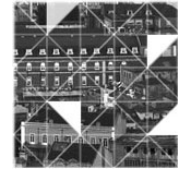

CIDADES, Comunidades e Territórios



On People In Changing Neighborhoods.

Gentrification and Social Mix: Boundaries and Resistance.

A comparative ethnography of two historic neighborhoods in Milan (Italy) and Brooklyn (New York, USA)

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the study of urban transformations in two historic, inner city neighborhoods: Paolo Sarpi Street, the so-called “Milan Chinatown” in Italy, and Park Slope, whose history reflects the waves of immigrants who helped create Brooklyn's character in New York City. These cases embody two unique urban environments undergoing several processes of gentrification since the 1970s. The Milan Chinatown is represented by a handful of streets, the global flow of Chinese goods and the daily routines of elderly people and families. The complexity of the “Sarpi Question” is precisely determined by the discussion of social dimensions, space and ethno-racial, economic and political, all at once. Park Slope is distinguished for being the largest landmark district in Brooklyn, and enjoys quiet, tree-lined streets with wide architectural variety. Progressive yuppies and establishment lesbians have long ruled the classy section of the Slope, in particular the named streets between 7th Avenue and Prospect Park. These days the action is happening all along 5th Avenue and in the so-called “South End” of the Slope. Given this background, the discussion begins with a comparative analysis, on the one hand, of the deepening of the causes which led to the break of an apparent balance in the practices of local cohabitation of the Milan's Chinese District. On the other hand, the New York case study aims to address the issue of neighborhood changes and renewal through a specific interpretation key: a changing neighborhood as a place of symbolic elaboration of socio-cultural boundaries. Through a wide ethnographic empirical demonstration², this contribution mobilizes a set of ideas concerning the academic and political debates surrounding the gentrification and social mix of the contemporary city.

Keywords: Gentrification; Social Mix; Socio-Cultural Boundaries; Urban Conflicts; Ethnography; Milan; Brooklyn.

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² See the appendix for the methodology.

Introduction

Given the recent debate in urban studies with different approaches and explanations of gentrification between the supporters of culture and individual agencies on the one hand, and the capital and class defendants on the other, one is prompted to analyze what happens in a social mix of middle and upper classes in popular neighborhoods in transition. Yet even if we pursue this critique of urban renewal following the cultural approach – taking into account the theories of Bourdieu (1984), Jager (1986), Hamnett (1992), and Ley (1996) – we are still left with a fundamental unanswered question: what happens to people who live in a changing neighborhood? In fact, it is precisely because cohabitation in a socially mixed neighborhood is a contested cultural terrain that it promises new insight in the socio-spatial³ perspective. In this respect, the cultural turn in urban studies has illuminated the path to a “new urban sociology” that joins political economy and cultural analysis (Zukin, 1982, 1995, 2010).

This paper investigates the relationship between the gentrification process, political economy and the social production of meaning by analyzing how people interact in two changing neighborhoods in Milan and New York. Milan and New York offer valuable reflections into this process. The two cities are a paradigm for a “transition zone,” where new neighborhood communities have been created after the disinvestment of factories and laboratories⁴.

This process has led to a (re)combination and a (re)novation of buildings and residents in a new cultural and creative environment. The two case studies share the same history in terms of neighborhoods with impoverished heritages which have followed different trajectories during the path to gentrification. In Milan, the process of urban renewal was driven by the local government that forced the long term ethnic entrepreneurs and lower class residents out of the city center. Conversely, in New York we are witnessing the upper-middle class transformation of a neighborhood through the establishment of a group of liberal progressive people since the end of the 1960s, followed by the interested actions of traders and real estate developers.

In the analyses of Milan and New York, however, one prevalent factor emerges, and that is the issue of “control of public space.” The political decision to persecute the Chinese dealers in Milan reflects also a problem of perception rather than a concrete question of cohabitation. In contrast, the lively progressive street life that forms an important part of the New York case is possible because the kinds of expected cross-class interactions that pop up in a global city neighborhood – where very settled structures and boundaries and role definitions have been changed – are constantly in flux.

In this context, my interest was not only focused on how people draw boundaries in defining what they call their neighborhood. Here the tension between residents or users is expressed in terms of “people who are like me” as opposed to “people who are not like me,” in terms of boundaries between different social groups. Most importantly, these cases demonstrate that the problem of cohabitation in a socially mixed neighborhood is a problem of re-presentation and perception, which is essentially political.

The final remarks of this paper, therefore, reflect and search for a way to conceptualize how the process of gentrification can have different results, in respect to different preconditions under which it occurs, according to local/contextual variations.

³ Mark Gottdiener (1985, 1997), with Ray Hutchison (2006), has been one of the leading proponents of introducing the importance of symbolic processes within a political economic framework to the study of urban sociology.

⁴ The concept of “transition zone” here is not referring to the Burgess’s ecological model (1925) of the internal structure of the city. Current perspectives on neighborhood change and gentrification challenge me to consider a transition zone the urban space which is literally experiencing the transition during the gentrification process, when there is a mixing of population with different classes and different lifestyles.

1. A Different Cultural Claim

Theoretical perspectives on Gentrification

Structural changes of post-industrial cities – especially New York, which shifted from an industrial to a corporate⁵ city – affected the ability of classes and races to successfully sell their labor (the loss of blue collar and semi-skilled white collar jobs) while at the same time sustained the growth of professional and managerial professions. After years of white flight and urban abandonment, the term gentrification came into usage in the mid-1960s when more affluent people began “revitalizing” a smattering of relatively low-income neighborhoods.

But the so-called urban revival really took off as part of the wretched excess of the 1980s. Even those who were part of the trend professed contempt for yuppies exposing brick walls, eating quiche and drinking at “fern bars” in far-flung parts of Manhattan and in Brooklyn. The trend abated a bit after the stock market collapse of the late '80s but roared back as Wall Street and the overall city economy rebounded in the late 1990s. In prosperous times, more people need housing and are able to pay more for it. But, says Peter Marcuse, a professor of urban planning at Columbia University, “a great economy is not great for everyone.” The newcomers bid up rents and vacant lots become sites for new buildings because, says activist Zack Winestone, “development feeds on development.”⁶

The process of gentrification usually refers to the renewal of run-down housing (rather than industrial) typically in working-class neighborhoods by newcomers who, by rejecting the cultural homogeneity of the suburbs, were interested not only in cheap houses or rents, but also in looking for a breath of “authentic diversity” and proximity to the city center (Caulfield, 1994; Ley, 1994; Smith, 1987). Although city planners and housing experts quibble over a precise definition, people who have recently lived in major cities know gentrification when they see it. To be very simple, this process means that “as more outsiders move in, rents and property values creep up, and longtime residents are squeezed out” (Carlson, 2003: 22).

Meanwhile, established businesses close and new ones open up — coffee shops, cafés and specialty stores catering to the neighborhood’s wealthier new residents. In fact, class narratives that emerge within these transformations of urban space have not only a material content, not only to do with economics but also with a certain kind of look, style, in sum with the symbolic sphere. It is this “synergy of capital investment and cultural meaning” (Zukin, 1996: 45) through which urban spaces are produced. Indeed, changes in the social and physical fabric of cities are reflected, and sometimes presaged, in changes at the level of representation and meaning.

Theories traditionally explain the phenomenon of gentrification as a result of a real estate mechanism – rent gap (Clark, 1998; Smith, 1979), or changed social attitudes (Ley, 1987), combined with individual behavior (Hamnett, 1991). The alternative approach, which will follow in the next pages, is that while gentrification clearly involves changes in the structure of the land and property market⁷, it can be better seen “as a product of the shift from an industrial to a postindustrial society in particular cities and associated changes in class structure, particularly the growth of an expanded middle class and their social relations, cultural tastes, and consumption practices (Hamnett, 2000: 333).

In drawing such a connection, the discussion focuses on the material as well as the symbolic production of space, which come together to secure the ground for a “cultural claim” on gentrification literature. As Tonkiss (2005:

⁵ See the “corporatization of gentrification” paradigm in section 3.2.

⁶ Source: Newspaper article by Rebecca Webber, “The New Gentrification”, *Gotham Gazette*, 11-12-2000.

⁷ The production-side theory of urban gentrification derives from the work of human geographer Neil Smith (1986-1987) explaining gentrification as an economic process consequent to the fluctuating relationships among capital investments and the production of urban space. Smith’s explanation for gentrification is focused on the interrelation between capital and the institutions of the capitalist land market (i.e. developers, real-estate agents, mortgage lenders).

82) clearly points out, “Urban meanings [are] the part of the fabric from which buildings, spaces and images of the city are made and remade.”

Finally, this paper is an initial attempt to widen the empirical base around gentrification and social mixing. Accordingly to Lees (2008), I will do a systematic comparison of two gentrifying neighborhoods, analyzing both gentrifiers and non-gentrifiers living in the same neighborhoods, at different stages of gentrification. In this ethnographic report I will look at how social mix – both in terms of class and ethnic diversity – is experienced and negotiated by the different social groups who live in changing neighborhoods taking into account recent incomers, long-term residents, business owners, as well as local community institutions, to understand what the nature of this co-existence may be.

2. Neighborhoods Profiles

2.1. Paolo Sarpi Street: Milan’s Chinatown

The 140,000 Chinese in Italy⁸ are concentrated in Milan, Prato (a leather-working city near Florence), Rome, and in the surrounding area of Naples. Most of them came from Wenzhou, in the eastern province of Zhejiang. The Chinese living in Milan have for some time now been regarded and described as a closed, silent, introverted and isolated community. The area of reference with the most ethnic connotations in this sense is Paolo Sarpi Street, the so-called Milan’s Chinatown.

Accordingly to Novak (2002), the proximity of the Sempione Park to the historical center of Milan and the fair zone as well as post-war reconstruction were the main causes that led to the neighborhood’s first wave of gentrification during the late 1970s, early 1980s, where both lower and middle classes coexisted. (The proximity of Sempione Park⁹ is shown on the map in figure 1.

An interesting comparison could be traced to the exact similar process that only a few years before happened in New York City. In fact, at the time of the first gentrification wave, the neighborhood’s population was composed of working class people and immigrant (Chinese) entrepreneurs together with pioneering yuppies and financial managers that would become the protagonists of Milan’s stock market boom during the fabulous 1980s¹⁰.

