GENTRIFICATION AND THE SOCIAL DIVISION OF URBAN SPACE IN EUROPE: THE CASE OF THE GREATER LONDON

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss and analyse the effects of new urban dynamic on the social division of space in large European cities. Special emphasis is given to the huge economical and functionnal restructuring of city cores, the links between globalisation and social change, and after all to the emerging of a new-middle class coming from the extent of the financial sector. The recent evolution of the social geography of the Greater London perfectly illustrates the functional regulation of the old fordist urban structure to the needs of the new global capitalism. To gauge the impact of this restructuring on the social structure of the city and residential patterns, the location of social groups has been analysed using data from the 2001 census. The result confirm the recolonization of the Inner city working-class district by the new middle class and it also reveals another feature of gentrification. Not only does the latter deteriorate the urban geographical pattern inherited from the industrial period at the agglomeration level, but it generates new forms of socio-spatial polarization as well, especially at the local level.

Key words: Social division of space, gentrification, Greater London, urban fragmentation.

1. Introduction

Gentrification firstly designs the replacement of low-income household by high-income household in a urban environment that have been initially constructed for the working-class (Glass, 1964). By extension, this term designs the "embourgeoisement" of the central run-down urban areas that occurred after the economic and social restructuring of city cores. In the Greater London, the first steps of gentrification have been observed at the beginning of the sixties (Glass, 1964). Its growth is regularly examined (Hamnett, 1973, 2003; Hamnett and Williams, 1979, 1980; Marsh, 1999; Robson and Butler, 2001; Butler and Robson, 2003) so are its consequences on the dynamic of settlement of several neighbourhoods. (noms) The multiplication of high-income household in working class district is said to banish local people, either by displacement (Lyons, 1996, Atkinson, 2000) or by replacement, taking into account that the gentrification develops faster in neighborhoods that undergo demographical decline (Hamnett, 2003). It has also been argued that gentrification could finally reverse the patterns of social segregation which prevailed in the industrial city : simultaneously to the colonization of the inner city by high-income groups, medium and low income groups would be finally evicted from city cores and a pre-industrial urban pattern would come into sight, with a urban core exclusively dominated by the wealthiest segment of the population. (Ley, 1981). In this contribution, we will try to answer to three main questions in order to highlight the effects of gentrification on the social geography of the Greater London:

1. What is the impact of gentrification on the inherited socio-spatial configuration of the industrial city ?

2. Does the Inner London become a more homogeneous space ?

3. Do gentrification lead to social mix ? what is the social division of space in a gentrified Borough ?

2. The inherited forms of the London urban structure

The greater London can be seen as a social and morphological mosaic that has been assembled during the successive rounds of urbanization. The shape of the city is, before all, the result of the urban dynamic which has been established under the long waves cycles: competitive (1850-1900), extensive (1900-1950), intensive (fordism - 1950-1975), and flexible (1975- until now). All theses cycles have determined different type of distribution (population and activities) in urban space and produced what Christian Kesteloot names "urban sociospatial configuration", that is to say different types of built environment occupied by specific social group (Kesteloot, 2004). The recent study of the residential location of social groups in the Greater London put in evidence at least two level of social polarization (Petsimeris, 1995 ; Lebreton, 2004) : the first comes out from a strong social antagonism between the oriental and occidental districts of the Inner City. The West-End (see figure one) represents the ecological area of reproduction of the London aristocracy and bourgeoisie since the XVIII century. This is the place in London where the function of power and decision are concentrated, and where we can find some of the most prestigious and expensive residential areas of the whole city. In opposition, on the other side of Central Business District (City of London), the districts have experienced for more than two centuries the industrial revolution and the creation of the proletariat in the urban space. Thus, if the West-End designs the "beaux quartiers"of London, wealthy and mostly white occupied, the East-End symbolizes the working-class London, the London of Charles Dickens, with its pubs, factories, urban docks, and its poor immigrants' settlements. This opposition is the most ancient but it remains very strong : it is between theses two sectors that the social inequalities are the most significant at the agglomeration level. For instance, in 2001, the proportion of unemployed was three times higher in Tower Hamlets (East End) than in Westminster (West End).

