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The "Creative Township" in the Post-Apartheid: Globalisation, Nation Building or Gentrification?

This paper analyses the ambiguities of post-Apartheid public cultural policies in South Africa by focusing on the case of the Red Location Museum and Cultural precinct (RLMCP), a multisectoral project for socio-economic development, based on tourism, art, culture, heritagisation and urban regeneration, implemented in Red Location, one of the oldest townships of Port Elizabeth. In the post-Apartheid period, cultural policies have been employed as catch-all policies that could lead to urban renewal, desegregation and development. The case of the RLMCP drives home how efforts to use art and culture as leverages to transform townships into the core of the creative city and into the prototype of a new form of neighbourhood led to exclusionary representations and patterns; moreover, it is an example of how cultural policies enforce gentrification dynamics at the local level, in the name of restructuring urban governance and rescaling the city to the global dimension.

Keywords: culture-led project; development; gentrification; creative economy.

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Introduction

In post-Apartheid South Africa, cultural policies have been identified as promising, cost-effective and alternative roads to township development, desegregation and transformation. The construction of museums, the creation of cultural festivals, the boosting of art and culture, with a specific focus on cultural diversity, have been considered as catch-all policies that could both improve the living conditions of township residents and lead to urban regeneration; moreover, cultural policies have been used as tools to enhance social cohesion and to lay the basis for the construction of the new South African nation. At the same time, public and private investments in the cultural sector have been strategically encouraged in order to make South African cities more appealing and smarter in international fora.

In South African cities, as well as in other cities that have been marked by historical inequalities and segregation, and in which social healing and reconciliation are expected to happen both on the material and on the symbolic level, the idea that cultural policies can act as tools for socio-economic transformation is rarely questioned and it is ecumenically accepted by public officers, urbanists, academics, civil society movements, citizens' committees. In post-Apartheid South Africa, this idea has gained a wide consensus.

The studies that have better analysed the social implications of cultural policies are the ones that focus on heritagisation, musealisation, public memory and gentrification (Atkinson and Bridge 2005; Clifford 1997; Coombes 2003; Lees 2004; Lees, Shin and Lopez-Morales 2016; Marschall 2012; Miraftab 2004; Miraftab, Wilson and Salo 2015; Prince 2010; Zukin 1995), as well as more recent studies on township creative tourism (Booysen and Rogerson 2019).

Cultural policies in townships have played out as a "curious blend of revitalisation and commodification" (Rubino in Atkinson and Bridge 2005, 12) and

have been employed as a form of city rebranding. In addition to this, cultural policies are often implemented by different forms of partnership between the public and the private sector, acting as a "form of privatization under neoliberal policies of decentralization" (Miraftab 2004, 98). As Miraftab (2004, 98) has highlighted, "like the Trojan Horse, these partnerships might arrive with the promise of a gift but only to further dispossess the poor from their locally mobilized resources".

Although references to dispossession or to displacement are quite common in the analysis of culture-led requalification, gentrification as a "phenomenon of globalisation" (Atkinson and Bridge 2005, 1) is often treated as a side effect, the lesser evil, or a price to be paid in order to achieve modernisation and requalification.

This paper aims at redefining the relationship between cultural policies and gentrification by analysing it in light of nation building and city rebranding and rescaling, instead of isolating it from other forms of urban governance. I argue that gentrification is not a consequence or an unintended outcome of cultural policies, but is instead a specific kind of public policy, one that is deliberately and consensually carried out in order to build a world-class city.

In this paper I draw from authors, such as Clark (2005) and Atkinson and Bridge (2005), whose definition of gentrification focuses on trajectories and dynamics, instead of concentrating only on the effects. These authors conceive gentrification as a process of change (Clark 2005) and transformation by substitution (Atkinson and Bridge 2005). The changes and the substitutions concern the users and inhabitants of a place (from lower to higher economic status), the built environment, the public and private capital (re)investment, and the history and culture of an area or of a community. Substitution can have many facets: it can result in urban dwellers' displacement and eviction, as well as in culture homogenisation and sameness.

