

**Go on play with the words, the effect is the same: how gentrification and liveability feature  
in public discourses of neighbourhood change**

by

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### **Author's declaration**

This thesis consists of material all of which I authored or co-authored (see Statement of Contributions included in the thesis). This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## Statement of contributions

This thesis follows the manuscript option for Master's students in the School of Planning at the University of Waterloo. This thesis consists of two separate manuscripts, both of which have been submitted to peer-reviewed journals and appear verbatim in the thesis, with the exception of editorial and format changes. The first has been adapted in response to peer review. The second is awaiting acceptance.

I (Giuseppe Tolfo) am the primary author of the first manuscript as presented in the thesis, entitled: "Gentrification in the media: the eviction of critical class perspective." It was submitted to *Urban Geography* in February 2019, accepted with revisions in July 2019, and re-submitted in September 2019. The original research idea for this manuscript was presented by Dr. Brian Doucet as a potential research project. Inspired by this idea, I designed the research method for the manuscript based on independent research and supervisory guidance from Dr. Doucet. I designed the analytical criteria, conducted all data collection, and analyzed the data independently. Based on this research, I wrote approximately 85% of the content of an ACSP 2018 conference paper; Dr. Doucet contributed the remaining 15%. Dr. Brian Doucet then helped adapt this conference paper into the manuscript as it is presented: we both contributed to framing the work within the existing literature, and to addressing reviewer comments after the article had been accepted. As it is presented in this thesis, I contributed 60% of the written content and Dr. Doucet contributed the remaining 40%.

I am the primary author of the second manuscript as presented in the thesis, entitled: "Liveability for whom?: the gentrification of memory in Vancouver's Northeast False Creek." It was submitted to the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* in September 2019. The original research idea for this manuscript was my own, and I designed the research method,

analytical criteria, and theoretical perspective based on literature review and supervisor guidance. I wrote approximately 75% of the content of this second manuscript. The remaining 25% reflects the written contributions of Dr. Brian Doucet and additional support provided by Dr. Martine August.

Dr. Brian Doucet contributed supervision and conceptual guidance and supported the development of the research questions and analytical frameworks for both manuscripts. The second manuscript was inspired by Dr. Martine August's seminar class.

## **Abstract**

Despite its association with displacement, gentrification remains a persuasive model for encouraging economic development and growth. For gentrification strategies to remain politically palatable, policy discourses mask the exclusionary consequences of neighbourhood (re)investment. These discourses suggest that neighbourhood improvements are equally distributed, anesthetizing critical understandings of gentrification. This thesis contributes to contemporary scholarship investigating the relationship between discourse and gentrification. It analyzes the extent to which public discourses of neighbourhood change comprehensively consider inequality, affordability, gentrification, and displacement; specifically, the extent to which displacement is recognized within public discourse as a consequence of neighbourhood change. Each chapter uses discourse and framing analysis to investigate an area of public discourse: in the first, media discourses; in the second, neighbourhood planning and policy language. Whereas gentrification researchers studying policy often target the policy discourse itself as the tool that silences critical reflection, this thesis demonstrates that media discourses – used as a proxy for mainstream discourses more broadly – have evicted critical class considerations. Public policy discourses, liveability in particular, then perpetuate this eviction to encourage the types of neighbourhood change that benefit affluent groups and accumulation. In order to reverse this process, planning and policy practitioners should acknowledge inequality, different experiences of neighbourhood change, and make minimizing displacement a primary policy objective.

## Acknowledgments

The research that informed this thesis was conducted and the thesis itself was written across three colonial cities: Waterloo, Vancouver, and Toronto. Given the subject matter presented – specifically, the critical focus on displacement and the need to recognize the many displacements that are a result of real estate market capitalism – I would first like to acknowledge the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples – upon whose traditional territories the University of Waterloo rests; the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations – upon whose traditional territories Vancouver rests; and the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Chippewa, the Wendat peoples, and again the Anishnaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples – upon whose traditional territories Toronto rests.

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You told me: “Just read.”

Later, you told me: “Read critically.”

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## Table of contents

Author’s declaration	ii
Statement of contributions	iii
Abstract	v
Acknowledgments	vi
List of figures	xiii
List of abbreviations	xiv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
The Story of Hogan’s Alley: Displacement and Discourse	1
Thesis purpose	2
Context: Gentrification, Neoliberalism, Rhetoric	3
Gentrification: history and debates	3
Neoliberalism and Gentrification as Urban Strategy	8
Rhetorics that depoliticize gentrification	10
Research Questions	13
Thesis Summary and Methodology	16
Second chapter: “Gentrification” in the media	16
Third chapter: Manifestations of “liveability”	20
Thesis Organization	22
Chapter 2: Gentrification in the media: the eviction of critical class perspective	23

Introduction	24
Gentrification in the media: an under-researched lens to examine urban change	26
Methodology	29
Gentrification's growing media presence	32
Shifting class interpretations in the narratives of gentrification	36
Gentrification and tourism	36
Gentrification and consumption	39
The consumption of gentrified spaces	42
Conclusions: The eviction of working-class perspectives of gentrification	46
Chapter 3: Liveability for whom?: the gentrification of memory in Vancouver's Northeast False Creek	51
Introduction	52
Liveability: a muddled concept	54
Methodology	57
Liveability in Vancouver	59
Entrepreneurialism in Northeast False Creek	61
Historic manipulation in the Downtown Eastside (DTES)	65
Viaduct removal, liveability, and displacement	71
Displacement in the present	71
Displacement throughout history	74

Discussion	76
Chapter 4: Conclusion	81
The Story of Hogan’s Alley (Revisited)	81
Chapter Summary	82
Chapter two: The eviction of critical class perspective	82
Chapter three: Liveability, for whom?	83
Synthesis and reflection on literature	84
A necessary alliance	86
Policy recommendation and areas for further research	90
Planning a more inclusive future	90
Consultation efforts representative of long-term residents	91
Support neighbourhood level planning	92
Policy recommendation to consider, looking towards reduced displacement	92
Build public housing	93
Reinforce tenancy protections	93
Anti-displacement zoning	94
Retain city-owned property	94
Housing/Land/Community trusts	95
Support broad coalitions towards transformative change	95
Areas for future research	97

The potential for discourse to inspire institutional change	97
More comprehensive redistributive property tax	98
Practitioner Interviews	98
Final Thoughts	99
Bibliography	100

## List of figures

Figure 1: Associations for content analysis	18
Figure 2: Frequency of Globe and Mail articles that mention ‘gentrification,’ per year	33
Figure 3: Globe and Mail articles focusing on Toronto and Vancouver, per year	35
Figure 4: Frequency of articles either supportive or critical of gentrification, per year	36
Figure 5: Map of False Creek North, 1990	61
Figure 6: Map of Northeast False Creek, 2007	63
Figure 7: Map of the Downtown Eastside, 2014	68
Figure 8: Map of Northeast False Creek, 2009	72
Figure 9: Map of Northeast False Creek Planning Area, 2013	73

### List of abbreviations

CBD	Central Business District
DTES	Downtown Eastside. This abbreviation is used to remain consistent with most planning and critical scholarship, as well as Vancouver planning documents. However, some scholars have used DES (see Liu and Blomley, 2013) to remain consistent with the Downtown Eastside Residents' Association who abbreviated their name to DERA (see below).
DERA	Downtown Eastside Resident Association
“Directions Reports”	Refers to one of three <i>Northeast False Creek: Directions for the Future</i> reports, released in 2009 by Vancouver City Council
EIU	The <i>Economist's</i> Intelligence Unit
“Expo ‘86”	The 1986 World Fair, held in Vancouver, British Columbia
FCN	False Creek North (see Appendix A)
FCNDP	<i>False Creek North Development Plan</i> (1991)
“Housing Plan”	<i>Housing Plan for the Downtown Eastside</i> (2005)
NEFC	Northeast False Creek
NEFC Plan	<i>Northeast False Creek Plan</i> (2018)
SRO	Single-Room Occupancy Hotel Suite
TEAM	The Electors' Action Movement

*The very coherence of narrative, the emplotting of people and processes, can render dominant stories persuasive and preordained, making alternative stories hard to tell... In these senses, narrative can suture hegemonic understandings of the world; in so doing, the contingent politics of social relations disappear.*

- Blomley, 2004, p.51

*[I]t would be easy to read Sim City discourse as a kind of hegemonic misrepresentation designed to promote rampant real estate development in Vancouver and to distract attention from the social and environmental problems facing the city. There is certainly something to this, but such a dismissal would be oversimplistic. Sim City discourse embodies a whole series of social values about urban lifestyles and sustainability. It is as much a vision of what the city should be as a representation of what it actually is. By itself, there is nothing wrong with it. By articulating a vision of a good and desirable city, Sim City discourse provides a way to stage an open discussion about how (or whether) we want to achieve that objective. The problems arise when particular values get fixed and naturalized. Then, Sim City discourse becomes a tool of legitimation, rationalizing the imposition of very partial understandings of the urban landscape and the lifestyles that it can and should sustain.*

- Lees and Demeritt, 1998, p.340

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **The Story of Hogan's Alley: Displacement and Discourse**

In 1928 the City of Vancouver published the Bartholomew Plan: an attempt to rationalize land-use patterns. Subsequently, the City rezoned its East-End neighbourhoods – including Hogan's Alley, its once prominent Black Canadian community – for factories, warehouses, and light industrial uses (Compton, 2010; Liscombe, 2007). Following the change, banks began to refuse mortgage capital: the East-End was redlined. Repairs and upkeep fell. Industrial uses encroached upon residential communities. By the end of WWII, many homes were in a state of disrepair (Anderson 1991; Compton 2010).

During the postwar 1950s, structural shifts in the resource economy accelerated the decline of the industrial waterfront, along with neighbouring residential communities and commercial districts (Sommers, 1998). Proximity to declining industrial and commercial districts triggered public support for renewal, while the racial connotations triggered revanchist slum rhetoric (Anderson, 1991). Hogan's Alley was specifically considered a problem spot by the media and the public at large: representing “squalor, immorality and crime” (Compton 2010, p.91). The city proposed replacing much of present-day Gastown, Chinatown, and Strathcona (then, the East-End) with a new waterfront freeway (Punter, 2003). Thanks to the organizing efforts of a diverse group of community activists and residents the freeway plans were canceled (Ley, 1996; Punter, 2003), but not before Hogan's Alley and its Black Canadian residents were displaced to build the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts (Compton, 2010).

The story of Hogan's Alley is a common one. It locates Hogan's Alley within a wider history of racially charged zoning whereby – much like the fate of Africville in Halifax (Nelson



2002) – claims of urban blight impose a self-perpetuating cycle of decay (see also Weber, 2002): the redlining imposed by the Bartholomew Plan accelerated conditions of disrepair – the very motive used to substantiate its destruction. But the story also locates Hogan’s Alley within a wider history of dominant class prioritization – whereby policy redirects minority groups to the margins and ensures that these marginalized groups are ostracized (see Blomley, 2004; Coates, 2014; Rothstein, 2017; Rutland, 2018; Sommers, 1998; Sugrue, 1996; Thomas, 1994). It’s the story of a people, community, and neighbourhood refused the necessary resources to respond to their needs and with these needs unaddressed, a people, community, and neighbourhood displaced.

To this day, displacement remains a threat for marginalized residents in the neighbourhoods adjacent to the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts, across the Downtown Eastside (Blomley, 2004; Hyde, 2014; Smith, 2003). In fact, displacement, and gentrification remain prominent threats for marginalized and vulnerable populations internationally (Lees, Slater, and Wyly, 2008). So while for some Vancouverites the story of Hogan’s Alley might be an embarrassing anecdote – a failure that does not align with the present focus of the “liveable city” (Cameron and Harcourt, 2007; Vancouver, 2011; 2013; 2015; 2019) – to those threatened by displacement, the story of Hogan’s Alley lives and breathes in their everyday struggles.

### **Thesis purpose**

While displacement remains a threat, contemporary discourses that motivate neighbourhood change have changed. Previously, blight and slum rhetoric encouraged the reclamation of cities: these renewal strategies placed displacement as central motivators (Anderson, 1991; Blomley, 2008; Weber, 2002). Today, discourses of sustainability, diversity, rightsizing, social-mix, and liveability all encourage different forms of investment and

improvement but have the same result for marginalized groups: gentrification and displacement (Lees, 2012).

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the extent to which contemporary public discourses of neighbourhood change comprehensively address inequality, affordability, gentrification, and displacement; specifically, the extent to which displacement is recognized as a potential and foreseeable consequence to neighbourhood change in the context of real estate market capitalism. Each of the two chapters that make up the core of this thesis investigates a separate form of public discourse: the first, mainstream media discourses; the second, neighbourhood planning and policy language.

The second chapter is a systematic study of the use of “gentrification” in Canadian media. The purpose of the study is to analyze and evaluate the extent to which media representations of ‘gentrification’ reflect critical conversations taking place in academia.

The third chapter is a systematic study of how “liveability” manifests itself in different neighbourhood contexts. The purpose of the study is to analyze policy discourses that support neighbourhood investment and change, specifically “liveability” discourse, and to evaluate the extent to which associated neighbourhood planning initiatives comprehensively addresses inequality; more specifically, to what extent displacement is considered as a potential and foreseeable outcome of neighbourhood change.

### **Context: Gentrification, Neoliberalism, Rhetoric**

#### **Gentrification: history and debates**

This section briefly describes the origins of the term “gentrification,” followed by a summary of production and consumption explanations for gentrification. Reference to this early

scholarship is important as it emphasizes gentrification as the product of inequality, and remains critical of displacement.

The term “gentrification” was first coined in 1964 by Ruth Glass, a critical sociologist investigating transformations in inner-city London. Glass’s original description is a poignant assessment of the complex urban process:

*One by one, many of the working-class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle-class – upper and lower... Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced and the social character of the district is changed.* (Glass, 1964; quoted in Lees, Slater, and Wyly, 2008, p.4).

As implied by the term itself, “gentrification” is a process rooted in inequality and class: the middle-class “gentry,” and the effect that their migration decisions have on the working-class and their neighbourhoods. But the description further captures gentrification’s violence: the reference to ‘invasion’ suggests class warfare. Glass also makes it clear that displacement is the expected, if not inevitable result of this space-based class-struggle.

As the middle-class reclamation of the central city became a recognized phenomenon in major world cities, so too did gentrification become the subject of significant urban inquiry. Early scholarship focused on generating explanations for the perceived shift in traditional urban development patterns: identifying what it was that had encouraged this “back-to-the-city” movement. This became a subject of intense academic debate (Lees, Slater, and Wyly, 2008).

On the one hand, gentrification was interpreted as the cumulative effect of affluent newcomers migration and consumption decisions (Lees, Slater, and Wyly, 2008). These consumption or culture-based explanations focused on the dispositions of in-moving gentrifiers: their marginal status (Rose D, 1984), their liberal, progressive, and countercultural leanings (Ley, 1996); and their preference for difference – lifestyles only available in the central city (Caulfield, 1989).

Production explanations challenged the assumed sovereignty of middle-class consumers by focusing on the underlying political and economic conditions that encourage neighbourhood investment and disinvestment: the institutions and relationships that produce value and distribute profit (Smith, 1996). Reflecting on the critical scholarship of Harvey (1973), this school of thought connected gentrification to the creative and destructive tensions of capitalism: constantly seeking out new opportunities for profit, flowing between the circuits of capital to avoid over-accumulation, and facilitating the devalorization of land trapped in earlier and unproductive uses. In this context, gentrification is the inevitable result of a capitalist real estate market founded on speculation and inequality (Blomley, 2004; Harvey, 2009; Smith, 1979; 1982), directly connected to earlier processes of deindustrialization and suburbanization (see Checkoway, 1980). Gentrification is therefore simply the most recent frontier at which real estate profits are made (Smith, 1996): an inevitable product of the ‘locational seesaw’ of urban development (Smith, 1982); of mobile capital easing towards its next fix; and proof that the ‘rent-gap’ – the difference between the ground rent in land’s current use and in its potential, or “highest and best use” – has signaled profitability (Smith, 1979).

For these early critical gentrification scholars, the conditions that produce profitability were a prominent consideration, but so too were the consequential displacements and evictions: since gentrification leverages the inequities of capitalism, these consequences were considered intentional (Smith, 1996). David Ley (1996), a figurehead of consumption and cultural explanations, was similarly (though perhaps unequally) critical of displacement, and of the socio-economic polarization encouraged in the post-industrial economy. Ley’s thoughtful description of Vancouver’s Granville Island Market demonstrates his discomfort with state-facilitated “playgrounds” which encourage consumption at the expense of the working poor:

*On Granville Island an adventure playground was created in the shell of the former Spear & Jackson sawmill... The playground (as a microcosm of the Island) contained some of the inversions of a contemporary urban aesthetic, an orientation to experience and the sensuous which is so central to the state's intervention in the built environment of the post-industrial city... a place of industry became a place of play, a setting for production was turned into a setting for consumption... what has occurred is an anesthetization, a taming of a once wild and vigorous industrial landscape. (1996, p.7)*

This description references many of those considerations associated with critical Marx-influenced scholarship. Granville Island's new urban aesthetic is supported by appropriation – a foundation of capitalist urban development (Harvey, 1978) – in this case of neighbourhood character and history. The “shell” of an industrial powerhouse is reinterpreted as an area of cultural production, to be consumed by the incoming gentrifiers. The employment and livelihoods of the working poor are therefore directly threatened by middle-class tastes for neighbourhood “continuity” (Ley, 1996, p.7). Ley also describes the “anesthetization” and “taming” of the “wild” urban spaces, calling on frontier and colonial rhetoric and highlighting what Smith (1996) memorably defined as the “revanchist” logic of gentrifiers: defending class privilege by evicting those that do not align with a neighbourhood's new middle-class purpose; looking to erase the colours of history that do not match the appropriate palette. Ley (1980, 1990, 1996) was evidently cautious in praising a process that removes residents from their jobs, homes, and communities in order to promote consumption. Both production and consumption explanations for gentrification, therefore, recognize the violence of displacement.

Gentrification is no longer the “quaint” practice of marginal citizens (Smith N, 2002): the process has “mutated” and matured (Davidson and Lees, 2005; Lees, 2000; Wyly and Hammel, 2008). More recent mutations are spearheaded by large-scale institutional developers and financed by institutional lenders (Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Wyly and Hammel, 1999). With these changes in scale, so too has the breadth of communities affected increased: “financification” describes a process that has been transformed by the liquidity of international finance and its

associations with highly-paid financial services employees (Lees, 2000); “super-gentrification” describes the process by which communities grow too expensive for all but the international elite (Lees, 2003); rural and suburban municipalities have experienced gentrification pressures; and the effects of speculation noted down and across the urban hierarchy (Lees, Slater, and Wyly, 2008).

Gentrification is also a force of change outside residential communities: spillover real estate market speculation evicts otherwise productive industry (Curran, 2007), and transforms commercial districts (Zukin, 2008; 2011). Justifiably, gentrification has been redefined as “the production of urban space for progressively more affluent users” (Hackworth 2002, p.815): no longer limited to middle-class upgrading of previously working-class residential neighbourhoods, gentrification is the investment of financial or cultural capital (see Ley, 2003) that results in social upgrading, landscape transformation, and displacement (Davidson and Lees, 2005).

As gentrified landscapes have become commonplace, research too has evolved: the presumed distinction between cultural and economic arguments for gentrification reconciled by an understanding that culture and consumption interact to create profitable investment opportunities (Lees, Slater, and Wyly, 2008); that even the diversity, sexual orientation, and existence of marginalized groups can be appropriated towards growth objectives (Florida, 2012). Still, it is important that while once considered contradictory, the economic and cultural explanations for gentrification both reference class-struggle, and recognize displacement as an unacceptable, though foreseeable consequence of neighbourhood change in the context of inequality.

## Neoliberalism and Gentrification as Urban Strategy

Recent mutations to gentrification are, in part, the result of neoliberalism's hegemony. This section provides a history of liberal and neoliberal theory and describes how – for cities constrained by austerity politics – gentrification has become a “crucial urban strategy” (Smith N, 2002, p.440).

Classical liberalism assumes that individuals, guided by their own self-interest, will consume towards optimal societal outcomes. It equates consumers with citizens, prioritizes consumption as society's highest virtue, and deifies private property rights. The policy implications of this ideology are that property remain free from state interference and markets left unrestrained. But prior to the 1970s a more egalitarian form of liberalism dominated in practice. Keynesianism prioritized individual self-interest but included redistributive corrections to address market failures: imperfect competition and information, the provision of social and public goods, the presence of externalities, and inequitable access to essential goods. Within cities, these egalitarian corrections inspired welfare programs, public housing provisions, the enforcement of building codes, and justified property taxes to fund and distribute public goods un(der)provided by traditional markets (Hackworth, 2007). In a way, these corrections addressed the inequalities inherent to the capitalist city, placating the working class to sustain capitalism (Harvey, 1973; Madden and Marcuse, 2016).

A more conservative form of liberalism began to take shape in the 1970s – one that rejected Keynesian welfare-state corrections and any recognition of capitalism's inequalities (Hackworth, 2007). Neoliberalism reprioritizes the sovereignty of the consumer and of private property (Smith 2002). While common neoliberal policies include austerity, deregulation, and the retrenchment of public service provision, neoliberalism is best understood not as a ‘thing’ but as a ‘process’. It

consists of an initial “roll-back” – a hollowing out of the welfare-state intended to minimize capitalism’s inherent inequalities – followed by a “roll out” of subsidies or direct market interventions to groom a socio-political environment welcoming to international capital. The assumption underlying this growth boosterism is that the market will distribute the benefits appropriately; however, neoliberalism confuses efficiency with equity (Peck and Tickell, 2002). As such, neoliberalism exacerbates inequality (Hulchanski, 2007; Walks, 2015) and incorporates punitive policies to silence the very class tensions produced by unrestrained capitalism (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Siciliano, Cowen, and Smith, 2015).

