

“Johannesburg has its own momentum’:
towards a vernacular theorisation of
urban change”

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This paper demonstrates the importance of contextually sensitive research and the benefits of using theoretical frameworks which make allowance for nuance and complexity in understanding urban processes and outcomes. Moving away from fixed ways of reading and analysing processes of urban renewal, such as gentrification, revanchism and neoliberal urbanism, it seeks to show how a diversity of imperatives and agendas are present and shape moments of urban change. Drawing on research conducted in inner-city Johannesburg which focussed on private-sector-led housing provision and regeneration, it shows that the process being experienced is characterised by a multiplicity of goals and practices and is giving rise to a complex, hybrid process which does not fit comfortably into pre-given categories or analytical frameworks. Rather, a vernacular form of regeneration is emerging which reflects and also responds to the diversity and contradictions of the post-apartheid moment.

The paper is structured as follows: the first section introduces readers to the inner-city. It traces the history of urban decay which defines the area and provides the foundations for the regeneration project which this paper is concerned with. The following section details the framework through which regeneration is being conceived and pursued. It summarises various authors' critiques, but also adds an alternative perspective by highlighting the role agencies specialising in funding affordable and social housing are playing in shaping the regeneration process. From here the paper proceeds to discuss the practices of housing providers, which need to be seen as products of the developmental framework introduced by funding agencies and local government. They have also arisen out of housing providers' close engagements with the socio-spatial realities of the inner-city, and thus reflect the complex nature of space, as something that is produced by dominant structures and systems, but also in turn produces actions, identities and experiences i.e. forms of what Bourdieu (1984) understands as 'habitus'. The developmental benefits of the process are further underscored by tenants' experiences and accounts of living in the inner-city, which are largely positive, as will be demonstrated. However, the process remains formulated within a market paradigm, which tempers the developmental aspects. It is consequently a complex, hybrid process which is not easily classifiable as gentrification, neoliberal urbanism or developmental

regeneration. Rather it is a mixture of the above factors, which demonstrates the complexity of space and urban processes everywhere.

