

## From Class to Gentrification and Back Again

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### Introduction: Class, class theory and (spaces of) gentrification

In this chapter, we argue for the need to carefully scrutinise the models of class that underlie understandings of gentrification and how they are mobilised, while also introducing more recent considerations from the sociology of class that focus on values and classificatory struggles (Skeggs 1997, 2004; Tyler 2015) into the study of gentrification. Our contention is that when rethinking gentrification to account both for the specificity of different contexts around the world and to speak to a planetary gentrification that can account for very different social, economic and political histories, different registers and languages of gentrification (Lees et al. 2016), it is timely to revisit and revitalise the understandings of class that have underpinned this body of research. In many ways, what we present here is a logical extension of concerns that, as Lees et al. (2016) remind us, have long been at the heart of urban theory that warn against the ethnocentric imposition of theories developed in Western European industrialized economies onto the reality of urbanization in other economic and social systems. Simply put, we question the extent to which conceptualisations of class variously developed to explain 19<sup>th</sup> century labour relations and the class struggles emerging from industrialization (in Western European economies), and the manifestation of such relations of power through taste and consumption practices (cf. Bourdieu 1984), are fit to the purpose of critically analysing contemporary processes of gentrification the world over.

Following Imogen Tyler's (2015) provocation of class analysis more generally, we seek to develop the question: 'what is the problem that class describes' to consider (again) what is the problem that we try to describe when we present gentrification as a classed process? We argue that class is relational, situational and in progress, and that located, 'on the ground' studies based on qualitative work are important in complicating ideas of gentrification and its relationship to class. Gentrification through this lens emerges at once as a classed and classifying process that (re)produces inequalities and injustice. To explore these questions more fully, we examine in detail two recent monographs on class and gentrification, in two very different national and urban settings. These have been selected precisely to illustrate the complexity of relationships between the state and local articulations of class, how class formations interplay with and unfold in very different cultural and political contexts, including sites where class has not, at least officially, been acknowledged as part of the social structure.

The first of these is Kirsteen Paton's (2014) study of working class people's perspectives on gentrification in Glasgow. Paton reiterates that gentrification in this context is a process that is motivated by not only the remaking of space but also the remaking of the working class through the manufacture of aspiration. However, as we discuss, she also explores

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how these interventions give rise to multiple and, importantly, ambivalent working class experiences and identities in ways that are not captured so readily in much of the gentrification literature. The second example—Li Zhang's (2010) *In Search of Paradise*—explores the shift from state-provided housing to the emergence of private home ownership in Kunming, a regional city in China. In this way, she identifies a shift in how place-making plays out in Chinese cities. Zhang's ethnography perceptively argues that this is best understood as an, '*emergent* moment of class-making in a formerly socialist society that had passionately denied the existence of social class in its recent history' (p. 3). As housing emerges as a commodity, residence becomes a site of spatial distinction not previously attainable, place-making the grounds for the production of new class formations.

Before moving on to the discussion of these empirical cases, we start by revisiting the key conceptual and theoretical apparatus of gentrification research and social science approaches to understanding the relationship between class and space.

#### *Gentrification, class and displacement*

The original understanding of gentrification put forward by Ruth Glass (1964) to explain processes of residential transformation in London—the influx of the middle classes into neighbourhoods and the corresponding displacement of the working class—describes how middle-class migration and investment in an area corresponds to shifts in demographics, changing the classed constitution of an area. More recent research on planetary gentrification (Lees et al. 2016) argues that understandings of this relationship between class and urban transformation carries the residues of the British example that it initially described, leading to a focus on the role of 'global gentrifiers (the global north and south's new middle classes)' (p. 110) rather than paying attention to the increasingly important role of '(trans)national developers, financial capital and transnational institutions'. However, Glass' (1964) perspective continues to influence research in this area because the urban transformations that gentrification intends to describe remain sites through which new class formations, relations and struggle may be produced. Within these considerations space figures prominently as something to be appropriated, fought and struggled over.

While gentrification has been predominantly a social phenomenon associated with urban contexts, as early sociological accounts (see for example Pahl 1965) and more recent calls for the recognition of planetary gentrification make clear, similar processes of capital accumulation act on place beyond the urban, extending to rural settings (Phillips 1998a, 1998b, 2004; Lees et al. 2016). Indeed, gentrification research, at least when understood as residential choice and emplacement of the middle classes has historically sought to challenge the dichotomy of the urban-rural divide. Indeed, Ray Pahl's (1965) work, *Urbs in Rure*, the vanguard of this body of work, bore witness to the counter-urban movement of the new middle classes and the transformation of rural areas around London through the

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development of the commuter belt. Documenting suburbanisation, these works highlighted the relationship between the class formations brought about through widespread social and economic transformation in post-war Britain—notably the expansion and rise of the new middle class (see for example Abercrombie and Urry 1983; Goldthorpe et al. 1969)—and the transformation of space. As this earlier work demonstrated, these suburban environments were understood as fertile grounds for the reproduction of the new middle classes.

