

## Ernesto López-Morales, [Hyun Bang Shin](#) and Loretta Lees Introducion: Latin American gentrifications

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## **Latin American gentrifications**

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### **Abstract**

Currently Latin American cities are seeing simultaneous processes of reinvestment and redevelopment in their historic central areas. These are not just mega scale interventions like Porto Maravilha in Rio or Puerto Madero in Buenos Aires or the luxury renovations seen in Santa Fé or Nueva Polanco in Mexico City, they include state-led, piecemeal, high-rise interventions in Santiago, Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, Panamá, and Bogotá, all of which are causing the displacement of original populations and thus are forms of gentrification. Until very recently, these processes have been under conceptualized and little critiqued in Latin America, but they deserve careful scrutiny, along with new forms of neighbourhood organisation, activism and resistance. In this introduction, we begin that task, drawing on the work begun in an Urban Studies Foundation-funded workshop on Global Gentrification held in Santiago, Chile in 2012. Our aim is not just to understand these urban changes and conflicts as gentrification, but to empirically test the applicability of a generic understanding of gentrification beyond the usual narratives of/from the global north. From this investigation we hope to nurture new critical narratives, be sensitive enough to engage with indigenous theoretical narratives, and understand the dialectical interplay between state policies, financial markets, local politics and people. The papers in this special issue deal with the core issues of state power, urban policies (exerted at metropolitan and neighbourhood levels), an enormous influx of financial investment in derelict neighbourhoods, which produces exclusion and segregation, significant loss of urban heritage from rapidly ‘renewing’ neighbourhoods, and even some institutional arrangements that make possible anti-displacement activism and self-managed social housing production.

## Introduction

The central goal of our project was to respond to the post-colonial challenge of ‘decentring the reference points for international scholarship’ (Robinson, 2006: 169) on gentrification. This meant observing how gentrification was being conceived (i.e. questioning the usefulness and applicability of the term ‘gentrification’ in the Global South) and how gentrification research was being conducted in Latin America. We believed that this entailed unlearning existing dominant literatures that continue to structure how we think about gentrification, its practices and ideologies, and as such we sought to bring new ‘others’ to the global academic fore.

It was also important for us to respond to the need for theoretically-guided dialogue across national borders to avoid getting locked into the parameters of local and national debates, and to understand that phenomena like state urban renewal policies, speculative interests of landed developers, the incoming of new middle-classes into derelict downtowns, neighbourhood contestation and mobilization, are not cut from the same cloth across different Latin American contexts. We do this by even considering certain path similarities with East Asia, Sub-Saharan and Arab Africa and the Middle East (Shin, Lees and López-Morales, 2016), and also the usual suspects of the western Northern hemisphere. We were aware of differences: we included the varying local and national political and socioeconomic conditions of each case, how investors and policymakers behave, where, when and how original residents resist, adapt and/or surrender to displacement forces or interests, and what the roles of the state are in these processes.

Drawing on Lees’s (2012) agenda setting critique of the idea of global gentrification, we were very sensitive to the reification of contextually-attached narratives of gentrification from north Atlantic cases that were (inadvertently?) taken for granted or ignored the regionally cultural and/or politico-economic aspects attached to the process. As a research team we wanted to bring both new evidences and theoretical constructions from Latin America to the gentrification studies table and not to ignore, but to inform, discussions that might very well have been kept trapped in the theses of, for instance, policy-led ‘expansion’ of gentrification through neoliberalism (Atkinson & Bridge, 2005) and the hegemony of (western) ‘gentrification waves’ (Hackworth & Smith, 2001). For us, it seemed misleading to talk about third-wave gentrification in places where the first and second ones had yet to occur or were occurring simultaneously. The three of us needed something new, something beyond comparative work that had already been done in gentrification studies. We were wary of theory extracted from one case and applied to another. We sought in our Santiago workshop and subsequently in the deep editorial work we did in this special issue with the respective authors, what Robinson (2015) calls new ‘theoretical imaginations’. And, we are pleased that all the authors featured in this special issue have developed their own theoretical imaginations.

Robinson (2011) and McFarlane & Robinson (2012) claim that as part of the ‘globalization era’, interests in drawing comparisons among different cities have escalated, as economic and social activities, as well as governance structures, link cities together through spatially extensive and intense networks of communication and flows of information. It may be nothing new that countries and metropolises in Latin America have shared similar paths of

change in governance, import-substitution industrialization and post-industrialization, an endemic tendency to dictatorial and/or populist national regimes and processes of municipalisation, middle-class formation, higher dependency of local markets on state-led transportation facilities, and so on. All of these features provided opportunities for urban reflection and theorizations, which of course might be nothing new in of itself if compared to previous powerful intellectual narratives from Latin America (e.g. marginality theory and dependency theory) that later on were applied to different parts of the world (see Caldeira, 2009 and Baño, Ruiz & Ruiz-Tagle, 2009, for recent accounts of these trajectories).