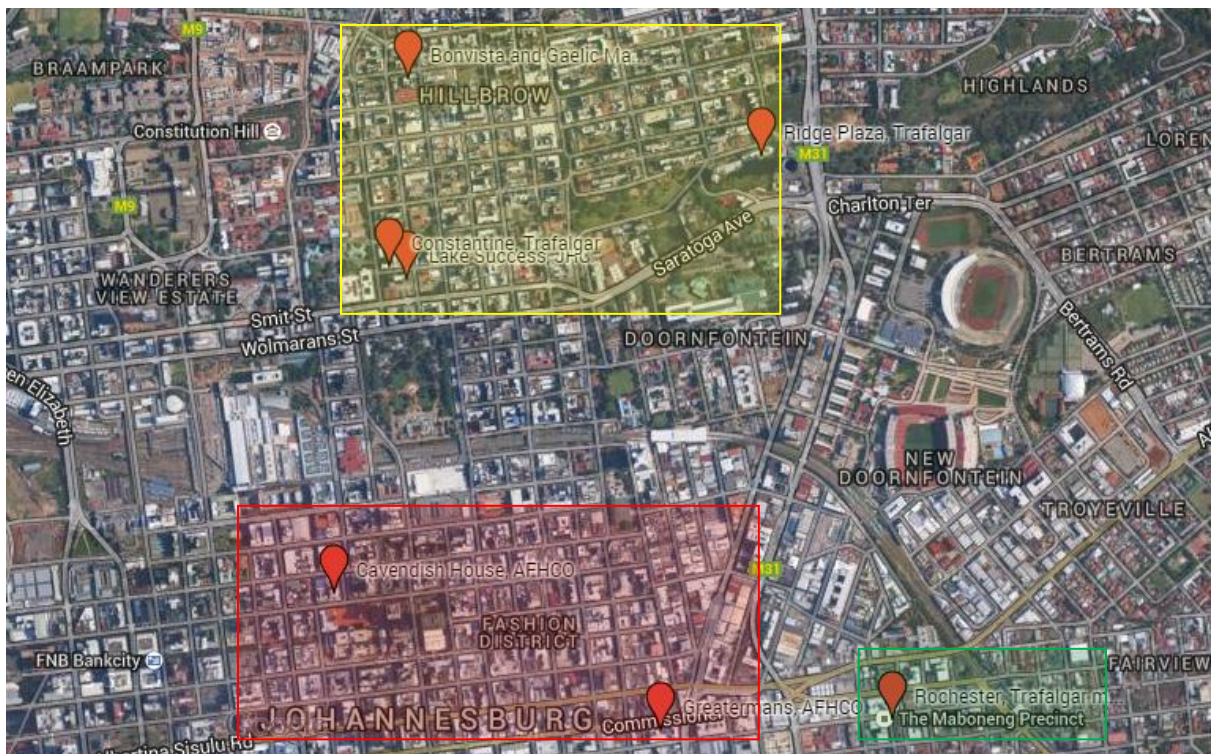
Transition in the inner-city

Johannesburg's inner-city is highly variegated and not clearly defined. It contains a mix of land-uses, economic functions and income groups. Selby in the west and Jeppestown in the east are semi-industrial areas comprising warehouses, factories and motor mechanics, whilst the central areas Braamfontein, the Central Business District (CBD) and Marshalltown host international financial and corporate entities. At the same time, within the CBD and Jeppestown there are many informal businesses and decayed buildings which have been disconnected from water and electricity supplies for several years, yet remain occupied by people with nowhere else to live. The section of Jeppestown closest to the CBD is also home to the Maboneng Precinct, a redeveloped area in which former industrial buildings have been converted into artists' studios, high-end retail outlets, restaurants and residential units¹. Other significant but less affluent residential areas include Fordsburg and Mayfair, two semi-industrial, low-density suburbs in the western part of the inner-city, home to a largely Muslim population, and Yeoville in the north, where a large Congolese community has established itself. Hillbrow and Berea, two high-rise neighbourhoods located in the heart of the inner-city, best encapsulate the momentous transitions which characterise the area. Occupying roughly 2km², these neighbourhoods have some of the highest residential densities in the city and are presently home to approximately 200 000 people. Whilst they were originally established to house the white population employed in and around the CBD, today they are home to an overwhelmingly Black African population, comprising South Africans as well as migrants from other African countries, particularly Zimbabwe and Nigeria. Hillbrow is a notorious area and for many people throughout South Africa is synonymous with danger, crime, sex work and drugs. As this paper will show, however,

¹ Research was carried out in this area, but due to its small size and negligible residential population (It currently occupies 150 000m² and houses roughly 500 residents) the CBD and suburbs such as Hillbrow and Berea were deemed to be more representative of the dynamics and processes defining the inner-city at present and thus receive greater attention.

it is also an area which is currently experiencing transformative changes and is increasingly becoming home to a stable, cohesive black residential population.

This article is based on research conducted in the CBD, Jeppestown, Hillbrow and Berea over nine months. Research involved interviews with housing providers in these areas, as well as government officials, security personnel, housing supervisors and tenants living in renovated buildings. Interviews were supplemented by ethnographic observation carried out in the course of living in the inner-city, which included attending community events such as football days and holiday programmes for children, planning meetings, security shifts and street patrols. The aim of the research was to interrogate the effects private-sector-led security and housing provision are having on the inner-city and the communities living in it. Below is a map depicting the central regions of the inner-city and marking the locations of residential buildings in which research was carried out:



The inner-city has always been at the forefront of the making of the South African social and political order (Burawoy & van Holdt 2012) and has undergone dramatic changes since the end of apartheid. It originally embodied and formed the basis of the country's system of racially oppressive capitalism but today stands as one of the most palpable sites of post-apartheid racial transformation. The city developed in conjunction with the late-19th and early-20th century gold mining boom (Beavon 2004). Under the colonial and apartheid regimes it flourished but was maintained as a racially segregated area, with the presence of black people² highly regulated and restricted (Chipkin 1993; Mbembe 2008). However, following the 1976 uprisings in Soweto, the area began to experience increased racial transformation and residential and capital flight as the white population became increasingly uncertain about the future (Morris 1999a). The exodus of businesses and residents accelerated throughout the 1980s, eventually leaving the area in a state of neglect, overrun with empty shops, abandoned buildings and decayed infrastructure.

As white businesses and residents abandoned the area and segregationist laws weakened, large numbers of black people began to move in. There was a severe shortage of housing for black people in the townships. Furthermore, as the political climate became more rebellious and fractious these areas were overrun by violence and turmoil, promoting people to seek housing in the more peaceful central city, even though this violated apartheid zoning laws and placed them at risk of eviction (Morris 1999a; Winkler 2006). The first black people to move into the inner-city were predominantly Indian and Coloured and were generally well-educated and relatively wealthy (Crankshaw & White 1995). Their relocation created tensions but was tolerated in suburbs such as Hillbrow. However, as conditions in the townships worsened, Black Africans moved into the area in greater numbers, accelerating the exodus of white people (Morris 1999b). The change in the racial composition of the inner-city was

² In this paper the term 'black' is used to refer collectively to all the different racial groups in South Africa who were discriminated against during the colonial and apartheid periods. In cases in which more specific details are required, the terms Indian, Coloured and Black are used to differentiate the groups. This is done with the knowledge that whilst these terms are impositions and socio-political constructions, they were historically relevant to the ways in which South Africa was structured and experienced and remain salient to people's identities and engagements with the world today.

remarkably fast: in 1986 only 6% – 20 000 out of 120 000 – of Hillbrow's residents were black; by 1993 85% of its residential population was black. By 1996 only 5% was white (Tomlinson et al. 2003) and at present, whilst statistical data is scarce, almost most all of Hillbrow's approximately 200 000 are Black Africans.

