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Losing one's place: Narratives of neighbourhood change, market injustice and symbolic displacement in Melbourne and Sydney

Abstract

This article examines the narratives offered by those displaced through the gentrification of neighbourhoods in Melbourne and Sydney. Extensive qualitative interview data generated from encounters with self-identified displacees in these cities is used here to examine their responses to changes in and after they moved from their originating neighbourhoods and the impacts these changes had on them. This data reveals that, despite displacement commonly being defined in terms of physical movement, in many cases participants became dislocated and isolated by the physical and social changes that took place while still residing in neighbourhoods as they changed. The article traces these twin modes of displacement – both as a series of impacts generated by direct market dislocation but also as feelings of loss connected with a home that might be imminently lost and the cherished place around it. These narratives reveal how private renters respond to a symbolic violence that they locate in a changing built environment and a shifting social physiognomy that impinges and threatens the viability of their tenure of these palces. The article locates these resentments and displacements within a socio-political context that celebrates ownership and investment in the very homes and places that are now lost to them.

Keywords: Gentrification, displacement, neighbourhood change, sense of place, Melbourne, Sydney

1. **Introduction**

In many cities globally, gentrification has become the archetypal leitmotiv of class-based contests for housing resources, with significant interest and research effort directed at measuring its incidence and impacts. These empirical efforts have ~~inevitably~~ been caught-up in contestaions over the ~~a deeper~~ a politics of method and interpretation, particularly insofar as the question of household displacement is concerned, in which searching questions have been asked about the degree to which

studies been effective in understanding the extent and experience of displacement (for example, Smith 2008; Newman and Wyly 2006; Slater 2009). This article is intended as a contribution to such debates, and as a spur to further thinking about the experience of displacement – focusing both on the loss of home and on the complex feelings of alienation and estrangement to place many feel even while still struggling to maintain a foothold in their neighbourhoods (Davidson 2009). These related forms of displacement are given life through in-depth qualitative data generated from interviews conducted in Australia's two largest metropolitan centres, primarily through the voices of private renters.

Gentrification has become increasingly notable in Australia and has appeared to boost the fortunes of places and people in a country obsessed with homeownership and the realisation of personal freedoms and financial security through such investment. While the voices of those stressed by their mortgage payments and costs of living are much in evidence in the social conversation fuelled by newspapers and news media, those at the margins, in public housing and a lightly regulated private rental sector, generate much less concern or interest (Atkinson and Jacobs 2010). The work presented here is an attempt to use empirical research to give voice to those touched by a process that, while appearing to re-make and renew places, envelopes and hides many of the more pernicious impacts for those who are either evacuated by its incidence, or remain as stressed households awaiting the time they can no longer afford to remain.

Early studies on gentrification in Australia tended to focus on the aesthetics of these changes (notably Jager on Melbourne in 1986) but, as in many other cities, this soon made way for a concern that the process was leading to localised household displacement. The massive pressures on the cost of housing and affordability in recent years in Australian cities has however promoted an interest in the vital role, and often extreme cost, of the private rental sector (Randolph and Holloway 2007). This sector is thus at the vanguard of many of the changes plotted in this article, a sector in which significant housing stress has deepened as many households are

prevented from accessing homes they would like to buy, or are deferred access to public housing as entitlements have been reined-in by state and Federal funding retrenchment. An early indication of the changes to come can be found in a study almost forty years ago (CURA 1977) of gentrification in Melbourne's inner neighbourhoods. This concluded that 45 percent of private renters felt they had been displaced (moving because of the cost or state of repair of dwelling) and that 20 per cent of home purchasers and 22 percent of public tenants said they had been displaced. This suggests a longer and more extensive history to a problem that has long been ignored or concealed within everyday urban life, despite the intense impact on those households affected.

Given the unprecedented market changes impacting on house prices and rents that Australian cities have experienced in recent years, it is timely to reassess the scale of displacement and to consider the wider threads of its qualitative impact. Recent work (Atkinson, Wulff, Spinney and Reynolds 2009) has indicated that the displacement rate for vulnerable households in the gentrified areas of Melbourne and Sydney is around 50 percent higher than the out-movement rate for equivalent households in other areas of these cities. This indicates substantial household movement and social stress in these cities due to displacement from gentrification activity on the one hand, while also strongly indicating that lower-income households were being dislodged from these cities by market pressures more generally.