We adopted a simple and generic gentrification definition to start our project with, choosing Eric Clark's (2005, 2015) elastic but targeted definition, one that seemed useful for the comparative urbanism we were to do. Clark (2005: 263) argued that gentrification is:

a process involving a change in the population of land-users such that the new users are of a higher socio-economic status than the previous users, together with an associated change in the built environment through a reinvestment in fixed capital. The greater the difference in socio-economic status, the more noticeable the process, not least because the more powerful the new users are, the more marked will be the concomitant change in the built environment. It does not matter where, it does not matter when. Any process of change fitting this description is, to my understanding, gentrification.

This was a definition ample enough to recognize contextual differences between cases, without losing the relational, class-sensitive perspective that the gentrification lens offers. And importantly, we wanted to keep hold of the political power of the term. In his more recent work, Clark (2015) has suggested that the powerfully generic nature of 'gentrification' needs to be understood not through a binary approach to hypothesis falsification, but as an ample questioning that brings together renewed aspects of urban policy, the class-led reclaiming of urban space, social and cultural differentiation, and often unseen externalities derived from the privately-led, rent seeking investment in derelict areas. This is something that Neil Smith (2002) argued for too and that we develop in our discussion of 'planetary gentrification' (Lees, Shin and Lopez-Morales, 2016). In so doing we have sought to unveil the socially unjust processes occurring in the class-led reurbanization impacting Latin American cities today, a process barely understood as gentrification by either Latin American publics nor international academics.

In refining our project, we looked at the limited arguments of gentrification sceptics (e.g. Hamnett, 2009; Maloutas, 2011) who were concerned about excessive stretching of the term. We were concerned that it was an overly simplistic assumption that applying gentrification theory beyond the usual suspects in the West showed evidence of yet another colonial mindset or an Anglo-Saxon intellectual hegemony that wiped out other indigenous considerations. Part of the critiques by gentrification skeptics was focused on a supposed loss of analytical rigour, seeing gentrification as a term to be used exclusively in the Anglophone world. Such a stance does nothing to drive new theoretical formulation. More recently, other emerging academics have aligned themselves with this gentrification

scepticism (e.g. Ghertner 2015) with no consideration of the moral and political fall-out from such a stance

Our ‘comparative gesture’ was about transcending earlier cases in order to properly contextualise the rise of gentrification in Latin America, in tandem with other urban processes, and attuned to local specificities. As the late Neil Smith (1996:185-186) argued:

I do not think it makes sense to dissolve all these experiences into radically different empirical phenomena. It seems to me that it is of primary importance to retain a certain scalar tension between, on the one hand, the individuality of gentrification in specific cities, neighbourhoods, even blocks, and on the other hand a general set of conditions and causes (not every one of which may always and necessarily be present) which have led to the appearance of gentrification across several continents, at approximately the same time. The power of a more general theoretical stance is augmented by the suppleness that comes from a sensitivity to the details of local experience – and vice versa.

But we also wanted to assess how academics from the Global North could learn from their Latin American counterparts about gentrification. This meant seeing how gentrification policies emerge in different countries by repetition (copying), borrowing (aspects that suit) or by being reinvented (for a different context). Was gentrification indigenous somehow, responding to long term paths and continuity experienced in these cities (see Shin and Kim, 2016, for a similar argument in South Korean contexts), or was it a totally new phenomenon of class-led urban reconfiguration? Could we talk about a ‘gentrification blueprint’ (Lees, Shin & López-Morales, 2016)? Could we develop an account that anticipates the geographical and historical specificity of places?

Further questions that came up in ensuing discussions were as follows. In a region largely characterized by the imbalance between central urban areas with plenty of public infrastructure and extended peripheries of deprivation and exclusion, how does gentrification relate to the existence and creation of new infrastructure? Did a ‘new’ middle class emerge, and is the term ‘gentry’ applicable? And also crucially, how deep is the interaction between (local/global) real estate capital and central/local states in the creation of conditions for gentrification to occur? In this regard, we were curious about the role of public policy instruments such as planning regulations in the creation of gentrification, and what particular local, social effects and economic ties were being produced or fractured by gentrification, given the existing relations of production and forms of accumulation. And, was it possible to learn from the struggle of Latin American housing activists against the exertion of power embedded in the process of increasingly market-led urban reconfiguration? How was gentrification being perceived by local inhabitants?

In achieving this project we gathered more than 100 people from different Latin American countries together for a two day workshop in Santiago de Chile. There were various issues that impacted what we were organizing: very sadly, Professor Hilda Herzer, who was also included in our Urban Studies Foundation award team, could not attend the Santiago workshop and soon after she passed away. Her input and expertise was really missed. In addition, unlike many of the scholars who took part in the London workshop on locating

gentrification in the Global East who had a very good command of English, this was not the case amongst our Latin American colleagues. As such, much more editorial input has gone into this special issue than would have been the norm, but the value of this was that it created new conversations over meanings about things. The editorial process was indeed a great learning experience that led us to understand the similar trajectories of various cases but also the political contingencies that separated them. This was very important, given we did not want to 'provincialize' gentrification theory and hoped to see what was/is new about urban redevelopment in Latin America. The result is the special issue that stands before us.