The area was both residential and productive. In this phase, Chinese people used to live in the “backstage” of the neighborhood, in some secondary streets like Via Rosmini, Via Giordano Bruno, Via Giusti, and Via Aleardi, which are minor transit points, and where housing includes laboratories in courtyards and basements. In addition, markets, handbag stores, and restaurants abounded with the developing of Chinese import-export.

Indeed, the new law on trade simplified the procedure to start new business activities and this, together with a more general crisis of small proximity shops, led to the growth and diversification of Chinese trade activities in Milan.

⁸ Source: Associna October 2011, Association of the Chinese second generation in Italy, available at <http://www.associna.com>.

⁹ Sempione Park is the second largest park in Milan. With its English-style, it owes its name to its position along the line that leads through the Arco della Pace, from the Duomo to the Sempione Pass. The Castello Sforzesco, Arena, Arco della Pace, Triennale and Acquario Civico (some of the city most important sights) stand along the park’s perimeter.

¹⁰ The golden age of Italian finance was between the early 80s and the early 90s, also when the fashion and advertising industry became globally connected. Milan was kind of the center of that world. It was the time when Gianni Versace started to think of himself as *Versace* and Giorgio Armani became *Armani*.

Figure 1. Neighborhood's geographic location in Milan inner city (blue rectangle), and a map of Paolo Sarpi's street (blue line) within the neighborhood (red circle)



Source: Author's elaboration on Municipality of Milan's cartography.

In the past, Bramante Street had never attracted many companies to open businesses because of its unfortunate characteristics of poor passage and visibility, being so pressed between the tram tracks and a narrow two-way street with small sidewalks. Yet the first Chinese wholesalers decided to invest in the 1990s there and in other internal streets in the same neighborhood. Because of the intrinsic characteristics of wholesale trade, these businessmen were more interested in obtaining a strategic position near the expensive and important Paolo Sarpi Street – the hub for retail and service business for the Chinese community in Milan – in a location with lower commercial value rather than having beautiful window exposure, as is the case of larger avenues. This brief background highlights on the one hand the extreme "determination" of the Chinese business system and, on the other hand, it points out how the commercial frame of this urban space came to be heavily transformed.

Nowadays the balance is broken by a constant flow of goods, vehicles, vans, trolleys, boxes, fumes and rubbish. Chaos overwhelms Paolo Sarpi as well as the adjacent thoroughfares. Cohabitation is at risk, wedged between the business needs of the Chinese community and the daily habits of residents – i.e. the Chinese work ethic based on breaking one's back for 16 hours a day – and the new zero tolerance Milanese outlook. Beneath the seeming intolerance, exasperation and exhaustion are all simmering. On both sides, Italians and Chinese have been living side by side now for seventy years without any conflict up to 12 April 2007, the first time ever that three hundred Chinese reacted violently against measures imposed by the public authorities.

"The transformation of the Sarpi neighborhood from a residential and craftsmen's area into an ethnic area, which is characterized by a socially and economically complex structure, is still an on-going process, which often leads to internal conflicts due to social status diversity and different social needs" (Novak, 2002:24).

The Sarpi neighborhood is decreasingly productive because of high rent prices, unavailability of spaces, growing intolerance of the residents, and increasing controls on Chinese trade as well as on road conditions. Indeed, it is rapidly evolving toward something more visible and deep-rooted as well as more stable and complex. It is not a mere place of residence, but a growing place for financial and service exchange, trade, and both national and international relationships. Moreover, the neighborhood is characterized by the "dynamics of village," with relationships among neighbors, trade, meetings, and sharing; at the same time, it is characterized by the "dynamics of global relations," such as the international exchange of goods, information, capital and persons.

Figure 2. The urbanity of Paolo Sarpi's neighborhood

Source: Author's archive.

Currently, the Sarpi neighborhood features a great number of wholesale businesses. Over the years these have generated a range of traffic problems mainly linked to the unloading of goods, as well as issues pertaining to the cohabitation with the local Italian population (an estimated 90 to 95%¹¹). Therefore, as of 17 November 2008, the Municipal Authority of Milan established a limited access zone – the *Zona a Traffico Limitato* (ZTL). As a result, only residents are allowed access and transit, though taxis and motorcycles are exempt from exclusion. To enforce such provisions, the local authorities have erected a network of CCTV cameras to monitor traffic. This first step toward the zoning of the neighborhood was politically interpreted as an attempt to eradicate Chinese wholesalers from the district.

“We have taken these steps because we are convinced and we hope the Chinese will start to emigrate.”

(Riccardo De Corato, Deputy Mayor of Milan and security Councilor, interviewed on December 2008)

“No buses, no taxis, no cars and no trading. Why don't you just build a wall around us?”, reads a banner displayed by traders in the 2008 Christmas season, the first month of controlled traffic flow. Ethnographic research attempts to explain how this result was reached.

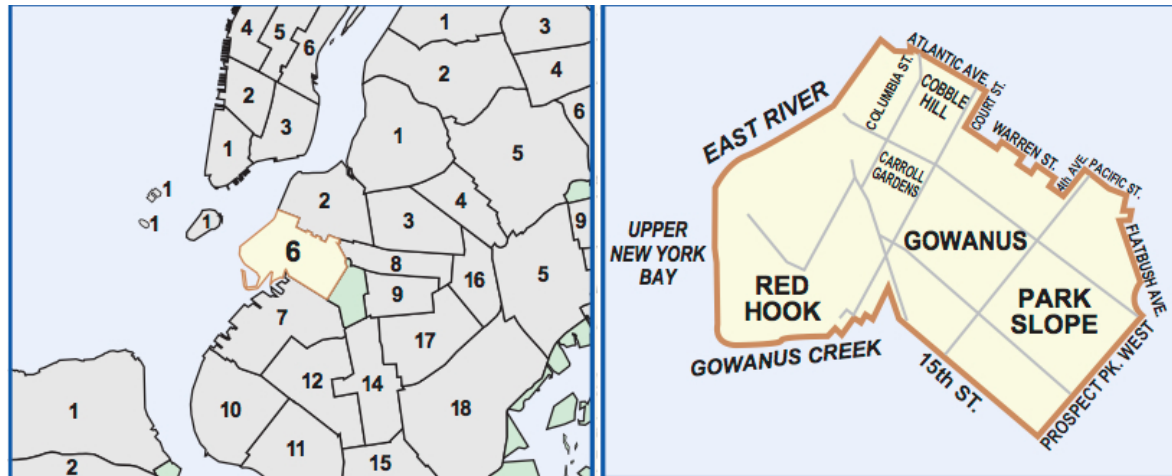
2.2. Brooklyn's Park Slope: a New York City Neighborhood

The setting of the second case study comes from the New York urban scenery and, more specifically, from Park Slope, a neighborhood in southwestern Brooklyn, roughly bounded by Prospect Park West to the east, Fourth

¹¹ Source: Vivisarpi, Association by the neighborhood committee and Associna, Association of the Chinese second generation in Italy.

Avenue to the west, Flatbush Avenue to the north, and 15th Street to the south. (See figure 3 for geographic location)

Figure 3. Geographic location of Park Slope's neighborhood/ community district in New York's borough of Brooklyn



Source: Author's elaboration from official available data.

In the late 1800s Park Slope became a magnet for Brooklyn's well-to-do, a retreat for those who wished to live lavishly as well as in close proximity to Brooklyn's lovely historic landmarks, the green expanse of Prospect Park, and quick commuter routes to Manhattan. But the appeal of today's Park Slope lies in its people as well as its place (Jackson, 2004: 165-171). Within its blocks of beautiful brownstones, Park Slope is home to a diverse and ever-changing community of residents who cherish the neighborhood's unique history and architecture. Magnificent mansions were built during the late 1800s on Prospect Park West from Grand Army Plaza to 1st Street and some of them still exist. After World War II, wealthier Park Slope residents moved to the suburbs and working-class residents moved into North Slope. Some of the luxurious brownstones were turned into rooming houses and later demolished for new apartment buildings. Other buildings were abandoned. Only in the 1960s and 1970s residents began to work to recover the value of these lovely homes; affordable row houses bought at that time are either still being enjoyed by their original buyers or have been sold at great profit, as the neighborhood is once again thriving.

"In the [19]60s New York went... started to go through a huge demographic transition that involved white flight, the arrival of Blacks and Puerto Ricans, and lots of... a lot of tension around the dissolution of white working class neighborhoods. And there was never any overt conflict in Park Slope or the South Slope or, uh, *whadda* now call that "little S". Um, so, as the Whites departed from this part of Brooklyn in the... in the 50s and 60s, partly due to economic restructuring, partly due to the decline of the port, partly due to the intergenerational upward mobility of these families, hum, various kinds of people moved in... to the neighborhood, especially the working class parts of the neighborhood, not... not Black people but mostly Puerto Ricans, and some other... the early... there... there're a bunch of early Ecuadorian immigrants and so forth, hum, too that – uh, that moved in. Well we moved here... I had friends that moved in here in this neighborhood in the 60s; I moved in at... in January of 1983. So I... am getting on 30 years being here. And, you know, Park Slope was one of... it... it was created as an historic district, as one of the very h... first historic districts in New York City and that must have happened in the early 70s... or somewhere in the mid-70s. And the Old House Journal was founded here sometime more or less in the same period, which is kind of a weekly newspaper for, uh, historic preservation and so on. And that's partly because... well there was an uptick of movement... of young professional families into this part of Park Slope at the end of the 60's."

(John, long-term resident, age 65, Professor, interviewed on July 2011 and November 2012)

So, investing in a South Slope home has been a wise choice for many. Moreover, a vocal and supportive lesbian community has also led the gentrification process in Park Slope, and since 1993, the Lesbian History Archives, one of the largest collections of lesbian research materials in the United States, has been housed in the neighborhood. Lesbian communities correlated with the expansion of the women's movement and the attraction of gentrification as 'sweat equity', as well as the strong influence of lesbian social networking power, an interpretation also evident in Rothenberg's work (1995). Indeed, Park Slope is noted for its large number of writers, editors, academics, and lawyers. Some joke that almost everyone in Park Slope is a recent transplant from the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Unlike some other Brooklyn neighborhoods, where most residents are Brooklyn native, Park Slope contains few residents who grew up in the borough¹².