The migration of low income households to the margins of the large metropolises (Burke and Hayward 2001) has become a feature of Australia's housing landscape. Less clear is how, and how many, households are affected by displacement as a result of being out-bid in the rental and purchase markets in formerly low-cost areas. In Australia, gentrification has been noted by researchers profiling the changing character, cost and local politics of the country's major cities (Shaw 2005; Bounds and Morris 2006). With interest in housing affordability, and increasingly, the role of the private rental system at the fore of policy debates regarding housing stress, the work presented here was intended to offer insights into the way that socio-economic

migration in Australia's cities is affecting low income households. As with cities like London and San Francisco, many households in cities like Melbourne and Sydney find it increasingly difficult to access affordable accommodation, which generates more generalised forces of systemic exclusion and sorting in the housing stock. Ambitions to create familiar strategies for urban renewal, creativity and pacification, associated with gentrification in other locales, have also been part of the landscape of recent empirical assessments of key changes in Australia's cities (Atkinson and Easthope 2009; Pennay, Manton and Savic 2014). In this context gentrification has been promoted by some local authorities, often indirectly through the courting of higher income residents, yet the high costs of housing in cities like Melbourne and Sydney has also driven moderate and high income households to consider cheaper areas. For low income households in the neighbourhoods where gentrifiers have moved to, the resulting pressure has forced dislocation, but also uneasy tensions with longer-term residents.

These pressures increasingly apply to middle-income households as well as to those on much lower incomes. The Australian dream of homeownership has been chased to the point at which private household debt is comparable to that of US households; many have 'bet all' on entering a market they felt would deliver increasing wealth, come rain or shine. What kind of local pressures and experiences does such a context produce? This article begins by considering the conceptualisation of displacement before reporting on the findings generated by an analysis of in-depth interview data with predominantly private tenants in the cities of Melbourne and Sydney. The data presented are used to bring life to accounts of the hardships associated with the negotiation of these housing systems in general and the costs and personal impacts generated by localised processes of gentrification.

2. Gentrification, displacement and symbolic change

Much of the research on gentrification has tended to be focused in the US where the process has not only been a more marked aspect of the housing landscape but also

where protection from rental increases, accommodation in public and social housing and welfare protection are much less in evidence. Despite differences of scale this is a rather similar housing landscape to Australia and its relatively modest protections and regulations for lower income households and renters more generally. The transitions and pressures of life negotiating the private rental sector in particular raise questions not only about the extent and impact of gentrification, but also its effects on the individuals and households strained by these pressures, most acutely realised in the in cases of displacement and involuntarily moving people to new neighbourhoods and dwellings.

Work on displacement has shown that it can be extensive and socially damaging. For example, studying London between 1981 and 1991, Atkinson (2000) showed that 38 per cent of working class households moved away from large numbers of newly gentrified areas in this period. In the US, Sumka estimated that 500,000 households, roughly 2 million people, were annually displaced (Sumka 1979), though Le Gates and Hartman (1981; 1986) viewed this as a misleading undercount by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. More recently new insights on the outcomes of gentrification and displacement have emerged from studies that have used the New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey (Freeman and Braconi 2004; Newman and Wyly 2006). Freeman and Braconi (2004) found somewhat counter-intuitively that when all significant factors were controlled, low-income households were 19 per cent less likely to move from the selected areas of gentrification, when compared with low income households in neighbourhoods across the city as a whole. Newman and Wyly (2006) question Freeman and Braconi's assertion (2004) that gentrification does not play a large role in displacing low income households. They employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to yield a rich analysis of both the numerical level of displacement and its impacts on displacees. Employing a logit analysis, the authors found that between 6.2 and 9.9 per cent of all local moves among renter households in New York City were due to displacement and that most displacees were driven to move by the increases in rents (between 25,023 and 46,606 renter households moved each year as a result of dislocation pressures from gentrification). Yet it is

often the work of Freeman and Braconi (2004) and McKinnish, Walsh and White (201008) to which the media and politicians turn in seeking justification for defunding housing programs or for the direct promotion of gentrification.

The 'count wars' over the actual scale of household displacement have been expanded and advanced by the work of Davidson (2009) who, drawing on the work of Heidegger and Lefebvre, has argued for more nuanced and more phenomenological accounts of 'being in place' and its disturbance by neighbourhood changes like gentrification. Davidson argues that we are granted only a limited understanding of the experience of place and home where we think of displacement as being singularly concerned with the spatial movement and dislocation of people. Such views identify displacement as:

> 'a spatialized migratory process, whereby the occurrence of displacement is constituted in the out-migration of individuals from a particular urban place [and] the 'staying put' of incumbent residents within a prescribed space is found as evidence for the absence of displacement' (p.225).

