

Gentrification as global habitat: a process of class formation or corporate creation?

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The relationship between gentrification and globalisation has recently become a significant concern for gentrification scholars. This has involved developing an understanding of how gentrification has become a place-based strategy of class (re)formation during an era in which globalisation has changed sociological structures and challenged previously established indicators of social distinction. This paper offers an alternative reading of the relationship between gentrification and globalisation through examining the results of a mixed method research project which looked at new-build gentrification along the River Thames, London, UK. This research finds gentrification not to be distinguished by the gentrifier-performed practice of habitus within a 'global context'. Rather, the responsibility for gentrification, and the relationship between globalisation and gentrification, is found to originate with capital actors working within the context of a neoliberal global city. In order to critically conceptualise this form of gentrification, and understand the role of globalisation within the process, the urban theory of Lefebvre is drawn upon.

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Introduction

The relationship between gentrification and globalisation has become of increasing concern for gentrification scholars. In the post-1993 'third wave' of gentrification (Hackworth and Smith 2001) the latest forms of the process have often been described as consequences and manifestations of a host of global processes. This has included the identification of a global profusion of gentrification (Atkinson and Bridge 2005), the claim that gentrification serves the middle classes by helping establish identity in the metropolitan habitus of the global city (Butler 2002), an understanding of gentrification as a strategy of social capital accumulation based upon an appeal to all things global and cosmopolitan (Rofe 2003), Smith's (2002) assertion that gentrification is now a revanchist, neoliberal urban policy agenda that has stretched around the globe, and the explanation of how flows of global financial capital have become residentially manifest as an elite group

of gentrifiers (Lees 2003; Butler and Lees 2006). Furthermore, in answer to whether we can identify a 'global gentrifier', Bridge concludes negatively, since those 'global supergentrifiers' in global cities which have been central in connecting the two processes 'have very different aesthetic affiliations distinct from something we might call gentrification' (2007, 45) and a coherent process of gentrification cannot be identified across space. In each of these studies we therefore find a different relationship between gentrification and globalisation.

For Smith, gentrification has become a global urban strategy:

to differing degrees, gentrification [had] evolved by the 1990s into a crucial urban strategy for city governments in consort with private capital in cities around the world. (2002, 440)

Here, gentrification has become bound-up in a global circuit of urban policy transfer where the promises of inner city 'revitalisation' and 'renaissance'

have lured countless national and metropolitan governments into promoting a return of the middle classes back to the city. Neoliberal class and political alliances with a global reach are therefore seen as central to gentrification. This politico-economic focused interpretation has not been repeated by others where globalisation processes have been more associated with transformations in sociological processes and the role that gentrification plays in middle class identity formation (Butler 2002 2007; Rofe 2003).

Butler finds gentrification to be a process of class (re)formation:

[E]ssentially my argument is that gentrification is a 'coping' strategy by a generation which, whatever its other differences, is reacting not only to changed social and economic circumstances but also against its own familial upbringing. (2002, 4)

It is the context of London as global city which gives rise to much of this changed circumstance: 'our respondents chose where to live as part of a 'coping strategy' to deal with living in a globalising metropolitan centre' (2002, 21). From this perspective, the relationship between globalisation and gentrification therefore appears distinctly led by the agency of middle class actors eager to (re)establish class identity through the place-based performance of habitus. Furthermore, Butler has given primacy to conceptualising gentrification as a process of class formation through calling for gentrification to

decouple itself from its original association with the deindustrialization of metropolitan centres such as London and its associations with working class displacement. (2007, 162)

As a result, gentrification is seen to function

as an important way of understanding the mediations between global processes and flows, on the one hand, and the construction of identities in particular localities, on the other. (2007, 162)

In addition to politico-economic and sociological characterisations of a global form of gentrification, others have viewed processes of globalisation as being central to gentrification's proliferation:

[G]entrification is now global. It is no longer confined to western cities. Processes of neighbourhood change and colonisation represented by an increasing concentration of the new middle classes can be found in Shanghai as well as Sydney, or Seattle. (Atkinson and Bridge 2005, 1)

Here it is claimed that gentrification now acts as a colonising force, with the globalised process consistently featuring the 'privileging of whiteness, as well as the more class-based identities and preferences of urban living' (Atkinson and Bridge 2005, 1). Certain gentrification-related identities are therefore seen to have become globally mobile forces.

This paper argues that the current collection of commentaries on the relationships between gentrification and globalisation has not adequately considered how capital has been central to the creation of globalised gentrified spaces. Drawing on a multi-method study of one of the latest forms of gentrification in London, UK, the paper finds that current interpretations of the ways in which gentrification is related to, and indeed a manifestation of, globalisation are incomplete. At various stages of the gentrification process – design and planning, selling and marketing, living – global narratives¹ important to the form of urban development taking place are identified. Although these are identified in both real estate actors and gentrifiers, it is the global narratives instigated and fostered by real estate capital that are most pivotal in generating a relationship between gentrification and globalisation.

These findings contrast with much of the recent examination of the gentrification/globalisation relationship where gentrifiers themselves have been thought most responsible for fostering this association (see Butler 2002 2007; Rofe 2003). This is not to suggest that capital operates in isolation from gentrifiers or indeed that we should consider these two pivotal aspects as divisible (Warde 1991). Indeed, this research found gentrifiers active agents in the gentrification process; performing as discriminating consumers, market demand shapers and neighbourhood participants. However, the construction of gentrified urban space, and its relationship to globalisation, was found to originate with real estate actors.

The paper employs Lefebvre's (2003) urban socio-spatial theory of 'levels and dimensions' as a framework to examine how the varying elements responsible for the creation of urban space are operating in the gentrification studied. This illustrates how the presence of globalisation within gentrification is less generated by the agency-led creation of habitus (Butler 2002 2007; Rofe 2003) and more by the commodified production of habitus. The global narratives of this gentrification are found

to be symbolic of the individualistic, 'non-local' and ephemeral urbanism Lefebvre (2003, 98) found promoted by vanguard neoliberals.

