**Gentrification Flagship VS. Eco-Solidary Urban-Farm: Analytical Double Standards? Case Studies of Media Coverage of the Gentrification Process in the xviiith Arrondissement of Paris[[1]](#footnote-1)**

The xviiith arrondissement of Paris, and especially the Barbès-Goutte d’Or-Château-Rouge neighbourhood – located down the hill of Montmartre –, is the topic of regular and mostly negative media coverage focusing on communalism, drug trafficking, street praying, and prostitution, to cite just a few of the recurring themes. This is notably where Tati[[2]](#footnote-2) opened in the 1950s (Lallement 2005), the arthouse cinema Louxor reopened (Lallement 2014), and the Institute for Islamic Culture and the contemporary music venue Centre FGO-Barbara were also set up. The area has also been the focus of relatively recent academic studies examining it from a variety of angles (Bacqué et Fijalkow 2006; Chabrol 2014; Clerval 2016; Lallement 2005; Palumbo 2014). It has often been described as “multi-ethnic,” “multicultural,” and a “commercial immigrant hub” allowing for the development of specific activities (Rives 2010). Indeed, the Goutte d’Or has been known historically as an immigrant neighbourhood, with people coming from the provinces in the xixth century and primarily from North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa today. Over the last few years, however, this area has undergone considerable change and been symbolically re-evaluated as part of major public intervention efforts to combat unsanitary housing conditions (Chabrol et al. 2016; Barthélémy, Michelangeli, et Trannoy 2007). Less discussed are the relatively new institutions established there, such as restaurants, which hardly go unnoticed, as show the following reactions of clients:

“I wish I was still in Paris paying 9€ for my small beer … throwing peanuts at the poor people in the Brasserie Barbès,” reads a humorous Twitter post by former Parisian Emmyrtille, a self-described “eco-friendly, ethical, zero waste, well-meaning guilt inducer, bobo feminist with vegetarian tendencies,” on May 9, 2015. She was referring to a then newly opened restaurant in the neighbourhood. A few months later, VéDS, who calls herself an “urban Tinkerbell working for participation [and] participatory democracy” praised “a sustainable, eco-friendly outreach project creating a social space” on Twitter (May 21, 2016). Another social network user mentioned “a new cultural space for sharing and collaborating” (May 19, 2014). Both posts were discussing another restaurant, *La REcyclerie*, located not far from the first. Whereas both restaurants opened a few hundred meters and a few months apart, they aroused opposite reactions, calling for a deeper understanding of what is at stake.

This chapter shall examine a field study on the gentrification process conducted in this arrondissement, looking at these two restaurants through their media coverage. While academic work about the xviiith arrondissement has not focused on specific retail places– with the notable exception of a study of wine merchants in the xith and xviiith arrondissements (Delamarre 2013) –, studies of other districts in Paris (Corbillé 2013) and processes related to commercial gentrification (Zukin et al. 2009; Chabrol 2011) will shed light on my analysis.

The concept of gentrification has been used in France relatively recently. Indeed, the bourgeoisie and the working classes often lived side by side in most of France’s city centres, or even on top of one another in blocks of flats. The process of urban renewal that Ruth Glass observed in 1960s London, for instance, did not begin in Paris until much later, due in part to the fact that the bourgeoisie never left the city and its affluent western neighbourhoods (Préteceille 2007). Furthermore, it should be noted that every city and neighbourhood produce their own specific configurations of the gentrification phenomenon (Chabrol et al. 2016) despite similar elements related to the evolution of capitalism being at work, such as the rent-gap theory (Smith 1987).

Moreover, studies of the relationship between the media and gentrification remain relatively rare—unlike in the United States, where they are more frequently conducted (Brown-Saracino et Rumpf 2011; Lavy, Dascher, et Hagelman 2016; Rucks-Ahidiana 2018). Despite the fact that gentrification is a widely discussed research theme in social sciences, few scientific studies have analyzed the way the media has handled the process. The rare studies on this theme often quantify the use of the term “bobo” – which they identify as gentrification figure – in the press (Collet et Rivière 2018). In their contribution, Collet and Rivière (2018) mention six references to such comments, while focusing on how frequently the term appears in the press, notably within an electoral context. Tissot’s contribution in the same book shows the importance of the press in the publicization of the concept created by Brooks in 2000 (Tissot 2018).

On the other hand, the importance of the media’s ability to impose certain topics in a public debate (Dunning, Murphy, et Williams 1986) and its role in people’s perception of social phenomena are also known (Logan et Molotch 1987; Schudson cited by Rucks-Ahidiana 2018). The lack of academic interest in press coverage of gentrification is therefore worth noting.