The hegemony of neoliberal policy affects all levels of government, but its inequities are particularly acute at the urban scale (Hackworth, 2007; Hulchanski, 2007). Constrained by the hegemony of neoliberal policy, cities are forced into an inter-urban competition: urban entrepreneurialism becomes a coping strategy, through which cities encourage private market investment to sustain economic growth (Harvey, 1989). In this race to the bottom, the enticing simplicity of the ‘creative’ thesis has become a blueprint for growth: encouraging and shaping neighbourhoods that inspire tech industry workers’ in-migration – considered stewards of economic success (Florida, 2012). But the vibrancy, culture, character, and consumption amenities that have come to define ‘creative city’ incubators mirror the ‘authentic’ urban experiences characteristic of early gentrifying spaces (Peck, 2005; Zukin, 2008; 2011). And so gentrification has become the “material and symbolic knife-edge of neoliberal urbanism” (Hackworth, 2007, p.98): an entrepreneurial strategy pursued to achieve economic growth targets and sustain capitalism (Smith N, 2002), no longer state-facilitated, but state-led (Hackworth, 2002).

Gentrification’s popularity as a neoliberal growth strategy indicates that cities have been swayed by a “moral” argument that considers gentrification the alternative to inner-city decline



(Slater, 2014). Faced with neighbourhood disinvestment, looking to improve the urban imaginary to court mobile professionals and improve bond-agencies ratings, cities grease the wheels of private capital and funnel it into these soon-to-be ‘creative communities’ (Hackworth, 2007). This false dichotomy fails to appreciate both disinvestment and renewal as stages in the “seesaw” of capitalism, both essential conditions of the capitalist system that thrives on inequality (Smith, 1982). By failing to recognize the socio-economic inequality, neighbourhood improvements are presented as objectively beneficial – as public goods (Duany, 2001). But while these policies create opportunities for profit and improve neighbourhood amenities, true to their neoliberal origins, market solutions exacerbate inequality and encourage displacement (Stein, 2019).

#### Rhetorics that depoliticize gentrification

One of the ways that the state eases the flow of private capital towards disinvested and marginalized neighbourhoods, facilitating neighbourhood improvements and justifying gentrification, is by masking policy in language and rhetoric (Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Lees, 2008). Rhetorics leverage what is known as a discursive frame:

*The term discursive frame refers to the process through which interest groups involved in urban politics seek to convince others of the merits of their particular understanding of how the world is, how it should be, and the policies that will make it better in the future.*  
(McCann, 2003, p.160)

Through framing, certain aspects of urbanity are deemed acceptable and others corrosive, creating opportunities for gentrification to be encouraged as a-political (Anguelovski, Connolly, and Brand, 2018; Metzger and Wiberg, 2018). These frames mask the contentious consequences of capital switching by presenting policy outcomes as “win-win,” and have been used to funnel capital into previously disinvested neighbourhoods, thereby contributing to displacement (Lees, 2008; Questel, 2009). These masks are effective precisely because they do not speak to the externalities

of reinvestment, nor inequality (Marcuse, 1985a). Three common discursive frames that support neighbourhood changes, but do not speak to inequality, are social-mix, sustainability, and liveability.

Social-mix is a well-researched example of a discursive strategy that ignores systemic inequality, thereby perpetuating the conditions of poverty (Lipman, 2012). It has been aptly described as “gentrification by stealth” (Bridge, Butler, and Lees, 2012), and an “underhand strategy of a conspiratorial state to displace the poor” (Ley, 2012, p.54). Combining blight imagery, misconceptions regarding the effects of isolated poverty, and blind faith in the ‘benevolent’ middle-class, theories of social mix support the mixed-income revitalization of chronically underinvested neighbourhoods and housing projects (August, 2014). These revitalization efforts promise increased economic opportunity and improvement to the quality-of-life for long-term residents, but rely on a tenuous assumption that ‘neighbourhood effects’ significantly alter socio-economic outcomes (see Manley, van Ham, and Doherty, 2012; Lees, 2008). Instead, by aligning with the dominant class interest (Van Criekingen, 2012), discourses of social-mix have been used to minimize government expenditure (Shaw, 2012) and justify entrepreneurial city initiatives in depressed neighbourhoods (Glynn, 2012). Ultimately, by opening up marginalized neighbourhoods to middle-class housing and consumption opportunities, social-mix dilutes the political power of and increases social isolation for vulnerable residents (August and Walks, 2012). Social-mix, therefore, leverages a “language of balance in the service of exclusion” (Blomley, 2004, p.99).

Just as social-mix rhetoric has been appropriated towards more exclusive means (see Ley, 2011), sustainability discourse has been criticized for appropriating the efforts of environmental justice activists to the benefit of capital accumulation (Checker, 2011; Gauna, 2008), transforming

neighbourhoods for the benefit of middle-class residents (Immergluck et al., 2018). Indeed, Anguelovski (2016) defines green amenities as Green Locally Unwanted Land Uses, or GreenLULUs, her language deliberately recalling environmental justice activists struggles against LULUs (ie. toxic land uses): the two functionally analogous – both working to exclude marginalized communities from liveable spaces. Likewise, Loughran (2014) describes parks as symbols of uneven economic development and Immergluck et al. (2018) compare sustainable development initiatives to suburbanization: subsidized middle-class amenities that increase the precarity of marginalized groups (for a discussion of facilitated middle-class suburbanization see Checkoway, 1980; for a discussion of the systemic exclusion of racialized groups see Coates, 2016 or Rothstein, 2017). Overall, while sustainable developments may promise public health benefits, sustainability rhetorics have been associated with ecological (Dooling, 2009) and environmental (Checker, 2011) gentrification. These references to gentrification allude to the contribution green amenities make to land revalorization and the consequences for those excluded from the market (Anguelovski et al., 2018).

Liveability discourse shares similarities and is sometimes considered synonymous with sustainability discourse (Howley, Scott, and Redmond, 2009). Some scholars define liveable city initiatives as the local level initiatives that collectively contribute to international and intergenerational sustainability (Gough, 2015); like-minded scholars recognize liveable city efforts as the present-day and tangible components of achieving social equity (Holden and Scerri, 2013). But others have described liveability and sustainability discourses as opposing forces – linking liveability to consumption and resource depletion (Newton, 2012). Others still consider “liveability” an entirely separate evaluative framework, one that focuses on design and aesthetic

considerations (Godschalk, 2004). Given these differences of interpretation, it is no surprise that liveability discourse is recognized as being both vague and context-specific (Lauster, 2019).

This ambiguity is precisely why liveability is so persuasive as rhetoric and discursive frame: it is the perfect example of a “slippery word” which “suppresses critical questions” (Marcuse, 2015, p.152). Context-specific interpretations are delineated by socioeconomic class (Ruth and Franklin, 2013) or scale (McCann, 2007) – ie. the differences between neighbourhood, city-wide, and regional liveability levels; but these delineations and inequities are masked by a curated perception of objectivity (McArthur and Robin, 2019). Liveability rhetoric, therefore, supports gentrification by masking inequality: one interpretation of liveability calls on social equity considerations, which displaces critical questions about who neighbourhood improvements serve, allowing other interpretations that align with aesthetic, lifestyle, and consumption characteristics to operate in the interest of consumerism and capitalism (Ley 1980). Liveability initiatives are then introduced without accounting for conflict, only to have private property rights appropriate the associated benefits, thereby exacerbating the conditions of inequality already present (Stein, 2019).

### Research Questions

Wyly and Hammel (2008) suggest that contemporary policy innovations encourage gentrification by silencing the political and theoretical advancements made by critical scholars and community organizers. Lees (2008) similarly acknowledges that the core success of effective policy discourse is that it “never uses the word ‘gentrification’” (Lees, 2008, p.2452). Whereas the class nature of ‘gentrification’ is rooted to the word and central in Glass’s original description,

these more recent rhetorics hide the consequences of neighbourhood change beneath false promises, “anesthetizing” public understanding (Smith N, 2002).

The above examples of discursive frames typify this success: of “language that has itself been gentrified” – divorced from its “critical meanings” and from the harmful consequences of neighbourhood change (Marcuse, 2015, p.155); of “parasitic” gentrification, attaching itself to a discourse and “living off” the associated policies (Lees, 2012, p.163); and of capitalism appropriating the rhetoric of community groups and activists towards accumulation (Ley and Dobson, 2008). Social-mix, sustainability, and liveability would, therefore, be considered effective neoliberal policy innovations (Shaw, 2008): each discursive frame distracting from inequality while contributing to displacement.

But underlying the suggestion that discourses are used to mask the contentious consequences of gentrification are two assumptions: first, that mainstream gentrification discourses are sufficiently comprehensive to necessitate a disguise; and second, that the discourses that mask gentrification speak to desirable neighbourhood improvements.

The belief that critical and theoretical advancements need be anesthetized is rooted in a fairly substantial assumption: that the critical underpinnings of gentrification scholarship – which include recognition of inequality, class struggle, and displacement – are shared by the public. Considering that even gentrification scholarship has, at times, lost track of its critical consciousness (Marcuse, 2016; Slater, 2006), this assumption demands investigation.

A discourse used to encourage neighbourhood improvements is only an effective mask and distraction if it speaks to the desires and sensibilities of dominant classes. While this seems straightforward, it is particularly relevant when considered in the context of the popular liveability discourse. With gentrification (Wyly and Hammel, 1999) and inequality (Hulchanski, 2007;

Walks, 2015) negatively affecting a greater number of urban residents, researchers have noted that most citizens never experience what makes a city “liveable” (McArthur and Robin, 2019). This has been described as the paradox of the liveable city: as liveability is discussed by mainstream media, and as it often influences policy discussion, it speaks exclusively to the comforts and living situations of a handful of an international elite (Lauster, 2019; Holden and Scerri, 2013). In other words, in the event that liveable city rhetoric encourages greater neighbourhood investment and therefore displacement (Stein, 2019), a greater proportion of the urban population is experiencing these exclusions. If this is true, and if liveability is purported to speak comprehensively to the experience and needs of the urban majority, affordability should be a recognized precondition for liveability.

These assumptions set the foundations for a research project which investigates the extent to which contemporary public discourse of neighbourhood change comprehensively account for inequality; specifically, the extent to which inequalities impact neighbourhood access. This research asks:

- + To what extent are the media’s references to “gentrification” class comprehensive, and how have these references changed over time?
- + To what extent do neighbourhood level manifestations of “liveability” – a policy discourse uses to support and encourage neighbourhood change – comprehensively address inequality and issues of affordability; specifically, to what extent is displacement recognized as a potential and foreseeable outcome of neighbourhood change?

## **Thesis Summary and Methodology**

This thesis is informed by a mixture of qualitative research methods. Qualitative methods are exploratory, and best used to develop an understanding of the meanings assigned to social and human phenomena (Cresswell, 2014).

My research methods were designed to identify and describe the mainstream discourses neighbourhood change. Recognizing the use of discursive frames also places this research firmly within the social-constructivist tradition (Lees, 2004; McCann, 2003; Slater, 2002). A social-constructivist perspective is grounded in the understanding that context is socially, culturally, and historically constructed (Hyde, 2014; Liu and Blomley, 2012), and influenced by socioeconomic position (Cresswell, 2014). Discourse is recognized as not purely linguistic: it provides meaning and constructs reality (Slater, 2002). Together, context and discourses influence how individuals and policy-makers make sense of social (including urban) phenomena: determining the types of information considered, the value attributed to different information, and the types of stories formed surrounding this information (van Hulst and Yanow, 2016).

### **Second chapter: “Gentrification” in the media**

The second chapter in this thesis is called “Gentrification in the media: the eviction of critical class perspective.” This chapter was inspired by the first of my research questions: To what extent are the media’s references to “gentrification” class comprehensive, and how have these references changed over time? The chapter specifically asks:

1. How has the frequency of “gentrification’s” appearance in the media changed over time?

2. To what extent has the framing of “gentrification” changed over time and how do these interpretations of gentrification reflect different class perspectives?

The roles of catalyst, contributor, and victim of gentrification, and the potential of acting in all three capacities are well understood in academic scholarship: Zukin (1982) demonstrates how artists simultaneously displace industrial uses and prepare an environment for upper-class consumption and residence, effectively the architects of their own replacement. Recent scholarship into the role and motivations of the gentrifier also grapples with the uncomfortable reality that many of the harshest critics of gentrification, including critical scholars, have in fact contributed and continue to contribute to gentrification (Schlightman et al., 2017). This chapter interrogates mainstream media references to “gentrification” to determine whether the associations are similarly critical and comprehensive.

To identify the appropriate media sample, different mainstream newspapers were compared on the basis of the amount articles, op-eds, or letters to the editor with references to “gentrification” and the frequency of reference. Based on the data available in digital archives, *The Globe and Mail* was the first major English language National daily to make use of the term “gentrification” (in 1980), and the newspaper that has referenced the term most frequently. It is true that 63% of its readership above the age of 35, and 38% of its readership making above \$100,000 a year (Globe and Mail, 2019) and it has been considered the voice of the establishment and “reliably conservative” (Taras, 1996). Still, *The Globe and Mail* is Canada’s largest daily newspaper (Levson, 2018; Roy, 2018) and it is well regarded as a mainstream publication without extreme political orientation (Hackworth, 2009, p.2692). Based on its readership numbers, its relatively centrist position, having referenced “gentrification” first (according to digital archives),



and having referenced “gentrification” most frequently, *The Globe and Mail* was chosen for the study.

This chapter analyzes the content and the frames within every *Globe and Mail* article with explicit reference to the word “gentrification” between the years 1980 and the end of 2017. To conduct the content analysis, each *Globe and Mail* article was read, coded, and interpreted. The articles were originally coded on the basis of associations, which developed iteratively over the course of a sample reading of random articles, to ensure that the questions were thematically representative. This random sample of articles was generated by numbering each article within five-year periods and using the random function on excel to identify specific five articles per period (40 articles total): using this method, my sample was not overly weighted by more recent articles of which there were more. To check for consistency of subject matter across other mainstream publications, a similar exercise was completed for *The Vancouver Sun*, *the Vancouver Province*, *the Toronto Star*, *the Toronto Sun*, and *the National Post*.

Afterward, these associations were asked as simple binary questions to each article (see Figure 1 for a complete list of the associations). A brief summary of each article was also recorded.

Figure 1 - Associations for content analysis
Are the neighbourhood changes associated with “gentrification” viewed positively? Are the neighbourhood changes associated with “gentrification” viewed negatively? Are the neighbourhood changes associated with “gentrification” perceived as neither positive or negative? Did the article include an explicit reference to displacement? Did the article include an implicit reference to displacement? Did the article reference affordability? Did the article reference unaffordability? Did the article reference income polarization? Is a definition of “gentrification” provided? Is “gentrification” associated primarily with aesthetic changes? Is “gentrification” associated with generic and homogeneous environments? Is “gentrification” associated with “authentic” urban environments? Is “gentrification” associated primarily with real estate market pressure and speculation?

Is “gentrification” associated with renewal, modernization, or condominium development?  
Is “gentrification” associated with artists?  
Is “gentrification” associated with yuppies or hipsters?  
Is “gentrification” associated with the middle-class?  
Is “gentrification” associated with elite or luxury development?  
Is “gentrification” was associated with foreign ownership?  
Is “gentrification” associated with retail/amenity changes?  
Is “gentrification” associated with housing?  
Is “gentrification” associated with consumption more broadly?  
Is “gentrification” considered inevitability?  
Was the article a travel or tourist guide?

For many of these associations, my role as a researcher involved estimating a journalist’s understanding of gentrification and relied heavily on my own subjective interpretation. Due to the evolving nature of these associations, and perhaps influenced by researcher bias, quantitative temporal analysis of these associations was not particularly insightful: temporal analysis was challenging because of the evolving nature of gentrification critiques, and the different types of displacement recognized and across the study period. Because of these subtle changes in associations, my analysis began to naturally incorporate elements of framing analysis.

Framing analysis assumes that “frames” construct our reality and our understandings of social problems (McCann, 2003), and thereby heavily influence policy response (van Hulst and Yanow, 2016). While similar to latent content analysis, it is less quantitative. By identifying prominent media frames, this form of analysis can highlight the qualities of different phenomena that have been emphasized and prioritized in public understanding (Hyde, 2014; Liu and Blomley, 2012).

Using framing analysis, I identified three prominent discursive frames. Quotes that poignantly reflect these discursive frames were recorded throughout the analysis. The chapter is made up primarily of my analysis of these quotes acting as metonyms for broader public discourses. The chapter describes how the process of gentrification, as it is presented in the media

discourses, has become associated primarily with changes in the amenity and consumption landscape, with unaffordability interpreted from the perspective of a more affluent audience.

The chapter concludes with a reflection on Slater's (2006) discussion of gentrification scholarship: gentrification discourses have evicted certain critical perspectives, erasing the victims of displacement or those threatened by displacement, and presenting affluent residents as burdened by lost comfort. The chapter also highlights a loss of self-awareness regarding gentrifiers' contribution to the process of neighbourhood change: in particular, a failure to recognize the consequences of consumption decisions. This loss of critical self-reflection creates a disconnect in the lineage that connects working-class displacement, the struggles of marginalized residents, lost neighbourhood authenticity, and the present struggles of middle-class affordability.

#### Third chapter: Manifestations of "liveability"

The third chapter in this thesis is called "Liveability for whom?: the gentrification of memory in Vancouver's Northeast False Creek." This chapter was inspired by my second subsection of research questions: To what extent do neighbourhood level manifestations of "liveability" – a policy discourse used to support and encourage neighbourhood change – comprehensively address inequality and issues of affordability; specifically, to what extent is displacement recognized as a potential and foreseeable outcome of neighbourhood change? The chapter specifically asks:

1. What services and amenities are being provided, and needs being addressed, under the umbrella of Vancouver's commitment to liveability? Specifically, are unaffordability and the threat of displacement considered?
2. Given the types of services and amenities provided, and the types of needs being addressed, what socio-economic groups are served by liveability?

To answer these questions, this chapter uses discourse and frame analysis to investigate neighbourhood level articulations of Vancouver’s commitment to liveability and how, in a context of increased unaffordability and inequality, policies that may promote further exclusion are communicated to the public.

Despite the prominence of liveability discourse, there has been little systematic analysis of neighbourhood level articulations. Vancouver is an appropriate subject to address this gap as “liveability” guides its planning policy (Vancouver, 2019) and its commitment to liveability evolved similarly to other cities internationally (Cervero et al., 2009; Ley, 1996; Loopmans, 2008). But the city is also symbolic of liveability’s contentions (Holden and Scerri, 2013; Lauster 2019; McArthur and Robin, 2019): recognized by international rankings for its liveability – in 2018, the City ranked sixth in *The Economist* Intelligence Unit’s (EIU) “City Liveability Rankings” (EIU, 2018), and it was also the only North American city among those recognized by *Monocle* for its “Quality of Life” (Gibson, 2018) – but is also known for its poverty and income polarization (Kenny, 2016). This manuscript investigates manifestations of Vancouver’s commitment in two adjacent neighbourhoods that have historically experienced different forms of neighbourhood change: the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and Northeast False Creek (NEFC) (see Appendix A).

The intended focus of discourse analysis is the wider construction of narrative. The research method confronts the difference between interpretation and objectivity – recognizing that discourses are representations rather than a reflection of reality (Lees, 2004). My analysis focuses on the planning language and policies in both Vancouver neighbourhoods, interpreting the intended audience of the policy, and evaluating the extent to which gentrification is a significant concern. The two planning areas are then compared, with a focus on the ways in which each address displacement. While critical scholars have described liveability as inherently exclusionary

(Ley, 1980; McArthur and Robin 2019; McCann, 2003; 2007; Stein 2019), this chapter also investigates whether the socially just and equitable interpretations of liveability exist, and in what context these interpretations manifest themselves.

This chapter demonstrates that liveability is not inherently exclusionary, but that an interpretation that more appropriately addresses issues of affordability is possible only when displacement is recognized as a potential outcome. The failure to recognize how amenities contribute to gentrification, and how displacement is related to liveable city initiatives more broadly, is the product of manipulations of history. These manipulations are used to generate support development activity, by evicting the negative experiences of marginalized residents.

### **Thesis Organization**

This thesis follows the manuscript option for master students in the School of Planning at the University of Waterloo. It includes two independent manuscripts that together explore how displacement and the exclusionary consequences of gentrification figure into mainstream discourses of neighbourhood change and gentrification. Both chapters have been reformatted for the purposes of the thesis. The final chapter summarizes key findings from both manuscripts, discusses the relationship between the findings, highlights relevant findings for practicing planners, and proposes directions for future research and advocacy.

## **Chapter 2: Gentrification in the media: the eviction of critical class perspective<sup>1</sup>**

This chapter was submitted to Urban Geography in February 2019, accepted with revisions in July 2019, and re-submitted in September 2019. It appears here re-formatted.