Black entrants into the inner-city were generally of lower education and income levels than Indian and Coloured tenants, and had to resort to sub-letting and overcrowding apartments in order to afford rents. The increased numbers of people living in high-rise buildings put great strain on infrastructure and led to many buildings becoming overburdened and falling into disrepair (Crankshaw & White 1995). Intensifying this was the fact that financial institutions were becoming increasingly fearful of the inner-city as an investment destination and began to red-line the area, preventing landlords from improving their buildings or new investors acquiring properties (ibid). This precipitated a spiral of decay as the already-ageing buildings started to crumble under the strain. Destruction was exacerbated by opportunistic landlords who capitalised on the precarious position of black residents, charging excessive rentals and neglecting their responsibilities, secure in the knowledge that tenants whose presence was illegal were unable to challenge them. This practice became widespread and created a culture of slumlordism in the inner-city (Morris 1999c; Murray 2011). Eventually, however, tenants began to organise and resist the exploitative practices of white landlords. Buildings were vandalised by angry tenants and rent boycotts modelled on those utilised in the townships became commonplace resistance strategies (Morris 1999c). Landlords lost control of their buildings and owners of individual apartments abandoned their units, leaving many buildings with no management structures and ever-mounting utility bills. Criminal syndicates capitalised on this situation and filled the vacuum in rental collection and control. The collapse of infrastructure and breakdown in property relations and law and order also opened up space for other criminals (Leggett 2003). By the mid-1990s property prices in the area had plummeted, the majority of shops and businesses had fled and buildings had become slums, drug dens and brothels. Local government, overburdened with city-wide challenges and staggering inequalities

inherited from the apartheid era, had given up all control over and efforts to maintain the area (Winkler 2006).

Regenerating the inner-city: experiments and opportunities

However, the inner-city is also a significant symbol of South Africa's racial transition and the emergence of new forms of African urbanity (Mbembe & Nuttall 2008). For the Comaroffs (2012, p.9), 'African modernity is a *vernacular*...wrought in an ongoing geopolitically situated engagement with the unfolding history of the present [italics in the original]'. It is always in-process and novel (Pieterse 2010). Thus, as much as urban processes and experiences within Africa are shaped by external and macro-structural forces, they are also formed by the creative practices and agency of local actors responding to the contemporary worlds they face and appropriating, reworking and improvising with remnants inherited from the past (Simone 2001). Yet urban scholarship often runs the risk of losing this sense of dynamism, experimentation and constant becoming putatively global terms such as gentrification, revanchism and neoliberal urbanism come to define the language and analytical scope of scholars working in a variety of contexts, including the post-colonial world.

Western scholarship, even when critical, remains bounded in its own frames of reference, forms of knowledge and language (Chakrabarty 2000). It consequently is unable to come to grips with the motivating logics and impulses behind much social action outside of the West. As the Comaroffs (2012, p.3), citing Chakrabarty (2000, p.7), explain, 'Diverse, variously animated life-worlds have to be translated into the "universal and disenchanted language of sociology" whose telos decrees: "First in Europe, then elsewhere"'. Through this mode of thinking the complexity, dynamism and multiplicity of Southern societies is lost and they become inserted into a form of trajectorism (Appadurai 2012) which leaves little room for innovation and experimentation or deviation from the predominant norm emanating from the West. Thus urban processes come to be framed within or labelled according to the experiences of Western cities, such as revanchism or gentrification, and spaces for alternative,

contextually-embedded experiences, forms of critique and theorisation diminish (Robinson 2003; Parnell & Robinson 2012).

These limitations are demonstrated clearly by the changes taking place in inner-city Johannesburg. Rather than re-enforcing the global dominance of gentrification or neoliberal urbanism, the regeneration process exemplifies the experimentation and uncertainty of post-colonial social orders. In the early 2000s local government renewed its interest in the area and initiated a process of regeneration. This was also the time in which neoliberal policies and practices became entrenched in South Africa (see Marais 2001; Bond 2003; Gumede 2007) and consequently came to shape the ways in which regeneration was conceived and pursued. Whilst there is no single national or local policy on urban regeneration (HDA 2013), the various strategy and policy documents which contribute to local government's approach make it clear that the overarching emphasis is on attracting private investment and increasing the value of land in the inner-city (City of Johannesburg 2007; Winkler 2006). Local government's role is limited to boosting investors' confidence and facilitating the return of private investment (ibid). Being a fundamentally neoliberal, market-based conception of urban improvement, which sees the private sector as the key drivers of renewal, it has therefore come in for its fair share of criticism. Beall et al. (2000) and Bremner (2000; 2004) argue that the regeneration process places too much emphasis on achieving World Class or Global City status, instead of poverty alleviation, creating employment and assisting informal traders. Murray (2008, p.46) complains that the rush to attract private developers parcelled the city into 'privatised fiefdoms' which negate any sense of public space. Winkler (2009) argues that the interests of private investors are privileged above those of local communities and the poor, and that the regeneration process is another iteration of the global spread of gentrification.

