Narratives as Daily Heritage in Neighbourhoods Undergoing Gentrification: A Study of Four European Neighbourhoods

Yankel Fijalkow
(Centre de recherche sur l'habitat, UMR 7218 Lavue ENSA Paris Val-de-Seine)
fijalkow.yankel@gmail.com

Claire Lévy-Vroelant
(UMR Lavue, Université Paris 8)
clevyvroelant@gmail.com

This article shows the creation of a vernacular heritage, primarily discursive, in four inner-city working-class European neighbourhoods undergoing gentrification. It is a survey conducted from 2013 to 2015 in the framework of a European research programme — REV, acronym for 'Rester En (centre) Ville' (Stay in the city [centre]) — among 250 inhabitants of neighbourhoods subjected to various stages of gentrification processes in Lisbon, Vienna, Brussels and Paris. In order to collect and identify this material we have carried out an ethnographic study of the places through observations in daily spaces and semi-structured interviews of inhabitants and users from these neighbourhoods as well as representatives from local associations. Narratives can be considered as part of the heritage, and tools for resistance to gentrification. They express the 'commons' of populations mobilizing, in addition to their individual and collective memory and their experience of the territory. They reveal the diversity of positioning faced with the dynamic of gentrification, particularly the way discourses and narratives on the neighbourhoods enable people to live in them and to overcome their daily ordeals and to implement togetherness.
Keywords: Urban narratives, gentrification, heritage, neighbourhoods.

The gentrification of working-class neighbourhoods often goes hand-in-hand with showcasing their historical value. Whether gentrification is driven by the land rent economy (Smith 1996) or arises from the new middle-class culture (Ley 1994), it is aligned to a model of positive narrative on working class neighbourhoods promoted by public authorities, municipalities, real estate agents and some resident associations'. As Beauregard (2003) explained, the emergence of this narrative stems from a *repurposing of the story* of these neighbourhoods, supposedly devitalised and infamous before the announced beginning of a new destiny. Their working-class dimension is the subject of a symbolic (and economic) promotion that occurs through the prism of authenticity, a value rediscovered for the occasion and well described by Zukin (2009).

Narratives are a driving force of creative prophecy in the gentrification process (Merton 1948, Bacqué and Fijalkow 2006).Yet, do narratives that investigate the past as well as the future of neighbourhoods, often presented as 'villages' to be rediscovered (Fijalkow 2006), not convey some kind of 'heritagisation'?[1] The latter can take the form of cultural venues, whether mercantile or not, where items, landscapes and ways of doing things in the neighbourhood are enhanced, or of collective memory institutionalisation processes. Urban researchers have more often been backed by institutions to identify architectural and urban heritage (Choay 1992) than a heritage shaped by collective memory (Veschambres 2008). Going along with this second line of research (Massey 1995, Hayden 1994), should we not take into account the heritage of the people enduring gentrification while participating in it? Should we not stick to the intellectual procedures (Heinich 2014) implemented by heritage producers, whether they are

---

[1] The right word, in French, which is also a neologism, should be 'patrimonialisation'.

experts or mere inhabitants? Indeed, if the contemporary heritage industry, marked by globalisation, consists in ensuring that the notions of territory are in line with those of a collective sense of belonging (Savage et al. 2004), what of poor and migrant populations that have turned formerly underprivileged neighbourhoods into host neighbourhoods before they are 'gentrified' or about to be gentrified?

If, indeed, gentrification as a process of adopting middle-class values in an initially working-class neighbourhood takes the form of a 'social relationship of space appropriation pitting unevenly endowed actors and groups against one another' (Chabrol et al. 2016: 25), the ability to influence the places in the neighbourhood steeped in the instances of social groups is enshrined in practices and narratives. Through individual and collective strategies, people are resisting gentrification by questioning its alleged relentlessness, be it in housing (Fijalkow 2013) or in the public space (Chabrol 2011). Apartment sharing, room renting, gathering in streets and squares, open-air shops and markets, amenities such as cafés, launderettes and furnished hotel rooms, and streets and parks as multilingual spaces (Blommaert et al. 2005), are many significant opportunities to contribute to the process of 'heritage-making'.

Moreover, what about newcomers? If one cannot exclude the possibility that more recent inhabitants share a relationship to the territory fairly similar to that of older inhabitants, one wonders how both participate in the narratives about the neighbourhood, oppose or agree with one another and create or fail to create 'commons'. Better yet, 'one can also be gentrifying one day and be gentrified the following day. [These groups] should be used in pairs, to refer to unequal social relations that take on forms and commit continually renewed actors.' (Chabrol et al. 2016: 70).

In this article we are therefore proposing to show the creation of a primarily discursive vernacular heritage in four European inner-city working-class neighbourhoods that are undergoing gentrification. The discussion benefits from a survey conducted between 2013 and 2015 in the framework of the European research programme, REV — acronym for 'Rester En (centre) Ville' (Stay in the city [centre]) — conducted among 250 inhabitants of neighbourhoods that were undergoing various stages of gentrification in Lisbon, Vienna, Brussels and Paris.[2] In order to collect and identify this material we carried out an ethnographic study of the places based on observations in daily spaces (launderettes, cafés, social centres and public equipment), informal conversations and semi-structured interviews with inhabitants and users in these neighbourhoods and with representatives of local associations.[3]

---

[2] The research programme was funded by the Plan Urbanisme Construction et Architecture (Construction and Architecture Urbanism Plan) which falls within the responsibility of the Ministère de l'Écologie, du Développement durable et de l'Énergie (Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy). The team was made up of French, Belgian, Portuguese and Austrian researchers: Marie Chabrol, Sylvaine Conord, Teresa Costa Pinto, Yankel Fijalkow, Yannick Henrio, Christina Liebhardt, Madelena Matos, Christophe Reinprecht, Martin Rosenfeld, Caroline Rozenholc, Mathieu Van Kriekingen.