The relationship between wider social and economic transformations and gentrification is also well-captured in the accounts of 'pioneer' gentrification, new middle class formations articulated through the revaluation of urban living. As Ley (1996) describes in his comprehensive study of Canadian cities, the new pro-urbanism of gentrifiers was an outcome of the counter cultural politics of 1968, the experience of urban living of the university educated middle class and a reaction to mass-produced environments and the perceived conformity of the suburban lives of their parents. Per Ley (1996), this 'new middle class' placed value on bespoke production and historic value, manifest in the housing aesthetics and neighbourhood preservation elements of gentrification. Such practices demonstrated the ways in which housing and neighbourhood aesthetics interplayed with the production of middle-class identities. Jager (1986) shows this through his careful analysis of Victoriana, residential choice and class reproduction through gentrification in Melbourne; Mendez (2008) also examines this in her account of the middle classes in Santiago, Chile, and their pursuit of authenticity through neighbourhood selection.

These studies explored how the consumption practices of the middle classes translate into the construction of social boundaries that crystallise into spatial boundaries. In this rendering, middle-class tastes and aesthetics are privileged, reflecting a wider shift from the 1980s within class analysis towards the consideration of lifestyle and consumption and their roles within (middle) class formation, inspired by Bourdieu's (1984) *Distinction* (see for example Savage et al. 1992; Savage and Butler 1995). Within this theoretical framework, claims to cultural practices become the grounds for judgement and status discrimination, symbolic dominance exercised by the new middle classes in the pursuit of social reproduction. This conceptualization of class formation has become hegemonic in understanding the identities of middle-class incomers and their residential practices. This is particularly well-illustrated by Butler and Robson's (2003) presentation of gentrifiers in London who exhibit a 'metropolitan habitus', the capacity to live with difference as a significant marker of their class formation. In this work, class formations have local inflections, the capitals, resources and assets of groups at the neighbourhood level structured by and structuring place-specific mini-habitus. Writ large within this Western European metropolitan habitus is a persistent tension between the middle-class ideal of social mixity and the familiarity of others 'just like us' (see for example Butler and Robson 2003; Bacqué et al. 2015). Within these studies of the middle classes and gentrification,

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 place takes a pivotal role within middle-class formation, bringing into sharp focus preferences and dispositions, and the resources, assets and capitals that make this possible (Savage et al. 2005; Benson 2013), while class struggle seems to take a backseat.

Importantly, many of these studies share the same methodological flaw: an *a priori* categorisation of incomers to a neighbourhood as 'middle class' and thus the subsequent bounding of the research around this population. Such studies use gentrification as a shorthand to talk about how places are appropriated by the middle classes to support their own identity claims, how they experience the urban transformations of which they are a part, and as such their insights into class relations are more limited. Our contention here is that, for the large part, this research operationalizes gentrification as a way of describing the population rather than identifying a process replete with class struggle. Further, it reduces perspectives on gentrification to those who are the most likely beneficiaries of this process (Slater, Curran and Lees, 2004; Slater 2006), the voices of those populations most impacted by these urban transformations are silenced through the process (Lees 2014; Paton 2014).

Older critical sociologists and geographers took Glass's term in a different direction, linking it with wider processes of spatial and economic restructuring (e.g. Sassen 1991; Smith 1996). While a consensus emerged about the outcome of the process that gentrification describes, in terms of 'the re-creation of space for progressively more affluent users' (Hackworth, 2002: 815), there was a movement away from seeing middle-class people's preferences as the driver of the gentrification process in this body of literature. The middle classes were conceptualized not as the source, but agents that are implicated in the urban changes that gentrification creates. An understanding of a different driver of gentrification underlies this approach, which is neatly encapsulated in Smith's (1996) argument that the physical deterioration of inner-city areas is 'a strictly logical, 'rational' outcome of the operation of the land and housing markets' (p. 62). This insistence that we examine the structural processes that foster gentrification is why critical geographers have expressed frustration at broadsheet newspaper accounts of gentrification being driven by (pioneer) middle-class consumption choices. However, despite the insistence on the structural forces at play, this literature is still based on a model that reduces class to broad categories—the middle-class incomers and a displaced working class—and gentrification as a process where one replaces/displaces the other. In other words, class relations exist *a priori*, structuring the encounters taking place within these locations. This is a model that neglects the possibility that class relations are also shaped through encounter, through the changing dynamics of the housing market, localised forms of state intervention, and the specificities of localities. In other words, this work fails to grasp how the class struggle that gentrification is named after can generate new or ambivalent class positions.

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The (Marxist) theoretical framing of class struggle between the middle and the working class within this body of literature has become central to theoretical debates about the appropriation of space by the middle class and processes of displacement and stigmatisation. In part, these understandings rest upon conceptualizations of the middle classes that position them in relation to labour relations, whether this is a middle class in the service of the elites and upper classes (being enticed by the local state or developers to be agents of neighbourhood improvement, for example) or an intermediary class position, with their actions and behaviours aimed at preserving their social position. Notably absent within these analyses is the possibility that the struggles over space relating to housing and residence that gentrification primarily describes, might allow for emergent class alliances and formations.

The focus on structural transformation central to the Marxist accounts of gentrification are a timely reminder of the lens onto such changes that the study of gentrification might offer. At a time when the economic performance of the world's mature economies is heavily reliant on housing, household debt through mortgages supporting increasing state indebtedness, a period Lapavistas (2013) aptly describes in his eponymously named book 'Profit without producing', what then of class relations? How might this understanding of macroeconomic forces and increasing financialisation shift our understandings of gentrification?

