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TEORIAS DA GENTRIFICAÇÃO: UM ESTUDO SOBRE SUA APLICAÇÃO NO SUL GLOBAL

THEORIES OF GENTRIFICATION: A STUDY ON THEIR APPLICATION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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Abstract

Based on the reflection raised by Roy (2009), concerning the need for perspectives that go beyond the Euro-American urban theoretical axis, we understand that there is an attempt to fit contexts of the Global South into dominant existing theories, which do not always address all the issues and needs of those areas appropriately. With this critique in mind, we propose an investigation about the phenomenon of gentrification to understand which definition would cover the urban diversity of the Global South, particularly, in Latin America. This article brings an analysis of the concept of gentrification and its changes over time since the term was first coined by Glass (1964), through the studies of Smith, Zukin, Clark, Lees, and Siqueira, among others. We pose questions about neoliberal contemporary urban dynamics related to this phenomenon in the so-called peripheral countries. Our goal is to understand how this process occurs and its particularities in Latin American contexts. In doing so, this article highlights contributions and limitations of gentrification theories established by studies from the Global North and identifies the most relevant definitions to understand and to cover the diversity of the phenomenon, also in urban Global South.

Keywords: Gentrification, Global South, Definitions, Decolonize

1 Introduction: in search of a rupture from Euro-American theoretical views

In an article published in 2009 by the British academic journal Regional Studies, the Indian urban planner Ananya Roy has already considered the need for a perspective guided by new geographies of theory that are attentive to the urban condition of the Global South. She advocated an approach capable of bringing theoretical specificities about urban spaces. Roy emphasizes that much of the theoretical apparatus used to understand urban issues is based on experiences of cities in the Euro-American axis. As a result, there is an

attempt to fit Global South situations into such existing theories. She then questions whether it would be possible to use urban contexts from the Global South — which generally have less space at the center of debates — to reconfigure conventional theories by providing a more complete understanding of several urban phenomena. Roy's argument is more related to the scope of the analysis than to the pertinence of generalizing theories.

Considering the limitation of the scope of the analyses, in other words, that it is not enough to study urban issues in the Global South only as exotic and distant cases, this article proposes to rethink the application and relevance of the definitions of gentrification in the region. We share the view of geographers Loretta Lees and Hyun Bang Shin, and the architect and urban planner Ernesto López-Morales in the book Planetary Gentrification (2016) as they present gentrification as a generalized model of neoliberal urbanism that is mass produced and consumed in the 21st century. We understand that this phenomenon can also be seen as a trace of the capitalist urban planning conceived and practiced since mid-19th century, which favors the interests of the private sector. Only then we will be aware of the various segregating forms of space production.

Lees, Shin, and Lopez-Morales (2016) gather issues, investigations, and conclusions from a broad and essential research on gentrification. The research was developed through studies of regions outside the usual Euro-American perspective, which is already so investigated. In addition to Europe and North America, these regions include Latin America, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. The authors analyze gentrification from a more global angle and from more critical economic, political, and social perspectives. We believe that it is time to "decolonize" the literature regarding urban theories, leaving the Euro-American hegemonic point of view and paying attention to the Global South, seeking to contribute especially to thoughts and understandings about Latin American territories. However, the "decolonization of thought" proposed here does not mean ignoring or dismissing everything that is known about the contexts of countries of the Global North. For example, as Lees, Shin and López-Morales (2016) emphasize, we ask what aspects of the Global South, as well as those of the North, can enrich concepts, theories, and characterizations of the phenomenon of gentrification in peripheral countries.

