

Gentrification and urban social change in Western cities

Chris Hamnett

Abstract The paper attempts to explain why the concept of gentrification has become so influential in urban literature since 1980. It argues that while gentrification has been a significant phenomenon over the last 30-40 years in many cities, it has arguably been overshadowed in importance by suburbanisation and slum development. Its intellectual and theoretical importance can be traced to three key issues. The first is the role of gentrification in offering a counter weight to the impact of de-industrialisation, suburbanisation and urban decline on the inner areas of western cities in the 1970s. The second are the theoretical arguments over gentrification between the advocates of a supply side, land market, Marxist approach and a choice and preference class based demand side approach. Gentrification also ran counter to some traditional American urban land use theory that argued the middle classes preferred suburbia to the central city. The third is the debate over the links between gentrification, social class change and low income displacement. Much western critical human geography argues that gentrification is always a bad thing whereas some city governments see it as a positive event.

Keywords Gentrification; urban decline; urban regeneration; social class; displacement

西方城市的中产阶级化及社会变化

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摘要 阶级化引起了西方城市研究文献的大量关注。外国人会认为“中产阶级化”是近几十年来西方城市的主要现象。无论是支持的还是反对的都有太多的文章对这个问题进行研究，导致了人们认为中产阶级化是重构西方城市的主要过程。这种看法也许是错误的。中产阶级化对于西方的一些城市来说是重要的，但它不是最重要的过程，最重要的过程可能仍然是城市郊区化，至少在北美的一些城市是这样的。城市中心的衰退也是相当重要的过程，特别是在像底特律，克利夫兰和匹兹堡等许多古老的工业城市。与城市郊区化和城市中心衰退相比，中产阶级化是相对较小的现象，只集中在伦敦、巴黎、纽约、多伦多等一些主要城市。

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本文试图说明为什么西方学术界对于中产阶级化的关注程度与其在实际中的重要性不成比例。是什么原因使中产阶级化在过去的 30 年的西方城市研究中具有如此重要作用?对于中产阶级化的大量关注是否具有合理性?为了解答这些问题,本文从如下三个方面寻找答案:首先,中产阶级化为城市郊区化及市中心的衰退问题的提供解决办法。19 世纪早期,纽约、芝加哥等城市伴随着工业化进程而快速发展。这种发展促进了城市交通的发展,使城市中心区域变得拥挤,状况恶化。这使得中产阶级从现有住宅搬出,引起了城市中心区衰退及郊区城市化现象。这种进程在 20 世纪 50-60 年代的美国得到加速发展。大量黑人移民从南方国家向北方工业城市中心地区的流入,使城市中心区经历了由“白”到“黑”的种族变化,城市贫困者,黑人暴乱的发生更加强了对城市中心区的负面印象,造成了大范围的白人流失及郊区城市化。20 世纪 60 年代中期以后到 90 年代,后工业化现象引起了失业率上升,城市重建及大规模人口流失。美国大规模的高速公路建设破坏了许多城市中心住宅区,进一步造成了人口流失及城市郊区化。在中产阶级化之前,许多城市已经经历了由富有阶层迁往郊区,人口减少,低收入群移动,部分地区被废弃等引起的长期经济及社会衰退。从这个层面来看,城市的中产阶级化可以为一些衰退地区提供一个崭新未来。第二,城市中心生活吸引力引起了学术界的讨论。关于西方城市中产阶级化现象的增加有很多不同解释。其中主要的解释有如下两种。一种是 David Ley (1979) 和 Daniel Bell (1973) 从需求的角度进行的解释。他们认为工业化向后工业化城市的转变及服务型经济的产生,生产及就业结构的改变需要受过高等教育的专业人士、管理及技术人力,即新“文化阶层”。他们喜好城市中心文化及娱乐生活,具有较强的城市中心居住的趋向。另一种是 Neil Smith (1979) 从供给角度进行的解释。他强调资本,收益性,房产市场对住宅结构形成的重要作用。这两种解释在起源上有很大不同,中产阶级化为两种不同的理论提供了争论的战场。第三,对于居民迁移具有重要意义。中产阶级化是伴随着住户阶层的转变,贫困层及工人阶级的转移。但是,在西方大部分国家房客受到很大程度保护以防止迁移。业主不能被强迫出售或离开。受影响最大的群体是租房者,付不起高房价、高房租的潜在购房者及租房者。因此,关于中产阶级化在城市社会转型中的作用及作用程度,及其在不同类型居民迁移的相对作用存在激烈的争论,并有待得到详尽说明。不可否认,中产阶级化确实是西方一些城市中心区社会及外部结构重塑的重要过程,1970 年代以后的西方主要老城的中心区衰退使其受到如此大的关注。但是这样的过程并不是没有任何代价,中产阶级化经常伴随着贫困层和低收入层的迁移和城市中心区的重建和翻新等问题。