Since its beginnings as "Prospect Hill," Park Slope has been divided into two smaller neighborhoods, North Slope and South Slope. Although real estate prices and immigration have continued to keep these communities separate, the distinction is becoming blurred. The North Slope, for example, adjacent to Grand Army Plaza and the 7th Avenue shopping area, offered the only stores or restaurants in "the Slope" until the 1990s. But nowadays shops and dining areas are opening in South Slope as well. Indeed, the beauty of its landscape and architecture make this neighborhood a very attractive area with historic brownstones sloping down from the magnificent west side of Prospect Park¹³. In fact, one of the priciest areas of Park Slope is where the streets have names and not only numbers, which is the northeast or, being more precise, at the intersection of those named streets with Prospect Park West, the "park block." This area of the neighborhood was known in the 1880s as the Gold Coast and today it is a historic preservation district larger than any other in New York City thanks to its breathtaking Victorian mansions with wraparound center staircases and original wooden details. However, the housing stock of the neighborhood was always class stratified. The lots themselves were different, while going beyond Ninth Street they get decreasingly nice. If at the park blocks there are still brownstones, as we start going down the houses start becoming brick-walled. And they start being basically always built as lower middle class housing, and then the lower down we go on the hill, the lower down we go on the class strata and, just in terms of the housing stock, when we get between Fifth and Fourth Avenues we are already a whole other class fraction away.

Nonetheless, the beginning of the gentrification process in Park Slope was driven by the effort of a specific group of people. Pioneer gentrifiers, who perhaps would never recognize themselves with this kind of "label", were undoubtedly the "boosters" of the changing of Park Slope to a historic site while most Manhattanites still considered it an unacceptable place even to go out to dinner. By organizing, raising money and agitation for preservation, by lobbying bankers to limit redlining, pioneer gentrifiers were very vocal and effective champions of the brownstone revival that spread from Brooklyn to the rest of the country. If preservation constitutes an alternative strategy for the revalorization of the historic heritage of a district (Zukin, 1982), gentrification in Brooklyn began as a grassroots movement led by young and idealistic white college graduates searching for authenticity and life outside the burgeoning suburbs. As Osman (2011) argues, this first stage of gentrification was in a sense idealistic and anti-chic, anti-corporate. All the pioneer gentrifiers had their moral code focused on giving the neighborhood a new life. In fact it seems that the preservationists of Park Slope were never motivated by money or economic interests in real estate. The only house that most of them ever owned was their own Park Slope Brownstone. They were not exactly "rich". They were teachers and nurses, artists and writers, architects and engineers who were able to get a mortgage during the critical problem of red-lining.

During the late 1980s and 90s, its avenues became more and more filled with fancy, overpriced boutiques and the neighborhood would offer up as a prototype of modern urban living for WASPs¹⁴,

¹² For a good discussion of Brooklyn Neighborhoods, see *The Neighborhoods of Brooklyn*, by Kenneth T. Jackson (Editor), 2004.

¹³ Prospect Park is a 585-acre urban oasis located in the heart of Brooklyn, which roughly bounds the neighborhood of Park Slope to the west. The masterpiece of famed landscape architects Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, who also designed Central Park, Prospect Park features the 90-acre Long Meadow, the 60-acre Lake and Brooklyn's only forest. The nation's first urban Audubon Center, the Prospect Park Zoo, and the Celebrate Brooklyn! Performing Arts Festival are just a few of the cultural attractions that make their home at the Park. Interestingly, both neighborhoods, Paolo Sarpi in Milan and Park Slope in Brooklyn are bordered by one of the largest historical parks of their city.

¹⁴ White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) is an informal term, often derogatory or disparaging, for a closed group of high-status Americans mostly of British Protestant ancestry. The term implies this group wields disproportionate financial and social power. Source: Lewis, A. "WASP — From Sociological Concept to Epithet," *Ethnicity*, II, June (1975), pp.153-62.

...beat or hippie-influenced, liberal arts school graduate, spoiled suburban children of the baby-boomer generation (i.e. “Yuppies”), inspired by television and movies, who envisioned Park Slope’s quaint tree-lined streets as a real-life Sesame Street set, perfect to raise children among other like-minded individuals in an urban setting. Those natives still remaining are dismissed by the Yuppie gentrifiers as a breed of “Reverse Redneck”: dopey, uneducated, brusque, greasy ‘Arthur Fonzarelli’ types with thick accents whom are conversely not ‘real New Yorkers,’ such as the Yuppies, but rather regional residents by accident of birth who serve no purpose other than to be Park Slope placeholders until more Yuppies arrive from their cul de sac spawning grounds to claim their rightful brownstones¹⁵.

Nowadays, the pre-gentrification families native to Park Slope have almost completely been either priced out or brought out, to be replaced by outsider newcomers willing to pay multiple times the amount of rent for the same apartments simply for “the right to say” they live in Park Slope. The writer Amy Sohn, talking about the life of Rebecca, one of the characters of her last novel set in Park Slope (where the author lives), perfectly describes the gap between the northwest part of the neighborhood (where the historic district is located and which experienced the first wave of gentrification) and its southeast area (with a more modest housing stock and commercial spaces, the last frontier of this changing):

The neighborhood itself was testament to this. On Rebecca’s block alone, Carroll Street between Eight Avenue and Prospect Park West, half a dozen buildings had undergone facade renovations in the past years. Rebecca could not even push Abbie down Seventh Avenue to Connecticut Muffin to grab a French roast without bracing for the roar of jackhammers. Down on Fourth Avenue, a gritty strip of tire repair shops, gas stations, and glass cutters, new modernist buildings featuring million-dollar lofts were going up each day¹⁶.

All of those discourses and representations on Park Slope’s reputation helped me to delineate the character of the neighborhood and to focus on its different social groups and their unique internal codes and set of symbolisms:

Consumption was inconspicuous in Park Slope in a way it wasn’t on the Upper East Side. The women with rich husbands never called them hedge fund managers or investment bankers. They just said, “He’s in finance.” If you were rich in Park Slope, you tried to hide it. But there were giveaways, and these giveaways got under Karen’s skin: the mothers who mentioned that their kids went to Saint Ann’s; the two-thousand-dollar Mulberry handbags that some women took to the playground; the Southampton Beach stickers on the Subaru Foresters parked on the streets. When she got to the intersection of Prospect Park West and Carroll, she crossed to the park side, walked two blocks south to Garfield Place and sat on a green bench facing a strip of mansions. The air was thick and sticky and passersby wore looks of glazed weariness, eager to get into the comfort of air-conditioned apartments. Babies lolled in strollers, red-faced, while East Indian nannies patted them with hankies¹⁷.

The urban gentry group, or more specifically the Park Slope’s super gentrifiers, may be observed lolling around with yoga mats or oversized luxury baby strollers (mainly branded by MacLaren), or they may be seen in Converse Chuck Taylor sneakers flitting by on skateboards or the Italian Piaggio-Vespa scooters. Behind their dark-framed glasses, hiking/ rafting sport sandals and nasal tone, Park Slope Yuppies have a reputation for displaying acute leisurely lifestyles, like brand-name or tailored clothing, exorbitant expensive automobiles or for buying their groceries in specific high-priced organic gourmet markets. The same feeling was openly expressed by Stephanie, a long-term resident who told me more about the neighborhood’s change:

“It just feels like it’s overrun with like families and children now. Then over time this neighborhood has become almost a caricature of affluent, Yuppie-hood with entitled parents and kids wearing punk t-shirts. It’s ridiculous. You can’t blame the children, they’re just children. It’s the parents, or some of them, are just jerks. (...) It’s just the obnoxious parents, that’s who. And it’s just this sense of – I’m sure of course, there’s all those stories of the food coop, which I’ll never go near, but some people do have that sense of community to be doing that. But, for me, it just feels – it’s just not my thing. I’m not crunchy in that way. I don’t need to eat organic food, I’ll eat anything. I’m not a coffee snob; I’ll buy a Dunkin’ Donut coffee

¹⁵ Source: ‘Urban Dictionary’ website, on ‘Park Slope’, available at <http://www.urbandictionary.com>, accessed on 27 March 2012.

¹⁶ Source: Amy Sohn (2009), *Prospect Park West: A Novel*, New York: Simon & Schuster.

¹⁷ See Amy Sohn (Sohn 2009), (op. cit.).

sometimes. Shoot me, I don't care. Some people feel like they have to have the best of the best all the time. I'm like: "Give me a break! I'm from Brooklyn, We're not fancy!"

(Stephanie, age 53, lesbian, long-term resident, Graphic Designer, interviewed on May 2012).

As Zukin remarks, the neighborhood of Park Slope created a model of aesthetically interesting, inner-city living, "(...) that by the 1980s would attract and retain a post-postwar middle class of professionals, artists, and intellectuals – a 'creative class' before the name was invented.¹⁸ These significant changes nonetheless left a gap between celebrating the authenticity of historic houses and acknowledging the authenticity of the lower-class families who lived in them" (2010: 12).

Figure 4. The urbanity of Park Slope's neighborhood



Source: Author's archive.

3. The Preconditions for Gentrification Were There

3.1. Addressing Urban Conflicts, Social Mix and Local Politics in Milan

The urban regeneration process in the Paolo Sarpi neighborhood provides the macro level context to study local policies about urban government and social mixes. An urban crisis may be considered a pivotal event, one able

¹⁸ Indeed, it is important to underline how Milan and New York were globally associated through the fashion and advertising industry during the 1980s, a link that left a fundamental footprint in the culture and lifestyle of both cities, a connection that has been underestimated, which needs further research.

to put a problem into focus thanks to its evocative power. The problem may previously have been hidden, ignored, underestimated or neglected and is now part of the political agenda. The main issue within the problem appears to be one of perception rather than a concrete question of cohabitation. The issue of the Chinese becoming rooted and strengthening their visibility and dominating role in the area produces a defensive reaction on the part of the local population. As well as fearing that their neighborhood may “disappear,” the local Milanese feel that their real estate interests may suffer and their lifestyle may be under threat (Novak, 2002). But the great wall of Chinese discontent is also made up of the feelings of Italian citizens who feel betrayed and mocked by the Municipality who, according to them, “has not been able to govern through the changes.” Paolo Sarpi is a social workshop in the heart of Milan, a micro-history allowing for a range of analytical frames, the first among which helps to understand the effects of the global economy, as Daniele Cologna explains, “at present Chinese wholesalers are responding to the demand for goods on the part of street sellers, markets and immigrants in general. They have located their businesses where there is greater traffic, i.e. where it is most convenient for them. Once again, we are before a global challenge, that of creating a commercial platform for the distribution of goods originating from China”¹⁹.