These countries had diverse colonization and industrialization processes, which reflect in socioeconomic differences and several patterns of urban occupation. There are also particularities and strong contrasts related to precarious settlements and slums, which have specific spatial and infrastructure conditions. These conditions imply flows and dynamics that can interfere with gentrification in these cities. This way, Roy (2009) elucidates that the problem is not related to the application of the theories and ideas of the Global North to the Global South, but that these theories are limited by the urban contexts of these countries and may not cover all urban variations and needs of Global South countries, considering other kinds of contradictions and problems:

> The critique of the EuroAmerican hegemony of urban theory is thus not an argument about the inapplicability of the EuroAmerican ideas to the cities of the global South. It is not worthwhile to police the borders across which ideas, policies and practices flow and mutate. The concern is with the limited sites at which theoretical production is currently theorized and with the failure of imagination and epistemology that is thus engendered (Roy, 2009, p. 820).

From this perspective, this paper seeks to highlight contributions and/or limitations of the gentrification theory already established by studies of the Global North and to identify definitions that can be used to understand the cases of the phenomenon in the Global South, especially in Latin America.

2 On the definition of gentrification and its changes over time

The sociologist Ruth Glass (1964) was the first to coin the term gentrification, in her introduction to the book London: aspects of change. This book offers, through the perspective of various authors, analyses and studies about London during the years of 1950 and 1960. Many of the urban issues addressed in that work still resonate today, helping to understand the changes that have occurred and the ones that are occurring in the English capital. Glass presents a view of London as a complex and diverse city, about which one cannot have a closed understanding. This way, she describes changes in urban dynamics that were occurring since the post-World War II period and coins the term gentrification to denote a new and distinct movement that she predicted could transform the central areas of the city. This dynamic, which she observed and highlighted, consisted of a process of replacing residents belonging to more proletarian and vulnerable classes in central neighborhoods, where housing units had undergone renovations carried out by new residents belonging to a middle class with higher economic power. This focus of the phenomenon — the rehabilitation of housing units by the new residents themselves and the location in urban centers — remained remarkable for some time and retains a more conservative character, especially when observing the process in today's cities.

It is worth mentioning that, although Glass coined the term in this book, she did not propose to theorize about gentrification. She was more interested in portraying aspects of urban changes in London. Even so, she describes the observed dynamics, gives a name to that dynamic, and lays out some important points for its understanding. In this light, Glass refers to gentrification as a process — a characterization that this article will also defend — and understands it as an inevitable phenomenon in London, due to demographic, economic, and political forces.

The geographer Neil Smith, who studied and published for decades on the subject, emphasized in 1979 the role of capitalist housing production and profit making, which often override the needs and demands for housing of the lower-income classes. He also points out that it is necessary to analyze the role of both producers and consumers in gentrification processes. Smith claims that the power of profit is more decisive than that of the demand for a certain product and that this demand can be "manipulated" with a certain level of success:

> To explain gentrification according to the gentrifier's actions alone, while ignoring the role of builders, developers, landlords, mortgage lenders, government agencies, real estate agents, and tenants, is excessively narrow. A broader theory of gentrification must take the role of producers as well as consumers into account, and when this is done, it appears that the needs of production — in particular the need to earn profit — are a more decisive initiative behind gentrification than consumer preference. This is not to say in some naive way that consumption is the automatic consequence of production, or that consumer preference is a totally passive effect caused by production. [...] Rather, the relationship between production and consumption is symbiotic, but it is a symbiosis in which production dominates (Smith, 1979, p. 540).

Although Smith already highlights the importance of understanding processes from a capitalist point of view of production, he remains following Glass' original and more conservative position. Smith (1982) defines gentrification as a process in which central working-class neighborhoods are rehabilitated by new residents, owners, or real estate developers of the middle class. In his 1982 publication Gentrification and Uneven Development, he makes that clear by making a theoretical distinction between "rehabilitation", which, for him, is what occurs in gentrification, and "redevelopment". For Smith, "redevelopment" does not involve the rehabilitation of old buildings, but it involves the construction of new buildings in these areas, using the infrastructure already in place and often demolishing old constructions.