Contra the recent advocacy in urban studies of planetary urbanism (Brenner and Schmid 2011; Wyly 2015), our approach to understanding social transformation takes context seriously (see also Lees 1994, 2003; Brown-Saracino 2009; Lees et al. 2016), a point reflected in our methodological preference for ethnographic research (Jackson 2015; Benson 2011; see also Lees 2003). This allows us to move beyond top-down models that we see as prevalent within these universalising understandings of urban transformation to think on a range of different scales to consider what gentrification might look like, how it might be variously structured and framed, how it might in turn structure locales and class formations, in different locations. While earlier debates in this body of research can broadly be characterised as either promoting economic conditions or cultural practices as explanations for gentrification (see for example Smith 1979; Ley 1986)—although as Slater (2006) argues, both approaches were more nuanced than this binary opposition suggests—these work with *a priori* definition of who counts as working or middle class.

Slater's (2006) passionate treatise on the eviction of critical perspectives from gentrification research warned of the dangers in projecting a positive, almost celebratory image of gentrification that sees the influx of the 'creative class' as a marker of economic success, arguing for the urgent reintroduction of critical perspectives. We argue that such a critical perspective needs to be paired with a careful consideration of the complex practices and processes through which class formation and classificatory struggles operate within contemporary urban locations, and their implications for both people and place.

Benson, M. and Jackson, E. (forthcoming) 'From Class to Gentrification and Back Again', in Lees, L. and Phillips, M. (eds) *Handbook of Gentrification Studies*. London: Edward Elgar

Indeed, as Modan (2006) demonstrates in her ethnography of Mount Pleasant, a neighbourhood in Washington DC, how people talk about the places they live and what it means to belong to these places, not only constructs the symbolic boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, but may have 'material implications for how those places develop and change' (p. 7). Simply put, such practices and processes are sites and moments in which power is exercised and realised, and deserve critical evaluation.

As we have outlined above, despite the proliferation of research on the classed process of gentrification there has been little consideration over what work the categories of class that are mobilised within it do. Therefore, there is a real need to reconsider class (as a concept) within gentrification research, to question what starting with understandings of class that are derived from occupational and income categories—reifying the power relations that stratified Western European industrial economies—and then simply applying them in analysis does to our understandings? We argue that such an approach runs the risk of shutting down understandings of gentrification that would see it instead as a process through which class and space are co-constituted. This is not to suggest that spatial struggles are the only place where class is made. Rather, just as earlier class and gentrification scholarship indicated how changing structures of labour reconfigured class positions, contemporary struggles over housing and urban space are one loci through which class relations, positions and identities may be constituted.

The perspective we advance here sees class as relational, situational and context dependent; urban transformation—a product and symptom of ongoing macro-economic transformation—is both structuring of, and structured by, class relations. In this conceptualisation, gentrification (naming one such urban transformation) becomes a site through which classificatory struggles are recast (I. Tyler 2015). Lees' (1994, 2003) longstanding assertion that gentrification research needs to take local context seriously further supports our call here for a revitalised understanding of class within gentrification research that takes seriously how class relations are articulated in and through localities (see Brown-Saracino 2009) and countries (Lees et al. 2016) and under what conditions.

With this in mind, we look at recent reconceptualisations of class. We explore what a spatial turn in this new landscape of class analysis might look like, a project that requires bringing the concepts of class and space that underpin gentrification research back into the light. As we argue, a reconsideration of these concepts offers a productive way of engaging with calls for more context-specific understandings of gentrification.

### **Rethinking class and gentrification**

The last few years have seen renewed interest in social class within geography and sociology, and debates and disputes abound about how it should be conceived and theorised. Indeed, rising social and economic inequality make class analysis more relevant than ever (Dorling 2014); inequality and struggle may have changed form, but they

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remain a significant and persistent presence (Atkinson 2015). Within this context, class as a concept names and reveals structural inequality (Savage 2015a; I. Tyler 2015). And yet there is a tendency within this work to resort to measurable categories that categories proposed by stratification scholarship, which fix class position around income and occupation (Skeggs 2004, 2015; I. Tyler 2015).

The approaches to understanding class that we favour conceptualize class as a classificatory struggle framed around the pursuit of value. They are contextually-agile and are therefore appropriate to the longstanding call for gentrification research to be more attentive to local particularities (Lees 1994). We consider this contribution to be two-fold, focussing both on the fields of class analysis (which is based in Sociology and has tended to overlook space) and gentrification studies (which is has been historically based in Geography and works with rigid models of class). Here we examine what the reframing of class analysis around classificatory struggles can contribute towards understandings of gentrification. Further, beyond gentrification studies, we think about what might be gained for studies of class by introducing spatiality into understandings of class exploitation and inequality.

### *Revisiting class*

We want to advocate for a dynamic approach to understanding class and how class is made, told and performed in and through struggles over power and authority. Class is relational, a project of classification and (de)valuation (Skeggs 2004; I. Tyler 2015); tied to material and economic relations, it is a site of exploitation. Class then defines a struggle for dominance in the field of power, the shoring up of positions through appropriation, demonstrating the exercise of symbolic violence that lies at its core (Skeggs 2004). As Imogen Tyler (2015) persuasively argues, this is an understanding underscored by a shift from reified 'class' identities and formations, towards a consideration over the ways in which class exploitation and relations are remade. Importantly, and building on the relational and intersectional approaches proposed by feminist class scholars (see for example Bradley 1995, 2014; Skeggs 1997, 2004; Crompton 2008), this approach sees class as inseparable from other social positions, such as gender and ethnicity.