Gentrification's global narratives as habitat

Henri Lefebvre postulated that society operates on three socio-spatial levels: the 'global', 'urban' and 'private'. The global level is state and society:

[T]he global level accommodates the most general, and therefore the most abstract, although essential, relations, such as capital markets and the politics of space... Simultaneously social (political) and mental (logical and strategic), this global level projects itself into part of the built domain; buildings, monuments, large-scale urban projects, new towns. (2003, 79)

For Lefebvre the global level is dominated by the logics of capital. The 'social orders' which arise from industrial growth 'that is, the ideologies and institutions established at level G [global], the state level' (2003, 90) are seen to be dominant shapers of urban space:

the urbanist submits to the requirements of industrialization in spite of his reticence and awareness of, or desire for, something else. As for the architect, he condenses... existing social relationships. Whether he wants to or not, the architect builds on the basis of financial constraints (salaries and payments). (2003, 90)

At the global level, the imperatives of exchange value and capital accumulation are therefore dominant forces which shape urban space.

According to Lefebvre, the urban level represents an intermediary level; those spaces which are not 'global' creations (i.e. spaces of politico-economic power) or 'private' spaces (i.e. privately owned buildings), namely 'streets, squares, avenues, public buildings such as city halls, parish churches, schools, and so on' (2003, 80). The urban level acts as a mediator and 'provides the characteristic unity of the social "real," or group' (2003, 80). Urban space therefore offers a terrain for 'defense or attack, for struggle' (2003, 89) between the global and private; the authoritarian and individual. The urban level offers a space of social collectivism whereby an alternative to the totalitarian neoliberalism of the global level, with its related atomistic private level, can be formed and asserted.

The private level becomes manifest as 'large apartment buildings, private homes both large and small, campgrounds, shantytowns' (2003, 80). At

the private level, Lefebvre draws the distinction between 'habitat' and 'habiting':²

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, urban thought... pushed the term 'habiting' aside... It opted instead for 'habitat,' a simplified function, which limited the 'human being' to a handful of basic acts: eating, sleeping, and re-producing. These elementary functional acts can't even be said to be animal... Habitat, as ideology and practice, repulsed or buried habiting in the unconscious... Habitat was imposed from above as the application of a homogeneous global and quantitative space, a requirement that 'lived experience' allow itself to be enclosed in boxes, cages, or 'dwelling machines.' (2003, 81)

Habiting is therefore a more 'authentic' act of place-making, a lived experience (see Lefebvre's 'lived space' (1991) for the development of this set of ideas), one which is not imposed by authoritarian (global) powers which implement some kind of market or statist 'urban rationality', but rather generated by the agency of individuals.

Lefebvre argues that the capitalist city has seen the global and private domain suppress both the urban level and, as a consequence, the act of habiting. From above, the global level plans and controls space with totalitarian neoliberal passion; everything is brought under the rubric of the dominant mode of production (also see Lefebvre 1991). Whilst from below, technological and technocratic processes are seen to have generated an 'ephemeral and nomadic' private domain, defined primarily by individualism, where everyday life is dictated by the routines of industrial production. Lefebvre concludes that '[w]hether from above or from below, this would be the end of both habiting and the urban as sites of bundled opposition' (2003, 95). In short, urban space has become fundamentally transformed into a primary element in economic production and habiting becomes an obstacle for that urbanised mode of production:

The second [urban] level (M) appears to be essential... this level is nothing more but an intermediary (mixed) between society, the state, global power and knowledge, institutions, and ideologies on the one hand and habiting on the other. Wherever the global attempts to govern the local, whenever generality attempts to absorb particularities, the middle [urban] level comes into play. (2003, 89)

Such attacks on habiting and the urban level have not been found by researchers interested in the spaces created through the gentrification/globalisation relationship. In contrast to Lefebvre

(2003), who saw capitalist urban space being shaped and reshaped by powerful global level forces, when discussing gentrification in the context of globalisation many researchers have emphasised an alternative response whereby gentrifiers have reacted to global processes with the creation of identity and place (Rofe 2003; Butler 2007). This gentrification represents an agency-led establishment of urban space, community and neighbourhood in an era of heightened capitalism; it is the agency-led performance of habitus in an era of spatial transformation in social, political and economic structures.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus has become a popular tool in gentrification research. Although Bourdieu developed various evolutions of the habitus concept, it is generally understood to be

the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations. (Bourdieu 1972, 72)

In terms of gentrification, this understanding of the ways in which social structures are (re)established has been used to interpret the role of tastes, social and cultural discursive practices and judgments in the gentrification process (see Bridge 2001; Butler and Robson 2003). Specifically, it is through a set of place-based practices that gentrifiers are seen to constitute and reproduce their class position.

The habitus concept has proven to be a very productive tool for understanding how the agency of gentrifiers is centrally important in structuring social class and organising the class composition of the city. In particular, the concept has been useful for interpreting the role of architectural aesthetic in gentrification:

Whereas the dispositions of the traditional bourgeoisie are unschooled, tacit, unreflexive – the aesthetic practices of the new middle class are public, discursive and self-conscious. The very visibility of their aesthetic practices, their eye to fashion and trend setting solidly positioned is the very stuff of the gentrification aesthetic. (Bridge 2001, 211–12)

Habitus has also been used to understand how gentrifiers deploy a series of social capital resources in their neighbourhood in order to generate, and associate with, certain place-based identities (Butler and Robson 2003). These structuring cultural identities have also been identified as being increasingly 'global' in character across various types of gentrifiers:

there is some suggestion that those in the private sector are more likely to embrace global culture and those in the public to escape it, the evidence for this is weak. It would seem that the evidence for this is therefore not to be, for the most part, rooted socio-demographically but more in the complex structure of ideas, beliefs and attitudes that not only constitutes the metropolitan habitus and its divisions but also structures choices about personal identity. (Butler 2002, 23–4)

This paper examines the relationship between gentrification and globalisation at various stages of the urban process. It finds a form of gentrification less defined by habiting and habitus and more representative of Lefebvre's (2003) habitus. Gentrification is found to be closely associated with globalisation either through connections manufactured by corporate developers (i.e. construction of habitus) or lifestyle choices of gentrifiers which generate an 'urban' level which is distinctly 'abstract'³ (Lefebvre 1991). The gentrification studied, and its connections to globalisation, is therefore less a sociological coping strategy or form of class reproduction (see Butler 2002 2007; Rofe 2003) and more as a capital-led colonisation of urban space with relations to globalisation in terms of architectural design, investment strategies, social-cache-boosting marketing strategies and 'non-local global' lifestyles.

