GENTRIFYING THE BRAZILIAN CITY: CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES IN URBAN STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper intends to explore the applicability of the concept of gentrification to understand urban redevelopment in Brazil. Brazilian cities have been experiencing intense socio-economic and physical transformations that challenge traditional studies on urban development in the country. In these sense, while these cities still carry the strong marks of the past urbanization, in a system that continues to privilege specific areas and groups of society, more recent processes of spatial production may not be explained by the usual concepts and approaches of Brazilian urban studies. Included in these are the experiences of upward redevelopment of target areas with the displacement of former uses. At stake here are not only historical downtown renewal projects, but also the privatization of public spaces, implementation of gated communities, and speculation over urban properties, among others. While authors have been trying to frame these processes under structural transformations that characterize a phase of entrepreneurial urbanism, gentrification has been identified as a result of this new form of spatial production.

This paper engages with the gentrification theory, on its original formulation and recent debates, to explore the possibilities and challenges of its applicability to the Brazilian reality. On its original theory, the concept of gentrification has been coined to understand the return of investment to inner cities in England and the United States after a long period of suburbanization and deindustrialization. However, if even in these realities the concept has been inspiring heated debates around its definition, explanation and meaning, gentrification poses difficulties to understand the emergence of similar processes in distinct urban realities, explored by studies of cities in India, China, continental European countries, and Southern America. Included in this scholarship, the analysis developed on this paper moves between theory and case in a dialectical process that does not look for a synthesis. Rather, while moving between different spaces and temporalities, gentrification theory demonstrates the call for both necessary and contingent dimensions of spatial production. Therefore, while gentrification may pose interesting questions about the emergence of converging patterns in cities with diverse urbanization processes, it is also important to question the straight forwarded importation of theories and concepts for the Brazilian urban reality.
Gentrification has been inspiring heated debates since Ruth Glass first coined the concept as a process of residential succession and displacement occurring in central London (Glass, 2010 [1964]). Divergence emerges especially between a restrictive definition, related to the transformation of existing housing stocks mainly by homeowners (Bondi, 1999; Glass, 1989; Lambert and Boddy, 2002) and a broader definition that includes different uses, agents and processes, such as in the more recent debates around rural gentrification (Phillips, 2010), touristic gentrification (Gotham, 2005), new-built gentrification (Davidson and Lees, 2005) and global gentrification (Smith, 2002 and Atkinson and Bridge, 2005). Considering that cities have been experiencing a range of economic, political, socio-cultural and geographical restructuring since Glass first coined the concept in 1964, that classical definition has become less useful to understand the evolution of the process. On the other hand, considering the expansion of the term to understand these new forms and international cases, some authors (Beauregard, 1986; Bondi, 1999; Glass, 1989) argue that gentrification became a chaotic concept, in terms of trying to encompass diverse processes under a single, all embracing, universalistic notion. Moreover, one could wonder if the term should not be dismissed considering its trivialization and incompatibility with these new cases – among which we could include the Brazilian city – and this is the case of Lambert and Boddy (2002) that advocate in favor of alternative concepts, such as "re-urbanization".

The present working paper, nevertheless, makes an argument in favor of the concept, considering the strong political connotation that gentrification gives to a process that is clearly political once it is related to uneven spatial production, the costs of displacement, and public and private interests. In this sense, if gentrification is in need of reconceptualisation, its explanatory power as an urban process that involves polarized social relations is still valuable. However, there is indeed the necessity of a definition that captures the essential aspects of gentrification without over-stretching the concept. This paper intends to contribute to this discussion by engaging with the gentrification theory, on its original formulation and recent debates, to explore the possibilities and challenges of its applicability to the Brazilian reality.

In this sense, this paper is structured in four parts and final considerations. On the first part, Brazilian studies on gentrification are briefly explored in terms of the common and growing usage of the concept to understand the recent transformations in spatial production in the country. The second part explores some of the problems of the classical gentrification theory to understand new cases that include not only diverging urban contexts, such as Brazilian cities, but also the evolution of the process in traditional scenarios of gentrification in the United States and England. On the third part, the transformations in Brazilian cities will be related to the expansion of gentrification in the horizontal and vertical scale in what has been denominated the globalization of gentrification. The forth part of this paper focus on the methodological implications of the expansion and evolution of gentrification as well as the call for a gentrification theory that can explore the convergences and divergences between cases. As a result, if gentrification is clearly connected with capitalist spatial production and uneven development, we can only understand it in a more dialectic perspective that deals with both structure and agency, convergences and divergences, necessary and contingent elements. It is
within this perspective that gentrification theory can be used to understand urban realities diverse from its original definition, such as Brazil.