In the cities of the Global South, and especially in cities marked by spatial segregation and socio-economic inequality, "local state can act as a facilitator" (Lees, Shin and Lopez-Morales 2016, 175) of this process. The local state can "penetrate and somehow domesticate the spatiality of urban poverty and informality" (Lees, Shin and Lopez-Morales 2016, 149), in order to make it more comprehensible and suitable for private capital investments, with the aim of triggering economic development and strengthening urban governance. As Lees argues, in the global South "gentrification is a 'mode' or type of urbanization" (Lees in Parnell and Oldfield 2014, 506). Local state-led urban planning can easily collide with other non-formal and grassroot ways of creating and regulating the cities (Benjamin in Parnell and Oldfield 2014).

This paper focuses on township regeneration through its transformation into a "creative township". I derive the notion of "creative township" from the debated and highly contested concept of "creative city", intended both as a site of development by means of creative economy and as a space of cultural diversity and tolerance (Landry and Bianchini 1995; Florida 2005; Yencken 1988). In particular I refer to the notion of "creative city" as elaborated by Florida, who states: "My view of creativity and cities revolves around a simple formula, the 3 T's of economic growth: technology, talent, and tolerance" (Florida 2005, 6). The "creative township" does not only entail the idea that township development and transformation can be achieved thanks to a mix of cultural activities, heritagisation, boosting of arts and creative industries, but also that townships are sites of social engineering, innovation and experimentation, aiming at social cohesion and the well-being of their inhabitants. The construction of the creative township is depicted as intrinsically positive and as the epiphany of progress. The "creative township" embodies the city of tomorrow.

The construction and conception of the "creative township" is here analysed by focusing on the case of Red Location Museum and Cultural precinct (RLMCP), a publicly funded multisectoral project for socio-economic development, based on tourism, art, culture, heritagisation and urban regeneration, implemented in Red Location, one of the oldest townships of Port Elizabeth, in Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality.[1]

The RLMCP was launched in 1996 by a municipality councillor who had the idea of building a museum of the anti-Apartheid struggle in Red Location in order to develop the township; since then, it has become much more ambitious: the last master plan outlined the creation of the biggest cultural precinct in the whole African continent. Despite the great expectations surrounding it, the project has been halted by disgruntled residents since 2013. Currently, the buildings already completed lie abandoned, waiting for the end of the negotiations between local government and Red Location residents, while the municipality is still looking for the funding needed to complete the gigantic architectural work.

On the one hand, residents' protests have expressed fears of displacement, exclusion, dispossession and neglection; on the other, criticisms have been advanced as to the conception of history, art and culture embodied in the project and as to the removal of inequality from the debate on development and cultural economy.

An in-depth analysis of RLMCP project and the claims of its discontents sheds light on the ambiguous relationship between cultural policies, global capitalism, nation-building policies and gentrification in post-Apartheid South Africa.

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[1] The findings outlined in this paper are the outcome of a period of research fieldwork that I conducted in Red Location in 2014-2015.

1. Red Location as a site for development

In 1902, an outbreak of the bubonic plague occurred in Port Elizabeth. At least 136 people died. The plague outbreak was attributed to the bad hygiene conditions of black people's houses located in the city centre, which led the Colonial Plague Board to decide that 350 houses were to be demolished and their inhabitants relocated to the margins of the city. As it was necessary to provide shelters for many people in a very short time, the city administration bought a plot of land in the countryside and settled on that land a large number of army barracks, which had been used during the Anglo-Boer war. The barracks, made of corrugated iron and wood, were painted red. At the time, this new settlement did not offer any other basic service to its residents. Because of the colour of its houses, the settlement was given the name of "Red Location" (Baines 2002; 2011). In the following years, some of the cottages originally intended for single workers were adapted for families, so the location ended up being overcrowded and presenting extremely precarious hygiene conditions.

Ninety years later, after the end of Apartheid, when the first Transitional Local Council began to govern the city, Red Location dwellings were literally collapsing, too weak to withstand heavy rain and wind, and they caught fire easily. In 1996, during a public meeting held to discuss the renewal of the old post office, African National Congress (ANC) councillor Riordan, chairman of the Finance and Administration Committee, launched the idea of creating a museum of the anti-Apartheid struggle in Red Location, an area of 1.45 square kilometres and about 15000 inhabitants, most of them amaXhosa. Red Location was still known as a poor and disadvantaged area; *The Herald*, a local newspaper, reported:

> He said the council had inherited a city in which about 17000 families were still forced to endure the indignity of the bucket system and more than 15000 had to walk distances

> to obtain water. The council was committed to bringing development to areas where there was at present no viable commercial life. It was hoped the Red Location Museum was an initiative to encourage this. Without these kinds of initiatives in the townships, they would simply become ghettos (*The Herald*, September 23, 1996).

