

**The Nexus Between Touristification and Gentrification:
A Case in Brufut Heights, the Gambia**

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doi.org/10.51505/IJEBMR.2024.8410

URL: <https://doi.org/10.51505/IJEBMR.2024.8410>

Received: Mar 25, 2024

Accepted: Apr 01, 2024

Online Published: Apr 21, 2024

Abstract

Tourism development along the coast of the Gambia has caused an increase in the rate of gentrification in urban Gambia (See; Smith, 1982; Weisler, 2019). Commodification and financialization of land are relatively new in the Gambia but these phenomena have positive and negative impacts on communities. According to Aalbers (2008), the financialization of land and housing is unsustainable. When the laws of demand and supply control the housing sector as a financial mechanism, financial interest will dominate thereby gentrification and capitalized rent gap become eminent (Criekingen, 2008; Lapavitsas, 2013). This paper explored how state-induced touristification influences gentrification vis-à-vis the nexus between touristification and gentrification.

The study revealed that the touristification of Brufut Heights has caused an insupportable burden of gentrification, economic hardship, displacement, and increased crime rates. Over 98% of the respondents argue that they cannot afford a house in Brufut Heights, 99% believe that they are victims of state-led gentrification while 3% are not affected by touristification. 98% believed that there is a rapid increase in the rent gap around touristified areas causing displacements.

Keywords: Touristification; Gentrification; Rent Gap; Urbanization; Commodification; Financialization

1. Introduction

Tourism development along the coast of the Gambia has led to an increase in the rate of gentrification and rent gap in communities such as Bakau, Banjul, Senegambia, Kololi, Brufut, and Batokunku (See; Smith, 1982; Weisler, 2019). Commodification and financialization of land are relatively new in the Gambia. According to Aalbers (2008), the financialization of land and housing is unsustainable. When the laws of demand and supply control the housing sector as a financial mechanism, financial interest will dominate thereby gentrification and capitalized rent gap become eminent (Criekingen, 2008; Lapavitsas, 2013). Therefore, the state must play an active role in the control of the housing industry. Urbanization is another phenomenon that exacerbates gentrification issues (Smith, 2002). In this paper, I will explore how state-induced touristification influences gentrification vis-à-vis the nexus between touristification and

gentrification. The interplay between these phenomena is important to investigate in a Gambian context.

Land ownership is predominantly by state or inheritance through family, clans, and “*kabilos*” which means lineage. Lands are predominantly allocated to people through a show of desire to possess it by presenting cola nuts to the village head in request. The proliferation of land commercialization and financialization in the last three decades in peri-urban Gambia has increased significantly, especially in coastal communities.

1.1 The Gambia

The Gambia is relatively a tiny country, highly underdeveloped, and with few resources, the country’s economy and people depend largely on agriculture and tourism. The country received its first-ever tourist visitors from Sweden in 1965(GTDM, 2006). The sector continues to grow year after year to date. However, there were numerous challenges such as –low level of awareness, poor tourism infrastructure, low investment, poor product quality as well as concerns over benefit sharing, social impacts, and negative environmental changes. Notwithstanding, from a microeconomic lens, tourism contributes significantly to livelihoods through foreign exchange contribution to the GDP, local income, and employment (GTDM, 2006; Faal, 2007).

The country is the smallest in mainland Africa with a population of about 2.4 million inhabitants. It is predominantly a winter-sunshine tourist destination with a centralized six-month tourist season along the coast. The destination was formerly regarded as a triple 'S'(Sun, Sea, and Sand). The triple 'S' destination is a multi-cultural society with rich cultural diversity and hospitable people with beautiful smiles. It is called ‘**The Smiling Coast of Africa**’ (GBoS, 2013).

The country has recently experienced the proliferation of real estate companies, hotels, and tourism ventures. These activities are in response to the country’s need for economic progress through tourism. However, these activities led to ecological damage, undesirable land-use change, gentrification, increased poverty, high crime rates, drug addiction, and prostitution along the coastal communities. In this study, I wish to qualitatively describe policy-induced gentrification through touristification and its impacts on local people.

