

“Bringing Sandton into Soweto”: Perceptions of Tourism-Led Gentrification in a South African Township

Abstract

Over the past five decades, a vast literature on gentrification has developed. Evidence of gentrification in South African cities has been recorded in historically White neighbourhoods or city districts. The presence of gentrification in peripheral, poor, traditionally Black townships has had very little (if any) consideration in the literature, and this investigation aims to address aspects of this scholarly oversight. The paper is set in the iconic South African township of Soweto. It is argued that the Vilakazi precinct in Orlando West is an example of tourism-led gentrification. The investigation unpacks the development and gentrification of the precinct and the range of tourism roles therein. The study found that residents' experiences were mixed; some aspects of expanded leisure and services were seen positively, while forms of economic and social exclusion were also recorded following the literature on township tourism. This unique case study connects the Global North and South experience of tourism-led gentrification, arguing that much common ground between these regions is to be found.

Keywords: tourism, gentrification, township, South Africa, Soweto

1. Introduction

Gentrification is a global phenomenon (López-Morales, 2015), with a range of literature defining the process and the underlying development context, attendant agencies and impacts (Hamnett, 2021; Lees & Phillips, 2018; Slater, 2021). The spatial reach of gentrification is vast but uneven in its manifestation and academic coverage. In this regard, urban South Africa has witnessed few instances of gentrification. Two decades ago, a key argument was that South African cities were generally considered a “unique” urban form (Visser, p. 419 2002) that often discouraged comparative theory-building. Yet, it was contended that many theoretical perspectives and urban processes (such as gentrification) usually reserved for consideration in cities of advanced capitalist societies are also relevant in South Africa, not least the role tourism plays in initiating and developing gentrification. As suggested here, such similarities can also occur in unexpected places. Visser's intervention indicated that:

The emergence of an increasingly large Black middle class also questions the possibility of gentrification in South Africa's former Black townships. Whereas these areas are nearly universally portrayed as homogenous dormitory towns and neighbourhoods of poverty and struggling working-class residents, this is not always the case. (Visser, 2002, p. 419)

As this investigation aims to show, gentrification can occur in these places, often influenced by tourism.

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This study explores the origins and evolution of gentrification in the historically significant neighbourhood of Orlando West, in the larger Soweto township, a geographical location that until recently was not seen as a site for gentrification. In agreement with the idea of “planetary gentrification” (Lees et al., 2016, p. 4), we explore the unfolding of this process of urban change through the lens of tourism-led gentrification. In doing so, the investigation highlights the role of tourism as a catalyst for the gentrification of this part of Soweto. The following objectives are explored to support the aim. First, some theoretical contextual remarks concerning gentrification are made. It is noted that globally, many examples of tourism-linked urban regeneration projects result in gentrification. These debates are then explored in various Southern and mainly African urban contexts, where it is argued that gentrification is not a significant phenomenon in its urban systems. However, the best examples of gentrification in South Africa can be linked to leisure and tourism expansion by private and government investment and planning interventions. The importance of township tourism is highlighted as a catalyst for this process.

The paper then introduces the study area and considers the methodology from which the empirical material for the research was gleaned. After that follows a discussion concerning the emergence of the Vilakazi Street precinct in Orlando West as a site for gentrification in Soweto. It is argued that since the mid-1990s, private entrepreneurs established several leisure spaces and tourism products linked to critical historical events and figures, setting the stage for gentrification. Building on this trend, various state levels subsequently invested in the area, consolidating conditions for the gentrifying activity to increase. Indeed, tourism in Soweto, and Orlando West specifically, has grown significantly since the fall of apartheid and is now a primary tourism product (Kgagudi, 2019).

The overarching observation is that gentrification in Orlando West has been driven by tourism. The study is considered unique in that the researchers understand this to be the first investigation on the continent to consider the tourism-led gentrification of formerly racially segregated residential areas away from the central business district (CBD).

2. Tourism gentrification and its various manifestations

There is a vast literature on gentrification and the processes underlying its genesis and evolution (see Hamnett, 2021; Slater, 2021, as summative references). It is important to note that gentrification has been registered in various geographical contexts (Smith, 2002). Since the birth of gentrification as a research focus, both production and consumption explanations of this process have highlighted sustained engagement of gentrification (Lees et al., 2008). Scholars have concluded that the meaning of gentrification has expanded significantly in recent decades— and some would argue that the meaning of the term has become too broad (Lees et al., 2008). Nonetheless, the term's relevance remains and is likely to expand globally. However, some question the global relevance of gentrification as a phenomenon, suggesting that “gentrification theory fails in much of the world” (Ghertner, 2015, p. 552). Indeed, “it is time to lay the concept to bed, to file it away among those 20th-century concepts we once used to anticipate globalised urbanisation” (Ibid.).