Davidson concludes that studies of displacement, few and far between in comparison with studies of gentrification itself, abstract us from what they are supposed to measure – the injustice of feeling supplanted and discarded by the kind of changes identified through the term 'gentrification'. This observation is important because it suggests that even the modest data we have on displacement (and displacement from gentrification is only one form of household displacement) offers an opaque view of its prevalence since it tends to ignore feelings of injustice, anger, resentment and of being supplanted even while remaining in place. Often such feelings are generated by new symbolic markers and incoming affluent populations as much as being evicted or priced-out of a neighbourhood. These further ingredients of displacement, and indeed what we might term un-homing (to more fully recognise the kind of emotional attachments to place and dwelling Davidson argues for) is important because it is precisely such feelings, of resentment and place mourning,

that form the basis to claims that gentrification can be a negative dynamic and a source of injustice that is played-out through social inequalities and housing markets. This assessment suggests that we need to grasp the lived realities of neighbourhood conditions and their negotiation by residents to fully understand affective ties and the damage done to them by rapid capital investments and population changes.

The point of these observations is that we need to take-in deeper feelings of displacement as a deeper set of social and indeed psychological transformations that may be generated by localised examples of gentrification. These shifts in identity, stress and well-being may be seen to occur whether or not people are forced to actually move by market mechanisms (dramatic increases in rent or house prices that lead to exit or exclusion), evictions or the termination of tenancy agreements. These reflections can lead us to understand how displacement is comprised of more than simple 'boundary crossings' by households moving between neighbourhoods and out-migrating from gentrified areas. Such a perspective also forces us to consider why and how we might include those who remain in a neighbourhood as displacement because they endure experiences of alienation and newfound disconnection from their neighbourhoods as the character of such places change.

In the analysis that follows we will see how feelings of displacement often emerge *prior* to being forced to move. Such feelings are not only rooted in social changes but are also attached to changes in the symbolic environments and physical changes re-inscribed into the locality - in terms of commercial changes, forms of physical upgrading and restoration, aesthetic re-makings and even the more forceful demolition and modification of the neighbourhood by new residents. In short, the alienation of displacement may follow a two-stage process in which a kind of incumbent un-anchoring to dwelling in place occurs whether or not a subsequent move from the neighbourhood occurs. These observations deepen our understanding of the nature of displacement as being more than just about a wrangling over the adequacy of data (Barrett and Hodge 1986; Freeman and Braconi 2004). While displacement does indeed occur in circumstances where 'any household is forced to

move from its residence by conditions which affect the dwelling or its immediate surroundings' (following US Department of Housing and Urban Development in Le Gates and Hartman 1981, p. 214), the emotional and social impacts wrought by neighbourhood change are also potentially carried within those that stay.

3. Methodological approach

The research involved seeking contact with individuals who had been displaced by what they themselves felt to have been gentrification in the neighbourhoods they lived in or were forced to exit. These were achieved through solicitations in newspaper adverts and snowball sampling methods in both cities. The 29 interviews upon which this article is based were comprised of self-selecting participants, willing to come forward because they identified with our description of being priced-out. The newspaper adverts generated a total of 16 interviews in Melbourne and 11 in Sydney (one interview in each of Hobart and Brisbane was also conducted). This approach was adopted because of the need to locate a group that is both hard to find and geographically dispersed. To this end adverts were placed in the broadsheet *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Melbourne Age* and also the nationwide *Big Issue* magazine in order to cover a range of readerships. While we cannot fully know the degree to which this group were typical of the displacee experience the effort generated one of the largest sets of achieved interviews with displacees so far conducted internationally.

All of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed in full to enable a systematic qualitative analysis using NVivo. A qualitative coding framework was applied to all instances of a particular issue as this was identified when picking over the interview materials. As an example, the 'code' 'Holding on' was used as a category derived from narratives that focused upon the difficulties of paying rent and the desperation to stay in a particular locale. 'Holding on' was then applied to other examples of this kind of narrative where it was uncovered in subsequent interviews. The data was thus worked through over the transcripts both deductively and inductively, that is to say

using existing codes and ideas that had underpinned the general thrust of the work and 'building' a coding framework that was generated out of the voices and concerns of those we spoke to in the course of the research. Refinements and changes to the framework were made to enable the creation of more sufficient theoretical inferences taken from the data; a sub-set of this analysis is presented here as these efforts related to notions of displacement.