Most importantly, this case demonstrates that the problem of cohabitation in a socially mixed neighborhood is a problem of representation, which is essentially political.

Lanzani (2003) also highlights the far from marginal role that immigration plays within contexts of domestic transformation. If we dwell mainly on generative processes, on evolutionary patterns and on the relations created within the geographical contexts hosting them, perhaps we are able to single out some rationale; I mean a range of evolutionary processes which appear more evident in their patterns during immigrants’ settling process which do however impact the city and the contemporary area. We can, in other words, think of immigration as an extremely sensitive tool able to identify emerging spatiality and new protocols in spatial organization rationale, singling out deep points of contact with some recent investigations on transformation taking place in the European arena.

Following the socio-spatial perspective, my approach analyzes the real estate development as the “leading edge of changes in the metropolitan region,” considering more specifically that “politics to be highly linked to the concern of property development” (Gottdiener and Hutchison, 2006: 77).

Whether we consider city or suburban governments, the central feature of the local state – its ability to acquire wealth and to channel social resources – has meant that organized interests must compete with one another for control. This struggle for control over urban and suburban settlement space provides the drama of local politics (Ibidem: 236).

The political process analyzed in the case study of Milan’s Chinatown seems to operate as the “élite theory” of urban politics (Hunter, 1953; Stone, 1989). Moreover, this ethnographic research attempts to study how the mayor and city councilors of Milan made decisions on local political issues including social diversity and urban renewal. In fact, behind the local administration there is a select group of powerful and influential developers, the “Milanese power structure” (Manzo, 2012a: 439), that controls the city development toward its specific interests. However, there is another aspect that affects the question of power and control over urban space in the Milanese Chinatown case study. Residents and dealers organized associations and movements to influence the local government. The concept, developed by Castells on urban social movements, described as “urban-orientated mobilizations that influence structural social change and transform the urban meanings” (1983: 305), can be adapted to this study to explore how communities’ associations (re)present their issues regarding their everyday lives in their neighborhood (Boyte, 1980; Logan and Rabrenovic, 1990).

These observations also suggest that there are many layers of the relationship between the way in which an urban space has been modified and the ways in which it is used. Regarding the Chinese presence in this Milanese neighborhood, these observations also suggest that “cultural habits lead the immigrant to change the uses of existing spaces until they can create their own” (Krase, 1993: 54). The past decade of immigration has already

¹⁹ In “Chinatown, niente trasloco. Gli abitanti presi in giro”, *Corriere della Sera* 11-10-2007.

had a major impact on Italian identity and this can be seen in its streetscapes. This is true not only because of the numbers of newcomers but also because of their visual differences with indigenous Italians. These racial (physical) and ethnic (cultural) differences in their local practices have produced an even greater change in the ‘appearance’ of some of Italy’s well-known urban landscapes (Krase, 2007: 102).

As I will argue in this paper about Italian urban policies, it seems that the Milanese power structure affects the ‘undesirables’ – using the words of Aalbers –, poor groups that are considered problematic and the source of problems and inconvenience for other residents (2011: 1697).

3.2. Addressing Super-Gentrification, Diversity and Boundary-Making in New York

The theoretical framework upon which this case study was built can be summarized into three basic concepts: super-gentrification (Butler and Lees, 2006; Lees, 2000, 2003; Slater, 2003), the diversity approach on the study of global cities (Mollenkopf and Castells, 1991; Vertovec, 2007a) and the boundary-making paradigm (Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Lamont and Thévenot, 2000; Lamont, 1992). In other words, this study deals with the gentrification phenomenon, based accordingly on these three key ideas.

People make sense of their worlds through a simple cognitive mechanism of connection and separation of things by drawing lines of distinction that leave a mark in space. As Simmel analyzes in his *Sociology of Space* (1997), spatial boundaries are formed and reproduced by social action and also influence ways of thinking. This semantic organization of an urban space, or “signification rhythm”, as Barthes (1997) describes, highlights the relationship between physical places and spatial meaning. Moreover, my focus on social boundaries in a changing neighborhood relates to the production of differences among people, both in terms of social and cultural diversity and of division. Making borders in urban space means ‘shaping the meaning of things’, creating sites of encounter and inclusion on one side and lines of division and exclusion on the other. Harvey (1989, 2006) recognizes that those who have the power to command and produce space are therefore able to reproduce and enhance their own power. This power is manifested in the ability to create distance between the high status in-group and low status outsiders and to define the legitimate use of space so as to bring the mechanisms of social control to bear on the ways that space is used. Through appropriation and domination, the powerful differentiate public space. It is within the parameters outlined by these practices that the local lives of ordinary urban dwellers take place. As Lamont and Molnar (2002) emphasize, these potential boundaries can acquire a very peculiar symbolic connotation in the social sphere. They might refer to conceptual distinctions, “vocabularies of motives” (Mills, 1940), “repertoires of evaluation” (Lamont and Thévenot, 2000) and specific cognitive tools used by social actors to classify objects, people, practices, time and space. However, these new social (re)definitions and (re)constructions can entail social conflicts.

The cumulative result of the “corporatization of gentrification” (Smith and DeFilippis, 1999: 650) has contributed to the rise of Park Slope “from one of the elite residential communities of Brooklyn to one of the most desirable neighborhoods in the entire city, a symbol of New York’s (and Brooklyn’s) remarkable economic revival of the late 1990s” (Slater, 2003: 35). The 1990s’ real estate boom in New York City, coupled with the extraordinary salaries that can be made in the city’s corporate world, have led to what Lees (2000) has termed the ‘super-gentrification’ of the Brooklyn neighborhoods where gentrification had matured during the 1980s. Super-gentrification happens in a few select areas of global cities – like New York or London for instance – that have become “the focus of intense investment and conspicuous consumption by a new generation of super-rich ‘financiers’ fed by fortunes from the global finance and corporate service industries. This latest resurgence of gentrification can be distinguished from previous rounds of revitalization and poses important questions about the historical continuity of current manifestations of gentrification with previous generations of neighborhood change” (Lees, 2003: 2487). This process is part of the ongoing renaissance of Brooklyn, in which Lees has outlined the following changes: “(...) gentrifiers in Park Slope today are significantly wealthier than gentrifiers in the past. Sweat equity is not a prominent feature of the process today. Indeed, contemporary gentrifiers have to be wealthier than ever before because average prices for single-family townhouses have doubled since 1997... This rapid appreciation is linked to the dramatically increased value of the New York stock market and the

financial services industry whose profits have (re)lubricated gentrification in New York City” (Lees, 2000: 397-398).

Moreover, in this project I apply the concepts of diversity to investigate how distinct social categories influence and shape the construction of social boundaries within a diverse community that is experiencing gentrification. First, I consider diversity as a concept linking the new conjunctions and interactions of variables that have arisen based partly on patterns of immigration to NY over the past decade in order to examine “the conjunction of ethnicity with a range of other variables when considering the nature of various ‘communities,’ their composition, trajectories (and) interactions” (Vertovec, 2007b: 1025). Here I am referring to what Amin calls anthropology of “local micropolitics of everyday interaction” (2002: 960), related to what Sandercock describes as “daily habits of perhaps quite banal intercultural categories” (Sandercock, 2003: 89). Again, such interactions should be viewed in terms of intersections of multiple variables, not just through the lens of basic and/ or separate ethnic categories. Next, considering the analytic tool that feminist and anti-racist scholars deploy for theorizing identity and oppression, I embrace the intersectionality approach, defined as “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations – as itself a central category of analysis” (McCall, 2005: 1771).

As Foner describes, “the incredible ethnic and racial diversity in New York City and its history of immigration have affected on-the-ground relations and created a mixture and mingling of ethno-racial groups. In the 1990s, when he was in office, former Mayor David Dinkins often referred to the city as a gorgeous mosaic (Foner, 2007: 1009). If ethnic diversity is the expectation in New York, indeed, in describing the vibrant inner-city culture emerging in New York, Kasinitz, Mollenkopf and Waters speak of a “new kind of multiculturalism (...) of hybrids and fluid exchanges across group boundaries” (2008: 16). Moreover, research on intersectionality, the influence of race, class, gender, and sexuality, has explored how multiple categories work simultaneously to shape individual identity and behavior. In fact, as Allen argued about the appeals to diversity in the construction of new tastes for urban neighborhoods and housing, “for adults the urban ambience of diversity is a continual source of stimulation and renewal and a reminder of the cultural relativity of one’s own style of life” (Allen, 1984: 31-32).

There are several excellent studies on gentrification and the relationship between the old residents and the newcomers in gentrifying neighborhoods, as well as on the new middle class desire for diversity and difference. However, there is little evidence on which to base the assumption that gentrification will increase the social cohesion and the social mix of urban neighborhoods. According to Rose (2004: 208), there is an “uneasy cohabitation” to take into account. However, focusing on the intergroup relation during the gentrification process, few have thoroughly explored how race, class, and sexual orientation operate and what roles they play in the gentrification process. Conversely, as Vertovec (2007b) highlights, it is necessary to investigate the conditions and challenges of diversity that will bring to life a wide variety of material and insight with theoretical bearing. These may include contributions toward a better understanding of “new patterns of inequality and prejudice” and “new experiences of space and ‘contact’” (Ibidem: 1045).

4. Neighborhoods Cannot Turn Back the Clock

4.1. Stay Away from Sarpi Street or Fight against City Hall!

As Gottdiener and Hutchinson remark, despite the old saying ‘You can’t fight City Hall’, “many people do just that” (2006: 241). According to Castells (1983), urban social movements are usually directed against the city hall. The target of this movement was, again, the local Milanese government. The Sarpi “question” is made up of a range of contrasting voices, each witnessing constantly clashing interests.

As we prepare to represent the conflict in the Paolo Sarpi setting, we need to make a small detour, introducing a temporary change of scene: from the Chinese community to the Vice-Mayor, from an ethnically diverse neighborhood to the heart of the Municipal Government of Milan. Vice-Mayor De Corato immediately makes me aware of his rhetorical dimension. His approach is an alarmist one. He states that the true issue of Europe and of the entire western world is the Chinese one. Not Romanians or Arabs, but the Chinese – as there are so many: one and a half billion.