关键词 中产阶级化; 城市衰退; 城市更新; 社会阶级; 置换

1 Introduction

Reading the western urban literature, many readers could get the impression that ‘gentrification’ – the regeneration or redevelopment of poor, working class inner city areas for middle class housing, is the major urban phenomena in western cities in recent decades. There are so many articles about it mostly critical, that it could easily seem it is the major process reshaping western cities. This would be a mistake. Gentrification is important in some western cities, but it is certainly not the most important process – that probably remains suburbanisation, certainly in North America where some of the major cities have sprawled out into the suburbs. Inner city decay and abandonment has also been of major importance, particularly in many older industrial American cities such as Detroit, Cleveland and Pittsburgh and, to a smaller extent, British cities such as Glasgow and Manchester. Gentrification, by comparison has been a relatively minor phenomenon, initially concentrated in a few major cities such as London, Paris, New York, San Francisco, Toronto, Vancouver, and Sydney.

But gentrification has attracted a lot of attention in western urban literature and began to exert its intellectual influence elsewhere. On my first visits to China in the mid 1990’s I was asked to look at new build housing developments in a variety of cities and say if I thought they were ‘gentrification’. This raises the question of why gentrification has been so important in western urban literature for the last 30 years or more, and also whether that attention is justified. There is a danger that labelling almost everything involving new ‘high end’ housing as gentrification, the descriptive and explanatory meaning of the term has become overused and devalued.

In order to try to answer these questions it is necessary to look at the history of some western urban development, particularly in Britain and in the US to see why gentrification was of major theoretical, policy and political importance since the late 1970s. I will argue that the answer lies firstly with the history of suburbanisation and inner city decline in the USA, to which gentrification offered a partial solution, second with the theoretical debates regarding urban social class change, and third to its implications for residential displacement, urban policy and radical politics. I discuss each of these three factors in turn.

2 Historical Context

As is now well known in the west, the term gentrification was first used by the urban sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964 to describe certain social and housing market changes taking place in parts of inner London. As she noted:

‘One by one, many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle classes-upper and lower- shabby modest mews and cottages –two rooms up and two down– have been taken over when their leases expired, and have become elegant, expensive residences. Larger Victorian houses, downgraded in an earlier or recent period – which were used as lodging houses or were otherwise in multiple occupation – have been upgraded once again...Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed’ (Glass, 1964, p. xviii).

The mews and cottages she referred to were simply small houses built for the working classes in the C18th or C19th but the process also involved large houses which had been built for the middle classes and which had become devalued and downgraded. What is very important is that gentrification is simultaneously a process of physical housing change, involving: 1. the renovation or reconstruction of an old housing stock, 2. Often tenure change, from renting to owning, and 3. social class change from working class to middle class. The third element is the most important and gentrification is a process of upwards residential class change. More recently, the term gentrification has been extended to include ‘new build gentrification’ where new housing has been constructed for middle class groups on empty or derelict urban areas. Initially, gentrification was a process confined to the inner city, but more recently, examples of suburban and rural gentrification have been identified where there has been a process of upwards social class change.

Glass used the term ‘gentrification’ in an ironic sense to refer to the traditional class structure of eighteenth century rural England where the ‘gentry’ were the upper middle class below the landed aristocracy who owned most of Britain and above the working class or the landless peasants or small farmers. As such she was using the term to refer to the emergence of a new middle class below the elite but well above the working class. Although Glass was the first person to use the term, a similar process had been noted in New York’s Greenwich Village in downtown Manhattan in the

late 1950s and early 60s when sections of the cultural intelligentsia were identified as living in the area.

Why should gentrification be so significant for urban debate in the west? To understand this it is important to understand the nature of much western urban change over the preceding 50-100 years. What had happened from the early C19th onwards was that cities such as London, New York, Chicago, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham all grew very rapidly as a result of urban industrial development. The pace of growth was almost comparable to the growth rates seen in cities in China and elsewhere from 1980. London's population grew from 1 million in 1801, already the biggest city in Europe, to 6.5 million in 1901. Similar rapid growth took place in Manchester, Glasgow, Chicago, Paris and Berlin.

This rapid growth was accompanied by rapid outward growth, aided by new developments in urban transport, the horse drawn omnibus, the tram, the steam train, and then the underground and the bus and car from 1920 onward. This, combined with rapid industrialization, led to the deterioration of many inner urban areas which became very overcrowded. Thus, from 1900 onwards London saw a process of rapid suburbanisation which was accompanied by inner city decline. Some of the middle class housing areas developed in the mid to late C19th began to slowly decline as the middle classes moved out to more attractive housing elsewhere. The housing was often divided into smaller cheap apartments for working class families.