Examining gentrification's global narratives

As a contemporary form of gentrification, the new-build type (Davidson and Lees 2005) does not readily resemble the process of urban change originally described by Ruth Glass (1964) as 'gentrification'. Gentrification's changing face, in terms of new-build, is distinguished by different groups of people being involved in gentrifying, contrasting gentrification landscapes being developed, and new socio-spatial dynamics in operation. Gentrification in this form is not about the redevelopment and restoration of old, devalourised housing stock by members of the middle classes who are rich in social and cultural capital, yet (relatively) poor in economic capital (Bridge 2001; Ley 1996). Rather, it consists of the development of large, luxurious apartment complexes by corporate developers and their consumption by the professional middle classes. As such, some have questioned whether this form of urban change should be considered gentrification at all (Boddy 2007). However, this process clearly is gentrification

for it (i) upgrades the social composition of the neighbourhood, (ii) results in a significant landscape change, which itself is motivated by a demonstration of cultural identity, (iii) involves a significant reinvestment of capital into previously devalorised space, (iv) and generates processes of replacement and displacement (mostly indirect).

This paper draws upon research conducted in three neighbourhoods witnessing this gentrification in London, UK. All the neighbourhoods are located along the River Thames and have undergone the redevelopment of industrial and brownfield riverside land into prime residential space. As developments in a global city, the proximity of gentrification to global processes is obviously more pronounced. However, the types of gentrification examined here do not represent the elite forms of gentrification identified by others in the same city (Butler and Lees 2006). Indeed, many of the neighbourhoods examined here are marginal urban spaces that represent new points of the city's gentrification frontier. The paper does therefore not correlate a strong globalisation relationship with super-charged processes of gentrification, but rather identifies global narratives throughout a variety of neighbourhoods undergoing different forms of gentrification. The paper also does not attempt to identify coherent social class characterisations that might be associated with 'global gentrifiers' (Butler 2002 2007; Bridge 2007) or particular neighbourhood transitions. Riverside gentrifiers certainly share common middle/professional class positions (see below). However, it is not possible to classify them into certain coherent fractions according to a wide ranging set of lifestyle strategies (Butler 2002). The (global) identities associated with gentrifiers in the latter part of this paper purely represent characterisations of global associations; not coherent, multi-faceted sociological categories.

The paper draws upon a range of data collected in a multi-method research project (2002–2005). This includes interviews with key informants⁴ (e.g. developers, planners and residents), company reports, social surveys of development residents⁵ and census data. The narratives discussed here are those references to globalisation that were both most pronounced and seemingly important to the decisions and practices at each of the identified gentrification stages. The multiplicity of globalisation narratives identified point to the varying ways in which globalisation is identified, understood and incorporated in the urban process.⁶

Design and planning

It is increasingly recognised that urban spaces are being constructed with explicit reference to globalisation via entrepreneurial urban strategies, urban hierarchies and architectures (Olds 2001; McNeill and Tewdwr-Jones 2003; Chang *et al.* 2004). This theme was explored in interviews with actors involved in the design and planning of new-build, gentrifying developments in London. A consistent concern with 'global style' and 'global people' emerged. At this stage globalisation is therefore identified as being central to the development of gentrifying urban space.

Developers

Gentrifying developments along the Thames are predominantly being constructed by corporate developers, such as St George plc, St James plc, Berkeley Homes and Barratt Homes. In interviews with executives and managers of major corporate development companies, the motivations and rationales which influenced their decisions and shaped the form of riverside development were discussed. Specifically, corporate actors were asked about how the buildings they were responsible for were conceived, what motivated their choice of architects, and who they thought were the buyers of their developments. From this collection of interviews, it is possible to identify a number of global narratives which help illustrate how processes and ideas of globalisation permeate the actions of real estate actors engaged in gentrification.

When asked about how they went about selecting an architect and building scheme for a riverside development located in West London, a regional director of a major developer closely related narratives of globalisation and metropolitanism:

I think you could say we are looking to produce a global style type of building. We are looking for a building that really looks and feels like it is all about metropolitan London . . .

This explicit reference to a 'global style of building' was explored further. Specifically, the interviewee was asked how that type of building is conceived of and designed: 'Well, we don't really think too much about coming up with the design. That is the architect's job.' Here, the choice of architect was considered as key in having the 'right' type of building designed:

For a scheme along the riverside we will look to hire a second tier architect. The guys . . . just below the likes of [Richard] Rogers and [Norman] Foster . . . You know with these guys that you will get something that looks the part. It will be a metropolitan type structure.

Therefore developers are seen to be selecting an architectural practice to design a development based upon their perceived ability to produce a metropolitan building. Further interviews with developers confirmed that the distinction between non-metropolitan and metropolitan largely related to a distinguishing between suburban, low-density development with few architectural merits and high-density urban developments which receive a greater investment in architectural aesthetic.

This connection highlights the ways in which certain urban places and spaces have become thought of as tangible manifestations of globalisation. Whilst global cities such as London have long been recognised as the basing points of globalisation (Castells 1996), this connection shows how the physical spaces of these basing points are also icons of globalisation. Indeed, those architects responsible for designing them, such as Koolhaas (Latour 2005) and Foster (McNeill 2005), are pronounced purveyors of 'global' architecture; creators of global place. As such, it is particular landscapes, not entire cities, which generate this relationship. Other concomitant landscapes of global cities, such as inner city slums and migrant neighbourhoods, remain defined as local or regional domains (Anderson and Al-Bader 2006). Global 'style' and 'metropolitanism' are therefore not simply accrued through spatial propinquity. This is a selective association which Knox (1996 2002) labels 'global metropolitanism' in reference to the ways in which particular urban spaces, functions, peoples and places have been imbued with global identity.

In this study, particular residential landscapes – specifically, high density apartment buildings built with significant investment in architectural aesthetic – have seen developers and architects intentionally set out to develop this type of association. Subsequently, they have become inhabited by the same social groups Knox identifies as central to fostering the association between 'global' and 'metropolitan':

The most direct contribution of world cities to global metropolitanism stems from the critical mass of what Sklair (1991) dubbed the transnational producer-service class, with its 'transnational practices' of work and consumption. (2002, 33)

For Knox, it is therefore the human faces of the global city's command and control functions that are pivotal in associating the 'global' with 'metropolitan'. Along London's riverside, it is exactly this group that developers perceive as the market for their developments.

The architecture of riverside developments is required to be suitable for London's young professionals and elite trans-nationals. As one developer explained:

The design of the building is important. I mean, you are looking to sell the apartments to all these young Russians coming to the city and they don't really know the different areas of the city. What they see is how the building looks. So, you have to make the building look impressive. It has to look the part . . . It has to fit in with London's image.

