2020; Nikuze et al. 2019). Thus, the notion of non-materiality is significant to deconstruct common beliefs behind "material decency" as the magic solution to a diverse range of social problems associated with precarious neighbourhoods (Meth 2020; Coelho 2016).

A third cornerstone might be flexibility. Across various contexts, the incremental character of autoconstruction has been widely recognised (Bredenoord and Lindert 2010; van Noorloos et al. 2020). However, unlike Latin America, Africa's housing programmes have hardly acknowledged flexibility over time. Not only do they provide fixed, one-size-fits-all solutions to which households with very heterogeneous needs must adapt, they also actively discourage people-led change (Beier 2021; Charlton 2018a; Schramm 2017). One woman in Er-Rhamna, comparing her current home with her previous rental apartment, remarked that living in a shantytown had enabled her to develop her home according to her very own personal needs. Living together with her mentally sick husband, she was happy having been able to construct a separate room as an extension to the house, which allowed her husband to live close to her without permanently sharing the same space. To oppose the stigmatisation of incremental construction, new housing concepts need to reflect on how to account for people's changing demands for adequate housing.

Fourth, adequate housing is contextual. Different geographic locations and cultural backgrounds have historically led to different, vernacular forms of housing. However, Africa's standardised housing programmes, driven by "material decency" and cost effectiveness, are rather marked by architectural homogenisation. Notwithstanding basic differences between low-density detached housing in South Africa and high-rise condominiums in Ethiopia, housing tends to be characterised by little sensitivity to local contexts. Without falling into the trap of fetishising vernacular construction (Grubbauer 2017), I would like to highlight the need to acknowledge that adequate housing demands differ according to climatic conditions, cultural and social practices. For example, in the case of Morocco, four-storey apartment houses and regular grids have disregarded cultural preferences for semi-public space such as courtyards and cul-de-sacs, which have historically served as meeting places especially for female neighbours. Likewise, in Ethiopia, standardised condominiums show little sensitivity to local practices of socialisation such as coffee ceremonies (Planel and Bridonneau 2017). In both contexts, non-contextual architectural designs and the rigid implementation of resettlement have led to social isolation (Beier 2019; Planel and Bridonneau 2017).

Finally, adequate housing is about choice. While wealthy people may choose where and how to live based on their preferences and resources (Satterthwaite 2020: 5), liberal choice is often denied to low-income people. I do not mean that low-income households simply have less choice because of fewer financial resources (Potts 2020). Their choice is often denied for political reasons and because of discrimination. It is the government that decides what is best for them. In some countries such as Rwanda and Morocco, housing programmes request people (by force) to leave the place they live and move to houses with predefined minimum standards at a certain location they are unable to influence. In other countries such as South Africa and Ethiopia, people decide to place themselves on housing waiting lists. Once selected, house assignment leaves little room for manoeuvre. However, a lack of choice does not only occur in the context of repressive housing schemes. It also builds on notions of "material decency" and related stigmatisation denying people to stay in precarious neighbourhoods out of choice. In Morocco's shantytowns, people that would have had enough resources to buy property but decided to stay faced even more stigmatisation than others. They were considered as profit-seeking spongers waiting to benefit from state housing. Again, these points highlight Stokes' structural barriers to escalation and related stigmatisation behind the social proliferation of "slums".

To conclude, I call for new housing concepts that do not struggle to explain why 40-year-old Abdallah decided to leave his newly bought, formal apartment vacant and instead preferred staying in his family home in one of Casablanca's oldest shantytowns. We need housing concepts that do not struggle to explain why Khadija is happy to wake up in order to empty the buckets inside the house each night it rains, while for others, leaking roofs are a main reason behind their wish to move out. To overcome these putative contradictions, new housing concepts must take adequate housing seriously. A stronger emphasis on the non-material dimensions of housing, for example, through Stokes' *Theory of Slums*, may offer the necessary inspiration for reflection. Likewise, the five cornerstones of adequate housing could offer a starting point to challenge "material decency" and developmentalist thought in urban planning and housing policy.

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