1. Introduction: towards a C21st global gentrification studies

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This Handbook surveys the contemporary state of play of the gentrification studies literature, a body of work that now dominates both the sub-discipline of urban geography and also urban studies more generally. It does not set out to rehearse previous debates on the definition of ‘gentrification’ nor does it rehearse the well-worn battlegrounds over explanations (on these see Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008, 2010); rather this book is a collection of chapters by both long-standing and up-and-coming researchers on gentrification that represents the latest in global thinking on this process. It provides critical reviews and appraisals of the current state of, and future development of, conceptual and theoretical approaches, as well as empirical knowledge and understanding in gentrification studies. It also seeks to encourage dialogue across disciplinary boundaries, for the contributors sit in and work across geography, sociology, anthropology, planning, policy, law, and so on.

The book is divided into 5 parts: Part 1 looks at recent attempts to extend and rethink gentrification as a planetary process and condition, drawing on the ‘new’ comparative urbanism; and a more ‘earthly’ take that replaces old style complementarity in gentrification studies with relationalism. Part 2 reviews the key/core concepts that have dominated gentrification studies to date, including class, landscape, rent gaps, and displacement; adding spatial capital to this list, updating them conceptually and globalizing them. Part 3 looks at other social cleavages in addition to social class, including sexualities, age, ethnicity and gender, providing ideas on future research trajectories. The cross-cutting of social cleavages in addition to social class needs fresh and deeper empirical investigation; this book seeks to instigate such an agenda. Part 4 looks at some of the different types of gentrification, including slum gentrification, new-build gentrification, public housing gentrification, tourism gentrification, retail gentrification, gentle/soft gentrification, environmental/green gentrification, the cultural economy and gentrification, and wilderness/rural gentrification. These types of gentrification all deserve attention in their own right but can also be read together. Part 5 contains chapters on living and resisting gentrification. Unlike in most gentrification books, this part takes seriously the complexities of living with gentrification, resistance to gentrification (all types and levels of resistance) but also key to this resistance – possible alternatives to gentrification. Here readers will find some of the most comprehensive reviews of resistance in the literature to date and real attempts to find alternatives to gentrification. Although the key users of the book are likely to be advanced undergraduates, post-graduate students, and international scholars of gentrification, the chapters also have real purchase for policy makers, planners, housing activists, and indeed everyday people for whom gentrification is an issue.

It is now over 50 years since the British sociologist Ruth Glass coined the term ‘gentrification’ in 1964. In 2014, University College London held an event to celebrate her contributions (see https://www.mixcloud.com/UCLUrbanlab/playlists/ruth-glass-and-
Yet still, few people have taken the time to read the bulk of Ruth Glass’s other work, beyond that little paragraph where she coined the term ‘gentrification’ (Glass, 1964). Her wider work deserves much more attention; indeed her writings could be seen on a par with those of Jane Jacobs (1961) in New York City. In fact, Glass was a much better predictor of future urbanism than Jacobs was. Indeed, her writings are quite prescient in places. Lees, Shin and López-Morales (2016) discuss her ‘prescient comparative urbanism’ but there are many other instances too. Glass’s research and commentary on social mixing is especially insightful and echoes the findings of Bridge, Butler and Lees (2011) in their discussion of mixed communities policy, which has produced social segregation in the form of gentrification. In her discussion of a new high-rise council estate completed in 1950, Churchill Gardens in Pimlico, London, she was critical of the kind of social balance that today’s planners want – a mixed population. She says that this mix ‘has given rise to social tensions and anxieties on a moderate, yet still noticeable, scale’ (Centre for Urban Studies, 1964: 282). Although she found a genuine neighbourliness in Pimlico flats, she also found a social divide amongst the tenants and undercurrents of resentment. She states: ‘Neither “social balance” nor practical collaboration has led to the ideal pattern of perfect “social mixing”’ (Centre for Urban Studies, 1964: 282). Indeed, in a footnote (9 on p.289) she says that a dislike of social mixture in Churchill Gardens actually played a part in the decisions of people to move out! She asserts that ideas about social balance and mixing in planning ‘are over simplified, and indeed unrealistic. Social solidarity and segmentation inevitably co-exist’ (p.282). She is surely correct when saying that ‘the aim of “neighbourhood unity” has been much stressed in planning literature; its achievement has even sometimes been regarded as the ultimate yardstick of success, by comparison with which mundane aims, such as the provision of good homes in proximity to workplaces and services, has been seen as subsidiary’ (p.283). Here we find some important earlier empirical work to input into longstanding debates around gentrification and social mixing (see Lees, 2008). Perhaps policy makers should (re)visit Glass’s work, for she said many of the things that those gentrification scholars critical of (new) urban renewal and mixed communities policy are now saying.

