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The geography of gentrification: Thinking through comparative urbanism

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Abstract

This paper revisits the 'geography of gentrification' thinking through the literature on comparative urbanism. I argue that given the 'mega-gentrification' affecting many cities in the Global South gentrification researchers need to adopt a postcolonial approach taking on board critiques around developmentalism, categorization and universalism. In addition they need to draw on recent work on the mobilities and assemblages of urban policies/policy-making in order to explore if, and how, gentrification has travelled from the Global North to the Global South.

Keywords

comparative urbanism, gentrification, global south, mobilities and assemblages, postcolonial perspective, urban policy

> One important way of investigating the global spread of gentrification – while remaining sensitive to its different geographically and historically specific manifestations and effects – is to adopt a comparative perspective. Such a perspective already has a rich and productive intellectual tradition within gentrification research, arguably more so than in other strands of urban literature. (Harris, 2008: 2411)

I Introduction

Back in 2000 I published a paper in *Progress in Human Geography* that called for a progressive research programme on the 'geography of gentrification'. Part of my argument was that context and temporality had been sidelined in both gentrification research and in urban policies that promoted gentrification. The latter was a critique of one size fits all gentrification models/programmes/policies being launched in the UK, the USA, and elsewhere. I argued that a 'geography of gentrification' must include a consideration of both the spatial and the temporal dimensions of gentrification: international, intranational, and citywide comparisons; and a consideration of the timing of processes. The research programme I was arguing for, and indeed that I had already begun to work through (e.g. Carpenter and Lees, 1995; Lees, 1994), shared/shares many similarities with the renascent research agenda around comparative urbanism – a field of inquiry which seeks the 'systematic study of similarity and difference among cities or urban processes' (Nijman, 2007) both through description and explanation. This 'new' comparative urbanism is a

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field of inquiry which has perhaps become best known for its attempts to move urban studies towards a postcolonial agenda (see Robinson, 2006); but back in the 1990s when I was working on 'the geography of gentrification' the process was all but unheard of in the cities of the Global South, and as such gentrification studies were not yet directly confronted with issues around developmentalism and categorization.

Over the past decade we have seen the rapid and visceral emergence of state-led gentrification in the Global South – processes of gentrification are now changing the centres of cities in China, India, Pakistan, South America and South Africa (among others). Gentrification began to take off in the Global South (or at least it began to attract the attention of the media and certain academics) at the turn of the 21st century but even then the geographies of a global gentrification presented (e.g. Atkinson and Bridge, 2005; *Urban Studies*, 2003) all but omitted the Global South in any meaningful way. Despite a good discussion in Atkinson and Bridge (2005) about gentrification as a form of neocolonialism – the White Anglo appropriation of the central city – there was no discussion about appropriate theory to analyse this, nor of how it might play out differently in the predominantly non-white cities of the Global South. Porter and Shaw's (2008) excellent collection, which features case studies from Europe, North and South America, Asia, South Africa, the Middle East and Australia, develops a comparative analysis of regeneration/gentrification strategies, their effects, and efforts to resist them, but it still does not pay enough attention to the issues of developmentalism, universalism and categorization in comparative urbanism. As Robinson (2011a: 2) says, 'promising edited collections which take care to juxtapose case studies from different parts of the world still do so without allowing them to engage with each other or with more general or theoretical understandings of cities'. Recent journal special issues on gentrification (my own included) can be criticized likewise (e.g. *Environment and Planning A*, 2007; *Population, Space and Place*, 2010; *Urban Studies*, 2008).

Future comparative work on gentrification needs to attend to the issues around comparative urbanism more critically. This would take us away from an 'imitative urbanism' (from the idea that gentrification in the Global North has travelled to and been copied in the Global South) towards a 'cosmopolitan urbanism' (where gentrification in the Global South has a more expanded imagination). This requires a comparative imagination that can respond to the postcolonial challenge, and it will have implications for how gentrification is conceived (questioning the usefulness and applicability of the term 'gentrification' in the Global South) and how research is to be conducted (this will push us to learn new kinds of urbanism and involve multiple translations throughout the world). Importantly, it entails unlearning (drawing on Spivak, 1993) existing dominant literatures that continue to structure how we think about gentrification, its practices and ideologies. As Harvey (2004: 239) says, 'If our urban world has been imagined and made then it can be reimagined and remade'.

II Gentrification and comparative urbanism

When one reads through the renascent literature on comparative urbanism in urban geography (e.g. Ward, 2008) there is no sign of the gentrification literature, of its long tradition of comparative work (between different countries, different cities, and different neighbourhoods within single cities), of its 'geographies of gentrification' (some examples include Butler, 1997; Butler with Robson, 2003; Clark, 1994; Clay, 1979; Lees, 1994; Ley, 1988, 1996; Smith, 1996), even by way of critique. Researchers interested in comparative urbanism will find some of the theoretical and conceptual debates

around gentrification illuminating, but more importantly the gentrification literature can learn from the new literature on comparative urbanism, in particular moving towards a post-colonial approach to comparativism.