In order to help fill this void, this chapter will then focus on the press and commercial gentrification, or the replacement of local businesses that are usually ethnic or affordable with “trendy cafés, restaurants, pop-ups, art galleries, etc.” (Sakızlıoğlu et Lees 2020). Through the study of two bar-restaurants – a typical example of commercial gentrification (Zukin et al. 2009) – located near each other on the Boulevard Barbès/Ornano, I will study the role of the press representations regarding commercial gentrification processes.

The boulevard is characteristic of the “working class occupation of the street” (Clerval 2011), which includes, among others, peanut and corn vendors, cigarette sellers, and beggars in addition to heavy pedestrian traffic, customers of the many ethnic stores, and a strong police presence. Many of my interviewees cited the Boulevard Barbès/Ornano as being like a “border” between a socially valued space in the west and a less valued one in the east. Within the context of a more general study of the xviiith arrondissement in Paris, I was able to conduct ethnographic work in the area and meet some inhabitants in order to understand their relationship to otherness in this changing multi-ethnic space.

This chapter will examine how the media has covered these restaurant openings and the way it has eventually looked at the resulting social relationships. After presenting the methodology, it will provide a general analysis of the editorial line assumed in the articles. It will then focus on two aspects of the media coverage of the restaurant openings. The final section will reflect on both of these businesses as stages in the gentrification process.

1. Method of Corpus Analysis

Fourteen articles were studied for this chapter. Instead of offering a quantitative analysis, as some studies have done (Brown-Saracino et Rumpf 2011), the goal is to provide a localized analysis guided by fieldwork (Lavy, Dascher, et Hagelman 2016) and enriched by a four-year study of the arrondissement that began in 2017[[3]](#footnote-3) and continued within the framework of a number of student groups I supervised as part of an ethnography course in 2020.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The articles were collected thanks to the Europresse database and are strictly press articles that appeared in print or online. Eight concern the Brasserie Barbès and six *La REcyclerie*, restaurants that opened in 2015 and 2014, respectively. As these places were not necessarily the subject of long-term media coverage (most articles having appeared when they first opened), I have examined all the articles published during my initial study in 2017.

The journalists vary in their presentation of topics, and I have analyzed the content in a way that made it possible to identify the different themes that were covered. For all of the articles, these have been grouped into different categories according to the lexical fields of the terms used:

* neighbourhood;
* insecurity, illegality;
* social relationships, gentrification;
* ethnicity, multiculturalism, race;
* specificities of the project;
* values, representations.

During the first stage of textual analysis, it was necessary to eliminate the articles, pronouns, and other words that were naturally omnipresent in the articles but could not be classified as part of the selected themes.[[5]](#footnote-5) Once this initial task was completed, the words used in the articles were classified in the chosen categories according to how often they were used.[[6]](#footnote-6)

1. Contrasting Media Coverage

My first observation of the articles analyzed concerns their length. The articles about the Brasserie Barbès are longer, averaging 945 words compared to 650 for *La REcyclerie*. Articles about the former generally provide more in-depth analysis. Furthermore, while the opening of the brasserie generated heavy media coverage in 2015, this coverage subsequently dwindled. *La REcyclerie*, however, received less coverage in 2014 but was the subject of a few articles in the years that followed. The articles published right when the brasserie opened, which are mostly short and neutral or even positive, do not offer a detailed investigation – leaning on newsworthiness –, while those published over the weeks that followed are far more substantial and provide a more critical take on the restaurant – using a more investigative approach. The tone of the article is generally conveyed in the title.

Across all of the newspapers, the articles about *La REcyclerie* are neutral or positive in tone. It was indeed commented upon by many different newspapers poles apart. *Bio à la Une* described it as an “urban farm” (Labracherie 2017), while *Le Figaro* highlighted its “on-track concept”(De Santis 2014). *L’Humanité* rejoiced the opening of a place which “cultivates the fertile path of conviviality” (Barbezat 2016) by allowing Parisian “peasants” (Schaub 2016) to “garden and sunbathe.” (Oihana 2014). *Bio à la Une* is an online platform that “provides daily news to those who want to adopt a healthier lifestyle,” specifically covering the areas of health and the environment. *Le Figaro*, a paid national daily, is traditionally considered to be affiliated with the liberal right. On the other side of the political spectrum, *Libération* and *L’Humanité* are two paid national dailies considered to be left-wing. The former, cofounded by Jean-Paul Sartre, has historically been linked to left-wing intellectuals, while the latter has long been the Communist party’s newspaper. The free daily *20 Minutes* has been described by its president as a paper producing uncommented “hard news” that does not take political sides.[[7]](#footnote-7) Despite their often-distant political positions, all of these news outlets provided relatively similar coverage of *La REcyclerie*’s opening, praising an innovative project without raising any questions related to the urban changes that such a place might bring to that type of neighbourhood.