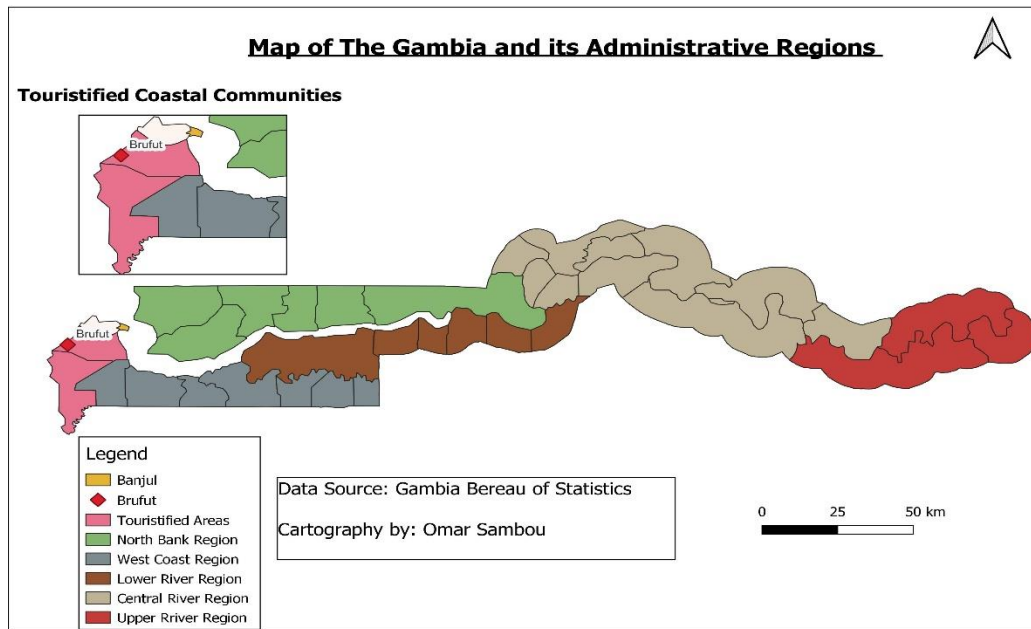


Figure 1: Map of the Gambia indicating its administrative regions

1.2 Touristification of coastal communities in the Gambia through TDA

Gambia's tourism policy, tourism master plan, and sustainable tourism policy all aim at making the country a big tourist destination. This has led to the touristification of coastal communities to attract tourists interested in the Sun, Sand, and Sea. The state has enacted different policies to attain the touristification goal of the country (O. Sambou 2024)

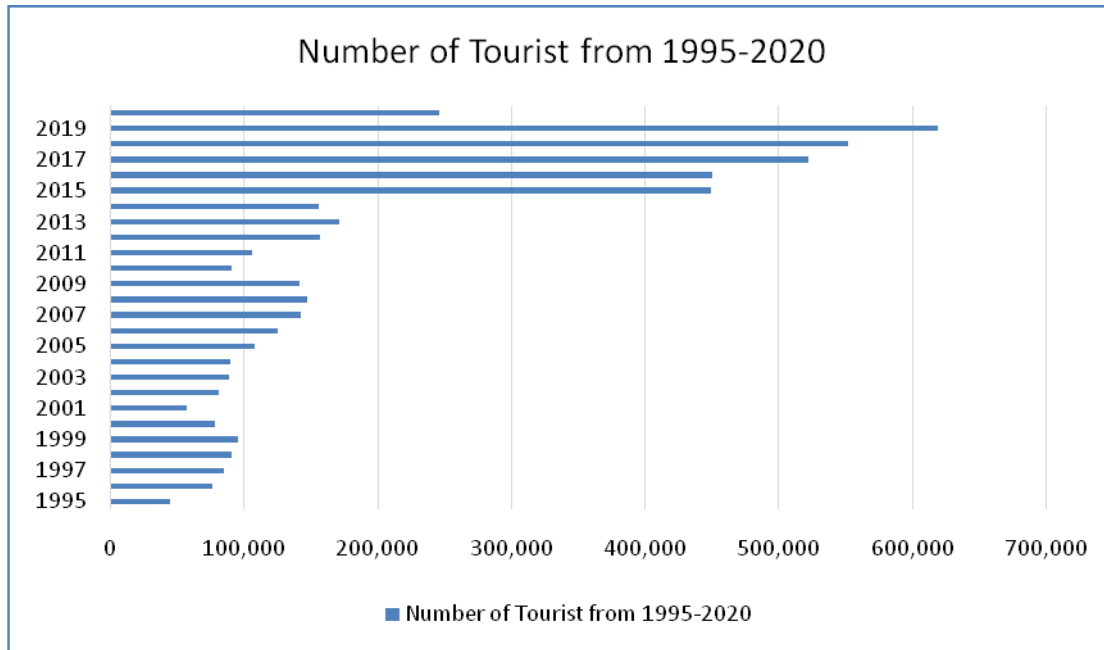
First, the country introduced Tourism Development Area (TDA) protection along all the coastal communities in Kombo. In this regulation, all land that is within 800m of the ocean belongs to TDA. This law automatically seized lands from communities for tourism development. Second, increased investment in accommodation facilities and security in the TDA. This limits access to local people who are often referred to as “bumpsters” (people who want to get money from tourists). The third area of focus is an intense advertisement of the destination to many European nations. The Tourism Development Board over the years has been to many nations to sell tourism opportunities and attractions in the Gambia. This is meant to attract many tourists to the country (Dieke, 1993).