Despite a lot of new hype around comparative urbanism, the discussions of what it might constitute epistemologically, methodologically, and overall as a research agenda/strategy are disappointingly thin. This is not surprising as there are some complex issues at the heart of such an endeavour. Recent writings are thick with idealism but thin with the practicalities of everyday urban research. Part of the problem is that comparative urbanism means different things to different researchers. Nijman (2007: 1) claims that comparative urbanism is a field of inquiry that aims to develop 'knowledge, understanding, and generalization at a level between what is true of all cities and what is true of one city at a given point in time'. This seems reasonable, but as Robinson (2004) states there are important theoretical and methodological questions to sort out if we are to (re)deploy comparative urbanism in a way that does not fall back into modernist ideas about universalism, scientism and problematic discourses on developmentalism, especially when we are researching the Global South. These theoretical and methodological questions have not yet been sorted out and it might well be that focusing in on a particular urban process, such as gentrification, may help.

One reason is that 21st-century gentrification has begun to throw up some complex issues around comparing the process in developed and developing world cities, issues around temporality and difference. Another is that the gentrification literature has also been at the forefront of discussions on how theoretical approaches are changed in different cities and contexts (cf. Robinson, 2002: 549), as can be seen in discussions of the 'emancipatory city thesis' and the 'revanchist city thesis' (see Lees, 2000; Lees et al., 2008; Slater, 2004). Discussions on the 'emancipatory city thesis' and the 'revanchist city thesis' have been clear about the locatedness of these theorizations in particular cities and the problems that come about when they are used out of context. Gentrification researchers have already taken comparison 'not just as a method, but as a mode of thought that informs how urban theory is constituted' (as McFarlane, 2010, asks of urban studies), and we have situated and contested claims around theories of gentrification, and around the way that these theories have 'travelled' (see MacLeod's, 2002, critique of the 'revanchist city' thesis from Glasgow). In fact we have been interested in both how theories of gentrification have travelled and how the process itself has travelled (from the central city to rural or suburban gentrification, from historic architecture to new-build architecture, from metropolitan cities to provincial cities, and from world cities to emerging world cities, etc. – see Phillips, 2004, on the politics of 'gentrification's others'). Like in the comparative urban studies literature more widely (see Ward, 2010) the gentrification literature has acknowledged the challenges of dealing with different geographical scales; for example, gentrification does not always simply cascade down the urban hierarchy from metropolitan to provincial cities – sometimes it happens in both places at the same time (see Lees, 2006), sometimes it is a relational thing (see Dutton, 2003, on the 'uneven socio-cultural relationship' between London and Leeds). As Peck (2002: 332) states, 'a relational and reflexive analysis of scale is necessary – one that is sensitive to geographic, historical, and institutional contingencies, rather than absolutist and categorical approaches in which political-economic functions are rigidly, exclusively and unambiguously fixed at particular scales'.

Like urban studies more generally, the gentrification literature has long positioned comparison to the fore, the term 'gentrification' was coined with respect to the process in London (a particular place, at a particular time) and all literature since has been forced to conceive of gentrification comparatively with the process

that the British sociologist Ruth Glass (1964) identified in inner London in the 1950s/1960s. Of course many of the 'past' comparative studies in the gentrification literature have been exactly the type that today's postcolonial comparative urbanists might critique. Nevertheless there is still plenty to learn from them. Take, for example, the problematic of comparing gentrification in London and Paris when until very recently French academics did not use the term 'gentrification', they used 'embourgeoisement' instead (see Preteceille, 2007) and of comparing the process in London and Berlin, where the German 'klasse' means something quite different to the British 'class'. In Spain the terms 'recualificación social', 'aburguesamiento', 'aristocratización' and 'elitización residencial' have been used (Garcia, 2001), but in Spanish-speaking countries outside Spain, e.g. Chile, the terms translate differently.[1] What gentrification researchers need to do now is to critically debate the international usefulness of the term 'gentrification' and to consider how comparison might take place with respect to historic gentrifications (there are plenty of new histories to be written) and contemporary processes of gentrification in the Global North *and* the Global South. We should not read gentrification in the Global South as simply the recreation of the periphery (the urban South) in the image of the supposed centre (London or New York).

In addition, we need to pay much more attention to the temporality of processes of gentrification around the world. The stage models of gentrification that emerged in the 1970s are ill suited with respect to contemporary gentrification (see Lees, 2003a, for a critique) and the revised stage models (like Hackworth and Smith, 2001) are very US-centric. As Nijman (2007: 2) states, 'social scientists often formulate "thick theories" defined by complex arguments about sequence and duration ... Yet mainstream social science methods are not well-suited for analysis of these kinds of temporal arguments'. The temporal arguments in gentrification need to be rethought. Nijman also notes that geographers face an even more complex challenge because they have to focus on comparison across spaces/places as well as the temporal. Different stage types of gentrification are emerging in different places at different and indeed the same times, making comparisons complex. For example, in 2011 inner London is experiencing the typical first wave/pioneer sweat equity type of gentrification, alongside third wave, state-led new-build gentrification and stalled gentrification. There are important questions about gentrification types, timing/temporality and scales both for understanding this process more fully, and importantly for having the knowledge and tools we need as critical social scientists to resist it.

