

Urbanization in South Africa: Gentrification exasperating Xenophobia

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Abstract: In recent years there has been a significant increase in international investment in order to promote efforts to urbanize growing African cities. As many occupy land informally, the displacement of lower income groups to better profit on land demands has risen. This is particularly evident in the South African city of Cape Town. This phenomenon is a contributing factor to the exasperation of the recent xenophobic attacks in South Africa due to clashing cultures and inadequate urbanization planning. An analysis of gentrifi-

cation in the African context demonstrates that it is far less class based than it is ethnically based. The prevalence of urbanization and how urban planning harms the disenfranchised; evidence that gentrification is ethically/culturally based using the case study of Bo-Kaap in Cape Town; and a demonstration of how a new form of gentrification, “studentification”, are methods in which xenophobic attacks in South Africa are further agitated.

In the past few years as urbanization efforts have increased in major African cities

such as Lagos, Kinshasa, and Johannesburg, international investment has risen. In order to promote these investments properly and further urbanize the surrounding areas, certain groups with informal land rights have been displaced. These forms of displacement are often voluntary as these developments increase the cost of living for lower income groups yet are seen as quite affordable for wealthier groups. This increases the property value to one which is closer to central city living. This disadvantages lower income groups as they cannot sell the land they have inhabited for generations as they do not have formal land rights and are often

cast out. Many of which do not desire to leave as they hold strong cultural ties to these areas. This process is called: gentrification.

There is evidence that gentrification in South Africa is evident, yet we have to evaluate how this affects both the current inhabitants and those who are being integrated into these gentrified societies. More importantly, are these tensions leading to larger social issues. I will argue that the gentrification phenomenon has increased due to the urbanization of major cities in order to attract foreign investment which in turn has exasperated xenophobia in South Africa due to a forced clashing of cultures

and the insufficient urbanization planning. In order to demonstrate this progression, I will first discuss the prevalence of urbanization and how urban planning harms the disenfranchised.

Secondly, I will discuss methods that gentrification is ethically and culturally based using the case study of Bo-Kaap in Cape Town. Finally, I will attempt to demonstrate the subtle yet serious ways in which urban planning and gentrification can lead to xenophobia using the new form of gentrification: studentification. While most of the studies concerning gentrification relate to class issues, this study is different from all others as it adds an

element of cultural divide to then explain the way in which these cause tensions.

Literature Review

The term gentrification was coined by Ruth Glass in the early 1960s (Kotze 2013). Glass observed that working class spaces in London were being invaded by the middle class (Kotze 2013) for cheap and then remodeled into more “expensive residences” (Kotze 2013). This process inflates rental property prices and forced displacement of “low-income earners unemployed” (Kotze 2013) residents. This displacement occurs as rent prices increase and surrounding services (Kotze 2013) are

developed to cater to the wealthy middle class. The popularity of gentrification around the globe is due to “elements of the global capitalist classes” (Kotze 2013, p125), thus neo-liberal ideals (Kotze 2013). Gentrification “influences the quality of life and welfare of different social groups both in material and non-material outcomes” (Kotze 2013, p125). Thus, the effects of gentrification are diverse.

Arguments supporting the influx of higher income middle class folk to areas primarily occupied by lower income groups is the idea that it will “promote home ownership” (Kotze 2013, p125) and this will

eventually will further encourage “independence, entrepreneurship and community pride” (Kotze 2013, p126). However, this is a contentious and problematic argument as these encouraged benefits are aimed at the elite and is not meant for the benefit of the working classes (Kotze 2013). In general, inner city areas have “historically been an area of invasion and succession” (Garside 1993, p30). These areas were primarily occupied by lower-income people who settled here until they were able to afford to relocate in suburban communities (Garside 1993). Working class communities benefited from living in the inner cities as it allowed

them access to “affordable housing, close proximity to places of work and school, and public transportation” (Garside 1993) as well as a community of similar cultural groups as most inner-city residents were immigrants. This provided a network of support where language, culture and religion were shared (Garside 1993). Thus, the process of gentrification is a visible component of a social transformation within a city (Garside 1993). Furthermore, gentrification is a shift in the traditional invasion and succession were reversed as the inner city poor and the working class were then displaced by young affluent families moving inwards from the suburbs to the

inner-city areas (Garside 1993). The ideology of the state is that which is “aimed at the provision of consumption and service provision” (Garside 1993). This then reinforces the contention of the state as these jobs are not accessible to the working-class poor. The process of gentrification to shift sector work from industrial base to service employment (Garside 1993). This means that far more skilled and educated workers enter these spaces. This leads to visible class divisions. The following represents the general trends of gentrification around the world. They usually inter-sect with class relationships. However, this differs

in the African context, particularly in South Africa where a history of apartheid has complicated all factors of life.