1. GENTRIFICATION IN BRAZILIAN URBAN STUDIES

Gentrification is the process of upward redevelopment with displacement. First used to explain cases in Europe and the United States, gentrification is not unknown to Brazilian urban studies. The term has been used on its English form (gentrification), on its neologism (gentrificação) or has been translated into the linguistic construction “social upwarding” (enobrecimento). Even if using different terminologies, most Brazilian urban studies have not been dealing directly with theoretical issues, either in terms of the origin of the concept or the more recent debates about its evolution. If, on the one hand, it is possible to assume that this growing usage of the concept is related to the anxiety that current forms of redevelopment have been causing, on the other hand, it is important to question the straight forwarded importation of theories and concepts for the study of contemporary Brazilian urban reality.

Brazilian studies have been mainly using the classic definition of gentrification applied to analyze “revitalization” projects of colonial downtowns in trying to explain the privatization and commercialization of historical heritage. In this sense, the transformation is related to historical structures that are rehabilitated or renovated for high-income uses after a period of disinvestment in which business districts were relocated to new areas and historical colonial downtowns were neglected. In this sense, Brazilian studies have been exploring the projects of revitalization of historical downtown areas as strategies of gentrification to promote cultural or touristic districts in diverse cities, such as in São Paulo, Recife and Salvador (Vargas and Castillo, 2005). However, if “revitalization” projects have been resulting in gentrification in the United States and Europe (Bidou-Zachariassen, 2006; Boyer, 1992; Harvey, 2001, 1997, 1989c), in Brazil such results are disputable.

Brazilian scholars have been demonstrating that these projects depend on major state intervention and management, in contrast to what is usually assumed to be a private-led gentrification process in core countries (Frúgoli Jr. and Sklair, 2008), an argument that is questionable given the importance of the state for gentrification of those areas and realities too as will be further mentioned. Nevertheless, even with the great amount of public investment, the socio-economic composition of these spaces in residential terms has not changed or has only changed in areas adjacent

1 I use “revitalization” in quotations marks to emphasize the construction of an image for the place as currently without life or dead, dismissing the appropriations of space that may not follow the prescriptive images of “revitalization”, but can be as lively as the cases used for comparison. In this sense, these projects construct an ideological narrative of disinvested places that condemn them as lifeless to justify redevelopment while depicting this process as natural. However, they negate that most colonial downtowns of Brazilian cities became dynamic popular centers, with intense commerce, informal appropriations of spaces, while maintaining their function as the main nodes of urban transportation.
to the new urban projects (Leite, 2007). Therefore, the anchor projects of museums, cultural districts and touristic facilities, may promote a gentrification of consumption (Frúgoli Jr. and Sklair, 2008; Leite 2007) that is limited to punctual events or specific times and places, without dramatically changing the socio-economic landscapes of colonial downtowns in Brazil. In this sense, one may argue that the strategy of intervention aims for gentrification while it has not been successful in achieving that goal for different reasons, such the lack of interest (demand) for housing in colonial areas on the part of the middle and high income groups targeted in these projects. Finally, the criticism of the construction of the built heritage as a single perspective that privileges white, Portuguese and erudite production (Rubino, 2005) is rather relevant and could be matched to Atkinson and Bridge’s (2005) analysis of global gentrification as a form of neocolonialism that privileges Western, white and middle-income appropriations of space. Nevertheless, this type of analysis usually does not go beyond the preservationist impulse.

On a second approach, Brazilian studies have been trying to understand gentrification within the frame of urban competition and urban restructuring (Arantes, 2000; Fernandes, 2001; Kara-José, 2007; Leite, 2007). In this sense, most of the literature about urban neoliberalism and entrepreneurial urban policies, as well as gentrification, has been developed from the observations of British and U.S. cities. However, Latin American and Brazilian scholars have been exploring similar shifts in terms of planning and dismantling local socio-economic and political arrangements. Therefore, even if we recognize that socio-spatial segregation, as well as displacement, has been historically characterizing Latin American cities, the new forms and intensity of recent processes constitute significant changes. Urban redevelopment strategies prioritize private interests, targeting a new image of the city to attract investments and a high-income clientele over facing the more difficult and concrete social realities of cities. In São Paulo, the discussion usually follows the Global City assumption, including the emergence of citadels or islands of development connected with dynamic economic flows, and luxurious residential and consumption areas for the workers in the global economy (Ferreira, 2002 and Nobre, 2000) in contrast with the poverty of slum areas.