### **Overview of the special issue**

Drawing on what we might term a geo-economic narrative, closest to the radical definitions by Smith (1979) and Clark (1987), López-Morales (this issue) discusses a rapid and enormous concentration of middle-income-oriented, new-build real estate built between 2000 and 2012 in Santa Isabel, a residential area of Santiago's downtown. He identifies this as a case of gentrification because developers have imposed a land purchase price that leaves around half of the original, low-income owner residents without any chance of obtaining replacement accommodation, hence their displacement to more distant, affordable areas. He calls this a form of exclusionary displacement and shows it to be not just a process inherent to neoliberal redevelopment, but gentrification seen as an effect of multiple intertwined processes underway: namely, increased financialization of the real estate economy, entrepreneurial zoning policies that attract reinvestment into 'safer' places, societal changes that transform housing preferences for an upward emergent middle-income strata, the still weak power that neighbourhood activism has in Chile (inherited from a long and fierce right wing dictatorship between 1973 and 1990), and most of all, the transformation of the highly densified urban centre as an 'object of desire' (Carrión, 2005). Following the case of Santiago, Inzulza-Contardo (this issue) explores the emergence of new socio-spatial environments over the last three decades in Santiago de Chile. Using two neighbourhoods as case studies, the historic Bellavista and the formerly upper-income El Llano, Inzulza-Contardo illustrates how high-rise real estate has radically changed the existing physical fabric as well as transforming the social nature of these places due to the in-migration of 'young urban professionals' and the subsequent loss of neighborhood community identity.

Delgadillo (this issue) also discusses the relationship between heritage and gentrification. The data presented in his paper reveals how the City of Mexico's market-oriented, state-led urban development policies are increasing land and housing prices and making it hard for original, low-income populations to remain in revalued central areas. Since its creation in 1997, the Federal District government (currently renamed 'City of Mexico') has promoted policies for recreating an intensive, compact and sustainable urban development in certain parts of the historical centre of the city. Delgadillo calls this the 'selective modernization' of the city's (now) most profitable urban areas. Policy implementation is shown to be contradictory and sometimes even corrupt; and the outcomes include the social cleansing of street vendors and panhandlers from key roads in the centre of Mexico City. Delgadillo's

paper deals with power, the financial scale of this gentrification, its imposition, and social exclusion and disenfranchisement at a scale that only those who have lived in this city can appreciate.

In Rio de Janeiro, Gaffney (this issue) applies a gentrification lens to see how many residential landscapes rapidly went through changes in response to a cycle of global mega-events that have accelerated real-estate speculation, triggering the occupation of strategic favelas by state military police, and the implementation of state-led urban development projects. Gaffney observes an increase in rents across the metropolitan region with identifiable processes of gentrification in the Flamengo, Zona Portuaria, Vidigal and Barra da Tijuca neighbourhoods, and in general a multiplicity of ‘gentrifications’ within this mega-city.

Rodriguez and Di Virgilio’s paper on Buenos Aires attempts a bottom up perspective, supported by the authors’ involvement in urban activism in Buenos Aires. Their approach is similar to that which characterized the Gino Germani research cluster led by Hilda Herzer until 2013, the Argentinean Marxist sociologist who also participated in this project mentioned earlier. They focus on the gentrification of the southern area of Buenos Aires, acknowledging the limitations of the gentrification term for the analysis of transformations in Latin American cities. Their paper addresses class-led urban change in order to explain why and how local residents and grassroots organizations resist gentrification, namely the promotion of neoliberal urban renewal policies vis a vis the genesis and development of Law 341, and the *Programa de Autogestión de la Vivienda* (Self-Managed Housing Programme) which so far have produced valuable outcomes in terms of people’s management of the right to the city.

The paper by Janoschka and Sequera aspired to be a summary piece. Rather than presenting new empirical research, it largely relies on their knowledge of Latin America and their previous works (see Janoschka, Sequera and Salinas, 2014) to discuss the decisive role played by the public sector, and the speed, scale and ‘ferocity’ of new real estate markets. They frame the latter as ‘symbolic violence’, which is implicit in the re-appropriation of architectural and cultural heritage (see also Inzulza-Contardo, this issue) and the ways formalization impacts highly informal urban systems.

These papers are all sensitive studies that have outlined multiple urban realities in Latin American cities. Their discussions are expected to refine gentrification theory and provide new insights into ongoing discussions in both the global South and North. In subsequent sections, we identify some of the salient aspects of these discussions, linking to the contributed papers where possible.