At present within British class analysis, the works of Pierre Bourdieu occupy a particularly prominent position. Where earlier conceptualisations of class considered class relations as constructed through labour and property relations, speaking of post-war France, Bourdieu (1984) identified 'culture' as an additional site through which these relations and class might be structured. Reflecting on the formation and reproduction of the petty bourgeoisie, he argued that culture and the judgements made on the grounds of taste that accompany these act as a site for status discrimination. This argument built on a wider conceptual framework that identified several forms of capital—social, cultural and symbolic—in addition to the economic (Bourdieu 1986). Imported to Britain in the late 1980s, this understanding of class formation was put to work initially to understand the

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 fragmentation of the British middle classes at that time (see for example Savage et al. 1992; Savage and Butler 1995)—how varying levels of capitals, assets and resources combined to produce different formations within the middle classes. In the 2000s Bourdieu's concepts became commonplace in the study of class in Britain (see for example Atkinson 2015, 2016).

Recently, the methodology that underscored Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984), multiple correspondence analysis, has been revisited to plot British cultural tastes through large-scale surveys (see for example Bennett et al. 2008; Savage et al. 2015). These grandly claim to chart transformations in British class structure, and include the highly publicised Great British Class Survey (GBCS) (Savage et al. 2015; Savage 2015b). As scholars including Bradley (2014), Skeggs (2015), and I. Tyler (2015) assert, this recent use of Bourdieu describes class groupings in ways akin to what has otherwise been referred to as social stratification. As these feminist scholars argue, in further entrenching fixed ideas of class divisions the new models of class structure generated by this methodology fall short of critically reflecting on the ways in which class relations are transformed under contemporary political and economic conditions, instead reifying class identities. This timely reminder of the significance of macroeconomic contexts in the production of class relations is pause for thought about how we might reconceive of class and its relationship to wider structural transformation, but also, through focussing on processes, what a model of class that is mutable and adaptable to local particularities—rather than an ethnocentric imposition—might look like.

Bourdieu's ideas about different types of capital and his efforts to demonstrate that class extends beyond the socioeconomic and into the symbolic and cultural are useful additions to our understandings of class. However, as Skeggs (2004) argues, distinction—judgements over culture—is best understood as a practice of valuation where some people and some actions have value and others do not; they enable some people to claim legitimacy for their actions while for others legitimacy is denied. As Skeggs' (1997) ethnographic work with working class women demonstrates, practices of valuation and their obverse feed into the formation of class and gender, divisions produced, naturalised and reaffirmed through the minutiae of everyday life. Being a subject of value does not only relate to classed forms of personhood but also ideas of respectability tied to nation, race and gender (Anderson, 2015; Dhaliwal and Forkert, 2015).

Skeggs' (1997, 2004) intervention renders visible the ways in which Bourdieu's (1986) model works to favour those able to convert capitals into status and social position. In other words, understandings of class framed in these terms privileges an understanding of value founded on exchange and accrual. As Skeggs (2004; see also Skeggs and Loveday 2012) argues, Bourdieu (1984) provides a compelling analysis of how the middle classes accrue forms of capital to become or maintain themselves as proper subjects. However, the taken-for-granted understanding of value as made through exchange negates other forms



Benson, M. and Jackson, E. (forthcoming) 'From Class to Gentrification and Back Again', in Lees, L. and Phillips, M. (eds) *Handbook of Gentrification Studies*. London: Edward Elgar

of value (e.g. use value) through which valuation could take place. As Skeggs' (2004) work demonstrates, aligning oneself with the subjects of value or else merely being defined by a lack of value is not inevitable. Privileging certain practices of valuation—which are, in and of themselves, emblematic of class divisions—to the exclusion of other processes, results in the foregone conclusion that some people are lacking in value. As Bradley (2014) argues, this is a significant methodological flaw, perpetuating the class divisions it sets out to challenge, a critique levelled at Bourdieu (1984) and the recent studies that have emulated his methodology to the ends of understanding class structure in contemporary Britain.

A further elaboration of this critique lies in Imogen Tyler's (2015) argument for a dynamic approach to understanding class, that allows for the possibility of recognising new class relations emerging through contemporary struggles, and the new alliances that these conditions might instigate. In response to the Great British Class Survey and its efforts to propose new class formations attuned to contemporary social and economic contexts, she warns that we need to carefully (re)consider the social problem class describes and make certain that this lies at the core of our conceptual and empirical projects. Class as the production of inequality through social relationships is therefore mutable not fixed; this revised understanding of class challenges both conceptualisations that might present it as a form of identity politics—class(ed) identities as intransigent—or as in some way measurable, as stratification scholars might have it.

The theoretical framings provided by Skeggs (2004, 2015) and Tyler (2015), although inspired by ongoing conversations about class and how it operates in Great Britain, offer a series of considerations that are transferable to other contexts. They recognise that class formation and relations are dynamic, responsive to context and circumstances; they present these as produced through systems of value that privilege the lives, practices and actions of some over and above those of others. Importantly, class struggle emerges as a process through which inequality is produced and perpetuated. Such a conceptualisation bolsters contemporary analyses of the injustices of contemporary urban renewal and gentrification, but might also allow for exploration of the ways in which these are not passively accepted but resisted by residents as Lees (2014) has so powerfully described in her work with residents of London's Aylesbury Estate. Further, they do not assume a context or the transferability of classed identities that abstract them from sites of production, recognizing instead that these are relationally produced. Taken together, these theories constitute a radical shift in how we conceptualise class, calling for new methodological and conceptual considerations. Here we take these considerations forward, to argue for the value of these perspectives in thinking through diverse moments and spaces of gentrification in ways that recognise the particularity of these contexts and how class relations and exploitation play out within these.