In the planning and developing stages, developers are therefore creating urban landscapes that will appeal to a 'trans-national producer-service class' (Sklair 1991). In short, a close association between 'global' and 'metropolitan' is fostered by riverside developers because metropolitan-style buildings are perceived to be desired by a specifically targeted market.

Hierarchically ranked in reference to globally famed architects such as Norman Foster (McNeill 2005), second tier architectural practices were perceived by the developers interviewed to be capable of producing buildings which have global cache; buildings which are capable of appealing to those professionals working in London's trans-national corporations. However, these practices do not charge the same fees as first-tier architects and the power balance between developer and architect is much different. This power balance appeared to be a significant consideration for some developers interviewed. When asked about how a design for a riverside development is agreed upon, an executive developer responded:

The architects always come up with something they think is special, but that is what we ask them to do. They are the arty types. They usually come in with their initial ideas and we put their feet back on the ground . . . So, I guess we straighten things out and make the idea make money.

In contrast to the eye-catching and often-controversial developments of 'star architects' (e.g. the Foster and Partners designed Albion Riverside, London), the developers interviewed therefore required a more generic style of building; one which would

have enough of a global metropolitanism association to be desired, without the risk of rejection. An association with things 'global' is therefore not fostered through a desire for innovative or striking architectural schemes, but rather to be suitable for market, and ultimately to provide a return on investment. As such, a concern with aesthetic is therefore primarily motivated by the imperatives of capital (i.e. Lefebvre's 'global level').

The perceived target market also has a strong influence upon the nature of residential space created. This was identified by developers through consumer surveys, contracted research and investor feedback; demonstrating the intertwined relations between developers, investors and residents.⁷ Developers viewed prospective riverside development residents to have a series of residential requirements which were generated from their lifestyle demands. Most commonly, development residents were seen as the stereotypical⁸ time-pressed professional who required on-site exercise facilities, 'life management services' and basic retail amenities. As a result, most riverside developments offer private gym facilities, extensive concierge services and on-site restaurants:

The concierge service has proven to be quite a selling point in a lot of developments. Lots of people live alone or in working couples, and can spend lots of time away from home. The idea that we can deal with their needs at home [for example, dry cleaning and housing cleaning] ends up being very appealing to most people . . . You know, they view it as money well spent.

In building their developments for London's transnational professionals, a certain type of residential space therefore results. In terms of architecture, a specific type of building and aesthetic is identified as appropriate, whilst the demands of prospective residents result in developments offering an extensive array of on-site facilities and services in order to enable them to manage their out-of-work demands.

Architects

Interviews with architects echoed many of the narratives of developers. The narrative of global metropolitanism (Knox 2002) was expanded upon when I asked one senior partner of an architecture practice involved in multiple riverside developments to discuss the notion that the social cohort identified as the market for riverside developments influenced their architectural aesthetic:

In most of the riverside stuff, you are building for the high end of the market, so it will be designed to look impressive . . . They are high-rise and high-density, so they automatically become very metropolitan . . . I would say they do represent the type of development which is characteristic of contemporary London.

Another architect interviewed further discussed the connection between their riverside buildings' aesthetic and London:

I think developers usually want a bland metropolitan type of thing. They certainly want the type of people who work in accounting and banking to buy the flats. That is why they are all one and two bedrooms . . . The stuff we have worked on has usually ended up being a largely impressive, but a fairly regular glass and steel structure.

In explaining the process of designing a metropolitan-type building, architects discussed how, in the case of riverside developments, this type of development is often designed without reference to local architecture. Since all of the riverside developments studied were constructed on brownfield sites, all the architects interviewed were faced with designing a new building within an existing urban context. In the three case study sites, this context differed significantly, with neighbouring areas consisting of such things as 1930s suburban housing, Victorian terraces, high rise social housing tower blocks and industrial areas. In such contexts, one architect explained how surrounding architecture is often used to inspire new build projects:

We will often examine the surrounding area to look for cues and inspiration. It might be Georgian windows, a water plant, anything really . . . Usually you will want some [connect] to make the development click.

Yet, when asked about the studied riverside development in Brentford, West London, that they had worked on, the same architect did not remember this process occurring:

For the development in Brentford, we really did not use any of the surrounding architecture. I remember visiting and searching for things . . . There are certainly things we could have used . . . But, I don't remember any of that fitting . . . So the building was developed in isolation really.

The development of the complex therefore became divorced from the immediate architectural context as the architect drew inspiration from different landscapes, namely metropolitan ones.⁹

In the actions of developers and architects we therefore find the pronounced employment of

global narratives in the construction of gentrifying developments. These narratives both influence the type of development (i.e. the perceived residential requirements of gentrifiers) and are used to position apartment complexes within the real estate market (i.e. the use of architectural aesthetic). Corporate developers and hired architects are therefore pivotal in establishing a relationship between gentrification and globalisation, since their strategies create an urban habitat that distinguishes itself through a globalisation relationship. As will be demonstrated, subsequent inhabitation by gentrifiers does not feature significant alternation, manipulation or resistance to this relationship; and therefore there are few signs of place-making practices at the 'private level'.

Selling and marketing

Once planning permission for a development has been granted and the buildings have been designed, the business of selling riverside apartments starts. Beginning even before a brick has been laid, developers pursue off-plan sales aggressively (Karadimitriou 2005). Major corporate developers in the UK, such as Berkeley Homes, set this agenda out in annual reports:

Berkeley's strategy continues to be to sell homes at an early stage in the development cycle, often at the off-plan stage. Securing customers' commitment in this way ensures the quality of future revenue. (Berkeley Homes 2006, 11)

Off-plan selling offers the opportunity to developers who have invested significant amounts of capital into site purchase, remediation, architectural design and building contracts to receive a return on their investment sooner. It therefore increases the speed of the circulation of capital for real estate developers (Harvey 1982), producing a higher tempo urban development process that negotiates and reduces their capital's exposure to risk through decreasing the amount of time which it is exposed to the cycles of the real estate market. For investors, the advantages of buying off-plan are that real estate can be bought at a discount and speculatively.