Figure 1. The administrative canvas of the Greater London

The second level of social polarization which characterizes the geography of the Greater London opposes the Inner City to the periphery of the agglomeration, (Outer City), a large urban belt close to the rural environment with small densities and individual housing. This is the classic prosperous suburbia, especially in the middle and outer suburbs, which developed subsequently to the suburban rush that took place after the Second World War. The opposition between *Inner* and *Outer London* can be made on the basis of : a – the social rank of the population who lives in theses two urban rings; b – the housing morphology; c – the type of housing occupancy used by the residents. To understand the social geography of the Greater London, we have to keep in mind that the heaviest programs of construction of social housing have been accomplished within the limits of the Inner London, which has been administrated for decades and decades by the labour party, whereas theses construction have remained sporadic in the Outer London which was mainly controlled by the right party, strongly refractoring with social housing. Consequently, despite some large-scale developments in the east industrial suburbs, the public housing in Greater London stays strongly concentrated in the Inner London, whereas the periphery is mainly owner-occupied and constituted with individual or semi-individual houses.

3. The social reconquest of Inner London and the reversal of the social segregation pattern

To appreciate clearly the extend of gentrification in Inner London, we have to remind that a large part of the Inner London had already been entirely occupied by working-class until the sixties (Hamnett, 2003). Gentrification is a phenomenon that takes all its dimensions within the Anglo-Saxon urban form, with their run-down central areas, North American downtowns or English inner cities. In the sixties, when the suburbanization of the middle class started to reach his peak in England, the West-end represented a statistical anomaly in the social geography of the Inner London, an island of prosperity surrounded by a sea of working-class neighborhood (Hammersmith, Fulham, Islington, Lambeth). Such a massive and secular presence of blue-collars workers in the inner city has left a large and substantial housing stock that has been largely repurchased and refurbished by individuals gentrifiers during the seventies and eighties. Once again, the characteristics of the urban form remain essential in understanding the development of gentrification within the anglo-saxon urban cores inherited from the second industrial revolution. Without the massive proletarization of theses cores during the XIX and XX centuries, the potential gentrifiable housing stock would have been reduced even more. Let's have a look on London's case : first confined in specific areas as Camden and Islington during the sixties, the gentrification will really spread out in the early eighties successively to the internationalization of the economy and the functional restructuring of the London city core. The transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy based on financial, business and creative services has led to an increasing number of professionals and managers in the social class structure of the greater London (Hamnett, 1995). Simultaneously to its growth in the social structure, this new middle class started to spread out of the traditional upper class areas of the Inner London, like Westminster and Kensington. Not only did they record a big increase in socially mixed neighborhood but they grew in long-established working-class district as well, like Tower Hamlets and Hackney (figure 2).

Figure 2 . Relative growth of Professionals and Managers in Inner London, 1981-1991

During the same period, the medium and lower classes have registered an important contraction in the Inner London class structure (Petsimeris and Ball, 1998). Indeed, we could easily argue that the transformations of the labour market will lead to a complete remaking of the agglomeration class structure, and that the Inner London will be soon occupied only by managers and professionals. The recent change in housing market support this hypothesis : the incessant demand of dwelling coming from the new middle class puts an incredible pressure on the housing market that has led to a fantastic increase of the real-estate values. Between 1995 and 2001, the prices of houses have increased of more than 100% in most of the inner Boroughs (figure 3). Thus, for the low and medium income households, the opportunities to acquire a roof in the Inner London are now considerably reduced, due to the fact that these households cannot compete economically with the new middle class. Even for the two-wages households of the public sector, the purchase of a house in the Inner London represents an impossible mission, and most of time they must buy their home in the periphery where the cheaper areas are now located. (Hamnett, 2003)
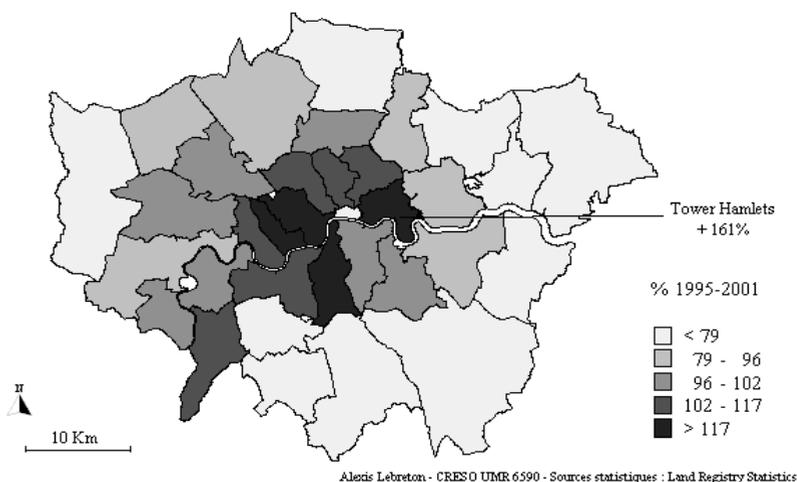
Figure 3. Relative change of the average cost of housing, Greater London, 1995-2001.