Nijman (2007) argues that there are four theoretical questions fundamental to comparative urbanism: (1) questions about the spatial identification of the city itself and of the wider urban, economic and political system it is in; (2) the role of the state or city-state; (3) the relationship between globalization and the urban – the impact of globalization on urban processes, networks and categories; and (4) questioning whether globalization means urban convergence. These are good questions for gentrification research. In addition to these theoretical questions, Dear (2002) demands that we consider comparative urban epistemologies too (he is interested in The Chicago School of Sociology, Marxist urban political economy and postmodern urbanism). Gentrification researchers have long debated urban epistemologies (e.g. Marxism versus humanism, etc.; see Lees et al., 2008, 2010), but they have considered them less in terms of comparative urbanism (although wider discussions of Marxism and humanism touch on this). We need to think again about the comparative value of different theoretical perspectives.

In addition, gentrification research can now be used to reject The LA School's 'paradigmatic city' because their model of a centreless

Los Angeles now seems rather naive as gentrification has begun to take off in downtown LA. If anything, the late emergence of gentrification in LA demonstrates the importance of comparative urbanism for gentrification research: why did gentrification come late to LA? Is it because LA is a relatively young city? Is it due to the sustainability (Smart Growth) agenda in a car-dominated city? Are contemporary processes of gentrification there the same as or different from other cities in the USA and indeed cities elsewhere in the world? After all, there is no historic 19th-century architecture, LA has a reputation for being inauthentic, and there is little there in the way of authenticity. Indeed, in a city like LA that is dominated by its Latino population perhaps Jenny Robinson's (2006) 'cosmopolitan approach' can be brought to bear on a developed world city. Ironically LA might be a good place to begin to look for 'alternative comparative frames'. After all, as Reiff (1992) states, LA is a 'third world city' in a 'first world city'.

McFarlane (2010) argues that urban studies has inherited an impoverished sense of comparison due to the influence of debates around 'pragmatic urbanism' (e.g. The LA School), but I do not necessarily think we have to step outside of developed world cities completely to develop alternative comparative frames. No matter where our study of gentrification is located, as Ward (2010) makes clear, this involves understanding cities differently from the way they have been theorized comparatively in the past. Ward (2010) advocates a relational comparative approach, arguing that:

> stressing interconnected trajectories – how different cities are implicated in each other's past, present and future – moves us away from searching for similarities and differences between two mutually exclusive contexts and instead towards relational comparisons that use different cities to pose questions of one another. (Ward, 2010: 480)

Following Clark (2005: 256), I would like to see 'a more inclusive perspective on the geography and history of gentrification', but one informed by the new debates on comparative urbanism. Like Clark (2005; see also Sayer, 2001) I find the social construction of gentrification as 'an object of study' increasingly problematic in the face of the mutation of gentrification (e.g. from an urban to a suburban mindset) and its rapid spread in the Global South. I am concerned that traditional conceptualizations of gentrification from the Global North will dominate and thus distort accounts of gentrification in/from the Global South. Like Clark (2005) I want to see some dispute over the 'conventional truth', the time-space delineations of gentrification. As he argues:

> confident proclamations ring out: Gentrification is now global! The problem with this is not if gentrification can be observed in places around the world, but it is again an issue of time: it is now global ... The extent of occurrence of the phenomenon from a global historical perspective remains however largely uncharted. (Clark, 2005: 260)

III Gentrifications, neoliberalisms and assemblages

There has been a lot of research in comparative urbanism around issues of government and governance (e.g. Brenner, 2004) and it is clear now that gentrification researchers need to pay much closer attention to government policies on gentrification as neoliberal models of governance (see Lees and Ley, 2008). Sometimes the state is directly involved in contemporary gentrification, as in the case of state-led gentrification in the UK and the USA (see Lees et al., 2008). At other times it aids rather than directs gentrification (e.g. Moscow; see Badyina and Golubchikov, 2005). In some cases it is even ambivalent about gentrification, as is the case in Switzerland (see Rerat and Lees, 2011). These different forms of governance matter. There is certainly a difference between state-led gentrification that considers what to do with the displaced, even if this

means displacing them to the periphery of cities as has happened in Shanghai and other cities in China, and state-led gentrification such as that in Pakistan where no allowance is made for the displaced. Yet 'planned displacements' to the periphery of cities do not necessarily lead to better outcomes for the displacees. Take the case of Istanbul – in 2008, 300 Romani families from Sulukule, a neighbourhood in central Istanbul that had been declared an urban renewal (state-led gentrification) area, were moved to a development called Taşoğluk approximately 40 kilometres from the city centre (from which it took an average of three hours to commute back to their neighbourhood, workplaces, relatives and friends). Their neighbourhood was demolished despite massive national and international protest, but after only six months of living in Taşoğluk 291 of the families moved back to Sulukule because they could not afford their new rents and there were no jobs on the periphery. The result – the returnees were officially homeless and those who could not fall back on the help of family or friends started to live in tents or in the ruins of their old neighbourhood (see http://www.tarlabasiistanbul.com for other examples).