[3] We have also performed photographic tours and a travelling exhibit based on the collected material and photographs (Sylvaine Conord), but we are not using that work within the scope of this article.

In these neighbourhoods, globalisation, reshaping of the workforce, emergence of precariousness and renewal of urban policies are concomitant phenomena. Thus, one may wonder what in the narratives of those targeted by the transformation because they are poor and migrants refers to what pre-exists, bears value and is a 'common good'. How are spaces called, represented, characterised? What kind of memory do they carry? Are these references shared with other people, particularly people who settled in more recently?

Asking the question in this way implies better defining *what creates heritage in these narratives*. It requires taking into account going back and forth from one identity element to another, as well as the resources mobilised by those experiencing problems as inhabitants of neighbourhoods that are undergoing gentrification but also as citizens facing today's world challenges; we collected stories about scenes of daily life, reinterpreted accounts of past events, description of iconic characters and locations. This heritage is neither only local, nor national, but rather transnational (Albrow 1998). It reflects the special relationships of the inhabitants with their neighbourhood and its history, while mobilising elements from their life-histories and migrations. This heritage is made up of past events that have a meaning today and results in the reasons at the root of the right to be there, and to belong 'there'.

On the one hand, newcomers in working-class neighbourhoods, who often have a middle-class background, develop a narrative on the neighbourhood whose history and collective memory they have taken over: the 'polar parisien' (Parisian detective story) greatly exemplifies this pattern (Barrère and Fijalkow 2013). On the other hand, their narrative also feeds on that arising from working-class backgrounds that often stem from various migration waves, their own narrative and their history of the neighbourhood; in particular, the problems they experienced on settling down and their struggle for achieving decent living conditions (Barrère and Lévy Vroelant 2011). The present discussion shows how these narratives interact in the development of the discursive heritage of neighbourhoods that are experiencing gentrification.

The 'heritage' we will study in the following pages consists of stories shared by the people living in these territories. We shall show first (Act 1) how these narratives are the foundation of 'the commons'; that is, non-mercantile and non-privatised resources that belong to everyone (Flahaut 2011). Then, we shall highlight the fault lines often connected with nostalgia (Act 2). The complementarity of these oppositions that sustain the identity of hospitable neighbourhoods that stand firm against the urban rationale that rejects them will be addressed in the last section (Act 3).

Act 1. The Points of Agreement that are the Foundation of the 'Commons'

We regard the inhabitants and users' narratives as shared resource that enables them to have a social life. A quasi-central location in the city, an opposition to the neighbourhood being stigmatised, collective memory, the feeling of being ' from here ': these elements are so many values shared to a great extent that are the foundation of every one's social capital in these working-class neighbourhoods (Retière 2003) and allow them to develop a sense of collective identity.

'*Peripheral Centralities*'

Our research sites could be said to be *surrounding the centre.* Located near a train station, three of them are host and transit territories. They have been longstanding immigrant neighbourhoods — 'peripheral centralities',[4] both because of their location and their memory, as they are at the same time custodians of collective landmarks for city-dwellers and stigmatised and coveted places.

In Lisbon, Mouraria is a socially fragmented neighbourhood, where contrasts are exacerbated by pressure from tourism and all kinds of trafficking. It is at the centre of Lisboan identity — particularly linked to Fado and *convivir* culture — while being, at the same time, marginalised. A 'multicultural' ethnic image is superimposed on its bad reputation as a hotspot for prostitution and drug deals; an image of which city councillors have taken advantage, as evidenced by the new *fusio* marketplace that has amputated the lower part of the neighbourhood.[5] Its topography, the over-representation of migrants and of citizens from former Portuguese colonies have turned it into a 'typical' or 'traditional' neighbourhood. As early as the 1940s and 1950s, Mouraria was subjected to major demolition; then, in the 1980s, it was rehabilitated through intervention on the built heritage. In the 2000s, new studies pointed out the density, insecurity, ageing and unoccupied housing. In a city where owners are a majority, in this neighbourhood two thirds of households are tenants.

In Vienna, the Volkert und Alliiertenviertel neighbourhood was built between two train stations in the 1880s. Located at the boundary of the host neighbourhood and the Prater, it is undergoing fast gentrification. Under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it was a gateway for 'immigrants from inside'. For a long time, it was a working-class neighbourhood where many Jews lived, most of whom were exterminated. After WWII, as early as 1945, the neighbourhood deteriorated, while immigrant workers coming from the East settled there. Today, one notices the arrival both of new people with a middle-class background and of second-generation immigrants. Migrants currently settling in this neighbourhood come from former Yugoslavia, Turkey, Germany and, more recently, from Asia and Africa. Like other people in the neighbourhood in a precarious situation, these newcomers are tenants in the private sector and are, therefore, directly threatened by real estate pressure. The neighbourhood is also inhabited by students who patronise the art galleries and the shared workspaces.

In Brussels, the Heyvaert neighbourhood is a former industrial and working-class area straddling two municipalities (Molembeck and Anderlecht). It is marked by the presence of migrant populations. It is also highly coveted by real estate interests. Today the average local income is very low and the proportion of foreigners exceeds 40 percent. This neighbourhood is

---

[4] For la Goutte d'or in Paris, see the work of Toubon and Messamah (1990).

[5] Visiting the *Fusio* marketplace, 'the more Lisboan multicultural place', is highly recommended to tourists : https://www.visitlisboa.com/fr/a-voir-a-faire/shopping-categories/marches-foires/marche-de-fusion-foire-de-martim-moniz

well located — less than one kilometre from the centre, near the canal and the slaughterhouses market, close to the *Gare du Midi* (the largest train station in Belgium) and the *gare de l'Ouest* — and is currently undergoing transformation. Several projects have been undertaken over the last few years which are bringing about the fast conversion of this neighbourhood structured around the export of second-hand cars to Africa.