4. Physical dislocation: Displacement beyond the neighbourhood

It was clear that the primary effect of gentrification was to create severe economic pressures on lower-income residents (both renters and owners) through a number of mechanisms. Clearly the most important of these relates to the increased costs of housing and, in particular, a pressure on private renters as landlords raised rents in alignment with the economic purchasing power of more affluent buyers and tenants looking to move to the neighbourhood. The general pattern of this process was related by a tenant in Sydney:

> I think, in the inner city – inner west [a traditionally more working-class area of the city], and that – more and more people are moving in there and buying. I think it's moved away from just being student houses into being people that work in the city. As for the northern beaches and the northern suburbs, I think, just due to the demographics, inherently most people up here end up with pretty good jobs, just because it's upper-middle class and most people are university educated…But there definitely are a lot of renovations going on within the city and out here... what happens is people buy out in the city and renovate and they can sell and it pushes the value of all the properties up. Because originally all the city stuff was all terrace houses, it was all working class. Now people renovate them and they're trendy and they go up a lot in price and it pushes people that have probably lived in the city for generations further out to the western suburbs (John, Sydney).

In fact all of the participants had been displaced directly as a result of such pressures (though a handful were evicted, usually in order to take possession to rehabilitate the property and later sell or re-let it). Most interviewees described how their landlord had sought massive increases in rent or significant increases at regular periods *during* their tenancy, something allowed under tenancy law in each state. In some cases this occurred at the end of a lease, but more commonly such increases were introduced during the tenancy agreement and in a few cases on an almost monthly basis:

> We all got letters saying that our rent was going to go up from, in our case, $195, to at least $400, and this was going to happen at the end of the getting to know you period, which was thirty days, I think. I think that the other people got even less notice because I was on the invalid pension. They had to, without just cause, i.e. they were evicting us because we'd done something, at that time they had to give people on invalid pension thirty days notice. And then after this warming up period – I'm trying to be politely sarcastic – I'd heard around the grapevine that it might possibly go up as much as $650 a week. So being on invalid pension and [...] being a consultant and not knowing when the next job's coming – computer consultant at the time – we just sort of, 'Well, we're not living here any more!' (Janine, Sydney).

The general force of these changes in terms of rising costs for lower and moderate income tenants produced a double outward wave of migration, from the originating neighbourhood and a more general tendency to move further from the core of the city. The general observation was that tenants' landlords felt able or compelled (where they had recently purchased in a hot market) to raise rents and thus making many neighbourhoods more difficult to reside in for lower-income residents. This often raised deep feelings of injustice and anger at the resulting hardship of many tenants and in some cases genuine anger (in this case over the phenomenon of encouraging the bidding-up of already advertised rents):

I think it should be illegal to have the price-war thing. I think really it's one of the factors in our area that pushes the prices up. And I think – I think it should be illegal. I think they shouldn't be allowed to do that. Because I think that – I can see very few people that can afford that sort of carry-on. And I think it puts pressure on families and [...] for the rental price, you know, the landlord's already decided that that's the price that will be accepted. And so I don't understand. I think it's really – I think it adds to that vulnerability that you can do that. I think it's outrageous. And I think that they should bloody stop it (Rose, Melbourne).

For some tenants these pressures inevitably meant being steered toward cheaper and often poorer quality accommodation in the same or neighbouring localities or moving to suburbs further out of the city. These problems seemed particularly acute for older tenants who perhaps were less able to resist rent increases or to challenge them through legal means, as this older female tenant shows:

I: …every 6 months they've been putting it up?
A: Yeah, and basically I have to keep very quiet because downstairs are paying $95 a week more than me so I really have to keep quiet. Yeah, 14% rent increases, that was the figure they quoted, so yeah they're saying the people, the pensioners that have been living here for years are being evicted (Mildrid, Melbourne).

The extent of these transformations made it incredibly hard, sometimes even for middle income households, to retain a foothold in these central city neighbourhoods. Some tenants attempted to challenge these shifts but faced an entrenched mentality of market logic and general intransigence by landlords:

I asked the Tenants Union to investigate the increase because I felt it was exorbitant for the age of the place. And I listed down my reasons for

wanting it investigated. Eventually an inspector came along and he went around, but before he even came to look he gave me the, he said to me 'you know, rents are going up'. And I said 'I know rents are going up but there is such a thing, I am a long term tenant, and there is such a thing as reasonable increases' (Laurie, Melbourne).