Off-plan sales occur in a variety of ways, including at international real estate investment fairs in places such as Dubai, Moscow and Singapore, and actually in on-site sales offices established before construction of apartment complexes begins on newly remediated ground along the riverside. Both

of these processes have distinctive geographies which certainly implicate global processes. However, the aspect of property sales I want to focus on here is the sales and marketing literature produced by major corporate developers active along the Thames. This literature is circulated to potential residents and investors by various means, including websites, magazines, sales pamphlets and advertisements from the point when planning permission is granted. The material is used to both describe the type of development available for purchase (i.e. basic floor plan details, options, units, costs etc.) and begin an exercise in place construction and marketing. It is this latter element which is of interest here, since through examining developer marketing material and analysing resident survey data and interviews with developers, another important set of global narratives can be deciphered.

Developer selling and marketing activities involve the creation of texts and images that position riverside developments within the context of 'Global London'. The neighbourhoods where riverside development was studied were not central city locations (see Figure 1). However, through their marketing materials developers have attempted to connect their apartment complexes to Central London; to London's global spaces of culture, business and finance. As such, what is offered by developers to potential residents is not a local existence, but rather a global city lifestyle.

Through attempting to link their developments to more celebrated parts of the city, the immediate neighbourhood of the development is often overlooked (or erased) by marketing rhetoric which emphasises accessibility to other areas. For example, when describing their development in a marketing brochure, St George plc states:

In addition to being an up-and-coming borough, Wandsworth is in close proximity to some of London's more celebrated hotspots. Parsons Green, Battersea Village, Chelsea Harbour, Clapham Old Town, Putney Riverside – all are within easy striking distance of Riverside West. And just a short cab ride away brings you to the shopping and social whirl of Fulham and Chelsea – the King's Road, Conran's Bluebird, the Chelsea Farmers' Market, and, of course, Sloane Street. (St George plc 2003)

In all of the development marketing literature, in all of the areas studied, little or no attention is paid to the local area in descriptive sections beyond emphasising how it is 'up-and-coming'. Instead, developers have attempted to generate a spatial

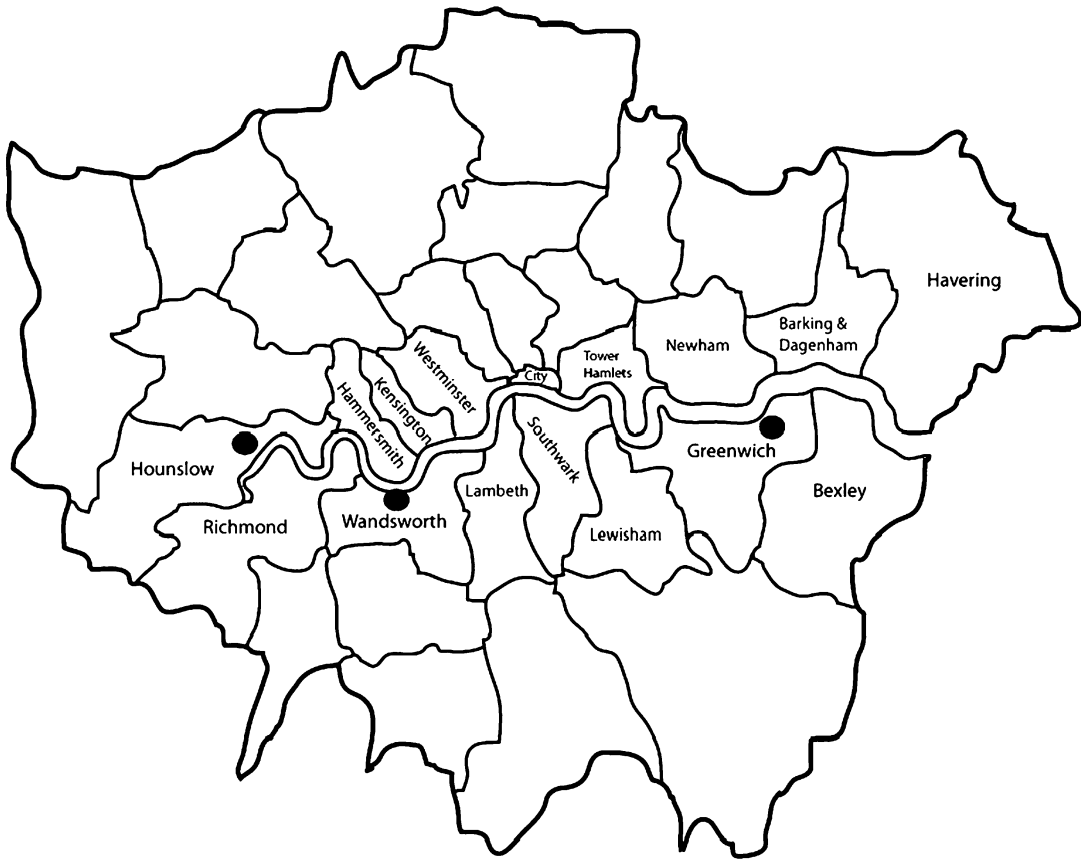


Figure 1 A map of London's riverside boroughs with case study sites indicated (from right to left: Brentford, Wandsworth and Thamesmead)

Source: Author

imagination that generates associations between their development and spaces of globalisation (particularly in terms of global finance and cosmopolitan culture). In this sense, the local neighbourhood is devalorised and overlooked by developers as something largely unimportant to potential residents and investors.

Nowhere is this focus upon connecting suburban residential space with central city/global nodes more explicit than in marketing material maps. For example, in Berkeley Homes' brochure for the Royal Arsenal development,¹⁰ Greenwich (East London), it uses an aerial photo to demonstrate the development's location in the surrounding area (see Plate 2). However, absolutely none of the local neighbourhood (Greenwich and Woolwich) is included in the image. Instead the image is cut to

display the City of London and Docklands. The same editing of local space occurs in St George plc's marketing materials for the Battersea Reach¹¹ development in Wandsworth. Here an aerial photograph is used to illustrate the proximity of Chelsea and Central London to the development. Again Wandsworth itself, the neighbourhood where the development is located, is completely missing from the image. In both examples, proximate space is erased in order to emphasise global connections. Such spatial perspectives clearly reflect the wider neoliberal doxa which valorises the spectacle of (global) capital and consequently erases contemporaneous poverty and abject working-class sustenance (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2001).

Both interviews with developers and survey data collected from residents of riverside apartments



Plate 1 An example of contrasting 'global' (background) and 'local' (foreground) architecture in Wandsworth, London, UK

Source: Author

support this spatial perspective. When asked about what kinds of neighbourhoods are suitable for high-density, luxury apartments, a developer interviewed responded:

You know it does not really matter what type of area it is. If a riverside spot comes up, everyone is pretty much queuing up with an offer . . . Neighbourhood has never been a big deal for us. I mean look, we have stuff out here (Brentford), in Battersea where there is no decent transport, and out east [East London] where the neighbourhoods are pretty much no go.