The prominence of businesses' influence has been exacerbated by the proliferation of City Improvement Districts (CIDs). These are local variations of the Anglo-American Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) (Peyroux 2008), which are drivers of

entrepreneurial urbanism and the privatisation of public space (Ward 2006; 2007). CID districts are criticised for further fragmenting an already unequal and divided city (Bénit-Gbaffou et al. 2012; Didier et al. 2012). Their use of privatised cleaning, maintenance and security services entrenches differential access to resources and amenities and makes the disparities between areas which are controlled by private interests and those which have not attracted investment even more stark (ibid). Security personnel in CIDs are also shown to focus a great deal of attention on policing ‘unwanted’ populations, particularly the homeless and beggars (Berg 2004; Peyroux 2006; Paasche et al. 2013). Furthermore, many people have been evicted from buildings prior to their refurbishment (COHRE 2005). Therefore there clearly is much to criticise and global trends, neoliberalism and revanchist urbanism can all be seen to be shaping the area.

At the same time, progressive and developmental changes should also be recognised. The process unfolding not only seeks to increase property values and investment, but is also achieving socially developmental goals, for instance in the distinctive way in which the rent-gap in the area has been utilised. The rent-gap has been highlighted as a decisive factor initiating the gentrification process (Smith 1987). Whilst cultural factors and the role of the state are also influential (see Butler & Robson 2003; Ley 2003; Harris 2008; 2012), a general feature across all incidences of gentrification is a depressed property market which attracts investors who recognise the value which can be unlocked with little capital outlay (Smith 1987). The inner-city of Johannesburg certainly presents a case of a rent-gap. The property prices in the area plummeted throughout the 1990s (TA 12/02/2013). The area’s substantial infrastructure and central location, combined with local government’s neoliberal agenda, make it a potentially prime spot for the types of gentrification experienced elsewhere, including in Cape Town (Paasche et al. 2013), to emerge. However, strategic decisions and the confluence of local factors have resulted in a different form of regeneration being pursued.

After the period of decline, developers were able to purchase buildings at extremely low prices. But rather than spurring a flurry of redevelopment aimed at serving upper-class interests and tastes, this served as a catalyst for social and affordable housing to be provided. A programme initially termed the Bad Buildings Programme and later rechristened the Better Buildings Programme (BBP) worked on the principle that the City Council would repossess buildings which had fallen into decay and whose arrears amounted to more than their market value and then sell them to pre-approved developers at reduced rates (Zack et al. 2009). A condition of this programme was that companies acquiring and renovating buildings would have to cater to low-income communities. The Johannesburg Housing Company (JHC), the predominant social housing institution in the city, was able to acquire several buildings through this programme.

Social housing in South Africa caters to households earning too much to qualify for the free housing provided through the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), but too little to access housing via the market. The RDP provides housing (usually in stand-alone units located on peripheral land) to those earning below R3500 (£200) per month, whilst social housing caters for those earning between R3500 and R7000 (£400). Thus the BBP and the way the deflated property market was utilised facilitated the expansion of housing for low-income communities in the central region of Johannesburg. Being able to live centrally is a novel and desperately needed opportunity for the majority of black people. In interviews tenants enthuse about the access to transport, economic opportunities and social amenities living in the inner-city affords them. They draw stark comparisons between the inner-city and the peripheral, still impoverished townships (or locations, as they continue to be known as) and many emphasise the ways living in the inner-city has improved their lives. A tenant living in social housing represents these views when he explains "Hillbrow is the only place, the only solution. If you stay in the location the money spent on rent and transport is equal to what I pay here" (Tenant Three, Lake Success, Hillbrow, 01/03/2013). Thus the creative use of decayed properties in the inner-city not only brought about much needed physical upgrading and improvements, but also assists in integrating people into the

city's urban fabric. The private sector did not benefit from the BBP as much as social housing institutions, but were also able to acquire buildings at very low prices. In South Africa there is no subject-linked subsidy for social housing (TA 12/02/2013). Rather, there are two once-off subsidies available, the Capital Restructuring Grant and Institutional Subsidy (HDA 2013). These help cover initial capital costs and equity contributions required for development projects, after which institutions are expected to sustain themselves through commercial practices. Private sector housing providers do not qualify for these subsidies, but in the inner-city they are able to cater to low-income earners due to the low costs of acquiring properties, which effectively served as a form of subsidy (MMC 08/04/2013).

