REVIEW / DERLEME

Local Limits to Gentrification: Theory on the Move

Soylulaştırmaya Karşı Yerel Limitler: Dinamik Teori

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ABSTRACT

Gentrification research has long had a pivotal role in urban knowledge production. One of the consequences has been the emergence of a sizable quantity of literature pointing out the destructive processes and effects of gentrification. Yet the current terrain of gentrification research is not adequate for comprehensive understanding or to mitigate the negative outcomes of this phenomenon. This necessitates reflection upon a framework of gentrification research that is deficient in terms of context and alternative forms of the phenomenon. This article addresses this gap by exploring and critically reviewing studies and the application of the conceptualization of limited gentrification around the world. The aim was to determine shortcomings and tendencies in limited gentrification research with the goal of raising awareness about producing alternatives to pervasive gentrification and to make room for much-needed theoretical and conceptual contributions.

Keywords: Critical urban theory; gentrification; limited gentrification; resistance.

ÖZ

Soylulaştırma araştırmaları yıllara dayanan geçmişiyle kentsel bilgi üretiminde önemli bir role sahiptir. Bu bilgi üretiminin sonuçlarından biri de yıkıcı soylulaştırma süreçlerini ve bunun etkilerini gösteren büyük bir literatür oluşmasıdır. Ancak soylulaştırma araştırmalarının mevcut birikimi, bu olgunun kapsamlı olarak anlaşılması ya da olumsuz sonuçlarının hafifletilmesi için yeterli değildir. Bu durum, bağlamsallık ve soylulaştırma olgusuna karşıt alternatifler üretmek konusunda yetersiz kalan soylulaştırma araştırmalarının çerçevesini yeniden düşünmeyi gerektirmektedir. Bu makalede, limitli soylulaştırma süreçlerini odağımıza alarak, bu boşluğu irdelemekteyiz. Limitli soylulaştırmanın dünyadaki araştırmalarını ve kavramsallaştırılmasını araştırarak ve eleştirel bir bakış açısıyla inceleyerek, limitli soylulaştırma araştırmasının eksikliklerini ve eğilimlerini bulmak amaçlanmıştır. Bu araştırma, kaçınılmaz olarak nitelenen soylulaştırmaya alternatifler üretme konusunda farkındalığı arttırmayı amaçlarken aynı zamanda da çok ihtiyaç duyulan teorik ve kavramsal katkıya yer açmayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Eleştirel kent teorisi; soylulaştırma; limitli soylulaştırma; direniş.

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Introduction

After observed and coined by Ruth Glass 60 years ago, gentrification has not only turned out to be one of the buzzwords of the late century, but also "becoming increasingly influential and unfolds at a planetary scale" (Lees et al., 2016, p. 4). Especially in an era when state-led gentrification appears as a "political evolving model of urban destruction" (Günay, 2015) with serious negative impacts on urban space and urban community such as forced evictions and displacements, it is of major importance to question how gentrification could be resisted and limited. Although gentrification literature grown immensely over the time, the produced "theoretical baggage" (Lees, 2008) still fell short neither to respond to this question nor to mitigate destructive effects of this phenomena. Instead, the scholar works up to date mostly signal the 'successful' gentrification processes and their consequences by using the Western theoretical compasses and underestimating the "interdependence (all places)" and "uniqueness of all individual places" (Massey, 1994, p. 64). To deal with the problematique of gentrification, it is a must to adopt a relational and contextual perspective and push the limits of gentrification both geographically and theoretically by converting our lens to limited, failed or thwarted gentrification processes. As Peck (2015, p. 179) claims, "the test of urban theories ought to be the explanatory veracity across cases, not where they come from".

Within this context, the purpose of this article is to critically review the studies and conceptualization of limited gentrification and to find out the gaps and tendencies of general research framework of limited gentrification. In order to accomplish this goal, the first section of the article is reserved for the nuanced conceptual discussion of the theory of the gentrification by unpacking the primacy of Western context. The second section presents a critical review on existing knowledge and formulations on limited gentrification. The article concludes with critical remarks regarding the limited gentrification phenomena to expand the gentrification debate.

Critical Evolution of Gentrification

Once this process of "gentrification" starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaces and the social character of the district is changed (Glass, 1964, pp. xviiii-xix)

Starting from Glass's mentioned definition, gentrification has been continuously conceptualized and re-conceptualized in urban agenda through academic debates and theoretical enquiries in due course of changing socio-political conjuncture. Following the conventional arguments based on demand and supply-side contextualizations (see Smith, 1979, 1996; Ley, 1986, 1996; Zukin, 1987), gentrification research has been evolved over the time conceptually, empirically, ideologically and methodogically by questioning the Anglophone-oriented discourse of diverse geographies, context-depended complexity, and inadequate representation of the phenomenon.