Notwithstanding this criticism, other researchers have continued with studies that can be argued to provide valuable analyses of the phenomenon. For example, global gentrification has been periodised, demonstrating different stages from the first to the fifth wave (Aalbers, 2018).¹ Each wave has a dominant explanatory mechanism underlying its emergence. State policy changes and interventions are primarily identified as central driving forces of these waves (Lees & Phillips, 2018) and are often the result of various forms of exclusion.

¹ The first wave of gentrification is sporadic gentrification and is highly localised, and the second wave is seen expanding geographically and extending into cultural spheres. Third-wave gentrification often involves state structures, be they local, regional or national, where gentrification is seen outside the inner-city core and into the periphery of the city and, in some cases, rural areas, and the fourth and fifth waves are described as the intensification of third wave gentrification and gentrification here is more generalised.

A critical subset of debates focuses on tourism gentrification, resulting in what Sigler and Wachsmuth (2020, p. 3190) observe as “tourism-led, state-led and lifestyle-led urban transformation”. Gentrification caused by tourism and the confluence of private capital and state intervention has affected many places worldwide (Cocola-Gant, 2018). Indeed, significant tourism gentrification has been registered in diverse urban settings in the developed North (Pinkster & Boterman, 2017) and the developing South (Jasiński, 2021). Such gentrification has mainly been recorded in large urban areas (López-Gay et al., 2021). An increasingly recurring refrain is touristification, transnational gentrification and urban change against the backdrop of attracting international real estate investment (Sequera & Nofre, 2020, pp. 3169–3189). Collectively, Cocola-Gant (2016, p. 1) refers to tourism gentrification as “the new gentrification battlefield”.

Irrespective of the gentrification phase or its underlying explanatory process, there are generally four markers associated with gentrification (Hackworth & Smith, 2001). Those are physical, economic, and social changes, and some form of exclusion at various levels is usually centred on the class ascendance of those occupying those spaces. They all (to a greater or lesser extent) have class and other forms of displacement in common, from lower to higher income groups, gay to straight, Black to White, etc. Both positive and negative effects of gentrification have been described in the literature (Lees et al., 2008).

A plethora of literature is linked to gentrification’s displacement of the working class both in the Global North and Global South (Hamnett, 2021; Lees et al., 2008). Different authors have defined gentrification in various ways. Most agree that displacement associated with gentrification reflects the supplanting of long-term residents, who are often of lower social status than the incoming residents. There are generally improvements in the local infrastructure, increases in the cost of the affected housing and reduced housing availability. Smith (2002) notes that such displacement of original residents is gentrification’s most damaging and controversial effect (irrespective of whether this is occurring in the Global North or South). Mehdipanah et al. (2017) state that gentrification often leads to unsustainable increases in lifestyle costs, leading to the social exclusion of residents of lower socio-economic levels. Sutton (2020, p. 89) brands gentrification as “a spatial manifestation of economic inequality”. Social exclusion owing to expensive pricing, including housing and local goods, can lead to the barring of vulnerable groups. However, as Rucks-Ahidiana (2021) notes, gentrification occurs differently in different neighbourhoods.

Gentrification scholarship in the Global North also suggests that gentrification has perpetuated racial residential segregation, for example, when there is a shift to White people living in formerly predominantly Black neighbourhoods (Hwang & Ding, 2020; Hwang & Sampson, 2014). Although limited in number, studies of Black-on-Black gentrification have been carried out in the Global North. The precincts of Harlem (New York City) and Bronzeville (Chicago) have experienced Black gentrification, attracting many Black middle-income newcomers as a result of the cities being promoted as tourist destinations (Anderson et al., 2012; Hyra & Rugh, 2016). A study on Black gentrification in Philadelphia by Moore (2009) revealed that the increased Black middle class presented opportunities for this group to invest their economic and social capital into improving the quality of life for low-income Black residents.

However, it should be acknowledged that gentrification in the Global North is not uniform, and there are differences even between European countries, for example. Kowalczyk-Aniol (2023, p. 104), for example, argues that “even though research on tourism-oriented urban change is growing in number, little attention is paid to policy drivers, urban change and lived-experience nexus, especially in the context of Central and Eastern Europe”. The author suggests a need for knowledge about how such change, urban regeneration and urban entrepreneurial policies promoting tourism-oriented urban change and gentrification are differentially expressed (physically, socially, etc.) and negotiated. A similar view, though not directly linked to tourism, is represented by Janoschka et al. (2014, p. 1234): “Certain evidence suggests that the symbolic and material expression of gentrification in Spain ... and scientific discourses relating to it differ notably from those in the Anglophone world”.

