Toward a Global Urban Sociology: Keywords[1]

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Many cities in the Global South are structurally different from the Northern, particularly American, cities on which much of urban sociology's conceptual apparatus has been based. Thus, depicting them in terms of a standard urban vocabulary risks imposing an inappropriate way of seeing. We need a vocabulary that is able to accommodate their different urban experience. This special issue contributes to the work of building that vocabulary. We select five keywords in urban sociology—*eviction, segregation, suburbs, violence,* and *gentrification*—and reconstruct them in light of the places we study (India, China, Mexico, the Philippines, and South Africa). Our aim is to produce a set of keywords better equipped to travel South and, in the process, advance a truly global urban sociology.

Our special issue is inspired by Raymond Williams' celebrated *Keywords* (1983). In the book, Williams set out to define a set of concepts fundamental to the study of culture and society; not define in the dictionary sense, that is, with the intention of settling a word's meaning once and for now, but in the sense of demarcating a topology of signification, and of showing the meanings of foundational concepts—for example, art, work, experience, nature, and democracy—to be multiple, inconsistent, and frequently at odds. In this respect, Williams aimed to *unsettle* our established understandings of keywords. In so doing, he hoped to develop a more sophisticated and nuanced conceptual vocabulary. The task was important, he believed, because such a vocabulary structured our entrée into and engagement with the topic of culture broadly.

Our aim, similarly, is to unsettle a set of keywords for urban sociology with respect to the experience of cities in the Global South. Concepts are socially embedded, after all. Their meanings are "inextricably bound up with the problems [they are] being used to discuss" (Williams 1983:15). These problems, of course, are rooted in specific social contexts. The concept of segregation, for example, has been defined mainly with reference to the situation in Chicago over the course of the twentieth century; hence, its focus on race and
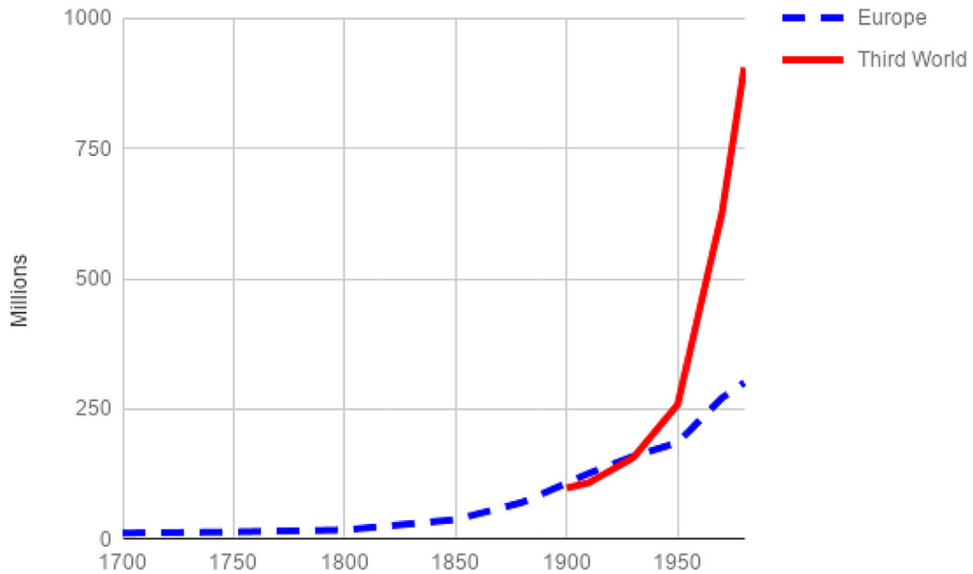
FIG 1. Urban population growth in Europe and the "Third World" 1700–1980. Note: Third World" includes market economies in Africa, Latin America, and Asia (China and other planned economies are excluded). [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

poverty, hence, its emphasis on spatial concentration and social isolation. Segregation in the Global South does not necessarily share these features, as we will see. We must be careful, therefore, about exporting our vocabulary to very different urban contexts. But it is easy to be careless. Concepts, such as segregation, eviction, suburbanization, violence, and gentrification, having been elaborated in the context of Northern, specifically American, cities, are routinely applied, sometimes wholesale, to cities in the Global South. These cities are structurally different, however, and depicting them with a vocabulary derived from US cities can lead to misunderstanding (Ren 2018). We risk imposing an inappropriate way of seeing. We also risk not seeing or properly grasping the distinctiveness of their urban situation.

