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Isolation and Connection in Urban Space

In the two books, “Behind the Gates'' and” Renegade Dreams”, by Setha Low and Laurence Ralph, ideas of isolation and connection in urban space are the focal issue. Overall these ideas are important in urban anthropology because they are a consequence of inequality, particularly social, economic and racial inequality. Harvey's idea of urbanization being connected to capitalism's end and goal of profit plays a huge role in this. When seeing this urban theory connected to gentrification, capitalism's goal to make a place investment worthy leads to higher prices in rent and the surrounding area, which consequently leads to displacement. This makes some people connected and others isolated to an urban space that is economically stable. These intentions of capitalism can inevitably keep some people out and forced to live in forgotten areas. Ralph rightly shows how this kind of economic isolation that is due to public policy in an area that is disregarded, leads to other kinds of economic stimulation such as drugs. The other main theory of what urbanization is and how it occurs is from Wirth. His idea of a place being urban is based on more social features that in turn reveal a more social isolation and connection. Because a place that is urban still has importance to the economy around it by way of being a route of transportation or the housing city of the free market, Wirth believes that density in proportion to space takes a role in defining an urban place. In conjunction with other things Wirth creates a persona of the urban person. Because of this kind of fast pace, productive life people in urban areas are not as socially connected with one another. Their interactions are fast and abrupt. Usually they are only made in relation to getting a job done. What this means is that rural areas are socially more connected with one another even if they are isolated from the direct circulation of money. On the contrary the urban city has deep connection to the upper parts of the economy, racial inequality structures and high social class although these very people are less connected to each other.

In Behind the Gates Setha Low argues that transient people are isolated from gated communities. There are a few reasons for this, but the main one according to the ethnography was the view that someone’s uncertainty of remaining in a place was cause to distrust and never accept that person into the community. These transient people are those who rent and do not invest in the same way owners do in gated communities. Many of those who do invest are those who are willing to be there in the long run and this is a common thread for community trust. This idea of shared experience is shared in later chapters of the book. Particularly renters are seen as those outside of shared experience of the rest of the community from an economic standpoint. Whether the renter cannot do this or more importantly if they can do the same as the owners in the community but don't make them an economic hindrance. They make uncertain the future value of the investments they have made. If all high class people invest in a spot, there is certainty of it being that same kind of community long term. So Setha Low argues these people are isolated socially from the community even if for a given time or for all their lives they are physically in the space. Economic isolation is also present here. Another group of people Low argues are isolated are those of different race to the predominant people of a gated community. In chapter 7 the best example is shown of this in the lives of Carol and Ted. When they decided to leave their lifelong neighborhood because of the integration of other students that had different racial experiences, they reinforced the isolation of these people groups. Them also having another economic standing shows how they reinforce isolation. So long as these “different” people are not allowed to integrate into a community because those who stimulate the economy leave, racial inequality in regards to class and economic standing appear in gated communities. People like Carol and Ted leave to gated communities to keep these others out. In this way people of different racial backgrounds are directly and indirectly affected economically and become isolated.

In Renegade Dreams, Ralph argues that those who have been affected by gang violence, particularly life long injury holders, are isolated from necessary models of healing. The example used in Chapter 4 takes Justin’s experience in a wheelchair to be different than that of a person who experiences a like injury in the physical sense because of other factors, particularly the economic ones. The ideas of normal treatment are out of their depth when applied to the people of Eastwood which shows the kinds of inequality in healthcare based on economic factors. The social factors also play a role. Justin's injury from the gang means his status and income have been mostly stripped away from him even if he did get the correct surgeries and medical help. Another people Ralph argues are isolated are those who rap without authenticity. In chapter 3 the rapper Blizzard raps about a particular lifestyle that he does not live anymore. What is important about this is the bigger problem in rap with rappers outside of the contexts such as Eastwood where these lives they are glorifying are real options for those who listen to it. In some sense those who listen to this kind of music in one context such as one that is economically stable or in good social status do not think much of it and enjoy this art. However those in Eastwood see this as an influence to actually participate in these kinds of activities such as gang violence. And so the isolation here is from the lifestyle being rapped about and those who possibly inhabit those lifestyles.

Both Low and Ralph teach us that isolation and connection exist everywhere. Regardless of status or class, the communities we live in are connected in particular ways and isolated in others. These isolations may be social, economic or political by nature which are important to resolve since many of their roots are racial and power rooted. I believe each moves our understanding of urbanization uniquely. Low offers an amazing message about how even when we try our best for security or safety to isolate others from being in our community, we ultimately disconnect ourselves as well from the important connections we need. And Ralph makes compelling cases for why these kinds of people Low may be speaking of are needed to enter communities like Eastwood. The kinds of economic isolation that is filed in by gangs and drugs can be easily resolved if our communities were more interconnected. Regardless of class or economic status I believe that we all need to be cognizant of the way we understand community and create it. Because sometimes it is with an inherited view that is unequal.