*Class—space—class*

Benson, M. and Jackson, E. (forthcoming) 'From Class to Gentrification and Back Again', in Lees, L. and Phillips, M. (eds) *Handbook of Gentrification Studies*. London: Edward Elgar

Our starting point in shifting focus towards the consideration of how class and space interplay lies in thinking again about the problem that gentrification seeks to describe. Our assertion here is simple: gentrification names a struggle over space, through which practices of valuation and ownership are writ large. We return here to our opening comments on ethnocentrism and the need for a conceptualisation of class that allows for the possibility that class is not only wrought in and through employment relations. Indeed, to understand planetary gentrification (Lees et al. 2016) a conceptualization of class that can account for the ways that power relations and classificatory struggles play out through housing and land economies is urgently required.

We argue that gentrification is one site through which it might be possible to consider the spatial dimensions of classificatory struggles and practices of valuation that have, until now been somewhat overlooked in these re-visionings of class. Against this background, we pose the following questions: (1) How do classificatory struggles manifest in and through place? (2) How do these struggles make class relations and place? (3) In what ways is class (with race and gender) lived, mobilized and conceptualised in these struggles over space? These questions lie at the core of our argument that these re-visionings of class offer important insights valuable in making sense of contemporary gentrification processes. Just as I. Tyler (2015) calls for a shift in understandings of class to privilege the dynamic ways in which class relations and social inequality are produced through classificatory struggles, there is a need to think about how place is conceived within our understandings of gentrification.

As we have argued elsewhere, place is not a blank canvas within which these processes unfold; it is remade through processes of gentrification and everyday practice (Benson and Jackson 2013). In short, place is dynamic, and as well as being a site of existing class relations, it is also a site that structures class relations and is reshaped through them. This framing approaches gentrification as a project of (re)valuing locations, in terms of both economic capital and the attribution of moral and symbolic significance to places. These processes of reclassification also rely on social and spatial boundary-making, other people and other places excluded or expelled from the image of the place that is being pursued by those who are seeking to transform it (Watt 2009; Holgersson 2014; Jackson and Benson 2015), place remade in their image in ways that are fundamentally classed and racialised (see for example K. Tyler 2003, 2012; Modan 2006; Benson and Jackson 2013). These, then, are also processes of class formation, in which space plays a *dynamic* role (de Certeau 1984, Lefebvre 1991, Massey 1994).

This active remaking of place simultaneously involves the devaluation of some people and locales, alongside revaluation, processes in which the middle classes may act as agents, but which might also be brought on by the state. This is particularly evident in Paton's (2014; see also Paton, Mckee and Mooney forthcoming) work on Glasgow, discussed in greater detail below, which demonstrates how state-led gentrification in that context is as much a

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 project of restructuring citizens as it was about restructuring place: 'Devaluation of people and places not only contributes to the creation of a viable rent gap it also legitimises the use of gentrification as regeneration as being redemptive for these people and places' (Paton 2014: 187).

Focussing on the experiences and perspectives of prior residents, either those displaced by these processes or hanging on, managing to stay put, animates and complicates the (often binary) discussion of gentrification. Indeed we see this in Lees' (2012) close examination of New Labour's urban regeneration of London's Aylesbury estate, where she documents the genealogy of urban injustice, the discursive construction of the 'sink estate', the practices that exclude residents from the regeneration, exposing 'a variety of unjust practices that have been, and are being, enacted on the Aylesbury Estate', while also looking 'at what the residents think about the whole process ... and how they have resisted, and are resisting, dominant interests and practices' (p. 922). By documenting working-class experiences of and perspectives on gentrification, Paton (2014) finds ambivalence among her working class interviewees towards this process. Glucksberg (2014) also registers this more unequivocal response from her interlocutors in south London, who had seen their council estate demolished, vividly encapsulated in the phrase 'we were regenerated out' (p. 97). These examples identify the coupling of the devaluation of place and devaluation of people as central to the logic of regeneration/gentrification (see Lees 2014). And yet, the differences in these analyses also connect to the specificities of the locales under examination – in Glucksberg's London case, displacement was more immediate and brutal, whereas in Paton's Glasgow case it was a slower burning process. This highlights how the local context of programmes of redevelopment and situational dynamics of classificatory struggles are significant in making sense of the production of inequalities (I. Tyler 2015); it is precisely in unpicking these differences that we can learn how regeneration both seeks to restructure classed environments and how this is lived, incorporated and resisted on the ground. As *Staying Put: An Anti-gentrification Handbook for Council Estates in London* (Just Space, Lees, LTF and SNAG, 2014) shows, there is a significant appetite for resistance to such urban processes and the economic and political structures that promote them.