By playing the role of a social filter for the news households who attempt to reside in the Inner London, the housing market maintains lower and medium income groups outside it. The first londonian urban ring, formerly working class and rented-occupied, is submitted since the eighties to a vast social restructuring that jeopardizes this old domination of class. Nowadays, high income groups constitute the largest part of the population of the Inner boroughs. According to the 2004 census, the professional and managers represent almost 40% of the active population of London :

Managerial and professional	**38**
Intermediate occupation	9,1
Small employers and own account workers	7,3
Lower supervisory and technical	5,9
Semi-routine occupations	9,5
Routine occupations	6,4
Never work, unemployed, not elsewhere classified	**23**

Figure 4. Greater London :Socio-economic classification of working age population, 2004
Source : office for national statistics

As we can also notice it on figure 4, the economically inactive and unemployed situated at the other extremity of the social scale constitute 23% of the population of London. This proportion is still very important, and the fact is that for the last decades, these low-income groups have become increasingly concentrated in the public housing sector which gets little by little residualised (Sommerville, 1986; Forest and Murie, 1991).

4. The social fragmentation of the urban space

Thus, the Inner London has become the privileged theatre of two antagonist dynamic. The gentrification – through the reconversion of deprived rental sector and /or arising from the operations of urban regeneration – lead to a social revalorization of the old urban structure. At the same time, there is an increasing impoverishment of the public housing, especially the high-rise and high density tenements of the inner City which have been colonized by poor ethnic groups like African, Bangladeshi and Caribbean. When the same neighborhood experiences simultaneously gentrification and residualization, the level of residential segregation is very high. In the municipality of Tower Hamlets for example, the pattern of distribution show without ambiguity the effects of the gentrification on the social and ethnic division of space at the infra-communal level. In the figure 4, we can see that the statistical unit of the eastern part of the Borough are occupied in majority by managers and professionals. We also note that the proportion of homeowners is very important (it can reach more than 80% of the population in many units). Indeed, the boundaries of this area follow the perimeter of the LDDC, (London Dockland Developement Corporation), the quango agency set up by the UK Government in 1981 to regenerate the depressed Docklands area of East London. Inside this sector, the majority of the residential building have been the subject of a reconversion. One finds there as follows : a – refurbished victorian terrace houses (see figure 5, photo1) ; b – refurbished council housing as closed residences (photo 2) ; c – lofts arranged in warehouses, workshops, factories and other non residential buildings whose waterfronts are well provided (photo 3).

Above the limit of the regenerated area, the environment connotes images of urban decay and social deprivation. As a matter of fact, the western and central area of Tower Hamlets is occupied for decades by a large Bangladeshi community which escaped poverty and famine in it homeland during the seventies. The Bangladeshi found in the old East End textile district jobs and accommodations, in cheap private housing (photo 5) or in medium / high-rise social housing, erected during the sixties in the gap sites from World War II bombing (photographs 5 and 4). This community grows rapidly : in wards like Whitechapel or Banglatown, the Bangladeshi constitute now until 90% of the population of certain statistical unit. The paradox lies then in the fact that in Inner London, we can find in the same district some block of private housing that have been strongly gentrified and few streets away tenements of very unattractive social housing occupied by unemployed and economically inactive residents.

5. Conclusion

For several decades, the Greater London is the theatre of a tough gentrification that upset the social geography of the entire City. The working class, formerly statistically dominant in Inner London, is now declining for years, revealing the transition from industrial to post-industrial economy and the professionalisation/deproletarization of the London class structure. The colonization of the inner London by the new middle class settles down the old social duality that existed between the two urban belts of London: traditionally gathered in the outer suburbs, the high incomes groups have massively reinvested the Inner London through the refurbishment of old houses and large scale regeneration schemes of run-down urban areas. Simultaneously to the social reconquest of blue-collar neighborhood, the recent change of the housing market has lead to a increasing concentration of the most vulnerable populations in the most unattractive part of social housing. Due to the political choices in town planning that have been made during the XX century, this housing stock remains basically settled in Inner London, which is consequently experimenting two antagonist dynamic of settlements at the same time. Thus, the recent change of the London urban structure do not invite us to think that the social geography of a post-industrial city will be identical to the social geography of the medieval city (Ley, 1981). The fact observed rather suggest that the city remains a space characterized by a strong heterogeneity, socially and ethnically fragmented, particularly at reduced scales.