The priorities on land confiscation from local people along the coast through a TDA policy for infrastructural development, investments in hotels and security as well as increased advertisement of the destination have led to an increase in the tourist numbers. Thus leading to an increase in tourist numbers, higher foreign income generation potential, job creation, and economic progress for the state and other actors. However, the process has led to land conflicts,

gentrification, increased crime rate, drug addiction, and prostitution. There were conflicts between the state and its contracted property developer and the traditional property rights holders (natives). The need for economic development through touristification was maintained as a priority for the government. The issues degenerated into a violent conflict between the police intervention unit and the traditional landowners. However, the state asserted its might to seize the lands.

There were several positive outcomes from the touristification project through the seizure of lands as Tourism Development Areas (TDA) by law. It brought about improved infrastructural development such as electricity and water supply, new roads, hotels, etc. There was an increase in tourist numbers thereby increasing tourism activities in the country. it created more business opportunities for the locals as well as income for the state.

Figure 2: Number of tourists visiting the Gambia from 1995-2020



Source: The World Bank (2022); Dieke (1993)

Tourist arrival to the destination has been on the increase since 1995. However, COVID-19 has led to a significant reduction in 2020. From the above chart, we can conclude that the country has a growing tourism sector.

State-induced touristification leading to gentrification and new gentrification has been on the increase since the economic crisis in 2008 (Jover, 2022; Díaz-Parra, 2021). Many developing nations in Sub-Saharan Africa are dependent on tourism for their economies and the Gambia is not an exception. The enacted policies by the government of the Gambia have proven to increase the number of tourist visits to the destination.

Table 1: This table is copied from Yeom & Mikelbank (2019)

Decade	Flow of Gentrifications	
1960	The term “Gentrification” was introduced in academia by British Sociologist, Ruth Glass in 1964	Gentrification has been interpreted in a perspective of inequality and injustice of the housing and land market under capitalism.
1970	Started looking for a factor causing working-class or low-income class displacement in gentrified neighborhoods	<p>Consumption and production-based approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumption-based approach: David Ley (1978 & 1981) argued new middle class (gentrifiers) cause the low-income class displacement • Production-based approach: Neil Smith (1979) argued physical change (or improvement) by capital investment causes low-income class displacement
1980	The renaissance of diverse gentrification studies	The consumption and production-based approaches are often combined when analyzing gentrified neighborhoods.
1990		
2000	Starting discussion about global gentrification and emerging a new factor causing the low-income displacement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gentrification became a significant issue not only in the U.S. or Europe but also many Asian countries. • College students, foreign labor forces, and foreign capital are often considered as the power to drive gentrification.
2010		

Adapted from Yeom & Mikelbank (2019)

Having understood the generational and geographic flow of gentrification, Africa is a continent will fewer studies on the phenomenon, especially West Africa. As cities grow, urbanization increases with a direct proportion to infrastructural development. Gentrification exposes the gap between the poor and the rich (Msabah & Bowers-du Toit, 2019).“The first documented use of

the term “gentrification” (Glass 1964) describes the influx of a “gentry” to lower-income neighborhoods in London during the 1950s and 1960s.” (Miriam Zuk, 2018, P:32).

In many developing countries around the world, a rapid rise in land value and a decrease in affordability by locals is evident. This spatial and social transformation is commonly referred to as gentrification leading to displacements, poverty, and inequality (Amie Thurber, 2019). The accelerated rate of gentrification leads to the disappearance of poorer neighbourhoods (Amie Thurber, 2019).

2. Methodology

In this research, a qualitative research method was used with an ethnographic approach to study the phenomena under study. Focus groups and household heads interviews within the study area were conducted. 1280 persons were used as respondents through random sampling of selected households within the study area. Three focus group sessions were conducted through purposive sampling. Persons considered stakeholders were identified for the focus group discussions.