Nevertheless, although this literature provides important insights on the transformation of planning and urban space, it tends to generalize this structure of urban competition and entrepreneurialism without acknowledging the many forces that may intervene in this process producing diverging outcomes in different contexts. In this sense, studies mention gentrification as one result of entrepreneurial policies without exploring either its definition or the actual dimensions of gentrification in Brazilian cities (Arantes, 2000; Sánchez, 2003 and Vainer, 2000). Therefore, the concept is used “loosely”, missing the necessary debate about the process, its dimensions and impacts for the local urban context. It would be possible even to speculate that if these authors criticize the importation of policies and the imposition of a top-down world-view to Brazilian cities, they ultimately seem to fall in the exact same trap by importing a concept without acknowledging the specificities of the Brazilian context.

Still, if it is possible to make this type of criticism to recent research on gentrification in Brazil, the reality that scholars are facing is one of great urban transformations
sensed not only by the academia, but also by local media, politicians, planners and residents. In this sense, the growing usage of the concept of gentrification is generally applied to new forms of spatial production in Brazilian cities that include upward redevelopment with displacement. Nevertheless, the Brazilian pattern urbanization brings challenges to the classical definition, as will be explained in the next sections while exposing the necessity to work closer to the evolution of gentrification processes in new empirical realities of global gentrification.

2. THE DIVERGENCES OF GENTRIFICATION: FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS WITH THE CLASSIC DEFINITION

While Brazilian studies have been identifying gentrification processes in the country, as already mentioned, there are clear divergences between these cases and the classical gentrification theory. This section explores three of these divergences: (1) the pattern of urbanization; (2) the conditions of the built-landscape; and (3) the agents involved.

Gentrification is a process of upward redevelopment with displacement. This means that for gentrification to exist a previous socio-spatial reality must be present and in opposition to a future condition in which other uses and users come to be privileged. The main aspect of this difference between what is current in place and what is envisioned as a future is the potential for additional accumulation in the production of space, i.e. the possibility of extracting an extra or a surplus from land values. Therefore, gentrification is the process in which land values are unlocked from a current and less profitable use of space to be used as a strategy for capital accumulation.

Inspired by the experience in the United States and England, nevertheless, classic gentrification theory assumes that the process is related to the movement of capital out of cities to the suburbs and then back. In this sense, capital would have moved out of cities to the development of suburbs after the Second World War considering the higher possibilities of profit (Harvey, 1989b; Smith, 1996 and 2010b). The lack of capital investments in the inner city would have led to its deterioration, setting a rent gap (Smith, 2010a and 2010b) in relation to the potentialities of the urban land. In this sense, there is a difference between what is currently being capitalized and what could be accumulated if these areas were to be redeveloped to the possible “higher and better use” of the urban land. Therefore, it is the pattern of disinvestment that actually made possible the reinvestment in the form of gentrification considering that the gap would be the source of potential profits in the return of capital to the city. Additionally, while the most powerful groups and elites would benefit from the process, the costs would fall on the most vulnerable communities, in the displacement of lower-income residents and minorities.
Nevertheless, if there is a strong bias in the arguments of utility maximization\(^2\), other urban realities, for instance Continental European cities, do not follow such a clear process of investment and disinvestment once that cities were consistently dense with high land values. This is also the case of Brazilian cities, which are not only dense, but also that have a structure of rich centers and impoverished peripheries. In this sense, the original inspiration of gentrification theory in analyses of neighborhoods change experienced by cities in the United States and England do not fit other patterns of urbanization that have not experience a strong urbanization process. Therefore, it seems more useful to explore the economic motivations of gentrification in terms of the different market approaches to land values over time and space, conforming geographies of investment and disinvestment. In this sense, gentrification is understood within the dynamics of capital that result in the unequal production of space and not related to a specific or single type of outcome, such as capital returning to inner cities. This means that gentrification is connected to larger cycles of investment and disinvestment in urban areas and that, while gentrification is linked to suburbanization processes in the United States and England, it is only because the same ideal of capital accumulation that lead to the expansion of suburbs is now looking for inner-city neighborhoods. That is why gentrification is a movement back by capital and not by people (Smith, 2010b) and this assumption can be used to understand different types of urban spaces, in city cores, peripheries and suburbs, including those located in Brazilian cities.