This was not the case for the Brasserie Barbès, which was much more divisive. *Libération*, for example, evoked the “stigma of gentrification.” (*Libération* 2015) *Les Inrockuptibles*, a left-leaning paid monthly devoted to culture, spoke of it as a “weapon of mass gentrification” in a heavily charged article (Camu 2015). However, *Marie France*, a paid women’s monthly with no particular political affiliation, chose to recommend the brasserie as part of its “Recommended Places” for going out (Bézard 2015), and *Télérama*, a paid weekly devoted to culture and also classified as left-wing, painted a flattering picture dismissing any fears of gentrification. Whereas the journalist awaits a “new hipster gentrifying submarine”, they are pleasantly surprised by the mixed clientele (*Télérama* 2015). In a particularly in-depth and balanced article*, Slate.fr*—a website labelled as left-wing, the French version of which was created in part by the former director of *Le Monde*[[8]](#footnote-8)—raised the issue of the “trial” of this very phenomenon (Cassely 2015) by explaining that this establishment was undoubtedly paying the price for other similar places.

Of course, political affiliations are not unrelated when covering certain topics, but the apparent role of the section in which these articles were published should also be noted. The “Going Out” and “Art of Living” sections tended to present these new places in a favourable light, while the “Society” section offered articles that were much more sceptical and even harsh in tone.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Title** | **Newspaper** | **Date of Publication** | **Section of Publication** | **Tone of the Article** | **Number of Words** |
| *La REcyclerie* |  | | | | |
| La Recyclerie, un concept sur les rails | *Le Figaro* | 06/03/2014 | Art of Living – Going Out in Paris | Neutral / (positive) | 393 |
| Paris : Réparer, jardiner et bronzer à la Recyclerie | *20 Minutes* | 06/13/2014 | Urbanism | Neutral / (positive) | 555 |
| Recyclerie. Les paysans de Paris | *Libération* | 09/23/2016 | Europe | Positive | 1028 |
| La Recyclerie cultive la voie fertile de la convivialité à Paris | *L’Humanité* | 11/08/2016 | Social-ecology  Social and Solidarity Economy | Positive | 943 |
| Ferme urbaine : la Recyclerie en circuit fermé | *Le Figaro* | 03/31/2017 | Art of Living – Going Out in Paris | Neutral | 407 |
| La Recyclerie : une ferme urbaine en plein cœur de Paris | *Bio à la Une* | 04/19/2017 | Environment-Agriculture | Neutral / (positive) | 576 |
| Brasserie Barbès |  | | | | |
| « La Brasserie Barbès appartient à tout le monde et à personne » | *20Minutes* | 04/28/2015 | Society | Neutral | 617 |
| Paris : la "no go zone" de Barbès va accueillir une brasserie branchée | *Le Point* (AFP) | 04/29/2015 | Society | Neutral | 735 |
| Plein soleil à la Brasserie Barbès | *Marie France* | 05/08/2015 | Cuisine –Recommended Places | Positive | 237 |
| Brasserie Barbès, arme de gentrification massive ? | *Les Inrockuptibles* | 05/21/2015 | Current Events | Negative | 1715 |
| Brasserie Barbès : véritable repaire de bobos ou restaurant populaire ? | *Télérama* | 05/23/2015 | Going Out – Restaurants & Gastronomy | Positive | 660 |
| Paris : Barbès se laisse pousser la moustache | *Libération* | 11/13/2015 | Lifestyle | Negative | 1057 |
| Comment la Brasserie Barbès a ouvert le procès de la gentrification parisienne | *Slate.fr* | 06/01/2015 | France | Neutral | 2276 |
| Sephora ou brasserie Barbès, quels stigmates pour la gentrification parisienne ? | *Libération* | 06/03/2015 | Society | Negative | 261 |

Whereas the positive press coverage of *La REcyclerie* stretches from 2014 to 2017, it is worth noting that the attacks on Brasserie Barbès were only published at the time of its grand inauguration. Journalists seem to have forgotten about this “weapon of mass gentrification” since (Camu 2015). While both restaurants are based on different offerings, analysis of these press articles reveals that the subtlety of the gentrification process partially escapes the journalists. The next part seeks to show how the media contributes to making it (in)visible by covering or overlooking the notion of gentrification as a subject of public debate.

1. Gentrification at Work in Businesses: Two Registers of Media Analysis

Restaurants and businesses serve as important indicators of the ambiance of a specific neighbourhood or public spaces (Simon 1997). In this respect, their transformation or renewal provide clues that make it possible to observe and analyze gentrification in an urban space (Van Criekingen et Fleury 2006; Zukin et al. 2009). Government authorities, often supportive of this transformation, understand this, and the City of Paris is no exception. The SEMAEST, a semi-public company[[9]](#footnote-9) and the municipality’s strong arm when handling commercial issues, has implemented a policy that aims to “quash” commercial specialization in certain streets. In practice, this policy often targets working class neighbourhoods and/or immigrants, where ethnic commercial specialization is frowned upon by gentrifiers. City Hall therefore does not necessarily disapprove of “new” businesses opening in areas that are home to a foreign population. It encourages them, even becoming heavily involved in certain strategic projects. This topic was discussed in various articles, emphasizing the City of Paris’s active role in fostering projects.

