# Planetary Gentrification: What it is and why it matters

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Many thanks for the kind invitation from Professor Miyo Aramata, which provides me with this opportunity to share my work on planetary gentrification. I am based at the London School of Economics and Political Science, in the Department of Geography and Environment. I have been doing research mostly on the issue of the political economy of urbanization in Asia. My primary empirical cases come from Seoul, Beijing, Guangzhou, and more recently Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam and Quito in Ecuador. My works mostly focus on how places turn into so-called 'a higher and better use', using a developer's jargon, what makes the transformation possible, and what kind of social and spatial implications are produced. This enquiry is linked to the theme of gentrification that has been at the center of my work since my PhD era. I also study mega events like the Olympic Games, which have influenced the dramatic transformation of cities like Beijing and Seoul.

Today's talk is largely going to be on the book *Planetary Gentrification*, which came out in 2016 and was co-written together with my colleagues Loretta Lees in the University of Leicester and

Ernesto López-Morales in the University of Chile. My talk is divided into three parts. Initially, I will start with a bit of descriptions about how this project came about to exist. So a little bit of the genealogy of the project so as to understand what has happened before this book came out and how this book was positioned as an extension to what my colleagues and I have been working on. Then, I will summarize what the book is trying to say, discussing the book's contribution to the global debate on gentrification. Finally, I will build upon a more recent work of mine to understand what it means to carry out research on gentrification, especially when you think of taking this theme of gentrification to a non-western context.

Studying global gentrifications in plural sense requires us to have a relational perspective and also a contextual understanding of what local specificities tell us about the actual forms and the nature of gentrification in various non-western places. This was what I was trying to address during the course of my own academic development. In the early years, my empirical research was primarily looking at the issue of urban redevelopment and gentrification in some dilapidated neighborhoods in Seoul and Beijing, with consideration to the issue of urban injustice and displacement. Regarding displacement, I will talk more about this later if we have time but for now, it would suffice to say that displacement, which is at the core of gentrification studies, is not to be confined to last remaining, direct, physical displacement. Displacement can be further expanded to look at, for example, what Peter Marcuse in Colombia University was trying to say when he refers to chain displacement, displacement pressure or exclusionary displacement. It would also involve what Rowland Atkinson was trying to highlight in his discussion of symbolic displacement, or what Mark Davidson and Loretta Lees were referring to as phenomenological displacement, all of which involve the experience of displacement effect even if you stay put. At the same time, it will be important to understand how displacement itself will be a

longitudinal, long process— it may actually give us some difficulties in terms of identifying when is the actual starting point of displacement and also when is its last ending point. All of these will be going to be fairly interesting stories which would allow us to understand a bit more critically the process of gentrification as well. While these are not going to be the main crux of my talk today, they are something to bear in mind while discussing displacement and gentrification as part of today's discussion.

Now, I turn to the history of how the book came about to exist. The direct input into the final writing of *Planetary Gentrification* actually started in 2011 when we the co-authors got some funding from the Urban Studies Foundation, which was supporting urban studies seminar series and allowed us to bring together researchers from Asia and Latin America in particular. So, in March and April 2012, we had two workshops, one in London and the other in Santiago, Chile respectively, to essentially think about global gentrification. This was quite an interesting experience for us to be able to hear various inputs from those who were doing their own empirical and original research in Asia and Latin America.

During the workshops, we were asking these questions. What is the complex geographical contingency to gentrification? Is the concept of gentrification really suitable to discuss the processes of urban restructuring experienced in inner city or peripheral areas of the cities outside the global north? And, what does the gentrification as a concept do analytically that other concepts cannot do better? Finally, is there endogenous process that is better captured by concept other than gentrification? So these were the starting questions we were trying to throw to the audience and to ourselves as well. What turned out initially as a kind of a series of workshops eventually led us to do a bit more of collective work. So, initially, the papers presented, together with a few more invited ones, fed into

the co-edited volume called *Global Gentrifications: Uneven Development and Displacement*, published by the Policy Press. And, you would have probably noticed the plural expression of gentrification in the book title.