### **Segregation and gentrification**

Since we started this project, there has been an interesting growth of new gentrification narratives. Latin America has not stopped experiencing the expansion of property-led housing markets and intensive urban restructuring of inner city areas aimed at middle-income groups, regardless of the political contours of national or local regimes. Known as

the most urbanized and also one of the most unequal regions of the world, Latin America's traditional patterns of urban segregation are seemingly being replaced and causing new displacements and exclusions from inner city areas. Whilst in the past, private land speculation and the absence of a strong housing sector were regarded as the main drivers of segregation (Espinoza, 1988), contemporary urban redevelopment policies and the advanced commodification of housing as a financial asset are now playing an even more decisive role. In this context, can we talk about segregation in Latin America in the same way as before?

It seems a rule of thumb in Latin America, and perhaps the entire spectrum of contemporary cities in capitalist developing countries, that the cheapest urban land is where the poor are often concentrated, though at times they may also be trapped in areas with high value land: the land with the worst environmental conditions, less infrastructure and reduced access to public goods. Urban segregation is also advanced in this, perhaps the most unequal, region in the world. Urban segregation multiplies the problems of access to quality education (also stratified by price and neighbourhood), ethnic exclusion (Margarit and Bijit, 2014), scarcity of transport and mobility (the poorer segments of society live further away, and travel longer to work or study), lack of amenities and public goods (e.g. lack of equal distribution of green areas and health services per capita), constructing them as risk areas, with poor urban security and largely dependent on municipality's budgets. (Ruiz-Tagle and López-Morales, 2014).

When Latin American cities started to expand significantly, in the early 20th century, this was due to a number of causes but among the most important were import substitution industrialization and a growing social housing demand generated by what would be the promise of a proto-Keynesian welfare state regime that would grant universal rights to housing. In the meantime, land seizures, favelas, *barriadas*, *callampas*, *campamentos* and *villas miseria* spread all over the fringes of rapidly growing cities. Governments then faced enormous challenges in disengaging themselves from the speculative price increases for private land, necessary for the construction of social housing, which in fact undermined the economic state management capacity to cope with a growing housing deficit and control urban sprawl (Sabatini, 2006). Later in the 1970s, and especially the 1980s, the tendency to peripheral segregation grew, as highly ideologized public policies saw the market as a more efficient land allocator. As national economies de-industrialized, housing provision was privatized and the real estate and construction sectors grew in scale. Currently what many critics observe is the proliferation of gated condominiums in former shanty areas (Alvarez-Rivadulla, 2007; Roitman, 2013). These do nothing but confirm the absence of social integration in these traditionally poor peripheries (Sabatini et al., 2010). But something more important is happening now in the redevelopment of newly recentralized areas of Latin American cities.

A particular type of segregation by mega-project has been witnessed in Buenos Aires, Puerto Madero. The latter led by private investment in transportation, services and housing. The project to attract higher socio-economic groups was established in 1989 with the transfer of extensive public land to a newly created, ad hoc, private-public corporation. The land subject to this redevelopment was traditionally vacant or used by lower-income groups, now refashioned to host local and transnational elites. But this project cannot



simply be seen as a starting point to claim that gentrification has arrived in the northern part of the city. There serious financial implications. Puerto Madero demonstrates a massive transfer of landed assets (unused infrastructure, docks, public spaces) at a cost of roughly US\$ 250 million to private redevelopers. This initiative triggered private investment of around US\$ 2.5 billion, and revenues to redevelopers are estimated to reach US\$ 6 billion based on a soft tax scheme, where city government collected taxes of only US\$ 158 million from this massive redevelopment (Garay et al., 2013). This case epitomizes not only a top-down policy of class-upgrading by segregating an important part of the city that at the time was defined as 'derelict-unused' land, and its conversion for the super-rich, but also the massive and immoral transfer of public goods which could have been used to provide public spaces and housing for lower-income groups.

However, as Herzer (2008) argued, in the 1990s and 2000s the entire southern part of the city showed signs of commercial restructuring and tourist-oriented redevelopment. Herzer, Di Virgilio & Rodríguez (2015) claim that the neighbourhoods of La Boca, Barracas, and Parque Patricios share historic origins linked to the predominance of working class residential uses and industrial and manufacturing activities, and that they have all undergone processes of gentrification due to state intervention through neoliberal urban-renewal land policy and the Law 341 - Programa de Autogestión de la Vivienda (PAV). Rodríguez and Di Virgilio (this issue) scrutinise these policies and outcomes in great detail. More recently, a new round of reinvestment has been ignited by the creation of the 'H' Metro Line towards the southern inner quarters of Parque Patricios (a traditionally working-class/lower-middle class neighbourhood, famous for hosting the Huracán Football Team Stadium) and the rebranding of the area by former Mayor Macri (now President of the Republic) as the new 'Polo Tecnológico' of the city. These initiatives are likely to produce further waves of social displacement from this area by excluding and segregating those who cannot afford remaining in the neighbourhood and are not able to adapt to the rapidly changing new scenario (see Apaolaza et al. forthcoming).