Glass predicts the future of London amazingly well: ‘any district in or near London, however dingy or unfashionable before, is likely to become expensive; and London may quite soon be a city which illustrates the principle of the survival of the fittest – the financially fittest, who can still afford to live and work there’ (Glass, 1964: xx). She talks about the lodging-house districts, adjacent to expanding middle class areas, ‘where all sorts of people who have to keep, or want to obtain, a foothold in central London, are crammed together – and frequently have to pay exorbitant rents for the privilege’ (p.xx). We only have to look at the massively expanding and increasingly expensive private rental sector in London today to see this being played out again. She also recognized the emergence of new middle-class fractions before Daniel Bell’s (1973) Coming of Postindustrial Society or David Ley (1996) who wrote about a cultural new class – ‘there has been some reshuffling of social groups, mainly again among the middle classes’ (Glass, 1964: xvi). Her wider work really does deserve our attention in gentrification studies and beyond.

Since Glass coined the term ‘gentrification’ half a century ago in London, academic writing on gentrification has exploded and gentrification studies has become a field in its own right. Figure 1.1 shows that academic writing on gentrification has more than trebled between 1979 and 2016. I have tried to represent the current state of the field in...
Source: Scopus, based on articles that have gentrification in the title, abstract or keyword.

Figure 1.1  Articles on gentrification 1979–2016
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There is a recognition now that the process is playing out globally and that solutions are urgently needed. In 2016 the Guardian newspaper asserted ‘Gentrification is a global problem. It’s time we found a better solution’ (https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/sep/29/gentrification-global-problem-better-solution-oliver-wainwright). It set out to examine the consequences of gentrification around the world and interrogate what was being done to tackle it. The journalist, Oli Wainwright, described the process well:

Gentrification is a slippery and divisive word, vilified by many for the displacement of the poor, the influx of speculative investors, the proliferation of chain stores, the destruction of neighbourhood authenticity; praised by others for the improvement in school standards and public safety, the fall in crime rates, and the arrival of bike lanes, street markets and better parks.

The series did not, however, look at the burgeoning body of work on global gentrifications. Gentrification scholarship still struggles to get into the public and policy realms, it is a difficult task given the predominantly negative evidence base most gentrification scholars have collated. Oli Wainwright asserted a solution to gentrification could be a tax on the value of land, ‘which would capture the value of improvements for the local community, rather than lining the pockets of investors’. But this fails to recognize the role of the state in gentrification or different land ownership regimes worldwide.

Academic work on global gentrifications has shown how gentrification is a central ingredient in the reproduction of capitalism worldwide (see Lees, Shin and López-Morales, 2015, 2016; also López-Morales, Shin and Lees, 2016; Shin, López-Morales and Lees, 2016, on gentrification in Latin America and East Asia respectively). Contemporary gentrification is linked to variegated neoliberalisms operating around the world and involves the destruction of state redistribution and provision of welfare while creating new forms of state and elite policy to promote capital mobility and consumption (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Chapter 16 in this Handbook by Melissa Fernández Arrigoitia on the gentrification of public housing shows the relationship between the destruction of this form of welfare and gentrification well. The expansion of free market rules to a worldwide scale has turned cities into reserves of rent extraction (Logan and Molotch, 2007), but things have escalated to the point where the secondary circuit of real estate (urban, rural and real estate anywhere in between) has taken over or is at least equal to the primary circuit of industrial production. The ascendance of the secondary circuit of real estate has escalated processes of gentrification around the planet resulting in what Harvey (1990: 77) calls ‘market-produced zoning of ability to pay’. This is what Ruth Glass also identified in her reference to the financially fittest having best access to London. The built environment then is produced according to the supposed demands of affluent users, and this displaces indigenous inhabitants and low-income users (see Chapter 9 by Zhao Zhang and Shenjing He, who discuss displacement and also accumulation by dispossession). Chapter 8 on rent gaps shows the elite discourses circulating on rent gaps and details how rents gaps are produced (that is, socially constructed); here, Tom Slater underlines the importance of investigating both the production and indeed consumption of planetary rent gaps.