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this chapter and manuscript is an intentional reference to the classic piece by Tom Slater (2006): “The Eviction of Critical Perspectives from Gentrification Research”

## **Introduction**

*Gentrification: A relatively new word, quite graceless, but useful in identifying a recent phenomenon taking place in growing cities: the middle-class reclamation of slums, and the consequent pushing out of the poor.* (Corbeil, 1980, p.F6)

In 1980, the word ‘gentrification’ appeared for the first time in the pages of *The Globe and Mail*, Canada’s largest national daily newspaper. Later that year it was used and defined again:

*It is part of the phenomenon of gentrification, in which older homeowners and tenants and buildings are displaced and the inner city is reclaimed for high-price middle-class development.* (Cuff, 1980, p.F7)

An obscure word that demanded contextualization, it replaced a local Toronto term, ‘white painting,’ which described the invasion of middle-class households into lower-income neighbourhoods (Lemon, 1985; Ley, 1996; Walks and August, 2008). Much like Ruth Glass’ original definition of the term, these early media accounts framed gentrification as a process of class transformation, with negative consequences for poor and working-class communities (Lees, et al, 2008). However, since that time, dominant media accounts of gentrification have shifted.

Even if the term is not directly used today, for many middle-income households, the aesthetics and lifestyles associated with gentrified spaces are aspirational, representing the “emancipatory” promise of the urban idyll (Caulfield, 1994; Hoskins and Tallon, 2004; Zukin, 2008). Notwithstanding the impact of these aspirations on marginalized groups displaced, this urban idyll was, for a long time, achievable for many professional households. A desirable neighbourhood has become too expensive? No problem. Cheaper housing is only minutes away – just two subway stops further!

As gentrification has spread to encompass most of the pre-World War II city, with its walkable streets, mixed-use, and dense urban form, this urban dream has becoming increasingly challenging for professional, well-educated, middle-class households, particularly in big cities such as Toronto and Vancouver. When homes in that adjacent neighbourhoods are already selling

for over one, or two million dollars (in Toronto and Vancouver, respectively), gentrification becomes a middle-class problem as well.

Gentrification has been described as the most politically loaded word in urban geography (Davidson and Lees, 2005), and the use of the word has extended well beyond the confines of academia. This article will examine how gentrification has been portrayed in the media, specifically the Canadian print-media. Despite recognition that media discourses are a cultural force central to the production of ‘place’ (Brown-Saracino and Rumpf, 2011; Gutsche, 2013; Liu and Blomley, 2013), systematic analyzes of the frequency and nature of the use of the term “gentrification” are lacking in scholarly research. Therefore, the aim of this article is to analyze the changing ways in which gentrification is portrayed in the media. Two research questions will guide this article:

1. How has the frequency of “gentrification’s” appearance in the media changed over time?
2. To what extent has the framing of “gentrification” changed over time and how do these interpretations of gentrification reflect different class perspectives?

An obscure term when it first appeared on 25 October 1980, in 2017 alone, “gentrification” appeared in more than 220 separate articles in major English-language Canadian newspapers<sup>2</sup>. Our analysis confirms that media representations of gentrification are “shifting and fractured” – supporting a variety of gentrification orientations (Brown-Saracino and Rumpf, 2011, p.307). But within these articles, what constitutes gentrification has shifted from a rather narrow account of the middle-class reclamation of the inner-city to a synecdoche for a range of urban transformations.

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<sup>2</sup> Articles which reference ‘gentrification’ in *The Toronto Star*, *The Toronto Sun*, *The Vancouver Sun*, *The Province*, the *National Post*, and *The Globe and Mail*, pulled using Factiva.



This article begins with an examination of media representations of gentrification in existing literature. We then turn to a temporal analysis of gentrification's appearance in the *The Globe and Mail*. To address our second research question, we read, coded, and analyzed all *Globe and Mail* articles mentioning 'gentrification' in the title or body of the article, to get a clearer sense of the media's use of discursive frames (see McCann, 2003) and the ways in which these frames change over time. We then analyzed the evolution of three interrelated, and common, discursive frames: gentrification and tourism, gentrification and consumption, and the consumption of gentrified spaces.

### **Gentrification in the media: an under-researched lens to examine urban change**

Since Ruth Glass first coined the term over 50 years ago, it has become a subject of major urban research. Many academic articles provide thorough overviews of contemporary debates and research frontiers (see Doucet, 2014; Lees, 2000; 2012; van Weesep, 1994). To some it represents the inner-city savior: emancipation, renewal, and authenticity (Brown-Saracino, 2004; Zukin, 2008). To others it represents displacement (Elliott-Cooper et al., 2019) and a loss of continuity (McLean & Rahder, 2014).

However, there has been little systematic study of the term's use in the media. As gentrification has become a defining urban process of our time (Wyly and Hammell, 1999), these topics have become part of wider, mainstream conversations that play out in a variety of mediums. Understanding popular discourses surrounding the term is important for scholars who study its causes, effects, and impacts (Brown-Saracino and Rumpf, 2011; Liu and Blomley, 2013). News media is a major part of shaping the wider public discourse as they are "not only...successful in telling us *what to think about*, but also can be successful in telling us *how to think about it*"

(McCombs 2005, emphasis in original, as quoted in Lavy et al., 2016, p. 198; see also Gutsche, 2015). This point was illustrated by Gin and Taylor (2010) who examined newspaper coverage of anti-gentrification movements in San Francisco and found that the mainstream media is more likely to promote development, rather than protest movements that seek to limit it.

One of the few accounts of the frequency in which gentrification appears in the media is by Cody Hochstenbach (2017), who examined national trends in the Dutch media. In a short article for the Dutch magazine *Geografie*, he describes how gentrification has gone from an obscure, to a mainstream topic. Hochstenbach documents how, until 2010, the term (or its Dutch equivalent of ‘gentrificatie’) appears less than ten times per year in major Dutch newspapers. Between 2010 and 2014, this begins to rise (34 counts in 2014). Since then, use has skyrocketed, with 99 references in 2016 and over 125 in 2017.

He attributes several factors to explain this meteoric rise of the profile of gentrification in public debates. First, the process is becoming more common in Dutch cities. Second, more affluent residents are now feeling the negative consequences of gentrification, as displacement and affordability challenges are no longer confined to the poorest segments of society. Hochstenbach (2017) explains:

*For the middle-class and young, well-educated ‘upwardly mobile,’ it is becoming increasingly difficult to find affordable housing. They appreciate the new amenities, but it’s unaffordable to live there.<sup>3</sup>*

He also attributes the growing interest to those working in the creative industries, specifically journalists, who find themselves priced out of the cities they write about.

At the level of an individual city, Modan and Wells (2015) looked at the way in which newspapers in Washington, DC described the production of gentrification since 2011. They argue

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<sup>3</sup> Authors’ translation

that much of this coverage focuses on the semiotics of gentrification – what it looks like, the actors involved (with a particular focus on race), and gentrifier lifestyles – without critically examining how gentrification is produced and by whom. Media representations of gentrification are such that the roles of civic, political, and business leaders – shaping and creating gentrification – are made invisible. Gentrification is described as a “simple, natural, cultural and agentless phenomenon” (Modan and Wells, 2015, p.7), akin to a hurricane, and society powerless to stop it. They conclude that a variety of linguistic strategies contribute to framing gentrification as an agent-less process. Statements such as “existing apartments were being converted into condominiums” (underlining in original) demonstrate the dangers of the passive voice (Modan and Wells, 2015, p.11): it masks those decision-makers influencing urban policy (see Marcuse, 2015).

At a very local level, Lavy et al. (2016) examine media representations of the Rainey Street Historic District in Austin, Texas. Media attention peaks when specific local events take place, such as debates about rezoning. Lavy et al. (2016) noted that articles framed gentrification in a positive light until 2009, a period that coincides with the arrival of the first night-club in the area; afterwards, discourses grow critical. Similar critical shifts are discussed in Hae’s (2011) study of the “embourgeoisement of nightlife” (p. 3461) in New York City, where it was often early gentrifiers who objected to the continued expansion of nightlife activities.

While these studies all explore the content of public and media discourses of gentrification, they are either location-, or period-specific. Brown-Saracino and Rumpf (2011) have produced the largest systematic study to date, analyzing a sample of 443 of the 4445 articles referencing ‘gentrification’ published between 1986 and 2006 in nine US newspapers. Their research shows that gentrification frames are dynamic – identifying critical, supportive, mixed, and neutral representations – and refute “the notion that there is widespread apathy about gentrification or

even static meaning assigned to the term” (p.307). They conclude that the media is not simply a “revanchist” tool of the elite (see Smith, 1996). Building on their contribution, Hyde (2014) provides a nuanced look at the culture surrounding food writing in the fast gentrifying Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. He shows that while gentrification is often criticized, community conscientiousness is encouraged only so much as it rewards consumption and is silent in the face of systemic inequalities contributing to gentrification. These media frames “delegitimize alternative narratives” of neighbourhood change in favour of “ethical entrepreneurialism” (Hyde, 2014, p.355).

Brown-Saracino and Rumpf (2011) close their comprehensive investigation with a call for greater focus on media discourses in academic research. Recognizing the many and varied “geographies of gentrification” (see Lees, 2000), the authors suggest investigation of gentrification discourses outside American media.

In our article, we focus on one nationally distributed Canadian newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, and analyze its use of the term “gentrification” from its initial reference in 1980 until 2017. We are particularly focused on not just identifying discursive frames but placing these frames in conversation to highlight the dynamic process by which public discourses are constructed, deconstructed and how they change over time (van Hulst and Yanow, 2016; Liu and Blomley, 2013; McCann, 2003).

## **Methodology**

Our study began by building on the temporal analysis of Hochstenbach (2017) and Brown-Saracino and Rumpf’s (2011) in the Dutch and American media respectively. To determine the frequency of the appearance of the term, we used *Factiva*, a powerful research database of

newspapers, business magazines, scholarly journals, trade journals, newsletters, and television and radio transcripts. We chose to limit the scope of our study by focusing on *The Globe and Mail*, Canada's largest national daily newspaper with a combined weekly digital and print readership of 6.5 million (Roy, 2018). Currently the most widely circulated daily in Canada – *The Toronto Star* held the title as recently as 2013 – *The Globe and Mail* has remained the most widely read national daily since as far back as 2006 (Levson, 2018). *The Globe and Mail* is also recognized for not having strong political identity (neither extreme left or right), despite having a more affluent and older readership (Globe and Mail, 2019), and is regarded as a high-quality publication (see Hackworth, 2009, p.2692). One might expect that gentrification, originally a neighbourhood level transformation, would see greater focus in a local newspaper. However, *The Globe and Mail* was the first major Canadian daily newspaper to mention 'gentrification' and the Canadian newspaper within which it has been referenced most frequently.

We limited our search to articles written between 1980 and the end of 2017; according to digital archives, 1980 is the first year that "gentrification" was referenced in major Canadian media. We also limited our search to references of 'gentrification,' eliminating 'gentrifier,' 'gentrifying,' 'gentrified,' and other related terms that pre-dated gentrification in the Toronto context (i.e. 'brownstoning,' 'whitepainting'). Overtime, interpretations of these other terms evolve tangentially, adopting different connotations. These connotations made establishing consistent narratives difficult. "Gentrification" was used most often and was therefore chosen for this study.

In total, we identified 818 unique articles in *The Globe and Mail* which referenced "gentrification:" this includes opinion pieces and letters to the editors. Numbering each article and then using excel random number generator, a random sample of articles was first read to identify

preliminary themes and associations for preliminary coding. A random sample of articles from other major Canadian newspapers was also read, to confirm consistent use of the word across other media sources.

The associations and coding categories identified included: the city or neighbourhood described; whether or not the article provided a definition; the type of change documented (commercial or residential); actors recognized (artists, hipsters, middle-class, affluent; foreign investment). More complex coding categories examined the article's assessment of neighbourhood changes associated with "gentrification" – whether criticized, supported, or subject to mixed-reviews. Articles were read chronologically, coded, and summarized for later reference. Important or relevant quotations were also added to the coding spreadsheet.

As the coding progressed, it became clear that changes in the use of "gentrification" and the implied understandings were too subtle to be captured by content analysis alone. To move beyond the identification of discursive frames, and to understanding how these frames were being constructed, our analysis incorporated elements of "framing analysis" (see van Hulst and Yanow, 2016).

A frame can be most easily understood as a lens through which one interprets the world, inspiring a particular understanding. By highlighting and omitting what should and should not be perceived as reality, frames impact problem definition and problem scope (see McCann, 2003) – providing "scaffolding for perceiving and articulating patterns" (van Hulst and Yanow, 2016, p.97) – and therefore solutions proposed. Frame analysis is more qualitatively focused than content analysis (Hyde, 2014); therefore this analysis can track the language and narratives used to explain gentrification in a more nuanced way.

Over the course of the reading, consistent themes and discursive frames were identified. Unlike Brown-Saracino and Rumpf (2011), who identified several frames used by journalists to justify, support, or criticize gentrification, our analysis focused on the process of framing: whereas a ‘frame’ is a static lens through which the world can be perceived, ‘framing’ is the political process by which these frames are constructed (van Hulst and Yanow, 2016). Our analysis therefore demonstrates how different interpretations of gentrification develop overtime and how perceptions are constructed. Reading every article, rather than a sample, although time consuming, also captured the subtle changes in discursive frames that occurred over time.

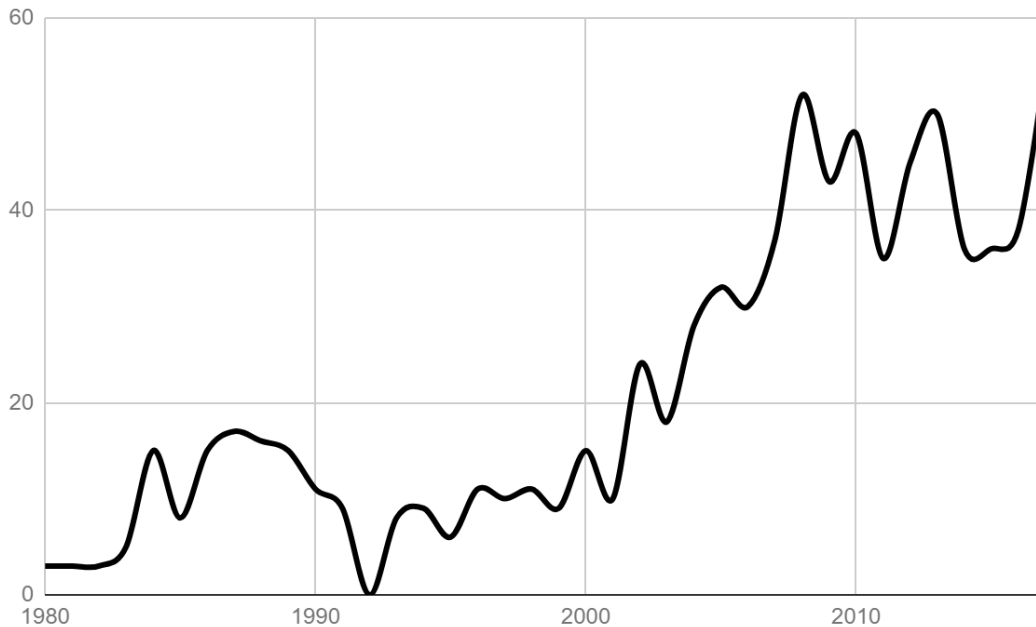
### **Gentrification’s growing media presence**

Just as Hochstenbach (2017) demonstrated in the Dutch context, we can see a dramatic growth in the use of the term “gentrification” in Canada’s *The Globe and Mail*<sup>4</sup>(Figure 1). The early popularity of the term in the 1980s reflects a decade of economic growth, and intense real estate market speculation. Property prices climbed dramatically in the late 1980s. During this period, gentrification was still confined to a handful of urban neighbourhoods in Toronto (see Lemon, 1985), and impacted fewer neighbourhoods in Vancouver (see Walks and Maaranen, 2008). This period coincided with Hackworth and Smith’s second wave of gentrification (2001).

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<sup>4</sup> One might expect a greater number of overall articles published since the advent of web publishing. These numbers have not been adjusted to account for this expectation.

Figure 2: Frequency of Globe and Mail articles that mention ‘gentrification,’ per year



(Source: Own Research, Factiva)

A quote from 1981 poignantly demonstrates how early accounts stressed the link between inner-city neighbourhoods becoming amenable to middle-class tastes, and the subsequent displacement of existing populations: “Gentrification improves the neighborhood for middle class gentrifiers but de-stabilizes it for long-term working class residents” (Yaffe, 1981, p.P8). Some early articles delved deeper, focusing not just on the process, but on the lived experience and meaning of gentrification for marginalized groups. When examining the role of a downtown Toronto community centre, this 1982 article linked the goals of its administrator – supporting low-income residents by connecting them with affordable housing and employment opportunities – with the new challenges of gentrification:

*Most patrons are older, long-time inhabitants of the Sherbourne and Dundas area who have been displaced... the rooming houses have disappeared, but the people are still here... Pensioners, disabled and ex-mental patients alike, these people have nowhere else to go... files of rooming houses and sympathetic landlords have been shrinking. (Cuff, 1982, p.F8)*

During this period, the complex, staged nature gentrification was well understood; the role of artists, both as agents and victims of gentrification, was often referenced (see Ley, 1996; Zukin,



1982). “It is the arts that turn undesirable neighborhoods into desirable neighborhoods” (Alaton, 1989, p.C3), who displace low-income residents, paving the way for: “sandblasted castles of the yuppie generation” (Taylor, 1985, p.A11), only to be displaced themselves in subsequent rounds of gentrification: “urban artists in North America are, to an ironic extent, the authors of their own misfortune” (Drainie, 1989, p.C3).

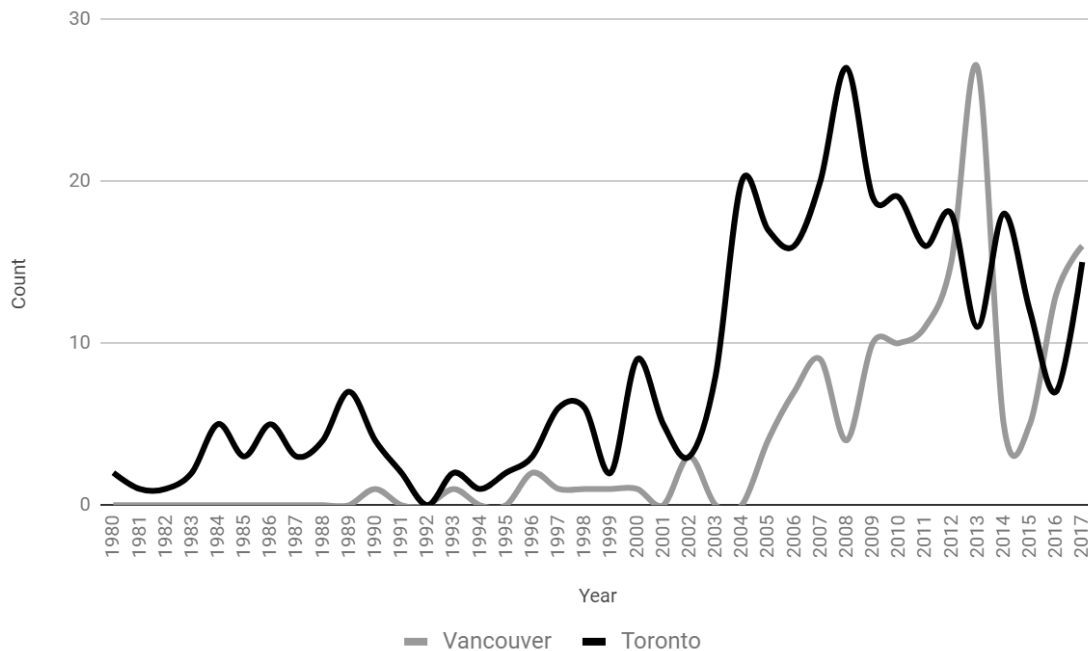
The major recession of the early 1990s stopped gentrification in its tracks. Some scholars predicted the ‘demise of gentrification’ and there were even signs that some neighbourhoods were ‘de-gentrifying’ (see Bourne, 1993). Similarly, 1992 was the only year since 1980 when the *Globe and Mail* made no reference to “gentrification.”

This respite would be short-lived. By the latter half of the 1990s, the economy had picked up and gentrification re-emerged as an even more dominant force shaping cities (Wyly and Hammel, 1999). Gentrification spread beyond older residential neighbourhoods – those that began as affluent suburbs of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, only to filter down the housing ladder over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – to include many formerly industrial districts and their associated working-class housing – particularly along King and Queen Streets in Toronto, where artists had made their homes, and where capital, in the form of newbuild condominium developments (see Davidson and Lees, 2005), were starting to appear. This aligns with the later stages of gentrification (Hackworth and Smith, 2001). The explosive growth in media references throughout the 2000s is also consistent with this rise of neoliberal urbanism (Hackworth, 2007): when gentrification became a strategy for urban growth and capital accumulation (N. Smith, 2002).

It is noteworthy that the tremendous rise in the use of the term between 2002 and 2004 in a national newspaper coincides with the opening of two new boutique hotels in the west end of Toronto: The Gladstone and The Drake. Both establishments attracted significant media attention

which considered them catalysts for gentrification along what was being referred to as *West Queen West* (see Muhtadie, 2003). In Vancouver, the unprecedented attention dedicated to gentrification in the early 2000s, was often paired with references to specific developments, such as the mixed-use redevelopment of the Downtown Eastside’s Woodward’s department in 2009 (Blomley, 2004) and the re-opening of the Waldorf Hotel as art and community centre in East Vancouver in 2011 (Fedoruk, 2016).

