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Second wave gentrification in inner-city Sydney

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There are few processes more central to the social and cultural transformation of the inner city in the past half century than gentrification. The social and economic changes that have engendered gentrification have transformed its character and meaning; it has become principally a strategy for redevelopment of brown field sites by the state and capital interests. Based on research in the formerly derelict harbour-front Sydney suburbs of Pyrmont and Ultimo, this paper shows how economic restructuring, state intervention, developers and cultural change have combined to totally transform the area. Drawing on [Wyly, E K and Hammel, D J (2001) *Gentrification, Housing Policy, and the new context of Urban redevelopment, in Critical perspectives on Urban Redevelopment*, 6 pp. 211–276], we have termed this second wave gentrification.

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Introduction

The character of gentrification has changed dramatically in the past two decades (Butler and Robson, 2001; Hackworth, 2002; Phillips, 2004). Several inter-related factors lie behind this transformation, including economic restructuring; urban consolidation or compact city policies; state intervention in the development of brown field sites using principally the housing demand of the new middle class; the rent gap of rust belt zones and the windfall profits of private developers who restructure and redevelop inner-city areas. This paper examines the decline and revitalization of Pyrmont Ultimo in inner city Sydney and compares this experience with recent developments in other “postindustrial” cities.

We briefly review Wyly and Hammel’s (2001) argument regarding three waves of gentrification and conclude that although the gentrification process in Pyrmont Ultimo cannot be neatly captured by Wyly and Hammel’s periodization, it does have components of what they have described as second wave gentrification. We show that gentrification no longer invariably means the displacement of an industrial working class and its replacement by a wealthy, young middle class who restore traditionally working class housing. Rather, it is now a multi-class phenomenon and the accommodation offered is often in apartment blocks built by major developers that differ significantly in quality, prestige and view.

Defining the concept of gentrification

Some have argued there is little point in creating a hegemonic definition of gentrification or engaging in endless debates about the meaning of the term (Slater et al., 2004). We agree that a single

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hegemonic definition of gentrification is of little utility due to the variability of the processes involved. Others have sought to separate urban development from gentrification, seeing gentrification as a bottom-up process, whereas urban development is driven by the state and/or developers (Lambert and Boddy, 2002). Traditional gentrification studies have tended to see it as an important and indelibly wedded aspect of contemporary strategies of the state and private capital in the redevelopment of the inner city (Hackworth, 2002; Berry, 1999). In describing the redevelopment of Pyrmont Ultimo as gentrification rather than simply redevelopment, we are arguing that it is the social and cultural phenomenon of gentrification that underpins the attraction, social composition and success of the redevelopment of the area by private capital and the state.

Phillips (2004, p. 8) points out that from Glass (1964a,b) through to Zukin (1990), gentrification has involved a new sense of “attachment to old buildings and a heightened sensibility to space and time” (Zukin, 1987, p. 131). Zukin (1990) pursues the idea of gentrification as a new organization of consumption. Similarly in Ley (1996, p. 82) work this sensibility is described as “a common structure of feeling” for the inner city. This sensibility is also reflected in Caulfield (1989) work, which captured the gentry’s preference for valuing the inner city and denigrating suburbia. In Caulfield’s work, this is linked to the idea of gentrified areas as emancipatory spaces, with gentrifiers developing urban meaning oriented to an alternative urban future and lifestyle, while suburbs are viewed as bland, homogeneous, hierarchical and conservative.

Ultimately both economics and culture are important for studies of gentrification, and, as Lees (1994) has argued, what are required are studies that recognise the complementarity of economy and culture (Lees, 1994 in Phillips, 2004, p. 12). Our study of Pyrmont Ultimo provides an historical analysis of the evolution of the area and the symbolic construction of this structure of feeling in the space through the appropriation of this symbolic capital by developers and the state to pursue what we have termed *second wave gentrification* (Bounds, 2004).

The gentrification process

The debate on gentrification has been dominated by the question of what drives the process (Smith, 1996; Wylie and Hammel, 2001; Zukin, 1990). Analyses have focused on shifts in individual preferences and lifestyle leading to a desire for inner-city living; sectors of capital creating the conditions for the process to take off; global restructuring and a remaking of the class structure, or the state endeavouring to curtail urban sprawl through high density development (Smith, 1996; Hamnett, 1991, 2000). It is now generally accepted that to understand the gentrification process it is necessary to combine the “con-

sumption-side” and “production-side” explanations (Hamnett, 2000) and that even within the same city, the process is not uniform (Butler and Robson, 2001; Berry, 1999).

The new phase of gentrification in Sydney parallels that of cities in other developed economies. Thus, recent research on gentrification in New York (Hackworth, 2002) identified important characteristics which can also be seen occurring in the redevelopment of Pyrmont Ultimo. According to Hackworth, the real estate recession of the early 1990s in the US marked a hiatus in the process of gentrification, which led to a questioning of its spatial and social significance and that subsequent to this hiatus, the nature of gentrification changed. He argues that a composite picture of the process is particularly important as it has “long been theorized as a window into larger processes of economic and social restructuring” (2002, p. 816). Hackworth ties case studies of gentrification into the immediate past history of inner-city real estate development in the US to make his case. Using examples from three New York neighbourhoods which underwent intense gentrification in the 1990s after being “spared a bout of the process in the 1970s and 1980s”, he points to four fundamental changes that have occurred in recent times. These are the predominance of corporate developers in the gentrification process; the active intervention of the state in fuelling the process; the political marginalization of anti-gentrification movements, and the changing economics of inner-city investment. As New York has in the past been the harbinger of urban development trends in other parts of the US, the analysis claims to offer insights into the future of gentrification in other cities.

A critique of his approach is that it fails to adequately conceptualize the process of gentrification. Hackworth’s approach identifies gentrification from the perspective of the real estate industry purely as revalorization and redevelopment without looking at the broader social conditions or social history of the areas under scrutiny. In identifying and analysing changes, it is necessary to document the social and economic processes that are the precursors to full-scale gentrification, lest by definition the process is simply reduced to corporate and state decisions to invest in the redevelopment of brown field sites. In Pyrmont Ultimo – as in Hackworth’s New York – corporate developers, the active intervention of the state and local and global economic change are all implicated, but we argue the process can only be understood by examining the broader history of the local area and the global economy.

Displacement

In the early stages of the economic restructuring of developed economies, gentrification of inner urban areas certainly did mean displacement, as these areas were predominantly inhabited by aging members of

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