One of the points that I am to make in my talk today is how we need to think of gentrification not with a 'G' in capital letter, which would imply just one gentrification model to be somehow exported or to be imported, but to think of it in plural sense so that local trajectories or locally available socio-spatial relations are reflected in discussing the emergence of gentrification in a more endogenous way. The forms and trajectories of experiencing gentrification may differ from one place to another, and, therefore, gentrification in plural with a small 'g' is what we have concluded.

The papers which were presented in London to discuss Asian experiences largely came together to feed into a special issue from the journal *Urban Studies*, published in 2016 with the title of 'Locating Gentrification in the Global East.' The special issue tried to understand gentrification in the context of some of the shared similarities such as the experience of condensed urbanization and economic development in East Asia led by relatively strong state, and the suppression of the civil society, which undermined the regions' democratic development. One of the questions for the special issue was how such national contexts fed into the formation of particular trajectories of urban development, which in turn provided contexts within which gentrification emerged in an endogenous way in Asia. Another special issue was published by the journal *Urban Geography*, which brought together those papers presented in Santiago and discussed Latin American gentrification experiences.

In addition to the above, I have also pursued two additional endeavors to locate gentrification in South Korea, published in Korean. One of

them is a special issue from the journal *Space and Environment* to look at the question of anti-gentrification struggles and locating gentrification in the developmental urbanism context of South Korea. The other was an edited volume entitled *Anti-Gentrification: What is to be done*, published by Dongnyok. In this collection, I tried to bring together activists, academics and other players in the civil society, to think about how and what we can do in order to fight or curtail gentrification.

These are the background and a foundation upon which my talk today is structured. Probably a useful point to start with is Ruth Glass whose name cannot be ignored in a gentrification talk. She is the person who basically conceptualized gentrification. So, for those of you who are less familiar with gentrification literature, it would be interesting to note that gentrification is probably one of the very few scientific concepts whose origin can be traced exactly to a particular publication. For gentrification, this is the writing of Ruth Glass, which came out in 1964. So if you do Google search or Google ngram, you will see that with the 1964 being the starting point, the number of publications that refer to gentrification increases rapidly since then.

Ruth Glass was also involved in thinking about urbanization in developing countries and also in developed countries. One of her assignments involved a visit to India and to carry out discussions with other urban specialists. Already in 1964, she talks about something that you usually hear nowadays among postcolonial urbanists, especially when you look at her text referring to the limitation of urban theories that were based on the experience of western cities. She states:

> What happens to the elaborate theories and speculations on the
> trends and implications of urbanization on the international

scale when it has to be admitted that even the most elementary
raw material for the verification hardly exist.[1]

She is simply acknowledging the fact that we do have much less
understanding of what is happening in less developed countries and
urbanization in those places and, therefore, in order to enrich our
understanding and our urban theories, we really need to address the
imbalance in the knowledge production targeting, especially, the less
developed regions.

This was also a major starting point for my discussions with my
colleagues, when we tried to bring together the diverse range of
experiences that came out of non-western countries. The late 20th
century's discussions of gentrification have been largely based on
those key cities of the West, such as London and New York or sometimes
Amsterdam. That is, gentrification debates were largely based on the
experiences of the usual suspects of the West, in Western Europe or
North America. We were aware of the gap in the literature, especially
the need of collecting the experiences of non-western cities, or non-
usual suspects, in order to better understand the whole picture of how
gentrification implodes at global scale.

Ruth Glass further highlights that:

So far, our knowledge of the current processes, configurations
and implications of urbanization in the developing countries has
been limited, or even apparently arrested, in several
interrelated respects. First, the framework of analysis and
enquiry in this field (as in many others) has been heavily
conditioned by Western, and particularly Anglo-Saxon, experience[2]

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[1] Glass, R. (1964) *Urban-rural differences in Southern Asia: Some aspects and methods of analysis.*
UNESCO Research Centre on Social and Economic Development in Southern Asia. See page 18.