2.1. Tourism-led gentrification in the Global South

There have been fewer studies concerning gentrification and tourism-led gentrification in the Global South (Liang & Bao, 2015); however, as in the case of different parts of the Global North, they, too, provide conflicting evidence and different interpretations of the problem. Some of the most comprehensive investigations of tourism-led gentrification come from China (He, 2010; He & Wu, 2009; Shin, 2010; Liang & Bao, 2015; Zhao, 2019). By analysing gentrification from a production-oriented perspective, literature on tourism-induced gentrification concludes that tourism-related investment increases property values and spills over into other related consumption spaces such as shopping malls, cultural centres and community facilities. By reorganising the local Economy in these spaces, such investment eventually leads to demographic shifts in affected communities. Although these analyses of gentrification can be categorised into state-led and tourism-led gentrification, contemporary case studies reveal that these categorisations are often interrelated and far more complex, as evidenced by studies from cities in China and Latin America.

Gentrification research in urban Africa is uneven and mainly restricted to coastal cities. Urban areas that have received some attention include Egypt (Eldaidamony & Shetawy, 2016; Elsorady, 2018; Mahmoud, 2017), Ethiopia (Nunzio, 2022), Ghana (Twumasi & Oppong, 2016); (Cobbinah et al., 2019; Nimo-Boakye & Badu-Nuamah, 2022), Kenya (Dok, 2020), Mozambique (Roque et al., 2016; 2020), Nigeria (Ajayi & Soyinka-Airewele, 2020; Godswill & Ukachukwu, 2018), Rwanda (Shearer, 2020), Tanzania (John et al., 2020) and Tunisia (Ben Salem, 2018). It is shown that state-led gentrification in Africa has been predominantly associated with establishing new or satellite towns at the periphery of historical areas characterised by excessive urban density.

For example, in Cairo, urban renewal and the displacement of poorer communities were part of master plans leading to "social polarization (sic) and loss of identity" through the "upgrading of historic medinas" (Mahmoud, 2017, p. 427). These themes reoccur in the literature. Similarly, in Kumasi (Ghana), low-income residents were displaced to the city's periphery, and traditional buildings were demolished rather than refurbished or remodelled (Twumasi & Oppong, 2016; Cobbinah et al., 2019). This trend could also be observed in Maputo, with the municipality's plan for modernisation partly enabled by private real estate investment and partly by extensive infrastructure and housing projects promoted by the Mozambican state (Roque et al., 2020). This has also been the case in the capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa (Nunzio, 2022) and Kigali in Rwanda (Shearer, 2020). It must be noted, however, that these examples of gentrification were state-led in conjunction with private capital and that tourism played a subsidiary role in subsequent urban transformations. The most transparent case to be made for tourism-led gentrification in Africa is Zanzibar in Tanzania (John et al., 2020) and in South Africa, as will be explored in the following section.

2.2. Gentrification and township tourism in South Africa

The first phase of gentrification in South Africa occurred in the 1980s on the southern edge of the Cape Town CBD (Garside, 1993). What was unusual about this occurrence was that it dealt with the displacement primarily of White residents (a White group area during apartheid) who were then displaced by coloured residents linked to increasing racial desegregation of the city following democratisation (Monare et al., 2014). On the opposite side, on the northern edge of the Cape Town CBD, a more familiar instance of gentrification emerged in De Waterkant (Visser, 2016). By the late 1980s, it was gentrifying, and many gay men started to reside in the area to take advantage of a significant rent gap (Kotzé & Van der Merwe, 2000). The neighbouring historic Bo-Kaap became the latest frontier for gentrification in central Cape Town during the 2000s (Donaldson et al., 2013). Much of neighbourhood change can be ascribed to tourism gentrification. Within the context of greater Cape Town, this stood in contrast to the idea of hybrid gentrification in the working-class parts of Westlake (Lemanski, 2014)

One of the older areas in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, namely Parkhurst, emerged as a node of gentrification (Rule, 2002) in the early 1990s. It is well-positioned between the “old” and “new” CBDs of the city, and the rent gap explains private investor interest in the area. A study by Monare et al. (2014) on the gentrification of Parkhurst subsequently found evidence of the super-gentrification of the neighbourhood in that it became a very desirable neighbourhood in Johannesburg.