This process picked up speed in the 1950s and 1960s particularly in the USA where large scale black migration took place from the southern states to the growing northern industrial cities. The migrants moved into the cheapest available housing, close to work, and this meant the inner city areas. These areas underwent a rapid ethnic and racial change from white to black and were accompanied by large scale white suburbanisation or white flight. This meant that many large American cities: Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Detroit, Chicago, Washington, Cleveland, underwent a dramatic ethnic change process in the early post war period. (Frey, 1995; 2011; Cross, 1992)

From the mid 1960s onwards a period of massive de-industrialization took place in Britain, the USA and some North West European countries. This was associated with a major rise in unemployment, urban redevelopment, and large scale population decline. The population of many of the former big western industrial cities fell dramatically during a 30 year period from the 1960-90s. This process of urban economic and population decline was accompanied by massive urban

housing abandonment and decline (Harvey, 1974; Beauregard, 1999; Wilson, 1999) and it was aided in many big American cities by large scale urban freeway construction which destroyed or blighted many inner city housing areas and led to further population losses, such as in the Bronx borough of New York.

The reality in many old industrial American and a few British cities by the end of the 1980s was thus large scale abandonment or decay, economic and population decline and large scale suburbanisation. This period saw the emergence of concentrations of inner city unemployment, poverty and decay as a major urban problem (Wilson, 1999). The prospect for the inner cities seemed quite bleak although this was much less marked in continental European cities such as Paris, Madrid and Milan where the middle classes still valued living in the central city. But this era was characterised as the crisis of the cities and in the USA it was accompanied by the outbreak of riots in some cities, notably Los Angeles and Detroit, where poor, black, residents expressed their anger and discontent (Beauregard, 1999) This reinforced the negative image of the inner cities as problematic, crisis hit and crime ridden and suburbanisation and white flight increased. It was in this context that gentrification was ‘discovered’. Not surprisingly, it was seen to offer a very different future from that of American inner city decline, although not one without its problems. A number of American city governments saw gentrification as a potential major solution to the problems of long term decline and abandonment and welcomed the process. But Ruth Glass argued in 1973 that what was happening in London was different from what was happening in the USA.

‘London is now being ‘renewed’ at a rapid pace – but not on the model about which we are so often warned. Inner London is not being ‘Americanised’: it is not on the way to becoming mainly a working class city, a ‘polarised’ city, or a vast ghetto for a black proletariat. The real risk for Inner London is that it might well be gentrified with a vengeance, and be almost exclusively reserved for selected higher class strata” (Glass, 1973 (1989, p. 178).

3 American urban land use theory

It should also be noted that the dominant post war American economic land use theory, put forward by Alonso (1964, 1967) and much argued that the pattern of urban land uses could be understood in terms of rents they were willing and able to pay to

occupy land. Without going into the details of bid rent theory, the theory showed that the city centre or central business district (CBD) was dominated by office and high value retail uses which could pay high rents because they had high sales in central locations. Conversely, he argued that most residential users preferred low suburban land costs, large plots and low densities to the high costs and high densities of city centre locations. Most Americans, argued Alonso, preferred space over accessibility. Consequently, while Alonso recognised there was a small urban centred group who valued city centre locations and accessibility over space, this was an urban land use model which justified/rationalized large scale low density American suburbanization and viewed city centre residents as an anomaly. This urban land use theory paralleled the outcome of various urban processes in the USA. It can thus be seen that when gentrification was first identified in North America by David Ley (1980) and Denis Gale (1979) it came as a surprise and a challenge to the dominant theory of urban land use change (figure 1).

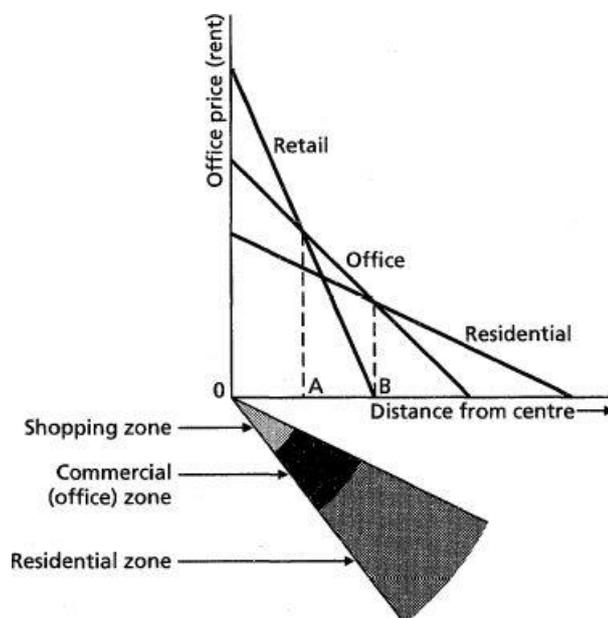


Figure 1. The Alonso Bid Rent model of urban land use

4 Theoretical approaches to the explanation of gentrification

Although Ruth glass was the first person to name gentrification her work was more description than explanation. What is clear is that it involved middle class households buying or renting poor