An examination of the 'practices' of gentrification (whether apparently the same or different to those in the Global North) across a variety of world cities would begin the task of decentring the dominant narratives of gentrification from the Global North (if not from world cities). But this decentring must be sensitive to an exploration of the different neoliberalisms associated with gentrifications around the world. Wyly et al. (2010) point to such differences between the Global North and the Global South:

> the long economic expansion and globalized credit boom across urban systems of the Global North drove gentrification outward from the urban core. The leveraged real-estate frenzy set the stage for an unprecedented crash and a wave of foreclosure driven displacements across many kinds of city neighbourhoods ... At the same time, transnational economic realignments and state-led redevelopment schemes transformed vast sections of the urban built environment of China, India, Brazil and elsewhere in the Global South ... Contemporary urban renewal in the Global South dwarfs the bulldozed landscapes that enraged Anderson (1964) and, even in the US, the phrase is losing its stigma: Robert Moses ... was the subject of a sympathetic, three-museum retrospective in New York in the Spring of 2007. All of these changes suggest that gentrification, displacement, and renewal have been respatialized and intensified in transnational urbanism. (Wyly et al., 2010: 2604)

Indeed we need to assess the utility of the term 'neoliberalism' (more often framed in gentrification writings within the North American experience) for the study of gentrification in the Global South. As Arif Hasan[2] of The Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR) has said:

> Whereas in Pakistan, redevelopment for the sake of keeping up with a globalised economy causes the marginalising of the poor sections ... in Europe they concentrate more on social and environmental issues before planning major city changes. (Fernandes, 2006)

Gentrification is embedded in what Peck (2010) calls an emergent regime of 'fast' urban policy formation. Fast policies are designed to travel fast, they are post-ideological (and this is important because it means they can be co-opted by those in any part of the political spectrum), pragmatic, and will propagate themselves spatially. Gentrification is sold to us as something that is creative, it is about urban 'renaissance', the rebirth of the central city. Creative neoliberalism is a feel-good term that is hard to argue against (Peck, 2010). As a 'fast policy' gentrification has become easily recognizable: it is easy to sell, as a creative process it is easily summarized and modelled (there are gentrification blueprints). The process itself has been simplified and essentialized ('gentrification generalized'; see Smith, 2002) and the end results are rather general policies that are often spliced with other rather general (but morally persuasive – thus making it hard to argue against such forms

of 'positive gentrification') policies such as mixed communities policy (see Bridge et al., 2011). Gentrification policies have been successful because they have coincided with a neoliberal climate, advances in communication technology have meant they have been picked up around the world more quickly and effectively, as have the professionalization and increased mobility of policy elites, and they have also coincided with what Peck calls the 'creativity fix' – for example, 'the creative city' which plays off competitive anxieties like league tables, etc. (on the creative city thesis and gentrification, see Lees et al., 2008: preface; Peck, 2005, 2010). Indeed 'creative gentrification' is seen to be a productive process (Peck, 2010: 216–217). We need to know much more about the mobilities of these policies and ideas, and how different policies and ideas have been spliced together to form policies of 'positive (productive) gentrification'. Here gentrification researchers could work at the forefront of a new literature that merges ideas from the policy mobilities literature with ideas from the comparative urbanism literature – for example, McCann and Ward (2010), who argue that in understanding contemporary urban governance in a global context we need to develop a conceptualization that is equally sensitive to the role of relational and territorial geographies, fixity and flow, global contexts and place-specificities (and vice versa), structural imperatives and embodied practices. Focusing on the specifics of gentrification across a variety of cities worldwide would begin the task of decentring the dominant narratives of gentrification from the Global North. But this in, and of, itself is not enough. We need to explore how urban ideologies of gentrification (for they are not singular) have developed, travelled, translated and diffused. We need a sense of both the fixity and the mobility of processes of gentrification. Harris (2008: 2409) has argued that we need to ask who is responsible for the creation of the gentrification blueprint, but I would take this a step further – and ask: can we really identify a singular gentrification blueprint? Are there multiple gentrification blueprints? Are the latter inter-related?