In Paris, la Goutte d'Or ('*Drop of Gold*') is an old, central neighbourhood, easily accessible by public transport. Gentrification is announced every year, even if it sometimes seems uncertain (Chabrol 2011, Fijalkow 2013). In this place of memory of the Algerian war of Independence, since 1983, the City of Paris has been conducting operations of urban renovation and rehabilitation in order to 'sociologically balance' a neighbourhood that still distinguishes itself for the presence of a high rate of comfortless housing and migrant populations. Public authorities wish to establish social diversity by encouraging middle-class populations to move in social housing units (Launay 2014). While this neighbourhood remains one of the least expensive in Paris, real estate prices were multiplied by three between 2000 and 2010; they doubled elsewhere in the city. One notices, however, the permanence of small shops run by North and sub-Saharan Africans, as well as persistently overcrowded and sometimes substandard housing. Uncertainty prevails for the future of the neighbourhood. The new owners wonder whether they will be able to sell, and at what price, and the poor and migrant populations how long they will be able to stay and benefit from the social and spatial amenities that they enjoy there.

The people who live in these neighbourhoods feel particularly rewarded by their central location. Faced with the rise in real estate prices, inhabitants generally feel lucky to still have access to the local facilities. Their daily heritage includes integration in the collective memory of the place, the feeling of being rooted there and an opposition to the stigma which they bear and which they circumvent though a system of values structured by *sui generis* standards. All these discursive elements seem to flow into an opposition to gentrification that draws on realities that exist thanks to these three elements (Bacqué and Fijalkow 2007).

Collective Memory on a Day-to-day Basis

First, narratives often convey memories of a 'before' in the neighbourhood. To some, memory is rooted in the personal path; to others, it is more collective and points out places, people, iconic events or processes of construction of 'the commons'. In la Goutte d'Or as well as in Mouraria, the elements that build the history of the neighbourhood are quite recurrent, revealing a narrative that emphasises historicity:

> 'Mouraria has always been marginalised, as far as public works are concerned. When the Arabs were in Lisbon, Mouraria was the place where Mozarabs, the tolerated Christians, used to live. Afterwards, it became the Arab district, the shadow district. After the earthquake of 1755, the Marquess of Pombal, when rebuilding the city, completely despised Mouraria, which was reconstructed by its

own people. […] Afterwards in the 1970s, Black and White retornados[6] settled in. And in the 1990s, this Asian immigration we all know. It has always been a ghetto.' (Male, 45-years-old).

'La Goutte d'Or area has existed since the mid-1800s. It started as a rundown neighbourhood, already with migrants, even if immigration at the time was not what it is today. There were Belgians, people who came […], Italians, you know, because the area was established during industrialisation with the arrival of railways. […] As we move on, you have WWI, and you're going to have immigrant labour with the arrival of Algerians and Moroccans. Particularly after WWII, the development was even greater with Algerian migrants that came to work in factories and other places but that were also activists, whether it be for the neighbourhood or in particular for the independence of Algeria […] and then, since the 1990s, immigration especially from West Africa. Then come the Asian populations, from Vietnam, Indochina. There you are, Vietnamese, with illegal immigrants.' (Male, 75-years-old)

In Volkert and Alliiertenviertel, history is like a box that displays elements of attachment and biographical identification: the construction of two train stations; Czech colonisation; the Jewish neighbourhood; WWII; reconstruction; the arrival of Yugoslavians and Turks. Institutional stakeholders (schools, the neighbourhood's social centre, the youth centre) are linked to a memory of immigration in order to reinforce the position of the working class that live in the neighbourhood. Members of communities develop their own strategies, like the Jews from Central Asia (former USSR), who settle where Viennese Jews used to live and take over their businesses. So, fragments from the past are circulating, are promoted and coexist.

Demurring Stigma

Second, paradoxically, it is the weight of the stigma that encompasses these neighbourhoods that enables their inhabitants to bring out the identity of these places. Most of the people interviewed take a stand on the reputation of these places which, according to them, are associated with two key elements; on the one hand, the presence of a visible immigration and, on the other hand, insecurity, trafficking and dirt. In order to fight the stigma, several discursive strategies have been put in place.

In la Goutte d'Or, as in Mouraria, some people gladly participate in a trivialising discourse through comparison with other neighbourhoods. Discourses of tolerance, empathy and understanding are associated with a willingness to integrate and to appease in the face of deviances that are not refuted. Below, are some examples:

---

[6] These were people who after independence left the Portuguese colonies in Africa.

'Despite the difficulties we run into in the neighbourhood […] Sometimes you're used to something [...] It's not all bad you know, there are some good people, there are some nice people that you always bump into.' (Male, 43-years-old)

'Because we have other issues in the neighbourhood, such as the plague of drug, there are a lot of people out of work, they cling to that situation. Those who are jobless ought to have a job. Because of that, they have all the reasons in the world, they feel they have the right to do what they do, they almost think it's legal. It's impossible to control […] and sometimes, things happen that go beyond regular parameters.' (Male, 65-years-old)

Therefore, in order to provide the image of a 'standard' neighbourhood, people need to play a pedagogic role:

'The friends that come to visit are worried, so we go and fetch them and walk them back to the metro [underground] station. There aren't more tramps than anywhere else.' (Male, 63-years-old)

In order to fight the stigma, some try to establish a positive image by standing out from other neighbourhoods in the city, more or less near, real or fantasised. The narratives, then, mobilise known images in order to express, through a comparison, a metaphor or an anecdote, the social feelings that relate them to the neighbourhood (Halbwachs [1940] 2015).