quality inner city housing, often in good, central locations, and renovating or improving the housing, often ripping out walls, building new kitchens and bathrooms and spending substantial amounts of money. As a result, they were left with attractive, centrally located period, and generally spacious housing. The closest Chinese parallel would be the purchase and renovation of house or villa in a 'hutong' in Beijing or a house in the French concession in Shanghai. The 'gentrifiers' usually had very distinctive social characteristics. They were usually young, one or two person households, university educated, in managerial or professional jobs, but not rich. It is also important to note that gentrification was initially only found in a relatively small number of major cities such as New York and San Francisco in the USA, Toronto and Vancouver in Canada, London and Paris, Melbourne and Sydney in Australia. All these cities had a significant and growing financial, business and creative services sector. There was little or no gentrification in many of the old ex-industrial cities such as Manchester, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit etc. The geography of gentrification was thus highly spatially uneven. There have subsequently been many other examples of gentrification even in quite small towns and cities with a historic central housing area. Gentrification has diffused from major cities such as London and Paris. The initial, classical, expression of gentrification was in older, rundown C19th, terraced, housing which could be renovated and modernised. Only recently has gentrification taken other forms such as loft conversions (Hamnett and Whitelegg, 2007) and new build gentrification. This is very common in cities such as Hong Kong (Ley and Sin, 2013), Shanghai (He, 2009; Ning and Yan, 1995) and Seoul (Shin, 2009, Kyung and Kim, 2011)

There have been several different explanations put forward for the rise of gentrification in western cities. Any explanation has to account for its social characteristics, uneven geographical distribution and its timing. Why was it only found in certain major cities from the late 1960s and early 1970s on. There are two, or maybe three major explanations. Minor explanations focus on the post war baby boom which began to leave university and enter the housing market in the late 1960s and early 70s. This is important, as this group provided a large demographic bulge in western countries from 1946 to about 1976. But while important, it does not explain why some members of this group decided to live in central and inner city areas. Other arguments suggest an increase in travel times which made inner city residence more attractive (see Hamnett, 1984, 1991 for a discussion). What has been of considerable importance is that the two main explanations have been very different in orientation. Gentrification has provided a theoretical battleground between two

very different types of theory.

The first major explanation was put forward by David Ley (1980) who argued that Vancouver (and later Toronto) had seen the emergence of a new, highly educated, professional middle class with a liberal political disposition and a strong cultural interest in central city cultural and entertainment activities. They constituted a new 'cultural class' with an aesthetic of city centre living. This choice and culture orientated explanation rests on a major change in the industrial and occupational class structure of certain cities as a result of de-industrialization and the emergence of the post industrial service economy (Hamnett, 1991, 2000).

Ley's theory rests on a shift from industrial to post-industrial cities (a shift from cities dominated by manufacturing industry to cities dominated by financial and business services and creative industry), and an accompanying shift in occupational structure from manual workers to more highly skilled and highly educated service sector workers, but this was overshadowed by his stress on the cultural and aesthetic values of this 'new class' who were argued to have a strong orientation to city centre entertainment and cultural activities and to central and inner city residential location. Ley linked his approach to that of Daniel Bell (1973) whose book 'The Coming of Post-Industrial Society' argued that the changes in the structure of production and work required a new group of highly educated professional, managerial and technical workers. This is very important because the changes in social class structure are linked to transformation of the industrial structure from manufacturing industry to services and to a change in the educational qualifications and cultural tastes of the new class.

Consequently, this explanation came to be seen as an individually based demand and preference explanation to urban social change and residential location but, I would argue it gives priority to the changes in industrial and class structure rather than just a change in tastes and preferences. Figure 2 shows the changing industrial structure and figure 3 the changing occupational structure of London.