A/ *La REcyclerie*: Positive Media Coverage Focused on the Project

In the case of the redevelopment of the former Ornano railway station, where *La REcyclerie* set up business, the City of Paris hired the project leaders, who had previous experience with this type of redevelopment, in a partnership encouraging gentrification (Correia 2018). The place presented itself as a “third space”, its main focus being local production, recycling, and ecology. Outside are the typical street scenes found in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods (Simon 1997), with neighbouring streets and a métro exit primarily frequented by individual men or groups of men of North African or sub-Saharan African descent, some standing in the street, talking. A fruit and vegetable seller can be found working alongside someone selling counterfeit wallets and belts. Nearby, fast food chains are heavily present, including McDonalds, KFC, and local fast-food shops, among others.

The restaurant interior is a hodgepodge decor centred around recycled and repurposed objects of all kinds, creating an “authentic” atmosphere vindicated by gentrifiers (Corbillé 2013; Zukin 2008). Past the front door is a rather vast entrance area. Few tables are close to the street, and most are on the other side of the bar, which is located in the centre of the room. The place does not therefore open directly onto the street, and there is no outdoor seating since the station platforms can be reached behind the building. The eating area is somewhat separated from any outside activity and notably cut off from any noise. Service takes place at the bar. A number of messages warn against the potential presence of pickpockets. The menu is relatively unique, and the prices—probably out of sync with the neighbourhood—are pretty moderate. There is no uniform; the waiters and waitresses wear their own clothes and a green apron with a logo. The clientele is rather young and mostly white, with varying unconventional dress styles. In a report that was not part of the corpus, the local radio station *France Bleu* described *La REcyclerie*’s customers in the following terms: “students from the neighbouring Paris Sorbonne university campus, bargain hunters from the nearby *Puces de Saint-Ouen* (flea market), and locals from the neighbourhood and elsewhere meet, talk, exchange, and share.” (*France Bleu* 2018)[[10]](#footnote-10) This is yet another example of a presentation praising the diversity the place has created.

I would now like to focus on the media coverage of the restaurant. A few academic studies that make general mention of *La REcyclerie* (Leglize 2016) are worth briefly noting, specifically one that looks at the urban agricultural project (Delgado 2018) or others that discuss the redevelopment of what was once an urban wasteland (Desgoutte 2019; Watine 2020). Newspaper articles mostly present the project behind the place, focusing on the historical aspect of the former railway station, the urban farm, the cafeteria, and the repairs workshop for members of the association located there. While articles in *Libération*, *L’Humanité*, and *20 Minutes* raise the issue of the restaurant as a place for “bobos,” they quickly move on to explain that it is a place of exchange and a meeting point. The “bobo” label has negative connotations in France, where it is equally criticized in academic studies (Tissot 2018).

My textual analysis confirms these elements, since the large majority of the terms mentioned by journalists refer to the specificities of the project (64% of the words used), such as recycling and sorting, animals, agriculture, plants, compost, DIY workshops, and so on. Next, and with much less frequency, come the neighbourhood (16% of the words used) and the values and representations conveyed by the project (15.7% of the words used). Here, the neighbourhood is primarily discussed in terms of the working class xviiith arrondissement or “northeast” Paris, which sometimes refers to the theme of ethnicity and race as well as multiculturalism (1.5% of the words used), but this is mostly meant to emphasize the urban renewal the project provides in this type of neighbourhood. All the articles I analyzed mention how the former Ornano railway station has been redeveloped, which I have classified as a reference to the neighbourhood rather than the project. Indeed, the redevelopment is described from an architectural and patrimonial perspective rather than being linked to the urban farm project. The articles mention how the building was previously used (as a railway station, a restaurant, and even a bank), and two of them (by the same author) speak of a “vestige of urban Parisian heritage.” (De Santis 2014). As for values and representations, they refer to the project through issues surrounding ecology, exchange, conviviality, solidarity, and sharing in addition to learning, ethics, and diversity. While social relationships and gentrification are never mentioned as such (2.8% of the words used), they surface indirectly through the figure of the “bobo.” Issues related to disorderly conduct, cleanliness, lack of safety, and illegality never appear in the articles studied.