The general pattern identifiable in the stories of our participants is that landlords felt able to impose large-scale rental increases because they knew that competition for housing resources was intense. Many interviewees found that incremental and often dramatic rent rises had a significant impact on their living conditions as their rising housing costs affected their spending ability to save. Some respondents discussed the impact of living with housing stress in detail and the emphasis they had to place on organising their outgoings in order to get by:

I don't even want to think about it. I was just sitting there doing budgets on Excel spreadsheets just trying to work out where's my money going, how much more money can I pay in rent, I mean, that was what it was like when I still had hopes to stay in the area. I was going through everything, food, transport, renting out a DVD, everything. Where can I cut back? (Jade, Melbourne).

Several respondents acknowledged that they would have dearly liked to be able to circumvent these pressures, had they the resources to buy a property in years gone by. Renting left them exposed to successive, and what were perceived to be unfair, rent increases, and this generated feelings of loss as they realised that they were 'behind' many other households; of course this also created feelings of resentment that they should be stuck in this way:

Because we missed the opportunity in the eighties when all our friends were buying, we never did and then prices doubled relatively quickly and it just got out of our league very quickly. So we've rented ever since we've

had kids. It's impossible to save anything. You can't save for a deposit, even if you could afford a place, and now rents are so high that it's impossible to save, so you get stuck in this financial bind (Bruce, Sydney).

The kind of narratives associated with being more directly displaced showed these periods to be difficult and emotional times. Many respondents highlighted how upset and challenged they felt being priced-out of the areas they lived in and the way that this impinged on the continuity of their daily social lives - losing friends, seeing others displaced to distant neighbourhoods and so on. A broader range of impacts was implicated in the process of being displaced. For example, those who were priced out of their neighbourhoods often found that this had a knock-on effect on their relationships and social networks. In the displacement literature, some researchers have found that people who are forced to move experience a kind of mourning for the areas and lives they have left behind and this could often be identified, as with the following vignette:

And this girl, she was such an eastern suburbs kind of girl and, you know, coffee shops and just swam in the ocean all the time, and it just killed her to move out of there. Whenever I caught up with her you could actually see the mental difference between how she was then and how she was after. Yes. It was like her spirit was broken, or something (Clare, Sydney).

It was frequently possible to identify a sense of dejection and resentment generated among those who had been displaced. Those who had been evicted were often deeply angry at their enforced move, but there was also a widespread impression of an ongoing squeeze on the choices and housing options of many tenants. A major impact of being dislocated in these ways was the creation of significant levels of fear and worry about finding another place in such an overheated market. Increasing levels of gentrification also appeared to generate a sense of fatalism, a sense of acknowledgement that landlords had a right to raise the rent:

I: So, how do you feel that the rent's gone up so much in the three years you've been living there?

A: Well, look, it certainly made me angry every time it did. But now that we've looked around a bit, I kind of can accept that's what's happening. I was under – I just assumed that our landlord or the real estate agent was just a bit money hungry and they just thought, 'Ah, well, we've got a tenant – Let's just bleed them for everything we can get.' But having looked around I'm probably willing to concede that that's not the case and I guess the prices are going up everywhere and there's not much unfortunately we can do about that (Tony, Melbourne).

Several interviewees felt that the background factors to the problems they faced not only stemmed from the pressures of gentrification, but were also linked to the broader issue of housing affordability pressures across the urban system. This is not an issue that has been deeply explored in the gentrification literature, nor has the question been asked concerning the extent to which displacement is linked to gentrification and whether in fact many households might also be displaced by rental increases generated by the affordability crisis more generally:

We're really concerned that he's going to put the rent up, because in our area the average cost of a house has gone up to about five-hundred dollars per week. We have asked to extend the lease and we're not sure at the moment but I'm really worried. He hasn't put it up since we've been there, but I am really concerned that it will go up again, and what we'll do when that happens…One of the things we're thinking about seriously is moving out of Melbourne because the rents are just so high because of this, so high in Melbourne (Rose, Melbourne).

Many interviewees related that they had moved more than once as a result of gentrification and subsequent price pressures and several described how they moved

to a new suburb only to find that the process continued and that they were forced to move on again to find affordable accommodation.