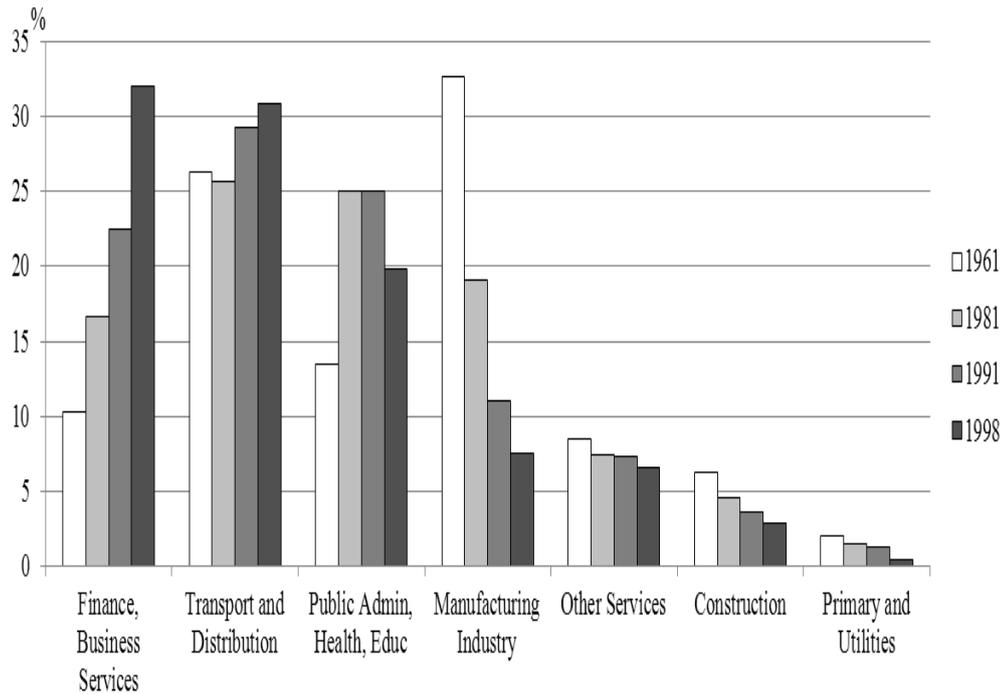


Figure 2. The Changing Employment Structure of Greater London, 1961-1998

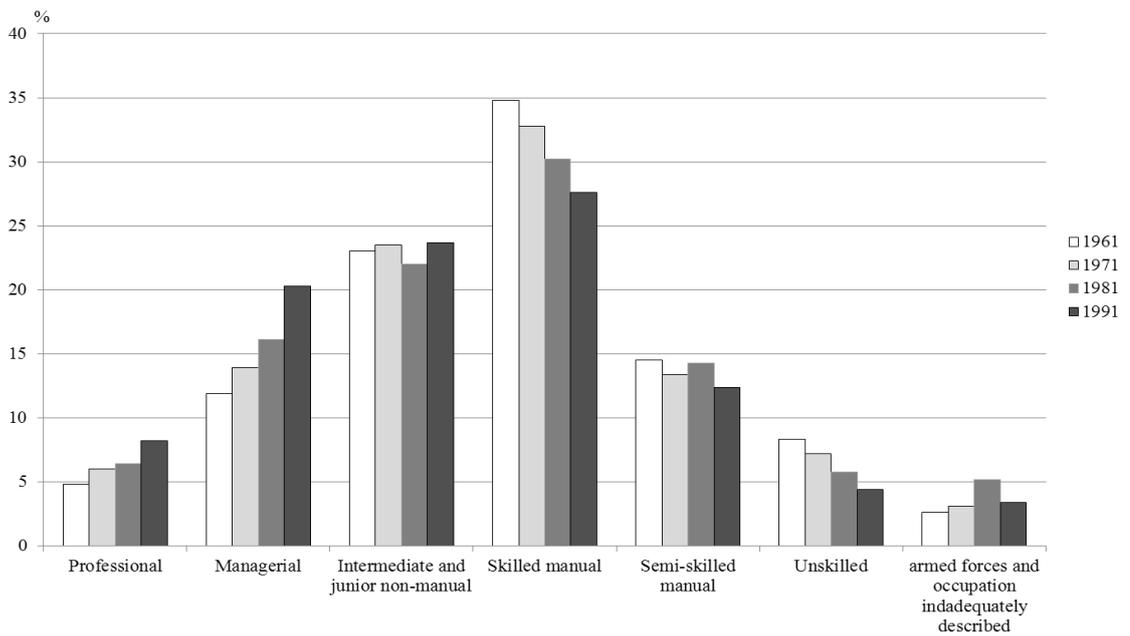


Figure 3 The Changing Distribution of Socio-Economic Groups in Greater London, 1961-91, Economically Active Males