[2] *Ibid.*, p.1

It is quite interesting to hear these words coming from someone who has conceptualized gentrification. These are the kind of words that would usually be repeated or emphasized by postcolonial urban theorists who try to challenge the western production of urban theories. The words of Ruth Glass provide us a useful ground upon which urban scholars with different disciplinary traditions can actually sit together and discuss gentrification in a more open way.

The book *Planetary Gentrification* is really trying to unpack the Anglo-Saxon hegemony of gentrification studies. In a sense, after co-editing the volume *Global Gentrifications* and two journal special issues, one from *Urban Studies* and the other from *Urban Geography*, three of us sat down together to write the monograph. The edited volume *Global Gentrifications* was led by Loretta Lees as the lead guest editor, while I was leading the guest editorial of the special issue from *Urban Studies* and Ernesto López-Morales the guest editorial of *Urban Geography*. So, we kind of did a very nice distribution of workload in a sense. And then, we thought, well, now that we have done quite a bit of thinking about different examples and a review of the existent literature, it was about time to sit down together to produce a collective monograph in order to produce a statement regarding what gentrification means to us and to urban studies more broadly. So, that is how this book eventually came about to exist. In this monograph, what we tried to do was to think of the conceptual reach of gentrification theory and how this can be actually interpreted against non-Anglo-Saxon traditions, while questioning the notion of global gentrifications or the notion of gentrification going global.

This expression 'gentrification going global' is something that became quite popular in the early 2000s. Neil Smith himself in a 2002 paper from the journal *Antipode* was talking about how gentrification can be seen as a global urban strategy. Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge also

produced an edited volume in 2005, which was about gentrification as a global urban colonial strategy, which implies gentrification being part of policy mobility from the West to the rest of the world. That is, gentrification is being exported to other places using a template produced in western cities. But, we were asking if this was the entire story and if it was the only story we could think of when we looked at these urban policies being exported. Is it really from the center to the periphery?

Of course, this question does require us to understand more about what was actually going on in different parts of the world. And in a sense, we benefited from our regional expertise. Ernesto López-Morales has studied the experience of urbanization and gentrification in Latin America, while I have studied urbanization and gentrification in Asia. Loretta Lees, of course, has studied the experience of North America and Western Europe. All these gave us a chance to have a more comparative dialogue among three of us. And, the dialogue fed into the book's discussion as well. We tried to avoid colonial knowledge production and aimed at a collegial co-production of knowledge — this was what we were trying to adhere to. And luckily, even after having produced all those works together, we still remain friends and colleagues, so I guess the co-production of knowledge really did work out in our case on this occasion.

In thinking about the question of gentrification's conceptual over-reach, it is important not to treat gentrification as a historically confined cultural process, associated primarily with 1960s' London. Part of the critiques one may come across nowadays will be about how gentrification cannot be applied to contemporary cities outside the UK because it really reflects the local history of London in the 1960s. What Ruth Glass observed was an incremental change in a working-class neighborhood of Islington, North London, which primarily involved dwelling-by-dwelling upgrading. For Ruth Glass, gentrification was a

neighborhood-scale process that became irreversible, eventually driving working class residents away from the neighborhood and middle class residents replacing them. Some of the latest critics who are skeptical about the use of gentrification in non-Western context would often refer to how gentrification needs to be really associated with London's experience of urban change during the time of Ruth Glass's original investigation.

But, I think that is an attempt to 'fossilize' gentrification, and a very limited understanding of how gentrification or other urban processes do get realized or reproduced outside their original comfort zone. And in this case, relating gentrification only to the 1960s North London urban context and to that particular type of neighborhood change does undermine the entire history of gentrification debate throughout the late 20th century, which involved the experience of gentrification in Vancouver, New York or Amsterdam in addition to London. Gentrification debates wouldn't exist if you simply limit gentrification to London's own cultural experience in the 1960s.