'Some kind of warmth that cannot necessarily be found in all neighbourhoods […] If I go for a walk on a Saturday morning when everybody is out buying bread, we keep saying hello to people, visitors from other arrondissements [districts] are fascinated. It reminds them of their childhood or of things they used to know in the past.' (Male, 60-years-old)

'When we rally around [in Mouraria] there is straightaway this sense of community. This is a difference […] [compared to other neighbourhoods]. It's like what we see inland, I mean in villages, because it's more compact, people feel the difficulties of all the others more.' (Male, 65-years-old)

Therefore, it is said that those who leave the neighbourhood change, which stresses the fact that it is the places and the people that generate this particular feature, this *bairrismo*[7] specific to old central working-class neighbourhoods, of which Mouraria would be an ideal-type:

---

[7] The *bairrismo* is the feeling of attachment to the neighbourhood seen as 'traditional' that manifests particularly through interactions and specific collective practices. On 'shaping and cultural identity' see Agier and Bonnafé (1986) and Cordeiro (2003).

> 'How can we explain the bairrismo? It is created by the communities, by the convívio[8]. The bairrismo is the convívio between people, mutual support; it's the fact that people do things together.' (Male, 51-years-old)

This emphasis on the magic of the neighbourhood, which has managed to remain 'local' and authentic despite globalisation, is an element of the discourse that, although generated by institutions, nevertheless circulates powerfully in the narratives of the people we interviewed. For example:

> 'All nations here maintain good relations and by coming here you travel without having to leave your house. Here, there's one thing that doesn't exist anywhere else, because whether White, Arab or Black, everybody shakes hands. All nations, yes, Blacks, Arabs, Toubabs.'[9] (Male, 62-years-old)

However, the most effective counterpoint is that given by the fame of the neighbourhood. The place cannot be so widely known solely for its flaws. The very fact of being identifiable thanks to a name speaks for the reputation of the neighbourhood. The presence of tourists that are not just passing by but enjoy staying and consuming there shows the drawing power of the neighbourhood:

> 'It [the neighbourhood] is known in African countries, you speak of the 18th district, everyone knows about it. Here, it's Africa.' (Male, 40-years-old)

> 'There are a lot of tourists that come to see our narrow streets […] we see them take plenty of photographs […] of this and that, in short of what they found most typical […] They even come to rent (apartments); not only people from [...] from Bangladesh, there are also […] Portuguese people, foreigners, Spaniards, people from the Netherlands […] They buy, and then they come here to spend some time, they rent out to friends […]' (Female, 40-years-old)

Anecdotes and a collective sense of belonging to the neighbourhood thrive on the circulation of statements like those cited above.

The Root Metaphor

The third identity relationship stands on the relationship between the neighbourhood and the individual biography. It varies depending on the neighbourhoods and the specificities of the biographical paths of the people interviewed (Guérin-Pace 2007). In la Goutte d'Or and Mouraria, stating an attachment to the neighbourhood is often linked to its bad reputation and living conditions. It is incorporated in the individual's past in terms of housing: 'I was born

---

[8] We have kept some words in the original language, which to us seem to express more appropriately the intended meaning. This is the case with '*conviver*', '*convivio*', which indicates the ability/capacity/facility to live together, coexist, share a life.
[9] This is an African expression that stands for 'white people'.

here', 'I never left', 'my roots are here'. All these expressions are a testimony of integration and of a sense of belonging to 'an organic us' made of social and spatial elements:

> 'I have a bond with this neighbourhood, I've spent almost all my life here. I worked in the Galeries Barbès [a shopping centre], I worked in the launderette and I was a caretaker in this building for thirty years.' (Female, 73-years-old)

> 'My roots are here, I'm proud to belong to Mouraria. Because not only was I born and grew up here, it's here that I feel protected […] I don't abandon my roots […] I feel bairrista and alfacinha [the local name for Lisbon's inhabitants], being 'bairrista' means showing who I am, I am from Mouraria! […] I'm not worth more than others but here [compared to other places of residence] I'm treated differently. I've never wanted to leave because I feel good here.' (Male, 36-years-old)

The biographical bond with the neighbourhood also comes about through the mediation of relatives, friends or other members of the community of origin. It is the known case of immigration channels that can create strong bonds with networks and hospitable and integrating spaces for a migrant population that is by definition uprooted:

> 'I came directly here because my sister lived here [la Goutte d'Or]. I came straight to her.' (Male, 60-years-old)

From this biographical bond with the neighbourhood ensues a sense of shelter; the feeling of having found one's home port:

> 'I see myself living here for the rest of my life… I don't know, I can't explain it very well, I love history and here I feel a very strong bond…I feel I'm in the right place […]' (Female, 38-years-old)

The preceding pages have shown elements of *what holds together* these globalised local societies, through what and through whom they hold together. We have looked at the 'load-bearing walls', at 'the cores of certainty', at what one cares about, from the perspective of values as well as from the perspective of reassuring and comforting practices, spaces and times that give rise to these practices. The discursive vehicle feeds on examples and anecdotes; urban scenes complement it (Silver and Clark 2015), establishing how one can live in these neighbourhoods.

We now need to explore the boundaries beyond which these neighbourhoods reveal their vulnerability, 'how they don't hold out anymore'.

Act 2. Fault Lines and Nostalgia

What makes a bond does not prevent what divides, what puts at stake togetherness and weakens individuals. In our neighbourhoods, three elements of the discourse on the harshness of local life and of life in general can be identified: the visibility of poverty; the imagined experience of hardly controllable invasions; and nostalgia for an ideal village. Paradoxically, these elements that could be regarded as negative spatial assets (Cailly 2007) make up a heritage that

is the foundation of 'the commons'. The visibility of misery and the ethnicization of social relationships materialise implicitly the elliptical narrative of an ideal community — even of humankind — and therefore of a heritage one cares about. The ambivalence of the discourses taken as a whole demonstrates a form of resistance to gentrification.