In survey data from open-ended questions which asked riverside development residents to identify the three primary reasons for moving into the surveyed development, a similar disregard for the neighbourhood was found. Respondents only mentioned local neighbourhood as a significant factor motivating their residential choice 14 per cent of the time in Brentford, 13 per cent in Wandsworth and 10 per cent in Thamesmead. Furthermore, when the local area was mentioned as a factor motivating their move, it was often associated with an identification of the area as 'up-and-coming' and a good investment (over 70% of the time). The

most popular motivations recorded were riverside location (45%), affordability (50%), employment (35%) and onsite amenities (35%).

The associations to globalisation created in the selling and marketing phases of the development process shows both similarities and differences to the types of global connections Rofe (2003) identifies in gentrifying neighbourhoods of Sydney and Newcastle, Australia. Rofe follows Zukin (1991) in connecting the space of the inner city with symbolic associations to globalisation; associations, it is argued, which are fostered by elite communities. Here, the inner city, with its collection of international cuisine and culture, is a 'landscape of power'; a distinctive space of global confluence and cosmopolitan¹² consumption that allows the area's residents to display their economic and cultural affluence. Rofe finds this association between gentrification and globalisation to have been fostered by gentrifiers and real estate agents who have been quick to connect their developments to cosmopolitan qualities of the inner city '[b]y mobilising lifestyle as a marketing ploy, real estate agents promote the inner city itself as a consumable product' (Rofe 2003, 2522). For Rofe, cosmopolitan, 'non-local' spaces are



Plate 2 A marketing image representing the location of the Royal Arsenal riverside development.

Source: <http://www.royalarsenal.co.uk>

therefore central in generating global identities in Sydney and Newcastle, Australia. However, this same process is not operating along London's riverside. The location of the three study sites cannot be described as being 'inner city' and none contain the cosmopolitan amenities, such as eclectic collections of global cuisine, desired/supported by gentrifiers in Newcastle and Sydney. Instead of real estate agents using these resources to establish global identities, corporate developers along the Thames have relied upon the prestige associated with their developments – generated through architecture, services, riverside location and price – and marketing materials which imagine spatial associations with global spaces. In this case, neighbourhood appears to have borne little responsibility for establishing a link between gentrification and globalisation. The role of neighbourhood in creating gentrification and global identities is therefore very different along London's riverside, since urban space, and particularly neighbourhood identity and sense of place, appear much less important.

Living

What of that residential nomadism that invokes the spendors of the ephemeral? It merely represents an extreme form, utopian in its own way, of individualism. The ephemeral would be reduced to switching boxes (inhabiting). To suggest, as Friedman does, that we can be liberated through nomadism, through the presence of habitat in the pure state, created with metal supports and corrugated steel (a giant erector set), is ridiculous. (Lefebvre 2003, 98)

Residents of London's newly redeveloped riverside predominantly fall into the categories that Sassen (1991) and Ley (1980 2004) have identified as symbolic of post-industrial urban professionals. Survey data from the three developments studied show that the majority of residents of riverside apartments are young, highly educated and working in professional occupations. The occupational composition of development populations features much higher concentrations of those in professional occupations than in London generally. In addition,

Table I Average age and occupational and educational composition of development residents

	<i>Brentford</i>	<i>Wandsworth</i>	<i>Thamesmead</i>	<i>London^a</i>
Average age	34.8	32.5	30.1	37
Percentage of population in professional occupations	67%	71%	68%	50.4%
Managers and senior officials	23%	17%	5%	17.6%
Professional occupations	27%	27%	32%	14.9%
Associate professional	17%	27%	32%	17.9%
Percentage of population with at least a bachelors degree	76%	94%	70%	31%

Source: Social Survey (2004); ^aLondon data source: 2001 UK Census

all of the surveyed development populations have an average age below that of London and the UK (38.1 years).

The majority of those living in riverside developments can therefore begin to be considered the kinds of people that have come to be associated with the trans-national elites and gentrifiers of global cities (Sassen 1991; Ley 2004). This stated, the socio-demographic composition of the developments does vary (see Table I), and qualitative data identified a diverse array of peoples within different developments. Therefore, new-build gentrifiers should not be considered a cohesive fraction of London's middle classes.¹³ This section specifically examines how riverside gentrifiers connect to processes of globalisation in terms of residency and place. In order to do so, survey and interview data gathered from development residents is drawn upon. Using this data, two types of resident global identities are identified. The first is the 'International'. This group is characterised as 'global' through occupations which incorporate them physically in global networks and flows. The second group, 'Cosmopolitan', are associated with global narratives through lifestyle and cultural identity. They tend to be less incorporated into global networks and flows and more enacted into lifestyle practices which are associated with global identities.¹⁴ In both cases, the global narratives identified are not symptomatic of gentrification being performed as a practice to generate a class identity (Rofe 2003; Butler 2007).

The International becomes associated with globalisation through employment enabling/enforcing mobility. Often working for major global corporations in London, this group's occupations meant they travel extensively as part of their employment, and often expected to relocate to other cities as their employers require. Although this group certainly represents the type of professional and trans-national

that is often associated with gentrification in global cities (Sassen 1991), this global mobility is not uniformly thought of as a social status enhancing quality. Indeed, some interviewees problematised this global connection:

I travel a lot with my job. That is how I ended up here really. I came over for a couple of weeks and next thing I knew, I was moving here permanently . . . There is always the chance that the job will take me somewhere else soon. You can only really know in the short term.

When asked whether this mobility was viewed positively in any ways, the interviewee responded:

When I started in the job I liked the travel, but now it is a bit of a drag . . . It just stops you putting down some roots really. You know, you won't buy certain things because you might move soon, and I certainly would not do much to the flat. I mean, if I am not going to be here it is not worth it.

Other interviewees shared similar feelings about doing a job that entailed a great deal of mobility, since the transitory nature of work and home restricted interaction in, and association with, local spaces.