Studying global gentrifications is not simply to start from the global south or turning around our telescope to look for unusual non-Western suspects of gentrification. It is not just to try to add more cases of non-usual suspects to the collection of gentrification studies in order to understand how gentrification with a capital G gets reproduced or not reproduced elsewhere. It is also not to ignore the usual suspects from the West. While we pay attention to cities outside the West, outside the comfort zone of previous studies, we also need to understand how gentrification in the usual suspect cities also get modified, evolved and challenged, while thinking about the unevenness within western countries as well. You also need to place all cities on a level analytical plane, building upon the traditional comparative urban studies, especially that of Jennifer Robinson who has been arguing in favor of the importance of thinking of cities as 'ordinary

cities.' No one city is to become the key paradigmatic city to be used as a lens to understand others.

Gentrification theory, both located and dislocated, is what the book is trying to argue, thinking about the endogenous and the exogenous nature of geographical conditions that influence the rise of gentrification. There are universal possibilities but also contingent factors that account for variations, especially when you think of locally available specificities and socio-spatial relations, which are also exposed to multi-scalar struggles that involve not only domestic national actors but also transnational players across geographies. What is very important is to have an open, embedded, and relational understanding of gentrification, in the same way that we have open and embedded and relational understanding of space as Doreen Massey used to argue. In her publication from 1993 (p.145), Massey was emphasizing that:

> interdependence [of all places] and uniqueness [of individual places] can be understood as two sides of the same coin, in which two fundamental geographical concepts – uneven development and the identity of place – can be held in tension with each other and can each contribute to the explanation of the other.[3]

For geographers, I think this relational perspective on space becomes quite a useful point of departure for understanding not only gentrification but also other urban processes involving, for example, the impact of mega event as well.

In *Planetary Gentrification*, we tried to distance away from the notion of one single universal process of gentrification being replicated elsewhere, and this is where we have become quite critical. For us, organic gentrifications are not to be taken simply as copies of those

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[3] Massey, D. (1993) Questions of Locality. *Geographical Association* 78(2): 142-149.

in the West, thus problematizing the notion of translation, especially from the West to the East, or from the global North to the global South. Until recently, one may often come across with a paper submitted for journal review, which attempts to verify whether or not gentrification exists in a non-western city or in the global South – such an enquiry, I think, is quite limiting and not quite helpful for enriched discussions about global gentrifications and urban processes in general.

Planetary gentrification is also about acknowledging on the one hand that gentrification does entail its own way of emerging regardless of being exposed to western influences. On the other, it is also about thinking of gentrification as method. In other words, 'gentrification concept is to be used as a way of better understanding urban processes which do not necessarily have to involve the verification of the presence of gentrification itself. I would like to refer to the table included on page 14 in the book, which reveals how our understanding of cities and urban processes can be differentiated from more conventional understanding that used to exist in the existing gentrification studies. In the traditional comparisons of gentrification, the city is taken as a bounded entity, and is treated as given. Neighborhoods are also treated as bounded, while their scale is related directly to the city scale. All these lines of thinking are to be avoided. We think of the city as an unbounded space, understood as being constituted through its relationships, including flows and networks, with other places. So in a relational way, we emphasize the multiplicity and diversity of cities and their centralities, especially not thinking of just one single centrality in a city but of multiple centralities emerging as cities evolve. The neighborhood, city, regional and global scales are inter-scaler and politicized, which pushes us to always think of open processes that play out at various geographical scales. Similarities and differences between cities are used to help theorizing back and changing existing

theories. These are the perspectives that we tried to maintain when thinking of planetary gentrification.

Planetary gentrification also builds upon the existing and emerging literature on planetary urbanization. Here, we refer more to Henri Lefebvre and to some extent, to Andy Merrifield's discussion of planetary urbanization. Our understanding was largely looking at how the so called secondary circuit of capital accumulation, especially the built environment, becomes the major destination of investment in contemporary societies and how urban crises are to be overcome in postindustrial cities of the West. Lefebvre was trying to identify how the capital investment occurs in the secondary sector. That is, how the flow of capital into real estate in particular has become a temporary measure to address accumulation crisis, but over time, remained to be permanent due to the seductive nature of capturing the value in real estate. Such lines of discussion have also been the major basis for our understanding of planetary gentrification, largely because of the way in which the secondary sector of real estate has become a major seductive way of making changes in contemporary cities around the world, and increasingly influential at planetary scale. Such a rise of the secondary sector of real estate is further helped by the financialization and policy mobility as well as a more endogenous process of making use of real estate as urban policy tool in both rapidly industrializing and postindustrial societies.