Opportunities to integrate low-income earners are also made possible by the commercial banks' persistence in red-lining the inner-city. This has created spaces for agencies specialising in financing low-income and social housing to operate. There are three agencies specialising in inner-city Johannesburg, the Trust for Urban Housing Finance (TUHF), the National Housing Finance Corporation (NHFC) and the Gauteng Partnership Fund (GPF). The latter two are direct off-shoots of government, although they operate independently, while TUHF gets its money from commercial partners and the NHFC (CM 16/04/2013). Whilst households earning between R3500 and R7000 are supported by social housing, those earning between R7000 and R14000 (£802) are left to access housing through normal market mechanisms. However, they are dismissed by banks as too risky to lend to and frequently have to resort to downward raiding, renting backyard shacks or RDP houses (Lemanski 2014). This group has come to be termed the 'gap housing market' and agencies such as the NHFC, TUHF and GPF only finance projects that will cater to people in this bracket. This focus means that the loans they provide are favourable and concerned more with the creation of sustainable housing than with profitability (KN 12/06/2013). Companies securing loans are given lenient terms and extended repayment periods. NHFC loans to private developers are charged at the prime interest rate plus 2%, whilst social housing institutions are charged only the prime interest rate (TH 09/03/2013). The GPF grants loan recipients a three-to-four year grace period on repayments to ensure that the projects become sustainable (KN

12/06/2013). As there is no rent control in South Africa financial organisations insist that projects they fund cannot charge starting rentals above R4500, and limit annual increases to 8% (TH 09/03/2013). Housing developers still have to ensure that their projects are profitable so that loans can be repaid and their businesses can survive, but these lenient conditions do give them room to manoeuvre and help maintain rentals at rates which people with restricted incomes can afford.

Funding agencies, whilst conscious of and constrained by the need to make loans which will be commercially viable, still place socially oriented development above ruthless property investment. The CEO of TUHF explains, “We often turn down projects where the product is too high-end, this million rand plus kind of stuff. It’s got to be low-to-moderate income” (PJ 07/02/2013). They also support landlords who are committed to improving the inner-city and working with tenants: “We have this saying, if a good landlord comes in with a bad deal we’ll work with him to get it right; if a bad landlord comes in with a good deal we won’t touch him with a 45 foot barge pole” (ibid). It is apparent that a form of developmental regeneration is being pursued, albeit through the market. As a hybrid form of regeneration with multiple agendas and outcomes it complicates or challenges conventional readings of urban processes, resonating with research carried out and conclusions reached by Miraftab (2007), Lipeitz (2008), Wang (2011), Parnell and Robinson (2012) and Houghton (2013). Together these cases add complexity to our readings of a variety of urban processes which, although sharing similar features to those identified by scholars concerned with gentrification, revanshism or harmful neoliberal urbanism, still remain distinct. Research thus needs to be attuned to the variety of outcomes resulting from the localised, vernacular strategies which actors embedded in complex societies and urban settings formulate as responses to the conditions facing them (Bernt 2012; Maloutas 2012).

The funding agencies active in Johannesburg encourage landlords to be sensitive to the needs of tenants who survive on limited incomes. This fosters a culture in which housing providers are more inclined to engage with their tenants and take their socio-

economic circumstances into account. Thus, whilst housing companies conduct thorough background checks on potential tenants and require proof of employment or income, bank statements and one month's rent upfront (demands which are onerous for many inner-city residents), they also permit one person to take out the head lease on an apartment and then sublet to others. It is common for two or three families to rent three-bedroom apartments or for two adults to share one-room apartments. This helps overcome the disparity between the rentals charged and the average incomes of the inner-city population (see SERI 2013) and makes housing accessible to a wider range of people, including those who earn informal incomes and migrants. Housing providers thus adopt pragmatic approaches which adapt to the needs and realities of the inner-city, rather than impose new forms of urbanism on it. In interviews several developers emphasise the importance of providing housing to the low-income market above high-end developments. Referring to the upmarket Maboneng precinct, which arguably does resemble gentrification seen in other parts of the world, one housing developer points out that in the inner-city "there is a market for the young yuppie environment but it's not a huge market, whereas the need for affordable housing is massive" (RP 08/02/2013). Another developer dismisses Maboneng as "not viable" and states that his company's focus is on "safe, solid, basic accommodation" which is far better suited to the needs of the majority of people seeking housing in the inner-city (NB 24/04/2013).