The gentrification debate in South Africa attracted little research attention from scholars studying urban development, not least tourism gentrification, during the 1990s and early 2000s. This lack of attention would change when Visser and Kotzé (2008) revealed that national and local government development frameworks played a vital role in the redevelopment of central Cape Town – identified as a typical example of third-wave gentrification. Visser (2016) explored this theme further, with one of the critical issues (relevant to our later discussion) being the role of tourism and leisure-led gentrification in the context of private and public capital investment. It would be this combination of investment partnerships that would lead to processes of gentrification being highlighted in parts of Johannesburg (Ah Goo, 2018). Several recent studies have explored gentrification on the eastern edge of the Johannesburg CBD, specifically in the Maboneng precinct (Gregory, 2016; Hoogendoorn & Gregory, 2016). Ah Goo (2018) also focused on the Maboneng precinct and the associated displacement by gentrification. Perhaps the most exciting thing about this investigation is that Black displacement and gentrifiers are registered.

Two decades ago, Visser (2002) suggested that there was evidence of gentrification in peripheral Black townships where residents were investing in housing stock that (since the end of apartheid) they could finally own outright. Thus, the post-apartheid era has seen South African townships undergoing redevelopment associated with increased property prices, an influx of Black middle-class people, tourism development and the out-migration of original residents (Sibiya, 2012). South African townships have often been portrayed as impoverished neighbourhoods occupied by struggling Black working-class residents; however, some townships have instead been showing signs of accommodating an emerging Black middle class and the rapid development of a tourism economy (Visser, 2002).

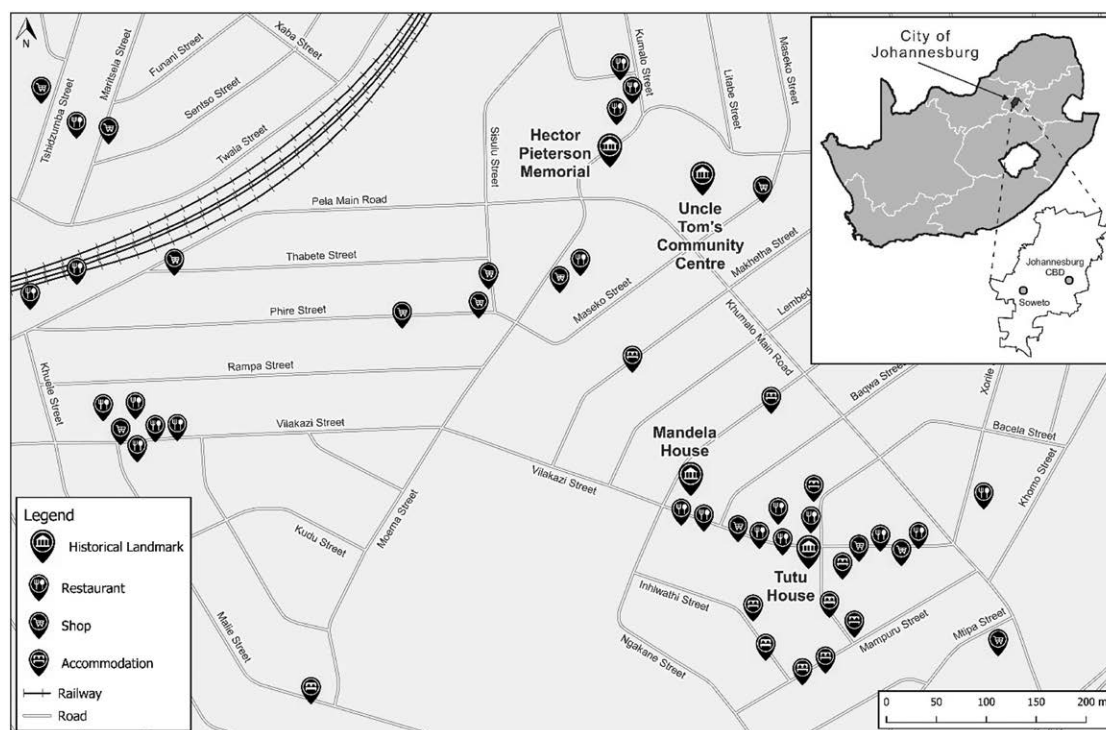
Indeed, we contend that the Economy around township tourism has created a fertile environment for gentrification. This environment was created through four phases of township tourism development, outlined by Booyens (2021). The first phase Booyens notes are the so-called ‘propaganda visits’ by political activists and photographers/journalists that put townships on the map in the international media during the 1980s (Frenzel, 2012; Rolfes, 2010). The second phase led to the preliminary establishment of leisure tourism through township tours during the transition to democracy in 1994 (Hoogendoorn & Giddy, 2017; Rogerson, 2004). During the third phase in the 2000s, townships became popular destinations for volunteer tourism, justice tourism, heritage tourism, poverty tourism and so-called ‘slum tourism’ (Frenzel, 2023; Scheyvens, 2001; Rogerson, 2004; Ramchander, 2004). Booyens’ fourth phase refers to a period of diversification, especially since the 2010 FIFA World Cup, where townships in select locations became well-established destinations offering a variety of tourism products such as helicopter rides, bungee jumping, creative tourism, cultural tourism and a range of leisure activities (Booyens & Rogerson, 2015; 2019a; 2019b; Dondolo, 2018; Marschall, 2006). The following narrative tracks the process of tourism gentrification in Orlando West, Soweto.