Figure 3: Globe and Mail articles focusing on Toronto and Vancouver, per year

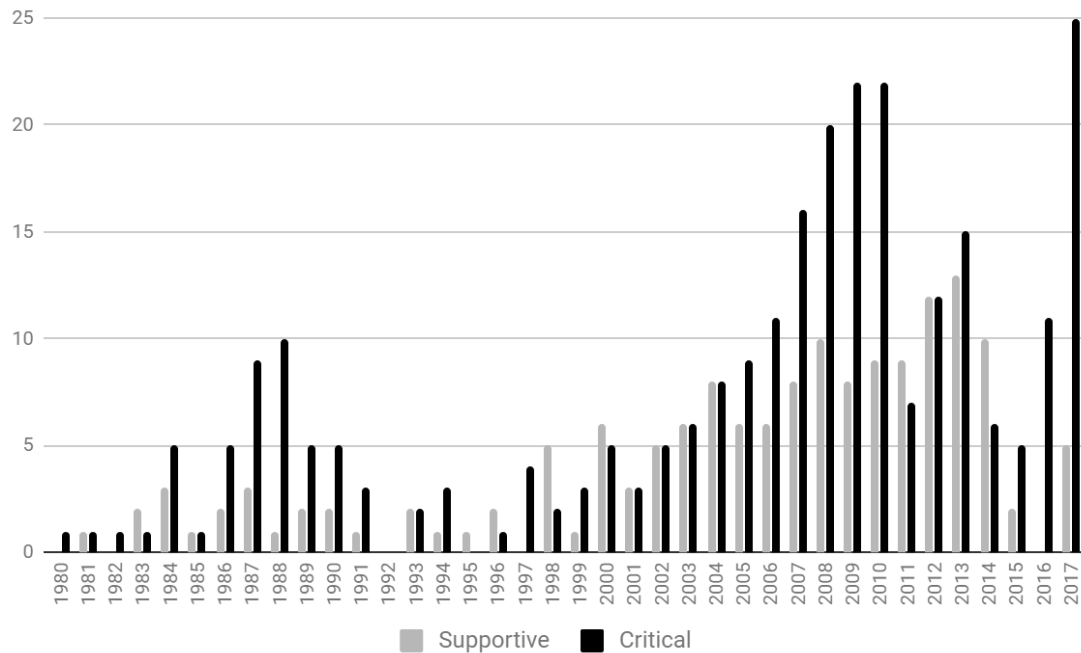


(Source: Own research, Factiva)

We also tracked the number of articles that were either supportive or critical towards gentrification (Figure 3). Our analysis shows that each wave of gentrification begins with more supportive articles, quickly followed by more critical representations. It is particularly striking that in the last few years, very few articles have been supportive. These findings are not entirely inconsistent with Brown-Saracino and Rumpf’s (2011), who found that early coverage was more positive, grew more critical as displacement became more noticeable, and more supportive once again as gentrification became perceived as inevitable. In the remainder of the article, we will

explore the nature of these supportive or critical narratives through three, interrelated themes; as we show, the ways in which critiques of gentrification have been framed have shifted, with working-class experiences and concerns largely evicted, in favour of a more middle-class interpretation of the challenges of gentrification.

**Figure 4: Frequency of articles either supportive or critical of gentrification, per year**



(Source: Own research, Factiva)

### **Shifting class interpretations in the narratives of gentrification**

#### **Gentrification and tourism**

The association between tourism and gentrification has appeared regularly in *The Globe and Mail* since the early 1980s. Unlike early critiques of gentrification, which focused on the complexities of the process, when gentrification becomes associated with tourism, it is celebrated for making an area desirable and attractive.

The following two examples demonstrate this difference. The first describes a Montreal neighbourhood benefiting from renewed middle-class interest: new restaurants and boutiques

attracting affluence. Still, the author places the neighbourhood's wealth in the context of displacement and rising unaffordability:

*Just around the corner from L'Express is Rue Duluth, a street that has been newly cobblestoned and that boasts a solid strip of restaurants from St. Lawrence to Lafontaine Park. The transformation of the area from working-class ethnic to restaurant chic has involved the usual costs of such gentrification. The influx of the restaurants has sent property values scurrying up. Rooming houses have become townhouses; the old residents have been shoved out by increased rents. (Snider, 1983, p.F3)*

Only nine months later, the second article describes investment in New York's South Street Seaport and praises the neighbourhoods' incoming affluence and desirability:

*The development represents a gentrification along the lines of Faneuil Hall in Boston, Harbor-place in Baltimore - or Harbourfront's Queen's Quay Terminal in Toronto... What all these urban waterfront projects share is a philosophy best summarized by the line on the Time Magazine cover that featured James Rouse two years ago: Cities are fun. (Godfrey, 1984, p.C3)*

The second article demonstrates the use of 'gentrification' to accentuate a neighbourhood's desirable qualities. In this form, gentrification is marketing jargon – shorthand for amenity rich – that engages exclusively with aesthetic level transformations and the consumption landscape.

When gentrification is used to describe a tourist destination, the relationship between individual and community is static. The process becomes detached from its fundamental parts: the conversation is no longer about displacement or class transformations, but rather about where to experience 'authentic' local experiences. Tourism articles are about selling place and encouraging visits; unlike investigative journalism, these articles market, promote, and celebrate a consumption-driven urbanity. To a tourist, a neighbourhood becomes a temporary attraction: a collection of consumption spaces to be experienced, rather than a home and a community in which to live. A gentrified neighbourhood is a "fun" collection of consumable attributes. There is, naturally, an absence of any wider context of what has been removed to make way for this playground.

Deindustrialized communities become neighbourhoods filled with promise where, in reference to the old harbours of Amsterdam: “abandoned warehouses and ghostly brick buildings [are] poised to become the next hip hotspot” (Reffes, 2007). Disinvested and impoverished neighbourhoods in Brooklyn become “piece[s] of urban wasteland... ripe for colonization” (Aria, 2002, p.T1), or possible destinations “ripe for refurbishing” (Sturdza, 1986b, p.C10). ‘Abandoned’ and ‘ghostly,’ these neighbourhoods are vacant and haunted by their disuse. Much like the ‘blank slate’ mentality that attracts many to explore cities such as Detroit (see Doucet, 2017), the rhetoric of ‘colonization,’ or ‘refurbishing’ devalues what is already there, unless it can be commodified and packaged for tourists. As the following quote about Paris demonstrates, there is a desire to preserve the historic buildings, rather than any social history of an area’s local (working-class) population:

*Fortunately, the refurbishing has been discreet, and the developers and renovators have been sensitive to the past... Unlike the nearby Les Halles, where over-enthusiastic wrecking and rebuilding has left virtually no traces of the district's original character, the Marais still reflects its glorious medieval past.* (Sturdza, 1986a, p.C7)

Recommendations on what to see, where to go, what to eat and how a neighbourhood should develop and change, are made without reference to long-term residents.

In some cases, it is the grit that makes an area attractive for tourists, particularly when juxtaposed with high-end amenities to reach an ideal “mix of bohemian and chic” (R. Smith, 2002, p.T1; see also Ravgiala, 1995). With this mix, neighbourhoods, such as the 11<sup>e</sup> Arrondissement of Paris, exhibit “under-the-radar cool... the aesthetic is raw [and] rivals New York’s Lower East Side, Antwerp’s Het Zuid and Toronto’s Queen West” (Forman, 2006, p.T7). Neighbourhood profiles promise authentic experiences to “adventurers” who travel to “discover the up-and-coming neighbourhoods;” these same articles reference neighbourhoods undergoing identical forms of gentrification: Belleville, Paris; Jackson Heights, New York; Shoreditch, London (Besant, 2015,

p.T2). There is an irony in seeking authenticity in neighbourhoods that all have some degree of uniformity; one example praises Beyoglu in Istanbul for its gentrified vibrancy, which makes it “difficult to remember you're in a city celebrated for its Byzantine and Ottoman history” (Weeks, 2009). Destination cities are appreciated based on their having achieved a uniform quality; having displaced all forms of cultural distinction.

Used to describe the latest tourist hotspot, gentrification is celebrated. It is a simplistic term that describes the upgrading of an area through a ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry, 1990, 1992), which becomes home to leisure activities for those who do not live there, this discourse easily ignores the lives of those who were displaced to create this playground.

### Gentrification and consumption

As we noted earlier, many early accounts of gentrification were critical of the process because of its consequences for working-class and marginalized residents. At the time gentrification was considered a fringe movement within the wider middle-class; gentrifiers were defined by their opposition to mainstream tastes (see Caulfield, 1994; Ley, 1996). Media accounts of gentrifiers during this time mocked and othered them: euphemisms and tropes targeted symbols of gentrifier tastes to expose consumer motivations, and degrade the perceived empty promise of the ‘return to the city’ movement. References to “quiche and fern culture” (Brown, 1982, p.F2) and “quiche blight” (Shana, 1983, p.P7) imply that unique neighbourhood cultures had been replaced by middle-class consumption (best represented in the 1980s by quiche). Critical accounts of gentrification and consumption at the time questioned whether the bland consumption habits of new, middle-class gentrifiers warranted the displacement of culturally rich long-standing communities.

The derision of gentrifiers' consumption habits seems laughably outdated today. But the shift in the relationship between gentrification and consumption – from a narrative critical of gentrifier consumption habits, to a 'gentrification' defined by middle-class values, tastes, and aspirations – was both slow and subtle. It began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when 'gentrification' began to be used to describe the upgrading of other objectives, consumer goods, and services (see also Brown-Saracino and Rumpf, 2011). The "gentrification of beer" described improvements to consumer packaging (Snider, 1984, p.CL3). The "gentrification of Harley-Davidsons" was written about in the context of increased upper-class and mainstream interest in motorcycles (Laternus, 1990, p.P3). Country music even underwent "an astonishing gentrification" as it found an increasingly urban audience (Mitchell 1994, p.C1).

Slowly, a new narrative emerged that celebrated and validated, rather than mocked, the aesthetic and consumption habits associated with gentrification. It was also at this time that scholarship was growing attentive to the role of urban policy in shaping gentrification – the process becoming central to the ways in which cities were developing (van Weesep, 1995; N. Smith, 2002). As third-wave gentrification expanded the reach and scope of the process in the late 1990s (Hackworth and Smith, 2011), gentrification became the policy of choice among entrepreneurial city managers constrained by neoliberalism (Harvey, 1989; Peck, 2005) and the relationship between gentrification and consumption within the media changed.

By the early 2000s, Richard Florida's (2002) creative class concept was giving planners and policymakers a toolkit on how to create a more gentrified city: one fit for mainstream, middle-class consumption. Gentrification was increasingly recognised not for its negative impacts on poor and marginalised groups, but for its ability to improve impoverished areas and blighted areas by making them attractive for new, more affluent residents. State-led gentrification becomes a central

tenet of the “roll-out” stage of neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Encouraging gentrification and middle-class re-urbanisation became official, and unofficial policy goals through a combination of new flagship developments (Doucet, 2013), the restructuring of problematic neighbourhoods (Bridge et al., 2012), support for creative and artistic activities, and liveability policies surrounding the promotion of (middle-class) leisure and consumption spaces (Tolfo and Doucet, forthcoming).

We can see how Hackworth and Smith’s (2001) assertion that third wave gentrification was characterized by less criticism towards the process, manifests itself within media discourses. In Toronto, gentrification “work[ed] to extend that groove into the former sleaze of Parkdale” (Reardon, 2000, p.A26). Vancouver’s Gastown was described as, “the potentially pretty neighbourhood with cobblestone streets [that] also butts up against the drug-addled war zone that is the infamous downtown eastside” (Gold, 2007). A few short years later, it was approvingly described as an “emerging neighbourhood [that] has come a long way since the rough-and-tumble turf wars of its recent past” (Hui, 2012, p.A14). Associated with hip and trendy neighbourhoods, gentrification moved from being a fringe movement to a mainstream vision for a prosperous, dynamic, and creative city.

Gentrification’s ability to rid the city of slums and undesirable areas, and the consumption-oriented spaces it created, made the process attractive to affluence. Areas untouched by gentrification were described as vacant and without life, whose history needed to be “overcome” in order to make them suitable for investment and middle-class consumption (Jang, 2012, p.S3). This new support focused on the tangible improvements to neighbourhoods and cities, brought to life as a result of gentrification. This aligns with Smith’s (1996) own discussion of frontier terminology; by describing “seedy areas” as lacking in “life,” it implies that neighbourhoods



unexposed to “entrepreneur” interests, and resistant to middle-class consumption, were both undiscovered and empty (Jang, 2012). As with tourism, preservation and heritage are spoken of in terms of the built environment, rather than of existing communities; in this case, new consumption narratives about gentrification encourage middle-class residents to become tourists in their own backyards.

### The consumption of gentrified spaces

While gentrified spaces for consumption are often supported by the media, a more recent and critical narrative has emerged that focuses on how, and by whom, gentrified spaces are consumed. This narrative is critical of contemporary gentrification for two reasons. First, it is seen to bring about a loss of ‘authentic’ consumption spaces – the very spaces which attracted previous gentrifiers. Second, gentrification is now so extreme (and housing prices so high), in Toronto and Vancouver in particular, that affluent households are themselves excluded from these cities. Unlike earlier critiques of gentrification, which were focused on the consequences for low-income residents, contemporary critiques are constructed through a decidedly middle-class lens. The blame for lost authenticity and middle-class affordability is aimed at the next round of gentrifiers: more recent in-movers, corporations and mainstream businesses, large developers, or foreign investors. These later-stage gentrifiers disrupt the ‘character’ of ‘my’ neighbourhood: the neighbourhood that ‘I’ discovered many years ago.

This frame is perhaps best illustrated by the author and playwright Linda Griffiths (2007), who wrote an op-ed for *The Globe and Mail*, mourning the loss of the local Portuguese grocers that attracted her to the neighbourhood twenty years previously:

*I'm sick about it; it's totally ridiculous, but I am. The thought comes at me when I wake up, a nasty little feeling that the world is unhinged, my little piece of it anyway... Twenty years*

*ago, when I first bought the house and moved in with my friend, the area was almost totally Portuguese. There were two local stores nestled in the middles of blocks... You could walk there in your jammies – and I did. The beauty, the individuality of these stores, with baskets of peppers, squash, a striped awning with an individual's name inscribed on it, the same person you actually met inside... Five years ago they closed, remodelling the building so completely you would never know it had been a store... This is no happy leave-taking: It's a tragedy. (Griffiths, 2007)*

Recognizing her status as an outsider, she's originally "self-conscious" within the community (Griffiths, 2007). As the author begins to support the local grocers, she describes being seduced by the community's ethnic character. She aligns herself with longstanding community members threatened by further rounds of gentrification. But because of her acceptance and understanding of its ethnic character, she refuses to acknowledge her role as an incoming gentrifier twenty years before.

Griffiths (2007) describes her shock as other middle-class in-movers like herself do not embrace the culture of the neighbourhood: "I often wondered why more people like me didn't shop there... The new people moving in treated it like a convenience store" (Griffiths, 2007). Having had immersed herself within the established community's culture, the author distinguishes herself from them and blames these recent in-movers for subsequent changes.

Griffiths' (2007) is a particularly powerful example of how critiques of gentrification are viewed from a middle-class frame and reinterpreted based on its impact on middle-class communities. Working-class, or immigrant perspectives are themselves 'evicted' from narratives about the consumption of gentrified spaces. Griffiths (2007) laments the closure of the local Portuguese stores, without pausing to consider her role in the process. This account of neighbourhood change focuses on the privileged loss of valued amenity, rather than the experiences of the long-time residents forced to shutter their businesses. Seen in this light, displacement is superficial: the loss of cherished and authentic spaces, rather than the destruction of well-established communities.

This frame is consistent with Brown-Saracino's (2009) "social preservationist" subset of gentrifiers: those who seek to preserve "authentic" long-time residents. These gentrifiers are vocal opponents of later stages of gentrification, perceived as a threat to community character (Brown-Saracino and Rumpf, 2011). Rather than engage with one's role as an early-stage gentrifier - ushering and steering later stages of gentrification - similar trend-setting journalists hide their favourite neighbourhood hot spots. Neighbourhoods or amenities, untouched or undiscovered by mainstream audiences or corporate interest, ought to be protected:

*The steakhouse-cum-nightclub is emblematic of a neighbourhood that remains something of a hidden gem. Everyone who ends up here finds themselves with the same predicament: wanting to rave about it and still keep it secret.* (Gollner, 2013, p.L3)

The words "hidden" and "secret" demonstrate that this author has only consumption interests in mind.

Building on this, many articles in the early 2000s profiled the work of entrepreneurs who defined their relationship to gentrification based on the types of consumers they hoped to attract. These business owners claim innocence, provided their business model does not attract affluent consumer interest, and attempt to distance themselves from contemporary changes by aligning themselves with earlier and more authentic uses and users: Gentrification is avoided if the retail character avoids "consumer-safe homogeneity" (Shulgan, 2009, p.M3) and neighbourhood change praised "as long as it stays true to the neighbourhoods roots" (MacDonald, 2013, p.M6) and avoids attracting "the fashionista crowd" (Muhtadie, 2003).

In recent years, as this new, middle-class critique of gentrification has emerged in the media, attention has shifted away from how these entrepreneurs worked to extend the boundaries of gentrified space, towards focusing on the role of corporate interests and foreign capital in shaping gentrification. The most powerful symbol of this larger-scale gentrification is the condominium, which has been described as a "clear cut case of gentrification and rapacious

developers endangering the history and culture of a neighbourhood” (Bula, 2017, p.S1). In Vancouver, in particular, gentrification and housing unaffordability are blamed on the “spectacular failure to regulate big foreign money” (Gold, 2017a, p.S6) as inflationary pressure is said to rely “largely on an inflow of foreign money to fuel its real estate industry” (Gold, 2017b, p.H7).

In this new narrative, the middle-class is now threatened by gentrification, their dreams of an urban idyll increasingly out of reach as extreme gentrification radically reshapes urban space. This perspective is best summed up by *Globe* columnist Marcus Gee, a regular commentator on gentrification. In a 2017 article, he states that:

*The process sneeringly called gentrification has brought new life and new investment to this corner of the city, as it has to the older parts of big cities around the world. That can't be a bad thing. But in the past year or so, something different has been happening. The steady climb in prices has turned into a swooping ascent. (Gee, 2017)*

Reflecting on how Toronto has changed since he purchased his downtown home in 1989, we begin to learn more about how gentrification has become a middle-class problem:

*We have won the real estate lottery. As anxious-looking young couples walk up the street to the latest open house, we can sit back and thank our stars that we got in when you didn't have to be rich to afford a house in Toronto. (Gee, 2017)*

These contemporary, middle-class challenges become personal when he thinks of his own children unable to afford a home like the one they grew up in:

*They love our neighbourhood. It would be nice to think that they could have a place like ours one day, in a walkable, central part of town where you don't have to commute forever to work or get in the car to buy a loaf of bread. Like just about everyone in our position, we worry about their future even as we enjoy our windfall. (Gee, 2017)*

For many young professionals who grew up in the city, this experience is familiar. But while we might be sympathetic, this reflection on Gee’s own children’s struggle to afford an urban lifestyle reinforces the middle-class lens through which issues like gentrification and ‘affordability’ are measured and discussed; in articles such as this (Gee, 2017), references to the

challenges of the urban working-class, immigrant or marginalized communities and their struggles with an increasingly gentrified and unaffordable city, are conspicuously absent.

### **Conclusions: The eviction of working-class perspectives of gentrification**

In the media, gentrification is now squarely viewed through the perspective of mainstream, middle-class consumption, lifestyles, and challenges. While this may appear obvious to contemporary newspaper readers, our careful reading of the entire body of work on ‘gentrification’ in Canada’s *Globe and Mail* reveals that this was not always the case: critical analysis began by both criticizing the class change and displacement inherent to the process, as well as by questioning the motives of the early gentrifiers. As gentrification has become mainstream (cf Hochstenbach, 2017), so too have the experiences, motivations, fears, and desires of the *gentrifiers* become central to the media’s framing of it. Displacement of the poor has been replaced with concerns about whether young professionals (and their children) will be able to afford their urban dreams.

Modan and Wells (2015) demonstrate that, through both a variety of language techniques that frame gentrification in passive terms, and an emphasis on the cultural and lifestyle traits associated with the process, the real agents of change – politicians, developers, residents – are made invisible in a process that is described in newspapers as natural, inevitable or unstoppable. A similar process can be seen in our own analysis of the ways in which gentrification has been portrayed in the Canadian media over a period of almost forty years. Early accounts were much more thorough in their understanding of the complexities of gentrification and how its component parts fit together: speculation, class transformations, neighbourhood upgrading, displacement and amenity change. More recent accounts of gentrification rarely discuss the process holistically – instead interpreting gentrifications from one of several frames (Brown-Saracino and Rumpf, 2011)

that almost never focus their attention on issues that are front and centre to an area's poorest populations.

This does not mean that gentrification is celebrated; as we have shown, critical representations are still very common. But these new critiques are written from the perspective of the middle-class experiences with gentrification – the natural position of a middle-income journalist finding it hard to afford a gentrified lifestyle, something that would have been taken for granted a few decades ago. But as Gillian Rose (1994, p.48) reminds us, examining dominant cultural forms “has the insidious effect of translating most geographers’ interests in *power* into an interest in the *powerful*.”