Since Ruth Glass coined the term ‘gentrification’ in London it has entered the public lexicon in countries around the world and this has triggered academic debate over whether a term coined in London in the 1960s has purchase outside of London in the 21st century. In Chapter 2, Hyun Bang Shin and Ernesto López-Morales address these debates.
and focus on why ‘gentrification’ cannot be so easily dismissed as a term for processes around the globe. It is interesting that academics are much less bothered by the use of the term ‘suburbanization’ around the world, than they are with the term ‘gentrification’. There seems to be something about the term ‘gentrification’ that provokes negative reaction from many quarters, both from those in their ivory towers and from activists on the ground. Yet as Ley and Teo (2014) have said of Hong Kong, even if the term is not widely circulated in media and public discourses, its ontological presence can be identified through careful scrutiny of how urban neighbourhoods are targeted for capital (re)investment involving displacement of local inhabitants. Theirs is strong affirmation for investigating gentrification even in those cities (and countries) where the term (and thus the process) seemingly does not even exist. Waley (2016) talks usefully of making a claim for gentrification to be understood from the Global East. Chapter 19 by Juliet Kahne shows that gentrification is also happening in another city where one would not expect it to exist, in the most archetypal suburban city in the Global North – Los Angeles, one of the few North American cities which has long not been associated with gentrification. Indeed, spatial capital (see Patrick Rérat’s useful discussion in Chapter 7) in terms of commuting, connections, quality of life and environmental concerns has (re)emerged as a significant factor not only in LA but in gentrification globally.

The different chapters in this book evaluate the state of play in the gentrification studies literature. These scholarly contributions think through gentrification in both developed and developing countries, even if we are uncomfortable with such terms; for as the chapters show, developing world entities such as informal housing or slums exist in developed world cities too (see Eduardo Ascensão on slum gentrification in Chapter 14). For a number of the contributors, English is not their first language and their linguistic competences mean that they are able to draw on non-English literatures on gentrification. This immersion in non-English literatures is most welcome and it will no doubt enrich the gentrification studies literature. Indeed in Chapter 4 I continue to make the case for comparative research on gentrification across the globe, taking on board ideas from the ‘new’ comparative urbanism, pushing back at those who reject gentrification as a process in their specific locational and research contexts. Importantly I argue that there is much theoretical, conceptual and especially methodological work yet to be done. I also balance the neglect and marginalization that I have long been interested in: that of people being socially cleansed from cities and communities worldwide by gentrification, with the neglect and marginalization of cities in the Global South in (northern) urban theory that ‘new’ comparative urbanists are focused on.

This collection is also the first to take seriously the incorporation of what could be considered gentrification’s ‘other[s]’ (Phillips, 2004), such as rural/wilderness gentrification as opposed to inner city gentrification (see Chapter 22 by Darren Smith, Martin Phillips and Chloe Kinton), retail gentrification as opposed to residential gentrification (see Chapter 18 by Phil Hubbard), and what might be seen as ‘add on gentrifications’ such as tourism gentrification (see Chapter 17 by Agustín Cocola-Gant), and green/environmental gentrification (see Chapter 20 by Hamil Pearsall). The blurring of the urban and the rural is to be found in different ways in all of these gentrification types. This blurring (discussed in literatures on planetary urbanization and planetary gentrification (see Brenner and Schmid, 2012, 2014; Lees, Shin and López-Morales, 2016)) is a new window of opportunity now for (re)conceptualizations of these processes. Of course, Glass’s (1964) use of the term...
‘gentrification’ was itself a complex mix of urban and rural – as Hamnett (2003) points out, it was ‘rooted in the intricacies of traditional English rural class structure’ (p. 2401). The term is ironic in that it makes fun of the snobbish pretensions of affluent middle-class households who desire a rural, traditional way of life (or at least a commodified version of it – as seen in the uptake of Aga stoves, wood burning stoves, and fired earth tiles) (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008). Gentrification and rustification are intimately connected. A recent article in The New York Times (Smith, 2017) exemplifies this when it talks about ‘wilderness chic’ in a restaurant called Raymonds in St. John’s, Newfoundland, Canada, where:

the moose is garnished with flecks of pickled winter chanterelles, dark, bitter cress leaves and crisp, celadon-green caribou moss. A dab of aioli, flavoured with powered young pine needles, sits in the middle, and the whole thing is drizzled with sunflower oil and white birch syrup.

The journalist talks about the pairing of rural and sophisticated, local and cosmopolitan. The owner even has a trapper who brings him beaver, which is then cooked in a pouch and served on brussel sprout leaves. The wilderness is brought to town and made urbane.