Secondly, considering the transformation in uses and users, it is difficult to identify a case in which the built-landscape is not an important piece in the gentrification process. Even if we consider neighborhoods in which the physical structures are the main asset, such as Brownstones in the classic gentrification cases, incomers mostly adapt the existing structure to their demands, in terms of reforms, renovations and utilities upgrading. This is due both to the previous disinvestment in the area and the distinct patterns of consumption between longtime residents and gentrifiers. Accordingly, built landscape transformation can represent patterns of capital investment and disinvestment in certain locations as well as identify socio-economic transformations and displacement. Therefore, gentrification also entails changes in the physical landscape by investments in urban infrastructure and upgrading of existing structures. With these aspects in mind, most of Brazilian studies have been focusing on projects for the “revitalization” of colonial areas.

\(^2\) In this sense, authors assume that when a neighborhood is first developed there is no difference between the capitalized rent and the potential rent. This means that when buildings are first constructed they represent the “highest and best use” for the parcel. However, if this may be true for some cases, this is also based on certain determinism over individual agency towards maximizing profit. In this sense, if location and land use regulations may inspire a specific type of use, for example, a 10-story high condominium, this does not mean that developers, constructors or individual owners will favor that outcome not only considering profit margins, but also inspired by cultural, social and differing individual preferences. Therefore, instead of considering “rational individuals maximizing preferences”, maybe there are different motivations and multiple rationalities that result on “highER and bettER useS” instead of “the highEST and bEST use”. Just by searching land use legislations, such as zoning, and comparing with the reality of the urban landscape, may already demonstrate some divergence with this hypothesis.
While these researches have been contributing with findings about the lack of demand for housing in these areas, resulting mainly in the gentrification of consumption in punctual events as already mentioned (Frúgoli Jr. and Sklair, 2008; Leite, 2007), it is important to ask about other forms of built-landscape transformation that gentrification may entail in Brazilian cities. For instance, in terms of great urban projects that entail demolitions and new constructions.

Some authors, especially Lambert and Boddy (2002), argue that new built gentrification does not exist, considering that it does not entail population displacement, eviction or rent-hikes. However, new built structures may promote displacement both directly and indirectly. On one hand, it is possible to talk about evictions for demolition of an existing structure and construction of a new type of development focusing on a higher-income clientele. In this case, not only rental units, but also business and homeowners may be subject to pressures from increasing prices and effects on everyday activities, such as changes in consumption patterns and community life (socio-cultural or political displacement). On the other hand, new built gentrification may cause indirect displacement by constructing on brownfields that might have exclusionary effects in the region as well as spillover effects on nearby locations, causing exclusionary displacement or price shadowing (Lees et al., 2008). This may happen by increasing rent prices, taxes, stimulating evictions due to the possibility of higher profits with new uses, among others.

Accordingly, new built gentrification can also represent patterns of capital investment and disinvestment in certain locations. In this sense, as Zukin (1987) reminds us, as gentrification became a “product based on place” (193), the evolution of the gentrification process may entice different forms of physical landscape transformation, from renovations to new built and new uses. Following this development of the gentrification process, Davidson and Lees (2010 and 2005) make a case for including new built gentrification as a “maturation” and “mutation” of the gentrification process in the post-recession era. In a similar way, if under his first works Smith (2010a [1982]) identified a difference between gentrification and redevelopment especially in terms of the first being related to renovation of old structures while the second included the construction of new buildings, in more recent analyses (Smith, 2002) the author recognized such difference as unrealistic once that both existing and new structures may promote gentrification. Additionally, new built gentrification may also be characterized by more involvement of diverse agents in planning, marketing and selling those spaces, such as architects and developers, as well as more intense role of the state. It is within this perspective that Hackworth (2006) analyzes post-recession displacement moving to marginal locations with large-scale new developments and great capital investment in New York; Davidson and Lees (2005) explore the projects for London’s Riverside Renaissance; and Wyly and Hammel (2002 and 1999) include HOPE VI housing projects as policies promoting gentrification in the United States.