Not surprisingly, this approach generated considerable criticism from Marxist based critical urban theorists, particularly from Neil Smith (1979) who argued in an important paper that the demand and preference explanation was theoretically partial and limited. Smith argued that such

demand based explanations failed to understand the key role of capital (and the state) in urban restructuring and grossly overstated the importance of demand, choice and preference. Instead, he put a stress on the importance of profitability and the form and structure of the real estate and mortgage markets. He argued specifically that the period from the 1940s onwards had seen the gradual deterioration of the inner city and a fall in land and property values as capital investment had moved to the suburbs creating what he termed a 'rent' gap between the value of the deteriorated property and underlying land values. Eventually, when this gap between the actual and potential value became wide enough, real estate developers, landlords and property investors would shift investment back to the inner city to close the gap (figure 4). It is an elegant theory and there is no doubt that Smith was right to point to the key role of capital, finance and profitability in shaping urban residential structure. Hence the sub-title of his paper 'A back to the city movement by capital, not people'. In this respect, whereas Ley focused on the demand side of the equation, Smith focused on supply (Hamnett, 1991, 2000 for a discussion). It is also clear that, at least in the early years of gentrification, residential property in the inner city was often relatively cheap compared to newer suburban property and it was possible to purchase quite large houses for a relatively low price. This was another attraction for gentrifiers. What has happened in recent decades, however, is that inner city housing in cities such as London, Paris, Sydney, New York etc has increased rapidly in price and is now generally more expensive than houses in the suburbs in terms of cost per square metre. Figures 5 and 6 show average house prices in London in 2012 and the percentage house price change by borough 1995-2012 and highlight the increases in the inner areas of the city.

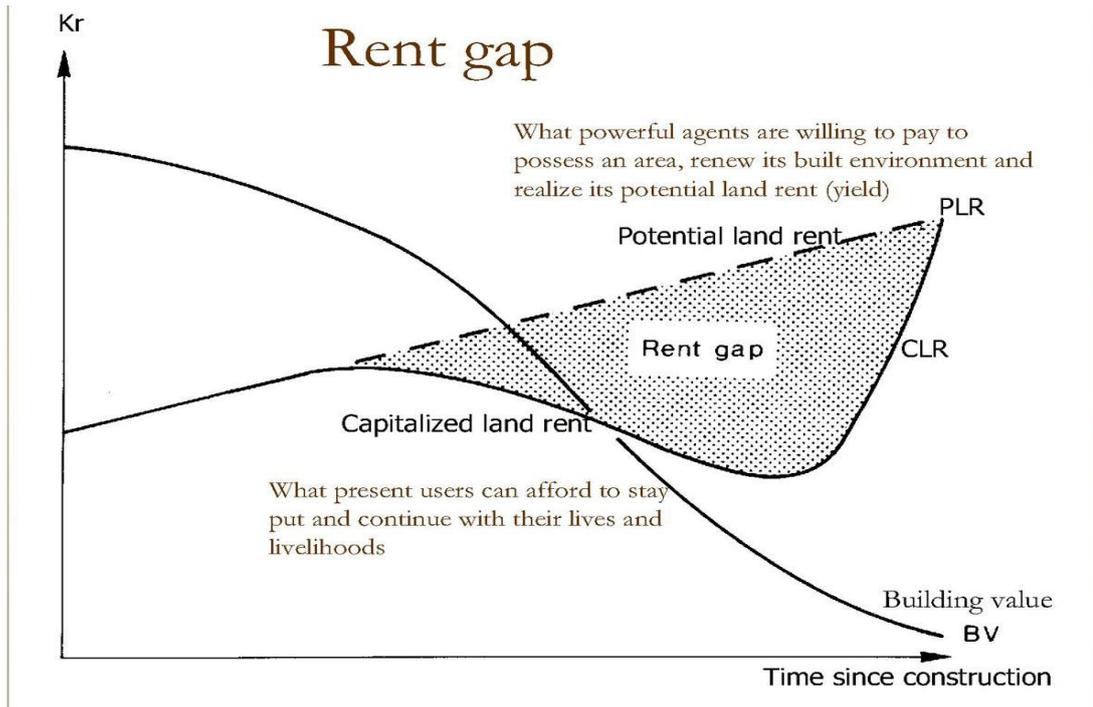


Figure 4 A diagrammatic representation of Neil Smith's 'Rent gap' (source: Clarke and Hansen)