5. Symbolic displacement: Lived space and the loss of dwelling

As we have seen, displacement involving physical movement and out-migration from a neighbourhood generated major practical problems, emotionally charged feelings of loss and a sense of trauma among those it affected. In this section the deeper phenomenology of displacement is profiled using the accounts of displacees. In these narratives of neighbourhood change we can find deep feelings of resentment and passionate descriptions of the changes wrought by gentrification. These responses were often described in ways that highlighted how gentrification brought feelings of isolation and alienation, as well as a deeper sense of nostalgia for changing social relations and lost connections. Many of these feelings were located at a time prior to the movement out of the neighbourhood, feelings of 'dis-placement' in the terms that Davidson (2009) has discussed in which social actors identified a sense of a loss of place, despite managing to remain in the locality. These changes are described here using the language of symbolic displacement (Bourdieu, 1998; Charlesworth, 2000), here used to refer to the sense of subordination, discomfort and unease with trying to stay-put while the visible and sensed changes of the physical and social fabric of the neighbourhood and its symbolic order shifted dramatically as rapid gentrification took place.

Displacement for many interviewees had, as revealed below, already occurred prior to moving out of the neighbourhood. The sense of their general precariousness was fuelled not only by gentrification per se but also by a combination of tenurial insecurity and the kinds of changes in the physical and social environment around them which revealed a new language and structure of place that no longer included them or their perceived reference groups. The changing atmosphere and character of neighbourhood life generated by waves of gentrification resulted in internal feelings of a deepening psychic dislocation and inadequacy in relation to the kinds of

conspicuous wealth and more subtle codes of dress, conduct and being that now permeated the neighbourhood. This appeared to split responses to such changes into a kind of retreatist mentality, shutting out the changes and trying to maintain a sense of dwelling in place, or making the decision to fully exit the neighbourhood. Since there was nothing that they themselves could do to reinstate or inscribe the place that they had known the decision to remain either decision was met with bitterness and often by anger. Many displacees saw the migration of wealthier households to the area as an unwanted loss of social diversity, the intrinsic interest and physical authenticity of places that they were dwelling in:

> I feel a bit sad about it, to be honest with you. I feel a bit sad that it – Well, when I first moved into – Well, having been in that area for such a long time in my life in X and all those areas, I've seen it become just so gentrified and so yuppiefied that it's really quite become homogenised as well. That's the saddest thing of all. And the fact that you just don't see too many different faces in the crowd anymore. What it means also is that those migrant groups have had to move out and go to cheaper places to live because it's now too expensive to rent in those areas (Doug, Sydney).

The sense of loss was often particularly strong because the place as it was remembered was seen to stand in strong contrast to the new waves of capital investment and physical changes that were ultimately responsible for 'unseating' them from the neighbourhoods they had been living in. Physical cues in the landscape of the neighbourhood were often read as signs of social change that would not only change the character of the place they lived in, but also generate the kinds of economic imperatives that would likely push them out in due course and which yielded feelings of a kind of damage to the symbolic order of their place and their attachment to it but which also nevertheless fitted with an unassailable market logic underpinning these changes and their access to housing (Bourdieu 1991). In short, these individuals felt a sense of violation but also their own powerlessness in affecting any kind of counter-change or opposition (Bourdieu 1991).

Their changing relationship of displacees to place also became linked to feelings of psychic distance from the kind neighbourhood that emerging in the form of new consumption and leisure landscapes and the feel of social life on the street. In many neighbourhoods there were stories of demolition and reconstruction and an emerging aesthetic that was identified as further forcing a break to the kind of social and physical history of the place:

> you know sort of big, gaudy Georgian, with great huge [urns] out the front and those sorts of things…they're popping up in – and they're knocking down properties to build them. There'll be an old art deco house with a lovely old English garden. It will just get bull-dozed and a huge mansion will get built in its place, with the circular driveway and a landscape garden, and then a huge big black Mercedes out front. And there are some very upmarket little businesses opening and, yes, very sort of high end. Interesting, like lovely cafes with organic produce and those sort of things, but high end of the market (Jill, Melbourne).