3. Study area and methods

Soweto is located 16 km southwest of the Johannesburg CBD in Gauteng (Figure 1). Currently, Soweto has a population of approximately 1.7 million residents. It is the largest township in South Africa regarding geographic extent and population size (Moagi et al., 2021). Soweto was initially established in the 1940s and was constructed to accommodate Black people living in areas designated by the apartheid government for White settlement (Ramchander, 2007). Soweto’s creation was gradual, with Black African residential

areas established at different times and places in response to different needs. According to Holland (1994, p. 17), the main goal of Soweto was “to ensure that the Blacks who were needed as workers in Johannesburg’s White-owned factories and businesses did not live in or near White residential areas”. Soweto transformed from being a dormitory city of considerable size to being an increasingly diverse economic base beyond just acting as a labour pool for the more prominent (historically White) Johannesburg metropole (Harrison & Harrison, 2014). In the early 2000s, Orlando West, a part of Soweto, evolved as a place of tourist consumption, interwoven with middle-class professionals working across the larger metropolitan region and an emerging grouping of residents that embraced tourism as an economic opportunity (Mgiba & Chiliya, 2020).

Figure 1
Orlando West, Soweto



The data used in the study was from self-generated primary fieldwork obtained through face-to-face questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. At the time of the investigation, there were over 10,800 households in Orlando West (Frith, 2022). A representative sample of 370 families with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% participated in face-to-face interviews. In addition, seven interviews were conducted with business managers (most restaurant owners) and one representative from the Mandela Museum. The respondents had all been employed for at least a decade at their respective places of work.

Drawing on the insights from these engagements, the following represents part of the findings made. Attention first focuses on (1) the current physical state of Orlando West and (2) why changes have come about since the dawn of democracy. Finally, the consequences of these changes are considered.

3.1. The origins of Vilakazi Street precinct’s physical transformation and its links to gentrification

Gentrification has dimensions that relate to a neighbourhood’s physical state, which might differ from its original purpose (Lees et al., 2008). From a physical change perspective, since the 1990s, the study area has

attracted increased attention as a tourist destination (Moagi et al., 2021). The establishment of a part of Orlando West as a tourism destination was incremental, being limited at the start to the transformation of Nelson Mandela's house in 1997 into the Winnie Mandela and Family Museum. It now operates as Mandela House under the auspices of the Soweto Heritage Trust (Mandela House, 2022). The Mandela Museum, in its various forms, is the longest-running non-residential establishment in the Vilakazi Street precinct. It is important to note that the underlying reason for gentrification was, right from the outset, linked to leisure and tourism. After the museum's establishment, other facilities and attractions followed. Also of note was the introduction of interpretative township tours mainly for international tourists that would include this landmark, which resulted in the establishment of additional leisure/tourism facilities and walking tours. Several other tourism services offered by various operators have led to land use changes from residential to restaurants, bars and other activities. For example, Sakhumzi Restaurant, the longest-operating business on Vilakazi Street (19 years),

was a residential property that gradually turned into a restaurant. The owner's [Mr Sakhumzi] wife used to cook for his friends, and the business slowly grew into a restaurant. The company became a successful restaurant as visitor numbers increased in the neighbourhood. (Interview – Restaurant Manager 1).

The adjacent NexDor restaurant was established soon after, while the Vilakazi restaurant has been operational for ten years. In the latter case, "it was an office, the owners saw potential and attention that the street had garnered, and they then turned it into an eatery" (Interview – Restaurant Manager 4).