However, Smith restructures his position in text The New Urban Frontier, published in 1996. Revealing a broader understanding of gentrification, Smith advocates that this distinction would no longer make sense. He argues that the phenomenon should not be restricted to the rehabilitation of housing in central areas by the middle class, since it is connected to a larger urban restructuring. In this restructuring, it would be a mistake to exclude "redevelopment" from the scope of gentrification. With this broader characterization of the process, it is possible to include evictions for the demolition of an existing structure, either due to structural degradation or simply because the construction of a new project on the site may yield higher profits. Although he presents this broader understanding that emphasizes the power of the capital, Smith (2000) maintains the spatial focus on central neighborhoods and on so-called developed countries. And he defines gentrification as a process of capital reinvestment in urban centers that aims to serve a wealthier class. In addition to residential rehabilitations and constructions, this process uses redevelopments with focus on businesses and services.

Smith, over decades studying this process, was a researcher with important contributions to the consolidation of the empirical understanding of the phenomenon and to its definition. He also linked his studies to a theoretical approach, aiming for an understanding based on significant urban issues from the period and updating his concepts when necessary. The French sociologist Catherine Bidou-Zachariasen, also a scholar of the process, follows Smith's perspective and acknowledges that: "[…] gentrification has now become the dominant form of contemporary urbanism, as well as 'the' urban policy of large Western cities, articulating public-private financial partnerships" (Bidou-Zachariasen, 2006, p. 32, our translation).

To the American sociologist Sharon Zukin (2010), gentrification is a replacement process, in which the rich replace the poor and in which social and cultural homogeneity replaces diversity. Zukin's research focuses on cities and on how they were remodeled through deindustrialization, gentrification, and immigration, bringing the capitalist view of the real estate market, the production of space, and the symbolic economy. In an earlier work, Zukin (1991) highlights that the central districts are transformed into new markets for shopping, services, culture, and housing for the upper classes, attracting new dynamics and populations to the area. This process thus increases the value of the built environment in the centers, increases investments and real estate pressure in historic buildings, and also increases the demand for restored buildings. Such demands lead

to the replication of old architectural styles and, contrary to that, to the creation of historic districts for the protection of built heritage, as a way of trying to maintain the authenticity of these spaces, to resist replicas and to profit from authenticity.

The urban values proposed by the American journalist Jane Jacobs (2011) in her seminal book The Death and Life of Great American Cities, originally published in 1961 — such as smaller blocks, streets occupied by people, neighborhoods with local identity, and authenticity — became part of the ideal sought by gentrifiers. Thus, many of Jacobs' social goals and the preservation of classes in their original neighborhoods have been lost over time. In this scope, Zukin (2010) observes the search for authenticity in New York and argues that, as this search is a practice more common to the middle and upper classes, it works exactly as a way of displacing the original inhabitants from what would be these authentic neighborhoods, as the rich move in and remodel the area for themselves. She also mentions that many of the so-called authentic neighborhoods, originally comprised of working classes, become neighborhoods of white ethnicity and middle and upper classes. In an attempt by these upper classes to benefit from the "authentic", gentrification arises. Dominant groups use capital and culture to transform urban spaces, that is to say, authenticity itself can also be considered both a social product and a product to be consumed. From this perspective, whether real or produced, authenticity becomes a tool of power.

As city centers changed, so did gentrification. In the United States, for example, the attention given to old buildings with restorations — which were the basic characteristic of gentrification — was followed by a large number of new constructions, since the early 1980s, according to Zukin (1991). This fact is aligned to the idea that "redevelopment" is also part of gentrification, as agued by Smith (1982). Projects for new residential, commercial, and mixed-use buildings near historic districts take advantage of the desire for old buildings and for the diversity of urban centers.

3 Gentrification and the Global South

With strong questions regarding today's urbanism and gentrification, Lees, Shin and López-Morales (2016) address issues brought up by a diverse and essential body of research on gentrification, developed within their studies in different regions of the world. They bring an analysis from a more global standpoint — as the title Planetary Gentrification already indicates — and carry out less commonly discussed case studies, as they are located in the Global South or Asia. Through a more critical economic, political, and social perspective, the authors combine their regional experiences and global studies in urbanism, addressing gentrification beyond the common and already well-investigated Euro-American view. In agreement with Roy's (2009) position, presented at the beginning of this article, the authors can deconstruct some very strict concepts, conclusions, and practices on the dynamics. Furthermore, they question the pattern of studies produced only in so-called developed countries, by foregrounding their understandings of urban experiences in various countries as a way of enriching the theory and concepts that underlie the phenomenon.