These physical re-inscriptions of place were regularly identified as the root of unease about what was happening to place and the means by which a gradual process of defamiliarisation was engendered. Commercial changes were also often identified as a major change in the emblematic landscape of the locality:

> I suppose it's to do with the diversity of places to go. I mean I don't use a lot of those facilities down there. I wouldn't go to the beautiful - It's a lovely place, it's like a little boutique but it has vegetables and fruit and it's just looks so expensive - I would probably go to a supermarket in the suburb instead (Rose, Melbourne)

More broadly what emerges in the accounts of social and physical change is the wider sense of a changing physiognomy of the built environment and the people found in its

public and semi-public spaces. These were read, perhaps rightly or wrongly, as signs of deeper social changes and the provoking of an unsettling of the relationship to place as a result:

> ...the shopping strip, it's all totally changed, it's all for people you see photoed on the back of the Sunday Age, you see those people in the gossip section on the back of the Sunday Age going to the opening of some, oh I don't know. You do see women with breast implants walking down the street with small dogs, it never used to be that it was a real working class area and it had a bohemian feel as well so there was a creative edge to it as well, but that's all gone. It's just generic people, they're all the same. There's still the public housing and although some of them really drive me up the wall I'm glad they're there because if they weren't it would just be the most boring place. And the shops down there are reflecting that change - we've got Witchery there now we've never had Witchery there. (Jane, Melbourne).

Many of the changes being wrought were also strongly identified with the internal spaces of the homes themselves, often a sense of places and buildings changing even as tenants moved out of these spaces. These aesthetic changes were identified as being in line with the needs of a different kind of tenant or owner, often mediated by developers and landlords who, figuratively speaking, appeared to be wallpapering over the kind of place that tenants remembered:

> Those white china tiles – sort of really odd rectangular shaped tiles in the bathroom – and it was all the dark, teak stained wood doors. All the doors, the window frames, picture rails – it was just beautiful. Well, the property developer came in, they painted over all the dark wood, the timber, painted it all white... So we moved and they did their terrible thing – renovation on it, the flat – paint, and revolting stuff. They carpeted the stairwell which had those beautiful old mosaic tiles, and painted the wood

banister white. Yes, so that kind of destroyed that lovely building. (Clare, Sydney).

The wider point to be made from these physical-social transitions and cues in the local landscape relates to the kind of unease of tenants even while they retained some position in these gentrifying neighbourhoods, increasingly feeling a sense of instability and that the place was no longer a place that they recognised or felt at home within. Not surprisingly, this influenced the degree to which residents were able to feel at home in their neighbourhood or private dwelling and this fed into a wider sense of ontological unease and feelings of being perpetually 'on notice' to vacate:

> I: So are you feeling insecure about your housing, because your rent's been going up and having been displaced once already?
> A: Absolutely. Every day. What affects me is on a day to day basis is that I have been looking forward to really settling in fully to my flat….but I'm frightened to fully settle in, because I'm just so really – I don't want to attach myself to the place too much because it will just be too heartbreaking to in a few months time to go to all that effort, to then have to move out because I can't afford the rent. It sort of breaks my heart. It really affects my quality of life every single day, every time there's a registered mail notice in the mail box, and I think, 'Oh no, is this just going to...' And I'm relieved if it's just a rent increase, to be honest (Jill, Melbourne).

For some displacees, these situations became almost unbearable and generated ongoing anxieties about the risks that they might face in being unhoused. For example, in this interview a tenant discusses the kinds of daily routines that the threat of eviction or rent increases generated as they tried to avoid property agents. The hot property market was seen to facilitate a casual and callous way of operating by agents that was all the more difficult to deal with because they tenants had no

means of resisting the changes. In the context of a discussion about this kind of symbolic displacement the actions of agents were identified as critical to the impression of a place that was no longer open to tenants and which had the effect of generating an emotionally destabilising environment. In terms of symbolic change this was also made manifest in strategies of disinvestment, such as not providing repairs and maintaining decoration which generated feelings of being out of place, even while they still tried to stay put:

> In the 12 years that I have been here, erm, the carpets, the carpets have not been replaced, the place has not been repainted – there is, you know, there's a whole host of things gone wrong and the only thing that has been done in the 12 years that I have been here, they repainted the bathroom, and that's all, because the managing agent said 'if you can't afford it, you know what you can do' (Vicki, Melbourne).

These examples show how a range of factors were involved in creating feelings of displacement and breaking relationships to place. These feelings could be located in new faces, in changing social histories and in the physical traces and marks of the streetscape and its facilities that appeared to change or were erased as waves of investment flowed into the neighbourhood. In analysing the narratives of displacees we can see how many already felt out of place and a sense of loss and defamiliarisation, even before they were finally forced to leave the neighbourhood.