In 1998, a national competition for the construction of a "museum of Apartheid" (which afterwards became a museum of the anti-Apartheid struggle), including an auditorium and a restaurant, an art gallery, a centre for creative arts, with exhibition spaces, sales and workshops, a market, a library, a hall and conference centre was launched.

The architectural competition was won by the firm "Noero and Wolff Architects", led by Joe Noero and Heinrich Wolff and located in Cape Town. The firm was South Africa-based, but Noero was already internationally known, so this represented the perfect link between the local/national and the global. Moreover, Noero, a white, privileged architect, had previously worked in townships, where he had built several churches and schools. The firm designed a museum that explicitly recalls the industrial past of the township (until the industrial crisis of the nineties most Red Location residents worked in the factories nearby).

Through the years, despite the protests of residents, who became more and more vocal, the international awards received by the project for its innovative aspects and the large number of positive reviews of the museum's architecture pushed Noero and the project promoters to increase their ambitions: the RLMCP could become the largest cultural precinct of Africa, while Red Location could become the prototype of a new way of building South African cities. In this sense, the RLMCP could become a model of "urban futurity" and a "condensed set of desirable and achievable urban forms" (Roy and Ong 2011, 13-14). Presenting the project to the Architectural League, in New York, in 2010, Noero stated:

> You build a museum where people live, and the people live in shacks and the shacks sit comfortably in front of the museum and it changes entirely the reading of the city and it changes the reading of the people outside of South Africa…When we finish with this project we will create an entirely new South African kind of city centre which will be culturally based, where people will live 24 hours per day, and it will be built on probably the poorest side of the city…very brave! (Noero 2010, Conference at the Architectural league of New York, minute 51:39).

This quote embeds the main contradictions of the RLMCP: the construction of the museum does not change the township, but the "reading" of the city; the actual target of the RLMCP are not the township residents, but the people who can see the external projection of the city. Moreover, the precinct is described as a "new South African kind of city centre" in the middle of the townships. The township transformation is operated by substitution (of economic and leisure activities, of buildings, of the kind of people who are expected to visit and live in the precinct facilities) and not by responding to residents' needs and demands (Montanini 2017; Smith 2016).

In 2010 a new master plan was drafted in order to build the cultural precinct: beside the Red Location Museum, completed and opened in 2006, an open-air theatre (completed in 2006), a restaurant (completed in 2006), a digital library and an art gallery (completed in 2012), the construction of three different-sized theatres, two cinemas, two rehearsal rooms, an art school, workshop and laboratory rooms, as well as a conference room was proposed. The project also included elements of urban renewal and housing provision, namely the construction of 210 social houses for shack dwellers who had to be relocated in order to make place for the implementation of the project, the construction of a bus stop and a market area, the erection of a statue of commemoration of the Rivonia Trial and the upgrade of Singaphi Street, the main road that leads to the precinct. This programme was completed by the Mandela Bay

Development Agency (MBDA), a public body concerned with developing the municipality, in 2014.

The RLMCP project has been repeatedly contested. The first contestations followed the presentation of the project idea, at the end of the nineties. Other waves of protest hampered the construction works in 2003 and 2009, and the construction works have been definitely blocked since 2013, when the Red Location Steering Committee (RLSC), a committee of Red Location residents, seized the buildings that had already been completed. The protests were mainly related to the fact that public money was invested into the construction of cultural buildings while nearby dwellers were waiting for the renewal of their social houses and for the creation of new jobs, but they also concerned history and memory.

In spite of the protests and the forced closure of the completed buildings, the RLMCP project, which was implemented in Red Location for more than twenty years, is still included in the city development plan. The RLMCP closure has also damaged other commercial and business activities that had been developed, with the help of the municipality, in the precinct premises, such as the Red Location Backpackers Lodge, that was run by a women's cooperative.

2. A three-headed hydra: development, nation building, city rebranding

The RLMCP is a multifaceted project based on three interwoven elements. The first element is development, which, since the project was designed, has been described as urban revitalisation, regeneration and uplifting, but also as economic growth through the boosting of economic activities in the township. The second element is nation building: the RLMCP is represented and offered to the township residents as a form of public compensation and restitution for those previously oppressed by the Apartheid regime

and as a form of acknowledgment for the people who took part in the struggle against that regime. The third element is city rebranding and repositioning in international fora, which must be achieved by increasing the city's economic attractiveness. The perfect link of these three elements was seen in the development of national and international tourism.