Foreign capital is always in search of investment opportunities in African countries and the popularity of these areas are dependent on the square meter price per property (Watson 2013). South African property prices are “four times higher” (Watson 2013, p224) than countries such as Kenya and Tanzania, increasing popularity of wanted to earn South African property. This process of urbanization and achieving a “modern infrastructural ideal” (Gandy 2006, p.377) is called making a

satellite city. Yet, given the colonial histories of African countries, they were left unprepared for “accelerated urban population growth” (Fox 2014, p200)

Societies in unofficial settlements suffer as well. In major cities who are undergoing these transitions to more metropolitan satellite cities, they often seize land outside of the city where property costs are less expensive while relatively close. This area of land is termed “empty land” (Watson 2013, p228). These empty lands (Watson 2013, p228) are unofficial settlements of individuals who cannot afford the rising living cost of these large cities of these satellite cities.

These groups of individuals form communities are often successfully evicted because these residents are often residing here unofficially, thus they do not hold land titles (Watson 2013) nor are they given any form of compensation (Watson 2013).

These areas are called inner cities and South Africa's inner cities are mostly made of non-white communities (Garside 1993). South Africa has a particularly interesting component when it comes to the gentrification phenomenon. The process of "invasion and succession" (Garside 1993, p30) in inner cities which was evident in other cities around the world was disrupted in

South Africa due to the apartheid legislation which "enforced racially exclusive residential areas for each designated 'population' group" (Garside 1993, p31). Thus, there was no mass immigration and families remained within their lower social classes and in the same regions for generations.

Country Introduction: South Africa

South Africa, a country in the southernmost part of Africa, is home to over 57 million people (Worldometers 2019) and is currently governed by the African National Congress party run by President Cyril Ramaphosa.

South Africa was colonized by the British in 1806 and gained their independence from Britain on May 31st, 1910. In 1948, the pro-Afrikaner National Party came into party and apartheid was implemented (Anon 2019), yet the idea was created by the white government in the 1930s (Mhlongo 2019). Apartheid, “was the sanctioned racial segregation, and political and economic discrimination against” non-white South Africans by the white minority (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica 2019). This was made possible by the Population Registration Act” (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica 2019) which classified citizens into

4 racial groups (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. 2019): Bantu (Black Africans), Coloured (mixed-raced folk), White, and Asian (Those of Indian and Pakistani descent). Aparth-eid ended in 1994 which resulted in a black majority government led by anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela.

A fundamental part of the success of the apartheid for so long was the forced physical removal of native South Africans from their homes into cramped areas outside of white suburbs with little to no public services or economic prospects (Fröhlich 2019). These areas are called townships and have led to “contri-

buted to high levels of poverty, lack of social structures, no public services and intense spatial inequalities” (Fröhlich 2019). Years after apartheid these issues still exist in South Africa (Fröhlich 2019). The wealth gap in South Africa is still disproportionate even a generation after the end of apartheid and the beginning of the ANC (Burke 2018)

Unprepared Urbanization

Urbanization is not the issue. Urbanization and spatial advancement are natural processes which occur with population growth and a general movement from an economy which is primarily manufac-

ture based to one which is more sector based. This is evident as the attempted adoption of anti-urbanization policies in order to focus on rural development has been unsuccessful (Fox 2014). The issue is that these urban plans do not consider the populations they are displaying and inconveniencing. Urbanization works best when it better the lives of those already living in the region being urbanized. For example, when apartheid ended in Soweto and black South Africans were no longer constricted to where they can live, many stayed in Soweto and decided with their new-found wealth to develop and urbanize Soweto. This is a

method which does not take away from the community; it is built to advance all members of the community. This is a Soweto which “commands level of respect” (Mhlongo 2019) and was built by Soweto residents for Soweto residents. Unfortunately, South Africa’s land distribution today still “mirrors” that of the Apartheid era (Fröhlich 2019) as about half of black South Africans still live in townships and slums. (Fröhlich 2019). Meaning land reform is still a fairly contested issue which remains on the roaster for political change (Fröhlich 2019), yet change is slow. This issue of informal land rights are exasperated by various neoliberal

policies made to foster more urban development in South Africa; however, provide a negative change of spatial inequalities (Fröhlich 2019) as groups of individuals in townships and slums are forcibly removed to provide opportunities and high-end developers outside of major South African cities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg (Fröhlich 2019). Neo-liberal ideals have led to the process of urbanization moving from the global north to the global south. This is also relevant in the gentrification context. Gentrification has “transferred” (Kotze 2013, p125) from Western regions developing regions. Gentrification allows for certain groups, those

of higher economic classes to profit while others, those from lower economic classes suffer (Kotze 2013). Given the apartheid legacies, ill-feelings remain, especially if this new group been advantaged historically.