The consensus from most survey participants was that the Vilakazi Street area had become a tourist destination and Soweto's central international tourist attraction (this observation corroborates Frenzel et al. 2015 and Frenzel, 2020) findings. Therefore, it made good business sense for additional enterprises in the precinct. This, in turn, placed pressure on the area's residential function and price pressure on adjacent properties. What needs to be underlined is that leisure and tourism consumption of the space was central to interviewees thoughts (Jürgens & Donaldson, 2012 previously highlighted the prevalence of leisure consumption; and Donaldson & Jürgens, 2012; Jürgens et al., 2013). As a respondent notes, this is "A tourist attraction. It is a historical street ideal for business" (Interview – Restaurant Manager 2), "because we sell African cuisine, which is ideal because this place is a tourist attraction, so it was perfect to showcase local cuisine here. It made good business sense" (Interview – Restaurant Manager 3). Local leisure seekers could also provide opportunities if tourists were not the critical market. The manager of "88 Beach" noted that the street had many restaurants, and the owners saw this as an opportunity (Interview Manager 2) to do something different by bringing the "beach" into the township.

A central observation concerning the study area's physical transformation is that most respondents (n = 281) revealed that the most notable changes were developing various types of other infrastructure in the neighbourhood. For example, most respondents (n = 281) noted constant additions and renovations ranging from new restaurants to new pavements, free Wi-Fi, small public parks and cash machine installations. Residential property and land use conversion to guesthouses and the establishment of informal bars were also registered as physical changes that have taken place in the past 20 years. It was also noted that public transport services have improved and are more accessible with the Rapid Bus Transit system, Rea-Vaya, operating in the neighbourhood. There was a move from informality toward what one resident described as a neighbourhood that meets "modern-day standards as opposed to an informal township".

Two key analytical observations should be made. The first is that private entrepreneurial actions provided the starting point of the physical changes observed. The typical first wave of "sweat equity" sparked changes in the area's leisure/tourism economy. Indeed, Booyens and Rogerson (2019a, b) noted the importance of the potential of creative tourism in townships in South Africa more broadly and Soweto specifically. Although

creative tourism potential ‘per se’ did not emerge as a strong theme from the respondents, creative tourism is noted as a possible avenue of investigation. Second, further private and public investments followed in public space development, reflected in property price increases in the area.

3.2. Property price change

Property realtors noted that the Vilakazi Street precinct has played a significant role in the property prices of adjacent residences (Interview – Estate Agent 1). They indicated that houses in Orlando West (not just those near Vilakazi Street) had experienced increased property prices. However, the increase in broader Orlando West was not as high as for properties in and around the Vilakazi precinct. A property report from the estate agents revealed that property prices in the Vilakazi precinct in Orlando West are almost twice those of properties in Dube, an adjacent neighbourhood to Orlando West (See Table 1 showing an example of this difference). For instance, the least expensive property was priced at just over a million rand in the precinct but just over a quarter of a million rand in Dube (in 2021, the average exchange rate was R14.79 for \$1). Several properties were available for R3.0 million to R4.5 million (Maeko, 2019). At the top end of the market, a residential property with guest house potential was valued at R12 million (Maeko, 2019). Again, leisure and tourism must be stressed in explaining the elevation of property prices for specific properties. What is also essential is that more significant properties or those close to the precinct are being repurposed for non-residential use, leading to upward price pressure on smaller or well-located properties.

Table 1
Cross-tabulation of property prices in Vilakazi precinct and Dube

Property in Vilakazi precinct	Property price *	Property in Dube	Property price *
56 Vilakazi Street Orlando West	2,000,000	32 Graig Avenue, Dube	690,000
5 Vilakazi Street Orlando West	1,870,000	39 Chalker Avenue, Dube	600,000
72 Maseko Street, Orlando West	1,600,000	5 Tsekedi, Dube	550,000
21 Moema Link Orlando West	1,400,000	3 Tsubaki Street, Dube	270,000

Source: Windeed Property.

Table 2 demonstrates the annual trends of median property prices in Orlando West from 2012 to 2020. In 2012, the property averaged R575,000; in 2021, the property averaged R860,000. This is a 33% increase in property prices over ten years. It is also essential to recognise that until the late 1980s, Black South Africans under apartheid legislation were seldom granted freehold titles to the properties they occupied in urban areas (Soni, 1992).

Table 2
Annual trends of property prices and number of sales in Orlando West from the year 2012 to the year 2020

Year	Average property price in Orlando West *	Percentage increment (%)
2012	575,000	
2013	500,000	13.04
2014	690,000	38.0
2015	690,000	0
2016	585,000	-15.21
2017	530,000	-9.40
2018	585,000	9.40
2019	650,000	11.11
2020	720,000	10.8
2021	860,000	19.44

Source: Property 24.

