

## **Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Global Challenges of Urbanization and Migration**

*On February 25, 2016, Perry World House, Penn’s new university-wide hub for global engagement and international policy research, convened the workshop “Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Global Challenges of Urbanization and Migration.” The workshop was co-sponsored by Penn’s School of Arts & Sciences, PennDesign, the Penn Institute for Urban Research, and the Alice Paul Center for Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies. It aimed to identify pressing global questions in the space of urbanization and migration and highlight the range of approaches being used to analyze them. This document offers reflections on the workshop and its policy relevance.<sup>1</sup>*

### *Introduction*

Today our world faces the highest level of human displacement in recorded history, with causes and consequences that are complex and often controversial.<sup>2</sup> Globalization is leading to new and changing migration patterns with nuances that seem to require an expanded vocabulary and can be difficult to capture in measured data. At the same time, the world’s population is on track to be 66 percent urban by 2050, forcing us to ask critical questions about urban equity and sustainability over the coming decades.<sup>3</sup> These issues, while often approached independently, are deeply interconnected—part of continuums that challenge the distinctions between voluntary and forced migration on one hand, or urban and rural communities on the other. In 2015, the United Nations and over 190 world leaders committed to a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aimed at ending extreme poverty, fighting inequality and injustice, and halting the progression of climate change. All of these goals are unquestionably linked to urbanization and migration, making it ever more crucial that scholars analyze these in ways that help contribute to global problem-solving.

### *Sociological and Demographic Insights*

A range of methodological challenges exist for research conducted on global trends in migration and urbanization. In many cases, national datasets do not disaggregate migratory flows by characteristics such as age, gender, education and skills, which can impede the development of

---

<sup>1</sup> This workshop report was prepared by Katelyn Leader, Program Associate at Perry World House.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, “Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase,” June 18, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs, “Highlights,” *World Urbanization Prospects, The 2014 Revision* (2014), 1.

effective policies.<sup>4</sup> In her presentation, “The United Nations Global Prospects on Urbanization,” UN Population Affairs Officer Lina Bassarsky confirmed that data limitations and definitional questions also hinder research on urbanization. The 2014 Revision of the World Urbanization Prospects states that “there is no common global definition of what constitutes an urban settlement,” and encourages people to take into consideration that national statistics are corrected for consistency but not for a shared definition of “city” or “urban.”<sup>5</sup> The lack of international uniformity in data collection and interpretation highlights the complexity of global research and underscores the importance of using a diverse methodological toolkit to study migration and urbanization.

While the world’s population has been more “urban” than “rural” since 2007, urbanization is not happening uniformly, varying in pace across time and regions. Asia and Africa, for instance, are still primarily rural, but expected to urbanize faster than other regions.<sup>6</sup> China and India are home to both the largest rural and urban populations in the world and expected to contribute more than one third of the global urban population increase between 2014 and 2050.<sup>7</sup> Between 2014 and 2050, India alone is projected to experience the largest urban increase (404 million people) of any country.<sup>8</sup>

The University of Pennsylvania’s Michel Guillot, Associate Professor of Sociology and Megan Reed, Doctoral Candidate in Sociology, explain that such significant demographic shifts require us to reconceptualize traditional country narratives, such as India being a “rural” nation. Guillot and Reed also suggest that these changes necessitate a better understanding of the causes and consequences of urbanization. For instance, the idea that urban growth is solely or primarily the result of rural to urban migration in most places can be misleading. Guillot says that urbanization in India is actually more about morphing places: approximately one-third of urban growth can be attributed to the reclassification of space to an “urban” category and nearly half to population growth. Only 22 percent can be attributed to migration.<sup>9</sup>

These transforming spaces are heterogeneous in creation, existence, and impact, which is why examining how different populations are affected at each stage is invaluable to effective policymaking. A study being conducted at the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for the Advanced Study of India (CASI) in collaboration with the Department of Sociology and the Population Studies Center is focusing on the heterogeneous impacts of urbanization on human

---

<sup>4</sup> International Labour Organization, “Labour migration statistics,” <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/policy-areas/statistics/lang--en/index.htm> (accessed April 2016); United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs, “Highlights,” *World Urbanization Prospects, The 2014 Revision* (2014), 18; “Migration Measurement Challenges: UNDESA/UNICEF,” UNICEF, GFMD 2007.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs, “Highlights,” *World Urbanization Prospects, The 2014 Revision* (2014), 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> Guillot, Michel and Megan Reed. “Urbanization in India: a research agenda,” presentation at Perry World House Workshop *Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Global Challenges of Urbanization & Migration*, February 25, 2016.

capital in India.<sup>10</sup> Through a survey of over 5,000 households, researchers will collect data on safety and crime, marriage, social networks and commensality, political attitudes and access to local elite networks, education, and migration. This level of analysis is complex, given the multifaceted and countless layers of opportunities and challenges that define human lives, yet essential for better understanding the possibilities that exist for sustainable urban development.