We are assuming, of course, that cities in the Global South represent a sufficiently different urban situation to warrant new or newly inflected keywords. What makes them different? It is beyond the scope of the issue to provide a systematic account of the differences. But let us consider a particularly crucial one for urban theory: the divide between formal and informal housing in many, but not all, Southern cities. This divide represents a social structure distinct to many cities in the developing world. While it is not the only social division or always the most important one, its emergence is a direct result of the "overurbanization" of these cities.[1] A number of so-called Third World countries urbanized rapidly in the mid-twentieth century. However, their urbanization differed markedly from the process that shaped European and North American cities a century earlier. It was distinguished by, one, the greater scale and speed of urban population growth and, two, the smaller role played by industrialization.

The urban population in developing countries quadrupled between 1950 and 1985 (Figure 1). It grew twice as fast as the urban population in the developed world during a

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TABLE 1. Industrial Employment and Levels of Urbanization (percent) 1800–1980

	Developed Countries[1]		Third World[2]	
	Employment[3]	Urbanization	Employment	Urbanization
1800	10	10	10	9
1850	15	16	9	9
1880	17	24	8	9
1900	19	31	9	10
1910	20	34	9	10
1920	21	37	9	12
1930	21	40	9	13
1950	24	47	8	18
1960	27	54	9	22
1970	29	61	11	26
1980	29	64	13	31

Source: Bairoch 1988.
[1]Europe (including Russia), North America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa (excluding Japan).
[2]Market economies in Africa, Latin America, and Asia (China and other planned economies are excluded).
[3]Manufacturing industries and mines.

comparable period of growth in the nineteenth century (1860–1900). This growth represented a population increase of more than 800 million people—a number greater than the entire urban population of the world in 1950. It took the developed world a century for levels of urbanization to rise from 12 to 32 percent; it took the developing world half this time. Instead of the city acting as "a brake on its own growth," the dynamic describing urban growth in the developed world, we see a dynamic of accelerating urbanization in Third World cities (Bairoch 1988:240). Davis (1965) described First World urban growth graphically as an attenuated S curve. Urban growth in the Third World looked more like a sharp J curve.

The second key difference has to do with the smaller role played by industrialization in the urbanization of these cities. In many developing countries, urbanization lacked the same strong association with industrialization that characterized the urban growth of developed countries in the first half of the nineteenth century (Table 1). The relative lack of industrial employment in a context of runaway urban growth created a situation, Hoselitz (1957:43) observed, with "no proper analogue in previous urban developments in the West." Scholars in the 1950s and 1960s diagnosed cities in developing countries as being "overurbanized." By this, they meant that urban growth had "run ahead" of the city's capacity to absorb the population (Davis and Golden 1954; Gugler and Flanagan 1976). There was not enough industrialization or economic development relative to urban population growth; specifically, there were not enough jobs, housing, and services.

This situation came to define the social landscape of Third World cities for decades to come. Informal work and informal settlement became widespread (Tables 2 and 3). The divide between formal and informal housing reflected a discontinuity in urban space; a stark contrast in the density of settlements, quality of housing, and provision of infrastructure and services. It also represented a discontinuity in urban meaning. The distinction between "normal" and "abnormal" housing (the modality of the latter notwithstanding) underlay a moral valuation of the residents of each type. The housing divide, in short, traced a social boundary, the terms of which echoed the colonial divide distinguishing Western from native sectors. Informal settlers were "squatters" and, as such, second-class,

TABLE 2. Estimated Share of Urban Labor Force in the Informal Sector in Selected Developing Countries