Finally, Brazilian studies on gentrification have been alerting for the greater presence of the state in contrast to what is usually assumed to be a private-led gentrification process in traditional cases (especially Frúgoli Jr. and Sklair, 2008).
On a first note, it is important to mention that gentrification entails a diversity of agents and even in more traditional cases, it would not happen without the support of the state in helping private agents, for instance by promoting changes in zoning ordinances, stimulus to redevelopment, and support for the removal and relocation of local residents. Nevertheless, considering the traditional gentrification theory, one aspect that differentiates gentrification from previous urban renewal experiences in the United States and England is the leading agent in the process. In this sense, while urban renewal would consist of a redevelopment led by public agents, gentrification appears to emerge as a private market phenomenon. Therefore, as already mentioned, while there is a diversity of agents involved, it would be possible to argue that on urban renewal projects the state is the driver of the process while on gentrification, it is the enabler of it.

In recent years, nonetheless, scholars have been calling for understanding the relationship between public policy and gentrification (Atkinson, 2003; Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Lees, 2000; Smith, 2002; Wyly & Hammel; 2002). In this sense, gentrification has been associated with the transformation from managerialism to urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989c), becoming an “active part of public policy” (Lees & Ley, 2008) while also been generalized into a “global urban strategy” (Smith, 2002), as will be further mentioned. Therefore, it would be necessary to explore the ways in which the state enables and legitimizes contemporary gentrification in diverse arrangements with the private sector.

Therefore, if the Brazilian pattern of urbanization brings challenges to the classical definition as already mentioned, this is not only the case of Brazilian cities, but also new urban scenarios of gentrification in both traditional and global cases. Trying to answer to the evolution of the process as well as diverging cases, Hackworth and Smith (2001) theorizes about the evolution of gentrification by identifying waves of the process. The first wave (prior to 1973) was characterized by small state intervention and sporadic gentrification in neighborhoods restricted to eastern United States and Western Europe. While the recession of the 1970s opened the opportunity to investors to buy inexpensive urban land, it is on the second wave (starting in 1980s) that gentrification is consolidated and intensified, resulting in conflicted process such as in New York’s Tompkins Square Park. In addition, gentrification expanded spatially to smaller cities once it was connected with process of political and economic restructuring at global and national level. While the crisis of the beginning of the 1990s slowed the process, the third phase represented its intensification in already gentrifying neighborhoods and expansion further from the city center to new neighborhoods and forms, already dismissing the classic link with suburbanization. This “post-recession” gentrification (Hackworth, 2002) is related to larger developers, considering the increasing amount of capital invested in bigger areas, and greater state support to compensate for the risks of new areas and larger investments.

Additionally, this new wave of gentrification is matched with current preoccupations about the generalization of the process and its globalization would assume five main dimensions (Smith, 2002). First, there is a transformed role of the state in the
intensification of public-private partnerships filling the void of liberal urban policies, resulting in larger, more expansive and symbolic projects. On the other hand, the second dimension remarks how global capital has penetrated also in more modest, neighborhood scale, developments. Third, opposition to gentrification is silenced by a new authoritarianism (the revanchist city) that uses repressive tactics to make the city safe for gentrification. Fourth, gentrification is no longer restricted to urban centers, spreading through patterns of capital investment and disinvestment. Finally, for Smith (2002) it is the fifth dimension that really differs this new type of gentrification from previous forms: the new configuration of public and private partnerships in which the private sector has considerable independence from the public sector and is no longer restricted by the requirements of public financing. By these terms, gentrification has achieved a new scale in redeveloping not only housing, but also great projects of production, consumption and entertainment. These new dimensions of the process serve as a starting point or an initial framework to understand the Brazilian case as well as other cases of global gentrification in converging urban processes as will be mentioned next.