“There are many who arrive, who knows where from (?)... Unless they arrive in the containers with the goods, and they bring over all kind of counterfeit stuff from China... Not one original piece. Everything they sell is fake.”

(Riccardo De Corato, interview quote)

The limits imposed by the Municipal Administration made Chinese trade increasingly difficult. The discourse that in a sense blew up in 2008 is connected exactly to this: the fact that all the Chinese wholesalers started to get fined. Therefore Chinese traders began to feel persecuted, and Jianyi (a member of AssoCina²⁰) also confirms that:

“These series of fines and prohibitions came from one day to the next and all the Chinese businessmen found themselves facing difficulties that didn’t use to be there at the start.”

(Jianyi, member of AssoCina, interviewed on November 2008).

The notion of “thresholds of tolerance”, one largely evoked in similar situations, here too reveals its ideological and prejudicial features. This “revenge against minorities” (Smith, 1996: 45), which responds exclusively to issues of public safety and subservience and attempts to hide migration phenomena, proves ineffective at managing the range of social, economic and town-planning meanings that any territorial concentration process entails. The revolt of 2007 is a result of this unease, linked to the fact that sanctions were continually imposed precisely on all those actions and activities that Chinese wholesale trade required.

“Italian dealers, for example... The ones that load and unload dairy products were completely ignored by the police even if they used hand-carts to go around while the Chinese were systematically blocked and fined. When ethnic factors come into play with commercial interests, the risk that is created is very dangerous... explosive!”

(Jianyi, interview quote)

Figure 5. The urban conflict in Paolo Sarpi Street on 12 April 2007



Source: Author’s archive.

²⁰ Associna is a nonprofit Association, formed by and to support second generation Chinese in Italy.

Moreover, the neighborhood doesn't have any public areas. It is mainly made up of densely packed roads and the only real large public area is Paolo Sarpi Street, which has always been a commercial Street of the district and a historical meeting point. In addition, when you speak about Chinatown, the large districts of Chinese settlement come to mind, where all the shops, the residents and people on the streets are Chinese. Conversely, in Paolo Sarpi Street 95% of the resident population is Italian, with the minority being Chinese. I have expressly talked about that with an urban planner at the Politecnico di Milano University, Christian Novak, who clarified to me that:

"The separation between the ground floor and the highest floors is what creates the real problem of cohabitation. The first one is almost completely Chinese in terms of use and attendance and the second one is almost completely Italian."

(Christian Novak, urban planner, interviewed on November 2008)

This wouldn't have occurred if the Milanese Chinatown had been put together as in the United States, for instance, where most of the residents are Chinese, as well as the traders and the visitors of the area. The third antagonist between the needs of residents and the Public authority's policies is the trader's group. Here, too, the situation is far from simple. More than 180 traders are represented by Associazione Liberi Esercenti Sarpi (ALES), where more than half are Chinese. As one of the storeowners of Paolo Sarpi Street stated:

"For the ALES association we are all traders and we don't make a difference. We are all traders, all working families on different levels and with different mentalities... we certainly don't want to create differences. For me, a person who works is a person to be respected... So, today trading is forbidden. Why? Because of "our esteemed residents", who want to walk around the street. We are not in agreement with this and we find it absurd and unacceptable for the future of a Milan in the 2015 Expo."

(Walter, butcher in Paolo Sarpi street, interviewed on May and November 2008)

The rationale behind the idea of pedestrianizing is twofold: firstly, it aims at reclaiming street furniture and, secondly, at reducing the use of the district as a logistics platform for Chinese wholesalers. This is how the Councilor begins to describe the problem. He welcomes me into his office at the Urban Center, housed within the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele where the department for the renewal of the City of Milan is located. From the rarefied heights of the Town Planning chair, here is Masseroli's Sarpi plan:

"So we have a neighborhood that has been transformed in a span of fifteen years from that of one of the most attractive commercial streets in the city to one of the most chaotic in the city; completely out of control from a city organizational point of view."

(Carlo Masseroli, Assessor, town Councilor in urban policy, interviewed on November 2008)

The Councilor knows that he cannot count on legislation to pursue his cuts on wholesale activities in such a dense area. Therefore, he has resorted to "a kind of scheme consisting of a range of measures to improve conditions in the neighborhood", as he puts it. The opinion of Vice-Mayor De Corato is even more bluntly articulated, as he explains that his Council has decided for traffic closure in Paolo Sarpi Street under the belief that the Chinese will begin to emigrate as "they can't stay there". And he adds to this that:

"Now, Paolo Sarpi Street is a pedestrian area (and they [the traders] didn't understand this small footway... It's not that they didn't understand, because if you and I understood it means that they also understood... because we are not that...). What is the declared purpose of the pedestrian area? It is to make the Chinese wholesale activities go away. Why did we do it? Not because we wanted to increase the air quality in Paolo Sarpi Street but because we want to get rid of these Chinese. If they don't understand this, what are we supposed to do?"

(Riccardo De Corato, interview quote)

Naturally the traders have understood this step as well and are all the more vexed. They say they will do their very worst and shall protest against these measures. Retailers especially, both Italian and Chinese, speak about a real blow due to the difficulties encountered by clients following the traffic ban for non-residents. ALES, the

traders' association, is basically talking about an abuse of power on the part of the Milan Municipality. Remo, the President of ALES, is very clear about it:

“The city got mad with us (the traders) although we have nothing to do with the wholesale. As you know, we started to consider this problem and to listen to everyone before anything else. They forced us to say: ‘prohibition of vehicles circulation or pedestrianization?’ At this point I was shocked.”

(Remo, President of the dealer Association “ALES”, interviewed on November 2008)

Moreover, there is a great buzz around the Sarpi neighborhood in the context of the outlook regarding the next 2015 Expo Fair. Many initiatives are being considered, and these are aimed at transforming and giving value to the surrounding area in the direction of Fiera City²¹. This certainly is whetting the appetite of both residents, who would see an increase in the value of their homes, and speculators, who always have their ear to the ground, too. Furthermore, the effect of new selection dynamics different to trade ones (no to wholesale and yes to retail), in the face of new elite residents promoted by the political and economic system, will certainly create a new interpretation of these spaces. Even Masseroli, the urban policy Councilor, does not appear to be shocked by possible future gentrification scenarios:

“Yes, if you want we can talk about gentrification with the Chinese community, however it was something inertial. I mean, the local government aims to provide incentives and create pathways. We want the creative and young people of Milan. I say that the real challenge for a city is to be able to offer strong attractive conditions.”

(Carlo Masseroli, interview quote)

Thus, the gentrification would be configured as a young, upper-middle- class university-educated population who may choose to dwell in a neighborhood of a recent ethnic past that is now looking onto new opportunities given by the pedestrian area, such as the ‘*movida*’ (nightlife-centric) of the Milanese clubs has already been evident in the closing by Garibaldi-Brera area, all shrouded in a halo of emerging cosmopolitan promise.

“A pedestrian island characterized by stone pavements, benches. But the residents also expect something else. They expect paths, planted trees, green areas and, above all, tranquility, silence and something that is much more similar to project-rendering than to reality. Not only that. It could become, with time, a place where you could re-establish nightlife, which today is quite weak. And if we think about what pedestrian islands have become in the Navigli area in just a few months, and what cohabitation problems these create, this is for sure one of the things that residents don’t expect and would never want from pedestrianization.”

(Christian Novak, interview quote)

An interesting comparison is made when we look at the problems emerging in districts where nightlife is lived out by some, and the needs of residents weigh on the other part of the equation: the former are a different tribe, arriving in the evening just to have fun, and have no interest in the abuse, or at least intensive use, of public space. They are not mindful of soiling or being noisy, and they are not concerned with a space they do not consider theirs, exactly because they do not live there and cannot see the spectacle of abandoned beer bottles at dawn! In conclusion, we could say that the local communities’ associations were capable of showing the ambiguous nature of the Milan city government, probably driven from the “élite” developers’ interests. These social movements constitute a form of politics, ready to fight for their everyday neighborhood practices.

4.2. My Slope, your Slope. Park Slopers and their Neighborhood Boundaries

As Morgan and Ren (2012) recently stated, there is nothing new about studying the key role of artists in urban change (Zukin, 1982) especially in New York City, where artists converted industrial lofts into studios and living spaces turning run-down or abandoned districts into “cool” neighborhoods. Forty years span of gentrification in

²¹ FieraMilano City is the new large-scale exhibition center in the outskirts of Milan (Rho), where the World Expo 2015 will be located.

the Brooklyn neighborhood of Park Slope has challenged me to explore a different characteristic that promoted gentrification. Here the scene was interpreted during the late 1960s by a group of middle-class, well educated, liberal progressive people. They challenge the politics of the neighborhoods, setting up the community of what it was, a down-at-heel neighborhood that helped to create a completely new reputation of its appealing housing stock.

Talking about the shift in the neighborhood demographics, one of the words that have obsessed me since the beginning of the field research and the understanding of the different ways to get access to the Park Slope kind of urban living is 'privilege'. During the evolution of gentrification, the different social groups used their neighborhood repertoires to draw boundaries (socio-economic, cultural and moral) in order to demarcate themselves from others, between other groups or other neighborhoods. One of the main pivots around which the *habitus* of gentrifiers and super-gentrifiers has been constructed is the privilege of the home, I would say the privilege of the brownstone in this case. In the last 40 years, this privilege has radically determined the way of life (call it urban living) of the different groups of gentrifiers. (I refer here to the economic privilege of those who could buy a house when prices were low or who were able to maintain a rent stabilized apartment or who are now wealthy newcomers that can afford luxurious apartments).

Here, resistance to gentrification was developed not by a traders association like in the Milanese case, but by a community based organization called FAC, the Fifth Avenue Committee. When the displacement of the old/ low income residents reached a high water mark in 1999, FAC declared 105 square blocks of Park Slope a Displacement Free Zone (DFZ), trying to maintain the delicate balance in a racially and economically mixed neighborhood. In the late 1970s, the neighborhood was reeling from widespread abandonment and blight, with more than 200 vacant buildings and 150 vacant lots within a mile of FAC's offices. Still, the neighborhood's proximity to Prospect Park, historic brownstones and well-built apartment houses made it ripe for gentrification. Interestingly, the FAC's executive director at the time of the DFZ campaign, Brad Lander, is today a New York City Council Member representing Brooklyn's 39th District, which also covers Park Slope. When we spoke, he explained to me that people, tenants, in small buildings had no legal protection.