In Latin America, as it has been also seen in East Asia (Choi, 2016), new transit infrastructure can make a real difference to deprived, relatively isolated quarters of inner city areas. Given the fast-pace of private sector redevelopment after public sector decisions to invest in certain areas, we see in Latin America class-related conflicts around access, competence, and appropriation of new mobilities (Gutiérrez, 2012). This could be also a form of segregation by state-led provision of centrality in certain recentralized places, because access depends on the differential means of transportation and communication that are available in a given space and that makes some spaces more desirable than others. Competence refers to the skills of individuals, which can be physical (e.g. the ability to cycle), acquired (e.g. having driving licences or subsidies for transport) or organisational (e.g. ability to plan/synchronise activities). Appropriation refers to the strategies, motivations, values and practices of individuals. It includes the way individuals act in terms of access and competences (be they perceived or real) and how they use their potential mobility (Rerat & Lees, 2011). But "if gentrification appears as a strategy for some groups of the middle class to increase their spatial capital, it can have the opposite effect on the 'displaced' population [...] In addition to the loss of their neighbourhood (and therefore of social capital) through gentrification, displacement can also result in a loss of spatial capital" (Rerat & Lees, 2011: 129).

Perspectives on segregation from a mobility viewpoint have been developed in Latin America by Rodriguez Vignoli (2008) who examined socially differentiated daily commuting in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Santiago and Mexico City as a result of spatial mismatch (residential/labour). Jirón (2010) uses the 'mobility turn' to address and measure the intangibles of exclusion. She sees a seesaw of confinement/enlargement of the social interaction opportunities through mobility, depending on the access capacity of the population related to its socio-economic background, and a set of negotiations in-between, based on the competence and appropriation held by the different income-groups in the city. Rodriguez & Tovar (2013) show seven other cases of large Latin American cities that have implemented Bus Rapid Transit systems (BRT) in the creation of enormous locational advantages that have led to rapid real estate change in the surrounding areas, yet without analysing displacement effects. However, as López-Morales (this issue) shows in certain inner neighbourhoods of Santiago, new increased access to mobility is a necessary condition for the amplification of the Potential Ground Rent. The relationship between spatial capital and gentrification is a significant one in Latin America and needs further, in-depth investigation.

In Mexico, early studies of gentrification focused on heritage designation and investment in cultural activities as symbolic appropriation of historic inner areas by the upper middle classes (eg. Jones and Varley, 1999; Hiernaux & Lindón, 2004), something that Delgadillo (this issue) confirms, and that Janoschka, Sequera and Salinas (2014) claim to be one of the four strands of gentrification existing in the Ibero-American region. Coulomb (2012) carefully analyses three chained processes of devaluation and abandonment in/from the historic central *colonias* of Mexico, a whole back-to-the-city movement accompanied by revitalization policies and huge investment by private actors backed by international funds and agencies like UNESCO, which means rent gap formation/exploitation and a whole restructuring of the concept of 'centrality' (cr. Lees, Shin and Lopez-Morales, 2016). Earlier, Carrión (2005), the famous urbanist and past candidate for Mayor of Quito in Ecuador, had defined the historic central areas of Latin American cities as 'objects of desire'. His views helped reconfigure Quito's downtown through public action in order to respond to the new needs, aspirations, and commercial demands from local and international affluent agents in the context of Ecuador's rapidly expanding economy. His prescription was to transform, all together, the fiscal, economic, physical and socio-economic nature of those spaces in Latin American cities inhabited by and 'wasted' on the lowest income stratas. In similar vein to Eduardo, Rojas's (2004) famous *Volver al centro* book which compiled a collection of 'best policy practices' for soft gentrification, combined with a strong belief in the power of private capital to remake space for its rent seeking goals, insofar as the public sector was to invest to secure positive environments for financial investment. In the early 1990s, the governments in Chile, Argentina, Mexico and Ecuador actively sought to attract higher income populations back to the central city. The result was a massive upgrade in the socio-economic composition of these areas, a gentrification effect that very few scholars took into account seriously during the 1990s and 2000s; indeed, quite the opposite everybody seemed happy with the positive 'repopulation' effects achieved.