The residential choices of this group were not dictated by the cultural capital, habitus-related motivations some associate with gentrification, but rather by much more pragmatic criteria. The lack of maintenance – and in many developments, the actual paid performance of maintenance – was a significant attraction, since this meant residents 'did not have to worry about pipes breaking' or 'having any upkeep on the place'. The security of the developments was also an attraction, with residents 'not having to worry about the flat whilst being away for business or leisure' and feeling that 'the security provided onsite [e.g. CCTV cameras and security guards] make it much safer to be a single women living alone'. Here, gentrification therefore served the purpose of mitigating the social

costs of a global narrative. Indeed, these gentrifiers and their residencies certainly reflect the types of 'living box' forms of habitat which Lefebvre (2003) identifies with neoliberal urbanism.

Cosmopolitans were riverside development residents that desired the global/cosmopolitan lifestyles that London offers. They share similarities with Rofe's (2003) production gentrifiers; those who gentrify and associate themselves with global narratives through residential purchase, not renovation and sweat equity. However, the association with globalisation in this group is different to the International, since being 'global' is something which is actively sought out and practised. Within this group, the imaginative construction of place – i.e. representations of space (Lefebvre 1991) – generated by developers appears to have been successful, since interviewees were motivated to live in their riverside development because they offered an association and propinquity to the places which developers emphasise in their marketing materials. Many residents therefore found their developments closely suited their tastes and residential demands through being appropriate for the fostering of global associations through leisure and consumption practices that incorporated them into global networks and spaces. In particular, spaces of global metropolitanism (Knox 2002) and intersecting 'contact zones' (Pratt 1992) for global flows, such as London's West End, were used for leisure, maintaining geographically expansive social networks, and establishing and imagining membership of a cosmopolitan community.

Cosmopolitans heavily focused their leisure and consumption activities in globally-networked spaces (i.e. Central London) and/or foreign places. The features of riverside developments were utilised to engage in these activities:

Living here [Wandsworth] works really well for me... I usually get a cab either to Chelsea, or occasionally the West End and meet up with friends... It is also really easy to get to Heathrow or Gatwick, from Clapham Junction... When we go skiing or away for the weekend this place is perfect. I mean, there is nothing to worry about. If there is a problem, the guys here [estate management] will fix it.

Even in more peripheral Brentford and Thamesmead, connections to more cosmopolitan areas had been established, despite these neighbourhoods' relative lack of transit links.

A lack of association with the immediate neighbourhood surrounding their riverside development

often meant perceptions of the 'local area' were not particularly cohesive within development populations. When asked about local activities, development residents discussed spaces scattered around proximate areas, and a cohesive sense of neighbourhood was difficult to identify. A more extreme example of this spatial imagination and behaviour came from an interviewee living in a riverside development in Thamesmead. When asked about using local amenities they responded:

Yeh, I will use local places for shopping and stuff [Qu: For example?]. Well, I often go down to Charlton [3 mile drive] to the supermarket to get milk and the regular essentials. [Qu: What about the corner store?] You are joking aren't you? I would probably get killed if I walked down to that place on the evening. Nah, I will leave that to the locals.

These spatial perceptions and behaviours therefore provide a stark contrast to Rofe's (2003) globally-connected gentrifiers and Butler's (2007) 'place makers', since local neighbourhood is far from being used to engender a personal association to globalisation or established place-based identity. Rather, this group is pursuing these practices in other urban spaces not proximate to their gentrifying residencies.

Many residents also maintained extensive social networks beyond the city. In order to maintain these networks, interviewees explained that telephone, email and travel were often used. High rates of residential movement also meant that email and occasional meetings offered a means to maintain geographically expansive friendship networks: 'Honestly, if my email bust, I would not have a clue. I am always emailing friends, at work and home. It is the way I keep my sanity'. In most cases, these social networks have not been incorporated into the local neighbourhood:

I knew lots of people before coming to London, but I really don't know anyone in Brentford. It is a shame really. But I could never imagine having anything to do with people around here. I mean, what would we be talking about? I don't have kids or anything.

The 'neighbourhood' was therefore not used, or regularly perceived of, as a space of community by most riverside residents.

Residents did feel a sense of community within their development. However, this sense was not usually fostered through social interaction. A sense of community was fostered primarily through a perception that similar people lived within the

development and that this 'community' differed from that surrounding the development. For example:

I don't know many people to talk to, but you have a look around and see who comes from the train station and you get a good idea. Most people are late twenties and thirties, working in good jobs in the City.

In some cases, this characterisation was made with reference to the local area, in this case Wandsworth:

I am sure that some locals were not too thrilled about these developments, but the fact of the matter is that we have brought a lot of money into the area. I mean, you have to be wealthy to be able to afford one of these places... Most of the people who live here are in professional jobs and look after their places.

Although survey data showed that very few development residents socialised with other residents, there was therefore still a sense of community based largely upon socio-economic perceptions.

The residential motivations of both these identities are distinct from the traditional image of the gentrifier (Caulfield 1994; Ley 1996; Slater 2004). There is little or no desire and/or possibility of place-making through sweat equity or renovation. In addition, the global narratives of the gentrifiers interviewed do not replicate those identified by Rofe (2003) who desire inner city neighbourhoods because of their cosmopolitan qualities or Butler (2007) who sees gentrification as an agency-led process of place construction. Neighbourhood considerations are significant because of their absence in this form of gentrification. Exclusive, metropolitan and largely self-contained apartment complexes have been utilised to satisfy habitat requirements of gentrifiers; however, gentrifiers themselves have not significantly participated in a process of 'habiting'. The construction of habitat has been conceived and performed largely by corporate developers. Lefebvre's assertions of the transformation of urban spaces via the dictates of a global level above those of the private appear supported along the rapidly transforming riverside.

Conclusions

Given the many global narratives within the gentrification processes examined here, the assertion of a growing link between globalisation and gentrification seems supported. Yet, the gentrification process examined does stand in stark contrast to the one observed by Ruth Glass in the same city in 1964. The presence of corporate developers and a

supportive urban policy framework (Smith 2002) has allowed riverside gentrification to take place at a rapid scale and rate. Indeed, the scale and rate at which developers have been able to redevelop riverside areas has been central in moving gentrification into ultra-marginal neighbourhoods such as Thamesmead. Rather than a creeping frontier, a rapid colonisation has been witnessed which could only have been achieved by this type of development, since the feelings of belonging which can be generated by large, enclave-like riverside developments, with a strong cultural association fostered by globally-orientated architecture and marketing materials, enable their residents to live in areas that they would not normally consider gentrifying.