Poverty and its Threats

Populations and objectionable activities generate a very precise geography and specific temporalities. In Mouraria, as in la Goutte d'Or and in Heyvaert, many narratives allude to these places where one knows that condemnable activities take place. There is recurrent questioning the action of the public authorities. Yet, criticism is also directly aimed at the troublemakers; informal street sellers, for instance, are typical of deviance and disorder. However, as in la Goutte d'or, it is often human density in the street and in underground stations that is at issue. Depending on very distinct times of the night or the day, such crowds are also a blend of sellers of smuggled goods, prostitutes of both sexes, touts for African hair salons, regular customers heading for specialist stores, employees of the companies that operate in the area, people living rough, inhabitants from the neighbourhood. The saturated public space thus appears as deteriorated, and poverty, of which the street scenes are evidence, is a threat and a daily ordeal. The police are often said not to have a regulatory and security role. At the same time, the role of togetherness and familiarity with one another are often mentioned. This would explain that in la Goutte d'Or, borderline activities benefit from a certain form of tolerance that also applies to the crowd of customers and car sellers in Heyvaert. A subtle chemistry enables one to resist:

> 'Here, it's really the roughest area in Brussels […] we see a lot of things happening. There's riots, there's a lot of things between youngsters and the police. Sometimes it gets really rough. But on the other hand, here you feel safe. We all know each other in the neighbourhood, so if there's any trouble we can call on one another. If I'm away, I can leave my kids; if there's a problem they can go to the neighbour's. So, yes, it's a united habitat. For me, it really was the positive aspect, I weighed up the pros and cons.' (Female, 45-years-old).

In Vienna, the difference lies inside the buildings — those from below against those from above; as a resident said, 'in our building, at the bottom it is still misery, above they're better off' (R12, owner since 1998). As class differences are more easily expressed there than those that relate to origins, borders still refer to a separation between irreconcilable lifestyles:

> 'Karmelitermarkt is an enemy country [he laughs]. There is some kind of competition between the two markets, Karmelitermarkt has long had a trendy reputation and there are a few clients that come here to avoid that atmosphere. Heinestraße still works as a border between the well-off part and the pauperised part of the second district.' (Female, 65-years-old)

By alluding to poverty as a constitutive element of the neighbourhood, these stories cultivate an opposition to the arrival of certain groups of people.

An Ethnicised Otherness

Urban change that is seen as threatening can be read on the faces as well as in the landscape and language sets distinctions, depending on the city, among 'White people', 'Toubabs', 'Belgians', 'French people', 'Gallic', 'tourists', 'hipsters', 'Africans', 'Blacks', 'Indians', 'Afghans' and other Asians. In the context of these globalised spaces framed to a large extent by *what circulates*, words that are used to refer to a social position are close to those that are used to refer to a foreigner, to the other, stemming from unabashed stereotypes. In Mouraria, the departure and return of the 'Moors' (the neighbourhood was named after them) is also a recurrent myth.

However, the perception of the more or less porous boundaries between groups is sharpened, and matches specific locations, which a woman informant, who enjoys the exoticism provided by her neighbourhood, reads with an 'ethnic touch':

> 'Here it's the African side, the other side it's the neighbourhood where you have the whole of North Africa […] you go to Marx Dormoy, and there you'll find Chinese and Thais. If you go a little further, you're going to the Hindus.' (Female, 62-years-old)

In Lisbon, too, the foreigner is visually identified, but here a positive emphasis is put on the blend of origins:

> 'It's much more globalized […] I think people see the neighbourhood as a "tourism park", in quotation marks […]. For me it has changed because it's no longer the typical neighbourhood of these twenty, thirty or forty families; other families have arrived, it's a multicultural environment'. (Female, 86-years-old)

The perception of gentrification is, therefore, often based on the genuine or presumed origins and on the colour of the skin; for instance, the arrival of 'whites' is associated with the increase in housing prices and therefore with a trend towards a middle-class outlook of the neighbourhood (Launay 2014, Collet 2015). In la Goutte d'Or, trendy bars, fashionable shops, new services, unveil the reshaping of the neighbourhood. For some, the Tembely bakery, the Barbès brasserie, the café Lomi demonstrate the ambitions of municipal policies. In Brussels, the degradation of the neighbourhood goes hand-in-hand with the departure of 'Belgians'. In Vienna, the departure of migrants has resulted, according to some, in a more homogeneous neighbourhood that is also better incorporated into the city. In an extreme version, the discourse associates 'hipsters' with 'Whites', particularly to denounce the domination of these 'bourgeois' people with 'masked faces':

> '[…] Here we are in the heart of what can be called the left wing "bobo land" people who are morally left-wingers but whose wallet is clearly right-oriented; that is to say that they have all the advantages, they have a good morality, they are on the side of the oppressed but at the same time they have the cash and the capital, so

they are actually unassailable. It is absolute domination; they can't be criticized because, compared to the reactionary bourgeois that were held in contempt by the working class, they actually like the working class so they're flooding the 18th district as well as the 19th and the 20th because rents are cheaper.' (Male, 40-years-old)

Invasion and Nostalgia for the Village

It is in relation to local commerce that expectations about authenticity are particularly strong. The African shops in la Goutte d'Or, in Heyvaert and in Mouraria, the Kosher or Turkish shops in Volkert and Alliiertenviertel are among the most emblematic figures. When they are described positively, these shops relate to a market demand and to customers who can find products and flavours from their home country. As for the negative side, the discourse of invasion establishes itself even when it is put more or less mildly:

'Now Château Rouge has become an African neighbourhood; a sub-Saharan Africa, as far as products are concerned.' (Female, 60-years-old).