## Domestication by public force

One of the major strategies to promote urban socio-spatial restructuring in Latin America is the use of force by the state to pacify and domesticate areas that used to lie outside formal circuits of urban accumulation. Brazilian cities, especially Rio de Janeiro, stand out in this regard. Until very recently in Brazil there had not been a proper discussion of gentrification, as the use of the term was considered to be of little relevance to depict undergoing processes of class-led conflicts in urban space. Instead, terms like *ennobrecimento* and others were (and still are) more regularly used by Brazilian authors and the media. An earlier exception was Rubino (2005) who called the shifts in the social and physical character of historic urban space - gentrification. Gaffney (this issue) also sees several types of gentrification, which are currently underway in Brazil, both in the favelas which are closest to the mass-scale redevelopment areas of *Zona Portuária* and in the Olympic areas. In fact deep urban changes are happening as Police Pacification Units (UPP) have been permanently installed in select favelas to vanquish drug trafficking networks and to enforce security, an initiative that has expanded in scale under the national government's Growth Acceleration Program (PAC). The initiative includes new transportation infrastructure (e.g. cables that connect favelas with the central area), new housing, social services, and open spaces within some of the most consolidated favelas. The 2010 launch of the US\$ 3.9 billion Morar Carioca program aims to re-urbanize, relocate or cope with all of Rio's approximately 1000 irregular settlements, whilst the Minha Casa Minha Vida program has also played a role in the displacement of some select neighbourhoods (Cumming, 2013). The class-led symbolic appropriation of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro is leading to the prospect of rising land speculation, newcomer residents and the eventual socio-economic exclusivity of gentrification in these places. A 'favela chic' phenomenon has emerged, namely the elevation of favela culture to global circuits of cultural consumption through its associations with cinema, samba and funk carioca musical styles (Cumming, 2015).

However, as Queiroz Ribeiro and dos Santos Junior (2007) have observed, the breakdown of social and reproductive structures in Rio de Janeiro from the 1990s, which used to serve as a support for social reproduction, have transformed the relationship between the poor and the rest of urban society. This means weakening their ties with the labour market and increasing their spatial and social segmentation, especially among low-skilled workers. Beyond this economic dimension, the isolation of the urban poor in cities also occurs because they increasingly have limited access to employment services, urban infrastructure and public spaces, leading to exclusion and stigmatization. In contrast, highly entrepreneurial gentrification can be seen as a major factor contributing to the worsening of the livelihoods of the poor through mechanisms of state-supported, class-led material and symbolic occupation of the space. This happens in areas where informality of property and labour relations are in crisis, and where the attempts by the state and a growing powerful financial sector to penetrate and somehow domesticate the spatiality of urban poverty seem to be evident.

We feel that the above framework could also be applied to Mexico City, which is facing the violent expulsion of street vendors from the pedestrianized Regina and Madero streets. During the 2000s, public and commercial spaces in the central historic *colonias* of Mexico City were massively transformed, public spaces secured via CCTV and the stronger

presence of police forces, and every sign of pre-existing poverty wiped out. A similar account was also given by Swanson (2007) in relation to Quito, Ecuador; the author found ethnic- and class-motivated revanchism exerted by local elites against the lowest strata of urban society, more specifically street vendors, panhandlers and poor children who used to be traditional users of certain central spaces. In Mexico City, a growing number of low-income tenants are displaced by realtors in association with absentee property-owners who aim to increase rents in many central *colonias*. Massive social disfranchisement from public decisions and the exclusionary practices of local governments in the central areas of the city worsen the situation for low-income tenants. Nevertheless, local residents are not passively waiting for displacement. In the case of the ‘Corredor Cultural Chapultepec’, a mega re-urbanization project that would have made possible the construction of 30-storey luxury office blocks and commercial and residential buildings next to some of the most traditional quarters of the inner city of Mexico City, local people and activist organizations used a referendum to block the aspirations of the Chief of City Government, Mr. Mancera. Around 65 percent of voters said no to the ‘cultural corridor’ project. However, there is no guarantee that this mega-project might not re-emerge in future, as the rezoning of the project area will have created enormous profits for a few developers who have already signed contracts with the City Government in the face of the disapproval of many citizens, high-ranked politicians and civil society.

### **A new gentrification economics in Latin America?**

The rent gap remains a theoretical lynchpin in the study of gentrification (eg Smith, 1979; Clark, 1987; Hammel, 1999; Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008; Shin, 2009; Lopez Morales, 2011; Lees, Shin and Lopez Morales, 2016) but much of our theoretical understanding is based on limited empirical research conducted well over 20 years ago. At a time of heated international urban competition, we are seeing in Latin America unprecedented levels of dislocation and displacement from urban space as a consequence of (often foreign) speculation in, and capitalisation on, land, in the form of mega-events, large construction projects, urban ‘regeneration’ schemes, assorted ‘growth machine’ agendas, and local/global economic crises of accumulation of landed investment. Rent gap theory has proven useful in analysing exclusionary displacement, e.g. cases where the private capture of ground rent has a class-monopoly nature (López Morales, 2015; see also Slater, 2006; Marcuse, 1985). More research and reflection is needed on the connections between ground rent and the rise of a new gentrification economics.

In Latin America there is an ongoing, vibrant discussion about land value capture (Sandroni, 2011) that clearly needs to include factors like the absorption of the rent gap, not only as a form of unequal economic wealth polarization but also as a source of financing state-policies of housing spatial redistribution and welfare. For all their foibles and complexities, Colombian and Brazilian city governments capture important elements of private land and construction valorisation, often used to finance social housing construction and/or public good provisions in deprived areas (Smolka, 2013).