Following recent work on the mobility and assemblage of urban policies and policy-making (e.g. Brenner et al., 2010; McCann, 2008, 2011; Ward, 2006) and drawing on the work on 'globalized planning cultures' (e.g. Friedmann, 2005) we can begin this task. Gentrification researchers have long been aware of the circulation of gentrification ideologies and policies – in the UK the Urban Task Force (see Lees, 2003b) travelled around Europe and elsewhere undertaking fact-finding on successful urban renaissance initiatives in other cities (Bilbao and Barcelona dominated). There has been discussion of similar policies of gentrification in different countries (e.g. Porter and Shaw, 2008; *Urban Studies*, 2008) but little detailed research into what McCann (2011) calls 'urban policy mobilities'. And there are important questions we need to ask. How does a gentrification blueprint account for and anticipate the geographical and historical specificity of places? What is the complex geographical contingency to gentrification (as part of neoliberal urbanism)? How do gentrification policies emerge in different countries – is it by repetition (copying), borrowing (aspects that suit) or is it reinvented (for a different context)? Is it indigenous? As Robinson (2011b) states:

> There is much at stake in how we characterise the spatiality of urban policy transfer and learning. It is important to question understandings of policy exchange and innovation which are the inheritance of a deeply divided urban studies shaped by colonial and developmentalist assumptions. Conceptualisations of the power relations of learning (often assumed to be imposed by powerful western or international development agents), deeply embedded assumptions about creativity and mimicry as the preserve of wealthier contexts, and presumptions that the trajectories of learning all need to be questioned. In this regard the very vocabulary we choose to use can perpetuate certain assumptions about power relationships – 'trajectories' of policy

> learning, for example, imply directionality and thus a sense of a distant origin and mimicry on the part of the receiving context, and can also tend to imply a form of imposition ... we need to explore alternative vocabularies and conceptualisations of the spatialities at work in processes of globalisation. (Robinson, 2011b: 22)

Robinson makes some good points and researchers are beginning to take heed (see Bunnell and Das, 2010), but the reality with respect to gentrification may often be what Robinson would prefer not to see (in terms of power relations) and in following this thinking such 'traditional' power relations must not and cannot be sidelined or ignored. What we need to aim for is more subtle (less black and white) theorizations of the power relations involved in the circulation of gentrification policies (cf. McCann, 2011). If we are to resist gentrification we need to look closely at the spatial dynamics of policy learning – this is a complex and intriguing process:

> The question which is both intellectually and politically important is, what enables ideas to take hold, connections to be forged, relationships to be formed, municipalities to pursue certain agendas, experiences to be packaged as best practice, and what are the effects of these achievements. This matters politically for two reasons. First humanitarian concern about urban conditions in most of the world means that policy action in the field of urban development needs to be able to be affective. Second concerns about the ambitions of powerful agents in this field make the determination of an appropriate political engagement with apparently hegemonic urban policy important. (Robinson, 2011b: 28)

IV Policy, resistance and comparative urbanism

In 2005 David Harvey criticized social science's lack of radical spirit, arguing that it had moved too far towards political power and the third way. He claimed that we had lost our revolutionary spirit and had forgotten that critical theory is there to understand the world but also to change it. Harvey was particularly critical of 'being policy relevant', which he asserted was about being in bed with government or political power. Some gentrification researchers, and critical geographers, have followed this ideological line (see the commentaries in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 2008). I would argue that taking this position on this issue is problematic in the face of the rapid policy transfer of gentrification worldwide. Gentrification researchers cannot avoid being 'policy relevant' even if we dislike that term, and I do; indeed my recent research has been about the lack of, poor, weak, contradictory, and indeed sometimes false 'evidence' behind so-called 'evidence based policy' (see Bridge et al., 2011; Lees, 2008). There are complex political structures (outlined in the quote from Robinson, 2011b, above) that you can only examine and only come to know about if you actually get inside policy organizations (as Peck, 2006, has done most successfully), undertake policy work, and/or policy critique. Getting inside policy organizations, and importantly they are not just purely governmental – we must consider the role of think tanks and NGOs, etc. – helps. This is not sleeping with the enemy, it is learning about the enemy in order to confront, resist, undermine and fight the negative aspects of gentrification, especially displacement and sociocultural homogenization. As Harris (2008) states:

> There has been no mapping, for example, of the significant role for new urban-focused think-tanks in the global spread of policies and practices of gentrification. With close connections to governmental, property and media elites, they have helped to push strategies of gentrification onto and up policy agendas. (Harris, 2008: 2409)

Resistance is a complex process and more often than not the levels, forms and effects of resistance are modest with respect to gentrification. The end point of resistance to gentrification has rarely been an outright victory (and yes this is

disappointing) as the fate of the former Woodwards Department Store in Vancouver, Canada, attests to. This symbol of gentrification in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver was the focus of anti-gentrification activity at the Inaugural Critical Geography Conference in Vancouver (see Lees, 1999). Its 'rehabilitation' is now nearly complete and it is being promoted as a model of 'social inclusivity'. At the end of the day anti-gentrification activists have had to make significant compromises over the massive private (market condos) component to the newly developed Woodwards (see Bula, 2010). Importantly, resistance to gentrification should be a collaborative project, as it was with respect to Woodwards in Vancouver (international academics, artists, locals and activists all came together to fight gentrification), but this collaboration needs to be extended outwards. I would like to see a form of comparative urbanism in which international (Global North and South) anti-gentrification critiques, movements and groups learn from each other and this can be aided by those of us active in the field and who see our work as politically important (see Slater, forthcoming).