Developers are also coming to take pride in playing a role in improving the inner-city and their tenants' lives, seeing themselves as positively shaping broader post-apartheid South Africa. One of the developers quoted above he exclaims that his company is "helping to start rejuvenate the city and provide desperately needed housing" and that this "gives a great feeling about what we are doing; we're contributing to a country that needs everything it can get" (RP 07/08/2012). Another developer echoes this and emphasises the wider benefits of housing upgrading:

"people *need* a living in the city, people *need* a better place to stay, people *need* work. Because it doesn't end there; the more we get more buildings, the more we able to create employment, even in the buildings here, for caretakers, cleaning staff, security. So this is what I believe in: to say whatever I do I'm

not helping only me, I'm creating jobs and I'm becoming part" (SR 10/06/2013).

This feeling of pride in contributing to the betterment of the area and society was shared by all interviewees, indicating that the regeneration process is being valued not only for the commercial success it has brought, which has been substantial, but also for the developmental results it is yielding. This makes it possible to speak of the emergence of a new way of relating to the inner-city and its population, which can be theorised as a new form of habitus. Bourdieu (2005, p.43) defines habitus as 'a system of *dispositions*, that is of permanent manners of being, seeing, acting and thinking, or a system of *long-lasting* (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata or structures of conception and action [*italics in the original*]'. It refers to the socially-learned evaluations, attitudes and actions which members of particular social groups adhere to and through which they mediate their expectations and understandings of their place in society (Bourdieu 2005; Reed-Danahay 2005). It is acquired through the transmission and inculcation of norms, values systems and cultural tropes and reflects as well as reproduces the prevailing socio-cultural order.

Emerging forms of habitus

In South Africa, like all post-colonial societies, there are competing forms of social order and value systems shaping communal life (van Holt 2012; 2013). Whilst racial forms of distinction and hierarchy persist in some settings, Nutall (2008) points to the emergence of new aesthetic forms which place greater emphasis and worth on blackness or black identities. She demonstrates that a new post-apartheid cultural habitus and system of distinctions is emerging, particularly in urban South Africa. Housing providers in the inner-city can be seen to be shaped by this new socio-cultural milieu. They have a close engagement with the area and the populations residing in it and, in contrast to the conservative banks and ruthless slumlords, are able to appreciate and embrace the racial and cultural transition which the area has undergone. As the person in charge of new developments at JHC explains:

“There was major panic and hysteria but when the dust settles it’s not all doom and gloom. The more we hold on to the past, the more we don’t succeed. It’s not the old CBD of banks, it’s something different. The people who were able to see that are the ones who benefited and made a difference” (MM 16/08/2012).

This appreciation for the area can be explained by the emergence of a new disposition towards the inner-city and the role it plays in post-apartheid South Africa, and the ways in which funding agencies nurture this. The majority of housing providers and investors are white. Yet they demonstrate a break with racist assumptions about and reactions to the city and its changing context. There is acknowledgement that the era of racial separation and the preservation of the inner-city as an idealised European space is over and that a new population with new needs, cultural practices and ways of being urban now inhabits it. Housing providers’ dispositions are, therefore, reflective of the new democratic dispensation and socio-political context they are embedded in and demonstrate the ways in which this temporal context produces a particular habitus. Even in conditions which resemble closely the neoliberal framework which has become hegemonic across the globe, alternative social priorities, policy frameworks and cultural and contextual settings are able to temper the harmful side of market-led regeneration and produce alternative and complex identities and outcomes.

This habitus is also a reflexive response to the material and spatial conditions of the inner-city. Whilst Bourdieu largely neglects the spatial aspects of habitus (Painter 2000; Savage 2011), Holt (2008) argues that habitus is inherently spatialised and embodied, and emerges out of people’s physical encounters with and in space. This becomes increasingly apparent when elements from Lefebvrian theory are added to the analytic equation. Lefebvre emphasises that space is a product of the social relations constituted by capitalism, but also argued that space reproduces these relations through the ways in which it structures and gives form to lived reality and practices (Schmid 2008; Stanek 2011). In this conception space is not simply where things happen, but is a constitutive

element of the form society takes and the actions people engage in. It influences why and how things happen and is therefore an integral element in the formation of people's habitus.

In Johannesburg the practices adopted by housing providers respond to and reflect the particular spatial conditions which they encounter. The inner-city, despite the process of severe destruction and decay, is not a blank canvas onto which visions and ideals can simply be imposed, no matter how dominant and influential the actors involved. Rather, it is a social space that inculcates attitudes, dispositions, worldviews and practices. For some segments of South African society, particularly white members, the decay represents all the dangers which they associated with the transition to a multi-racial, democratic period and many have sought refuge in far-removed gated communities (see Morris 1999c; Czeglédy 2003; Popke & Ballard 2004; Duca 2013). In contrast, housing providers' close proximity to and engagement with the inner-city leads them to adopt more pragmatic responses to its current forms of urbanity. As one (white) housing developer complains, "Everyone told me I was nuts [to invest in the inner-city]; most white people are scared of Hillbrow, where there are 500 black people; it's just prejudice" (PL 13/09/2012). Those active in regeneration efforts, however, have accepted the fact that the inner-city has changed and have embraced its status as an African urban centre.