This commercial transformation is also linked to the social reconfiguration of neighbourhoods and to the dynamics of *touristification*. An erosion of the so-called village lifestyle would supposedly ensue. New activities that 'are not for the people from the neighbourhood' appear. Narratives echo this painful loss, which is said to threaten the authenticity of places that have become hostile, 'soulless', and 'separatist': 'People from the neighbourhood can't go there to have a beer because it's very expensive.' (Male, 29-years-old).

In Heyvaert, the feeling of decline, of economic and residential degradation is associated with the departure of Belgians and European immigrants and the settlement of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle-East. This neighbourhood which used to be one of Brussels' economic epicentres, would be enduring today a centrifugal force that results in the decline of economic activities and in the residents' leaving. In the words of a local West African,

'There used to be a market on Saturdays and Sundays and all the inhabitants from Belgium used to come here to sell their cars. There used to be Belgians, Italians, Turks […] Now there's more noise, more dirt, more fights [...] Everyone who used to live here has sold their house and left […] I lived here for a couple of years, but it wasn't like that at the time. It was interesting here, it was quiet, it radiated *joie de vivre*, business was booming. It's all over now, business is over. Most of the people you see here are unemployed, live off social benefits. They come here to try and make ends meet and all the thieves from Brussels come here to sell what they've stolen. On the other side, there are some youngsters that sell drugs all day because they're safe here, the police don't intervene, they let them do what they want.' (Male, 58-years-old)

These negative presentations emerge from a vision of the present that is in contradiction with a regretted past. This West African, who claims to be from the neighbourhood, states a feeling of invasion by people coming from elsewhere; this newcomer, looking for cheaper rent, experiences streets insecurity and the neighbourhood's bad reputation, all the while praising its social diversity. This former inhabitant, once a migrant himself, rejoices in the new opportunities brought about by the renovation of his urban corner. Here lies all the paradoxical heritage of the neighbourhoods that we studied: in these 'Commons' that are neither smooth nor homogeneous, but on the contrary marked by hardship endured; places that feed ever-changing stances, halfway between universalism ('this is the United Nations neighbourhood', an informant claims poetically) and the feeling of unfairness embodied by pollution, dirt, demographic density — the misery that is present under various forms but, strangely, protects from further, possibly negative changes.

Act 3. The Aura of Legacy in the Resisting Neighbourhoods
In the neighbourhoods under study, heritage does exist, but one has to look for it. The ways of proceeding, '*façons de faire*' (De Certeau 1980) and the places of memory, *'lieux de mémoire'* (Nora 1992), whether tangible or intangible, stand in for the absence of monuments. It is a collective memory nurtured by values of hospitality; a memory that integrates narratives and discursive strategies to oppose the stigma on the neighbourhood. It is also a biographical relation to the neighbourhood that does not rule out transnational existences, and consequently a sense of urbanity. In a way, the people from these neighbourhoods are endowed with a residential capital: what they care about, what makes them hold out and what they stand for.

The Past, the City, the Biographical Path: Common Landmarks
The neighbourhood's identity, analysed from the perspective of the interviews conducted in each case with inhabitants and regular users, is defined through three types of relationships.

First, through *the relationship with the past,* or the implementation of neighbourhood narratives as the outcome of a story, including migrations, work, underground economy, marginal people, poverty of the public space and of housing; these elements often fuel a negative reputation. But there is also a heroic narrative of the neighbourhood that sometimes is based on elements of heritage (Saint Bernard church in la Goutte d'Or; slaughterhouses in Heyvaert, Severa's house in Mouraria) or on events whose memory remains alive and is passed on (Austro-fascism and antisemitism in Volkert and Alliiertviertel; the Algerian war of Independence; the strike of undocumented workers in la Goutte d'Or in May 1996). Here we find a kind of 'patrimonial emotion' (Fabre 2013) which is interesting to analyse starting from the narratives.

Second, the *relationship with the city,* expresses the view of the neighbourhood as opposed to other neighbourhoods in the city. It often operates through narrative constructions that focus on the singularity of these neighbourhoods by alluding to the metaphors of the neighbourhood-village against the anonymity of the city, of centrality or of an identity-world.

Conversely, the comparison with other neighbourhoods in the city can trigger discourses of denigration, abandonment and relegation.

Finally, the *biographical relationship*. The neighbourhood is depicted, in this case, as the privileged place of an individual biographical path; reference is made to roots, to identity in symbiosis with the neighbourhood ('this neighbourhood is my life'). On the other hand, this view of the neighbourhood can take a critical form that marks the imprisonment in a place of failure or of renunciation. These narratives mobilizing common references obviously blend with personal, subjective identifications which make them unique testimonies within a choir of multiple voices.

At first sight, this kind of neighbourhood is made up of embedded geographies: Heyvaert is understood in reference to the automobile car exportation market to West Africa, one cannot speak of la Goutte d'Or, of Mouraria or of Volkert-and Alliiertenviertel without mentioning an 'elsewhere' that, thanks to fast means of communication, interferes in the local life through incoming merchandise, information and new actors. The phone stores where one finds public letter-writers, money-transfer facilities and interpreters are, like some launderettes, *beacons of metropolisation*, arrangements invented daily by menial actors of globalisation. But they are also urban areas, living spaces in which the reference, the fixing point is the bond, whether it be a family bond or a friendship bond; a bond tightly combined with the place where one has experienced an uneven residential path, from hotels to bedsits, from bedsits to squats, in the hope, that sometimes comes true, of accessing regulated and standardized social housing.