Within these middle-class representations, two dominant discursive frames or gentrification narratives stand out. The first is the mourning for lost amenities that made gentrified spaces appealing to the middle-classes: the ethnic shop, the diversity, the ‘hidden’ nature of spaces that have been either discovered or displaced (see also Brown-Saracino and Rumpf, 2011). Within this narrative personal culpability is lost. As previously referenced, the interpretations of ‘gentrifier’ seemed to evolve separately from ‘gentrification.’ Given the loss of personal accountability seen with reference to ‘gentrification,’ analysis of how ‘gentrifier’ is represented in mainstream media is a worthy subject of additional research.

The second frame blames displacement on the next round of gentrification, whether it be from new residents who lack respect for the neighbourhood, or the developer who erects a condominium and spoils the area’s carefully curated character. Never self-reflective, or deeply inquisitive as to the policy shifts that enabled this type of development, these narratives rarely acknowledge the lived experience of low-income residents. It is perhaps unremarkable that as central city neighbourhoods in major cities have become wealthier since the 1980s, those

threatened most by urban gentrification pressures are middle-income earners: this is exactly as Hochstenbach (2017) predicted. But what is important is that contemporary media accounts of gentrification do not give any indication as to the complexities of the process, nor do they address its root causes. Gentrification is framed less as a process tied to wider trends of growing inequality or political-economic shifts (Hackworth, 2007; Hulchanski, 2007; Smith, 1996; Walks, 2015) than it is about lifestyle characteristics. This raises the question of whether transformative change is possible when the rhetoric is aligned with dominant class perspectives and when working-class accounts of gentrification have themselves been displaced? This has profound implications for wider planning, policy and public debates, as newspapers remain a major source of influence for mainstream audiences (Liu and Blomley, 2014; McCombs, 2005).

In his article on the ‘eviction of critical perspective’ from scholarly research on gentrification, Tom Slater (2006) highlighted how, for a variety of reasons, academics were focusing less on the working-class experiences and negative consequences for the urban poor, and more on the habits and motivations of gentrification. In part a result, critiques of gentrification in the 1980s were replaced with policy discourses that celebrate gentrification’s ability to reshape urban space to make it more ‘liveable’ (Tolfo and Doucet, forthcoming). In some ways, our findings resonate with Slater’s (2006) account; however, rather than seeing an eviction of critical perspectives, the media accounts we have studied show a clear eviction of critical *class* perspectives as critiques of gentrification are, in fact, growing in *The Globe and Mail*. But these critiques have largely evicted the lived experiences of the city’s poor working-class and instead frame the process from a decidedly middle-class lens.

It is true that with its national audience, the nuances of neighbourhood affairs are not *The Globe and Mail*’s primary focus. Given its mainstream appeal, one would also reasonably expect

*The Globe and Mail* to be more sensitive to dominant class concerns rather than the lives of marginalized residents. Comparison of our findings with more localized media (such as *The Toronto Star*, or *Vancouver Sun*) is a worthy topic of further study. Still, it is a telling sign of how significant a process gentrification has become that it has seen such phenomenal growth in coverage in Canada's main nationally oriented newspaper.

The relatively new “Yes in My Backyard” (YIMBY) movement gives further insight into the types of mainstream, middle-class responses that have emerged as a response to the contemporary critiques of gentrification and unaffordability. YIMBY is a pro-development movement that challenges the traditional NIMBY movements by calling for more and denser housing to be built in cities. YIMBY groups call for increased supply by eliminating single-family zoning, allowing for secondary suites, such as basement apartments, and, importantly, increasing density by allowing new developments to be built, both along main roads and in the ‘yellowbelts’ of single-family, detached neighbourhoods (Bozikovic, 2018a; Bula, 2016). A recent *Globe and Mail* article about YIMBYs in Vancouver noted that zoning: “protects expensive houses and forbids apartments that *middle-class people* can afford” (Bozikovic, 2018b, italics added). Another described Toronto's YIMBY movement: “They want to see more housing built. They want to see market prices fall ... Ultimately, they want young people to be able to participate in homeownership and to preserve Toronto as a city for all—not merely as a playground for the rich.” (Spoke, 2017). In this sense, the ‘rich’ are those who own single-family homes worth several million dollars and who prevent new housing from being built as it might spoil neighbourhood character. Rarely are there calls for this increased supply to be in the form of social housing or other non-market forms of tenure and ownership; it is more about ‘embracing and shaping’ (Bula, 2016) private-sector development.



The link between the rise of YIMBY movements and the increasingly middle-class portrayal of gentrification in the media is more of an exploration on our part, that future empirical research will need to investigate; *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star* and *Vancouver Sun* have mentioned YIMBY only fifty-nine times (forty-one of those since 2016). But it is fair to say that in mainstream public debates about the future of the city, which are heavily influenced by what is written in the newspaper, the perspectives and needs of low-income households are now squarely at the margins.

We end this article with two points of reflection. First, that the critiques of gentrification (particularly when concerned with housing) discussed in contemporary media accounts represent only one piece of the picture and genuine solutions for low-income residents will require very different approaches and strategies that are rarely discussed within the media. And second, for scholars, planners, and practitioners who are working towards building a fair and just city, we must double our efforts to find those discourses, experiences, and perspectives of gentrification that speak to the experiences of marginalized groups who do not fit into dominant interpretations of gentrification, and use our positions of privilege to enhance the profile of these perspectives within the debates that make and shape cities.

### **Chapter 3: Liveability for whom?: the gentrification of memory in Vancouver's Northeast**

#### **False Creek**

This third chapter and second manuscript is called “Liveability for whom?: the gentrification of memory in Vancouver's Northeast False Creek.” It was submitted to the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* in September 2019. It appears here re-formatted, with additional maps to support those less familiar with the subject area and Vancouver more broadly.

## **Introduction**

Inspired by its malleability, liveability is contentious (Ruth and Franklin, 2013). On the one hand, it can be an inclusive concept, in tune with social justice considerations, focusing on housing and essential service provision (McArthur and Robin, 2019). On the other hand, liveability can be interpreted as an aesthetic concept (Godshalk 2004), which focuses on design and creative-class-driven consumption, for affluent and upwardly mobile residents (Florida, 2012). In this interpretation, it acts as an anchor for gentrification (Stein, 2019). Popular rankings that list the most liveable cities attest to these contradictions: cities aspire to rank highly on these lists and tout their placement as a stamp of approval, yet these rankings are also criticized for ignoring the lived experiences of most citizens (Lauster, 2019).

Despite these contradictions, liveability endures as an enticing policy buzzword (McArthur and Robin, 2019), and is a term that has attracted significant scholarly interest. Large bodies of literature have examined the history of liveability (Kaal, 2011; Loopman, 2008), the (in)adequacy of liveability indices (Boeing et al., 2014; Kashef, 2016; Lauster, 2019), and the discourse's manipulative tendencies (Hagerman, 2007; Ley, 1990; McCann, 2007). However, there is a gap in our understanding of how the concept of liveability manifests itself at the local level and how the rolling out, or operationalizing of the concept, is incorporated into neighbourhood plans. Consequently, *the aim of our article is to analyze and evaluate the extent to which manifestations of liveability at the neighbourhood level comprehensively address inequality.*

Vancouver serves as a useful case study to explore this aim. While Vancouver regularly ranks as one of the world's most liveable cities, it is also one of the most. Liveability has also been used as a central pillar of its urban policy for many years:

*In Vancouver, urban planning focuses on liveability. That means creating a city of neighbourhoods where people can work, play, and shop... where residents feel supported*

*and engaged, and can enjoy a vibrant street life.* (City of Vancouver, 2019: Department of Planning homepage)

This article explores different manifestations of Vancouver's commitment to liveability in two adjacent neighbourhoods: Northeast False Creek (NEFC) and the Downtown Eastside (DTES<sup>5</sup>). In NEFC, planning policy focuses on the aesthetics of place promotion and delivering vibrancy to market participants. In the DTES, maintaining affordability is a prominent concern, but only for a fraction of low-income residents in what has long been one of Canada's poorest urban communities. In both neighbourhoods, the benefits of Vancouver's commitment to liveability flow to audiences whose numbers are constrained by incomplete "(re)presentations" of history (Sandercock, 1998). Analyzing these neighbourhood-specific interpretations, this article confirms that liveability can manifest itself with exclusive tendencies, and that liveability is often silent in the face of inequality. But, by drawing attention to conflict and displacement, an inclusive interpretation of liveability, attentive to inequality, may be possible.

The remainder of our article is as follows. We begin by analyzing the existing literature on liveability, focusing on the complexities of defining liveability, and how this confusion contributes to gentrification. To grapple with this exclusionary potential, the transformative opportunities and obscured conflicts of "sustainable development" are explored. Using an analysis of more than twenty local policy documents, we then provide an overview of City of Vancouver's commitment to liveability. We then shift to a detailed examining of how liveability is interpreted and made manifest in our two neighbourhoods, and how the transfer of land from the DTES to NEFC (with its different understanding of liveability) amounts to gentrification. Finally, we end with a call for

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<sup>5</sup> The authors recognize that the Downtown Eastside Residents' Association (DERA) reclaimed what was publicly known as "Skid Road" by re-naming it the Downtown Eastside. An abbreviation consistent with these origins would have been the DES. However, DTES has been used to maintain consistency with Vancouver City Planning documents and most academic scholarship about the community.

action for progressively-minded planners, policymakers, and activists to work towards a more equitable and just interpretation of liveability by asking the question of ‘liveability for whom?’

### **Liveability: a muddled concept**

Liveability is broadly considered an estimate of resident quality-of-life: a subjective response to objective spatial properties and policies that govern the tenure, service and amenity availability, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location, and cultural adequacy of living conditions (Lauster, 2019). Although a composite of several influences, some scholarship on the subject is prejudiced towards a focus on the built environment. Pacione (1990) describes liveable spaces as burdened by the “stresses” of urban density and proposes design interventions to minimize “crowding;” similarly, the “liveability prism” maximizes liveability by balancing urban design alongside economic, environmental, and social policy objectives (Godschalk, 2004). Researchers continue to propose liveable design solutions (see Harvey & Aultman-Hall, 2016), but this focus is often considered prescriptive: prone to generic environments (Boeing, et al., 2014); steeped in nostalgia (Kataoka, 2009). Instead, liveability indices – which evaluate goods and services availability, economic performance, access to nature, and socio-political stability – have become popular tools for communicating urban quality-of-life comprehensively (Lauster, 2019).

While most metrics track subjective interpretations of city-life, mainstream liveability indices are often designed to communicate a “convenient cultural understanding of a complex social construct” (Kashef, 2016, p.247). In other words, achieving “liveability” is tied to the preferences of a specific globetrotting elite. Popular indices are therefore criticized for speaking to the situation of the lucky few – “the city of the satisfied, experiencing liveability” (Holden and

Scerri 2013, p. 445). This has been defined as the “liveability paradox,” as most residents never experience the qualities that make a city “liveable” (McArthur and Robin, 2019).

The paradox suggests that experiences of liveability are influenced by one’s socioeconomic position. For wealthy residents liveable is “akin to desirable” (Ruth and Franklin 2013, p.19), bringing to mind Caulfield’s (1989) emancipatory promise of gentrification. Liveability discourse has similarly been described as a reaction to suburbia’s sterility: an appreciation for urbanity that stands in opposition to crime or sprawl (Lees and Demerit, 1998); a celebration of urban life invoked to attract affluence back to the city (Kataoka, 2009). Loopmans (2008) also relates gentrification to liveability discourse through Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, describing how interpretations align with dominant class consumption interests and how dominance is subsequently framed as “general interest” (p.2501). This argument recalls social sustainability’s post-political quality: a discourse that aligns with social hierarchies to restrict the range of politically palatable possibilities (Holden, 2012).

Ultimately, while the term “gentrification” is a politically loaded word fraught with conflict (Smith, 2002), liveability discourse appears benign and has justifiably been described by Kaal (2011, p. 543) as the “ideal political concept”: encouraging exclusion by limiting political opposition (see also McCaan, 2007). Bridge et al. (2012) made a similar interpretation for the way in which the term “social mix” is seen as a more benign and politically appealing concept than gentrification, even if they both have similar outcomes. Liveability discourse’s alternative interpretation as the present-day component of social equity masks its exclusionary potential (Ruth and Franklin, 2013). From this perspective, liveability’s progressive promise evades contextualization: in its designs for a “utopia” (Kaal 2011), it guides the conversation towards questions of what cities should be while avoiding difficult social questions of who cities are for.

The use of “liveability” as a discursive strategy recalls Quastel’s (2009) critique of environmental discourse: used to legitimize economic development while concealing the uneven distribution of benefits (Anguelovski 2016; Quastel, et al., 2012). Recognizing this inconsistency, Dooling (2009) defines neighbourhood greening strategies as “ecological gentrification”:

*[T]he implementation of an environmental planning agenda related to public green spaces that leads to the displacement or exclusion of the most economically vulnerable human population – homeless people – while espousing an environmental ethic. (Dooling, 2009, p.630)*

Checker (2011) similarly describes “environmental gentrification” as a discursive strategy that promotes capital accumulation.

Like liveability discourse, both ecological and environmental gentrification confirm that fuzzy definitions of sustainability are open to manipulation (Campbell, 1996). These manipulations are rightfully diagnosed as inappropriate manifestations of the sustainability rhetoric: the result of an overemphasis on economic and environmental constituents, and an inadequate focus on social equity (Dale & Newman, 2009). However, liveability discourse’s failures have not been afforded the same benefit of the doubt: in the face of real estate capitalism – where the value of urban planning efforts can be appropriated by landowners – the discourse has been written off as exclusionary (Stein, 2019).

Liveability rhetoric – as it currently manifests itself in international discourses – glosses over those difficult and class-laden questions and fails to cater to the diverse needs of urban populations. However, rather than dispose of the rhetoric entirely, McArthur and Robin (2019) describe liveability indices as victims of “their own definition of success,” and argue for alternative modes of knowledge production at the local scale (p. 1723). The authors support the creation of an oppositional liveability discourse, in touch with regular citizens.

This article contributes to efforts to reorient the concept of liveability towards a greater emphasis on socio-economic differences, conflict, and inequality. To do this, we investigate neighbourhood level articulations of liveability: asking whether liveability discourse is revanchist (Smith, 1996) – a “cosmetic” mask for gentrification (see Lees, 2008) – or if equitable articulations exist, and under what conditions? Through an analysis of different manifestations of liveability within City of Vancouver policy documents, we ask the question of who is and is not served by the city’s commitment to liveability. By doing so, we evaluate whether Vancouver’s commitment to liveability appropriately addresses the city’s stark inequalities. This article, therefore, offers the beginnings of a “counter-narrative” (McArthur and Robin, 2019), exploring the potential of liveability as an inclusive concept of social justice, attentive to social and spatial inequality.

### **Methodology**

This article analyzes the policy and language surrounding liveability as interpreted, defined, and operationalized in City of Vancouver planning documents. We read, coded, and analyzed neighbourhood specific plans for NEFC, False Creek North (FCN), and the DTES, as well as citywide planning initiatives and relevant Vancouver City Council reports that precede the *Northeast False Creek Plan* (NEFC Plan) or discuss the removal of the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts. In total, over 25 city planning documents were read, coded, and analyzed. This primary research was supplemented by the already significant body of research that discusses the DTES (see Anderson, 1991; Blomley, 2004; Burnett, 2014; Compton, 2010; Ley, 1980; 1990; 1996; Mills, 1988; Sommers, 1998; Smith, 2003).

While we have studied city-wide documents that help to frame and contextualize our case study area, we have focused our empirical analysis on the Downtown Eastside (DTES), Northeast



False Creek (NEFC) and on the George and Dunsmuir viaducts which separate these two neighbourhoods. Our primary approach was primarily a discourse or framing analysis. More qualitatively focused than traditional content analysis (see Hyde, 2014), this approach focuses on identifying the socio-economic position from which liveability was being interpreted in both neighbourhoods.

Frames can be understood as a means of selecting, highlighting, and omitting information, thereby shaping our perspective and understanding of social reality. Depending on what is recognized as salient, different problem definitions and solutions are proposed (see McCann, 2003). During our analysis, we tracked references to potential amenities, services, or stakeholder concerns. These were coded based on our perception of the demographic groups targeted. The degree to which the needs and perspectives of marginalized residents were met was specifically recorded, as was the extent to which ‘gentrification’ was mentioned. Any acknowledgment of history was highlighted and evaluated with reference to academic scholarship.

Our focus was language and subject matter within planning documents, as an indication of political and demographic perspective. As such, representative quotes are included throughout the article to support our analysis and conclusions. By analyzing and tracking the types of considerations highlighted, our analysis showcases two different manifestations of Vancouver’s commitment to liveability.

Though the analysis that follows is presented as two distinct manifestations of Vancouver’s commitment, these are not meant to be considered opposite interpretations of liveability. Neither articulation of liveability is comprehensively attuned to the needs of vulnerable populations. But, organizing the analysis as such clarifies the differences between the audience targeted by planning efforts.

## **Liveability in Vancouver**

As with other North American (Cervero et al., 2009) and European (Loopmans, 2008) cities, Vancouver's commitment to liveability can be traced back to the anti-freeway movements of the 1960s and 70s (Cameron and Harcourt, 2007; Ley, 1996).

In the post-war years, the living conditions in Vancouver's oldest neighbourhoods came under intense public scrutiny. Bracketed by the industrial activity along the Burrard Inlet and the False Creek Waterfront, these older neighbourhoods had been abandoned by the middle-class; economic restructuring pushed them into further decline (Sommers, 1998) and dominant public opinion connected decay with the conditions of poverty. Reformists feared the inevitable spread of "neighbourhood blight" and urban renewal was proposed as the obvious fix: a new freeway and complementary modernist towers to replace the waterfront neighbourhoods from Gastown to Chinatown (Punter, 2003). But the freeway plans met city-wide opposition. Diverse interests came together to develop a platform that promised "liveability" by managing growth while encouraging community retention, heritage conservation, environmental protection, and the city as a place to live (Ley, 1990; Vancouver, 1975).

In 1972, The Electors' Action Movement (TEAM) gained control of Vancouver City Council by appealing to the rising counter-culture movement and opposing urban renewal: by appealing to liveability (Ley, 1996). Though too slow to save Hogan's Alley – the Black-Canadian community destroyed during the construction of the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts (Compton, 2010) – TEAM helped save Chinatown and Gastown from demolition, encouraged the transition of False Creek waterfront from a noxious resource processing center into a progressive mixed-income neighborhood (Punter, 2003), and supported historic preservation in Gastown (Ley, 1996).

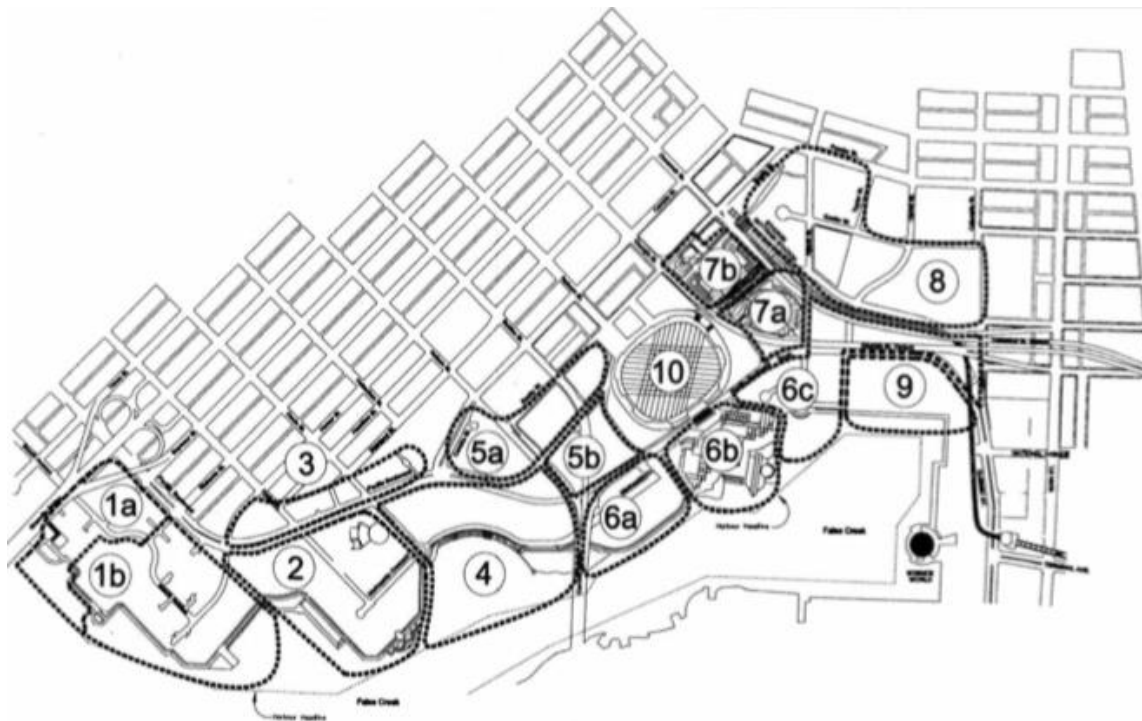
This is Vancouver's "heroic history": the story told by boosters to emphasize the city's success in preserving and augmenting environmental amenities and for having secured much of the downtown core for residential development (see Cameron and Harcourt, 2007). But this "heroic history" is guilty of several "sins of omission" and fails to consider the "noir" histories of Vancouver's commitment to liveability (Sandercock, 1998, p.35-37): by supporting a form of heritage conservation that encouraged real estate market speculation, TEAM sparked gentrification in Gastown (Smith, 2003); TEAM's environmentalism encouraged deindustrialization in False Creek, and the accelerated loss of industrial employment for the working class (Miro, 2009); and False Creek's deindustrialization encouraged the gentrification of the adjacent Fairview Slopes (Mills, 1988). So TEAM's interpretation of liveability may have been inspired by principles of inclusion, but was foremost a response to modernist planning (see Harcourt and Cameron, 2007). As such, it has come under fire for its fetishization of aesthetics at the expense of other considerations, such as a commitment to social justice (Punter, 2003; Ley, 1996). Even early criticism warned of liveability being "co-opted by the calculus of the marketplace" (Ley, 1980, p.258) to encourage gentrification and exclusion.