As López-Morales (this issue) argues, over the last 25 years, Santiago's low-income inner-city neighbourhoods have seen the increasing production of high-rise residential condos aimed at middle-income consumers. Average housing prices have more than doubled in the last ten years (inflation considered), but it was the real estate developers, not land-owners, who mostly benefited from the price increase by appropriating the majority of ground rents. This has been possible because of the growing availability of financial and real estate capital, and because of the increasingly higher costs of intra-urban mobility that are pushing urban residents back to central areas. Other factors include the historically central concentration of public goods like good schools, health centres and parks; a strategic land up-zoning in certain neighbourhoods vis-à-vis a discourse of derelict central and inner areas (López-Morales et al., 2012); considerable public investment in metro and traffic infrastructure; and, since 1991, a chain of state-led issuing of subsidies to the market, including vouchers that cover up to 10% of the sales cost of new apartments aimed at middle-income purchasers as well as more recent 'rental' subsidies, encouraging households to rent (as an alternative to buying). The reshaping of Santiago's inner-city neighbourhoods comes at the cost of historic heritage neighbourhoods and the loss of their architectural value (Inzulza-Contardo, this issue).

The systematic and unequal appropriation of ground rent by developers leaves small landowners, tenants, and multi-occupants at their mercy. The rent gap narrative of gentrification relies heavily on supply-side processes, facilitated by intensive processes of capital concentration in real-estate and construction, and it characterizes well the varied range of urban economies across the region, from Panama City (Sigler & Wachsmuth, 2015) and Bogotá (Manrique, 2013) to Rio, Mexico City and Santiago. The new property produced is accessible only to an incoming, more affluent middle-class, while the lower-class original residents are displaced. Petty landowners are forced to sell, are short-changed for their properties and cannot afford to remain in place. Tenants experience, unilaterally, massive increases in their rent payments and are forced to leave. Casgrain (2014) details the highly 'entrepreneurial' character of gentrification in Chile and the extremely polarized power relations held between those who manage the changes experienced in the neighbourhoods (the state and large-scale developers) and those who reside within them. Other accounts of powerful, highly speculative urban regimes can also be found in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia (Posso, 2015), where 'intact' patrimonial facades hide the displacement of an array of loci traditionally used by the poor, to be replaced by tourist oriented redevelopment, luxury apartments and hotels, with an enormous amount of profit created.

In Mexico City, Delgadillo (2014) and Olivera (2014) have found numerous policies that provide state incentives to facilitate property-led, tourist-oriented reshaping of central spaces (namely, Bando 2). These have intensified private redevelopment in the metropolitan centre, while other aggressive public guidelines are in place to tackle informality in historic central areas. Delgadillo (this issue) presents another interesting case in the Santa Fe area, which is experiencing redevelopment to create a modern and globalized residential, service and business district. In this area, local and federal governments have carried out eviction of local population who were legitimately occupying part of the land (9.5 hectares): affected were 510 houses held by a 3,200-inhabitant community of garbage collectors, a church, a school and a small market, all of which were displaced after the metropolitan

authority closed the dump in 1994, clearing the site and putting in urban services in preparation for the development of a mega real estate project. This project was followed by another luxurious real estate project called 'Nueva Polanco', led by speculative investor Carlos Slim, once the richest man in the world, according to Forbes magazine. This new real estate was imposed on a pre-existing, very central, Granadas low-income neighbourhood. The project rapidly transformed the area into a (still in progress) second Santa Fé complex, responding to the desires of the rich to work and live in more central locations. The socio-spatial reconfiguration of Mexico City does not respond to the needs of the existing population but of capital.

### **Resistance and territorialized political imaginations**

We have discussed elsewhere (Lees, Shin and López-Morales, 2016) that resistance to gentrification has been both significant and successful in several cases in the Global South. Although some may argue that the 'right to the city' is a western European idea, social movements in Latin America increasingly use it along with the 'gentrification' term for making their claims (Rodríguez, 2015; Janoschka, Sequera and Salinas, 2014). Nevertheless, if we conceptualise gentrification as defined by capital reinvestment in the built environment accompanying the displacement of existing users, the main tenets of the right to the city, which emphasises the taking-back of the power to produce space from the state and capital, may still hold. How these tenets are to be realised and how to put the right to the city into practice in urban strategies remains subject to various questions and interpretations. Conflict and resistance need to be contextualised in each locality, critically understood in their temporal and spatial dimensions, and also historicised in the ways in which rights claims have been exercised.