Similarly McFarlane (2010) argues for attention 'not just to different scholarly knowledge on cities from social science around the world, but different activist and public knowledges that are important for the production of a more global, more democratic urban studies characterised by diverse urban epistemes and imaginaries'. This is something that gentrification researchers, especially critical geographers, have tried to do (see Porter and Shaw, 2008), but we have a lot more work to do yet. It is certainly worth learning from activist academics like Michael Edwards. Edwards has been engaged with the regeneration of King's Cross in central London over a 20-year period, through research funded by the King's Cross Partnership, advisory work with local authorities and developers, and through his own and student collaborations with the King's Cross Railway Lands Group (www.kxrlg.org.uk) – an umbrella organization of local groups. Importantly, the latter's local work was 'strengthened and refreshed through international collaborations with similar struggles elsewhere in the world in two networks – BISS and INURA (see Edwards, 2010). This kind of outward-looking attention to wider struggles provides an important and steep learning curve and is the first step on the way to bridging local and global, northern and southern, resistances to gentrification.

Given the visceral nature of gentrification in the Global South it may be that we (in the Global North) can learn more about resistance from cities and neighbourhoods there (Harris, 2008, very briefly discusses anti-gentrification efforts in Lower Parel in Mumbai). Fighting gentrification as if it is some singular form of neoliberalism (see Peck's, 2010, critique of Harvey's singular and unambiguous account of neoliberalization as a class project) is not the way forward, for gentrification is not a singular project! It is polycentric, different in different countries, embedded in the soil and institutions of those countries. Precisely because it is not singular means that it will no doubt survive (cf. Brenner et al., 2010).

Part of resisting gentrification is about resisting dominant paradigms and gentrification is embedded in the paradigm of neoliberalism. This is a difficult paradigm to resist, for as Peck (2010) states neoliberalism cannot live on its own and as such it acts like a parasite grafting itself onto other things, onto different markets, even non-market hybrids. We can no longer view gentrification simply as a 'plague of locusts' (see Smith, 1984) devouring neighbourhoods; we need to see gentrification as mutating, as parasitic, as attaching to and living off other policies (e.g. mixed communities policy, the creative city thesis, modernization policies in cities of the Global South and indeed poorer cities of the Global North). In resisting gentrification, fighting gentrification, we must be sensitive to the complexities of gentrification

policy production, circulation and consumption, the complexities of gentrifications (plural). Resistance to gentrification, like resistance to neoliberalism, 'does not always conform to the David-and-Goliath metaphor of plucky, local resistance to a metastasizing global project, alternative politics may take radically different, unanticipated forms, cutting a very different course, and, by the same token, (re)shaping the market offensive' (Peck, 2010: 27).

A turn to comparative urbanism is vital in the fight against gentrification. We need to be attuned to the timings and intricacies of gentrifications (and neoliberalisms) worldwide, as Wyly et al. (2010) discuss: as analysts turn to the large-scale gentrification-induced displacements happening in the Global South, gentrification-induced displacement in the Global North is getting harder to measure and easier to ignore because recent gentrification evolved within the broader affordability crisis of the debt-leveraged financialization of housing. Wyly et al.'s (2010) discussion of displacement shows that researchers must pay greater attention to the politics of measurement (as they argue one of the most effective tactics of neoliberalism involves the statistical disappearance of its costs and victims) and to methodological questions around the definition of gentrifying neighbourhoods and the 'endogeneity of displacees' responses that render them statistically invisible' (p. 2605). Measuring the effects of gentrification worldwide and producing maps to demonstrate this could be used strategically to highlight the right to the city (cf. Harvey, 2008; Marcuse et al., 2009; Wyly et al., 2010).

V A postcolonial perspective

If gentrification is the new urban colonialism (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005), what might a postcolonial programme of research on gentrification look like? It is clear that cities like Mumbai, Sao Paulo, Mexico City and Shanghai are now at the cutting edge of urban change. Active processes of gentrification in the USA and Europe today are nothing compared to the '*mega-gentrification*' and associated '*mega-displacement*' that is happening in these cities. In Shanghai nearly a million people have been 'relocated' from the central city to the outskirts of the city over the past 12 years and 51.02 million square metres of housing has been demolished (He, 2007). The Asian Coalition for Housing Rights has monitored evictions in seven Asian countries (Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and the Philippines) and shown that evictions increased dramatically: between January to June 2004, 334,593 people were evicted in the urban areas of these countries; in January to June 2005, 2,084,388 people were evicted. The major reason for these evictions was/is 'the beautification of the city' (read gentrification). In the majority of cases, people did not receive any compensation for the losses they incurred and where resettlement did take place it was 25–60 kilometres from the city centre (Fernandes, 2006). Gentrification in the Global South is leading to the relocation (either formally or informally) of evicted inner-city populations to peri-urban areas far away from their places of work, educational possibilities, social networks and better health facilities. Of course the loss of home and community (see Davidson, 2009, on displacement and dwelling) will be painful in every individual case but the differences (if they are as they seem) in the sheer volume of these displacements cannot be ignored either. Keeping up with evolving laws on property is also vital if we are to understand the mechanisms of displacement/relocation (see Shih, 2010).