3. Brufut Heights: Touristification vs Gentrification

According to Neil Smith (1979), “Gentrification is a structural product of the land and housing markets. Capital flows where the rate of return is highest, and the movement of capital to the suburbs along with the continual depreciation of inner-city capital eventually produces the rent gap” (p: 546). In the Gambia and Brufut in particular, events marking the African Union Summit of 2005 and the proliferation of touristification, commodification, and financialization of housing along the coast led to gentrification.

In 2005, the Republic of the Gambia hosted the African Union Summit. This event gathered fifty-four (54) African Presidents and their delegations. Before the event, the government built new roads, hotels, and a villa for the summit. The infrastructures were built in Brufut Heights and before and during the construction, a series of protests and demolitions happened in the community of Brufut.

The AU Villa was built on lands belonging to members of the community of Brufut that were seized forcefully by the dictatorial regime of President Yahya Jammeh. In justifying more land seizure, the government passed a new law that all lands within 800m from the ocean belong to the state and are considered to be Tourism Development Areas. By this law, the government took several hectares of land from the community of Brufut to build hotels, malls, and other tourist attractions for the Summit.

As of the time of this research, Brufut Heights is one of the most expensive places to own a house in the Gambia due to the land seizure of 2005 and the touristification of the area. The new infrastructures built for the summit and later put on sale at exuberance prices led to significant displacement of the natives. The villagers who lost their lands tried all means to get compensation but to date, they have not received any. They not only lost their lands but can no longer reside in their community due to state-induced gentrification through increased urbanization and touristification of the area. Touristification has increased the rate of entrepreneurship and urbanization along the coastal communities. This phenomenon led to

gentrification and a capitalized Rent Gap (Harvey, 1989; Smith, 1982). The demand for land and housing at higher prices by tourism investors made the area lucrative for the land and housing business thus attracting the rich and displacing the poor.

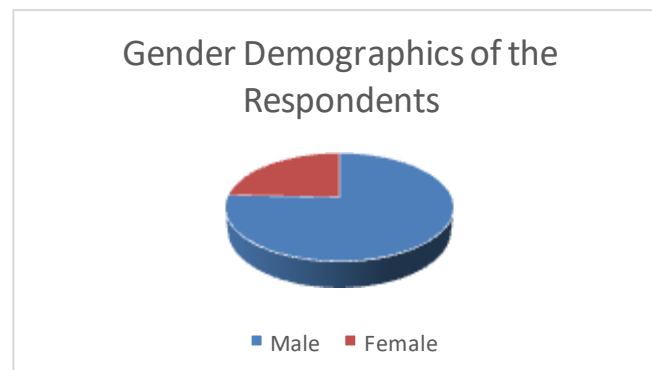
3.1 TAF Brufut Gardens

Ahead of the 2006 African Union Summit in the Gambia, the government collaborated with TAF Global to construct about 500 villas on seized land from natives. The TAF Brufut Gardens comprises large luxury villas and several embassy complexes, guarded houses for ministers and members of the judiciary. The estate is very popular with UK expatriates. It was built purposely to lodge the 52 presidents who attended the seventh AU summit in the country. Today these are used to lodge VIPs and are for sale to the public. The area, this village is built on is next to a holy place called Sannementereng. It has a long cultural background being a "holy" area where people came to pray for their future hopes and wishes to come true. However, touristification has made the place lose its spiritual and cultural value (Wikipedia 22/12/22 time: 10:50 pm). This has led to violent conflicts between members of the community and the paramilitary. Poor land tenure system that fails to define land ownership and use leaving it to communities is a big gap causing serious land-related conflicts in touristified coastal communities in the Gambia(Sambou, 2023)

The country has no housing policy or regulation. Rent and land sales are entirely dependent on the bargaining powers of the tenant/buyer and the landlords. Therefore, landlords are at liberty to determine the price of rent or the price of a house on sale. The lack of regulation disadvantages the working-class members of society. It threatens their ability to pay rent and/or buy houses, displacing them. The increase in prices is triggered by state-induced touristification that in turn leads to higher demand for housing in the area due to the high business attractive forces tourism has for entrepreneurship. Neil Smith advanced similar arguments in his 1979 article: "Towards the Theory of Gentrification..."

Out of the 1280 respondents, 68% were male and 22% female. The questionnaires were administered to household heads in Brufut.