Area	Year	Percent
Africa		
Abidjan (Ivory Coast)	1970	31
Lagos (Nigeria)	1976	50
Kumasi (Ghana)	1974	60–70
Nairobi (Kenya)	1972	44
Urban areas (Senegal)	1976	50
Urban areas (Tunisia)	1977	34
Asia		
Calcutta (India)	1971	40–50
Ahmedabad (India)	1971	47
Jakarta (Indonesia)	1976	45
Colombo (Sri Lanka)	1971	19
Urban areas (Malaysia)	1970	35
Singapore	1970	23
Urban areas (Thailand)	1976	26
Urban areas (Pakistan)	1972	69
Latin America		
Cordoba (Argentina)	1976	38
São Paulo (Brazil)	1976	43
Urban areas (Brazil)	1970	30
Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)	1972	24
Belo Horizonte (Brazil)	1972	31
Urban areas (Chile)	1968	39
Bogota (Colombia)	1970	43
Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic)	1973	50
Guayaquil (Ecuador)	1970	48
Quito (Ecuador)	1970	48
San Salvador (El Salvador)	1974	41
Mexico City (Mexico)	1970	42
Asuncion (Paraguay)	1973	57
Urban areas (Peru)	1970	60
Urban areas (Venezuela)	1974	44
Caracas (Venezuela)	1974	40
Kingston (Jamaica)	1974	33

Source: Sethuraman 1981.

or, more aptly, "not yet" citizens (Chakrabarty 2000). They were backward: deficient in terms of tenure security, income, and education but, above all, in *civilization.* Bourdieu (1979:91) described the boundary separating the Algerian shantytown from government flats and the formal city as the "threshold of modernity." It distinguished different communities and ways of life (see also Abu-Lughod 1980 on the dual city). In recent years, the divide between formal and informal housing has become even more salient. Neoliberal economic restructuring has led to the building of industrial, commercial, and residential enclaves—exclusive and often enclosed urban spaces (Caldeira 2000; Shatkin 2008). This has had the effect of sharpening the housing divide and amplifying its power as a social structure. Today, the class-cum-housing divide defines many Global South cities in the same way the racial divide defines many American ones. As we will see, it is implicated in every one of our keywords.

TABLE 3. Incidence of Slums in Selected Cities in Developing Countries

Country	City	Percentage of Urban Population Living in Slums[1]	
Sub-Saharan Africa			
Cameroon	Douala	80	1970
	Yaoundé	90	1970
Ethiopia	Addis Ababa	90	1968
Ghana	Accra	53	1968
Ivory Coast	Abidjan	60	1964
Kenya	Nairobi	33	1970
	Mombasa	66	1970
Liberia	Monrovia	50	1970
Madagascar	Tananarive	33	1969
Malawi	Blantyre	56	1966
Nigeria	Ibadan	75	1971
Senegal	Dakar	60	1971
Somalia	Mogadishu	77	1967
Sudan	Port Sudan	55	1971
Tanzania	Dar es Salaam	50	1970
Togo	Lome	75	1970
Upper Volta (Burkina Faso)	Ouagadougou	70	1966
Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo)	Kinshasa	60	1969
Zambia	Lusaka	48	1969
Middle East/Mediterranean			
Iraq	Baghdad	29	1965
Jordan	Amman	41	1971
Turkey	Ankara	60	1970
	Istanbul	40	1970
	Izmir	65	1970
Lebanon	Beirut	1.5	1970
Morocco	Casablanca	70	1971
	Rabat	69	1971
Asia			
Afghanistan	Kabul	21	1971
India	Calcutta	33	1971
	Bombay (Mumbai)	25	1971
	Delhi	30	1971
	Madras	25	1971
	Baroda	19	1971
Indonesia	Jakarta	26	1972
	Bandung	27	1972
	Makassar	33	1972
Country	City	Percentage of Urban Population Living in Slums[1]	
Asia			
Nepal	Kathmandu	22	1961
Pakistan	Karachi	23	1970
Sri Lanka	Colombo	43	1968
Hong Kong	Hong Kong	16	1969
South Korea	Seoul	30	1970
	Busan	31	1970
Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur	37	1971
Philippines	Manila	35	1972
Singapore	Singapore	15	1970