It is time now for gentrification researchers to decolonize the gentrification literature away from Euro-American perspectives and to pay much more attention to gentrification in the Global South. Following McFarlane (2010) this involves a:

> constant process of criticism and self-criticism that reflects on how a particular object of comparison is

> arrived at, and a commitment to develop new objects, methodologies and typologies of comparison through consideration of different theory cultures and perhaps also through new forms of collaboration. (McFarlane, 2010: 738)

As Harris (2008: 2423) argues, rather than exporting Euro-centric understandings of gentrification to the Global South we need to learn from the 'new sharp-edged forms' of gentrification emerging in the previously peripheral cities of the Global South – 'in this way some of the more parochial assumptions, practices and language of gentrification research can be "provincialized" and re-examined' (Chakrabarthy, 2000).

We need to be clear that neoliberalism is as much a product of the periphery as the centre (cf. Peck, 2010) and a fresh comparative urbanism of gentrification must be open to the hybridity of neoliberalism everywhere. Gentrification, like neoliberalism, is a product of particular historical, contextual and temporal forces. Contextualizing these neoliberalisms is essential in our fight against gentrification. In Shanghai national and local government is forcing large-scale gentrification on particular central city neighbourhoods, selling it not through mixed communities policies like in the Global North but as modernist progress good for the nation as a whole (e.g. He, 2007, 2010). How are ideas and images around 'modernization' travelling? Speaking on 'Urban development in the 21st century', Arif Hasan, comparing cities such as Beijing, Mumbai and Manila, has said that different cities with varied needs and population sizes have some strong similarities, but that whereas politicians in Mumbai aim to make that city resemble Shanghai, politicians in Karachi are striving to make the city look more like Dubai (see Fernandes, 2006; Hasan, 2007). What are the differences and similarities between these neoliberal urban development paradigms, and their effects? Much of what constitutes state-led gentrification in the Global North today takes the form of large-scale urban renewal, a 21st-century form of slum clearance, and in the Global South 'slums' from Mumbai to Santiago de Chile[3] (see Lopez-Morales, 2010, 2011) are being demolished for the purposes of gentrification; yet currently the vast literature on 'slums' pays little attention to the gentrification literature and vice versa – it is evident that this must change.

We need to question what we might mean by 'gentrification' and in so doing assess the usefulness and applicability of the term as a conceptual frame for processes in the Global South. This means reconsidering what processes and cases ought to be discussed under the umbrella of 'gentrification' and which ought to be excluded. The relatively recent debates around new-build gentrification (see the 2010 Special Issue of *Population, Space and Place*) were forced to confront the overly restrictive Anglo definition of gentrification, but this confrontation must now go further, for there are processes in cities of the Global South that share many of the same characteristics of 'gentrification' (see Davidson and Lees, 2005, for a list) but they are not called 'gentrification'. Lemanski (2011), for example, talks about the practice of 'downward-raiding' in low-income housing areas in cities of the Global South – a process where middle-income groups unable to afford to live in more formal parts of the city purchase property in low-income, often informal or state-subsidized, residential areas. Lemanski (2011) argues that theories of gentrification and downward-raiding essentially describe and analyse comparable forms of urban change, 'yet their accompanying literatures and popular use are restricted to wholly separate empirical worlds, suggesting that while gentrification is primarily found in "Western" cities, downward-raiding is exclusively reserved for the Southern city slum'. Of course, extending the term 'gentrification' yet again risks it collapsing under the weight of this burden, but as I have argued before this is a risk worth taking. Also, in extending the term to accommodate similar processes in the Global

South we are confronted, yet again, with the politics of the term. Is the term 'gentrification' useful politically with respect to the case of 'downward-raiding' in the South African slum, or not? Whatever the answer may be, it is clear that gentrification researchers need to learn more about processes akin to gentrification happening in cities around the world, especially in the Global South.

A postcolonial perspective might help collapse (or prove?) the myth of the linear development of gentrification as travelling from the Global North to the Global South, replacing it with an ontology of relational multiplicity and an epistemology of multiple forms of knowledge in continual construction. Amin and Graham (1997) warned of the dangers of overemphasizing particular spaces, times and partial representations of the city (see also McFarlane, 2010, on paradigmatic urbanism) – something that those who insist on sticking to Ruth Glass's definition of gentrification ignore at their own cost. We need to look at gentrification from 'outside the box' of the Global North and the western post-industrial city, indeed from outside the box of the rather parochial gentrification literature itself; herein at last we have a real opportunity to escape the confines of the traditional theoretical battlegrounds in gentrification (see Lees et al., 2008, on production and consumption accounts). What new, indigenous or cosmopolitan theorizations can be brought to bear on gentrification in the Global South, and in turn the Global North?