One of these concepts is displacement. It is important to consider it and understand it, given that it is an essential aspect of the gentrification process. It can be understood as an individual or a collective dynamic, voluntary or involuntary, according to its temporal or spatial dimension. Davidson and Lees (2010, cited in Lees, Shin and López-Morales, 2016) propose these two dimensions in their understanding of displacement. They emphasize that it should not be reduced to just the specific moment when a resident is forced or pressured to leave his home. They argue that it is a set of variable procedures that are articulated according to each context.

We also consider the very coherent understanding of displacement given by Angotti (2016):

> Displacement is not only about people moving from one place to another, but also large numbers of people having to move and having little choice in the matter. It is about people being forced out by rising land prices and rents, which is happening all over the city to a greater or lesser degree. It can happen as part of a gradual gentrification process, or it can be connected to rapid changes sparked by large-scale development and rezoning (Angotti, 2016, p. 38).

According to this Angotti's viewpoint, this article agrees with the understanding proposed by Lees, Shin and López-Morales that cities with different urban contexts have experienced economic, political, sociocultural, and geographic restructuring since the term was coined in 1964, and that gentrification itself has changed due to this. That made Glass' pioneering definition dated, less useful to understand gentrification's progression, and linked to the experience of a specific city. This fact limits the dynamics that occur nowadays. Thus, Lees, Shin and López-Morales (2016) follow the definition given by Eric Clark (2010), professor at Lund University, in Sweden, and which seems, indeed, more compatible with the current contexts:

> 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 (Clark, 2010, p. 25).

To understand the emergence and growth of gentrification globally and to recognize its differences in various contexts, we note that this globalization refers to an expansion both vertical (to smaller cities) and horizontal (to other geographical locations in the world). It is also necessary to deal with the economic aspects that guide and determine the means for gentrification to flourish. To this end, Lees, Shin and López-Morales (2016) devoted themselves to analyze contemporary economic issues, drawing attention to some of its aspects.

First, gentrification is a device of capital production on a global scale, as already mentioned here. Second, the phenomenon is also identified in the dynamics of "creative destruction", given that the urban space is an efficient path for reinvesting surplus capital with a certain degree of profit stability. Thus, motivated by the inherent need for economic growth, obsolete structures (or ones that are not) are replaced by more recent ones, often encouraging urban dynamics that lead to a certain homogenization of space. A third aspect is the production of space focusing on the unequal capital accumulation and on disputes for profit through urban areas under requalification. These economic aspects merit further investigation, since they can reveal a lot about gentrification in specific areas.

It is relevant to highlight the relationship between the third aspect presented by the authors and the concept of rent gap, coined by Smith in 1979, as the disparity between the current rental income of a property in an area and the future potential rental income of that property. According to this view, the difference is positive for the market if the current profit potential is less than the future profit potential. This concept remains relevant today and can be identified in many cases around the world. As Lees, Shin, and López-Morales emphasized, we are at a time when it is difficult to deny or ignore the power of banks, developers, and the State, both in devaluation and in revaluation of urban spaces according to their interests. Gentrification seems to be the process to meet the needs of the financial capital and the real estate market. That is to say, the characteristic initially observed by Glass of the middle class gentrifier, as the primary agent arriving and renovating buildings for their own enjoyment, has much less strength in current times.