TEAM's history is only made "heroic" by ignoring the long history of policy led eviction – what Kenny (2016) has described as "Vancouver's amnesia" (p.178): the City silencing displacement throughout its past to create a marketable public image. As the next sections will show, similar evictions are present within the contemporary planning literature guiding development in NEFC and the DTES: interpretations of history which justify liveability for specific resident groups but minimize the voices, perspectives, and needs of others.

## Entrepreneurialism in Northeast False Creek

In 1990, Vancouver approved the *False Creek North Development Plan* (FCNDP): a guide to the development of a new mixed-use neighbourhood along the northern shore of False Creek (FCN). Previously an industrial waterfront, FCN was expected to take advantage of its proximity to both the Central Business District (CBD) and the water and include park space and amenities. Most of the areas adjacent to the water were planned for residential uses (see Figure 5 – areas 1a/b, 2, 3, 4, 5a, 6, 7b) but those surrounding the BC Place (see Figure 5 – areas 5b, 6b/c, 7a, 8, 9) – a legacy resource of the 1986 World Fair (“Expo ‘86”) – were to be made “identifiable, memorable, and lively” (Vancouver 1990, p.5). Residential use was considered at odds with this “festival” focus and these lands were set aside for commercial development (Vancouver 1990).

Figure 5: Map of False Creek North, 1990



(Orientation: North = up. source: Vancouver, 1990)

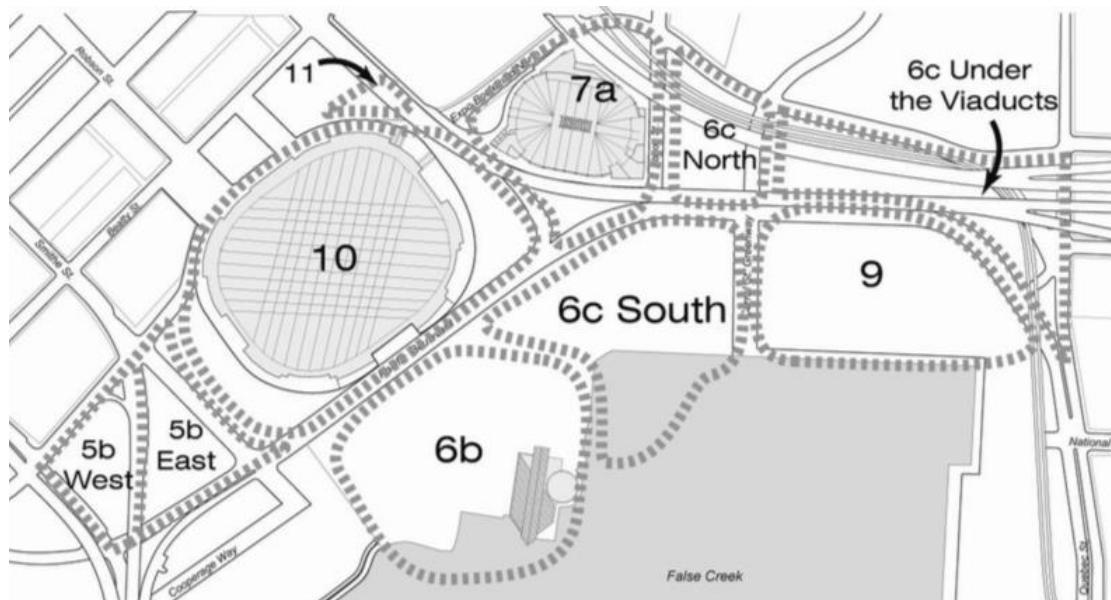
Looking to preserve the historic “character of Yaletown,” the FCNDP praised its “visual amenity” (Vancouver, 1990, p.16). However, this form of aesthetic preservation ignored the fact that, until the 1970s, False Creek was an active industrial zone (see Herzog, 2017): the displacement of industrial employment was largely forgotten (Hutton, 2011; Miro, 2009). References to Expo ‘86 similarly silenced the impact on marginalized communities: that over a thousand residents of the DTES lost their homes in the lead up (Sommers 1998); that the festival became a symbol of a new municipal agenda – prioritizing entertainment and consumption at the expense of equality (Blomley, 2004); and that true to the logic of entrepreneurial urbanism (Harvey, 1989), it signaled Vancouver’s arrival as a global metropolis (Ley, 1996).

Despite fairly recent working-class ties, FCNDP effectively erased the claim to space of the working-class; instead, it hoped to better integrate FCN with the CBD, improving liveability by encouraging “strong visual and physical connections” (Vancouver, 1990, p.5): architecture and memorable vistas were key considerations. The FCNDP recognized these visual amenities as key determinants of liveability and looked to “achieve a high standard of design and development” (Vancouver, 1990, p.4). Visual amenities were expected to take advantage of the post-industrial, waterfront setting to create “physical and functional linkages between the water and the land” (Vancouver, 1990, p.5).

By the mid-2000s, roughly ten million square feet (msf) of market residential real estate had been constructed within FCN. “[T]o take full advantage of a highly suitable, downtown location,” the *NEFC: Directions for the Future* reports (“Directions Reports”) reversed the City’s earlier position regarding condominium development adjacent to BC Place (Vancouver, 2009c, p.11). At the insistence of the development community, the Directions Reports committed to the investigation of four msf of additional residential development: a 45% increase in residential

density across FCN as a whole (Vancouver, 2009a). Residential development in NEFC (see Figure 6) was now considered sustainable, as it would maximize “the use of underutilized land in a central location that is well served by transit” (Vancouver, 2009a, p.11).

Figure 6: Map of Northeast False Creek, 1990



(Orientation: North = up. Source: Vancouver, 2007)

This association between compact development and sustainability is characteristic of Vancouver’s *EcoDensity Charter* (Vancouver, 2006; 2008): a citywide initiative that promised sustainability, liveability, and affordability through density. The policy considered sustainability, affordability, and liveability as distinct but related goals. By the logic of these categories, liveability is aesthetic: features that accentuate the “context, character and identity” of a neighbourhood to improve the “sense of place” (Vancouver, 2008, p.16).

At the time, only half of the citizens surveyed agreed with the proposed increase in density. Some cited concerns regarding the reduced liveability of residential space in such proximity to an “entertainment hub;” many were concerned that there would be inadequate “community facilities and amenities to support additional residents” (Vancouver, 2009a, p.12). But the Directions

Reports broadened the definition of amenity. Features of the public realm remained important considerations, including the design and placement of structures and their effect on “shadows, views, crowds, noise, and privacy” (Vancouver, 2009c, p.34). Community facilities and services were also recognized as valuable. But the majority of the Directions Reports described a new “highly urban, entertainment-oriented” form of liveability (Vancouver, 2009a, p.11), defined by a mixture of uses that would leverage entertainment infrastructure: “a different kind of liv[e]ability that differentiates it from other waterfront areas that are predominantly places to live with few opportunities to work and play” (Vancouver, 2009b, p.16).

To address the concerns regarding entertainment externalities and reduced amenity space, a constrained Council approved the *NEFC “Bridging” Work Program*. Landowners agreed to fund consultation efforts with cost-recovery at rezoning (Vancouver, 2010a). The bridge funding confirmed the need “to monitor and manage event noise,” and for innovative architectural solutions “to address the liveability of the housing by proposing additional mitigation measures in the design” (Vancouver, 2010b, p.3). The funding also covered mediation fees for a conversation between landowners and the public to identify an appropriate public amenities package for NEFC (Vancouver, 2010d). Following these discussions, the *NEFC Issues Report* was approved by Council, which included an updated public benefits strategy (Vancouver, 2011c). During these discussions, adequate park space was re-established as the primary determinant of neighbourhood liveability: Vancouver was described as a “renowned example for liv[e]ability and urban density” due to the “high quality and plentiful public open spaces” (Vancouver, 2011c, p.13).

The articulation of liveability in False Creek recalls TEAM’s aesthetic priorities, but not its social justice motivations. Landowners and development interests are referenced throughout, indicating their relative influence in the neighbourhood. Where development pressure is

acknowledged as a threat to neighbourhood liveability, additional parks, open spaces, and noise mitigation measures compensate for lost resident comfort. There is no mention of gentrification, or of the effects of market development on low-income communities; additionally, the idea that increased access to amenities might aggravate displacement pressures in neighbouring communities is unconsidered. Most importantly, there is no mention of marginalized residents, of working-class ties to the community, or of historic displacement. Instead, having evicted the historic claim of marginalized groups and unburdened by class considerations, liveability is articulated as a place promotion and economic development tool. Beneath this eviction of working-class ties lies an assumption that, if marginalized and working-class residents have a claim to the liveable city, it is not within NEFC.

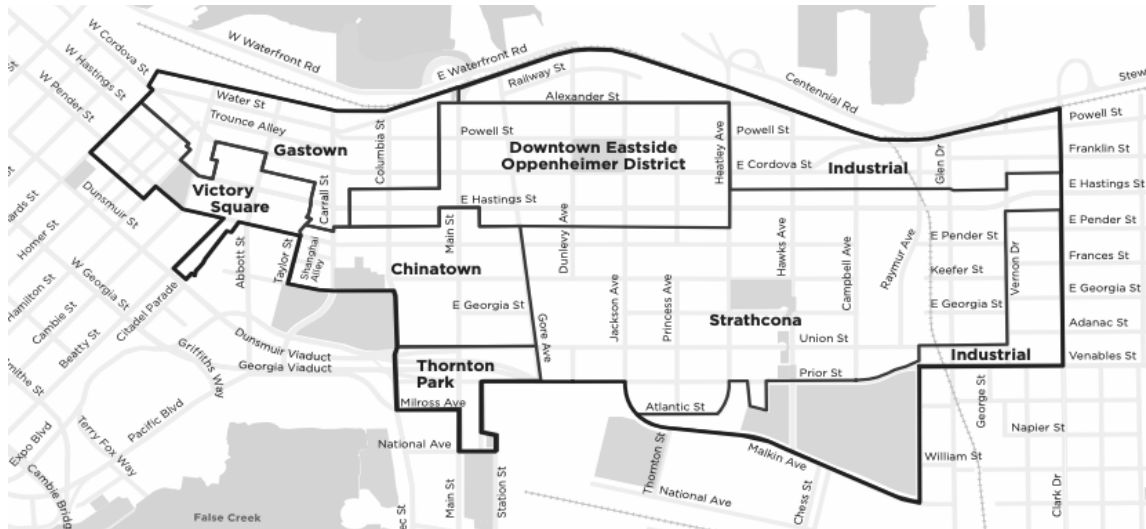
#### Historic manipulation in the Downtown Eastside (DTES)

Located at the eastern edge of Vancouver's downtown peninsula, the DTES is home to the city's oldest residential and commercial areas (see Figure 7). Originally adjacent to two former industrial waterfronts, it was once the centre of a thriving working-class community (Sommers 1998) and the stop-off point for generations of immigrant groups racialized and excluded from other neighbourhoods (Anderson, 1991). Over time, its place in the urban imaginary has evolved – shaped by waves of investment and disinvestment, each wave tied to dominant discourses regarding the neighbourhood's residents (Blomley, 2004). Today, the *Downtown Eastside* evokes images of poverty (Ley and Dobson, 2008), criminality (Siu and Blomley, 2013), and is considered by some “a place apart” (Sommers and Blomley, 2002, p.25): an “anathema to the modern, consumer-oriented, resort-style ambiance” curated by Vancouver civic-leaders and entrepreneurs



(Kenny, 2016, p.183). But wealth and consumerism also have their place within the DTES, making it the domain of extreme income polarization (Smith, 2003).

Figure 7: Map of the Downtown Eastside, 2014



(Orientation: North = up. Source: Vancouver 2014b)

The *Housing Plan for the DTES* (“Housing Plan”) was released in 2005. It begins by acknowledging the importance of the DTES’s affordable housing supply, and that market pressure and insufficient funding affect the future of this community resource:

*Significant changes are taking place within and around the area... condominium development is increasing overall... and social housing, which has traditionally replaced marginal SRO rooms, is not being funded... At the same time, housing opportunities outside the Downtown Eastside for low-income individuals... have been greatly reduced as housing prices climb and affordable rental opportunities are lost.* (Vancouver, 2005a, p.6)

In response, the Housing Plan focused on coordinating market forces to minimize the net loss of low-income housing: “no loss of low-income housing stock and no displacement of residents are fundamental objectives of the Plan” (Vancouver, 2005a, p.3). A one-for-one replacement requirement was established for the 10,000 remaining Single-Room Occupancy hotel rooms (SROs): the primary supply of low-income affordable housing.

The maintenance of low-income affordability and recognition of this neighbourhood as home to low-income residents sets this manifestation of liveability apart from the one introduced in NEFC. But there are two important considerations that qualify praise.

The first is that the Housing Plan was essentially a field guide to social-mix (see Bridge, et al., 2012): introducing market development for “moderate-income households” within already gentrifying areas (i.e. Gastown and Chinatown), with incentives (i.e. density bonuses and height relaxations) to fund social housing, promote economic development, and increase neighbourhood amenities (Vancouver, 2005a). Focusing replacement housing in the areas yet untouched by gentrification both signals profitability (Smith, 2003) and dilutes the control of low-income residents (see Walks and August, 2008) in the portions of the neighbourhood most threatened by gentrification, paving the way for further colonization by affluence. Notably, concentrating low-income affordable housing is the exact opposite of the anti-gentrification tactics used by the Downtown Eastside Resident Association (DERA), who spread the “culture of poverty” – a barrier towards gentrification – by developing social housing throughout the DTES (Ley and Dobson, 2008). Rather than oppose gentrification pressures, the planning policies in the DTES effectively coordinate the spread of exclusionary development, a process earlier introduced by Gastown’s heritage designation: “by selecting certain areas within the Downtown Eastside for targeted revitalization, [Vancouver] created a policy-based infrastructure upon which socio-spatial polarisation could flourish” (Smith, 2003, p.502).

The second consideration is that the promise of “no loss” to low-income housing is indicative of an incomplete understanding of housing insecurity in the DTES. This is reinforced by the frequent mention of the “low-income singles” throughout the Housing Plan: a nod to a period of community activism during the 1960s and 1970s when the DERA reinforced the DTES’s

role as a welcoming space for vulnerable populations (Sommers 1998). The DERA's original focus on "low-income singles" was a strategic revalorization tactic, meant to appeal to dominant class sensibilities as it emphasized the economic contributions of Vancouver's retired resource workers. At the time, the DTES's many lodging houses and SROs were filled with these retirees. The personification of poverty justified a very specific claim: by appropriating these residents as symbols of Vancouver's economic prosperity, the DERA justified the neighbourhood's affordability (Sommers, 1998) and the DTES became recognized as the place for the poor (Sommers, 2001). But this association between affordability, the SROs, and the resource industry created other forms of exclusion (Sommers, 1998).

The Housing Plan's language and policy of affordable housing replacement, rather than expansion, are evidence of these exclusions. Maintaining the current stock of SROs does not account for the 400 units lost between 1968 and 1975 (Sommers and Blomley, 2002), or the 2000 units lost between 1980 and 1997 (Smith, 2003). Furthermore, by tying affordable housing provision to the current stock of SROs poverty, poverty and low-income housing demand are presented as a historic creation. This policy does not recognize the ongoing structural economic shifts contributing to affordability and displacement pressures: since the 1970s, Vancouver has experienced rapid gentrification (Blomley, 2004), deepening unaffordability (Ley 1996; Ley and Dobson, 2008; Walks and Maanaran, 2008; Authors, 2019), and increased income polarization (Smith, 2003; Walks, 2015). For all those excluded from market development elsewhere, the DTES has been the home of last resort (Sommers, 2001; Burnett, 2014). Low-income residents have also been drawn to the neighbourhood for the network of nonprofits providing essential services: "the continued over-concentration of social housing and social services within the [DTES] ensures that the neighbourhood remains a magnet for the disadvantaged" (Smith 2003,

p.506; see also Robertson, 2007). Whether attracted to the institutional services or excluded from the market, the DTES has become the city's safety net: Vancouver's convenient home to poverty (Blomley 2004).

Since the 1970s, the nature of disadvantage and marginality within the DTES has therefore changed. Incidents of mental illness are more common (see Linden et al., 2011). There has also been a significant presence of Intravenous Drug Use since the 1990s; as a result, between 1993 and 1997, incidents of HIV/AIDs raised a state of emergency (Jozaghi, 2014). Public health remains a prominent concern (Linden et al, 2013; Liu and Blomley, 2012). Finally, while Indigenous settlements predate the colonial townsite (Blomley 2004), the proportion of Urban Indigenous within the neighbourhood is greater than the city as a whole (Robertson, 2007).

While the Housing Plan did not recognize the more recent causes of income polarization and poverty, it did address the complexity of the DTES's community's needs: "substance abuse, high incidence of mental illness and communicable disease, and a lack of viable retail services [have] seriously undermined the community's social and economic viability" (Vancouver, 2005a, p.11). Acting on this complexity, the Housing Plan encouraged the inclusion of a broad range of neighbourhood amenities: "low-cost food, clothing and other retail goods, appropriate services including treatment for substance abuse, training and entry job opportunities, health clinics, community centres." (Vancouver, 2005a, p.19).

Released ten years after the Housing Plan, the *DTES Social Impact Assessment* and the *DTES Plan* confirmed a similar policy direction. However, unlike earlier policies in the DTES or in NEFC, these documents acknowledged gentrification and the loss of affordable retail and essential services, and increased social isolation:

*Many are feeling the negative effects of gentrification through rising rents, displacement from homes, poor nutrition, and lack of access to affordable programs and services. (Vancouver, 2014a, p.89)*

*People fear losing the sense of community that exists in the DTES and being displaced... Many say that they already feel like they don't belong. (Vancouver, 2014a, p.52)*

Encouragingly, the *DTES Plan* sought to improve resident quality-of-life by “using city-owned space and or privately owned sub-leased space for vulnerable critical community assets and social/micro/local-serving enterprise at stable nominal rates” (Vancouver, 2014b, p.117). Still, maintaining the stock of 10,000 low-income affordable housing units was the priority, indicative of the historically imposed limit to affordability: low-income affordable housing preserved primarily for the “working poor” (Vancouver, 2014a).

On the surface, planning policy in the DTES articulates a “liveability” attentive to the needs of vulnerable populations. Due to the visibility of poverty, low-income affordable housing and services are recognized as necessary preconditions to liveability. Displacement is recognized as a threat and market development acknowledged as jeopardizing affordability and quality-of-life within the community: “gentrification is compromising residents’ sense of inclusion, belonging, safety and connectedness” (Vancouver 2014b, p.28). And yet, policies of social-mix actively encourage increased market development. Indeed, if one acknowledges the recent influx of high-end consumption amenities (Burnett, 2014; Hyde, 2014), the form of liveability that has developed as a consequence of social-mix policy aligns with the vibrancy promised in NEFC and is reminiscent of municipally managed gentrification in Parkdale: improvements “at the expense of a suffering population” (Slater 2004, p.322).

This combination of a commitment to low-income affordability while actively encouraging gentrification is contradictory: the policies proposed in conflict with their stated objective. It seems the voices of marginalized populations are recognized only because of their prominence; that

gentrification is acknowledged because displacement looms as such an obvious threat. This is an opinion shared by Burnett (2014):

*The very public and highly politicized nature of poverty and homelessness in the downtown eastside requires that the municipal government be seen responding to the needs of community residents in the face of gentrification, even as the state apparatus is actively involved in encouraging capital investment. (p.162)*

Calls for low-income housing preservation – for the “working poor” and “low-income singles,” descendants of the once prominent retired resource workers – indicate that the DTES’s inequalities are considered the result of earlier socio-economic shifts, not a consistent casualty “of the polarising neoliberal era [and] the flipside of the over-hyped post-industrial creative city” (Blomley 2004, p.67). As such, the DTES articulation of liveability, while attentive to the needs of some vulnerable populations and to the threat imposed by displacement pressure, is constrained by a perception of poverty trapped in the 1960s. This history limits to whom liveability is available.

### **Viaduct removal, liveability, and displacement**

#### **Displacement in the present**

The Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts are two pieces of highway infrastructure that run through the DTES and NEFC, connecting Vancouver’s downtown core to its eastern residential communities and industrial lands. In 2010, a study was commissioned by Vancouver City Council to investigate viaduct removal.

In both the DTES and NEFC, the viaducts encumber liveability. Informed by NEFC’s articulation, any adjacency to these active freeway arterials limits residential comfort; removal would also increase the availability of land for parks and open space. But the viaducts are also reminders of expropriation and of the displacement of a once-prominent Black Canadian community at Hogan’s Alley:

*Under the guise of urban renewal, the City purchased significant tracts of land and cleared them to prepare for redevelopment... The Georgia Viaducts were the start of this project and resulted in the demolition of Hogan's Alley. (Vancouver 2005a, p.10)*

The viaducts are therefore symbolic of that which threatens liveability in the DTES (i.e. displacement), and any land made available by viaduct removal would be suitable for low-income affordable housing, minimizing this threat.