VI Conclusion

One of the first gentrification researchers to write about 'comparative urbanism' was Andrew Harris in his work on gentrification in London and Mumbai (see Harris, 2008). Harris's work marked a turn away from work that compared the usual suspects (e.g. London and New York City), comparisons that McFarlane (2010) points out are based on similarity rather than difference. Other work on the Global South (for example, on South Africa, Visser and Kotze, 2008; Winkler, 2009; on China, He, 2007, 2010; Wang and Lau, 2009; Wu and Luo, 2007; on Singapore, Wong, 2006) has tended to view gentrification processes in the Global South through the lens of Anglo-American urban theory. There are a whole host of reasons why researchers in the Global South might do this, from the particularities of their place in the global world of academia, to their particular research training, etc. But I would like to see gentrification researchers learning through different (non Anglo-American) urban theory cultures of the city (cf. Robinson, 2002, 2006, on this politics of learning). McFarlane (2010) is right that urban studies has been slow to analyse how the experience of cities in the South might cause us to rethink urban knowledge and urban theory; gentrification studies can probably be exempt from this criticism to date (due to the supposedly later emergence of gentrification in the Global South) but gentrification researchers must now confront this task. We need to attend to 'ways of knowing' gentrification across the North-South divide – investigating in detail what academics, policy-makers, gentrifiers, and especially the communities being gentrified 'know' about gentrification on the ground. Such a project is not amenable to research at a distance – it would necessitate ethnographic engagement and, as Maringanti and Bunnell (2010) argue, this demands the use of language other than English, all kinds of cultural competencies, conceptual flexibility and a willingness to engage with plural traditions (see also Jazeel and McFarlane, 2010, on the complexities of postcolonial knowledge production).[4] Comparative urbanism requires a proper commitment to global learning, to learning through differences, and to being critically reflexive of the power relations between the Global North and the Global South (Jazeel and McFarlane, 2007).

Rethinking the 'geography of gentrification' through comparative urbanism is more than

formulating a postcolonial programme of research, for there remain important comparative studies to be made not just between the Global North and the Global South but also between cities in the Global North (see De Verteuil, 2011, on strong- and weak-centred gentrification in London and Los Angeles, respectively) and between cities in the Global South (see Weinstein and Ren, 2009, on gentrification and housing rights in Shanghai and Mumbai). We should not avoid comparing and learning from the usual suspects altogether, but such comparisons should no longer dominate the gentrification literature. Also, as I argued in 2000, context and temporality remain very important. To give an example, Clark (2005: 263) said: 'visiting Malmo, Neil Smith asked me to show him the battlefields of gentrification. At the time, I was at a loss to explain that there were processes of gentrification in Malmo, but no battlefields'. In 2005 gentrification had more 'benign unwindings' in Sweden, but this is changing as the Swedish welfare state and its public housing are dismantled and privatized (see Johnson et al., 2008). Perhaps those battlegrounds are now coming. The battlegrounds in different places will be different. Given the visceral scale of the (direct) displacements happening in the Global South – what Davis (2004: 23) calls the 'brutal tectonics of neoliberal globalization' – the battlegrounds there may be, and may yet be, more bloody, as authoritarian governments stamp out anti-gentrification protest and resistance. As Clark (2005) states:

> In places characterised by a high degree of social polarization, short on legally practised recognition of the rights of users of place and long on legally practised recognition of the rights of owners of space, the conflict inherent in gentrification becomes inflammatory. (Clark, 2005: 262)

Only a truly comparative urbanism of gentrification will tell us how and why gentrification has emerged around the world, why gentrification leads to violent conflict in some places and not in others, how we could and should make urban policy responsible and accountable at the global scale (Massey, 2011), and how we might put the question of what a 'Just City' should be on the day-to-day agenda of urban reform worldwide (see Marcuse et al., 2009).

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Notes

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2. Many thanks to Arif Hasan (Chairman of the Urban Resource Centre in Karachi and founding member of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights) for taking the time to discuss gentrification in Pakistan with me at the IAPS-CSBE and Housing Network Conference in Istanbul, October 2009.
3. Thanks to Roberto Figueroa for pointing me in the direction of what is happening with respect to gentrification in Santiago de Chile.
4. This will necessitate better cross-cultural institutional linkages between universities and urban researchers. The Cities Group at KCL has begun this difficult task. We now run joint PhD programmes between ourselves and Humboldt University in Berlin, Hong Kong University, and the National University of Singapore, and we are working with colleagues in those places and elsewhere on issues around comparative urbanism.

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