Figure 5 House Prices Changes in London by borough – 2012

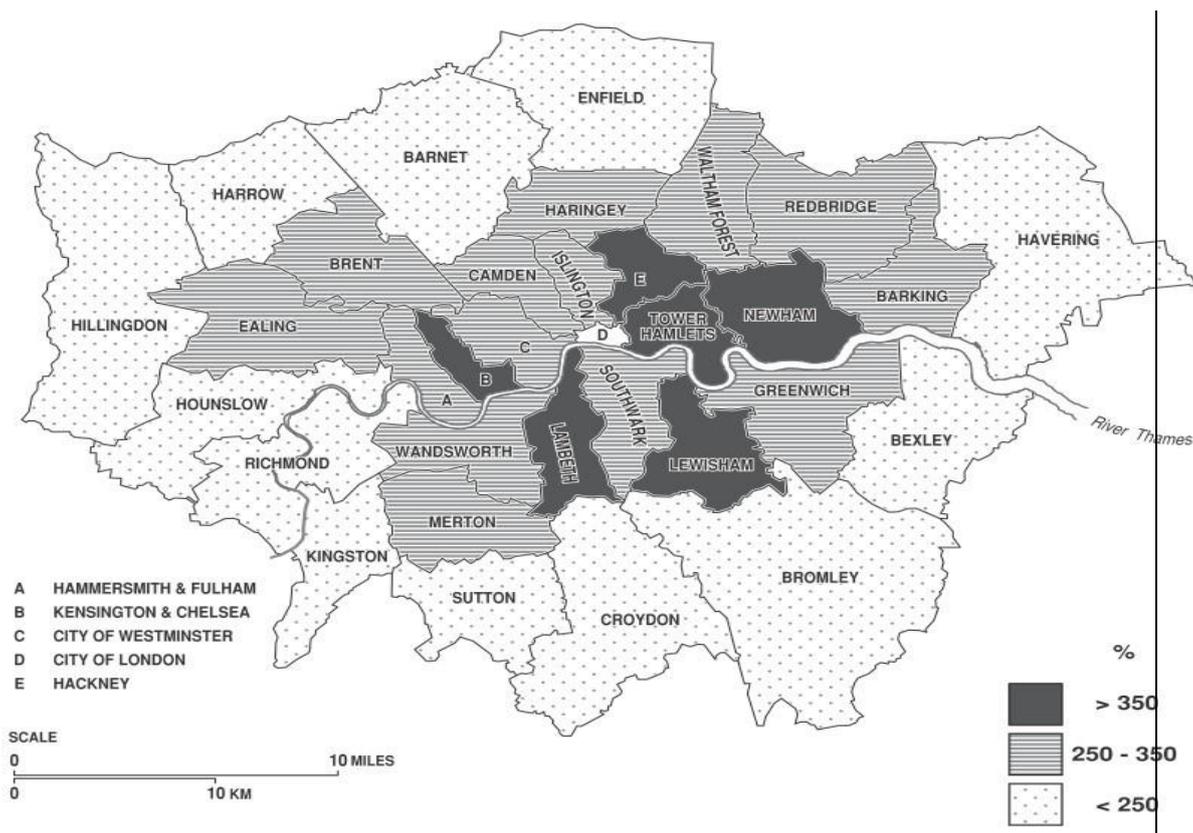


Figure 6 Percentage change in house prices in London by borough – 1995-2012

In general, residential development does not happen as a result of individual choice and preference but rather as a result of underlying structural changes in profitability. High rise residential or office development does not happen as a result of the aggregation of individual consumer preferences but as a result of developers seeing a potential opportunity for profit. However, in the case of traditional early stage gentrification where individual houses are bought from landlords and owner renovated it is possible for the process to be based to a large extent on consumer demand and preference. There were several flaws with Smith's approach. The first is that by focusing solely on the operation of the land and property markets, Smith ignored individual gentrifiers and their motivations. Rather than examine their social characteristics, why they gentrified, when and where, he simply ignored them.

This was problematic in three key respects. First, it failed to explain the type and location of property which was initially gentrified (usually older inner city housing in accessible locations), second why gentrification only took place in a small number of major cities, and why it started when it did. In this respect, both Smith and Ley's theories were partial and limited: each capturing an important part of the process but not the whole thing. The argument I have stressed has been the

role of industrial and occupational class change in creating a large new professional and managerial class in a number of major financial, business and creative cities such as London, New York and Paris and the housing market impact of this group, many of whom have chosen to live in the inner city close to their work (Hamnett, 2000) (figure 2) .This sees gentrification partly as a product of social class change. We can thus see that gentrification has been a major theoretical battleground between left and right, between the proponents of individual choice and consumer demand and advocates of a supply side, and capital orientated approach.

Subsequently, there has been considerable attention paid to gentrification as a form of state urban policy designed to help regenerate declining cities and to change the social mix of cities by bringing in a new middle class element (Smith, 1999). This has been the subject of much critical academic attention by Davidson and Lees (2005)and others. The critics argument is that social regeneration of poor areas by increasing social mix effectively means bringing in middle class residents. In other words ‘social mix’ is seen as a convenient disguise for gentrification. This links to the next point about gentrification and displacement.