"So we created this "displacement free zone," marked it on newspaper boxes and posters and when we heard a story about a family or a senior or a couple, whatever, who had been there a long time paying a low rent, and where a landlord was doubling their rent, we organized the neighborhood to go and tell the landlord that it's not acceptable. We won't allow you to do it. We won about half the cases. The most prominent one was two 80 year-old sisters, the Soto sisters. We went out, we took a bus load of people out to the landlord's house on Long Island and we showed up on his lawn and he signed a lease, and they're still there. That was!"

(Brad Lander, age 43, Park Slope Councilman, interviewed on March 2012)

However, as Slater (2003) points out, the DFZ brought in itself a contradiction: the more attractive the Committee made the streetscape, the more people wanted to live there thus contributing in the driving up of the rents. In our preliminary analysis²² we were interested in what kind of relationship comes about between the long-term residents and the newcomers of the Park Slope neighborhood. More precisely, what kinds of social relations and what forms of everyday practices are established between pioneer middle-class gentrifiers (insiders) and its new upper-class inhabitants (newcomers) as a result of a decades-long process of gentrification. In addition, we tried to understand what the specific aspects of the relationship between people in a changing neighborhood are. Our main goal was to understand how insiders and newcomers perceive each other and if social boundaries are going to be constructed between them. In this respect we were interested in determining which forms of symbolic elaboration are implemented and what kind of relationship comes about: 1) one in which the groups ignore each other; 2) one of distinction; 3) one of resistance/ conflict; 4) or one of cooperation/ acceptance. A similar typology about discursive practices concerning social diversity in gentrifying neighborhoods was conceptualized by Rose (2004a); however, in this case, they were preliminary hypothesis stemming from the ethnographic exploration of the neighborhood, and not positions emerged from the analysis.

²² At the time of the final review of this paper I was finishing the field work in the U.S. case study, facing the first step of the analysis of the data collected from winter 2011 to fall 2012 in Park Slope. So, what I am discussing here are the very early findings.

Thus, people in Park Slope used to say that in the past the “North-South dividing line” was not on 9th Street but around 3rd or 6th Street. In fact, this cognitive border changed over time following the gentrification process.

“I think maybe it was at 6th Street, at some point I remember 9th Street, when I was a kid, past 9th Street was different. My friend Rick, Rick’s parents have a house on either 11th, 12th or 13th, one of those streets, almost at the Park, really nice houses, but it felt like a deserted area when we were little kids, at least to me, I mean they lived there, so it probably didn’t feel that way to them, at least not as much. (...) but that was more the places where we would run into other kids. I wouldn’t say they were gangs. They were people who as youths were more inclined to do more troublesome things, like violence, petty crime, and substance use in bigger or less socially acceptable ways. (...) There were definitely other groups of kids that would rough you up; you didn’t want to cross them on the street, because you’re going to get into some shit with them. I never got into any issues with them...locally on the street, physically.”

(Gregory, age 29, born in the neighborhood, Performance Artist, interviewed on March 2011)

What was clear since the very beginning of my inquiry was the old residents’ feeling about the change of the neighborhood: from a kind of progressive unsafe one to a place characterized by sophistication yet divided by class. Talking about the “ethnic strife”, the fear of other ethnic groups, Gregory shared with me some of his childhood memories of Fifth Avenue:

“I remember on my corner... I’ll talk about the context on my block, President Street, about halfway between 5th and 6th. On the corners of my block now, on the east side of 5th Avenue, and on the north and south side of President Street, there’s a cat clinic, and there’s a Mexican restaurant that’s been there for a while, but not always. I don’t remember what was there before. The cat clinic was a *bodega*, which is like an *alimentare*²³. It’s sort of like saying go down to the Pakistani. And there would always be some Latin guys, generally older, sitting in chairs outside the *bodega*. I have this image in my head of men with hats, chatting in Puerto Rican Spanish. That *bodega* was there for a long time. It lasted through some of the initial gentrification. At some point someone was shot and I think killed in front of that *bodega*. Someone was definitely shot there, maybe they were killed; that might just be my way of dramatizing it. Now the Mexican restaurant is on the ground floor of a big apartment building, which still has Latin folks hanging out outside. There are old folks that live in that building, and still sit outside, and when there’s warm weather, there’s a fire hydrant outside, and they’ll still open it up to have a sprinkler in front. And they’ll have BBQs on the weekends. It looks like low income. I’m sure they’re rent controlled. (...) So it was folks like that. These are people that you hear shouting from the street up to the window, and having conversations like that, really nice old neighborhood stuff.”

(Gregory, on the same interview)

I have also spoken many times about the changes in the neighborhood with one of my karate colleagues, Kevin – a Irish origin middle age man – who grew up in the south part of the neighborhood, when Twelfth Street was “much worse, and drug dealers, and addicts and more poor people” than now, when there were Puerto Rican, Italian and Irish families, mostly of them workers. But the northern part of the Slope was different:

“I had a best friend in school, John, and sometimes I would go to his block, 3rd Street, between 7th and 8th Avenue. He was rich. Every time I went to 3rd Street I felt that I was so poor, they were so rich, I felt bad. So for me it was always like two neighborhoods. John’s house had 4 floors, beautiful old Victorian home. And our house on 12th Street was a three bedroom, our home on 10th Street was a one bedroom, and ten of us. But on 12th Street, soon one of my brothers moved out, he got married, and I was still very little. So there were 9 people in only a three bedroom. On John’s street all the houses were big. Some people have they own the house but they rent one of two floors, but John’s family lived in the whole house.”

(Kevin, age 55, born in the neighborhood, employee, interviewed on June 2011)

At this stage of the ethnographic research it seems that the geographic boundary between the north and the south part of the neighborhood reflects a class boundary of residents and users as well. It is not only a matter of people who live in rich historic brownstones (as in the North Slope) or in more simple houses or new contemporary buildings (as in the South Slope). It is more related to different lifestyles: a sort of “radical-chic environment” in the North (just gentrified), and “vibrant community of folks” in the South (still a working class neighborhood undergoing a process of urban renewal).

²³ The interviewee used an Italian word to better explain that he was referring to a grocery store.

“Now, it’s funny, we met at ‘sNice²⁴, right? Some people who work there, live here in the neighborhood very close. Many people don’t, but to work in a \$10/hour job, give or take a few dollars, in this neighborhood, in coffee and food, I’m really interacting with one set of people. Not everyone who lives in the area comes into ‘sNice; it’s a certain demographic. It’s the ‘sNice demography. (...) You know there are different groups. First of all we get middle school kids who come and spend between 50 cents and \$8-10 on lunch. I’m only there on one weekday a week, but I think they come in there all the time, pulling out \$20 bills. I could spend some time comparing that to my experience in middle school and high school, but I won’t bother. Who’s at ‘sNice? There are a lot of professionals, young and old, we get a lot of graduate students coming in and working there, such as yourself. Who else comes into ‘sNice? Young folks come into ‘sNice, because it’s a vegetarian and vegan café, and it’s a vegan bakery so there are a lot of people who are interested in that. (...) What’s crazy is that you go down to 3rd Avenue it is a completely different landscape.”

(Gregory, on the same interview)

This division is not only a narrative performed by the long-term residents, but it seems also observed by young newcomers. One night I was talking with Angela, a young Taiwanese intern at the New York Mag, who has recently signed a rental lease in an apartment close to mine on Twelfth Street because – after subletting my room for two months in the summer of 2012 – she told me she fell irremediably in love with Park Slope. However, in speaking about one of the local club for young people in northern Slope, she expressed a completely different feeling between the sense of community perceived by having elderly people sitting on the stoops and waving to the neighbors in the south/ still in transition part and the sense of entitlement in the north/already gentrified ones.

“Have you been to Union Hall? So we go there a lot but I think for me, and I’m just speaking for me personally, I enjoy the diversity that just very specifically 5th Avenue offers. I was just thinking about this because it’s called North Slope and then South Slope and that for me, it’s like people already have this preconceived notion like, oh, South Slope. But it’s not like that. If you walk down 12th [Street] towards me there’s this one old Russian man, he’s always sitting outside and listening to his music and I think if you lived a little bit closer to Union Street like North Slope, you’d only get to see that because, I don’t know, there’s a sense of – I hate anything pretentious.”

(Angela, age 22, born in Vietnam and grown up in Los Angeles, Media Journalist intern at The New York Magazine. Field note, 26-09-2012)

In summary, in speaking about the “North-South dividing line”, many people draw a symbolic border all along 9th Street. The social construction of this boundary has been built in their life through their neighborhood experiences, not in terms of that division. In many instances they emphasize a sense of division of class, ethnicity and immigrant status, and length of history as an immigrant, that has different layouts. They remember when North 5th Avenue was more like what South 5th Avenue is now. They don’t conceive a division at 9th Street, because the way that people used to code that originally was not at 9th Street. Park Slopers’ awareness of boundaries appears due to the experiencing the neighborhood as it was and as it changed, and seeing different kinds of stores open and close and different kinds of people, eventually feeling safe or unsafe at different parts of the neighborhood.

Despite what the residents of the North part of the Slope think about the neighbors living in the South –

“But I don’t... I don’t think of the South Slope as ever having been a neighborhood with a sense of its own boundaries and its own integrity. I think of it as a... a... a sort of invention of real estate agents, when they wanted to sort of the brand those blocks as being– places where, hum, people who couldn’t afford this section of Park Slope could move.”

(John, on the aforementioned interview)

– it seems that the South Slopers are improving their own sense of place attachment and place identity (Altman and Low, 1992; Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff, 1983) for their neighborhood. In the following figure, we can see an action organized by the South Slope Community Group to preserve and protect this part of the Slope community. They sent a clear message to developers and real estate agents with a mock ‘For Sale’ sign that

²⁴ ‘sNice is the quintessential relaxing spot in Park Slope – at 315, 5th Avenue and 3rd Street – that serves great lattes, panini and baked goods. People usually come there with a newspaper and/ or their laptop. There is a great menu for vegans also. The owners have another café in Manhattan West Village.

reads “House Not For Sale”. This neighborhood association urged everyone in the South Slope to display this sign prominently on their homes to show that they are united against non-contextual overdevelopment.