In addition, the ability to manufacture associations with globalisation without reliance upon more 'organic' occurrences (i.e. the inherent cosmopolitanism of some inner city spaces (see Rofe 2003)) has provided real estate agents with the ability to satisfy the residential desires of London's burgeoning ranks of global-oriented professionals. This stated, it is important to recognise the importance of the producer-market relationship between developers and gentrifiers. Interviews with developers certainly demonstrated the influence of market research and investor feedback on their development strategies. The construction of habitat does therefore not take place without the influence of gentrifiers and it cannot be described as simply being imposed. However, it is important to draw a clear distinction between gentrification as the consumption of a commodified product and the agency-led creation of habitus. In terms of the most commodified forms of gentrification, the same performance of discursive practices (Bridge 2001) and deployment of social capital resources (Butler 2002) by gentrifiers in more classical forms of the process simply do not occur.

The global narratives of gentrification outlined here are therefore best understood as the capital-led development of urban space and 'habitat' (Lefebvre 2003). Along the Thames this has been driven by large corporate property developers who have utilised globalisation in numerous ways – architectural aesthetic and place marketing – to extend the scale and scope of gentrification. Of course, this is not to say that local, metropolitan and national level processes, and especially public policies, are unimportant. That is certainly not the case. Indeed, the accompanying national urban policy framework

has certainly supported this redevelopment; highlighting the true neoliberal (see Peck and Tickell 2002) form of this urbanism given the state is supporting the described penetration (spatial and processional) of capital into the urban process. Rather, the point here is that globalisation appears to have played a central role in urban development and gentrification. Furthermore, the constraints on gentrification in terms of potentially-gentrifiable neighbourhoods and housing (Shaw 2005) appear to have been loosened by corporate developers through the utilisation and manufacture of global aesthetics and rhetoric.

The highly commodified nature of gentrification along the Thames signals that the process is increasingly capital-led in one of its diverse post-recession forms. Not only has corporate development been central to gentrification along the Thames, but also the global identities manufactured by real estate actors have generated an excluding and elitist form of gentrification that is far from emancipatory. Since the gentrification examined here rejects associations with 'neighbourhood', the global identities of gentrifiers appear less representative of a pluralist cosmopolitanism, and more representative of a private, rootless, elitist form of cosmopolitanism (Anderson 1998). With gentrifiers having few associations and/or social interactions with 'others' in their neighbourhood, and through concentrating their social activities within spaces and places that are connected into global flows and imaginations, the global narratives of new-build gentrification in London can be considered particularly socially regressive since they offer little prospect of the emancipatory social interactions often associated with gentrification (Caulfield 1994) or the type of urban space which negates class divisions and fosters social unity (Lefebvre 2003).

Understandings of the relationship between gentrification and globalisation must therefore become much more critical (see Slater 2006) of the role of capital in order to grasp its nature and complexity. Given gentrification remains 'nothing more or less than *the class dimensions of neighbourhood change*' (Slater *et al.* 2004; emphasis in original), the globally-styled imperatives of capital so visible in the gentrification examined here point toward the domineering role of the abstract and totalitarian 'global level' (Lefebvre 2003) in the production of urban space. Contemporary study of gentrification can therefore simply not detach itself from concerns regarding the neoliberalisation of urban space

(Butler 2007) and consequent displacement (Boddy 2007; Hamnett and Whitelegg 2007). This research shows that as gentrification has spread, mutated and diversified it has remained, if not become more, intertwined with socio-economic difference and capital's spatial logics. To lose sight of these central dimensions of gentrification would be to overlook the political nature of urbanism itself:

urbanism is a mask and a tool: a mask for the state and political action, a tool of interests that are dissimulated within a strategy and a socio-logical. Urbanism does not try to model space as a work of art. It does not even try to do so in keeping with its technological imperatives, as it claims. The space it creates is political. (Lefebvre 2003, 180)

Notes

- 1 I adopt the term 'global narratives' to best capture the multiplicity of globalisations involved with the observed gentrification process. I therefore interpret globalisation as a complex collection of varied processes, which both differ in ontological status and geography (Held *et al.* 1999).
- 2 Lefebvre here borrows from Martin Heidegger's (2001) 'Building dwelling thinking' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, where he distinguishes between 'dwelling' as in the basic action of taking shelter, and 'inhabiting' or 'to dwell' as a learnt/enacted practice which constructs home space/place.
- 3 Lefebvre (1991) characterises 'abstract spaces' as those which are hierarchical, representationally homogenous and socially fragmented. For Lefebvre, in abstract space 'lived experience is crushed, vanquished by what is 'conceived of' (1991, 51). Abstract space functions as 'centres of wealth and power' and 'endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates (i.e. peripheral spaces), and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there' (1991, 49).
- 4 A total of 20 initially planned, semi-structured interviews with key informants in the development process were conducted. This number was supplemented with a following set of telephone interviews. A total of 40 interviews were undertaken with development residents in the three sites.
- 5 In each case-studied riverside development, 150 homes were surveyed (450 social surveys in total). There was an average response rate of approximately 30 per cent across the three developments.
- 6 Note that these global narratives largely remain empirical observations. An attempt to theorise them as some coherent 'globalisation' process – something which is highly debated itself (see Amin 2002) – is not attempted here.
- 7 Indeed, this also demonstrates the dialectical relationship between Lefebvre's levels and dimensions given

- capital is making urban space, at least partially, according to the desires of some individuals.
- 8 This stereotype was not consistently found in any part of this research. Indeed, the lifestyles of interviewees varied substantially and cannot be captured in such a characterisation.
 - 9 This distinguishing between a kind of placeless global architectural style and 'regional' or 'local' style somewhat defines the global style itself (see Lefebvre 2003, 98–9; also see Anderson and Al-Badar 2006).
 - 10 Royal Arsenal is a 76 acre mixed-use development on a previously military site that will provide 2500 new homes upon completion in 2015.
 - 11 Battersea Reach is a 658 residential property development built on a 13 acre ex-industrial site.
 - 12 See Papastephanou (2005) for an extended discussion of the relationship between cosmopolitanism and globalisation.
 - 13 Development residents discussed here are those in private market housing. Two of the three developments did have a small proportion of 'affordable housing' residents (between 15 and 19%). Although characterisations of these residents are difficult to make, they do not have the same occupational or cultural associations as private residents.
 - 14 It should be noted that these two groups are not always distinct from each other, i.e. they are not distinguishable and cohesive types of global gentrifier (see Bridge 2007).

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