Figure 8: Map of Northeast False Creek, 2009

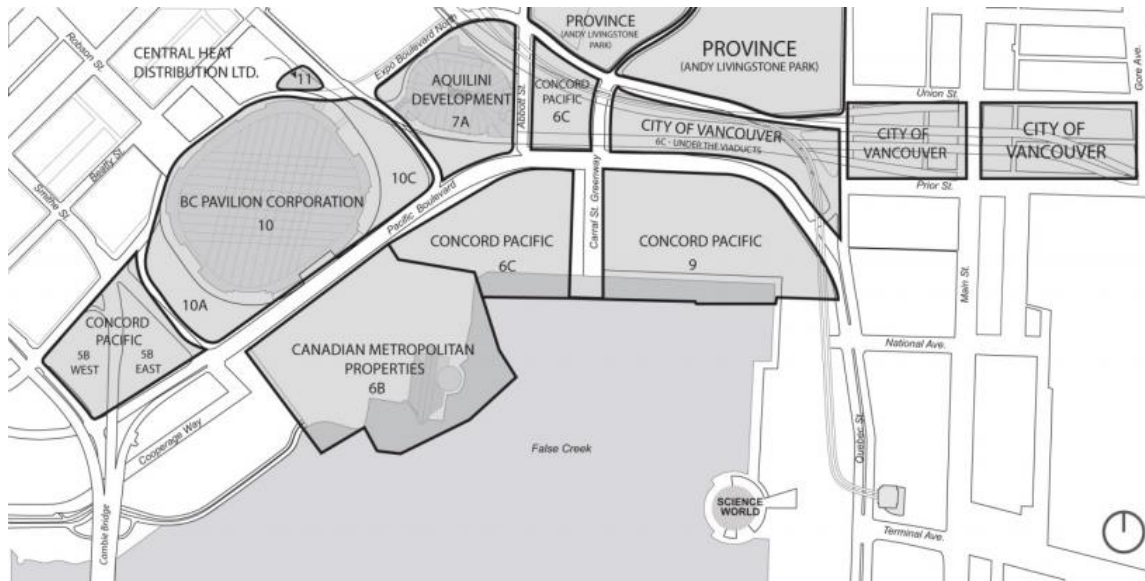


(Orientation: North = up. Source: Vancouver 2009a)

Until 2013, the four blocks that contain and surround the viaducts east of Quebec Street were part of the DTES, yet when Council began investigating the potential for viaduct removal, it approved that “[f]or land use and planning purposes, the viaducts [were] most closely related to NEFC” (Vancouver, 2010c, p.2). Following removal analysis, a Policy Report was presented to Council within which the benefits of viaduct removal are described exclusively as they relate to NEFC and NEFC is visually represented as containing the four blocks east of Quebec street (Vancouver, 2013). Following two more years of analysis, Vancouver City Council conditionally approved the removal of the viaducts and the four blocks east of Quebec Street were formally

transferred into NEFC (Vancouver, 2015) (see the difference between Figure 8 and 9 for reference). The NEFC Plan, released in February 2018, confirms this transfer.

Figure 9: Map of Northeast False Creek Plannin Area, 2013



(Orientation: North = up. Source: Vancouver 2013)

This is gentrification: “the production of urban space for progressively more affluent users” (Hackworth, 2002, p.815). An area where interpretations of liveability acknowledged social inequities – with planning policies attuned to gentrification’s exclusionary consequences – was appropriated by an interpretation of liveability far more aligned with urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989). While Vancouver maintained its commitment to liveability, this commitment severed ties with DTES residents and shifted its focus to align with NEFC policy encouraging entertainment, vibrancy, and place-promotion. At this point, concern for “low-income singles,” the “working poor,” or any marginalized group was erased – and their eviction across history confirmed. Here, gentrification was accomplished in the name of liveability, but considering gentrification and liveability synonymous is an oversimplification. An interest in liveability did not lead to gentrification: the consistent concern for liveability masked the change in neighbourhood function by inconsistently speaking to inequality or difference.



## Displacement throughout history

When Vancouver began analyzing the effects of viaduct removal, it had already indicated that the viaducts were more closely related to the NEFC planning context. The transfer of portions of the DTES into NEFC finalized the prioritization of middle-class liveability. The viaduct removal analysis indicates that liveability is defined by such evictions: of the working poor, their history, and their claims over space.

Presented to Council in 2011, the *Viaducts and False Creek Flats Planning Report* references the once proposed urban freeway network and the Chinatown led opposition which left the viaducts as standing reminders of urban renewal. The report compares the original viaduct – a connection between the downtown core and the wider neighbourhood network that bypassed industry – with the ways in which the current design is a barrier towards neighbourhood continuity (Vancouver, 2011a). The transportation analysis that followed further emphasizes the viaduct’s functional- and design-obsolence. It positions the viaducts as reminders of the city’s prioritization of the automobile and describes how public response to the freeway plans in the 1960s acted as “catalyst for change” (p.12); change that sparked heritage revitalization in Gastown and Yaletown, redevelopment of former industrial lands along False Creek, and luxury condominium development in Coal Harbour (Vancouver, 2011b). The report acknowledges that the viaducts are now reminders of past mistakes and barriers towards further investment and liveability:

*Legacies of past transportation planning decisions continue to inhibit the achievement of current goals regarding liv[e]ability ... this is exemplified by the provision of the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts. (Vancouver 2011b, p.13)*

The viaducts are similarly characterized as a planning mistake and removal a redemptive opportunity:

*In every city's evolution there are rare opportunities to take bold city-building steps to advance the city's goals and liveability or correct a past planning wrong. The potential removal of the viaducts provides an opportunity for the City of Vancouver to do both.* (Vancouver 2013, p.2)

The viaducts are further described as “an urban scar” that erases commercial activity and “a physical and psychological barrier” separating the surrounding neighbourhoods from the waterfront (Vancouver 2013, p.2).

The “liv[e]able urban environment” here praised is reminiscent of Vancouver’s heroic history (Vancouver 2011b, p.12): benefits undeterred by inequality or displacement. By describing the viaducts as “an urban scar” limiting the process of an otherwise “rapidly urbanizing part of the city,” the analysis demonstrates its prioritization of aesthetics, and the minimization of conflict across history (Vancouver, 2013, p.7): as barriers towards neighbourhood connectivity, not as symbols of displacement; as opportunities for recreation, rather than neighbourhood re-creation. In fact, throughout the viaduct removal analysis, reference to Hogan’s Alley – the community displaced during their construction – is sparse. Earlier renewal efforts are criticized for having evicted a “predominantly African-Canadian community known as Hogan’s Alley” (Vancouver 2011b, p.14), but only limited commemorative efforts are proposed. Recognition aligns primarily with place-making priorities: looking to “recapture the spirit” and commercial vibrancy of the earlier “social hub of the community” (Vancouver, 2012, p.21).

Released in 2019, the NEFC Plan promises to comprehensively address Vancouver’s shared history with the First Nations, Urban Indigenous, Chinese-Canadian, and Black-Canadian cultural communities. Reconciliation is considered “a foundational component” of the plan (Vancouver, 2018, p.20). But efforts to recognize cultural community displacement are similarly limited by a predisposition towards place promotion. Even here, recognition for the community’s erasure comes across as an afterthought: incorporated into the design of commercial commercial

revitalization (Vancouver, 2018); the more substantial commitments to artists live-work space, social housing, and a community-cultural centre all promised in earlier plans (Vancouver 2014b), but revisioned to fit with NEFC's entrepreneurial and creative ethos.

Ultimately, plans for the removal of the viaduct carry the baton of earlier NEFC planning efforts. The transfer of portions of the DTES into NEFC finalized the prioritization of aesthetics and place promotion in the name of liveability. The threat of gentrification is ignored. History is first and foremost ignored, and otherwise reinterpreted. By reinterpreting history – without comprehensive reference to displacement – liveability is presented as conflict-free and a-political; it becomes regeneration rhetoric that “anesthetizes” understanding of gentrification (Smith, 2002).

## **Discussion**

On the surface, Vancouver's planning commitments in the DTES and NEFC are snapshots of two distinct manifestations of liveability. In the Downtown Eastside plans, liveability is associated with improving the lives of low-income residents, who are “supported and engaged.” Next door, in Northeast False Creek, liveability is centered on neighbourhood desirability where residents can “work, play, and shop” and “enjoy a vibrant street life.” Transferring a portion of the DTES into the NEFC planning area cedes space from one version of liveability into the other.

Displacement is likely to follow. Market development at NEFC will not comprehensively address the needs of the DTES, nor be accessible to low-income households, resulting in exclusionary displacement (see Slater, 2009). An active piece of highway infrastructure, the viaducts also mitigate the effects of gentrification at the southern border of the DTES (Ley and Dobson, 2008); their removal will open up new areas to development and gentrification pressures (Cervero et al., 2009). But the transfer also amounts to displacement: “[A] process of un-homing

that severs the links between residents and the communities in which they belong... an affective, emotional and material rupture” (Eliot-Cooper, et al., 2019, p.3). Though it did not yet physically displace DTES residents, the transfer confirms the symbolic severance of the low-income community. This symbolic displacement is obscured by Vancouver’s commitment to liveability.

Eliot-Cooper et al. (2019) argue that by placing displacement at the centre of critical scholarship, gentrification is (re)oriented with socio-spatial (in)justice as a primary concern: recognizing this symbolic displacement as an indication of gentrification, this transfer of land from one municipal planning area to another, amounts to a hidden form of socio-spatial injustice. But this is not the only gentrification or injustice associated with, or concealed by Vancouver’s commitment to liveability. In NEFC, liveability evicts historic ties to the working-class. In the DTES, liveability confines poverty to the past by repressing the more recent casualties of neoliberal policy. The heroic history of liveability, that encouraged viaduct removal, excludes all reference to those dispossessed. In Vancouver, displacement is the “noir” side of achieving liveability (Sandercock, 1998), and while gentrification takes place when interpretations of liveability redefine their target audience, any use of liveability discourse implies the *gentrification of memory*: a telling of history that justifies the interests of capital and affluence by erasing the history of marginalized residents.

Hagerman (2007) previously recognized the symbiotic relationship between liveability and historiography, describing how waterfront revitalization efforts in Portland, Oregon involve “the silencing of particular stories... to make way for new liveable spaces” (p.288). McCann (2007) similarly identifies how liveability achieves consensus by leveraging differences between socio-spatial scales, and their associated histories, to obscure conflict. In these contexts, the removal of contested histories is considered deliberate, and liveability dismissed as a neoliberal development

tool. But policy discourses should not be dismissed on account of their failures; acknowledging failures paves the way for more inclusive outcomes. There are parallels here to scholars who recognize that a commitment to “sustainability” alone fails to benefit marginalized groups without an emphasis on affordability (Immergluck & Balan, 2018) and participation (Curran & Hamilton, 2012). Transforming urban spaces – creating more desirable and attractive environments – is a noble pursuit. But that liveability has been achieved by displacing marginalized and working-class groups demands that these efforts be tempered with caution. Efforts must be made to (re)interpret liveability as a social justice issue: making cities liveable for all.

In his critique of modernist planning, Holston’s (1998) praises the drive for a transformed urban and social condition but criticizes the “arrogant and false” assumption that the city can be planned without conflict (p.46). To avoid the “utopian paradox” – exacerbating the conditions that planning seeks to address – planning theorists and practitioners must “valorize the constitutive role of conflict” (Holston 1998, p.53). In the interest of inclusive policy, Shaw (2008) similarly calls for inequality to be recognized directly and for policy to address and speak to the “culture of struggle” that accompanies inequality (p.2641).

Without recognizing the “culture of struggle,” liveability falls into the “utopian paradox.” But liveability is only a-politically accepted when its dispossessions are ignored. To reinvigorate liveability with a commitment to social justice, we must be willing to recognize inequality and address liveability’s failure at its face. We must focus on the fault lines between different manifestations of liveability and what is produced in these conflict-zones: displacement.

The planning policy for the Downtown Eastside demonstrates that when inequality and poverty are pervasive, the threat of displacement is recognized as a barrier to achieving liveability. While the breadth of marginalized residents benefiting from the DTES’s commitment to

affordability is unduly limited by selective historical interpretations of the causes of poverty, pervasive inequality inspires efforts to minimize displacement. This demonstrates liveability's potential to move beyond consumption, aesthetics and place promotion considerations. It shows that liveability can be attuned to the needs of a marginalized communities. To expand the inclusive potential of liveability, policy agendas must be re-politicized and thus made to recognize the systemic exclusions that are characteristic of spaces becoming more "liveable." In other words, we must recognize displacement.

Whether we want it or not, liveability will remain a popular planning discourse. But in the past, communities have successfully reinforced the perspectives of marginalized groups by repurposing dominant symbols and discourses (see Blomley, 2004; and Sommers, 1998) – imbuing these artifacts with alternative or 'noir' histories (Sandercock, 1998). This article describes how historic narratives have been used to align liveability with dominant, conspicuous class interests and capital accumulation. Without the crutch of this narrative construction, however, the history of liveability is one of dispossession: defined by community disruption and displacement. Networking between those that have experienced displacement or those who are threatened by liveability, a new narrative can be created by community organizers to improve community solidarity – integrating all those currently excluded from its promise into a coalition. By emphasizing the consistent role dispossession has played in achieving liveability, it challenges the political palatability of its unquestioned promise: "different histories can serve contending social purposes" (Blomley, 2004, p.80). In these efforts, community organizers learn from the developers who appropriate rhetoric that promises inclusivity towards profit (see Ley and Dobson, 2008): by focusing on displacement, liveability may be appropriated towards community continuity.

An inclusive (re)interpretation of liveability would recognize the needs of neighbourhood specific residents and communities, as well as their autonomy in identifying these needs. In efforts to limit displacement, affordability becomes an obvious concern: but it is affordability as defined by the existing community of residents. It is also important to recognize that if liveability is confined exclusively to the realm of land-use planning, it is destined for failure (Davidoff, 2016). Addressing liveability comprehensively means integrating this new discourse, with movements focused on the universal right to housing, education, fair representation and democracy, and the provision of health services. In other words, the right to the city, is the right to a liveable city for all. By speaking to their history and present struggles, the discourse might move beyond shaping public perception and instead be used towards radical and structural transformations that are required for a fair and just city.

Gentrification and displacement are the results of failing to interrogate who benefits from improved liveability. When we do not speak directly to conflicts, inequality, or material well-being, we make it easier for words like liveability to be co-opted as synonyms for gentrification. If we instead place displacement at the centre of our analysis and interpretation of liveability, and recognize its violence as intolerable, the voices and perspectives of those threatened become the centre of our analysis, and liveability opens itself up to its progressive potential. The first step towards a more equitable discourse is, therefore, being willing to ask: “liveability for whom?”

## **Chapter 4: Conclusion**

### **The Story of Hogan's Alley (Revisited)**

In 2018, the City of Vancouver published the *Northeast False Creek Plan* (NEFC Plan) to guide the removal of the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts and the development of a new liveable, waterfront community at NEFC. Considered a departure from the past and an act of “reconciliation” (Vancouver, 2018), the NEFC Plan is meant to address Vancouver’s history of displacement: beginning with the appropriation of Indigenous Land (Blomley, 2004); including the eviction of the Black-Canadian community from Hogan’s Alley (Compton, 2010).

But displacement remains a coordinating force in the lives of Vancouver residents: gentrification has been a consistent threat since the 1970s (Ley, 1996; Walks and Maanaren, 2008) and continues to shepherd low-income residents and marginalized groups into the Downtown Eastside (DTES) (Blomley, 2004). As the real estate market presses in on the DTES (Smith, 2003) and the commercial landscape is reoriented towards affluence (Burnett, 2014; Hyde, 2014), low-income residents are forced into shrinking portions of the neighbourhood. Vancouver’s complicated history of dispossession, therefore, extends into the present (Kenny, 2016), and is currently accomplished under the guise of ‘liveability’ (Cameron and Harcourt, 2007; Vancouver, 2019).

The NEFC Plan may be presented as a departure from earlier planning policies which encouraged displacement, but it charts a similar policy direction: a gentrification strategy that confirms the symbolic displacement of marginalized residents (see Elliot-Cooper, et al, 2019). The story of the NEFC Plan and its effects on the DTES is, therefore, the story Hogan’s Alley: the story of a neighbourhood slowly but systematically erased. Modernist planning principles justified the displacement of Hogan’s Alley (Liscombe, 2007; Weber, 2002); liveable city principles justify the



gentrification of the DTES. Without appropriately addressing the material conditions of poverty, from the perspective of those displaced, the effect is the same: modernist renewal; urban liveability; displacement.

## **Chapter Summary**

This thesis analyzes the extent to which contemporary public discourse of neighbourhood change comprehensively account for inequality; specifically, the extent to which inequalities impact neighbourhood access under real estate market capitalism.

### Chapter two: The eviction of critical class perspective

*To what extent are the media's references to "gentrification" class comprehensive, and how have these references changed over time?*

Chapter Two analyzes how gentrification has been framed by the Canadian media. The use of "gentrification" in contemporary media is not emblematic of the critical or humanist underpinnings of gentrification scholarship (see Slater, 2002): much like Slater's (2006) warning, there has been an eviction of critical perspective, but this time as it relates to class. By framing gentrified neighbourhoods as amenity-rich spaces to be enjoyed by visiting tourists, the first gentrification discourse inspires voyeuristic tendencies. This voyeurism distances visiting tourists from the consequences of consumption, such that affluent actors are blind to their contributions to neighbourhood change and the actions that sustain gentrification are ignored. By the final narrative, gentrification itself has been distanced from its more devastating and dangerous consequences. Displacement is a feature, but only as it relates to dominant class perspectives – of authenticity and of middle-class affordability. Already blind to the effects of their decisions, but now threatened by gentrification, middle-class in-movers do not see themselves as soldiers of their

own misfortune: blaming others for rising unaffordability and lost neighbourhood character. Gentrification is reinterpreted as an outside condition imposed on earlier stage gentrifiers.

### Chapter three: Liveability, for whom?

*To what extent do neighbourhood level manifestations of “liveability” – a policy discourse uses to support and encourage neighbourhood change – comprehensively address inequality and issues of affordability; specifically, to what extent is displacement recognized as a potential and foreseeable outcome of neighbourhood change?*

Chapter three analyzes different manifestations of liveability in two Vancouver neighbourhoods. In NEFC, liveability manifests itself primarily as a tool towards urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989): it is motivated by the experiential and aesthetics, and it encourages placemaking opportunities and vibrancy. Planning documents ignore gentrification and how increasing the number or quality of urban amenities will contribute to affordability pressures in the NEFC or the neighbouring DTES. Without these considerations, the market dictates access to liveability. In the DTES, the prominence of poverty forces planning efforts and liveability to recognize displacement and gentrification pressures (Burnett, 2014). However, the planning policies introduced inadequately address systemic inequality and unaffordability, aggravating gentrification pressures further.

To reconcile increased unaffordability with the promise of liveability, both neighbourhood level articulations silence the perspectives of certain residents in the present and throughout history. In NEFC the neighbourhood’s connection to industry and working-class communities is erased. In the DTES, planning initiatives retain affordability for the “working poor” or “low income-singles” – obvious descendants of the retired resource workers who were once the primary neighbourhood residents (Sommers, 1998) – ignoring the more recent victims of neoliberal policy (Blomley, 2004). In both neighbourhoods, history is seen through the eyes of dominance and limits

the claim to space of marginalized residents. These historic manipulations justify claims of liveability, erasing those excluded.

Inequality, affordability, and the threat of displacement are inadequately addressed by Vancouver's dedication to liveability. Still, that the manifestation of liveability claims to address gentrification in the DTES proves that when displacement is recognized outright and when liveability tied to the needs of a specific community, interpretations of liveability can be more comprehensive, and potentially inclusive.

### Synthesis and reflection on literature

In 2015, Peter Marcuse called on academics to exhibit greater care in the use of language. He warned of language contributing to the presumed inevitability of urban processes. Specifically, Marcuse warned of the “gentrification of language”:

*[A] language that has itself been gentrified, with its original critical meanings displaced into conventional and one-dimensional use... divorcing the discussion from the consequences for those displaced and harmed by the processes, from discussions of winners and losers, from considerations of alternative ways of community development. What makes this process of displacement in language so insidious however, is that it is so often unconscious. (p.155)*

This thesis confirms the gentrification of language in discussions of neighbourhood change: both in terms of media discourses of gentrification and policy discourses regarding liveability. These public discourses ignore critical class considerations and interpret neighbourhood change without consideration for how inequality affects neighbourhood access.

The two chapters are mutually supportive. Recent media discourses reinterpret gentrification as a threat to more affluent urban residents: to the level and variety of amenities previously associated with central city life; to the character of quaint first stage gentrified neighbourhoods; and to middle-income affordability. This is to be expected, as cities begin to lose

much of the authenticity that attracted earlier gentrifiers (Zukin, 2011) and as central city neighbourhood become enclaves of extreme affluence (Florida, 2017; Hulchanski, 2007). In turn, the planning policy in NEFC promises vibrancy: an interpretation of liveability that targets the characteristic of the authentic spaces desirable to first-round gentrifiers (see Brown-Saracino, 2004) – the authenticity lost and longed for by mainstream media discourses (see also Brown-Saracino and Rumpf, 2011).