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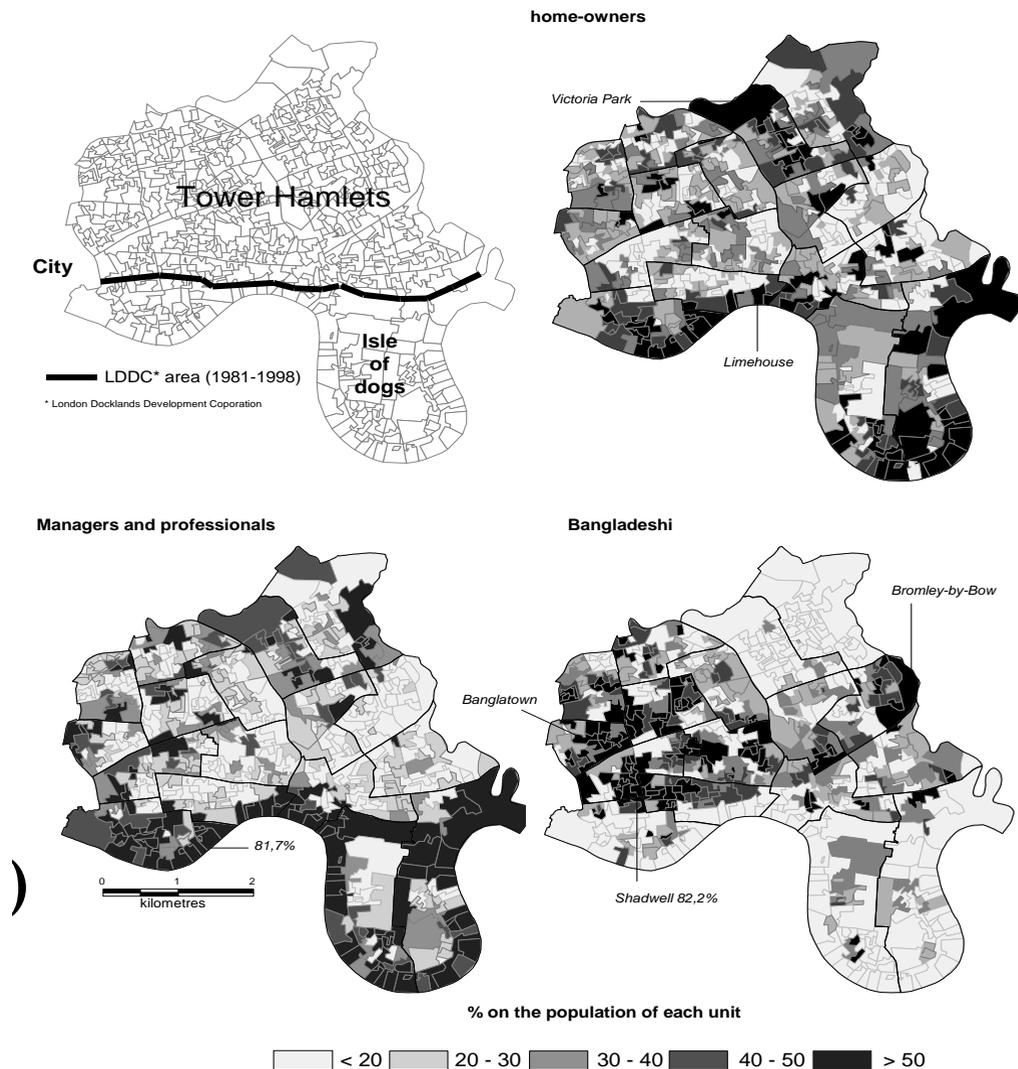
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Η γεωγραφία των χωροκοινωνικών μεταβολών και ανισοτήτων στη σύγχρονη Ελληνική πόλη

home-owners

Managers and professionals

Bangladeshi

% on the population of each unit

< 20 | 20 - 30 | 30 - 40 | 40 - 50 | > 50

Alexis Lebreton - Statistical sources : Office for national statistics
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*Figure 5. Social and ethnic division of urban space after two decades of gentrification.
Tower Hamlets, East London, 2001.*

Note : The distribution have been analysed according to the socio-economic rank, the ethnic appartenance of the population and the housing occupancy. The data used have been extracted from from the 2001 census (*Office of Population Censuses and Surveys*, OPCS). The statistical units used here are the Output Areas (OAS). These spatial units were designed to have similar population sizes and be as socially homogenous as possible.

Photo 1. Converted flat. Isle of dogs, 2001.

2. Converted Flat (Council Housing). Isle of dogs, 2001..

Photo 3. Lofts, Limehouse,2001.

Photo 4. Council housing (High rise), Bromley, 1998.

Photo 5. Council housing, Shadwell, 2001.

Photo 6. Council housing,Shadwell, 2001.

Photos : Alexis Lebreton, 2001.

Figure 6. Residential typology. Tower Hamlets, East London, 2001.