Understood as a classificatory struggle along the lines that I. Tyler (2015) advocates, and her provocation to move beyond fixed and essentialist class identities, gentrification has the potential to remake both class and space. It renders gentrification a process in which class relations and place are best understood as mutually constitutive and a site *par excellence* to see this in action. It might produce unlikely alliances, and complex encounters with sites that bring together residents from different social backgrounds in shared struggles, as Brown-Saracino (2009) identifies in her ethnographic accounts of preservation practices in three neighbourhoods in the United States. This complicates understandings of gentrification, highlighting the value of understanding the nuances of how gentrification as a struggle over space—a process not only structured by, but also

Benson, M. and Jackson, E. (forthcoming) 'From Class to Gentrification and Back Again', in Lees, L. and Phillips, M. (eds) *Handbook of Gentrification Studies*. London: Edward Elgar

structuring of, class relations and inequalities—unfolds in different locations. In many ways, this is precisely the antidote to the well-rehearsed and popularised accounts of gentrification that either pit middle-class incomers against the original working class residents or policy solutions that propose the introduction of middle-class residents as a panacea for structural problems such as under-investment and poverty (see Bridge, Butler and Lees, 2011). Such analyses and accounts rest exactly on the reification of classed identities that I. Tyler (2015) warns against, leaving the wider structural forces that produce inequality unremarked on.

While we have focussed elsewhere on the way in which place-making interplays with classed identities, arguing that constituent identities are (continually) moulded through the creation and mundane maintenance of places (Benson and Jackson, 2013), here we want to take an additional step in arguing that these practices of place-making are sites for the production of classed relations and classificatory struggles. This might seem a reiteration of longstanding arguments that present gentrification as a site of class struggle, but our innovation here is to think outside of *a priori* categorisations of class and to think instead about *the ways in which particular processes and sites of gentrification play a role in the constitution of class relations*; to see gentrification as struggles over value, power and authority; and to identify these as possible sites where new coalitions and allegiances emerge. We argue that this is an approach that is much more attentive to the nuances of contemporary classificatory struggles brought about by processes of social and economic transformation.

### **Ethnographic approaches to class, space, and gentrification**

Making this shift in the conceptual framing of class and gentrification requires a similar reconsideration of methodology. It is perhaps unsurprising that the studies that we find the most useful in analysing the complexities of class formation and the development of inequalities through processes of gentrification are often ethnographic or highly inductive qualitative research that seeks to understand the lives and experiences of people living in particular locations. Lees (2003) argues for the usefulness of ethnography in investigating 'the ongoing social practices through which space is continually shaped and inhabited' (p. 111). Here we are extending this to argue that an ethnographic approach can produce a dynamic understanding of the production of class relations. Such methodological reflections further influence our discussion in the remainder of this chapter and the choices of two studies that we discuss in detail. These two examples illustrate the complex interplay of class and space and the transformation of these at their intersections, through gentrification.

*Case Study One: 'Maybe the penthouse though!'*

*'Gentrification: a working class perspective' Kirsteen Paton (2014)*

Given the argument advanced above, it may seem jarring that our first example has a title that promises 'a working class perspective' but this title is a little misleading. From the

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Paton (2014) critiques not only the absence of working class voices in studies of gentrification but also the denial of the complexity that is granted to the middle classes in gentrification studies (who are variously cast as 'the flâneur, the gentrifier, the cosmopolitan' (p. 1)). In her study, grounded in Partick, Glasgow — a predominantly working class neighbourhood on Clydeside that borders the more affluent West End — Paton argues that gentrification is not only about the class restructuring of space but about the attempted gentrification of working class subjects.

The context of Glasgow is important here. In the wake of the decline of the shipbuilding industry, place-marketing campaigns since the 1980s have tried to shift the city's association with poverty and deindustrialisation (including campaigns with the slogans 'Glasgow's Miles Better' (1984), 'Glasgow's alive' (1997) and more recently, 'People make Glasgow' (2014)). Such campaigns were quite successful in attracting outside investment, however, as Paton argues those who were not in-line with this 'Miles Better' city were those who 'have suffered most from the effects of restructuring [who] are deemed a problem and a deterrent to investment and who are subsequently targeted by neoliberal policy' (p.60). This stigmatisation, in tandem with the reification of the middle classes, impacted on housing policies which combined 'trickle-down economics with the promotion of self-help, bolstered by the manufacturing of aspiration via promoting home ownership.' (p. 61). Paton's book is a chronicle of gentrification as a process that seeks to co-opt working class residents into participating in, and buying into, gentrification as a hegemonic project through the 'manufacturing of aspiration' (p. 126).

The first ethnographic encounter in the book perfectly conjures the ambivalent working class positions that arise from this. Paton meets Sylvie, at Sylvie's behest, not in a traditional Partick establishment but in one of the new bars. Talking over wine in the sunshine, Sylvie expresses mixed feelings over the new housing development but when the author mentions that she has been inside the development, Sylvie wants all the details. When the conversation turns to rent, Sylvie starts to work out what would be possible for her — she'd like to live there, 'Not all the way up, maybe halfway, with a wee balcony. Maybe the penthouse though!' Paton comments:

'her aspiration is as lofty as the high-rise itself yet is slightly tentative, grading herself as being worthy of a place only halfway up. The key point is that she refuses to be excluded from the gentrification process taking place despite her lack of means, and that the proliferation of this type of development is the very housing trend that sees curtailed growth in social housing.' (2014: 4)

Sylvie cautiously includes herself into this gentrified future, which as Paton argues offers both (limited) new rewards and new injuries (2014: 125). As well as this soft cultivation of aspiration, Paton also explores how working class people are formally invited to participate in the process — through, for example, consultation exercises — but then if

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they are seen to be making the wrong choices this is used to further malign them. Paton uses the example of the redevelopment of Mansfield Park, where the working-class residents' lack of interest in the park's redevelopment (that was to include a bandstand, an eco-play area and a 'meditation labyrinth') is met with frustration by the director of the local housing association:

'It's almost an aspirational thing [...] I was staggered by the comments I read from these people. What reasons are people in this [neighbourhood] not aspiring to something dynamic and vibrant and wonderful here and they have the opportunity to do so?' Helen

Helen goes on to suggest this lack of interest in participation is to do with a lack of self-worth, thus the process reinforces the idea of a working class that need to be fixed. However, this is not the only working class experience of gentrification, Paton also describes how some working-class people find opportunities within these processes of change, for example Loretta who had become a developer and landlady, or Brian who had bought property in Partick in the 1970s and was encouraging his children to do the same (2014: 152). Paton argues gentrification is not a zero-sum game for working class people but that their participation in it and the terms of engagement are unequal.