These articles are therefore limited to general descriptions of the project. By focusing on the establishment’s creators and employees, they marvel at a place that brings nature right into the city. The projects created by this “third space” are the centre of attention. *Le Figaro* describes the place as “ultrabobo” twice, (De Santis 2014; 2017) using a term frequently used by the people I interviewed, but it only does so to explain how this concern vanishes as soon as one enters the establishment, notably because of the collaborative activities on offer. However, observations and interviews show that, despite the project’s intention to remain open to the community and its goal of diversity, this place nonetheless recreates internal social hierarchies, mostly targets customers from outside of the community (and even tourists through social media), and indeed contributes to the gentrification process (Bergeron et Jolivet 2020). The neighbourhood is particularly multicultural, with immigrants composing 27% of the population and even 30% when only considering the area east of the Boulevard Barbès/Ornano—compared to 23.4% for the arrondissement and 20.4% for Paris.[[11]](#footnote-11) And yet most of the clientele is white, despite the neighbourhood being home to a considerable amount of North African and sub-Saharan African immigrants (Pinçon et Pinçon-Charlot 2008). The values and representations conveyed by this place, which figure heavily in the articles, perfectly correspond with what the gentrifiers want, something that champions social and cultural diversity (Tissot 2015). Nonetheless, media coverage is limited to *La REcyclerie*’s direct stakeholders, adopting a promotional tone without really addressing the underlying issue of social relationships or even asking customers how they feel about the place. This is not the case for the media coverage of the other restaurant, which largely focuses on the topic of social relationships and the upheaval that the opening of such an establishment can create in what is still a relatively working-class neighbourhood.[[12]](#footnote-12)

B/ The Brasserie Barbès: Social Relationships as the Media Focus of a “Trendy” Restaurant

The restaurant opened because the City of Paris chose it over a KFC, signifying a desire to “upgrade” the neighbourhood (Cassely 2015). It replaced a former discount clothing and fabric store, one of the neighbourhood’s main specialties, that burned down in 2011. It just so happens that this was once the site of a brasserie in the 1950s, a story that the new brasserie’s creators use to portray it as a “return to its roots.” The brasserie is located at the intersection of the Boulevards Barbès and de la Chapelle. It sits opposite the well-known discount store Tati (now closed), near the Barbès-Rochechouart métro station and surrounded by fast food places and phone stores. It is fronted by an enclosed patio with 1.5-meter-high glass panels, clearly separating it from the street. Thick velvet drapes are drawn over each door and kept closed in the winter, highlighting the difference at work when one enters. The place is calm and contrasts considerably with the hubbub of the street. The menu, which can be viewed on the brasserie’s website, offers slightly updated traditional dishes. Without being perfectly adapted for the neighbourhood, where it is still possible to have an espresso at the counter for less than 1€, the prices are not exorbitant for this type of restaurant.[[13]](#footnote-13) Here, the servers and bartenders are in uniform. This is not the laid-back atmosphere of *La REcyclerie*, with its part-time staff of students. These are professional restaurant workers. There is also a distinct difference between the people “outside” and those “inside,” although the latter are not only white. The style of clothing observed is classic but distinguished, with most men wearing suits. The flow of people passing by the brasserie is extremely busy, most likely following the rhythm of the nearby métro station and the only partially obeyed traffic lights. The flow of people and vehicles creates a deafening cacophony of cars, sirens, and honking horns for passers-by. Street vendors can be found on the sidewalk, selling anything from drinks and popcorn to chestnuts, corn, and even packs of cigarettes from shopping carts. Discussions between these vendors and passers-by imply that their presence and the conversations in which they engage serve a social purpose, with the negotiation of prices acting as a pretext for starting a conversation in an atmosphere of relative acquaintanceship or *coveillance*, “looking out for each other” (Simon 1997). This concept implies a form of light social monitoring within the context of acquaintanceship, which keeps the public space pacified and makes it possible to quickly resolve any eventual conflicts. While the space is primarily frequented by men, women are also present but do not tend to linger there.

Media coverage of the brasserie was very different from that of the other establishment, echoing the academic studies analyzing the gentrification of the La Chapelle neighbourhood (Goreau-Ponceaud 2018). The titles of the articles often refer to the notion of gentrification and rarely do so without relatively harsh criticism, as I mentioned. My textual analysis shows social relationships of class to be omnipresent in the articles about the brasserie (26.4%). They primarily refer to the local specificities of this multicultural neighbourhood (40.8% of the words used). When the neighbourhood is concerned, its history and what it represents is discussed, notably its internationally-known landmark Tati (Lallement 2005). The working-class atmosphere in the street is also noted. Gentrification and the social relationships of class are subsequently referred to often in media coverage of the Brasserie Barbès, not only through direct reference to the phenomenon of gentrification but also through the various subjects connected to it. This includes mention of symbolic social groups like the bourgeois, bobos, and intellectual professionals as opposed to the poor, the unsteadily employed, and manual workers, as well as discussion of the issue of segregation or price hikes. The issue of ethnicity and race figures here (3.7% of the words used)—diversity, African, North African, Muslim, immigration, and so on. However, the connection to gentrification is firstly an observation involving the social relationship of class, echoing other studies (Fallon 2021). The particularities of the project are also described (16.4% of the words used), notably referring to the brasserie’s offering, its decor, and the dishes served there. The representations and values conveyed by the place (8% of the words used) evoke novelty as well as the chic and trendy—or pretentious—atmosphere of this new restaurant. However, this is notably the result of the sections in which the articles are published, as those printed in the “Going Out” and “Society” sections do not provide the same type of analysis, with descriptive words being employed according to whether the brasserie is praised or criticized. The targeted clientele is often referred to through “symbolic figures,” such as hipsters with facial hair wearing plaid shirts and Stan Smiths.