These three elements – development through urban regeneration, nation building, and city rebranding – have been included in the project since the beginning. Each of them entails a specific conception of culture. In the RLMCP project, culture is identified in various ways: it is embodied in material heritage, history and memory; but it is also labelled as "local" (local art, local culture) and "diverse", and it is mingled with tourism and the creative economy.

The Competition Brief of 1998, the document that includes the instructions to participate in the architectural competition to build the Red Location Museum and the other annexed buildings, describes how Red Location can be transformed into a 'cultural experience' (Albrecht Heroldt Architects, 1998, quote from the motto reported on the first pages). In the preface, Nceba Faku, the first executive major of Port Elizabeth after Apartheid, described the aim of the project as follows:

> to transform Red Location, a sad and neglected place of great political significance in the history of the anti-Apartheid struggle in the Eastern Cape, indeed, the whole country, into a major tourist attraction […] [The project will] offer the tourist a multi-faceted cultural experience, a taste of vibrant Africa, a celebration of the talents of local artists and craftsmen. […] In Port Elizabeth, Red Location, New Brighton, is hallowed ground (Albrecht Heroldt Architects 1998, 2).

This quote starts from the township's space and its past to get to a global dimension ("a taste of vibrant Africa"). This transition is made by means of tourism development. It

can be seen that the idea of rescaling, the possibility of acting at the local, national and global level has been present since the beginning of the project.

As Zukin (1995, 83) emphasises, “cultural strategies of redevelopment are complicated representations of change and desire.” The connections made by project promoters between culture, identity, urban planning, development, inclusion, tourism were and still are considered common sense by a large number of South African urban planners and local government officers. The idea that there exists a virtuous circle between urban planning, urban uplift and the strengthening of civic values was and still is shared by various actors, and hardly questioned.

According to the Competition Brief, compensation to the Red Location residents consisted not only in the celebration of the Struggle, but also in the showcasing of “indigenous culture”. This was to become possible by translating culture into history commodification and heritagization, tourism and art marketing. As Lees, Shin and Lopez-Morales (2015, 161) note, “commodifying the physical fragments [of the past] into a new spatial commodity that is trendy and scalable” is one of the flagships of gentrification.

When the museum was opened, tourism also included some forms of “slumming” (Frenzel and Koens 2012): the main attraction of the cultural precinct was that it was located right in the centre of the location. Visiting the museum meant going to the township. For activists living in the same city, but outside the townships, going to the RLMCP represented the possibility of performing a militant act: attending conferences with black intellectuals in a museum setting, listening to jazz concerts in the place that saw the birth of South African jazz. Knowing how to get to the RLMCP was a way of marking their proximity with that area and with “comrades” living on the location site.

For international tourists, going to RLMCP was an opportunity to visit the township and to observe it from a sanitized space. Museum staff explained that, in the first months of the museum opening, they had to recreate a fake shack interior inside the museum in order to prevent tourists from invading the privacy of the dwellers living beside the precinct.[2] In some way, slumming was a consequence of the extraordinary juxtaposition of elements that were considered incompatible (informal dwellers and a museum), but also of a process of requalification and rescaling that was being carried out in an accelerated way.

In the intentions of its supporters, the RLMCP had to demonstrate that it was possible to visit and access the townships, and that South Africa was a pacified and desegregated place, where everybody could feel welcome everywhere.

The business plan of the RLMCP explains: "At the Red Location functions are generally non-racial. Probably because of the quality of architecture, and the excellent cleanliness and security in the area, it is a preferred township venue for non-racial events" (Dojon Financial Services 2011b, 17). This sentence openly links non-racialism to cleanliness and security. In other words, the space was meant to be accessible to all citizens, coming from other townships and especially from the suburbs, because they could feel comfortable and safe in it, thanks to the decency and the "sanitization" of the place. Accessibility, as something concerning other citizens more than Red Location residents, is also present in another sentence: "Like the Young Vic and the Shakespeare Globe theatre, the Red Location Performing Art Complex must determinedly attract a younger and more adventurous audience, and one that celebrates South African diversity" (Dojon Financial Services 2011a, 5). Here two interesting circumlocutions,

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[2] Former museum staff members interviewed by MM, 12/03/2015 and 16/03/2015.