One of the first conventional (de-facto) approaches of to this phenomenon is Neil Smith's supply side structuralist (wave) point of view (Smith, 1996). Based on rent gap theory, in which "process of disinvestment followed by revalorization" (Lees et al., 2016, p. 34), Smith theorized a three stage model for explaining gentrification by focusing on macro analysis of capital flow, especially the role of developers, mortgage lenders, real estate agents and governmental agencies (Hackworth & Smith, 2001; Smith, 2002). Urban scholars like Zukin (1987, 1989), Ley (1986,1996) and Caulfield (1989), on the other hand, framed their gentrification theories on consumer-driven, demand-side principles. According to their approach, gentrification is linked to culture and diversification of the lifestyle of the new middle class (i.e. nostalgic, authentic, gritty urban experience and consumer behavior with strong cultural capital). Having based on perfuntoryand and lack of critical engagement in framing gentrification in terms of results rather than means, this "theoretical logjam" - borrowing from Redfern (1997) - is unlocked by complementary works which rejected the distinct theoretical dualism and seek to combine these two camps by asserting the question of 'why' and 'how' in gentrification research (Clark, 1992; Lees et al., 2008).

Departing from the conventional approaches and mainstream explanatory debates and frameworks, as a result of growing theoretical inquiries and disillusionment with de facto explanations, more pluralistic understanding of gentrification started to be flourished, thus gentrification mutated through different directions in terms of forms, actors, scale and locations. However, the big epistemological break of the 1990's gentrification research was achieved, with the demise of Keynesian welfarism and vulgar nature of aggressive capitalism, by "putting the gentrification debate in the policy perspective" (van Weesep, 1994, p. 74). While the studies tried to disclose the nexus between public policy, state and gentrification, the focus of gentrification scholars shifted from cause to effect of the phenomenon. This shift was partly due to the scaling up state-led gentrification and intensifying private-led investments, but mostly as a result of unprecedented rates of displacement, unaffordability and poor economic conditions (Wyly & Hammel, 2008). Especially from the beginning of the 2000s, 'state-led gentrification' became the main and common theme of gentrification literature (Hackworth & Smith, 2001; Lees & Ley, 2008; Smith & Williams, 2013; Uitermark et al., 2007) as public policy became the main engine drive of the gentrification. While Smith (2002) analyzed this process of state-led gentrification as the "global urban strategy" from a

structuralist point of view by generalizing the relationship be-tween globalization, neoliberalism, gentrification and chang-ing role of the state; the other scholars, especially the ones that were researching outside of Anglophone conjecture, as-sociated the mutation of gentrification with a nuanced and contextual analysis of the phenomenon by adopting a more critical approach that elaborates "existing urban knowledge and formulations" (Lees et al, p. 223). This ontological awak-ening not only initiated the theoretical enquiries by means of "western centric convergence thesis" (Ma & Wu, 2005, p. 10) and "asymmetrical ignorance" (Robinson, 2003, p. 275) of gentrification theory -which assume that "gentrification moved down the urban hierarchy from First world to Second and Third world cities and not indigenous to context" (Lees et al., 2016, p. 4)- but also gave rise to "locally tuned process of gentrification". The critical urban scholars urged about the importance of particularities, the historical context, contex-tual and contingent factors of successful gentrification stories of a given locality. On the other hand, the liberation of gen-trification theory from the place confinement of Anglophone cities does not mean that we cannot have a general under-standing of gentrification. Today gentrification can be broadly defined as "the commodification of space accompanying land use changes in such a way that it produces indirect/direct/symbolic displacement of existing users and owners by more affluent groups" (Shin et al., 2016, p. 458). The key point here is to balance and build a perspective that embraces the sym-biotic relationship between generality and peculiarity.

While adopting a relational and contextual perspective helps to push the limits of gentrification away from the narrowly understood ''fossilized'' of gentrification, there is a need to convert our lens to look at ''unsuccessful'' cases of gentrifi-cation to familiarize with broader picture of the actually exist-ing gentrification that is rooted in contingent and contextual factors of limited, failed or thwarted gentrification processes. This requires decentering and distancing ourselves from the dominant explanations of gentrification including; state, de-velopers and policy instruments, let contextual factors, such as society, historicity and urban contestation, to channel us to discover new forms of gentrification. Apart from seeking to make a conceptual contribution, the uncovering of limited gentrification has another, maybe more important, mission that's to discover the ways to limit the spread of gentrifica-tion and displacement in the current time that "the domina-tion of capitalist interests continues to shut down alterna-tives of gentrification" (Lees et al, 2016, p. 5).

Reframing the Limited Gentrification

Academic enquiries on limited gentrification have been finite in terms of geographically and theoretically and "far between to date, but they are growing internationally" (Lees & Ferreri,

2016, p. 2). Starting from Jane Jacob's (1961) fight with ' un-slumming' in NYC, Anglophone academics began to work on resistance to gentrification non-holistically that address only one aspect or factor of the phenomenon. These scattered and reductant researches, which stewed over to maintain the low income population in the inner city, principally focused on urban policy (Marcuse, 1984, 2013; Marcuse et al., 1986; Wyly & Hammel, 2008) and anti-gentrification resistance pol-itics and movements (Hartman, 1984; Robinson, 1995; Smith, 1996) as they were accepted as the most prominent factors of limited gentrification.