Figure 6. Action posted by the South Slope Community Group (on the left); Young woman sitting on the main entrance of her brownstones on the South Slope boundary²⁵ (on the right).



Source: Author's archive.

Engaging the research role of observer, I also joined the Park Slope Food Coop²⁶ on June 2011, taking part of the orientation process and performing many hours of voluntary work. The scene I'm presenting now is part of my field notes and shows that, despite this sense of class division, the neighborhood is still experiencing the legacy of altruism and the politics of solidarity. As I have observed, people that belong to different social groups and are at the same time members of the Food Coop, often use their sense of community to support and help lower income families.

“Tonight I'm quite tired at the end of my shift. We are going to close when a Black mother with two children and a cart full of groceries passes in front of me at the mini-entrance desk. The lady is in her forties, she is tall and thin, she is wearing simple clothes. I would say poor, lean kind of clothes. And from the expression of her face she seems very tired... One of the two children is a little boy, he looks like three or four years old, while the second child is a girl maybe about eight. This little girl with long braids has two incredible “panther” eyes. While the mother goes to the cashier, she passes by the central desk to ask if we have some quarters to give her... I am curious about the scene and so I keep my eyes on her. My colleague on the opposite desk says to the girl that unfortunately she uses every quarter for the laundry, so the girl goes back to her mother empty-handed. I am thinking that her mother is scolding her, because she is repeating over and over again to her daughter, «Stop! You can't buy anything more. I have already paid for shopping. We must go now!!», so the mother, with the grocery bags, goes into the exit area and begins loading the bags into the baby stroller but suddenly something happens. The daughter, with one of the grocery bags on her shoulder, takes her little brother's hand and slinks away with him along the aisles of the supermarket, disappearing among the customers. After a few seconds we all see them coming back, running, still with the bag on her shoulder, toward their mother at the exit. Normally every person who shops at the Food Coop must pass a final check of either bill and bags before going out, it's a Coop rule! But no one checked the girl. We all have seen the scene, but no one spoke, and no one has checked. I specifically looked at the expression of the exit guardian, who even tried to turn the face in the opposite direction, pretending not to see.”

(Author's field note, 11-11-2011)

²⁵ On 9th Street, between 6th and 7th Avenue.

²⁶ The Park Slope Food Coop, PSFC is a food cooperative located in the neighborhood and famous across the US because it is one of the oldest and largest active American food co-ops. But there is more. Since 1973, the PSFC has been providing Brooklyn and beyond with quality food and products while serving as a community center and meeting place for its member-owners: people who believe in the value, rewards and responsibility of collective labor, action and ownership. In sum a microcosmos of Park Slopers throughout the last 40 years.

That night all the people working at the co-op probably supposed that the little girl had stolen something that her mother couldn't afford, but no one had any reaction; the Food Coop members, in that case, paid more attention to the community value of solidarity than any other economic or moral interest. As we can argue, despite the making of boundaries during the gentrification process, there are unexpected blended territories where we can observe an overlapping of social groups in people's activities and juxtaposition of action or meaning. All help to constitute "the loose mix" of transition zones (Manzo, 2012c: 35).

Nowadays, Brooklyn is undergoing an interesting demographic shift. It is changing from a place with a Black majority to a more racially diverse New York City borough with an exodus of African Americans and an influx of Whites and Hispanics²⁷. These demographic shifts are changing the social, political, and economic contours of many of Brooklyn's neighborhoods. The ongoing gentrification process in Park Slope represents these changes and can offer insight into what occurs at the intergroup social relationship in a neighborhood experiencing social mix while in transition.

5. Gentrification, Social Mixing and Local Interventions

5.1. Experiencing Gentrification and Negotiating Social Mix in Milan and New York

As we saw during the previous discussion, different experiences of gentrification correspond to diverse kinds of negotiation and definition of changing neighborhoods by different social groups. Despite the making of symbolic boundaries or resistance practices, either people in Paolo Sarpi and Park Slope neighborhoods found a way to coexist. But, what might the nature of this co-existence be?

In terms of meaningful social interactions, I have observed that while Chinese and Italian who owned businesses in Milan had a role in promoting social diversity, the middle-upper class' ability to create aesthetic distinctions into consumption practices was a more successful agent of social displacement. Paolo Sarpi neighborhood seems still a hybrid space (Manzo, 2012b), a symbol of plural urbanity, which involves diverse stores and customs, different functions and expressions. Its active street life characterized by flows of movement and instability can support an inclusive interaction among different social groups, regardless of strict urban regulations or preservationist movements. As a result, three years after the zoning policy, it seems that due to its multiple meanings, the process of Chinese-storefronts displacement is not really getting off the ground.

On the other side, thinking about the range of institutional interventions, clearly in Milan we were dealing with the paradox of urban safety policies because of the lack of social policies (Manzo, 2012a). The local government has only created temporary solutions, such as zoning, that restrict the passage road network in the neighborhood to residents only. No policy provision about a management of these businesses, in terms of trade types, urban spaces and shop number to be assigned, was ever taken. As Bricocoli *et al.* point out, "the exploration of urban transformations in Milano highlighted how both urban and social policies have been neglecting consideration for the intensive change which is occurring in the use of space in different urban areas. (...) It is within a discourse that is dominated by the frame of insecurities and in a context of overall simplification of the sense and conditions that can produce mixed environments, that 'separation' becomes a main principle in the spatial organization of the urban transformations" (2011: 7). As Monteleone and Manzo argue, the confusion between private and public interests, "and the combination of deregulation (*laissez-faire*) and security intervention across territories and populations are all seemingly contradictory aspects of neo-liberal ideas of politics." (2010: 161)

²⁷ Despite New York City's depiction as a "melting pot," many neighborhoods in the city for years have had little racial/ ethnic diversity, predominated by one or another of the major race/ ethnicity groups. The latest U.S. Census data (2010) shows that these residential patterns continue - but the data also reveals important changes. According to the City Planning Department's analysis of the New York City demographic shifts from 2000 to 2010, in Brooklyn the White population grew by 38,774 while the Asian population increased by 75,838. Blacks lost almost 50,000 people (-49,517). However, a large outflow of White and Black residents between 2000 and 2010 accompanied by a large increase of Asian and Latino residents has changed the racial/ ethnic composition of many of the city's established neighborhoods. Data source: Center for Urban Research, The Graduate Center, City University of New York - CUNY and New York City Planning Department.

By way of contrast, in Park Slope, considering first the effort on mixed housing programs driven by the FAC during the 1970-80s, and then the community actions in favor of the low-income families taken by the Park Slope Food Coop and various neighborhood's institutions like Community Gardens, the grassroots institutions played an important role in mitigating both the displacement effects and the social divides.

In sum, both in Milan and in New York I observed people fighting for a better living environment, not always supporting private interests. Thinking about Jane Jacobs's vision, in changing neighborhoods, diversity is not only a web of social ties, but also an important moral sphere in the lives of those liberal progressive people that mobilized grassroots movements to have political outlets, as we can see in the next interview excerpt taken in Park Slope:

“So the thing is, before my generation, say, there were the Beatniks, you know, in the Village – Al Ginsberg, all those people. So when we first – whoever we is – realized that we were not going to be comfortable in the mainstream culture, which you can see in the movies about the 50's, they called us Beatniks. (...) We were more like revolutionaries, we thought. Well, it started in college because of the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-War Movement. So there was a lot. And then when we came here, we were involved in different local things like, at one point, the Methodist Hospital was tearing down buildings to build their parking lot, so we were involved in fighting that. Like, one time a woman was across the street, who was a gay woman and had a little child. This was a long time ago, like the end of the 1980s. She asked me why we wanted to live here, because she had come from the suburbs and I think she liked the suburbs physically. But she said, you know, she's gay, she lives here because this is a great place for a gay couple to live and have a child. Why did we want to live here? And I said: the only reason you want to live here is because we came here and we started changing the neighborhood and made all the other people comfortable with us.”

(Emily, Gregory's mother, age 64, moved in the neighborhoods in 1969, joined the Food Coop in 1993, Psychotherapist, interviewed on February 2012).

However, while calling for inclusionary practices and promoting social diversity they have been producing the territory for the further waves of gentrification. Accordingly to Lees, further research is needed, especially in neighborhoods like Brooklyn's Park Slope, to demonstrate different types of gentrification which can be correlated with different typologies of gentrifiers, to avoid the taking place of debates “in the absence of a significant knowledge base as to how social mix is experienced on a day-to-day basis” (2008: 2464).

5.2. “Hard” vs .“Soft” Gentrification and the Struggle for Moral Displacement

In the beginning of this paper we discussed what and how the Chinese settlement on Sarpi Street has contributed to the preservation of the urban fabric of this neighborhood which is historically characterized by a mix of functions for housing, production and sales. The reflections on urban commerce in the Sarpi neighborhood interweave with the starting up processes of a financial renaissance of its commercial strip, in short, a commercial gentrification. As Rankin remarks, in commercial changes it is crucial to analyze the “strategies for retaining those businesses serving the needs of low-income and ethnically mixed residents” (2008: iii). Here, the resistance of both Italian and Chinese long-time businesses explicitly refers to a counter displacement movement against exclusionary policies. Moreover, to understand patterns of gentrification in the two case studies, it is necessary to address an important aspect of neighborhood change in Italy,

“because here in Italy, more than in the USA, it affects properties. Here, people who bought their houses in the 80s and 90s made a strong investment, spent a lot of money and so are very determined in preserving their investments. That's why they fight hard against everything that could decrease their investment value or lower their quality of life.”

(Novak, interview quote)

In this respect I would pose some reflections about the “Italian” model of gentrification, which can be considered “softer” than the “heavy-handed” U.S. ones. I argue that, before giving emphasis to the characteristics of stores and cafés which appeal to more affluent consumers – as gentrifiers – we should question the specificity of the Italian housing market which primarily shapes the dwelling conditions. It is in fact well known that in Italy the

rented sector accounts for about 20 percent of the housing stock occupied as a main residence²⁸ and the public housing projects are not significant. This means that in Italy – and Milan is not an exception – almost 70 percent of all households own a home^{29,30}. If it is inevitable that a certain degree of displacement is experienced as the result of the changes I have already discussed, the Italian residents in the Paolo Sarpi case study were protected by their own house properties, while it was much easier to affect the commercial activities through restricting urban policies. This has to say that gentrification in Italy seems softer because it affects businesses, rather than houses.