A central premise of gentrification debates relates to class displacement partly because of property price increases and rental affordability. As illustrated in Table 3, most respondents noticed increased rental prices. They believed the rental price increments resulted from gentrification in the area, with former residents moving out. “Yes, there has been an increase in the property prices; this is largely attributed to the area being a tourist attraction. Tourism has increased the property values.” (Interview – Restaurant Manager 2). “This street is a precinct and is worth millions. As a result, the house prices have significantly gone up. This place is a good investment” (Interview – Museum Representative). What is important to note is that the increase in property prices was connected to the perceived impact of tourism on property prices and rentals.

Table 3
Cross-tabulation of rental price increase between residents, estate agents and managers

Notice of property price increase	Residents (n = 381)	Estate agents (n = 2)	Managers (n = 7)
Yes	311	2	7
No	70	0	0

3.3. Employment change – The Vilakazi Street precinct

As a former dormitory town, Soweto had relatively limited employment opportunities as its purpose was to house a temporary labour pool for the White industry outside of Soweto (Phadi & Ceruti, 2011). Most respondents were not employed in the Vilakazi precinct, but the importance thereof in employment creation was recognised. They were also aware of the precinct’s role in opening opportunities in the hospitality sector and for other types of small business development (such as local clothing traders, musicians and artists). This resulted in observations such as “The youth benefits from job creation” or “They have created many opportunities for us to create employment”. These findings are similar to those of Hikido (2018) and Muldoon (2018) and echo township residents’ views that tourism has benefited township economies but has a limited economic reach.

Indeed, some (n = 33) claimed that business managers do not hire locals. They accused the managers of hiring foreign nationals and people not residing in Orlando West. The business managers interviewed refuted these claims and maintained that they prioritise residents when hiring. The residents additionally complained about the business owners’ lacking social responsibility. A significant number of respondents (n = 106) criticised the businesses for not “giving back” or “providing skills development” to the community. Thus, despite businesses making large profits from the street views were expressed that: “They don’t conduct projects to enhance or support people who have small businesses with relevant skills”, “Business owners don’t give back to the community or create any projects that will enhance the skills of the community”. These views speak to Muldoon and Mair (2022), who argued that even though township tourism has benefited many stakeholders, the scale and extent of these benefits are questioned.

3.4. Residents’ perspectives on the influx of more affluent people into the Vilakazi precinct

The influx of more affluent people to a gentrifying area is often experienced negatively by residents, similarly in Orlando West. Familiar themes were, for example, that the wealthier people who frequented the precinct led to inflated food prices. It was noted that business owners, in their view, overpriced their menus, other products and services to profit off these wealthier people and tourists, negatively affecting the working class, who often could not afford the higher prices. For example, “It is because of them [affluent people] that we cannot afford the establishments in Vilakazi” and “They are willing to pay any amount; hence, things are expensive there”.

Some participants additionally stated that the influx of wealthy people and tourists made them feel despondent because of “seeing wealthy people constantly in their neighbourhood flashing their lifestyle”. “It is a

little depressing because we are reminded that we did not work hard enough to live like them” or “People feel degraded when they are forced to look at things they cannot afford”. Some residents (n = 15) accused the wealthy patrons of not bringing about any changes or helping in the community, apart from only enriching the establishments/business owners, “They do not bring change, instead wealthy people who drive Lamborghinis give car guards small tips as [little] as R8”. There were complaints of parking space shortages, noise, and pollution from the middle- and upper-class visitors and tourists who frequent the establishments in the Vilakazi precinct and surrounding areas, particularly the restaurants and bars. Some respondents (15) accused the patrons of “making noise, parking and urinating at our gates” and “throwing away bottles in our yards”. A minority of respondents complained about increased crime rates because of the increase in affluent people in the area. One respondent commented that skirmishes occur among some street vendors because they are fighting for sales. In contrast, another commented that robbers and scammers target people (often non-residents and tourists) in the area.

Despite these complaints, some respondents (n = 45) stated that the influx of affluence (patrons, tourists, but also new resident entrepreneurs) had not changed the neighbourhood: “These wealthy people are just here to spend their own money, and it doesn’t affect us as a community”. Also, in contrast to complaints, many residents (n = 92) viewed the influx of the wealthy into the neighbourhood as positive: “They bring motivation when we see Black people driving expensive cars, we get motivated”. Some (n = 38) noted that the middle class have brought about business networking opportunities and has boosted the local economy by supporting small local businesses and spending money in the neighbourhood: “They help support small businesses in the community, e.g. car washes and people who sell T-shirts”.

The significant presence of footfall and the more remarkable ability of business owners to communicate with law enforcement agencies has reduced crime rates and made the area safer (see Malleka et al., 2022). The respondents stated that because of the infrastructure developments, particularly the streetlights and pavements, accompanied by a heavy presence of police and patrollers, they could now walk freely at night (see Hoogendoorn et al., 2020). Making the area safer under police guard, “The municipality is forced to take care of the area due to the tourist attractions”.