Hall (2015) describes how migrants in Peckham, London subdivide shops to accommodate a variety of businesses and how these practices symbolise and facilitate the area's super-diversity. Worryingly, she also notes the local council's attempts to ban these practices. Similar creative leasing and retail strategies have also become commonplace in Johannesburg's inner-city (AS 14/05/2013), but property owners have proven to be less resistant to them, again demonstrating their abilities to adjust to the area's changing nature and newly-constituted multiplicity. One developer explains that "in the CBD-proper, in the east, you see a lot of Ethiopians, foreigners, the signs aren't even in English. We cater for those people" (MM 16/08/2012). In describing the

commercial and social fabric of the inner-city he highlights two buildings in which Somali and Ethiopian traders have established businesses and states emphatically, “the commercial element is fantastic” (ibid). They therefore accept the re-use and adaptation of inner-city spaces to suit new purposes and needs.

Their habitus and ways of engaging with the space are also influenced by the area’s social problems. For example, when JHC’s CEO is asked why the institution concentrates its efforts in the inner-city, she responds:

“If you look at the amount of people that live here and work here, in absolutely horrendous conditions, why not the inner-city?!...[T]here were a lot of slumlords within the inner-city, old investors abandoned their buildings, slumlords moved in, people paid a fortune to these slumlords but lived in absolutely horrendous conditions, so [the focus] was to try and create quality units where people need it, within the market that we defined, and also play a role in urban regeneration” (ES 06/02/2013).

There is a strong emphasis on the materiality of the work housing providers are engaged in and the role spatial conditions played in shaping their priorities. Thus their habitus is a product of a wider socio-political context but is also firmly formed in space and in response to the experiences, needs and possibilities which the inner-city imposes on them. As one housing provider exclaims, “We’re here, we live it everyday!” (NB 24/04/2013). It is thus clear that the motivations driving the regeneration process and the results it is engendering have specific temporal and spatial dimensions (Lees 2012), which need to be taken into account and used to inform analyses of the process.

The distinctive habitus motivating actors involved in regeneration and housing provision is reflected in the way the head of a private security company which specialises in policing Hillbrow and Berea, reflects on the area. He is an Afrikaans former policeman and exemplifies the disposition animating actors involved in urban regeneration when he exclaims “there’s nothing not to love about the inner-city, about

Hillbrow! For you to stand on a building that's 20 stories high, see the sunset go down, where else are you going to experience that? London? Paris? Where else?" (HdK 21/05/2013). This sentiment, whilst perhaps romanticised, is also significant in representing the localised forms of habitus which the inner-city has produced. Here the inner-city is embraced on its own terms. Rather than being read in terms of its deficits and failures to meet the standards of European urbanity, or achievements in this quest, it is appreciated for its own idiosyncrasies, experiences and possibilities. It is hence vernacularised.

Belonging and becoming in the inner-city

The vernacular form which regeneration is taking is further evinced by the new forms of African urbanism it is facilitating. Since the end of apartheid Johannesburg has been inserted into the African continent through the constant flows of people and goods from the wider continent finding their way into the inner-city and out again. Rather than being an insulated bastion of segregation, it is now intertwined with the rest of the continent and the upheavals and uncertainties prevailing in other countries. Hence it is shaped by multiple elsewheres, all coming together in the spaces of the inner-city and producing a lively, dynamic urban centre (Mbembe & Nuttall 2008). The centripetal role which the city plays in the lives and imaginations of people across the continent is captured by a Zimbabwean tenant living in Berea. With passion he recounts

“The whole of Africa when you talk about Johannesburg – not South Africa, *Johannesburg* – it's like you are talking about the *mecca* because this is where everything is happening, this is where they think there are opportunities, here in Johannesburg. So you'll hear them talking about Cape Town or Durban but everyone is talking about Johannesburg the most”.

Whilst xenophobia is still frequent, some tenants residing in the inner-city have come to flourish in this environment and have gained more worldly, cosmopolitan forms of habitus. Another Zimbabwean tenant describes the community living in the inner-city as follows:

“It’s multicultural. The balance is even, you get all cultures here, you get all races...So it shows how much diversity we have, which I appreciate and that [xenophobia] has never been a problem here because it shows that acceptance within the integrated societies” (Tenant Five, Ridge Plaza, Berea, 30/05/2013).