Recent media discourses disassociate earlier rounds of gentrification, and the ongoing displacement pressures experienced by marginalized residents, from the contemporary struggles of more affluent central city residents. Disengaged from the experiences of those previously displaced, gentrifiers and policies evade responsibility or reference to inequality (Marcuse, 2015). Gentrification is interpreted as an outside force, unaffected by policy or individual decisions (see also Modan and Wells, 2015). Leveraging the lost personal culpability implied in media discourses, liveability evades comprehensive characterization of neighbourhood changes – recognition for how delivering amenities contributes to unaffordability and exacerbates inequality – thereby encouraging further gentrification.

Taken as a pair, the two chapters confirm that discursive frames have been used to “justify gentrification while neutralizing the political meaning” (Wyly and Hammel, 2008, p.2644). But liveability discourse does not, on its own, “anesthetize” understanding of gentrification (Smith, 2002). Dominant interpretations of liveability fail to critically engage with the experience and history of the working poor (ie. displacement), or recognize the contribution that additional amenities may have on land-market exclusions (Stein, 2019); but media discourses demonstrate that contemporary gentrifiers already fail to engage with their contributions to neighbourhood change. This theoretical shortcoming is therefore present within mainstream media discourse and,

rather than highlight this misunderstanding, manifestations of liveability perpetuate the shortcomings.

Public discourses of neighbourhood change do not comprehensively address inequality or affordability, nor the potential for neighbourhood improvements to exacerbate inequality and displacement pressures. What's more, by not drawing attention to the shortcomings of media discourses; by not emphasizing the experience of marginalized groups or the effect that market development and consumption has on housing affordability; and by failing to highlight the inherent inequalities of real estate market capitalism, planning discourses both mask and contribute to gentrification. To reverse these effects, planners must avoid discourses that silence class opposition and instead highlight the inequalities present in contemporary cities. If planning policy is to encourage more inclusive and socially just outcomes, planners and policy professionals must become discursively deliberate.

### A necessary alliance

In 2019, a group of academics, advocates, journalists, and planning practitioners put together a collection of essays and vignettes about the “housing crisis” in Toronto. *House Divided: How the Missing Middle can solve Toronto's Affordability Crisis* tracks the exclusionary legacy of detached-housing neighbourhoods in Toronto, discusses the effects of these exclusions in the present, and proposes policy solutions to open up the “yellow belt” – the neighbourhoods in Toronto currently zoned exclusively for detached-housing – to greater residential and commercial density. Put simply, the collection presents increased density in established neighbourhoods across the city as a means towards increased housing affordability (Bozokovic et al, 2019).

But the unnatural limit placed on development permissions is but one of the many causes which collectively explain housing unaffordability and insecurity (Bozokovic et al, 2019). Blomley (2004) presents colonial land ownership and development models – models that promote real estate market speculation – as another inspiration for instability in the housing market. Rutland (2018) describes how planners' efforts to enrich urban quality-of-life are founded on dominant class interpretations of “norms.” He describes how planning efforts often (if not intentionally) exclude populations that exist at the margins of the often white middle-class definitions of “normal” – ensuring increased precarity and instability for marginalized groups. And Lauster (2016) acknowledges that issues of affordability are constrained by cultural definitions of home – often limited to detached single-family dwellings – and cultural definitions of financial wellbeing and success – often founded on homeownership (see also Madden and Marcuse, 2016).

Within *Housing Divided*, Annabel Vaughan (2019) recognizes these additional strains on housing affordability and acknowledges that increased density will not act as a “silver bullet” or “panacea” towards affordable housing – rather a multi-pronged response is necessary. But Anna Kramer (2019) is most insightful with her critique:

*Of course, some residents have been dealing with the housing crisis for much longer than others. The newly house-insecure could choose to forge a politics of solidarity with those for whom housing insecurity is not a novelty. Yet such an alliance would require those with moderate or middle incomes to abandon the notion of housing as a wealth-generating extractive investment and reframe it as a movement that regards housing as a social good.*  
(p. 150)

Kramer’s (2019) recognizes that housing insecurity is not a recent phenomenon. It has been and continues to be a reality for low-income residents and marginalized groups excluded from the traditional real estate market. These exclusions are the foreseeable consequences of housing treated as an investment or commodity: traded based on its exchange value rather than its use value (Kramer, 2019; see also Madden and Marcuse, 2016). From this perspective, the housing insecurity

that now more widely experienced is not a ‘novelty,’ but the intended outcome of housing operating under the dominion of real estate market capitalism: “Housing crisis is not the result of the system breaking down but of the system working as intended” (Madden and Marcuse, 2016, p.10).

Kramer (2019) recognizes that the missing-middle solution does not support low-income affordability: a market-oriented solution cannot comprehensively address housing unaffordability and insecurity, the intended consequences of a system that allows housing to act as “wealth-generating extractive investment” (Kramer, 2019, p.150; see also Madden and Marcuse, 2016). Allowing the market to dictate who has access to housing in developing neighbourhoods is inherently exclusionary: at worst, producing inequality; at best, exacerbating it. While missing-middle housing might produce housing affordable and suitable for those more recently excluded from the housing market, as long as the system prioritizes real estate over housing, there remains those for whom Toronto will be unaffordable. In order to address housing insecurity comprehensively, our solutions must reclassify housing not as an investment, but as a right. Madden and Marcuse (2016) similarly make the case for an “alternative residential logic” (p.52): one in which housing is not treated as an instrument of profit but an essential need.

To bring about systemic change, Kramer (2019) hints at a new role for planning practitioners and theorists: one in which theorists emphasize the shared urban experiences that are the result of real estate market capitalism. In order to address housing insecurity comprehensively, the divisions between experiences of housing insecurity must be recognized and removed.

This thesis reiterates a similar call to action. It demonstrates that class divisions extend beyond interpretations of affordability, into public discourses of gentrification and liveability. Within mainstream media discourses, gentrification is interpreted as it relates to the loss of upper-

class affordability and dominant-class serving amenities. Neighbourhood plans inspired by liveability similarly encourages development and amenities suitable for more affluent classes, without appropriately addressing inequality or the consequences for marginalized groups. But as Kramer (2019) notes, decreased affordability and increased displacement are the foreseeable consequences of land treated as tool towards capital accumulation, rather than an essential right (see also Madden and Marcuse, 2016; Smith, 1982; Stein, 2019). Gentrification's exclusions are only recently affecting moderate and middle-income residents, but to build policy solutions that relate exclusively to middle-income experiences will not address the systemic inequalities (re)produced by real estate market capitalism.

To interpret gentrification exclusively as it relates to this dominant socio-economic group limits our understanding of the complex urban process, and therefore our ability to appropriately address concerns regarding affordability, inequality, and displacement. The manifestation of liveability in False Creek is proof of this failure: interpreted as a vehicle to deliver affluent serving amenities, blind to its more exclusive consequences. This manifestation of liveability demonstrates that planners are complicit in silencing the experience of a growing proportion of the population facing unaffordability in the city, using discourse to disguise the dirty work of capitalism, ie. displacement. Planning practitioners and theorists should instead look to inspire a comprehensive understanding of gentrification and housing affordability: drawing attention to inequality and the creative destruction of real estate market capitalism. This relates directly to Kramer's (2019) insight regarding housing affordability: finding solidarity among *all those experiencing housing insecurity* to recognize that inequality is exacerbated when land and development rights are treated as tools for wealth accumulation.



It is only in highlighting the extent to which inequality is reproduced, and the results of these inequalities, that a more inclusive urban future is possible. Planning practitioners are in an influential position, capable of drawing greater attention to inequality and supporting the creation of coalitions towards more inclusive cities. The following recommendations focus on this potential role for urban planners.

### **Policy recommendation and areas for further research**

#### Planning a more inclusive future

In *Capital City* (2019), Stein describes how urban deindustrialization created the space (literally: see Zukin, 1989) for the growth of the “real estate state.” As such, institutional developers and landlords have become dominant voices guiding urban planning policy and the city has become an “investment strategy” for global capital. In this environment, it seems planners are tasked with maintaining “liveability,” acting as little more than “wealth managers” of an investment portfolio (p.6).

In the interest of more inclusive outcomes, planning documents need to appropriately address the class- and context-specific experiences associated with neighbourhood change and that the benefits of urban investment are unequally distributed across socioeconomic positions (Lees, Slater, and Wyly, 2008; Butler, Bridge, and Lees, 2011). Although planning practitioners are not solely responsible for the writing of plans and policy, they are in part held accountable for the quality of life in our cities. Efforts should therefore be made to ensure that neighbourhood and citywide planning policies recognize inequality and clearly articulate “for whom” the expected benefits of a policy will flow. One of the ways that planners may draw attention to the inequalities inherent in the system is to improve the participation process.

### Consultation efforts representative of long-term residents

If cities are motivated by “liveability,” the form and shape that the rhetoric takes and the policies that are inspired by its promise should be founded on neighbourhood level participation. Representatives who can speak to the experience of those living through reinvestment should be consulted and empowered to ensure that manifestations of “liveability” or other broad policy objectives appropriately address neighbourhood needs: this includes defining affordability as it is likely to benefit the existing residents, thereby protecting against displacement.

### Incorporate Dissidence Reports

The Northeast False Creek Plan (NEFC Plan) never once references “gentrification” explicitly, nor housing market speculation. It is unlikely that the planners who contributed to the plan were unaware of the effects of gentrification across Vancouver and the neighbourhood Downtown Eastside. Gentrification and increased housing affordability were also likely common concerns during the consultation exercises leading to the plan. But in the final document, these concerns were minimized.

To avoid certain concerns becoming lost or depoliticized in the revision process, it may be possible to release reports that acknowledge different opinions. An organization that is already implementing a likeminded approach is MASS LBP in Toronto, Canada. MASS LBP creates citizens assemblies or representatives from different communities to discuss policy proposals and find consensus on issues through learning and discussion. MASS LBP recognizes that consensus is not always possible, and therefore provides an opportunity for those involved in consultation to include in published material their (often) conflicting opinions. These help to improve transparency as dissident opinions are acknowledged, and issues recognized as contentious.

### Support neighbourhood level planning

Where possible planning policy and zoning decisions should be made at the community and neighbourhood level discretion. There are similarities here to Davidoff's (2016) description of advocacy planning: the values and objectives of planning policy should be stated clearly, in order to avoid bias and ensure more inclusive outcomes.

The degree to which development is permitted should be decided by a representative body across the neighbourhoods, in conversation amongst each other. These neighbourhood representatives can then balance citywide population projections with the needs of their peers and neighbours (see Marcuse, 1985b). While this will inevitably lead to conflict between neighbourhood representatives, the absence of such a framework provides only the illusion of balance (Holston, 1998; Sandercock, 1998; Shaw, 2008). As both Bosikovic et al. (2019) and Lauster (2016) demonstrate, the current planning system is biased towards the protection of single-detached housing, which further places vulnerable and marginalized residents at a disadvantage.

### Policy recommendation to consider, looking towards reduced displacement

A more recent sub-section of gentrification scholarship reinterprets displacement as the primary indicator of gentrification (Elliot-Cooper, et al, 2019; Marcuse, 2016). Doing so, the focus of gentrification research shifts from neighbourhood reinvestment to the victims who are so often excluded from the processes of neighbourhood change (see Slater, 2009): with this reorientation, there is no mistaking the spatial injustice (Marcuse, 1985a). But a focus on displacement also inspires a broader interpretations of what can and should be recognized as gentrification and injustice: this includes forms of symbolic displacement (Elliot-Cooper, et al, 2019), and different temporalities of displacement (Davidson, 2008), which all contribute to vulnerability, precarity,

and loss of place. Taking a page from this recent scholarship, an obvious way to ensure neighborhood change minimizes injustice and exclusion is to eliminate displacement as a possible outcome (see Marcuse, 1985b). The following policy recommendations are not directly influenced by the findings of this thesis, but have been suggested as potential means of limiting displacement. Though these require political will and are outside the jurisdiction of a practitioner alone, they are listed here to underscore that inclusive policies have been developed: what is necessary demonstrating that many community interests align with such policies (using some of the participation techniques listed above).

While several specific policy recommendations are included below, minimizing displacement requires a rethink of policies more broadly: it means assessing all current policy, reflecting on the potential consequences for both marginalized groups and the real estate market (see Marcuse, 1985b); all municipally managed programs must be coordinated such that minimizing displacement is a clear objective; tax programs (eg. luxury tax, speculation tax, vacancy tax, land transfer tax) that supplement the construction of affordable housing and support other community-based development and anti-displacement efforts must also be considered.

#### Build public housing

The most effective means of ensuring that citizens are not threatened by gentrification, or market actors who appropriate the benefits of neighbourhood improvement towards exclusion, is perhaps the most intuitive: remove housing from the market. Put simply: build more social housing (see Walks and August, 2008)!

#### Reinforce tenancy protections

As ownership housing becomes available to fewer urban residents (Lauster, 2019), and the ‘housing crisis’ affects a greater portion of the world population (Madden and Marcuse, 2016),

tenant protections and rent regulations become more important. Rent escalation and inflation should be limited and should be tied to units or entire buildings rather than tenants. Eviction protections should be strengthened. Unit conditions should be monitored, and improvements to maintain adequate living standards should not trigger rent escalation or warrant evictions (see Marcuse, 1985b; Stein, 2019; Walks and August, 2008).

#### Anti-displacement zoning

There should be legislative limits on displacement: this could take the form of a floating policy in all neighbourhoods prohibiting displacement. In some zones, development will still be permitted, even encouraged, but with provisions for replacement or relocated units. In other areas, development and displacement will be strictly prohibited (see Marcuse, 1985b). The form that displacement and development takes should be decided by the neighbourhood or community (see above).

#### Retain city-owned property

Too much public value is appropriated into the hands of real estate capitalists and landowners by way of private-property (see Blomley, 2004; Harvey, 1978; Stein, 2019). There should be a commitment to permanent ownership of all public assets; this includes the development rights over valuable community assets, like public transit stations. These assets should not be considered a burden on municipal budgets. Instead, public ownership can be reinterpreted as an opportunity to contribute to a more equitable future. Where possible, these public assets should be transferred into the hands of community land-use planning boards (see above). Long-term community ownership will then match the needs of the specific community.

### Housing/Land/Community trusts

As described, planning policies should be redesigned with greater attention towards potential exclusions: taxes should limit the extractive tendencies of capitalism that exacerbate inequality and encourage displacement; housing removed from the market; and city-land transferred to community ownership to ensure the policy is responsive to community needs and perceived legitimacy (see Marcuse, 1985b). These policies all work towards a model of sustained community ownership, whereby representatives of the community act as stewards for community assets: housing units, commercial spaces, and other assets (urban farms, gardens, civic institutions), and the tax revenue. In such a system, the long-term goals of a community are kept in mind, which will naturally include avoiding displacement (Marcuse, 1985b).

### Support broad coalitions towards transformative change

Given the issues of inequality and gentrification within our cities (see Florida, 2017; Hulchanski, 2007; Walks, 2015), that the above policies have not yet found a place in the ‘planner’s tool-box’ is not for lack of ingenuity, but political will: “It would appear that there is no shortage of thoughtfully researched, well-founded equitable policy possibilities... The problem is one of political will at all scales” (Shaw, 2008, p.2641). Put in another way, there is a need for alliances that bridge socio-economic classes towards the goal of instituting systemic change to urban policy (Kramer, 2019).

Looking towards an inclusive and equitable future, at which point neighbourhood changes benefit long-term residents rather than replace them, planners may be able to support the creation of broad class-based coalitions, organized towards minimizing the effects of inequality in the face of neighbourhood change. One potential option is reinforcing and articulating discourses that

comprehensively address the insecurity produced by real estate market capitalism, such that more comprehensive policy programs can be adopted (ie. increased social housing).

Sandercock (2016) writes that the language with which we speak about neighbourhood change and planning influences the cohesion felt among otherwise different populations groups. Discourse is therefore caught up in the process of creating community identity: a common discourse helps establish a shared sense of belonging by creating a shared definition of a “good life.” There is perhaps a potential for “discursive strategies that are designed to voice, to foster a sense of common benefit, to develop confidence among disempowered groups, and to arbitrate where disputes arise” (Sandercock, 2016, p.414). The focus on discourse is here related to communicative planning efforts, which recognize planning as political and shapes the attention of planning efforts in partnership with marginalized communities, as a means of empowering disenfranchised voices (Sandercock, 1998). Here, however, the discourse of liveability is being used to acknowledge and minimize displacement, and therefore inspire structural transformations: to inspire a “alternative residential logic” (Madden and Marcuse, 2016, p.52)

Chapter 3 proposes emphasizing social justice under the banner of liveability, precisely because of its ties to exclusion: displacement is the consistent “noir” history of liveability (Sandercock, 1998). Reinterpreting liveability requires reviewing its history from the inverse position: as the individual experiencing one of several types of displacement, for whom liveability produces exclusion. From this position, those pining the loss of authenticity, those pining the closure of legacy amenity, those priced out of their childhood neighbourhood, those shuttering up their family business, those displaced from the neighbourhood, and those eventually priced out of the city find common ground. This reinterpretation of liveability, one that minimizes displacement,

may then be a discourse that unites the urban experience under capitalism – drawing attention to the unevenness of development and the inevitability of loss – towards more inclusive outcomes.

Creating a common ground, based on eliminating all forms of displacement, is not meant to inspire sympathy for those just beginning to experience the exclusionary promises of real estate capitalism. But by making the shared experiences of displacement a focus, we highlight how the upper-class “struggles” are simply adaptations of the deeper struggles faced by marginalized residents: those insecurities inherent to treating housing as a commodity in a system of real estate market capitalism (Madden and Marcuse, 2016; Stein, 2019). It is only when broad coalitions form – and the position of dominance aligns with the voices of marginalized groups – that broad institutional change is possible; that hegemony can be challenged.

### Areas for future research

#### The potential for discourse to inspire institutional change

This thesis highlights that interpretations of liveability and gentrification are similarly divisive, but suggests reclaiming liveability with a greater focus on displacement. The contested nature of “liveability” and “public benefit” inspires a degree of confidence that discourses might be appropriated to generate support for radical approaches to addressing systemic inequality; that language can ease the creation of coalitions and shared commitments:

*[L]anguage can influence the policy process in a variety of ways: it can alter perceptions of interests and issues; it can define the object of policy attention; it can promote particular policy agendas; it can shape the nature of communication between actors... it can cement coalitions or differences between actors. (Rydin, 1998, p.178).*

Discourse and framing analysis are grounded in the belief that language contributes to policy success by promoting cohesion and emphasizing common interests. Therefore, just as rhetorics can be used to silence political progress, so might they be used towards more socially just



outcomes. Building coalitions becomes a problem of learning from the “parasitic” quality of gentrification (Lees, 2000); from the real estate capitalists (Ley and Dobson, 2008) who appropriate the discursive strategies of community activists towards economic gain (Gough, 2015; Dale and Newman, 2009; Ley, 2012). There is, however, a need for a better understanding of how discourse might help create coalitions towards institutional change: drawing attention to issues of inequality and inspiring the political willpower necessary to affect change. Case-studies, such as Sommers (1998) discussion of DERA in the DTES, and examples such as those provided by Blomley (2004) are invaluable in establishing best practices.

#### More comprehensive redistributive property tax

With private property rights, the types of neighbourhood change that are perceived as valuable, inherently add value to the neighbourhood (Stein, 2019). While public land trusts might not be politically viable as of yet, there may be a potential to institute tax systems that encourages the redistribution of values currently appropriated. An example when this might be useful is when one considers a restaurant, grocery store, university, or elementary school that increases real estate values, forcing the employees of these establishments to live further from their place of work. This is a recognized phenomenon and the inspiration for hedonic pricing models. Perhaps a taxation scheme can be developed which distributes the increases in real estate value created by these “amenities” amongst those required to sustain these often-essential services.

#### Practitioner Interviews

The above recommendations describe how public participation requires transparency. Further research is therefore needed to understand how discourses that might traditionally include reference to more inclusive and ethical considerations (sustainability, liveability) move through the planning process. Speaking to practitioners about the process by which community concerns

are mobilized towards (at times) exclusionary policy objectives would be a worthy addition to scholarship.

### **Final Thoughts**

It is easy to be debilitated in the face of hegemonic ideologies: private property rights (see Blomley, 2004; 2008), neoliberalism (see Harvey, 1989; Hackworth, 2007), gentrification as urban growth strategy (see Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Smith, 2002), or housing as commodity (see Madden and Marcuse, 2016). These ideologies are particularly powerful as each is adaptive: manipulating prominent discourse (Lees, 2011; Ley and Dobson, 2008; Loopmans, 2008) and narratives (Blomley, 2004) to reinforce an understanding of social relations coherent with the hegemony. But that discourses and narratives have been appropriated – misrepresented to promote dominant class interests, to promote accumulation, and to distract from inequality (Lees, 2008) – does not suggest these discourses and narratives ought to be abandoned outright: quite the opposite. Dominant ideologies will be more effectively challenged when the stories we tell and when our discourses are representative of our aspirations; when our stories and language are inclusive and oppositional. There is therefore value in analyzing manipulative discourses and narratives that have been naturalized, as this investigation is a form of resistance that supports the delegitimization of their authority (Lees and Demeritt, 1998). It may be a challenge to reintroduce alternative discourses and narratives, but these discourses need to be repurposed to comprehensively affirm alternative futures (Blomley, 2004).

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