4. Conclusion

Gentrification and its impacts on neighbourhoods is a debate that has received considerable research attention. Part of this discourse relates to tourism-led gentrification. The South African literature on gentrification provides the best African-based example of a country where all the significant phases of gentrification have occurred and is directly aligned with Northern debates. However, the literature does not explicitly refer to tourism-led gentrification as a central guiding construct. In addition, the existing literature has yet to deal with poor townships, even though these are a vital feature of the South African urban landscape. One could argue that the period immediately following the change to democracy in South Africa (over two decades ago) presented the most significant potential for gentrification. What is unique about Orlando West and the Vilakazi precinct and its surrounds is that, unlike most gentrification examples in Africa, its genesis was not the result of direct government intervention through urban renewal programmes but tourism. It was a spontaneous outcome of private individuals harnessing the significant history of the place and the lucky timing in the mid-1990s of the introduction of a democratic dispensation. This led to the establishment of a leisure and tourism economy that, in turn, enabled gentrification to manifest in a part of Orlando West. The process has been further supported by government investment in infrastructure development projects. As explored in this investigation, the study area has changed significantly physically and symbolically. The impact of tourism gentrification echoes much of those registered elsewhere in tourism-led gentrification debates.

First, in line with Freeman (2005), the survey participants noted numerous benefits of gentrification in this area. These include providing more public services, usually in street repairs, policing, sanitation and lighting. This was generally confirmed in this study. Ehlenz et al. (2020) argued that some demographic groups enjoyed living in the proximity of gentrified neighbourhoods as it provided easy access to amenities that include the proximity to downtown entertainment, as well as vibrant cultural venues that can improve residents' well-being (Iyanda & Lu, 2021). The current study was in a suburban setting, far from a "downtown" precinct with many amenities. However, Orlando West has since developed these amenities owing to leisure and tourism activities occurring in the area. These activities are popular with tourists (including visitors from elsewhere in the region) and younger residents (cf. Hwang & Sampson, 2014).

Second, respondents reported that the streets were safer to walk at night with the heavy presence of police patrols and other forms of security. Literature on gentrification has regularly referenced the influence of gentrification on decreasing crime rates (Kreager et al., 2016; Collins et al., 2022). Third, a plethora of literature links the displacement of the original working-class owing to gentrification (Hamnett, 2021; Hwang & Ding, 2020; Slater, 2021). This research found that contrary to these observations, gentrification in Orlando West has yet to lead to the large-scale displacement of the original working-class residents. The question is which potential future residents might be excluded, not necessarily displaced.

Fourth, literature on gentrification in the global North suggests that gentrification has perpetuated racial residential segregation, as there is (in that context) often an increase of White people in formerly predominantly Black neighbourhoods (Hwang & Sampson, 2014). This process has harmed the poor and working-class families who resided in those neighbourhoods. This has, however, yet to be the case in the Orlando West context. The study revealed that despite the developments and upgrades, the Vilakazi precinct and its surrounds are still occupied by Black residents. The important related point is that this first investigation in South Africa points to Black entrepreneurs leading to tourism gentrification. This speaks to the limited literature on Black-on-Black gentrification documented in the Global North. For example, Harlem and Bronzeville have experienced Black gentrification, attracting many Black middle-income newcomers by promoting the cities as tourist destinations (Anderson et al., 2012; Hyra & Rugh, 2016). Perhaps more importantly, this links to gentrification examples in other African locations.

Finally, a key difference from other gentrified neighbourhoods or parts generally remarked upon in literature is the physical "aesthetic" considerably different from those reported elsewhere in the developed North, if perhaps less so in Africa. Gentrification in this investigation does not build on a neighbourhood with profound physical or historical references such as De Waterkant, post-industrial landscapes such as Maboneng and parts of Woodstock, or new-build interventions such as the Cape Town Foreshore district. It also contrasts with the gentrification of historic neighbourhoods such as the Medina districts of North Africa or Stone Town in Zanzibar on the continent. Vilakazi precinct is, in this regard, currently unique in South Africa but echoes the underlying cause of dependence on leisure and tourism seen in much scholarship. Whether this will be echoed elsewhere in South Africa's former Black township areas is unclear but requires investigation. In addition, this example also challenges the ideas concerning gentrification generally occurring close to a former CBD and its amenities.

In conclusion, the Vilakazi precinct is the outcome of private (and later public) investment in leisure and tourism activities that led to gentrification in this location. Overall, it represents a unique example of gentrification led by Black South Africans in a rather unusual peripheral urban location.

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