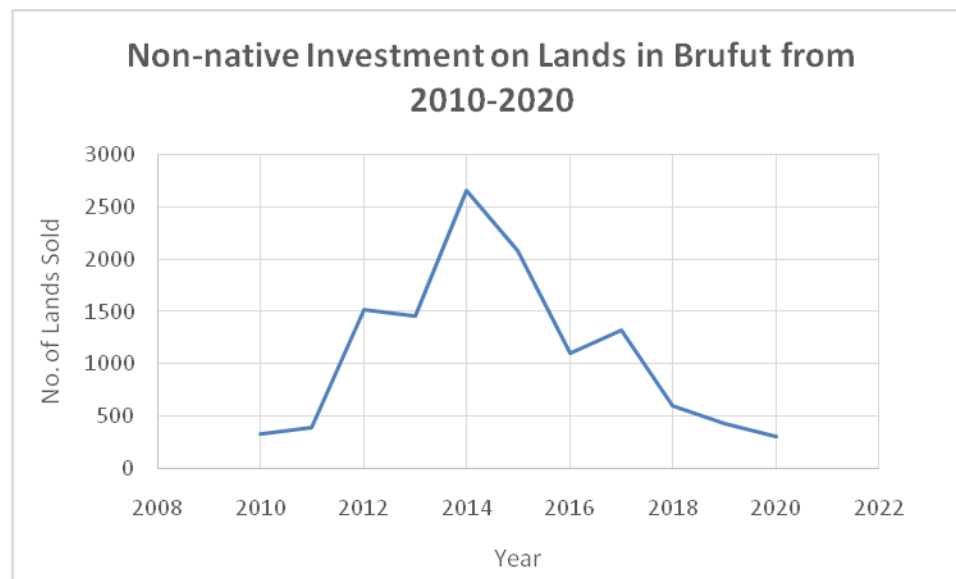
Figure 3: Gender Demographics of the Respondents



4. Touristification vs Purchasing Power

Before the AU Summit in 2005, there was less land purchase by non-natives in the community. Land ownership was mostly through communal inheritance and sometimes giveaways. It is natural and traditional that housing is a human right and community members act on this without having it as a written rule. However, from the data acquired from the community leader (*alkalo*) responsible for land sales documentation, the following graphical representation gives the figures for land sales to non-natives from 2010 to 2020.

Figure 4: Non-native land investments or purchases



Since 2010, there has been a significant rise in non-native land purchases in Brufut, during this period, many fear land dispossession and decided to sell their lands in prime locations. It attracted a lot of buyers due to the infrastructural development that the touristification process brought. However, some due to fear of dispossession, change of lifestyle, and increase in non-natives, decided to sell their compounds to move elsewhere while for some, it was the need for finance as the commodification of lands intensified. Most of the natives did not have the purchasing power to own lands as prices increased, those who owned lands were enticed to sell and non-natives with the purchasing power built interest in buying were attracted by the rapid infrastructural development by the touristification thereby causing displacement of locals and gentrification.

Table 2: Questionnaire respondents in percentages by natives of Brufut Village

Indicator	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	Percentage Of Respondents (n = %)			
Can you afford a house in Brufut Heights	0.391	0.156	6.484	92.969
The people of Brufut are victims of state-induced gentrification	78.125	21.016	0.781	0.078
Touristification has led to gentrification and displacement in Brufut	87.5	11.719	0.625	0.156
Are you positively affected by the touristification of Brufut	7.813	6.25	27.344	58.593
Are you negatively affected by the touristification of Brufut	71.172	25.00	3.203	0.625
Touristification and gentrification has brought alien culture & lifestyle to the community of Brufut	24.219	46.875	17.344	11.562
The touristification and gentrification affected the social cohesion in Brufut	31.25	46.875	8.594	13.281

The above Table (1) results have confirmed that the touristification initiative has led to the displacement of natives through gentrification. Over 98% of the respondents said that they can no longer afford housing in their native community and argued that they are victims of state-imposed gentrification through touristification. Only 13% agreed that they have been positively affected by the touristification by the government. 77% agreed that touristification has impacted negatively on local culture and 70% agreed that it has led to the introduction of alien cultures and lifestyles in the community. Most of Brufut Heights is now occupied by hotels, shopping malls, restaurants, supermarkets, STR apartments, tourists, and foreigners. In a nutshell, people with a higher purchasing power began to settle in while the natives were forced out of their lands by the state and others were compelled to sell their lands due to the changes in the socio-economic realities of the area. The new infrastructures attracted a new population and displaced the old. A former resident in a phone interview claimed that "the place is too expensive for me to reside, my earnings cannot keep me in such a tourist environment, everything is now expensive and European standard, I left because I could sell my house at a higher price and buy a new house yet have some money left. I made a profit from the sale of my house". This speaks to the fact that touristification has led to gentrification in Brufut Heights causing acute unavailability and affordability of housing for the natives and low-income earners. This has caused the displacement of persons due to the multiplicity of factors caused by gentrification(See Rent Gap Theory by Neil Smith, 1979; and Zuk, 2018)

Lamin Manneh is a victim of the land seizure when asked about the situation, he lamented that the government criminally connived with TAF Global, a real estate developer to seize their birthright “With land’s intricate links to identities, histories, and a sense of place, we continue spearheading efforts toward a class action lawsuit. The lands are our birthright and have been in our families for generations.”