Resistance can be seen in several forms, from highly organized and effective activism to silent forms of adaptation and struggle to stay put. Vainer et al. (2013) offer an interesting point of view in terms of implementing the right to the city, not just addressing conflict as a research issue but also setting out alternative ways of conflictual planning, an approach that sees the city from the viewpoint of its conflicts and therefore offers a rich body of knowledge that can inform and support a new type of political intervention. If top-down planning is seen as an 'efficient' way to prevent, mediate and resolve conflicts, it may also be regarded as dysfunctional, expensive, and threatening to socio-urban cohesion. Instead, conflictual planning addresses and unrolls the creative potential of conflict, from which collective subjects emerge to rescue the city as a political arena, i.e. a space in which citizens are confronted, faced, and propelled to arbitrate the development of the metropolis they live in. Rodríguez and Di Virgilio (this issue) speak of the mutual cooperative organization of La Boca neighbours in organizing socially-oriented real estate companies, enabling them to build inclusive estates. Other strategies have been envisaged by Díaz-Parra (2013) in Montevideo.

Indeed, there are many cases that show how new political environments are being born in Latin America, rising as self-managed, alternative and increasingly powerful spaces for everyday organization and struggle against the conjunction of power between capital and a

particularly exclusionary and authoritarian governmentality. Examples include the increasingly participatory social urban activism in Mexico, which has been effective in penetrating and transforming the institutional fringes left by a colossal authoritarian state, as the ‘Corredor Chapultepec’ case shows. We can also consider Colombia’s neighbourhood protection movements (Betancur, 2014), and the case of Ukamau<sup>1</sup> and the social housing complex to be finished by 2017 in downtown Santiago, following the achievements of the *Movimiento de Pobladores en Lucha* (Pérez, forthcoming).

## Conclusions

In the narratives included in this special issue, we have seen how the critical functions of the state in subsidizing upper-income demand and ‘zoning’ the rent gap are key issues in Mexico and Chile’s local state land regulations. We have also observed high-rise, new-build gentrification and private investment in derelict historic areas with a massive loss of cultural and architectural heritage in Santiago, Bogotá and Cartagena, and significant gentrification of Buenos Aires’s waterfront and its southern quarters (La Boca, San Telmo, Barracas, and more recently Parque Patricios). Readers of this special issue would notice the important role of powerful, large-scale real estate producers and the marriage of global and local investors that openly declare gentrifying goals. Also apparent are the difference in practices of capital investment and social reproduction in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. Noticeable is the significantly higher speed of the ground rent capture by a smaller number of developers and upper-income newcomers, and how those who monopolize the power to initiate spatial changes are bound together in a complex network of various actors: from real estate producers and traders, central/local government officials, and political elites to banks and international agencies for economic investment and development. The newly emerging, young and professional middle classes have also become part of this network, providing support for the rise of gentrification. In all the cases we have witnessed, neoliberal urban redevelopment in Latin America seems to have increased the traditional ‘scale’ of segregation, the main outcome being the gentrification of large parts of central areas, as both formal and indeed informal social housing production is driven to urban outskirts in the context of still unregulated urban sprawl. Significantly, we have also seen an ample array of powerful activism, movements which are more present, loud, and successful in counteracting the injustices of landed capitalism than movements in East Asia, Europe and North America: these movements turn out to be more effective in communicating their claims and networking with other groups. Many Latin Americans now see how the extremely polarized extraction of value from recentralized urban land needs to be (and can be) counteracted by progressive redistributive policies to capture land value.

We think that academics from the global North can learn from Latin America, and what is going on there relates to the gentrifications in the global East too (see Shin, Lees and López-Morales, 2016). Of course not everything that is going on can be explained solely by gentrification theory, for the material in this special issue constitutes a complex, specific and integrated depiction of how neoliberalism unfolds, renews and imposes its structures on

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<sup>1</sup> <http://mp-ukamau.blogspot.cl>

urban space in the Latin American region. We stand by our post-colonial (or anti-colonial as de Souza in this issue refers to) calls to deconstruct Anglo/Euro-American theoretical structures in order to allow for the emergence of new ‘theoretical imaginations’ (cr. Robinson, 2015; Roy, 2009). We think scholars from both the global North and the global South need to make a concerted effort to dissolve previous preconceptions. And we applaud critical academics in Latin America in terms of the growing (and increasingly active) number of interlinkages between scholars and social activism. Such a position needs to apply, use, distort, and mutate useful urban conceptualizations, give meaning to them, and build powerful discourses against the everyday construction of inequality in urban space drawing on those narratives, thus creating new scenarios for alternative, more inclusive, urban development. Urban activism in Latin America is making effective, political use of the term ‘gentrification’, and this is welcomed.

Since we began our project on gentrification in the Global South, the field we started researching has changed significantly: there are more and more excellent elucidations of processes of gentrification in the global South. And in Latin America, gentrification has emerged as one of the most striking and worrying outcomes of the post-2008 global crisis, one that is dialectically interplaying with the emergence of a more sensitive, insurgent and far more theoretically informed citizenship than in the past. This special issue constitutes a key reference point in this ongoing work in the Latin American subcontinent.

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