Associations, which are points of reference in a rough sea, bring to one's attention the existence of more stable anchoring structures. Because if these spaces are territories badly endowed with heritage (in the institutional sense that has been prevalent until today), they are visited, inhabited, dense in terms of economic relationships, businesses, emotions; they are highly charged neighbourhoods where the trafficking life hardly wipes away the pendulum movement that forms the pattern of urban daytime life: school activities, the start and end of a workday, shopping. Narratives of warm scenes are not rare, in which narrators call to order deviants that overstep and hurt local comprehension. However, as we have explained, poverty scenes are a form of opposition to gentrification.

It is precisely the tradition of openness that make these neighbourhoods vulnerable. Indeed, there is no need, as the City of Paris does, to open exotic but adapted shops to greet the new gentrification. Inhabitants do it themselves in line with the neighbourhood's hospitality. For example, in a local bakery, each little stuffed date and Arab cake slightly flavoured with orange blossom water will now be wrapped individually, whereas in the past several were wrapped together. Hospitality, providing visitors with the best from local production, has become the driving force for change. The balance, however, is subtle, and the question is raised of a price to pay so that the neighbourhood can remain inexpensive, accessible and working-class. Nuisances will, thus, sometimes be accepted inasmuch as they depreciate the neighbourhoods enough to protect them from radical and aggressive gentrification. Resourcefulness, as well as the fine boundary between what is legal and what is not, shows that

uncertainty in all its forms (Bauman 2001), has become an ordinary condition. Confidence is not evenly shared.

The Subtle Regulation of the Public Space

The first resource is the street, the public space visited, contested, coveted, necessarily regulated by customs specific to the places: 'Everyone is outside because the apartments are small' says Ahmed in la Goutte d'Or, emphasising the fact that, 'We live in the streets, the streets in working-class neighbourhoods have always been bustling because most apartments were dilapidated, unhealthy and cramped, they were very small, that's the practical explanation; it also creates a culture, a relationship with the public space.'

The return to the street of better-off classes has to a great extent fed on the friendliness in the streets of working-class neighbourhoods. This, however, also conveys change and selection.[10] As different standards come into contact, the movement of people associated with this enthusiasm leads to behavioural conflicts in the public space. This trend is particularly significant, as urbanism recruits the new inhabiting classes by flattering their preferences, including cultural spaces, bookshops, charity shops selling second hand items and clothes, organic food shops, and so on. The street has turned (back) into a very popular neighbourhood unit, where arbitration requires, nonetheless, diplomacy and consistency:

> 'Executives from the white middle class, artists, creative people have moved in the rue de Panama. Posters and bills have been stuck on the walls asking people to stop shouting at the bottom of buildings and lower their voices in the evening, to respect people's need for rest.' (Male 40-years-old)

Ultimately, what creates the heritage of these neighbourhoods is not as much consensus as the ever-latent argument and the permanent regulation of misbehaviour. The discourse of generalised invasion responds to the principle of unconditional hospitality. Generalised competition (of everyone against each other) opposes the neighbourhood community. The fight against spatial stigma opposes the promotion of the closed, supposedly authentic village. Unlike the smoothed city model that makes invisible the social relationships of appropriation and domination, the heritage of these neighbourhoods reveals a demanding urbanity. The jaded behaviour ('*blasé attitude*') of the man from the metropolis (Simmel [1904] 2013) does not suit the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods.

Epilogue: Narratives Create Heritage?

The elements that we have discussed show the strength of the narratives in central European neighbourhoods that are undergoing gentrification. Narratives can be considered as part of the heritage, and as tools for resistance. On the one hand, they express the 'commons' of people mobilising, in addition to their individual and collective memory, their experience of the territory; that is, what unites them and what divides them. On the other hand, they reveal the

---

10. See also the issue 144-145 of the Journal *Espaces et sociétés* (2011) dealing with the popular use of space.

diversity of positions in the face of the dynamics of gentrification; particularly the way in which narratives on the neighbourhood enable people to live there, overcome their daily ordeals and implement togetherness. Ultimately, through their use and circulation, these narratives are a form of opposition to gentrification.

The social construction of reality (Berger and Luckman 1991) greatly rests on what is said about it, on image and creative prophecy (Merton 1948). The destiny of these neighbourhoods depends, at least in part, on the outcomes of the confrontation between different discourses, on the war of images and representations. Admittedly, discourses do not spring from spontaneous generation; they are dictated or inspired by interests, of which they are the transmitters. Neighbourhoods are filled with discourses. On the one hand, there are a large number of actors involved, whatever their position and their power. On the other hand, in today's era of immediate communication, discourses are superimposed, they borrow from one another, a little like a currency that would pass from hand to hand to sell or buy, in the process being hid, shown, bargained. In such a context it is not surprising that the people asked to give their viewpoint demonstrate a remarkable reflexivity and ability to talk about themselves, sometimes using ambiguity and expressing their view under cover of anecdotes with morals and ideas that are in line with part of the public opinion.

What if the term 'gentrification' defined something else besides the consequence, in western cities, of major economic transformation, of changes in employment patterns and policies of urban renewal implemented in central neighbourhoods? After all, these key trends affect, to various extents, all large European cities. Should their special features, 'the DNA of gentrification' (Chabrol and al. 2016:67) not be searched among 'the spirit of the places' that mark a *sui generis* heritage? Historical references intertwine in the narratives that stage significant others, combining the elements of the 'commons' in an intersubjective fashion.

The hardship that these neighbourhoods experience and the discourses of justification (Boltanski and Thevenot 1991) lead one to ponder their ability to perform. From a broader perspective, they raise questions on the role and the position of the researcher who passes on these narratives. At a time when memory issues have acquired significance and the 'arts of saying' have evolved (De Certeau 1980), this is an essential stake in our understanding of urban, and more broadly societal, transformation processes. Because ultimately, is it not through a narrative identity, in the sense of the ability to say, that neighbourhoods express the value of their heritage? What is most interesting is, undoubtedly, the fact that in this heterogeneous output, unheard-of alliances reveal themselves, which proves that gentrification cannot be limited to a merciless competition between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'.