Another study being conducted through Penn's Department of Sociology examines the heterogeneity of impacts on human capital in China. In the presentation "Unequal Starting Points: Children of the Rich and Poor in Urbanizing China," Associate Professor of Sociology Emily Hannum and doctoral candidate Emily Young explain that it is critical to understand the impact of spatial hierarchies on income inequality and educational outcomes. Their research explores the widening education gap in China, which they attribute to the emergence of an urban "affluent" class that is pulling away from resource-deprived families. Understanding how different urban realities can lead to drastically varied life outcomes is critical to creating policies that will promote inclusive growth.

### *Gender-based Insights*

The characteristics and consequences of urbanization and migration vary across nations and regions, as well as across individuals, households, and communities, based on numerous factors. Some of these include socioeconomic status, nationality, race, and gender. The importance of gender-based analysis, in particular, has gained widespread recognition among the international community, perhaps best exemplified in Sustainable Development Goal #5: "achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls." Attaining this goal will require significant insight into the diverse challenges and opportunities that women and girls encounter, the meaning of empowerment in different contexts, and the range of methods that might be used.

In her presentation, "The Demography of Commuting: How Population Groups (Women) Create and Respond to Cities," Janice Madden, Penn Professor of Regional Science, Sociology, and Real Estate, examines the demography of commuting through gender. In particular, she explores why women on average and over time (1981-2009) have shorter commute times than men despite changing opportunities and earnings. Her research considers differences in types of jobs, household roles, and the value placed on time, and she finds that women's increasing labor force participation and greater reluctance to commute has led employers to suburbanize (that is, locate closer to women's residences) and that women's wages are not strongly affected by their shorter commutes. Research that examines the underlying rationale behind gendered choices and constraints will be essential to promoting gender parity over the coming decades.

The importance of gender-based analysis was also underscored in the presentation on gender and health in cities by Anne Teitelman, Penn Nursing's Endowed Term Chair in Global Women's

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Health Associate Professor of Nursing. She describes how adolescent girls in urban areas are more likely to be sexually active than their non-urban peers while facing higher rates of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STI). Teitelman has developed a 10-session health intervention called “Stand Up Together,” focused on sharing knowledge and skills with adolescent girls on how to prevent HIV and STI, identify abuse, and promote healthy relationships. While its impact is still being evaluated as part of a randomized clinical trial, the impetus for this intervention speaks to the importance of identifying and addressing the specific needs of different populations of adolescents. Teitelman acknowledges, however, that empowering urban girls will ultimately require far more than health interventions; it will require the expansion of choice and opportunity in all aspects of their lives.

Another space that requires critical analysis with regards to gender is the law. In her work on international migration law, Jaya Ramji-Nogales, I. Herman Stern Professor of Law and Co-Director of the Institute for International Law and Public Policy at Temple University’s Beasley School of Law, examines urbanization and gender in Central America, focusing on the extraordinary rates of violence against women, the resultant migration, and global migration law’s response. Her presentation on this topic critiques the international legal definition of a refugee as outdated, grounded in the experience of men fleeing, for example, religious persecution by government actors, and failing to account for the contemporary female experience, which involves new forms of harm and types of perpetrators. Many Central American women arriving at our southern border are fleeing gender-based violence perpetrated by gangs, a situation the drafters of the Refugee Convention did not envision.

Ramji-Nogales depicts the asylum adjudication process at the southern border, known as expedited removal, as a “black box” that “makes a mockery of due process.” She argues that the arrival of increased numbers of women and children at our southern border in 2014 gave rise to “crisis” rhetoric that has enabled a “crisis” response—the detention of women and children fleeing torture and death. The inflexibility of the international legal framework and its concomitant inability to respond to emerging needs has thus helped to sow the seeds of a morally questionable and irrational response. Ramji-Nogales argues that international migration law must anticipate and expect migration flows, and play a role in coordinating migration. She suggests a temporary international legal regime as one potential method for reforming international migration law to better respond to the needs of states and migrants. The work presented in this section underscores the importance of conducting research that takes into account the needs of specific populations, in this case, differentiated by gender.