With a perspective closer to that of Clark (2010) and Zukin (2010) and using the concept of rent gap of Smith (1979), it is interesting to include here the point of view of the Brazilian architect and urban planner Marina Siqueira. Siqueira (2014, 2019) analyzes and theorizes on issues related to the applicability of the concept of gentrification in Brazil and proposes an analytical framework to identify its existence. However, before presenting this structure, we highlight some of her observations. She points out that the use of the term gentrification has increased in Brazil, especially since the organization and implementation of projects focusing on the mega-events that took place in the country: the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics. Politicians, the media, and the population itself began to point out several socio-spatial transformations resulting from these large urban projects as part of the phenomenon. In addition, the Brazilian dictionary Caldas Aulete, in 2013 (cited in Siqueira, 2014), included the term in its definitions, making it clear that the neologism was becoming more known and understood as a process present in Brazil's reality, going beyond its use only in the academic field.

The popularization of the term in Brazil raises the important issue of a generalization of application of a theory, in which the differences between the urban realities of the regions from where this theory was originated and of the regions on where it is being applied are not being considered. Examples of these differences are more specific socio-spatial contrasts, economic differences, and also in patterns of land use and occupation, among others. Siqueira (2014) notes that, in general, what happens is an import of the concept from the Global North and its use with an attempt to fit it to similar local examples. However, she argues, like many of the scholars already cited here, that gentrification is no longer limited and related only to historic or central urban neighborhoods, nor just to countries in the Global North. Although there is already a certain consensus as to the globalization of gentrification, there is still no agreement on a concept able to remain consistent when applied to various contemporary contexts. In other words, there is a difficulty in applying a standard definition of gentrification to a different socio-spatial context from which it arose. This way, Siqueira's analytical framework seeks to propose criteria capable of embracing the empirical diversity of the process, aiming at a definition that can be applied not only to more traditional urban examples but also to more recent cases of global gentrification.

Siqueira (2014, 2019) proposes a framework that seeks to identify the dimensions of gentrification capable of ensuring credibility and consistency to the definition. She then establishes three minimum criteria that delimit the concept and that must be able to be identified in each case: (1) possibility of producing a gentrifiable space (the condition), that is to say, in agreement with Smith's rent gap, there must be a difference between the capital accumulated with current land uses and the potential future profits from changes in use; (2) upward socioeconomic change of the local population with displacement of vulnerable resident groups (the dynamics), in other words, with the arrival of an incoming group (in-movers) with higher socioeconomic power, the concept is clearly bounded by class; and (3) changes in the built environment (the consequence) due to the needs and uses of the new residents, such that these physical changes are also related to a spatial solution to the accumulation of capital, releasing fixed capital from less profitable uses and users. Assuming that the importance of the author's perspective on the criteria exposed in this framework is understood, we question the determination of improvements in the built environment as "the consequence". We understand that they can be, in many situations, attractive to capital, being part of a redevelopment process and of the "condition" for gentrification, as being one of the causes for population displacement and replacement.

Siqueira's proposal is a structure of analysis consistent enough not to lose its theoretical relevance, while also allowing sufficient flexibility to cover different contexts. Her goal is centered on the need to understand gentrification as a process and not just as a result. In other words, the goal is not only to perceive the space generated with upward socioeconomic change but to understand that gentrification is a sequence of events and actions that produce urban growth pushing out the most vulnerable classes of residents. Therefore, she does not limit to the characteristics of particular locations, nor to specific socio-spatial conditions. It is important to emphasize that gentrification implies that space is occupied after displacement and reinvestment of capital. That is, demolitions and new constructions without later reuse can cause displacement but they cannot be considered gentrification. However, this occupation of space does not necessarily have to be for housing. There can be new and different uses that also have a segregating character and that also characterize gentrification: for example, stores, accommodation services, spaces for tourist activities, among others.

In contrast to points of view presented here, some authors, such as the American professors Lance Freeman and Frank Braconi, deny these replacements and displacements. Freeman (2005) and Freeman and Braconi (2004) question whether population displacements and replacements are indeed consequences always present and responsible for demographic changes in neighborhoods that experience the process. Freeman argues that neighborhoods can be gentrified without widespread displacement, as long as the in-movers have greater economic power and sufficient political expression to promote changes in the area. That is to say, in-movers, instead of out-movers, would be the driving force behind the change in the neighborhood. The condition for taking this point of view into consideration is the existence of situations in which there is a significant amount of underutilized housing units and buildings to receive a contingent of new residents and/or users capable of causing and maintaining, in the area, the economic, social, and spatial changes characteristic of gentrification. However, it seems clear that the replacement of a population with less economic power by another population with a higher power is one of the aspects that can be noted as part of the dynamics of the phenomenon, as emphasized by Siqueira. It is also worth noting that the studies addressed by Freeman and Braconi refer specifically to territories of the Global North, mainly the United States.