3. THE CONVERGENCES OF GENTRIFICATION: GENTRIFICATION HAS GONE GLOBAL

Gentrification processes in Brazilian cities can be analyzed through the lenses of global gentrification theory. In this sense, the globalization of gentrification is related to its expansion both vertically, descending the urban hierarchy, and horizontally, to other geographical realities in the world (Smith, 2002 and Atkinson and Bridge, 2005). By identifying waves of gentrification, Smith (2002) argues that since the 1990s gentrification became a generalized urban strategy planned and supported by the neoliberal state in collaboration with the private initiative. Additionally, justified in terms of jobs, taxes and tourism revenue, gentrification became an end in itself, an objective to be achieved. In this sense, Smith (2002) argues that gentrification is the main policy of neoliberal urbanism and, consequently, it should be understood within a critical perspective on capitalism’s uneven development that dialogues with the local and the global scales.

Within a context of deregulation, liberalization, (partial) state dismantling and re-orientation to pro-capital policies, the neoliberalization of urban policies signify the emergence of an entrepreneurial city, planned by quasi-public agencies and operated through public-private partnerships. The neoliberalization of urban planning city is also related to the promotion of competitive policies focused on attracting investments by forging a good business climate and promoting its quality of life for the “right type” of people and uses, meaning the ones with capital (Harvey, 1989c). Within this creative destruction of space (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Harvey, 2007a), gentrification becomes an important policy in terms of local short-term strategies of urban renewal to redeem cities competitiveness, displacing older

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4 Sassen, in her seminal study on global cities, also understood that gentrification was a “far broader process linked to the profound transformation in advanced capitalism” (Sassen: 2001: 255).
uses to attract those of “the right type”. In this sense, Smith (2002) understands that global gentrification is an expression of rescaling, in the upgrading of the urban in relation to national and global scales, but also in reflecting cycles of capital investment and disinvestment. Gentrification, nevertheless, became an important instrument to connect capitalism’s macro-cycles of investment to the micro-context of local urbanism.

Additionally, Harvey (1989a), Jameson (1991) and Zukin (1989 and 1987) offer interesting perspectives for the integration of economic and cultural strategies in spatial production. These authors explain that more recently culture was integrated into commodity production more generally as a critical part of capital accumulation. From this perspective, besides the neoliberal regulation and the flexible system of production, a new global socio-cultural system had to be forged based on the promotion of new standards for social reproduction. What is now called postmodernism is interpreted as the cultural logic of the current capitalist system in answering the criticism to the Fordist system’s claims for more flexibility, personal and local identities (Harvey, 1989a; Jameson, 1991). Moreover, the study of the neoliberal city has to understand the promotion of similar postmodern redevelopment projects in cities around the world not only as the evolution of urban form studies, but also as a political economic effect of the transformation of the capitalist system (Cuthbert, 2003). Therefore, iconic architecture and buildings’ signatures of globalizing professionals and *starchitects* are not only postcards for cities, but real strategies for economic development in urban areas (Sklair, 2005: 298).

Still, Harvey’s integration of Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic capital into spatial production entails that the appropriation of life styles and patterns of consumption translated into building form is based in cycles of investment and disinvestment (Harvey, 1997). In this sense, the promotion of global projects and international styles are highly valuable socially and economically in cities in core and peripheral countries as signs of status. Therefore, within this perspective, we have a more holistic approach to gentrification rooted and limited by both production and consumption explanations. It is based on a new spatial fix for capital accumulation, but also supported by a new pattern of consumption, with the promotion of the gentrification aesthetics (Zukin, 1987).

In this sense and as mentioned before, the globalization of gentrification means its expansion on different dimensions. On its horizontal expansion, we can understand the new international division of production and labor, the overreaching financial market and neoliberal policies as well as the promotion of new patterns of consumption expanding gentrification processes beyond global cities in Western countries to include globalizing cities in peripheral countries, such as Mumbai and São Paulo. On the other hand, on its vertical dimension, we can identify that changes in urban policies, with the promotion of the urban scale and inter-urban competition, are expanding the gentrification process to heterogeneous cities, sometimes not included in the great circuits of capital and, therefore, reaching not only New York and São Paulo, but also smaller cities in the United States and Brazil.
Finally, it is important to consider that these more general trends are always contextualized in specific forms. Against the model of a free market with intrinsic laws functioning in the same form no matter the context, there are specific interactions between the inherited local structure and the neoliberal globalization project. In the realities of “actually existing neoliberalism” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) or “variegated neoliberalism” (Peck and Theodore, 2007), the impact of political-economic restructuring must be understood by the interaction and balance between a general approach to neoliberal initiatives and the local context, in terms of path-dependency of former arrangements, including the previous spatial fix. Additionally, this means that to understand gentrification as a global strategy of neoliberal urbanism means having to locate global processes into local realities. In conclusion, it is important to explore those fundamental problems with the classic definition and explanation of gentrification to explain the evolution of the process not only in traditional cases in the United States and England, but also to the new scenarios of global gentrification, such as Brazil.