However, when we link the production of gentrified spaces to middle class patterns of urban consumption, work and lifestyle, we have to consider the effects of the aestheticization of these everyday practices. Businesses, in fact, are critical to preserve not only the affordability of the neighborhoods but also to create a comfortable urban space where people share their lives together. I am arguing that there is a crucial point in any kind of gentrification, which is the struggle for moral displacement. In fact, it does not matter if people are owners of their houses – like in Milan – or if they have a rent stabilized apartment – like in Park Slope – because even if they have the right to stay in their neighborhoods, they can feel they do not belong anymore to it. If they start to face everyday changes in their usual stores, restaurants, cafés and even in their neighbors they can get uncomfortable. The comfort level is a very central issue that needs to be problematized. It is time to develop an understanding of displacement costs as “emotional, psychological, individual and social”, as Slater points out (2011: 580). Gentrification is a moral issue, like Malik – a guy from Jamaica who grew up in a poor Park Slope family under Social Security – perfectly explained to me that afternoon in May, when we were walking on 15th Street in Park Slope, heading to the Community Garden:

“I want to live here because that’s where I grew up. I love it because of the culture, because of the diversity in Park Slope, and now it just seems like it’s becoming to be just one type of people – which is just the rich people. It’s definitely getting more colonized as well, with all of these condos. It’s like... It doesn’t have *that* Park Slope personality anymore. It’s become a little bit like Manhattan for me. We should just take Park Slope and bring it there, it’s in the hands – it’s not Brooklyn.”

(Malik, age 25, grown up in the south/ poor part of neighborhood, Artist. Field note, 8-5-2012)

Concluding Remarks

What happens when a Neighborhood starts to sell its Soul?³¹

When dense, diverse and vital neighborhoods, the ones that are Jacobs’ ideal, are subject to residential or commercial gentrification they can miss their “authenticity”. As Zukin (2010) argues, when nothing is done to limit this process, a neighborhood gradually loses its soul. As we saw in Milan, the process of expulsion of the Chinese population – politically justified in the name of the ancient cultural heritage and of the recovery of its “Italian” identity – would deny the substance of any part of the history of people and places who helped transform and create the neighborhood, “engendering a change of skin and soul” (Manzo, 2012a: 435).

In other words, this is a very vivid memory that one of my Food Coop’s friends shared with me about the reasons to live in Park Slope and what, for him, makes the neighborhood of Park Slope authentic:

“I moved because I had moved the previous year from San Francisco, where I had lived for 8 years before, and I loved it very much. I moved first to Manhattan, to 2nd Avenue, between 14th and 15th Street. It was the late 1980s which was the height of the crack epidemics. Basically I couldn’t deal with Manhattan; I walked around and cried every single day. But a week after I

²⁸ See Baldini and Poggio (2012) for a good analysis of the rental sector in Italy.

²⁹ Source: first release by Istat, Italian Census data for 2011.

³⁰ There are many socioeconomic and cultural reasons for the high rate of home ownership in Italy, which is an exemplary case of Mediterranean, or familialistic, welfare regime. Home ownership is an important and multifaceted resource in Italy to both individual well-being and social protection. To read more about the topic see Poggio (2012).

³¹ The title of this paragraph was inspired by an article appeared on the Ford Foundation Report of Spring 2003 by Carlson Neil, which talks about the anti-displacement policies promoted by the Fifth Avenue Committee (FAC) in Park Slope. See Carlson (2003).

arrived, a few friends of mine moved from the East Village to Park Slope on 10th Street and I came over for a barbecue. Then we went to a concert in the park that was this really wonderful West African band called True Git that played like high life, and it was just awesome. We walked to the park and from the entrance to the band shell, and when we got there people were in front and they were tabling for solidarity with Central America and the Park Slope Food Coop, and I was like, 'oh my god it's Berkeley!' Why the f-ck did... didn't I know that this existed? I would've moved here. But ten months later I did move here, because, well I hated Manhattan, but I lived in San Francisco in a collective house and just by coincidence two of my roommates, two or three months after I moved, one of my roommates and his partner (boyfriend) got a job in NY and so they moved here. So then we all decided to live together and so we got (rented) a brownstone on 8th Street between 7th and 8th Avenue."

(Ed, age 54, gay, long-term resident, Professor, interviewed on August 2011)

In conclusion, we can argue that people in changing neighborhoods become attached to the way that their place looks (old buildings suggest history, small locally owned shops suggest neighborhood identity). In this respect, shifts on the level of class and capital during gentrification produce new patterns of spatial stratification and also reshape urban identities. Zukin, who focuses her attention on a gentrifier's aesthetic appreciation of urban authenticity, states that many urban dwellers today "find their subjective identity in this particular image of urban authenticity" (2010: 18). And what happens now is powerful and breathtakingly fast – a product of upper-middle class aesthetics and newspapers, magazines and blogs that compete to find new 'destination neighborhoods.'³² Gentrification "has always been symptomatic of a new middle class that is so aesthetically self-reflexive" (Bridge, 2005: 117) and the very nature of the gentrification practices, in these accounts, remains irredeemably bourgeois, both in the structure and sensibilities (codes of legitimacy, eating out at restaurants and other aesthetic displays of cultured consumption in housing and leisure). When I am talking about sensibilities, I am approaching the moral sphere that, needless to say, is a complex term. However, "to analyze morals and repertoires of values typical of a group's minds means to understand the lifestyle that distinguishes and defines them, their system of meaning, in sum, their culture." (Manzo, 2012c: 36)

The extent of gentrification and its implications for urban communities are poorly understood. On the one hand, rising property values can bring new wealth to longtime homeowners in poor neighborhoods. Fairly or not, new money often brings better services from city government – police, sanitation, schools – which may benefit all residents. On the other hand, as Carlson states, there's often a tipping point: "the moment at which the soul of the neighborhood is irredeemably changed. The old residents are displaced and the urban gentry remain ensconced in a neighborhood of newly expensive homes and swanky stores." (2003: 22)

After all, things change, so do cities.

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³² Sharon Zukin interviewed by Powell, Michael. "A Contrarian's Lament in a Blitz of Gentrification", *New York Times*, 19-02-2010. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/21/nyregion/21gentrify.html>

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APPENDIX: DATA AND METHOD

The primary methods of data collection in this study are ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews in the neighborhood. The use of multiple methods will facilitate the triangulation of the project's findings from a variety of vantage points (Lofland *et al.*, 2005).

In the Milan's case study the knowledge of the ethnographic field was formed during these last ten years, and gradually consolidated to become more and more in-depth. Some key events have led me to the final access to the field. In fact, since 2001 I have been working for Milan and I helped perform the population and business census in that area. At that time had a picture in my mind: the image of a complex, layered and multifaceted urban scene. Over the years I attended this setting as an observer. I saw, over time, a lively, colored and multicultural neighborhood with increased traffic generated by the Chinese wholesales. I also saw insults,

pushing, beatings and protest marches during the first revolt of the Chinese community. It was in 12 April 2007. Since then I have never “abandoned” the field. In the very beginning of the empirical research, I set as a first goal to deepen my references regarding the recent history of the district; meanwhile I was observing the urban space to gain a preliminary understanding of the dynamics that led to an event so disruptive of the social order. Moreover, because in that period I was working as a journalist in the press office of the City Hall, I was able to intercept some political designs about the redevelopment of the “Chinatown” area. The enviable vantage point as insider into the headquarters of the local Milanese government allowed me to establish profitable relationships with the secretaries of the mayoral staff and its councilors. In fact, thanks to my colleagues I had free access to interviews with politicians. Furthermore, in early 2008, taking part in a neighborhood visit organized by a local association and advertised in the Italian newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*, I built my first shy contacts with the gatekeepers of the neighborhood (more specifically, two local Italians and one local Chinese trader and members of the local dealers association -Ales- and the head of the association of young second-generation Chinese in Milan). Finally, in March 2008 I had my first official access to the field. I began building my network of contacts through these immediate gatekeepers, and through them I met residents and users from various parts of the neighborhood.

The second case study, the neighborhood of Brooklyn’s Park Slope, is part of my PhD Thesis project in Sociology at University of Trento, Italy (developed through the affiliation with CUNY University in New York, USA). The research lasted about twenty months: the data was collected since January 2011 and it derived from field work activity in the neighborhood, archival research on census data sets as well as in newspapers, local websites and blogs, and a set of audio-visual data (photographs and movies). The ethnographic data collection method is composed of different techniques: in the private places of the Park Slope Food Coop and a martial arts studio as co-performer³³, in the public space of the Community Garden on 6th Avenue and 15th Street as participant observer. I am also serving as a safe walker in a community organization named Safe Slope which offers to escort people who are coming home late at night or attending civic meetings in the neighborhood. Additionally, in-depth interviews (sixty-six) were chosen as the best method for examining residents’ perception in a systematic and detailed way. This experience has given me not only the opportunity to study the micro-politics of a place intensely populated by newcomers/ gentrifiers, but has also opened a window into the social core values and morals of long-term residents who – despite different socioeconomic backgrounds – have built up the community since the beginning of the 1970s.

In both cases, the data were gathered from interviews, observations, field notes, public documents, photographs, audio-visual recordings, journals, artifacts, and perceptions such as smell or taste.

Lastly, in each research field there was something “out of my control”. To be more precise, the primary exploration of the two neighborhoods happened unintentionally. On the one hand, I discovered Paolo Sarpi Street while I was working for the Census data collection of 2001, thus going back and forth from the private intimate spaces of many residents’ houses. On the other hand, I had my first interaction with Park Slope in 2009, when, upon deciding to experience New York for a month, I bumped into a room for rent on Seventh Avenue and Ninth Street: the core of the Park Slope gentrification. That's the thing about city life: you never know what is around the corner!

³³ At the Park Slope Food Coop, as a volunteer member, I performed many different kinds of jobs, such as shopping assistant, cashier, co-counter, receiving, cleaning/ maintenance, and processing products such as cheeses, olives, spices, dried fruits. I also did participant observation, sometimes while shopping at the market or while shadowing customers’ activities and talks. At the martial arts studio I trained in a traditional Shotokan karate club, taking in average 3-4 classes per week.