(*Continued*)

TABLE 3. Continued

Country	City	Percentage of Urban Population Living in Slums[1]	
Latin America and the Caribbean			
Brazil	Rio de Janeiro	30	1970
	Belo Horizonte	14	1970
	Recife	50	1970
	Porto Alegre	13	1970
	Brasilia	41	1970
Chile	Santiago	25	1964
Colombia	Bogotá	60	1969
	Cali	30	1969
	Buenaventura	30	1969
Ecuador	Guayaquil	49	1969
Guatemala	Guatemala City	30	1971
Honduras	Tegucigalpa	25	1970
Mexico	Mexico City	46	1970
Panama	Panama City	17	1970
Peru	Lima	40	1970
	Arequipa	40	1970
	Chimbote	67	1970
Venezuela	Caracas	40	1969
	Maracaibo	50	1969
	Barquisimeto	41	1969
	Ciudad Guayana	40	1969

Source: Grimes 1976.
[1]The definition of "slum" varies from country to country, and thus these figures are only meant to indicate rough orders of magnitude.

This is only one trajectory, however. There are others, also distinct from the course of urbanization in Western Europe and the United States. While the urban population in Third World cities was exploding circa mid-twentieth century, the communist governments of many so-called Second World countries pursued antiurban policies. These policies led to the "under-urbanization" of cities in China, Eastern Europe, and parts of Southeast Asia (Murray and Szelenyi 1984). These cities did not begin to grow rapidly until quite late in the century, with the easing of restrictions on property and population movement.

The divide between formal and informal housing has long stood out as emblematic of what used to be called the "Third World city." This label has become outmoded and even politically incorrect as the cities it designates have become more differentiated. We are certainly not calling for its return as a blanket description of cities in the developing world. Our concern, rather, is that without the categorical distinction we lose an indicator of the structural differences between "First" and "Third World" cities. We lose the sense that these are not just different cities but different *types* of cities, and revert, by default, to viewing them as simply different in individual ways—as if Chicago is different from Manila in the same way it is different from Los Angeles or Paris. Oddly enough, this view is compatible with the assumption that cities everywhere are basically similar simply by virtue of being cities. Without a higher grade lens, the category of urban becomes the main referent for First and Third World cities alike, even though its contents have been fundamentally informed by the experiences of the

former. Thus, we may be led to transpose concepts developed in one structural context to another.

The question is, how do we keep differences in urban structure and experience between the Global South and North in view? In this endeavor, we must sail between two "traps." On the one hand, Southern cities may be discounted—understudied and treated as exceptional or outside of urban theory—or obscured by the blanket application of "universal" concepts. On the other hand, scholars may play up the distinctiveness of these cities to the point of incomparability, rejecting existing concepts as irremediably tainted by their provenance and calling instead for a wholly new conceptual map—in short, building theory specific to the Global South. Geographers are more likely to fall into this trap, and sociologists into the former one. This move strikes us as myopic. It forecloses conversation about and across urban differences and precludes efforts to build a truly global urban framework.

Rather than simply introducing new concepts (although this is sometimes warranted), our approach is to *open up* existing ones. We do so by reconstructing a set of urban keywords from the ground up, that is, reconfiguring them in terms of the situations to which they apply. For instance, Ren, in her piece, articulates suburbs in terms of infrastructure, governance, and contention over land, arguing that it is impossible to think of "suburbs" in China, India, and Latin America without taking these topics into account. Our aim is to unsettle the keyword's established meaning while at the same time expanding its range of signification. We see this move as productive. For example, Weinstein argues in her piece that evictions in India and South Africa generally take the form of slum demolitions. As such, they are not individual but collective events affecting entire communities, they are executed by the state rather than by private actors, and they are often politically motivated, not just market driven. Her specification is useful for three reasons. One, it allows for greater analytical precision when applying the term eviction to these and other, similar contexts across the Global South. Two, it opens up new lines of inquiry. We are led to ask why eviction manifests in these different ways and thus compelled to define the scope conditions attending each manifestation. We are led to ask whether the two conceptualizations are commensurable—that is, what makes eviction in Mumbai like eviction in Milwaukee?—and thus compelled to clarify the keyword's essential content or identity. Finally, bringing a different form of eviction into view widens our framework of analysis. We acquire a broader conception not just of what eviction looks like but of what it might entail. This enables us to see an "old" phenomenon in new ways. Studying eviction in India, for instance, may lead us to look outside the conceptual box of evictions in the United States. We might investigate the collective impact of evictions on communities, the role of the state in abetting it, and the politics driving it.