As I noted earlier, we have also built upon Andy Merrifield's discussion of planetary urbanization, who was calling for 'dispens[ing] with all the old chestnuts between global North and global South, between developed and underdeveloped worlds, between urban and rural, between urban and regional, between city and suburb, just as we need to dispense with old distinctions between public and private, state and economy, and politics and technocracy'.[4] To some

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[4] Merrifield, A. (2014) *The New Urban Question*. Pluto Press, London, p. 4.

extent, his argument also gives us some interesting starting point for thinking about gentrification that is no longer conceptualized in a conventional way, which often confines gentrification only to urban processes in core urban areas or existent cities. We need to distance away from this association of gentrification with just one centrality.

So, planetary gentrification is really about thinking of an urbanizing society, highlighting the fact that there is the ascendancy of the secondary circuit of capital accumulation, especially the speculative real estate that has become a major phenomenon in major cities around the world regardless of their position in the global economy. The rise of the real estate sector also entails the subordination of the industrial production to the built environment. In other words, planetary gentrification compels us to think of how the whole interaction between these two processes, that is, industrialization as the industrial production and urbanization as the reorganization of the built environment, has become the major pillar of understanding contemporary urbanization – Here, David Harvey's discussion of different circuits of capital accumulation can be quite useful. The subordination of the industrial production to the second circuit of the built environment, that is, urbanization of capital, is becoming quite influential not only in postindustrial cities where the production bases have largely relocated to other less developed countries, but also in rapidly industrializing countries which also see nowadays their major cities being under the influence of real estate speculation as well as aspirational urbanism built upon the particular behaviors of middle or upper classes.

The rise of the secondary sector of real estate is manifested in many ways across the world. You see a lot of efforts by governments and businesses, trying to transform existing rural land into urban land, dispossessing local residents to turn rural areas into commodified urban space. As in London, public housing estates increasingly become

subject to privatization and commodification or to expropriation in order to be transformed into more commercialized and luxurious housing estates. There are also slum redevelopment projects that turn into real estate projects for accumulation of capital. Slums in the global South were traditionally seen to be a no go zone for capitalist accumulation, but they are also increasingly becoming subject to larger scale demolition and redevelopment as well, placed under the pressure of dispossessing the right of slum dwellers. These remind us of what David Harvey was trying to say in his discussion about accumulation by dispossession, which largely tries to ascertain the ways in which urban rights are being subject to dispossession.

In planetary gentrification, therefore, there are two main pillars of enquiry. On the one hand, there is the productive investment in the built environment including real estate and infrastructure, which is to support the industrial production as the primary circuit of accumulation but which has uneven impact on the reconfiguration of urban space. On the other hand, there is the commodification of space and rent extraction, that is the capturing of the land value increments, which become the very important driver of urban change. These two pillars, that is, the productive investment in the built environment and the commodification of space and rent extraction, come together in the contemporary urbanizing world to produce dispossession of urban dwellers as well as rural villagers. Planetary gentrification is embedded in this context of dispossession. That is, the planetary gentrification discussion is really locating gentrification within a larger framework of dispossession that occurs at planetary scale.

Previously, I was saying that gentrification cannot be simply thought of being exported from the global North to the global South or from the West to the East. This means that it is crucial to think of how this process of ascending secondary circuit of the built environment has been a more endogenous process as an economy treads the path of

capitalist development. Yes, cities and countries are being increasingly exposed to the exploitation by transnational capital, which includes the likes of global pension funds being a major driver of urban changes and of speculation. But at the same time, one cannot blame everything on transnational capital - You need to think of also the endogenous players; the endogenous builders, developers, local authorities or the central government, each of which, in their own way, trying to make the most out of exploitative processes of urban speculation. All these endogenous players produce local momentum of reconfiguring the urban space and of putting properties into a higher and better use and, as a result, gentrification. Therefore, we need to think of how the increasing exposure of cities to transnational process of urbanization takes place on the one hand, and on the other, how such transnational influence is not going to overwrite everything that exists in a given city and how it is going to fuse with what exists more endogenously in local places.