In conclusion, without losing sight of a definition that can be applicable to each and every case, the process is also contingent on local mediating structures. It is within this frame that we may understand the call for geographies of gentrification (Lees, 2000) in which not even in the same city gentrification is completely homogeneous. This is the case of Butler and Robson’s (2010) study of different neighborhoods in London and Hackworth and Smith’s (2001) analysis of post-recession gentrification in New York, both researches demonstrating the importance of geographical context and temporality to understand gentrification processes even on traditional urban scenarios of gentrification. Therefore, there is a necessity of working closer to the empirical realities of gentrification understanding that the concept, as any other, is a theoretical construct that helps framing reality, but it is not reality itself.

4. METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATION: OR THE NEED TO WORK CLOSER WITH GENTRIFICATION’S EMPIRICAL REALITIES

Gentrification was defined previously as a process of upward redevelopment of the built landscape with displacement. Considering that theory and methods are not separated aspects in a research design, but rather, they are interrelated, this definition of gentrification has two important methodological implications. The first one refers to its character as a process and not an end result. Gentrification is, by these terms a series of actions that produce change, i.e. upward redevelopment with displacement. However, because gentrification is always contextual or path-dependent, there is not an ideal or single outcome of it. Thus, it is not possible to identify a single gentrified space or analyze gentrification by searching for its final product once it is the process that defines the outcome and not the other way around. The second and related methodological implication is that gentrification

5 It is important to notice that if this agenda is already biased for core countries, it would be irresponsible (to say the least) to adopt it in a reality as socially distressed as the Brazilian society. This means cutting social programs in a context of extreme polarization in order to prioritize economic interests.
research should not try to find criteria to identify the final outcome (the gentrified space), but focus on aspects/criteria/variables to analyze the process itself. This means primarily to have a historical analysis of waves of investment and disinvestment as well as patterns of displacement, connecting different agents, scales and dimensions to explore the process of spatial production through which gentrification happens.

Finally, calling for contextual knowledge in gentrification studies also means recognizing that the advance of planning in different historical moments – colonialism, mid 20th century Bretton Woods, and late 20th century neoliberal institutions (Roy, 2008) – represented the expansion of hegemonic powers in international basis. In accordance with this perspective, Atkinson and Bridge (2005) suggest that gentrification is a new form of colonialism, considering that local waves of investment and disinvestment as well as consumer choices are becoming more intertwined with global and transnational processes. Through the influence of transnational professionals and elites, global patterns of consumption are produced and reproduced in cities around the world. It is important, hence, to understand neoliberalism as a socialization process in which the promotion of new values is as important as the more tangible aspects of it. It is by promoting its network of ideologies, rationalities and policies (including redevelopment policies) that neoliberalism achieves hegemony (Miraftab, 2009).

In this sense, research on global gentrification may move closer to Global South theories in acknowledging that (1) planning theories are normally originated in core countries and based on assumed universal values that do not hold in all other contexts; (2) planning has been used as a form of reproduction of domination in serving local and global interests in inherited structures of colonialism or adopted policies of multilateral organizations; (3) there is a conflict of rationalities not only in terms of groups and location, but also within them in considering the gap between advanced systems of governmentality and the growing inequality and marginalization of population in both core and periphery; and (4) the necessity of rethinking the ethics of planning in grounding its practice on local knowledge and situated values (Miraftab, 2009; Watson, 2009; Yiftachel, 2006). Nevertheless, this perspective must also recognizes the complexity and dynamic structures of domination not only related to core and periphery, but also within these positionalities. In this sense, it is necessary to move beyond simplistic and relativist notions of the valorization and incorporation of other voices in the internationalization of planning (Roy, 2009) to deconstruct local forms of domination too. This perspective is important also in considering that neoliberalism and globalization are produced in multiple cores and peripheries and it is clear that dependency and inequality are also produced domestically, as it is in the Brazilian case.