“young and more adventurous audience” and “celebrates South African diversity”, are used to refer to the fact that the RLMCP targets the most progressive and open youth, those most welcoming towards mixing and encountering, those brave enough to visit townships. Such phrases deliver an ambiguous message: on the one hand, the project targets the most progressive side of society, identified with the people who are open to cultural diversity – which, in South Africa, refers to different phenotypes, ethnic origins or class; on the other, it is intrinsically demeaning towards the township’s space and residents, suggesting that a township is dangerous and that one must be brave to visit it. In reality, New Brighton area is still perceived as a dangerous place by people who do not live there. After the Museum closure, various crimes have taken place on the site; in 2016, one security guard was shot dead in front of the museum.

The idea of public space embodied by the RLMCP is of a space where everyone can feel welcome and equal, as inside that space post-Apartheid values are promoted and shared. The complexity of diversity as a value, a constitutive part of the nation, is short-changed.

Findley (2004, 156) analysing the RLMCP, wrote:

> The monumentality of the museum had a curious effect on the people of New Brighton. Suddenly their neglected and marginalized town is the location of a large, serious, public institution. They are now part of a metropolitan area in a way they have never been. The civic urban sensibility this brings has inestimable value.

Her reflection perfectly recalls the promoters’ idea: the RLMCP brings civility to a space that is considered as “non-city”. If Red Location is a non-city, then Red Location residents are not full citizens; to become full citizens they need to embrace the new values of the South African nation, and also learn and acquire the codes of ‘civic urban sensibility’. The function of the project as a nation-building tool goes beyond preserving and codifying public memory: it is a tool of citizenship education for township residents

and, at the same time, it extends the borders of civilisation beyond the residential suburbs and the central business district. The RLMCP, similarly to other cultural policies, is a dispositive of urban governance (Bennett 1992; Bratich, Packer, and McCarthy 2003).

The RLMCP is a telling example of the South African 'narrative of becoming' (Murray and Witz, 2014). The RLMCP embodies the future – the future nation, the future city – and it is the future in the present. It is designed to be an ideal cultural public space, one that mingles "proximity, diversity, accessibility" (Zukin 1995, 262) and displays shared values of civility. The master plan states: "the museum is solemn and has a sense of shrine and pilgrimage" (Dojon Financial Services 2011c, 2).

The RLMCP is a form of 'enclave tourism' (Edensor 1998, 45), a sanctuary embodying the values of the new South Africa, and a site of innovation and creation of the future city, with few connections with the rest of the area. In 2012, Dorelle Sapere, an officer of the MBDA, in her review of the project, observed: 'the RLMCP is a magnificent set of buildings but largely superimposed on a community as layers of another reality" (Development Partners and The Matrix 2013).

3. The creative township

The RLMCP project acts as a tool of re-placement (Atkinson and Bridge 2005) and rescaling (Brenner 2004). Re-placement refers to a specific construction of space and a place-making activity that reposition a space while requalifying it (in this case, the

transformation of a township from an "empty"[3] space into a cultural precinct); rescaling refers to another kind of repositioning related to a symbolic space: the township becomes a "creative" neighbourhood and a tourist site, it transcends the city borders and enters a cosmopolitan and international space. Moreover, its mere existence places the whole city in the pantheon of world-class cities.

International rescaling is performed in many ways. One happens at the project level, even before implementation. When the idea of the Red Location Museum in 1996 was launched, the idea that partnerships and exchange could be established with the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC was mentioned. The Red Location Museum was described as a world-class museum (the phrase "world-class museum" was also reported beside the logo on the museum website). Later on, the museum was also twinned with the Gothenburg Museum of World Culture, in Sweden – a small amount of financing of the project came from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) – and the museum staff went on an exchange trip to Sweden in order to observe how the Museum of World Culture was managed and what kinds of activities for the surrounding community were organised.

To support the idea of creating a multi-purpose cultural centre and a culture-led regeneration project, one of the volumes of the master plan is devoted to best practices and to examples of successful cultural centres around the world. The architect and the main promoter of the project went on a "study trip to London and Stratford-on-Avon" (Dojon Financial Services 2011c, 4). The projects that are mentioned as inspiring are

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[3] The space where the RLMCP is built is often described as a previously empty space. In this way it is de-historicised; the past is devalued in relation to an enriching and empowering present.

the Barbican, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Shakespeare Globe Trust, the British Film Institute, The Young Vic in London, and the Artscape Theatre Centre in Cape Town. Other culture-led regeneration projects mentioned there are the Tate Modern in Southwark, London, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, the Tate St. Ives Art Gallery in Cornwall.