The issue of social relationships is covered in most of the articles. Jean-Laurent Cassely, in his article published on Slate.fr provides an analysis loaded with academic references to gentrification, including Clerval, Atkinson, and Zukin, among others. The division between the journalists who present the opening in a positive light and those who bemoan it echoes the paradoxes raised by researchers in the social sciences studying the phenomena surrounding gentrification. These include those who create places, those who benefit from such openings, those eagerly awaiting change, those who fear being excluded from the neighbourhood, and so on. Furthermore, it is possible to see the diverging views of the various people involved in this, be they residents, business owners, or customers, among others. When French journalists recognize the phenomena surrounding gentrification, they treat the issue much like their American counterparts (Rucks-Ahidiana 2018), but this is not the case for the topic of the social relationships of race, which are unheard of in France (Blum & Guérin-Pace cited by Fallon 2021). More specifically, social relations of race have not been treated through the lens of gentrification in French academic studies. While this chapter touches on a few ways of thinking about race relations, the analysis is too succinct to explore it further than existing academic studies on the topic have done. This is notably due to the fact that race is conceived as a stable trait in this chapter, with the racialization of individuals being determined by the position of the researcher, the journalist, or public statistics—as opposed to a fluid trait (Fallon 2021), which favours the categories of the actors involved by relying on how they racialize themselves. The articles thus refer to the Goutte d’Or as a “land of immigration” with the presence of North African and later sub-Saharan African populations and one that is also closely linked to the particularities of the local business network (Chabrol 2014). *Slate.fr* mentions the “disconnection between the affluent white clientele inside and the local immigrants excluded from the festivities, if not by the bouncer, then by the prices or at least the overriding atmosphere.” *Les Inrockuptibles* points out a similar division in the following extract: “inside are the predominantly white professionals. Outside is the diverse crowd of one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Paris.” (Camu 2015) Apart from a few quick observations, social relationships of race do not figure much here but create an important connection to the social relationships of class. These two extracts are also noteworthy because they racialize white people, who are less used to thinking of themselves in racial terms (Jounin 2014).

The identity of Barbès, a symbolic working-class—and immigrant—neighbourhood, seems threatened by this new restaurant, revealing what journalists see as large-scale phenomena taking place throughout the city and enacting lasting change. Elements related to insecurity and illegality (4.6% of the words used) flag local specificities, such as cigarette trafficking, illegal curbside selling, drugs, police presence, and so on. These elements contribute to Barbès’s reputation and strongly contrast with the practices of the brasserie’s targeted clientele.

Cassely explains that the “classic scenario of a progressive, step-by-step gentrification is not being respected,” criticizing the speed of the process rather than the appropriation of the neighbourhood. This concept of steps or stages of gentrification is commonly accepted in gentrification studies and might refer to academic work Bidou-Zachariasen et Poltorak's (2008). The arrival of this establishment was too abrupt to go unnoticed in a neighbourhood that has already seen substantial changes in its social composition since the 1990s-2000s, despite the efforts of local authorities to maintain public housing (Bacqué et Fijalkow 2006).

C/ Two Registers of Analysis for Two Stages in the Gentrification Process?

Both projects are based on different concepts and likely attract customers from different parts of the social space. While *La REcyclerie* probably attracts what Bourdieu refers to as the “new petite bourgeoisie” (Bourdieu 1979), whose high, left-leaning position in the social space is mostly due to considerable cultural capital, the Brasserie Barbès probably targets more executives and those in the liberal professions, whose high, right-leaning position in the social space is more due to considerable economic capital. This clientele, however, seems to be the one referred to as the “bobos,” a categorization upon which research has cast some doubt (Authier et al. 2018) but one to which the systematic reference in everyday discourse and by the press leaves one feeling that a more precise definition is needed than from David Brooks’s (Brooks 2004)[[14]](#footnote-14). Corbillé offers the following definition:

A social group that thus occupies a relatively high position in the social hierarchy, endowed with a certain amount of economic capital, albeit changing, and a solid cultural and social capital connected to family origins, studies, and professional practices (p. 96, 2013).