Among gentrification studies, one interesting example of this de-centering strategy that could be used in Brazilian studies is Harris’ study of gentrification in Mumbai and London (Harris, 2008). Within the perspective of “actually existing neoliberalism”, Harris makes a comparatives study of gentrification to understand the different histories and geographies of gentrification. The author concludes that, even in light of the different context in the world economy and the different roles of
the state, in both cases policy has been focusing more on facilitating market accumulation than social reproduction, affirming and facilitating gentrification. However, the institutional arrangements are markedly different. While there is a lack of accountability in London, the absence of a stronger liberal tradition in Mumbai results in a local form of governance in which the public and private sector functions have been blurred and act together in a "shadow state" to manipulate regulations and urban plans to promote gentrification. The social effects are also more intense in Mumbai with greater social-spatial inequality resulting from the transformation of urban patterns and residential displacement. In spatial terms, it is an original argument that gentrification caused the disruption and disorder of cities’ functioning and organization. Gentrification “fractured” the original urban structure, resulting in exclusive spaces in Mumbai and London, which seems parallel to the formation of elite’s citadels in Brazilian cities. Finally, it is interesting that Harris’ initiative to de-center gentrification theories is also reflected in the fieldwork that started first in Mumbai to establish the base for the future comparison with London. By changing the reference, Harris inverts the power relation of core countries emanating models for the rest of the world. This also seems to be a good strategy to keep the connection with the multiples realities of gentrification even if acknowledging the more acute social effects in Mumbai.

By assuming the importance of positionality to the production of knowledge, thus, planning should understand and explore the nature of difference, in a return to in-depth studies and empirical research, to generate ideas that can inform practice in contextual ways. Instead of searching for “a” theory, or even “the” theory, planning would learn from these cases to inform theories that, in turn, can be tested further in other cases, de-centering local and universal theories. The idea of examining closely these allegedly “Third World”, “developing” or “periphery” cases of global gentrification, therefore, can yield a certain type of knowledge that illuminates not only other realities similar to their own, but also those that usually contrast sharply with them, hence providing greater theoretical insight into the dynamics of gentrification and urban processes more broadly.

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout this paper, gentrification is defined as a process of upward redevelopment of the built-environment with displacement. Global gentrification is related to the transformation in urban planning related to the current stage of economic development and the formulation of a new socio-cultural pattern related to it. In these terms, global gentrification is connected with the expansion of neoliberal policies, especially in terms of urban entrepreneurialism and spatial production under globalization and economic restructuring. On the other hand, gentrification is also related to new socio-cultural practices and patterns of consumption produced and reproduced in cities around the world. These aspects cannot be dissociated and they evolve in conjunction. Nevertheless, these explanations have the intrinsic threat of falling into determinism, exploring cases similarly independent of the context and this seem the case of some of Brazilian studies on gentrification that do not acknowledge the path-dependency aspect of
the process. On the other hand, recent studies on global gentrification, including some done in the Brazilian academia, do not recognize the own evolution of the process to include new agents, contexts and justifications. There is indeed a necessity of revision of gentrification theory to understand forms of gentrification that challenge its classic definition in both traditional and new urban contexts.

Considering that concepts are abstract categories that do not exist in reality, but help us understand it, this paper argues that gentrification must be considered as a process taking place in a specific context, putting the proper relevance on contingency and complexity. Therefore, to keep the coherence of the analysis, the definition of the concept must be tight enough to identify converging elements related to macro or structural aspects without diminishing the importance of localizing forces. Within this perspective, even considering that gentrification has gone global or became the main policy of urban neoliberalism, studies on global gentrification have to understand this contextualization of the phenomenon in which the articulation with local patterns may alter the process over space and time.

In this sense, the research design for the study of global gentrification has to explore this contextual knowledge, using methodologies that dialogue with the different dimensions, scales and agents of the process. Additionally, instead of describing its frequency and symptoms, research should focus on unveiling how gentrification is operationalized and located in different contexts, identifying the local mediating structures that makes the process context specific. At stake here is not the fact that gentrification is specific only in Brazilian cities or other scenarios of global gentrification. Rather, gentrification is always specific and Brazilian cities, as well as processes within these cities, constitute just another case alongside traditional cases in core countries, opening spaces for de-centering positions and building theory from multiple positionalities.

REFERENCES


Cities, nations and regions in planning history