One of the emphases made in our discussion is the role of the state that needs to be acknowledged, especially when you think of the urban processes around the world. Very often, the state question gets omitted in the discussion of western process of urbanization and gentrification, as more attention gets paid to the transnational capital and elites. The process of neoliberalization, especially in the discussion of roll-out state, has made us realize the importance of the state in the contemporary world of globalization and neoliberalization. As the state becomes actively involved in urban restructuring, the promotion of gentrification and dispossession also involves the strong role the state.

The role of the state becomes more evident in East Asia or the global East.[5] When you look at East Asian urbanization, the state has always

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[5] See Shin, H.B., Lees, L. And López-Morales, E. (2016) Introduction: Locating gentrification in the global east. *Urban Studies* 53(3): 455-470.

been having a heavy presence in the society and in the economy. And to some extent, that kind of practice has also been replicated in other Southeast Asian rapidly urbanizing societies. In this regard, one of the interesting things that we found out while pursuing the co-production of knowledge is how there appears a bit of convergence in the way the state makes its presence in gentrification processes across the world. The heavy presence of Asian states in their promotion of condensed industrialization and urbanization and in promoting state-led gentrification is met by the repositioned role of the state in the postindustrial West, where the state is asked to play an important interventionist role during the neoliberal era after a phase of withdrawal in the 1980s and 1990s.

Gentrification is often naturalized by the state. In many cities across the world, the poor are stigmatized by the state and elite groups, identified as the main cause of urban deterioration. In other words, poor neighborhoods are accused of remaining poor because they are affected by the ill behaviors of those stigmatized poor residents. This is just another usual story that you get to hear from the elites in any given city. In *Planetary Gentrification*, we try to say no to such perspective. It is really the affluent groups as well as political and business elites, who are working together to produce the stigmatization. A lot of urban policies are put forward to redevelop and regenerate poor neighborhoods, with a rhetoric or an assumption that such places are dilapidated or in need of renovation, even though such policies are not based on adequate studies of targeted neighborhoods. Often, the physical conditions of poor neighborhoods are discussed in comparison with the average living condition of the city without acknowledging the richness of social functions provided by such places. Instead of taking into consideration the voices of existing residents, what is prioritized is the aspirational urbanism of the middle or upper classes, which becomes the blueprint for producing what comes after redevelopment. There is an overgeneralized

assumption that investment is the necessary condition for urban revitalization, which leads to the usual story of public-private partnership that becomes the key institutional mechanism for initiating urban redevelopment. Here, the private largely refers to private businesses and not necessarily community organizations per se. The poor with lack of financial resources is systematically excluded from this partnership.

I would like to end this talk by speaking about a few issues of positionality regarding the study of gentrification, starting with the epistemology of comparative gentrification studies. As briefly mentioned earlier, gentrification in pluralistic perspectives, thus 'gentrifications', is to identify how this process of gentrification mutates across geographies. While we try to retain a generic definition that gentrification is the class remake of urban space accompanying displacement, this process gets mutated and emerges in different forms across geographies to reflect the contingent factors that exist in various localities.

It is also vital to remain conscious of how gentrification studies reflect the more fundamental shift in politics and economics through active circuits of real estate capital and entrepreneurial urban policies. Such policies actively seek to turn urban space into a commodity for the sake of capital accumulation and social control. Here, we need to identify both exogenous and endogenous processes that are increasingly dominated by both national and transnational elites, producing widespread dispossession of people across the globe. Planetary thinking of gentrification is therefore important. What can the U.S. and western European cities learn from gentrification dynamics in the global South? The emphasis is on the fact that there are organic gentrifications that are not copies of those in the West, which suggests that there are more than the stories of translations of the West-to-East or global North-to-South.