These individuals usually consider cultural capital to be more important than economic capital. In addition to having contrasting values, this is one major way in which they differ from the traditional bourgeoisie. Since endowment with different types of capital leads to different tastes and ways of socializing (Bourdieu 1979), what each place offers can therefore target people occupying relatively distant positions in the social space. Here, this involves people positioned higher up but whose economic or cultural capital will vary and generate distinct strategies. The menus can be seen as reflecting these strategies, with different dishes and equally different prices. However, whereas the dishes offer prices that differ significantly, there is generally little difference regarding the prices of drinks.

Observations and interviews show differences in the clientele (Brizard et Triol 2020; Bergeron et Jolivet 2020), and interviewees mentioned different representations of these places. One of the interviewees offered to meet me there, going on to explain that he was joking. When I returned to the subject in the interview, he gave the following explanation:

They, like, put a large window to protect people. … You come, you set up shop, you ask prices that are… four or five times the price in the neighbourhood while openly not being intended for the locals. And then you add… a large window to show… like, the limit not to cross. Knowing that that gives off a kind… a kind… a feeling of… of what, of a zoo … There’s also another place that opened there… I don’t think the intention is the same, and then over there, the coffee is 1€, or 75 cents, so if you like, there’s voluntarily the thought to say “O.K. we’re bobos, but look it’s op… it’s accessible and all.” *About La REcyclerie.* Yeah, it’s a little like the Myrha, the approach isn’t the same, it’s a little… … O.K., it’s not exactly aimed at… at the people who are normally in the neighbourhood, it could eventually be aimed at a new type of population… But I mean, at least, it’s accessible, there aren’t prohibitive prices, there’s… what’s prohibitive is maybe… the state of mind, the culture that goes with it, I don’t know…

The interviewee, Anwar, 28 years old, came to the neighbourhood in 2015 and bought an apartment thanks to financial help from his parents. His job as a researcher in social sciences means that he is particularly aware of what is at stake in this area. He points out both the contradictions he has noticed in the new establishments opening up and the major difference between the brasserie and these other places.

Despite the differences he mentions not lining up with my observations about the prices of drinks, the way these spaces are laid out is certainly enough to create symbolic boundaries. Other interviewees mentioned the brasserie, showing the impact of these new places on the locals’ daily lives and their spontaneous comparisons between these establishments.

The discourse these establishments generates highlights the gentrifiers’ contradictions, including the injunction to create diversity, the desire to contribute to changing the neighbourhood or not, and embarrassment at the idea of causing former populations “to flee.” Regardless of whether or not one is a customer, these places rarely go unnoticed by residents of the neighbourhood. My interviews covered issues also mentioned in the press articles about these places. The journalist for *Les Inrockuptibles* described the Brasserie Barbès in the following way: “with its protective glass panel, the place feels like a giant aquarium for people from a good background who have come to observe the indigenous and exciting flora.” (Camu 2015). In addition to Anwar, Matthieu also mentioned the glass panel in the following extract:

I find that it’s… this difference between these two worlds has materialized even more … because you have these large… you have these large things in glass to delineate the outdoor seating and… but that go really high, so what I mean is that for… I don’t know why they did that, but you really have… the… the big bobos who are behind it, so you feel like you’re in a zoo with the big bobos behind their thing, and opposite there are the… the guys selling… Marlboros on the street. *Matthieu, jobseeker (business school graduate), 28 years old, homeowner, arrived in 2015.*

The term “zoo” was used in the articles and by these interviewees, who perhaps borrowed it from the articles they read. At *La REcyclerie*, *Libération* pointed out its 1€ coffee, more affordable for people with an unsteady income, and Anwar compared it with another restaurant that had opened nearby and had what he saw as a similar project.

With or without considering gradual gentrification, one can argue that only commercial gentrification was targeted in the articles I analyzed, while a study of real estate prices and population statistics show changes in the populations living there over quite a few years now. The article in *Libération* nonetheless mentioned real estate prices increasing from 5,160€ to 6,200€ between 2010 and 2015 (*Libération* 2015) or 20% in five years. The journalists for *Les Inrockuptibles* and *20 Minutes* noted substantial changes in the Goutte d’Or throughout the 2000s, including redeveloped buildings, the creation of new social housing sites, and the arrival of new, more well-off populations (Camu 2015; Oihana 2014).

Even though both projects are rather different, as conveyed in their media coverage, the negative elements openly denounced in the case of the Brasserie and briefly mentioned in that of *La REcyclerie* indeed demonstrate that the gentrification process is under way.