6. Conclusion

Two forms of 'losing one's place' in the city have been identified in this article, connecting with but also expanding earlier conceptions of displacement in the gentrification literature. First, the social costs and diffuse processing of households through the city from direct forms of displacement were evident. The accounts of those who have been forced to move contain stories of loss, regret and bitterness at the way in which their homes and the places they lived in have had to be abandoned.

In a wealthy society these accounts show forms of social division and resentment rarely captured in media or political narratives about the changing fortunes of cities or social groups. The data presented here echo the findings of the handful of previous studies that have managed to locate and engage with displacees for whom relocation indicates the gains of others while they are sorted through a highly competitive housing market, often to its margins.

The second key point to take from this material connects with Davidson's (2009) arguments about how we can and should also understand displacement as a form of symbolic dislocation and defamiliarisation - the loss of a sense of a place to dwell without physically moving from it that operates within a locale damaged by the intrusion of wider hierarchies and powers. This appears to provide an effective theoretical framework with which to interpret the narratives of displacees who regularly described their emotional responses in relation to physical restructuring, demolition, new forms of commercial infrastructure and services that were not 'for us'. Such perspectives lend weight to Davidson's arguments that researchers and policymakers should seek to understand how place attachment is damaged, and households affected, by more than just the hardest or clearest forms of displacement through eviction or the inability to afford to stay in an area and their subsequent out-migration. More than just revealing a sense of territoriality or working-class solidarism, the accounts presented here suggest a wider form of disruption, expulsionary logic and physical re-processing within gentrification and cost pressures. Such pressures generated pressures on lower-income residents to leave that was often related to feeling newly out of place, as well as to economic pressures.

Where might such findings and reflections take researchers in this area? It might be hoped that the combination of a sense of the scale of gentrification and displacement (Atkinson, Wulff, Spinney and Reynolds 2009) with the accounts of those whose household fortunes are so deeply impacted would help shape policy and draw political attention to such problems, yet this does not seem likely. The political economy of housing in Australia, like the US and to some extent the UK, remains fixed

on the relative well-being of homeowners as a means of boosting macroeconomic fortunes and electoral success. The 'most vulnerable' of vulnerable households being displaced in the Melbourne and Sydney contexts are private renters either in lower status occupations or not in the labour force. While many tenants and landlords understand or argue that it is 'the market' that has eroded the foothold of lower income households, it is in reality a complex amalgam of housing policy, economic change and a geography of poverty and under-investment that has opened opportunities for affluent owners and landlords who preside over the significant competition between tenants for the resources they control.

The character of cities like Melbourne and Sydney has changed enormously over the past decade yielding feelings of what has been termed here, following Davidson, symbolic displacement. Many neighbourhoods that functioned as housing markets, but also distinctive social areas, for lower and modest income households have been eroded, changed irrevocably by the arrival of 'big' money that was itself generated by changes in the labour market as the wider economy moved through successive boom periods and an increasingly retrenched role for state and federal housing agencies around the direct provision of housing.

Renters who viewed themselves as 'owners in waiting' in a society that sees ownership as normal have found that market conditions rapidly eroded these possibilities – unable to save enough become owners themselves. Local residents seeking to stay in neighbourhoods they had come to think of as home found themselves dislodged and making significant return journeys to work or to school. Those struggling to stay found themselves impoverished by hikes in their rents, but also feeling no longer at ease in neighbourhoods which were symbolically unrecognisable from the places and social networks that had been there in the past.

As competition for housing has increased, landlords have been quick to cash-in on higher returns, even where this has meant the ultimate eviction or loss of established tenants. This substantial private gain is defensible within the confines of the

regulatory climate, but as a moral economy remains far more ambiguous. Landlords in Australia, often individual investors, have effectively predated on those less well-off and unable to access homeownership. One sector of the community is effectively bankrolling the equity-driven wealth so often seen as critical to the retirement plans and welfare of the better-off.

Houses and flats have become scarce 'commodities' that belie their critical role as the building blocks of people's domestic and economic lives. Interviewees spoke of their fear at having to find another place, at their loss and misery over leaving places and people that they loved and the injustice of being simply priced-out or alienated by physical and social changes in their neighbourhoods. We require greater sophistication in the ways that we begin to recognise how displacement is not simply eviction or market dislocation of the marginal, but also encompasses a sense of neighbourhood change and shifting social networks that 'un-home' or dis-place less well-off residents.

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