I was mentioning earlier that it will be useful to think of gentrification as method as well. While gentrification is understood as a concrete urban process that affects neighborhoods under pressure of displacement, it can also be seen as a useful method to carry out the analysis of urban processes. In particular, when you think of the dialectics of generality and particularity, there is a need of attending to the tension between how gentrification can be generically defined and how gentrification reflects local conditions and experiences mutations across geographies. This entails the need of analyzing the uniqueness of a place without losing grips of the general cause: in other words, we do need to understand the contingent factors to understand multiple forms of gentrification emerging endogenously, but that doesn't necessarily mean that we go too far to simply even reject the idea of more universalistic understanding of gentrification, especially the class remake of urban space built on the exploitative accumulation process of secondary circuit of the built environment, that is urbanization. The speculative urbanization of capital has become a major urban issue in many cities around the world, and that kind of process is embedded in the capitalism itself — this is the context within which we study global mutations of gentrification.

The tension between generality and particularity also suggests that there is the importance of understanding or acknowledging the multiple possibilities or combinations of urban processes that may work in tandem. This means that urban inquiries do not get confined to a single process under observation. When you investigate a process of gentrification in a neighborhood, it will be important to understand how the neighborhood is also positioned in a larger geographical scale so that while you are trying to zoom in to understand what goes on in a neighborhood, you also need to understand what goes on in neighboring places simultaneously.

Take urban redevelopment of slums, for example. Such slum redevelopment often breeds gentrification, producing large-scale displacement of local poor residents who are in need of finding alternative places of residence. Such places often turn out to be adjacent neighborhoods, which see a large influx of displaced residents and, as a result, experience densification and a surge of rents due to resulting higher demand for affordable dwellings. This is what I have observed in my earlier study of a neighborhood in Seoul,[6] where thousands of households were evicted within a period of six months to one year, with the majority of people essentially – in my case about more than 70% of people displaced – finding their alternative dwellings in adjacent neighborhoods. These destination neighborhoods faced a huge pressure on affordable housing stocks and, therefore, escalating rents for such dwellings among the poor. The densification of such adjacent neighborhoods was related to the redevelopment-led (or new-build) gentrification of the slum neighborhood from where poor families were being displaced. So, it is important to understand such simultaneous processes of urban change without just focusing one's gaze at one particular neighborhood.

Similarly, it is also important to understand how there are multiple processes at work, one of which can only be gentrification. There are other urban processes that operate in a given city and a neighborhood, and it is probably important to understand what the position of gentrification is in this process and how gentrification interacts with other urban processes. This calls for attention to how evolving circumstances sometimes render gentrification to be more dominant, and how at other times gentrification may remain to be more marginal. Such dynamics would reflect the changing conditions of spatiality of urban places under observation and embedded socio-political relations.

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[6] See Shin, H.B. (2008) Living on the edge: Financing post-displacement housing in urban redevelopment projects in Seoul. *Environment and Urbanization* 20(2): 411-426

Gentrification researchers, therefore, need to ensure that their enquiries into neighborhoods are inclusive of wider processes of uneven development. Very often, gentrification studies involve drawing a boundary around a neighborhood, effectively rendering such a neighborhood as a bounded entity. This happens in particular when studies try to find out the size of displacement or verify its existence. Of course, we would need to see how many people are subject to displacement, but I think it is necessary for a researcher to be aware of the limitations of such practices of boundary drawing, go out of their 'comfort zone', and zoom out of neighborhood that they are investigating.

Finally, it is really crucial to consider how gentrification in the contemporary world becomes an economic, political and ideological project for the state. Very often, the idea of gentrification, especially creating city without the poor or driving existing poor people out of their neighborhoods, becomes a major policy goal for many urban governments. One example I can give is the case of Beijing where one of the city districts called Dongcheng district was announcing their plan in 2011 to reduce the population size from about 900,000 to about 650,000 within 20 years. Their plan was to reduce the population density and release the space for other more productive, and basically to transform the inner city of Beijing into world city looking appearance.[7] In doing so, the population reduction was really signaling the displacement of poor people, migrant workers or those who were in lower end of the service industries such as garbage collectors or low-end printing jobs. All were to face displacement to suburban areas outside the inner city district. Why? The city was trying to import more of highly skilled domestic workers and transnational elites. So, such urban transformation was the explicit

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[7] For more details, see Shin, H.B. (2018) Studying global gentrifications. In: Harrison, J. and Hoyler, M. (eds.) *Doing Global Urban Research*. SAGE, pp. 138-152.

policy goal, and is really an extension of what we usually observe as gentrification. It is effectively gentrification, usually discussed at a neighborhood scale, having gone wild, replicated at city scale. Such urban policy shift or urban policymaking is a reflection of cities' ideological commitment to produce particular type of city for the better-off populations.