Ethnic/Culturally Based Gentrification

Consider Bo-Kaap in Cape Town as an example of a region which historically houses lower-income households. This area became populace as the emancipation of slavery led to immigration outside of the cities (Kotze 2013) before the implementation of apartheid. The Bo-Kaap is an inner-city of primarily

working-class residents formally known as the Malay Quarter (Kotze 2013) in South Africa (Kotze 2013). This area holds many decrepit, yet colorful and culturally relevant houses (Kotze 2013) and mosques. Cape-town in particular is an area which is flourishing in terms of economic growth and tourism in comparison with other regions in South Africa (Burke 2018); it is considered prime real estate at the center of the city (Burke 2018)

There is a significant Muslim population living in in this part of Cape Town. Thus, this area is intriguing as it has social and historical value. The Cape-Malay people were able to inhabit this area

even during the apartheid because they represented the Cape Malay people. There are no real ethnic differences which would differentiate these people, other than they do represent a primarily Muslim population. Yet they were able to use this difference to resist forced evictions during apartheid as they were considered a separate group even though it was technically considered a “controlled area” meaning there is no designated particular race group (Garside 1993). There is often a sense of cultural heritage that is part of the social groups who occupy this space. This cultural heritage can also be profitable as it attracts tourists. This is

the case in Bo-Kaap, Cape Town whose colorful houses are an important cultural heritage which actually attracts tourists (Kotze 2013) despite its run-down and older aesthetic. Although, it is important to consider the commodification of the “run-down state” of these areas. Yes, it can provide important foot-traffic and revenue; however, these are still communities who deserve livable and affordable homes. Their cultural relevance is put at risk when a new housing development plan which included modern renovation and increase housing prices (Kotze 2013). The preservation of a neighborhood’s cultural identity is important

here as it is the mostly Muslim residents who are affected by the rise in property prices and experience a demographic shift as new non-Muslim members are buying homes. These types of tension lead to a collective discontent. Evidence of social unrest is in the protests and even the burning of tires in the streets of Bo-Kaap (Burke 2018). Although, this area in particular is not only about commercial value, it is about “identity and history and destiny of [Cape Malay] people” (Burke 2018)

Studentification: Where Gentrification Intersect and Urbanization

A new wave of gentrification is studentification. This process relates to the mismanagement of urban spaces and urban planning and adds to cultural tensions in a way which surpasses class. Studentification is the process where students inhabit parts of a suburb or town in an area near higher education facility such as university and the original residents of are gradually displaced due to this (Donaldson et al. 2014) This causes an issue where at a certain point only the needs of the student subculture is catered for (Donaldson et al 2014). This

phenomenon occurs when accommodation shortages on university campuses force students to “find accommodation in the private sector” (Donaldson et al. 2014, S176). Similar to the issues of urbanization where there is a shortage in affordable housing, there is also a shortage in the supply of accommodation by higher education institutions in Africa (Donaldson et al. 2014). Additionally, the private sector is using this to provide accommodation to this niche market (Donaldson 2014, et al.) as they know that students are desperate.

Students have specific “demographic and social characteristics (Donaldson et al,

2014) which makes them a gentrified group. They are “predominantly young, come from middle-class backgrounds, have no dependents” (Donaldson et al 2014, S177). In terms of demand and supply, students are flexible tenants and they do not have “all the preferences and requirements that a family would have” (Donaldson et al 2014, p177). Yet, most of these students are also international, meaning they are also of different cultures. Most students are from different countries on the African continent and from affluent families which can often cause further discontent for the primary residents of these neighborhoods.

Apartheid legacies and Xenophobia: Not Simply Class-Based

Xenophobic attacks often happen in areas where residents are suffering from poverty and limited forms of advancements. It is important to remember that it has only been 25 years since the end of apartheid and unequal structures still exists all around the country. Given this recent history, the sensitive issue of race is always relevant.

Evidence that gentrification is an exasperator of the recent xenophobic attacks is the issue of land reform (Fröhlich 2019), naturally history of apartheid and colonialism in South Africa. This is evident as

formal land rights in South Africa after apartheid have not are rare, especially for those who venture outside of the townships. This is more evident for those suffering extreme poverty. Feelings of discontent will rise as foreigners are able to afford and obtain these land rights, additionally making it more difficult for native South Africans. While this is not a justification for xenophobic behaviors yet serves to as evidence to how newcomers can aggravate an already tense community. There is a strong cultural relation when it comes to gentrification.

Gentrification influences more than just quality of life, there

are strong elements of cultural discontent which is historical in nature and here lies the issue of xenophobia. Gentrification in the South African context however differs from that of other parts of the world where class is the main component; however, in this context, different races and ethnic groups play a part as well, meaning gentrification can exasperate xenophobic attacks.

Conclusion

The gentrification phenomenon has increased due to the urbanization of major cities in order to attract foreign investment which in turn has exasperated xenophobia in South Africa due to a forced

clashing of cultures and the insufficient urbanization planning. In the case of South Africa, gentrification is far less class based than it is ethnically based, contributing to the increase in xenophobic attacks. This has been demonstrated by a discussion of the prevalence of urbanization and how urban planning harms the disenfranchised; evidence that gentrification is ethnically/culturally based using the case study of Bo-Kaap in Cape Town; and finally a demonstration of how urban planning and gentrification can lead to xenophobia using the new form of gentrification: studentification.

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