In between urban gentrification and rural gentrification there is also ‘suburban gentrification’, which is not covered in this book in any detail. In fact, very little has been written on this to date (but see Leaf, 2002; Huang, 2010; and Hudalah, Winarso and Woltjer, 2016). Lees (2003) discussed the suburban mindsets and tastes of super-gentrifiers in New York City, likewise those moving to the suburbs from the city or between suburbs in the Global North now desire what have been seen to be more urban characteristics associated with inner city gentrification. In the US, as in other places, the notion of the sterile, homogenous suburb that long acted as the counterpoint to inner city gentrification is being broken down. Many moving to and living in the suburbs are now seeking walkable villages with a creative vibe and shorter commutes. In another recent New York Times article (Foster, 2017), a family moved from the more stereotypical Long Island suburbs to Katona in Westchester County, an hour from New York City. The mother said:

It was so down to earth, I didn’t need to put on a full face of make up to bring my kids to school. I met a lot of artists and could talk about politics and travel.

Such comments could well have been from pioneer gentrifiers in New York City (NYC) itself, instead they were from suburban upstate New York. In the newspaper article, creative cities guru Richard Florida is interviewed and comments that he knew someone who ‘evaluated suburban towns based on the availability of fresh mozzarella’; such a food metaphor would have been made for NYC neighbourhoods undergoing gentrification in the 1970s and 1980s. He said: ‘Do you want to see pick up trucks or Volvo SUVs? . . . Trump bumper stickers or resist signs?’. These used to be the choices that Anglo-American gentrifiers made between inner city living and suburban living. In the Global North, the traditional notions of suburb versus inner city and their cultural identifiers have broken down, showing the mainstreaming of a culture of gentrification and planetary urbanization. In other parts of the world, the Anglo-American inner city/suburb dichotomy never existed in the first place or not in the same way (Lees, Shin and López-Morales, 2016). Martin Phillips says in Chapter 6 that gentrification landscapes urban and rural, material and symbolic, or lived, are a defining, if often taken for granted, feature of gentrification.
It is clear that the classic landscapes from the gentrification studies literature are both dated and not necessarily useful outside of the Anglo-American context.

The Handbook looks at a number of different types of gentrification, thinking through what is or is not distinctive about these types. These types overlap of course, for new-build gentrification (see Chapter 15 by Mark Davidson) can take place in urban or rural contexts, and certainly is taking place in cities as wide apart as London, Istanbul, Beijing and Santiago. New-build gentrification is evident in slum gentrification and it is the gentrification that replaces public housing. But there are other types of gentrification that are not in the book: super-gentrification (Lees, 2003), for example, does not appear. But this process is continuing in neighbourhoods like Brooklyn Heights in New York City. Some longtime residents are trying to stay in place and protect their real estate investment. For example, the Dean of CUNY Law School and a partner in a law firm recently sold their house in Brooklyn Heights for $5.65 million and moved into a condo elsewhere in the neighbourhood. The ex-chairman of the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s board of trustees sold his Brooklyn Heights Historic District home to his son for $4.5 million in 2017. Companies are now buying up property in Brooklyn Heights, even Donald Trump’s son-in-law, Jared Kushner, has become involved in profit-making in the neighbourhood. His company Kushner Cos recently did a makeover of the most expensive house in Brooklyn Heights, which had been a law school dorm that the company bought for $7.4 million. The landmark Greek Revival style row house now has an elevator, central air conditioning and five bedrooms that are all suites. Alas the new owner who bought the property for $12.9 million in 2017 does not think it is good enough and is planning to remodel it inside and out! The new owner is the Vice President of AJ Wealth in Lower Manhattan. Yet these sums seem miniscule when we look at the ‘hyper-gentrification’ happening in areas of London where the top 1%, multi-millionaires and billionaires are buying properties at £20 million ($26.4 million) plus (see Weber and Burrows, 2016). Classic gentrification texts on the role of the ‘new’ middle classes in gentrification seem somewhat outdated now in the context of super-gentrification and hyper-gentrification; and indeed in contexts outside of the Global North where class is constructed differently. In fact, as Michaela Benson and Emma Jackson state in Chapter 5, the different social and political histories framing class globally need due attention. I would also add political economic histories and applaud their emphasis on class as relational, situational and in progress. Likewise, Bahar Sakizlioğlu also argues, in Chapter 13, that we need to return to looking at gender in gentrification studies, updating our conceptualizations and deepening and expanding our empirical work. A female gentrifier in Istanbul may or may not share the attributes of a female gentrifier in Toronto or Paris.