The whole RLMCP master plan is studded with examples of and comparisons with Western projects. With the exception of a couple of South African projects or festivals (such as the National Art festival in Grahamstown), all the other theatres and cultural centres mentioned in the master plan are located in the UK, in some other European country (France, Spain etc.) or in the USA. Guggenheim openings in Abu Dhabi and Rio de Janeiro (where, as it turns out, a Guggenheim museum has never opened) are also quoted. Although the project promoters aim at branding the RLMCP an African cultural centre, it is interesting to note how the idea is not to create a regional/continental model (a reference model for other African countries), but to be recognised as an African, yet global model, by Western institutions and art communities. Moreover, by means of inter-referencing – a term that refers to "practices of citation, allusion, aspiration, comparison, and competition" (Ananya and Ong 2011) – the RLMCP is made intelligible and comprehensible to a Western audience.

While these comparisons target the museum and the cultural centre specifically, other aspects of the project are meant to have an impact on the township and on the whole city. Red Location is transformed into a tourism and leisure destination, recalling the 'enrichment economy' of Boltanski and Esquerre (2017).

According to the master plan, the attractiveness of the RLMCP is multiplied by transforming Red Location into a creative township (Dojon Financial Services 2011c, 8). The creative township is accessible and non-racial, attractive for new middle-class

residents, which is why building a "creative" township is also considered a way to desegregate the township by increasing the residents' social mix and the number of mixed housing projects in order to build a mixed-income community. Moreover, the creative township does not only mark the transition from an industrialised to a deindustrialised city, but also paves the way to private investors and developers.

The relationship between all the elements that compose the RLMCP and its surroundings is well explained by these excerpts from the master plan:

> The RLCC will make history tangible and save memory/ It will be one of the most valuable educational institutions outside of the local university/ It will be a centre of research/ It will preserve historic sites/ It will be a vital ingredient in the NMBM's quality of life, and will encourage skilled and creative executives to come to, and stay in, the Metro/ It will provide public and meeting space/ It will stimulate creative activity/ It will help to change attitudes and opinions and it will improve, greatly, the value of New Brighton property" ((Dojon Financial Services 2011a, 3).
>
> The institutions provide a foothold for knowledge-based industry to invest and develop. "Quality of life" or "quality of place" indicators are becoming increasingly important in guiding investors as to where to invest, and in guiding skilled worked in where to relocate to (Dojon Financial Services 2011b, 107)

The RLMCP embodies, at the same time, a successful political transition to a new South Africa, and the penetration of neoliberal economy into previously peripheral areas.

4. The claims of nearby residents

Protests on the part of Red Location residents have accompanied all steps of project design, launching and implementation, and have concerned many different aspects. Several residents' committees have been formed during the years and, on some occasions prior to 2013, in 2003 and 2009, residents' protests became more vocal, and

extended to disrupting or impeding the museum's activities. The residents' main concern, which remained at the forefront of all waves of protests, was the use of a huge amount of public funds for a cultural centre in Red Location, while social housing buildings that had been built at the beginning of the nineties, and which were located just beside the museum, lay in extremely bad conditions. When, in 2013, the Red Location Steering Committee (RLSC) opted for the forced closure of the museum and the occupation of all the completed buildings, its main claim was that social housing buildings should be put to rights. The RLSC declared that the key of the museum would be given back to the city mayor only after the works on the buildings had been completed. The main argument was that the rectification of social housing could not wait until the completion of the cultural centre. From 2014 until 2019 rectification works went on with many hindrances and breaks, due to disagreements between the municipality and the residents: the municipality agreed to rebuild the houses, but stated that the original size had to be kept, while the households that had enlarged their house in previous years did not accept that their houses should be rebuilt, but in a smaller size.

Although such contentions and claims are very frequent in South African cities, the use of the Red Location Museum and the other buildings as a bargaining chip and the occupation of the buildings highlight an interesting point: residents have halted the project because they believe it cannot replace other social and welfare policies.