References

Agier, M., Bonnafé, P. 1986. Sur l'Afrique noire pluriculturelle, l'africanisme et la France. *Journal des anthropologues*, 25 (1): 15-34.

Albrow, M. 1998. Travelling beyond local cultures. Socioscapes in the global city. In J. Bade

(ed.), *Living in the global city. Globalisation as a local process*. London and New York: Routledge.

Bacqué, M. H. and Fijalkow Y. 2006. En attendant la gentrification: discours et politiques à la Goutte d'Or (1982-2000). *Sociétés contemporaines*, (3): 63-83.

Barrère, C. and Fijalkow, Y. 2013. Le polar de Paris: une mise en scène des changements urbains de l'est parisien. *Lieux communs*, (16): 75-95.

Barrère, C. and Lévy-Vroelant, C. 2011. *Hôtels meublés à Paris, enquête sur une mémoire de l'immigration*. Paris-Grâne: Créaphis.

Bauman, Z. 2001. Identity in the globalizing world. *Social Anthropology*, 9 (2): 121-129.

Beauregard, R. A. 2003. *Voices of Decline: The Post-war Fate of US Cities*. London: Routledge.

Berger, P. and Luckmann, T. 1991. *The Social Construction of Reality*. London: Penguin Books.

Blommaert, J., Collins, J. and Slembrouck S. 2005. Polycentricity and interactional regimes in global neighborhoods. *Ethnography*, 6 (2): 205-23.

Boltanski, L. and Thévenot, L. 1991. *De la justification. Les économies de la grandeur*. Paris: Gallimard.

Cailly, L. 2007. Capital spatial, stratégies résidentielles et processus d'individualisation. *Annales de Géographie*, 2: 169-187.

Chabrol, M. 2011. *De nouvelles formes de gentrification? Dynamiques résidentielles et commerciales à Château-Rouge (Paris)*. Doctoral Dissertation, Université de Poitiers.

Chabrol, M., Collet, A., Launay, L., Giroud, M., Rousseau, M. and Ter Minassian, H. 2016. *Gentrifications*. Paris: Editions Amsterdam.

Choay, F. 1992. *L'allégorie du patrimoine*. Paris: Le Seuil.

Collet, A. 2015. *Rester bourgeois: les quartiers populaires, nouveaux chantiers de la distinction*. Paris: La Découverte.

Cordeiro, G. I. 2003. Uma certa ideia de cidade: popular, bairrista, pitoresca. *Sociologia*, *Revista do Departamento de Sociologia da FLUP*, XIII:185-199.

De Certeau, M. 1980. *L'invention du quotidien, 1: Manières de faire*. Paris: Gallimard.

Fijalkow, Y. 2007. Construction et usages de la notion de quartier-village. Village de Charonne et Goutte d'Or à Paris. In J. Y. Authier, M. H. Bacqué and F. Guérin-Pace (eds), *Le quartier. Enjeux scientifiques, actions politiques et pratiques sociales*. Paris: La Découverte.

Fijalkow, Y. 2013. Sociologie des villes, sociologie du logement: Des complémentarités à refonder à la lumière du processus de gentrification. *Sociologie et sociétés*, 45 (2): 177-194.

Flahaut, F. 2011. *Où est passé le bien commun?* Paris: Les Mille et Une Nuits.

Halbwachs, M. [1940] 2015. *La psychologie collective*. Paris: Flammarion.

Guérin-Pace, F. 2007. Le quartier entre appartenance et attachement: une échelle identitaire?

In J. Y. Authier, M. H. Bacqué and F. Guérin-Pace (eds), *Le quartier. Enjeux scientifiques, actions politiques et pratiques sociales.* Paris: La Découverte.

Hayden, D. 1994. The Power of Places. Claiming Urban Landscapes as People's History. *Journal of Urban History*, 20 (4): 466-485.

Heinich, N. 2014. *La fabrique du patrimoine: de la cathédrale à la petite cuillère*. Paris: Les Editions de la MSH.

Launay, L. 2014. Les classes populaires racisées face à la domination dans les beaux quartiers de Paris. *Espaces et sociétés*, (1): 37-52.

Ley, D. 1994. Gentrification and the politics of the new middle class. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* 12 (1): 53-74.

Massey, D. 1995. Places and Their Pasts. *History Workshop Journal*, 39: 182-192.

Merton, R. K. 1948. The self-fulfilling prophecy. *The Antioch Review*, 8 (2): 193-210.

Nora, P. 1992. *Les lieux de mémoire*, 2 (1). Paris: Gallimard.

Retière, J.-N. 2003. Autour de l'autochtonie. Réflexions sur la notion de capital social Populaire. *Politix*, 16 (63): 121-143.

Savage, M., Bagnall, G. and Longhurst, B. J. 2004. *Globalisation and belonging*. New York: Sage.

Silver, D. and Clark, T. N. 2015. The power of scenes: quantities of amenities and qualities of Places. *Cultural Studies*, 29 (3): 425-449.

Simmel, G. [1904] 2013. *Les grandes villes et la vie de l'esprit*. Paris: Payot.

Smith, N. 1996. *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*. London and New York: Routledge.

Toubon, J. C. and Messamah, K. 1990. *Centralité immigré-Le quartier de la Goutte d'Or-Dynamique d'un espace pluriethnique*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Veschambre, V. 2008. *Traces et mémoires urbaines. Les enjeux sociaux de la patrimonialisation et de la destruction.* Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

Zukin, S. 2009. *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.