In an increasingly cosmopolitan world, immigration and ethnicity are topics that gentrification researchers have continued to under-examine. Chapter 12 by Tone Huse makes a renewed case for why it is important to research gentrification and ethnicity; in particular, how gentrification can reorder or amplify ethnic segregation. While in Chapter 25, Geoffrey DeVerteuil argues that immigration adds to the complexity of race and gentrification, as some immigrants are racialized while others are not. DeVerteuil shows how immigrants can be a barrier to gentrification, displaced by gentrification or gentrifiers themselves. This complex position of being both victim and cause of gentrification can also be found in Andy Pratt’s discussion of artists and gentrification in Chapter 21. He wants us to separate out artists and cultural producers from cultural consumers such
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as the creative class and hipsters. It is the interaction of immigrants or artists with capital that seems to be the crux of the issue. As Petra Doan says in Chapter 10, the complex ways in which capital and sexual orientation interact remain incompletely understood. The same could be said about age/generation too (see Chapter 11 by Cody Hochstenbach and Willem Boterman who place age centre stage).

Freek de Haan, in Chapter 3, would like gentrification scholars to let go of what he calls ‘familiar unifying yet legislative concepts and narratives’ in gentrification studies. But this is already happening, because a closer look at gentrification globally forces us to unlearn much of what we have learnt. Narratives based on the Anglo-American post-industrial city are not good at explaining gentrification in 21st century Mumbai! De Haan wants to ‘slow down conclusions on gentrification’s actual presence or absence in order to extract new possibilities from situations of empirical and ethical ambiguity’. I am not sure we need to slow down to do this and the ontological multiplicity that he seeks is, I would argue, already present. Few would now argue that there is a single ‘elephant of gentrification’ (Hamnett, 1991).

The day before submitting this book I was in the US listening to Maine Public Radio when a two-hour debate came up on gentrification in Portland Maine, a small city I wrote about some time ago (Lees, 2006), in which rents have risen by 40% in the last five years. Fair Rent Portland was seeking a referendum on rent stabilization to protect working class citizens, this is different to NYC’s failed rent control. According to a statement from Fair Rent Portland, ‘rent stabilization will allow renters to feel secure in their homes, begin to build up financial reserves, and make long-term economic plans. It will ensure that the children of renters can remain in a single district, that vulnerable citizens with mental or physical health conditions can heal without having to face eviction, and that local businesses will have the workforce that they need to grow’. Who could argue against that? Oakland, California, has adopted a similar plan, fixing the amount landlords can raise rent to the Consumer Price Index. Indeed worldwide, from the new tax on foreign buyers in Vancouver, Canada (an extra 15% on the purchase price of a property) to the new Milieuschutz Law (social environment protection) in Berlin, policy makers are looking for ways to control gentrification. Importantly, this Handbook includes, in Chapter 23 by Sandra Annunziata and Clara Rivas-Alonso, a very detailed and much needed survey of the growing literature on resistance to gentrification. In the summer of 2017, in Barcelona and Majorca, protest groups including Arran Paisos Catalans and Endavant Ciutat Vella rallied against tourism gentrification, saying ‘Tourism kills the city. Tourists go home. You are not welcome.’ Their charge, like that in Chapter 17, is that tourism is making their city too expensive: that people are renting out flats to tourists, forcing residents out. More widely that the situation is forcing people to work in the tourism industry with long hours and low wages. The extreme end of this is the ‘dead city’ of Venice, which has few real city residents and where most property is turned over to tourists. In Chapter 26, Antonia Layard shows that property and planning law (in this case in England) has been used to facilitate gentrification, but it also can be used to counter gentrification. Of course, property and planning law is different in different countries and even cities; as such, context is very important here. The use of law in resisting gentrification needs much more investigation by gentrification scholars (see Hubbard and Lees, 2018).

Much less has been written about alternatives to gentrification; in this Handbook, two chapters have been devoted to this. Chapter 24 by Susannah Bunce outlines the utility
of community land trusts and eco villages. The strength of these initiatives, she argues, lies in their ability to galvanize public interest in and raise necessary discussions about community owned and stewarded land and housing as alternative modes of property ownership. It is interesting that social housing is not put forward as an alternative to gentrification; indeed, as Chapter 16 shows, social/public housing is being gentrified worldwide. This reflects the central role of the state today in both promoting and pushing gentrification forwards and both the destruction of, and lack of building of, social housing; something that, as Ruth Glass (1964) also said, has ruined the prospects for rational urban development: ‘... municipal housing has never yet been viewed as a social service intended for, and progressively extended to, all citizens irrespective of their circumstances’ (p.286). The alternatives to gentrification, as Chapter 24 and Chapter 27 show, now seem to be individual- or community-led initiatives. The state is no longer trusted to take a role. Chapter 27, written by Jess Steele, a gentrification scholar and regeneration specialist, puts self-renovating neighbourhoods on the table. As such, this final chapter perfectly bookends this volume, for it really directs gentrification scholars to the hard work we have yet to do on developing alternatives to the gentrification blueprint that has come to dominate cities, places and spaces worldwide.

REFERENCES

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