### *Development and Design Insights*

The keynote presentation was delivered by Ananya Roy, Professor and Meyer and Renee Luskin Chair in Inequality and Democracy and Director of the Institute on Inequality and Democracy at UCLA’s Luskin School of Public Affairs, and entitled, “Urban Color-Lines: How Poor People’s Movements are Making Territory in the Global City.” Through a rich narrative of the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign, Roy carefully illustrates the injustices of racial dispossession and banishment occurring in urban spaces and links them to histories of oppression; she describes

how households at “city’s end” (a zone of racial banishment) must continually fight *against* dispossession by hostile financial schemes and *for* emplacement—the right to their current space. At the same time, Roy highlights the multifaceted imagination of struggle that can unite grassroots resistance globally, suggesting that forces opposing housing discrimination in Chicago were inspired by a movement in South Africa, which in turn was motivated by injustices of neoliberal policy deemed to originate in Chicago.

Stefan Al, Associate Professor at PennDesign and discussant, identified three prominent themes in Roy’s work. The first theme was the manifestation of inequality through eviction, or, as Roy characterized it, racial banishment. Yet Roy demonstrates that eviction has not, both presently and historically, been a unidirectional exercise of power; it has been accompanied by resistance. Roy’s depiction of the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign reveals how eviction—consistent with many narratives of oppression—can become a source of mobilization and engagement for communities both locally and internationally. A second theme identified by Al was the colonial significance of the cities that shaped this narrative. On one hand, Chicago, and more specifically the University of Chicago was seen by the South African social movement as the birthplace of oppressive neoliberal ideology. On the other hand, Capetown, with its own legacy of racial banishment and dispossession, was inspiring the social movement in Chicago. While Roy’s modern day example of racial banishment is played out through banks, courts, and law enforcement, she also emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the historical roots of banishment, such as colonial regimes and slavery.

The final key theme identified by Stefan Al was competing notions of housing, and more specifically, housing as a right versus housing as property. The Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign invoked a United Nations human rights framework for their struggle, perhaps most explicitly captured in their chant “fight, fight, fight—housing is a human right.” And yet the reality is that, despite their support from the United Nations in the form of a report indicting the US for racial discrimination in housing, housing (or the lack thereof) has not garnered widespread support as a leading human rights issue in the United States: housing has instead repeatedly been treated as a question of property, mediated by banks, courts, and law enforcement. Roy’s work suggests that scholars and policymakers should recognize legacies of inequality, practices of racial banishment, the globalization of protest movements, and discrepancies of human rights discourse that she views as at the heart of development challenges.

### *Conclusion*

This workshop highlighted the need to approach questions of urbanization and migration from an interdisciplinary perspective and utilizing multiple methodologies. These phenomena have highly differentiated causes and consequences, and a wide range of rigorous academic insight will be essential to more fully understanding how policy can serve sustainable development in the coming decades.

On October 17-20, 2016, tens of thousands of international delegates, mayors and local leaders, grassroots activists, urbanists, and global leaders will gather in Quito, Ecuador for the

third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, commonly referred to as Habitat III. This UN Summit will aim to develop a “New Urban Agenda” that will “help systematize the alignment between cities and towns and national planning objectives in their role as drivers of national economic and social development.”<sup>11</sup> Key considerations will include how to integrate equity into the development agenda, support the sustainable development goals, and strengthen institutions that will help implement the New Urban Agenda. This conference, which convenes once every twenty years, is viewed by participants as an important opportunity to bring together diverse perspectives of academics, practitioners, and policymakers with the goal of creating practical and durable solutions to global urban challenges.

How can policy promote sustainable urban growth and prevent the marginalization of vulnerable communities? Are refugees better served in camps or urban spaces? How can we bring different methodological and disciplinary lenses together in productive ways to better inform policymaking? These are just a few of the pressing questions that will require serious attention in the foreseeable future. We welcome you to join Perry World House as we begin to explore them.

---

<sup>11</sup> Habitat III, “The New Urban Agenda,” <https://www.habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda> (accessed March 2016).