The new-found cohesion in the inner-city can largely be attributed to the success of the regeneration process, which has placed strong emphasis on community-building and enhancing the safety of the area. The improved urban environment means that competition for resources and services is less intense than in the informal settlements, which experience the most violent forms of xenophobia. An employee at a social housing company emphasises the positive relationship between urban regeneration and cohesion in the area when he reflects:

“The definition for us as a whole is seeing lasting impact, changing neighbourhoods and areas. We have done great things where what used to happen and where we are now are worlds apart. We are creating homes, working with communities. We’re a property management company, sure, but overall it’s really about community development” (MM 16/08/2012).

Many tenants spoke about how the area has become safer and more welcoming. This change has been brought about by security companies such as Bad Boyz and initiatives like the eKhaya Project. Both are tied strongly to and financed by housing companies, who together have established two Residential Improvement Districts (RIDs) in Hillbrow and Berea. The RIDs are structured on the same premise as the CIDs but are geared towards residential needs and the liveability of the areas, rather than commercial functions (Peyroux 2012). Under their auspices two parks and a theatre devoted to life skills and education have been established and holiday programmes for children are organised.

Regeneration efforts are allowing low-income and working class black families to gain stability and security, as well as conveniently-located housing. The positive impact is

underscored by the ways tenants' households have changed. Whereas in the 1990s and 2000s the majority of people living in social housing were single males, at present the majority of tenants' households are couples or nuclear families with children (JHC n.d.). 74% (42) of the tenants interviewed live with their families, whilst only 18% (10) live alone or with people they are not related to (data was unavailable for five interviewees). Regeneration is thus helping to reverse the dispersal and break-up of African households, which apartheid engendered, allowing black families to occupy a formerly racially exclusive area. Viewing these changes within the broader South African context thus allows for greater appreciation of their significance. One tenant underscores the transformative benefits of the process and the relation between residing in the inner-city and freedom. He recounts

“when there was this new political dispensation in 1994 the people – I’m talking about black people – started moving from the townships...Berea, Hillbrow is first place where black people came when they were coming from townships so it was like a *wow* thing, now suddenly we had this freedom, now we could live in these buildings which previously black people were denied so it was unbelievable! (Tenant One, Ridge Plaza, Berea, 30/05/2013).

Sadly this new freedom coincided with severe urban and social decay. Currently, however, not only are people able to live in buildings in the inner-city, they are able to do so in relative peace and security.

Conclusion

It is therefore apparent that, whilst this process is not without its flaws, hindrances or negative consequences, it is having developmental and transformative effects for the area and some of the people living in it. Previously the inner-city exemplified the destructive nature of cycles of disinvestment and racialised socio-spatial marginalisation. At present it is supporting new forms of African family life and ways of being urban, and is thus a powerful instantiation of transformation. As such it is a case which adds impetus to calls for urban researchers to be aware of and open to the diverse impulses, tensions and outcomes which coexist in and shape urban spaces and

societies (Roy 2009; Robinson 2011; Comaroff & Comaroff 2012; Lemanski 2014). Furthermore, it demonstrates the need for scholars to use vernacular forms of theorisation and interpretation which are able to reflect local concerns, agendas, life-worlds or forms of habitus.

In a context in which several of the features which have precipitated gentrification in other parts of the world are present, a more complicated process is unfolding. Features which lay the foundations for potential gentrification are mitigated by local concerns, idiosyncracies and ambitions, just as the benefits of the process are constrained by the prevailing socio-economic and political conditions. The coming together of the post-apartheid moment, and the particular social ethos this is characterised by, alongside the specific challenges and problems of the inner-city has animated dispositions, ideals and practices which are at odds with those often highlighted in academic literature as globally pervasive. At the same time, developmental ambitions cannot necessarily escape the constraints of the neoliberal period. This case study therefore draws attention back to the particularities of individual cases, and serves as a reminder that multiple impulses and factors prevail in all societies. These are not accurately accounted for within pre-formulated labels or evaluations such as gentrification or neoliberal urbanism and the need for flexible, vernacular approaches to urban research and theorisation is again emphasised. As one interviewee explained, “Johannesburg has its own momentum” (PL 13/09/2012); it is evolving in novel, unexpected ways and reflects the particular complexities of the post-apartheid/postcolonial moment as well as the general dynamism of cities everywhere. If research is only concerned with discovering the comparable, generalisable features of urban societies, and thus mobilising concepts or terms which supposedly have global reach, the particularities and possibilities inherent in individual cases is lost. Along with this, the ability to think differently and to understand alternatives, variance and experimentation in all urban societies is also lost. Rather, openness to alternative forms of motivation, approaches, actions and forms of academic critique holds potential for more nuanced and engaged forms of scholarship and learning.

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