1. Conclusion

The approach I have taken here complements those adopted by the researchers who have studied media coverage of gentrification (Brown-Saracino et Rumpf 2011). Rather than focusing on what journalists have deemed gentrification *per se*, I conducted a field study by characterizing what seemed to stem from the phenomena of gentrification—in the academic sense of the word, meaning the replacement of affordable shops with new forms of high-end businesses (Sakızlıoğlu et Lees 2020)—in order to examine the media coverage of this using a qualitative approach. The results are rather clear. The media and researchers do not necessarily agree on what constitutes gentrification. In my view, it is possible to speak of gentrification when there is a substantial change in the social relationships of a space that benefits a new dominant group to the detriment of a group less well situated in the social space.

These two examples of commercial gentrification undoubtedly offer very different projects, and the media coverage partly reflects this. My analysis of the press articles indeed shows that there is a strong contrast in the media stories. Depending on the publications, the sections in which the articles appeared, and especially the tone of each article, the different projects, the representations and values conveyed, and the social relationships of race and class are more or less present in the texts. *La REcyclerie* has essentially been viewed through the lens of its alternative project. By transforming an urban wasteland—the former Ornano railway station—into a place focusing on ecology, recycling, and urban agriculture, the project leaders provide nature-deprived Parisians with an oasis. Any fears of the social division that such a place might create are barely mentioned. Conversely, the Brasserie Barbès has been presented as the admiral ship of gentrification in xviiith arrondissement, with comments oscillating between denunciation of the phenomenon and praise for a project that seeks to normalize the notorious Barbès neighbourhood.

Nonetheless, in the articles I have presented that directly mention gentrification, the visible side of this phenomenon is what is covered through the businesses symbolizing this. This is only done when the business in question “skips over” certain stages in this process. While commercial gentrification is unquestionably one aspect of the phenomenon of urban change, it conceals other types of less visible changes that can be just as profound, some of which are mentioned in a few of the articles.

When journalists do observe the phenomenon, their analysis seems to follow in the same direction as existing studies, offering contrasting views of the potential benefits and risks of gentrification (Brown-Saracino et Rumpf 2011). Similarly, while the issue of race is present on a superficial level through what the articles more or less praise as the image of a multicultural neighbourhood, the issue of the social relationships of race and class are rarely addressed directly, even though they appear obvious to an attentive observer. And yet while there are major stakes at play in the studies devoted to gentrification (Rucks-Ahidiana 2018; Hwang et Sampson 2014), their absence in the press articles undoubtedly reveals the place of the social relationship of race in a French context (Clerval 2014; Palomares 2013).

Thus, even though the media does not make gentrification and its consequences equally visible in its coverage of both restaurants and without wanting to categorically denounce both commercial spaces as producing exclusion, it is possible to ask if both places have similar effects despite their different concepts.

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1. Translated from the French by Angela Krieger [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tati was a famous discount department store that closed in 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Mostly conducted through in-depth interviews with inhabitants and observations. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. They were third-year undergraduate students (*licence* level) at the Université Paris Sciences et Lettres, some of whose data and conclusions might be used here. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Given the qualitative approach and based on the different types of materials, the limited number of articles covered only required the use of an online tool (Lexicool: text analyzer and word counter) and a spreadsheet. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Detailed tables are available upon request. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Jean-Pierre Bozo, President of 20 Minutes France was auditioned by the French Senate in 2007: https://www.senat.fr/rap/r07-013/r07-0133.html [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Le Monde* is the most widely read French daily, considered to be the benchmark for the general press. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [Dalloz](https://www.dalloz.fr/documentation/Document?id=DZ%2FOASIS%2F000937) provides the following definition: “a semi-public company is a legal entity under private law, constituted as a public limited company under commercial law with the particularity of having capital owned by both public and private shareholders”. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The article and reporting are available through [this link](https://www.francebleu.fr/emissions/tour-d-ile-de-france-en-40-jours-baladeur-en-direct/107-1/etape-5-la-recyclerie-paris-18eme). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The figures are from a census conducted by the INSEE for the year 2013. The “neighbourhood” has been divided into IRIS (INSEE category of approximately 2,000 inhabitants) immediately located near the Boulevard Barbès/Ornano. This concerns the following IRIS: Clignancourt 1, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, and 26 and Goutte d’Or 2 and 3. For the eastern area, only IRIS Clignancourt 17, 18, 19, 20, and 26 and Goutte d’Or 2 and 3 have been kept. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The following figures illustrate this: employees and manual workers represent 21.2% of the neighbourhood’s inhabitants (23.7% for the eastern part of the boulevard) compared to 19.1% of the arrondissement and 15.1% of Paris in 2013 (source INSEE, census). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Despite changes to the menu, the prices themselves have not changed much since it opened. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Whereas it was invented and popularized in 2000 by an American author, the term has fallen into disuse in English speaking countries, while thriving in France. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)