The state-led touristification induced gentrification but the community members played a vital role in accelerating the gentrification process. As the price of land in the area hikes, many low-income earners were compelled to sell their lands to developers and other persons with the financial capacity. The commodification and financialization of land and housing became the newest and fastest way to a short-lived financial comfort for locals.

Gant(2015) explicitly highlighted that “Residential displacement driven by this process of ‘tourism gentrification’ has been noted by several authors. However, because the concern with the quality of life and the provision of consumption facilities are crucial for attracting middle-class users, the gentrification that both visitors and residents cause is increasingly commercial.”

Some natives sell their lands and move further away from Brufut Heights due to socio-cultural changes, the new standard of living, and lifestyle among other reasons. However, the government did not consider the plight of the displaced citizens. According to some residents, the touristification of the area has not improved the livelihoods of the people but instead increased difficulties for them. The malls and big businesses crippled the local businesses within. Comparatively, Portugal in the 2008 financial crisis developed policies that increased touristification, short-term rentals, and foreign investment. However, they ensured the evictions of tenants by law but did not seize lands by force (Jover, 2022). In the Gambia, the touristification policy was through land seizure by the state with no attention to the plight of the victims and the consequences that may arise. New York City, on the other hand, is a state that is very concerned about the welfare of the people and tries in both policy and practice to protect the housing lots for residents instead of proliferating Short-Term Rentals (STRs) (Weisler, 2019).

5. Housing regulations in the Gambia

Land and housing are one of the most unregulated sectors in the Gambia. Property owners do not need a permit or a certificate to rent their houses or apartments. The prices are solely dependent on the agreements between the tenant and the property owner. On land sale or mortgage, the price is entirely dependent on an agreement with no regulatory policy. The country has no effective housing policy, law, or regulation. However, construction requires building permits but enforcement is minimal.

There is no enforced land-use policy or regulation in the country. a “death-at-birth” lands commission was established by the government but has never been functional. Proliferation of real estate development has exacerbated land mongering and environmental damage. Coastal communities are vulnerable to environmental degradation from mining activities, gentrification and displacement from touristification, and increased drug addiction and crime due to new lifestyles.

6. Conclusion

The touristification of coastal communities in the Gambia has brought about economic gains for the state. Brufut Heights has caused an insupportable burden of gentrification, economic hardship, displacement, and increased crime rates. The seizure of lands belonging to natives by the state led to infrastructural development in the area. However, it increased the rent gap in the touristified areas causing displacements. Over 98% of the respondents no longer afford housing in Brufut Heights.

The touristification of Brufut Heights has caused gentrification in the area. The economic benefits that come with tourism should be viewed against the socio-economic impacts it has on the local communities in all aspects including housing. State-led touristification often neglects the gentrification consequences it comes with. It is also evident that real estate actors connive with the government to seize lands from communities for estate development, which often forces the local dwellers to move further away due to the inability to rent in the newly developed or redeveloped areas, unaffordable living standards, and other socio-cultural factors.

Based on this study, it is concluded that touristification induces gentrification and vice-se-versa. Others have argued that the two reinforce each other. Touristification requires development initiatives and in this case building of resorts, villas, hotels, halls, restaurants, and other attractions and services, which also happens in gentrification. Touristification can be a gentrification process while gentrification can happen through a touristification process. The two have a complementary relationship leading to other scholars calling it “tourism gentrification”(Bertocchi, 2021; Sequeira et al, 2018)

With exponential demographic growth in the Gambia, predominantly concentrated along the coast with big tourism enterprises, it is necessary to have regulatory policies for the housing sector to protect the most vulnerable members of society. Within hegemonic gentrification discourses, the state is the key actor orchestrating and driving the gentrification process through policy and neglecting displacement. The case of Brufut Heights highlights the need for further studies on non-state-induced gentrification and its relationship to other phenomena such as touristification, investment, and urban development including geographic position and characteristics.

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