The project of gentrification in this case is one of intervening in the making of working-class subjects through the promotion of aspiration and commercial participation. But the results of this process are not those that are envisioned by the policy makers. In this case, a top-down project was not merely rolled out over the heads of a population but required their participation through aspiration and consumption. Rather working-class people negotiate, resist and participate in gentrification in complex ways (cr. Modan 2006). Paton also finds little evidence of the middle classes mixing in and providing a social fix in the new residential developments, rather they see Partick as a step on the property ladder and are, in the main, perceived by their working-class neighbours as disinterested and aloof.

The impact of gentrification in this context is to reinforce the stigmatisation of those who do not or cannot participate, while drawing in more to participate through home ownership or consumption that they cannot always afford. This, Paton argues, is the paradox of gentrification: 'gentrification simultaneously excludes and includes working class residents ... [S]tate-led gentrification invites people to participate but this involves private consumption and it does not provide the means to achieve this' (2014: 155). Despite the different positions occupied by Paton's working class participants in relation to gentrification, the overwhelming sense is one of gentrification as, if not 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2011), then certainly cruel aspiration which plays a role in the restructuring of class identities: Paton argues, 'These restructured identities were classed, but not in the traditional sense. Instead they displayed neoliberal characteristics through narratives of choice.' (2014: 185).

This study contributes to our argument in three broad ways: (1) It highlights how state-led projects of gentrification can be implemented to not only reshape place but also groups of people, their values, behaviour and aspirations; (2) it highlights that these projects are not merely rolled out onto people but are incorporated, resisted and lived with in a variety of ways; and (3) it complicates the stark opposition of incoming middle class and pre-existing working class in terms of their perspectives on gentrification. While working class and middle class groups make distinctions between each other and between others who occupy these broad categories, for Paton, the greatest differences between the middle classes and the working classes were their material positions and degree of choice about where they lived, rather than different cultural aspirations for the area.

*Case Study Two: Housing in the production of class differentiation*

*In search of paradise: middle-class living in a Chinese metropolis' Li Zhang (2010)*

This second example provides further support for our argument for the need to reconsider the understandings of class and place that underpin gentrification research, particularly as this is extended to understanding urban processes ongoing around the world. The social and economic transformation of post-socialist China that Zhang (2010) describes renders highly visible the spatialization of class, the production of class relations and classificatory struggles. Throughout her discussion she presents class-making as a process of happening (ibid: 7), socially and economically produced through human relationships. Her ethnography astutely identifies the ways in which the privatization of homeownership in China goes together with the formation of a new, urban middle class; it reconfigures urban landscapes and brings into being middle-class lifestyles and subjectivities in ways that disturb understandings of the relationship between spatial configurations and class dynamics.

Zhang's (2010) focus is on Kunming, a regional city in southwest China, the capital of Yunnan Province. She describes the underdevelopment of the city under socialism, the shifts to the local economy brought in post-Mao, and the roles of tobacco and copper-mining industries within this, and, more recently the expansion of tourism, trade and the service sector in the recent growth of the region's economy. Today, Kunming is a booming provincial economy, the site of considerable social and spatial polarization. The wider context of postsocialist transformation in China—which Zhang (2010) describes as a hybrid of socialist authoritarian rule and new neoliberal governing practices—and its local articulation in Kunming raise important questions about the relationship between class and space. As Zhang argues, 'I maintain that the politics of class, through the lens of homeownership and spatial reordering, lies at the heart of postsocialist transformations because it brings many critical cultural, political, and social issues together ... postsocialist changes are not simply about the privatization of the economy or market liberalization but

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 also about the making of new kinds of persons and class subjects' (Zhang *ibid*: 13; cr. Lees, Shin and Lopez-Morales, 2016).

Housing is a pivotal feature of this equation that presents the shift from socialism to postsocialism as a moment of class-making. The movement from publicly assigned and supplied housing under socialism to the privatisation and commodification of housing made possible by the conditions of postsocialism, introduces spatial differentiation; importantly, this is housing development led by the state, and through which a (new) middle class is produced. Through the state-supported production of private housing, a new, more lifestyle-oriented class formation emerges; a significant factor in the formation of what Zhang (*ibid*) identifies as a 'new middle propertied strata' (*xinzhongchan jieceng*) of Kunming. Such a presentation of class-making through the terms of *jieceng*—a way of distinguishing on the grounds of socio-economic difference—deliberately intends to dissociate contemporary change from the politically-charged and violent moments of class struggle under socialism.