4 Conclusions: Suggesting a wide-ranging definition of gentrification

Understanding the transformations that have occurred over time in territories of the Global South, from processes that lead to a clear concept of gentrification, seems to be the correct way to understand the phenomenon itself. Thus, although the importance of Glass' original definition is acknowledged, we emphasize here again that she starts from and is limited by observing events in a specific location — London's central working-class neighborhoods — and more common to cities in the Global North. From this position, it is worth highlighting once again Roy's (2009) emphasis on the fact that most urban literature involving cities from the Global South relies on a theoretical apparatus grounded in experiences of cities on the Euro-American axis. An attempt is therefore made to fit contexts specific to the Global South into existing theories. With the aforementioned process in mind, and as Siqueira (2014) shows, we clarify that the understanding of gentrification and its definition cannot be overly elastic, at the risk of losing its theoretical relevance. Hence, it is necessary to have a consistent understanding of how the process occurs in the Global South based on studies of the Global South itself.

From this perspective and keeping in mind Siqueira's argument that gentrification should be understood as a process and not just as a result, this section draws on the above analyses of theoretical views on gentrification to propose a definition that is able to cover the diversity of characteristics in the Global North and South. For a definition consistent with the dynamics of the Global South, especially Latin American ones, we paid attention to some of the most particular urban aspects of these contexts mentioned earlier, such as: different patterns

of urban organization, use and occupation; large socioeconomic and infrastructure contrasts existing in close proximity; precarious settlements and slums.

Thus, we agree with and propose to use the aforementioned definition by Clark (2010), recognizing it as a proper and mature analysis about gentrification, about its transformations over time, its characteristics resulting from contemporary urban dynamics and its existence in the Global South. The author makes it clear that gentrification is no longer limited to urban and historic centers, nor to countries in the Global North. Clark (2010) defends a process in which there are: (1) a segregated substitution of population, with new users or residents having a higher socioeconomic status than their predecessors; and (2) physical improvements to the built environment through capital reinvestment. Clark is also keen to emphasize that, if the process presents these aspects, to him it is gentrification, no matter where it is.

We also deem that observing Smith's (1979) concept of rent gap, which can be explained as the positive difference between the current rental income of land in an area and the future potential rental income of that land, is essential to the understanding of the phenomenon under discussion here and of why it becomes so attractive in the neoliberal system. The high possibility of profit resulting from interference in a built space is an important characteristic of gentrification today. The rent gap attracts investments and projects to these areas, which become of interest to capital and stimulate gentrification. In the contemporary neoliberal dynamics, the power of banks, developers and the State in urban processes benefiting their interests is increasing. Gentrification has remained a great asset to meet the needs of capital reinvestment, real estate market and financial capital.

From this viewpoint, individual gentrifiers and the middle classes, originally considered main agents of gentrification, lost ground in comparison to the power of State combined with the power of market, using real estate dynamics and cultural capital to interfere in urban processes of the Global North and South. Thus, it is worth noting that, for gentrification to happen, space must be occupied after displacement, that is to say, there must be a population replacement, and there can even be changes in uses. Renovations and new buildings without further occupation can cause displacement but cannot be considered gentrification. Gentrification is a process of population replacement and of restructuring, appropriation and upgrading of urban areas, which has gained even more strength with global and unified economic dynamics. However, there are particularities, agents, and specific social consequences in different contexts, especially in the Global South. Hence the need to define this phenomenon also according to urban characteristics of cities from these regions and, particularly, of Latin American cities.

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