Despite these few researches on limited gentrification, more comprehensive and systematic approach, as an answer to the need for a sound analysis of the phenomena, firstly done by Shaw (2005) and then Ley and Dobson (2008). Focusing on three countries: United States, Canada and Australia, Shaw (2008) reviewed the limited gentrification under four major titles: local housing characteristics, housing tenures, embed-ded local communities, local government. Following Shaw's study, Ley and Dobson (2008) argued the context of impeded gentrification in Vancouver under three main headings: im-paired supply, policy response, community mobilization and resistance. However, this complementary research path fell into disuse by contemporary gentrification studies, which based their arguments in non-holistic research and focused on particular set of factors. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these contemporary reductant researches are differ from the previous ones as their understanding of the process become more critical and more linked to local contextual factors. While Anglophone academics like Walks and August (2008) and Levy et al. (2007) solely focused on the role of lo-cal public policy to limit gentrification, Lees and Ferreri (2016) and Maeckelbergh (2013) addressed political resistance as the main factor of limited gentrification. Some academics like Lees (2014) and Newman and Wyly (2006) merged these two factors to examine the limited gentrification.

One of the reasons of this non-holistic research approach is related to ambiguity of contextual factors, which cannot be named as precise ingredients that could create potential for being facilitator and limiter of the gentrification, as a result of different local conditions. Another one is connected to dom-ination and growing literature in Latin America on limited gentrification and resistance to gentrification. This is partly related to the fact that the understanding of gentrification in Latin America is linked to class struggle and "symbolic and/or material displacement of low-income people" (Rodríguez & Di Virgilio, 2016, p. 4). In reference to resistance to gentrifica-tion while Cabannes et al. (2010) and Janoschka and Sequera (2016) discussed the social movements, other Latin scholars like González (2016) and Rodríguez and Di Virgilio (2016) emphasized the importance of public policy to limit gentri-

fication. Additionally, recent works of Zukin et al. (2015a) and Zukin et al. (2015b) gentrification has opened up a new perspective to gentrification studies on the role of media as both facilitator and limiter of gentrification.

As the literature suggests, enquires related to phenomenon have been confined to Anglophone cities and literature. Although, recently, there have been a few attempts to understand the limited gentrification processes in South American cities, the hegemony of Anglophone style approach is still very visible by the dominancy of the two contextual factors: public policy and politics of resistance. This hegemonic approach not only overshadows the complexity and diversity of the process by overlooking the other contextual factors but also hinders the future academic discussions by generalizing the phenomenon and its contextualities. However, this does not mean that there are no common roots of limited gentrification of different geographies. Indeed, similar processes may relate and can occur in various urban spaces and learning from other contexts could very powerful but knowing that contextual factors are rooted in their own context, we should keep in mind that these limiting factors of gentrification "are not exclusive of one another. On the contrary, they can occur in combined and/or symbiotic ways. They may also develop at different times and scales" (Rodríguez & Di Virgilio, 2016, p. 5).

Commentary

"Critical urban learning involves questioning existing urban knowledge and formulations" (Lees et al., 2016, p. 222). Prescribing the Lees et al. (2016) words, this literature review tried to illustrate and analyze the diverse limited gentrification processes and contextual factors of it that are rooted in different geographies. By this point, it should come as no surprise that digging in the literature not only enabled us to discern the weak, missing and insufficient points of limited gentrification studies but also mirrored the two important problematic points, which are hegemony of Anglophone literature and context based approach, at the heart of this article and academic debate.

Although this critical literature review tried to unpack the debate of limited gentrification theoretically by reframing and pushing forward the contextual factors of it, the main question of Ley and Dobson (2008, p. 2472): "can we identify social and political processes and practices that delay, divert or even block gentrification?", remained unanswered comprehensively at many diverse geographies of gentrification and literature. However, beyond the shadow of doubt, keeping asking this kind of question will open doors to future critical urban studies. It can the also serve to re-engage and rethink contextualization of gentrification in Turkish academia.

The majority of gentrification researchers in Turkey has "mostly used existing conceptual toolboxes" (Islam & Sakızlıoğlu, 2015, p. 260) like stage or wave models for exploring the dynamics of gentrification processes in Istanbul and simply tried to show the identical qualities of the process with the Anglophone world by focusing on 'core elements' of gentrification. These results in overshadowing the contextual diversity and generalizing the complex process of urban change. Thus, the trajectory of new researches, especially the ones that will be carried out in Turkish academia, should critically address the contingent factors of specific contexts by adapting bottom up approach.

By way of conclusion, while these interrogations and deliberations on gentrification have a great importance for the maturation of urban theory making and in widening the horizons for future studies, the notion of academic exploration should go beyond this. Currently in Turkey, several neighborhoods are exposed to strong state-led gentrification and as a result systematic inequalities are produced constantly. Long standing position of majority of the Turkish scholars to this process is in the form of identifying it, rather than thinking alternatives to fight with it. However, as urban scholars, this should be our urgent research agenda. We should address the "political currency" of the term by pushing the localized and realistic anti-gentrification strategies and policies.

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