In principle, the development of the RLMCP project and the renewal of social housing are completely different policies, implemented by different municipalities and provincial departments. Nevertheless, the RLMCP project has crossed the housing problem in two ways: the RLMCP was presented as a development project, which also included the provision of new social houses; in addition to that, the dwellers of the old Red Location houses, as well as other informal dwellers who lived on the project site,

had to be evicted in order to build the museum and the other buildings. The people who were evicted, about 150 families, were promised relocation, and they were then put on a beneficiaries list. Because of irregularities in housing system allocation, of the difficulties in retracing all the former dwellers of the ancient houses, and of the project halt, which impeded the construction of the new social houses, relocation did not happen as expected, causing further discontent.[4]

The RLMCP has been presented as a project that would benefit all citizens, but residents, on various occasions, have claimed that the project must be beneficial for the citizens living in the location in the first place, and then for all the other citizens of Port Elizabeth. For instance, before and after the museum opening, residents asked to be employed by the Museum, and protested when they realised that only few inhabitants of the township got a job in the precinct. During the construction phase, a system of job alternation had been put in place: residents were trained and hired as construction workers for a short period, in order to enable many people to benefit from the presence of the building site; however, residents regarded such temporary hires as a symbolic act more than a truthful engagement on the employment issue on the part of the municipality. Beside the creation of some temporary jobs, the organisation of several socio-cultural events that involved the residents and the founding of the women's cooperative of the Red Location Lodge (the longest-lasting effect of the presence of the project), the promises made to the residents about the socio-economic impact of the RLMCP do not seem to have been met.

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[4] The complex housing problem in Red Location last from many years and it is a highly contentious topic. For a more detailed account see Montanini (2017a; 2017b).

The residents' committees have been also focusing on the use of the museum and the other buildings of the precinct, on the way in which the museum has portrayed the history of the township, and on the ownership of historical artefacts. For instance, when the museum was opened in 2006, various groups of residents asked to be allowed to practice other activities on the cultural precinct site than had originally been programmed by the project promoters. A local football team asked to use the space devoted to the open-air theatre, beside the museum, for weekly training, as it was grassy and level; another group of residents asked to be allowed to organise a chess tournament. The museum staff have agreed on many of these proposals, to strengthen the relationship with the nearby residents. In a way, such requests have contributed to shaping and modifying the mandate and goals of a cultural building in the middle of the township. A local appropriation of the museum facilities has taken place.

Concerning the way in which the history of the township has been portrayed, through the years residents have contested the exhibition of a picture outside the museum that portrayed a poor Red Location household during Apartheid, as well as the decision of keeping one Red Location old house as an artefact inside the precinct and the choice of not quoting and celebrating certain people who had resisted Apartheid in exemplar ways. Residents' concerns focused on the way in which the poverty of township households has been exhibited and the way in which the history of the township has been crystallised into public history.

Cultural policies have been contested as forms of representation and narration. While residents did not contest the fact that the township was very poor and in bad hygiene conditions, they did not think that this should have been the only way of talking about the township's past (an exhibition on the history of local jazz was much more appreciated). Moreover, residents have been hesitant in donating to the museum objects

related to the anti-Apartheid struggle, which the Museum was ready to exhibit. History commodification, as operated by the project, has created dynamics of dispossession and strategies of re-appropriation: in 2014, for instance, one resident claimed that the barrack (the Red Location old house) that had been exhibited inside the precinct belonged to his family, and so he wanted it back (*The Herald*, September 10, 2014). Certain residents have also asked for money in exchange for donating personal objects to the Museum; in most cases, these objects had a symbolic value, a value "of collection" (such as flyers of local movements, pins, flags, books etc.) and had not previously been considered as artefacts to be exhibited by the residents.[5]

Not all claims were part of a structured and shared strategy, and many of them were spontaneous and not endorsed by any organisation. Nevertheless, they can be regarded as efforts to understand what the cultural precinct was, and what kind of relationship could be established with the project. This is why, by contesting the project, these claims somehow describe and define it. Moreover, it is important to take into account all instances of the residents in order to understand how a project that has been portrayed as a cultural policy has entailed a series of actions and consequences that go far beyond public culture and cultural activities.