If urban keywords can be inflected in several ways, it is because their various meanings correspond to different structural conditions and historical trajectories. We seek to keep these differences in view. Rather than taking the standard meaning of a keyword and simply applying it, largely unmodified, to urban situations around the world, our approach is to situate a particular meaning within its constitutive milieu and then to consider it alongside other meanings. This move decenters but does not displace US cities. More than this, it advances a conceptual framework that is fundamentally, irreducibly comparative. Comparison becomes integral to how we think about—how we theorize—cities.[2]

This approach represents an effort to build a *global urban sociology.* We should be clear about what this means and distinguish our approach from similar efforts to "globalize" sociology. Here, it may be useful to draw a contrast with the approach promulgated by Burawoy et al. (2000) in the edited volume *Global Ethnography*. The aim of global ethnography is to uncover global forces, connections, and imaginations. The scholars featured in the volume focus on global forces as they manifest concretely, locally. They show how globalization is experienced on the ground, illustrating "the ways it attaches itself to everyday life" (p. 339). The move is outward, from microprocesses to macroforces. It involves extending theory to encompass a variety of cases.

We argue, in contrast, that focusing on the global, thus defined, can serve to obscure the kind of structural differences in which we are interested. Globalization, Tomlinson (2003:308) writes, is "in some senses an antonym for Third World." The rubric induces a shift in analytical focus from the differences between countries to their common integration into a global economy. We are led to emphasize processes of convergence and "flows" of capital and culture that cut across, rather than along, the development divide. The category of global cities, for instance, provides a lens for viewing cities as different as São Paulo and New York as subject to the same global forces and structured in similar ways. This is an important perspective, to be sure, but it does not erase structural differences resulting from overurbanization, late industrialization, colonization, and peripheral or dependent position in the world economy. Rather than keeping one eye on global forces, we emphasize keeping in mind the different urban trajectories and forms and different ways of being urban around the world. In our view, it is being able to comprehend these differences—once again, in the sense of recognizing them and taking them into account—that makes urban sociology global.

We distinguish our use of the term global in another sense as well. By situating keywords and highlighting their different inflections in different contexts, we challenge putatively "global"—that is, universal—theorizing. We emphasize, instead, the task of building a conceptual vocabulary able to accommodate the diversity of urban experience. This task is more important than ever given American urban sociology's increasing attention to cities in the Global South and its efforts to incorporate them into a common framework. We need to make certain that the experiences of these cities inform how the very categories constituting the field are conceptualized.

We see this special issue as contributing to the work of building a more global urban vocabulary. We selected five keywords in urban sociology: *eviction, segregation, suburbs, violence,* and *gentrification.* These concepts are well established in the subfield but fall short when applied to cities in the Global South. Hence, we set about reconstructing them in light of the places we study, including India, China, Colombia, Mexico, the Philippines, and South Africa. Our keywords are clearly connected—the fear of crime and violence to segregation, eviction to gentrification, and suburbs to segregation—and we mean for them to be taken in conjunction with one another, as forming a vocabulary for urban theory and research.

Notes

[1]Suffice to say, the urban population is also divided along various other parameters (race, ethnicity, tribe, indigeneity, religion, region, and so on), which may cut along or across, highlighting or obscuring, the housing divide.

[2]As Reyes (2019) has noted, this move, of building theory on studies firmly rooted in particular places, is in keeping with the tradition of the Chicago school of urban sociology.

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