As Zhang (*ibid*) presents it, the changes to housing bring into being the prospects for class formation in postsocialist China. The private development of housing takes the form of the construction of residential communities, including gated complexes, rather than the construction of individual homes here and there. This spatial concentration of homes is significant to the development of the kinds of cultural differentiation and lifestyle practices that are associated with class formation. In the Chinese case, emergent class formation is further shaped through the work property developers and other intermediaries do; simply put, there is no *pro forma* for what it might mean to be middle class, what middle-class living might look like under conditions of postsocialism. Housing differentiation is the locus for the constitution of class difference and relations. This is a simultaneous process of making the new middle propertied *jieceng* and the cultural milieu of this class formation. As Zhang (2010) emphasises, '[T]his is a process involving not only the political economy of housing and community production but also the cultivation of new lifestyles, mentalities, dispositions and aspirations among those who come to inhabit these places' (2010: 14). Property developers and intermediaries might then be understood to have *tabula rasa*, telling people what they want from their (private) homes, selling lifestyles and framing what different properties and residential environments mean and symbolise, producing and emplacing a new *jieceng* in the process.

So, where then and how do classificatory struggles manifest in and through place? These housing developments and their consumption first make visible the differences within the society. Indeed, consumption becomes a particularly acute marker of social stratification in the context of postsocialist China, marked precisely against the secrecy surrounding income and economic wealth. Further, set within a wider context in which state and public assets are dispossessed, the property developments that bring into being the new *jieceng* are intimately intertwined with the displacement, devaluation and relocation of other



Benson, M. and Jackson, E. (forthcoming) 'From Class to Gentrification and Back Again', in Lees, L. and Phillips, M. (eds) *Handbook of Gentrification Studies*. London: Edward Elgar populations. Class-making therefore also entails the development of new class relations; labour activism, protests and legal action against real estate developers are some of the ways in which classificatory struggles emerge through this process and in these projects. Class relations also play out in the employment of migrant workers—in this case those from rural areas moving to the cities—to provide services in the employment of the new middle-class residents of these housing developments.

The ethnographic focus of Zhang's (2010) work makes clear the value of moving beyond top-down models for understanding gentrification, identifying the intricate ways in which class and space co-constitute. What Zhang (2010) describes in detail is precisely the interplay of property development, class-making and place-making. The context of postsocialist China and the emergence of distinct social classes within these urban settings provides an opportunity to make visible the way in which class and class relations are made in and through space. Further, it brings to bear a sense of how context—political, historical, local—matters to our understandings. Rather than an established and essentialised middle-class population moving in and displacing the working classes, the wider structural transformations within China and specifically in Kunming illustrate the dynamics of class formation and the development of new class relations in place.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have proposed revisiting the understandings of class that underpin studies of gentrification with a view to making the latter a more malleable and adaptable concept. We have argued that the critical perspective on gentrification advocated by Slater, Curran and Lees (2004; see also Slater 2006), requires an attendant consideration of a critical perspective on class. This is a perspective that takes seriously the sites and moments at which class—as the struggle over value and worth—is produced, and the contextual and situational constitution of class formation.

Our tools of investigation and analysis need to be sharpened to respond to shift the conversation from the blunt and binary lens within which gentrification research seems to become repeatedly entrenched—the structural and economic determinism of Marxist approaches versus the cultural lens oriented towards human agency; the gentrifier versus the non-gentrifier; the new middle class versus the working class. These binaries serve little more than to reify identities and stagnate debate, while gentrification—as the two cases we have discussed in this chapter identify—continues as a classed and classifying process full of contradiction and ambiguity.

However, we might also want to turn the lens back on to the concept of gentrification and ask how well-equipped a concept developed to describe the middle-class displacement of working class populations in 1960s London is to describe processes of urban transformation ongoing on places such as China, which do not have the same frames of reference for understanding class. And yet, in reframing the discussion around an

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understanding of class that takes this as a struggle over value (Skeggs 2004, 2015; I. Tyler 2015), the making of the Chinese middle class through the development of exclusive housing complexes and the demands for a service class that this brings that Zhang (2010) describes, may be brought into conversation with Paton's (2014) account of how working class people in Glasgow navigate processes of urban transformation through which they and the place they live are repeatedly devalued.

Finally, these studies (Zhang 2010; Paton 2014) and others (see for example Modan 2006; Brown-Saracino 2009) are timely reminders of the methodological intervention required to test the limits of this reconceptualization of the relationship between class and gentrification. Such close-up analyses—qualitative and ethnographic—are to be celebrated for taking seriously wider structural transformation and economic forces and their local effects. These works—notably authored by feminist scholars—have a keen eye to wider structural transformation and economic forces, alongside contextual and situational specificity. The critical study of gentrification requires keeping a close eye on how people and places become devalued and marked out for intervention; how these processes are negotiated, participated in or resisted; and how such struggles can be generative of (changing or coalescing) classed positions. Indeed, it is within the ethnographic and in-depth qualitative empirical research that we can uncover the critical perspective that Slater (2006; see also Slater, Curran and Lees 2004) laments as being absent from gentrification research.

We have argued that to understand planetary gentrification there is a need not only to critically evaluate the conditions through which knowledge of the urban has developed, but also to apply the same logic to the understandings of class that we mobilise within these. Drawing our inspiration from contemporary feminist scholars of class who have put forward a dynamic approach to understanding class as producing inequality and injustice through the struggle over value (Skeggs 2004, 2015; I. Tyler 2015), we have worked through how this reconceptualization of class might reanimate scholarly engagements with gentrification and urban redevelopment theoretically, conceptually and methodologically.

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