The RLMCP went from being a "public good" to becoming a "municipality project" imposed on nearby residents. The process of rescaling through culture that the RLMCP embodies is highly contentious: the more project promoters and implementers

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[5] Former museum staff members interviewed by MM, 12/03/2015 and 16/03/2015. The issues of memory and history commodification in the RLMCP have been at the centre of many claims and debates. In this paper, I referred to the main reasons of contention. For a more detailed account see Montanini (2017a), Roux (2015), Smith (2016).

try to portray and manage the RLMCP as a world-class project that not only fits into global standards but can become a prototype and model for others, the more residents try to downscale it, to adapt it to the local context, to make it more manageable and understandable by local citizens. This tension is also triggered by the difference between the visible, material side of the project and its representation, played on a symbolic level and oriented towards a far-off future.

5. Conclusions

The RLMCP embodies a publicly led transformation, one of whose key points is the attraction of middle-class residents in the Red Location/New Brighton area by adapting the building environment to middle class urban aesthetics and by offering services and jobs that meet middle-class interests. The transformation of an area into a middle-class neighbourhood is one of the main characteristics of gentrification (Smith and Williams 1986). Moreover, studies such as Zukin's (1995) and Atkinson and Bridge's (2005) highlight how "capital captures culture", meaning that culture-led renovation is functional to commodification and capital expansion. The RLMCP is the first step of "the conversion of socially marginal and working-class areas of the central city to middle-class [and elite] residential use", which is one of the ways in which Zukin defines gentrification (Zukin 1987, 129).

Many elements of RLMCP can be led back to a logic of boosting the attractiveness of the township for middle-class residents: this involves increasing services, raising the quality of life and creating a neutral space where cultural diversity is celebrated and protected, and from which contested cultural elements are removed. In addition to culture, through the RLM, the history of the Struggle is also pacified and crystallized into a public memory frame, while the history of working-class labour is

aestheticized. Transformation is promoted under an “epic public rhetoric of preservation” (Rubino in Atkinson and Bridge 2005, 232).

Shaw (in Atkinson and Bridge 2005) has also underlined how gentrification processes do not only concern the housing market, but are also embedded in tourism, leisure and cultural activities. In Red Location, tourism and cultural activities serve both the purpose of increasing property value and that of rebranding the township and the city. The establishment of a cultural precinct is an implicit way to recognize what is culture and what is excluded from cultural landscape. The same can be said for heritage: while certain objects and buildings are considered worth preserving, others are excluded from preservation (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). The consideration for what is “real history” is one of the aspects of gentrification identified by Butler (in Brown-Saracino, 236).

As the project has been halted by the residents and construction works have not been resumed, the effects of the implementation of this project on the Red Location/New Brighton areas are not yet visible (the project did not boost private capital investments, the price of real estates did not rise significantly). While the effects of the project on the long term cannot be predicted, the intentions of its supporters have been expressed in several interviews, documents and statements. This is why, even before the completion of the project, residents have felt threatened and dispossessed in many ways. Danley and Weaver (2018) notice how gentrification does not only involve displacement and exclusion, but can also be limited to rising feelings of preoccupation and unwelcomeness. Gentrification can involve the creation of spaces that are difficult to codify and live in for long-term residents, and it can blur the relationship that such residents have with their neighbourhood. Red Location residents have tried to address

this sense of unwelcomeness and dispossession by appropriating and occupying the RLMCP buildings.

The RLMCP case provides a clear picture of the main function of culture-led transformation as a form of urban governance. In culture-led projects, gentrification is not an unintentional consequence, but an effective policy. Culture-led projects accelerate the transformation of disadvantaged neighbourhoods into middle-class ones by simplifying, shortening or bypassing the phases of urban planning and policy formulation. In turn, the aesthetic and innovative aspects of culture-led transformation are reinvested in order to rebrand the city and to acquire more power and consideration on the global arena. Often depicted as mostly consensual and commonsensical policies, cultural policies are instead two-faceted: paternalistic and authoritarian from a local perspective, liberal and emancipatory when addressed from the outside.

In this regard, nation-building policies are tightly linked to culture-led transformation and urban governance. Nation-building policies aim at having an impact both inside and outside the country's borders: inside the country, they promote social cohesion through pacification, homogenisation and elimination of contentiousness; outside the country, they portrait South Africa as a united and prosperous country that claims a regional and continental leadership. Cities' rescaling and rebranding, as well as the transformation of the built environment, are then functional to nation-building policies. In Nelson Mandela Bay, a traumatic political transition and the economic crisis of 2008 left deep wounds. The mix of top-down nation-building policies, culture-led transformation and gentrification processes results in a form of urban governance that heals some superficial wounds, but hides other, more serious ones.

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