5 Gentrification and residential displacement

The third reason why gentrification has generated great intellectual attention in the west has been because of the debate over its role in residential displacement. As noted earlier, gentrification is a process of residential social class change, primarily one of social upgrading which can often involve the displacement of poorer, lower income, working class groups by higher income gentrifiers and developers who are able to pay much more for desirable areas and price lower income groups out of the market. It is worth noting again Glass’s (1964) comment almost 50 years ago: ‘Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed” (Glass, 1964, xviii). As a result, gentrification in most western academic literature is seen as a ‘bad’ or negative process which adversely affects poor groups (Smith, 1996; Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008). The dominant view of gentrification is that it should be opposed. This is different from the way it is sometimes seen in other countries like Hong Kong where it is often positively linked to property price rises (Ley, 2013).

There is no doubt that in capitalist economies, where housing is a market commodity, whose price reflects demand and supply and which can be purchased by those groups with financial ability, that unless there are very strong planning or rent control policies in place, that high income groups will always price lower income groups out of the market. But there are a variety of different forms of displacement, ranging from direct displacement where landlords give tenants notice to quit or even force them out, to indirect displacement where lower income groups cannot compete in the market. This process is not straightforward, however, as in most western countries social housing tenants are protected from displacement to a great extent. In addition, existing home owners cannot generally be forced to sell or leave. Thus the groups which are most affected are unprotected private rental tenants and potential buyers or tenants who cannot afford the higher rents or prices and are forced out. There has been fierce debate over the relative importance of different types of displacement (see Marcuse, 1986, Atkinson, 2001; Slater, 2006, 2010, Watt, 2006; Hamnett, 2011, 2012).

One of the key arguments focuses around the role of gentrification in urban social change. In many western cities such as London, Paris and Sydney etc, there has been a substantial process of upwards social class change over the last 20-30 years which has involved a decline in absolute and percentage terms of traditional working class groups and an increase in professional, managerial middle class groups. The big question is to what extent this change in occupational social class composition has taken place as a result of gentrification squeezing out the poor and low income groups as critics such as Slater claims and the extent to which it is a direct result of the replacement of one social class by another as a consequence of a long term process of industrial and occupational change which has taken place independently of gentrification though gentrification may have intensified the process. I have argued elsewhere (Hamnett, 2009, 2010; Butler and Hamnett, 2008; Hamnett and Butler, 2013) that the upwards social class change taking place in some western cities cannot simply be seen as the result of gentrification led displacement. Rather, what has been seen is a process of replacement whereby the size of the working class has declined as a result of long term industrial decline and has been replaced by a larger middle class through the expansion of professional and managerial jobs in the service sector. As this process can take place over a period of 30-40 years, a decline in the size of the working class does not necessarily mean that they have been actively displaced.

Given that the gentrification process involves higher social class or income groups replacing existing residents it is clear that the former groups generally have more economic and often political power. But it is important to understand the mechanisms. In countries which have little legal protection for existing tenants or owners it is easily possible for landlords or developers to force them out and then either sell or redevelop housing for higher class groups. This is true in many American cities where there is no tenant protection. It is also true in many Chinese cities where the state has considerable power to authorise clearance redevelopment (Wu, 2004 a, and b). But in other cities residents have more protection and cannot just be evicted or told to move. But potential residents in the private sector can be and are, however, indirectly displaced through the operation of the price mechanism which effectively prices them out of the market.

6 Conclusions

I have attempted to show in this paper why gentrification has attracted disproportionate intellectual attention in western journals compared to its relative importance in practice. While there is no doubt that gentrification has been an important process reshaping the social and physical structure of the inner areas of some western cities, its importance has arguably been outweighed by the long term process of suburbanisation and inner city decline. However, it is precisely because of the major importance of inner city decline in many older western cities since the 1970s that gentrification has attracted so much attention. Prior to gentrification the inner areas of many American cities seemed to be in a process of long term economic and social decline as wealthy residents left for the suburbs, population declined and lower income groups moved or some areas were simply abandoned. To this extent, gentrification has offered the possibility of a new future for some declining areas. However, this process is not without its costs, as gentrification has often involved displacement of the poor or lower income groups and the renovation or redevelopment of inner city areas for luxury housing.

Gentrification has also played a role in a variety of theoretical debates in western urban geography. It has figured prominently in the debate between the proponents of individual choice and culture as the key determinant of urban change, those who argued for institutional factors such as the role of the state and those analysts, who point to the key role of capital and the search for

profitability in urban restructuring. This is not a simple debate. It is possible to argue that capital and profitability are of central importance in western cities, whilst simultaneously accepting that the state can play a major and sometimes central role, and also accept that individual choice and preference can be of considerable importance in some cases. Finally, gentrification, because of its links to displacement has been a rallying point for radical scholars who are opposed to residential displacement. While it is not as important as suburbanization in terms of scale, it has been far more theoretically important in urban studies because of its role in at least three key debates.

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