Such policymaking is essentially a political act of the local government, which speaks to the economic and political goal of capital accumulation. Here, the Chinese government pursues revenue generation through taking advantage of the rent gap in their cities. A lot of people consider Neil Smith as having produced a very economically deterministic view of gentrification, but my understanding of Neil Smith and his rent gap theory is very opposite. While discussing the widening of rent gap between potential ground rent and capitalized ground rent of a given place, from the early 1980s, especially in his 1987 publication,[8] Neil Smith was already stating that his rent cap discussion is trying to show how material possibilities emerge to produce gentrification, and it is not necessarily trying to show automatic occurrence of gentrification. And in that regard, Neil Smith is very much a political geographer – he was referring to the need of observing and analyzing political struggles that translate the material potentials of rent cap into reality, and the outcome of such political struggles being gentrification. His 1996 book titled *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, which discusses the hostile urban conditions of New York City and which has already been translated into Japanese, is a good example. This book is really a political geographical discussion of how the rent cap exploitation comes about by various unequal and socially unjust urban policies. There is an urgency of situating our understanding of gentrification in the concrete web of urban life to give meaning to

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[8] Smith, N. (1987) Gentrification and the rent gap. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77(3): 462-465.

the struggles of these places, and to inform locally embedded endogenous struggles against the displacement in order for wider cross-regional alliances to emerge.

Let me now conclude. One of the questions I often come across in recent years is what will be the meaning of gentrification or referring to gentrification or using the concept gentrification in a place where academically gentrification has not been widely discussed. For example, in Hong Kong, in China, or in South Korea, gentrification as an academic concept has been very limitedly circulated until recently. In South Korea, only very few urban researchers were using gentrification for their research in the 1980s or 1990s. Only in recent two to four years, gentrification has been in popular usage. Then, you may ask: (a) what is the meaning of such proliferation of gentrification nowadays, and (b) what will be the academic and political significance of applying gentrification to a place where gentrification as a concept doesn't exist. With regard to these questions, there are two responses that I would like to present. Firstly, it doesn't matter whether or not gentrification is referred to in one's discussions – If you prefer not to use gentrification, don't feel compelled to use it. That is what I would usually say. If locally, gentrification is seen to be difficult to be understood, you don't have to use it. There may be other similar alternative expressions, which may refer to a process that is effectively gentrification. For example, redevelopment is a very much widely used expression in Asia, although I do have my own issue within the expression redevelopment, as it is often presented as a fairly neutral process by government policymakers and the like. That is, despite the politicized nature of the process, redevelopment or other similar expressions are mobilized for communication to the public. On the other hand, when academics or other activists try to understand the underlying process and make themselves aware of the root or the

underlying cause of such unequal urban process, the perspective of gentrification can be quite important, and should not be ditched away.

Second, there is also an advantage of using gentrification and introducing it more actively into places where gentrification as a concept has been non-existent, especially when you think of highlighting the more connective nature of urban processes in a place where real estate has become an important way of producing inequality. Such urban processes are deeply rooted in in the local capitalism and at the same time, influencing and influenced by the activities of transnational network of capital. By means of identifying such processes as part of planetary gentrification, there is an opportunity for urban social movements to acquire a better understanding of the connected nature of urban exploitation that occurs at multiple geographical scales. In this way, we are able to understand how the experiences of urbanites in Seoul or in Tokyo are not unique to those places, but can be recognized as something that have also been shared with citizens in other places. Such enlightenment would help us form the basis for a degree of alliance across regions to enact internationalism for confronting place-specific inequalities and injustice.

I think I will stop here. Thank you so much for listening to my talk.


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