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Working paper

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A sense of displacement: Long-time residents' feelings of displacement in gentrifying Bushwick, New York.

Abstract

This paper is a contribution to reinforcing our understanding of gentrification and displacement as neighborhood expressions of inequality. It explores the experiences of gentrification of lower-income, long-time residents in the gentrifying neighborhood of Bushwick, Brooklyn, NYC. The focus is on components of displacement beyond the traditional emphasis on out-migration. In particular, the paper pinpoints the emotional, affective, psychological reactions of long-time residents triggered through the encounter with newcomers. While the entry point is the exploration of emotions and affects, the paper argues that these feelings are outcomes of material socioeconomic inequalities and, in particular, their powerfully racialized historical foundations, as embodied in the contemporary encounter of long-time residents with newcomers.

Keywords: *displacement, gentrification, Bushwick, Brooklyn, long-time residents, emotions*

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Introduction

“(In 2004) the neighborhood was lawless. We were launching giant fireworks out of my window literally for hours, and the cops never came”. [Restaurant owner in Bushwick. Interview with New York, 2010. (Wallace, 2010)].

“One of the challenges, and also the opportunity, of Bushwick for developers is it’s not a typical pretty Brooklyn brownstone neighborhood (...) it gives us a blank canvas to create whatever we want”. [Real estate developer. Interview with The New York Times, 2014. (Gregorsept, 2014)].

“Where I lived people worked hard to make their neighborhood great and they did it. It wasn’t safe in certain areas, but wherever we called ‘home’ we made a home out of it. We had amazing block parties during the summer, nobody has that, we did it and it was awesome”. (Own interview, 26, female, social worker, Dominican background, born in Bushwick, 2013).

These opening quotes epitomize voices from the three main characters in standard gentrification stories: the urban pioneer, the real estate developer, the long-time resident. The quotes display different – contrasting – modes of making space. The capability of making space is determined by the political and economic means at one’s disposal, but also by one’s intentions, worldview and attitude. Whilst the gentrification literature has provided extensive accounts and theorizations of the reasoning and modes of spatial production driving the first two characters – the urban pioneer and capitalist real estate developer (respectively referring mainly to Ley’s (1986) and Smith’s (1987) works – the third voice, that of the longtime resident, has remained relatively unexplored.

Gentrification in its essence is the affirmation of dominant modes of spatial production at the expense of disempowered ones. In gentrifying contexts, on the one hand, gentrifiers and developers enact their ability to make space and, on the other, economically and socially weaker groups experience a restriction in their capacities of producing space (Stabrowski, 2014). These groups literally and figuratively lose place. The present paper gives voice to long-time residents in gentrifying areas, trying to illuminate their loss of place in its material and emotional components. It does so by presenting the experiences of low-income long-time residents in a hastily gentrifying neighborhood, who are still in place despite the pressures to leave.

By exploring what gentrification means in the lived experiences of low-income, long-term residents in a gentrifying neighborhood and how it impacts their livelihoods, the article contributes to our evolving understanding of what makes displacement ‘displacement’, i.e., what forms of displacement play out in a gentrifying neighborhood and in what senses they are outcomes and expressions of economic and social inequalities.

The empirical case for the paper is Bushwick, in Brooklyn, NYC, which the opening quotes refer to. The paper highlights those feelings, senses, perceptions and thoughts associated with displacement occurring in ways other than literal, physical expulsion from the gentrifying neighborhood. But while the focus is on emotional, psychological, and affective - as opposed to physical – displacement, these feelings are contextualized and understood as an expression and outcome of material power structures.

In the article, the feelings and emotions of long-time residents are treated as the privileged materials to explore the impacts of gentrification on the everyday lives of residents. What emerges from their accounts is a complex topography of intersecting dimensions of inequalities and privilege that are brought up in the encounter with “other” bodies (the newcomers’) in neighborhood spaces. Ultimately, gentrification comes into focus as one of the many spatial expressions of material historical inequalities and oppressions that have shaped the history of the North American city.

Structurally, the paper opens with an introduction to the main theoretical anchoring deployed in the text. Then, I present my research methods and positionality. The third main section provides contextual information about the location of the study case and its history, before the article turns to core analysis and finally concluding remarks.

Theoretical anchoring

Displacement beyond out-migration

Within the long history of studies on gentrification, a heated scholarly debate has recently arisen around the relevance of gentrification-induced displacement, the “eviction” of critical academic stands on it (Slater, 2006), the necessity to unpack this taken-for-granted notion (Redfern, 2003, Davidson, 2009) and even whether or not displacement is a significant *sine qua non* condition for gentrification to happen (Vigdor *et al.*, 2002, Freeman and Braconi, 2004, Freeman, 2005, 2011). Fueling this debate on displacement has been a provocative critique provided by Slater (2006, 2008) arguing that gentrification literature in the past decade has shifted focus from the negative consequences for the poor towards the motivations and rationalities of the gentrifying upper and middle-class. This has resulted in a general emphasis on revitalization and alleged positive effects of social mixing, and, more importantly, a dulling of the critical edge in gentrification scholarship. Moreover, there has been significant attention paid to assessing the causes of production and reproduction of gentrification, while relatively few studies have addressed displacement and effects of gentrification on low-income populations (some exceptions being: (Curran, 2004, Fraser, 2004, Slater *et al.*, 2004, Newman and Wyly, 2006b, a, Wyly *et al.*, 2010).

In order to alter the trajectory of the gentrification conversation and readdress it towards its critical origins, Slater (2009) encouraged researchers not only to bring the spotlight back to the issue of displacement, but also to reconsider the pivotal writings of Peter Marcuse about gentrification and abandonment. Marcuse (1985) conceptualized four types of displacement: (1) *direct last-resident displacement*; (2) *direct chain displacement*, including not only the displacement of the last tenants, but also previous ones in the history of the building; (3) *exclusionary displacement*, i.e. the exclusion of certain kinds of households from gentrified housing stock; (4) *displacement pressure*. The latter is particularly interesting in this context:

When a family sees the neighbourhood around it changing dramatically, when their friends are leaving the neighbourhood, when the stores they patronise are liquidating and new stores for other clientele are taking their places, and when changes in public facilities, in transportation patterns, and in support services all clearly are making the area

less and less livable, then the pressure of displacement already is severe. Its actuality is only a matter of time. Families living under these circumstances may move as soon as they can, rather than wait for the inevitable; nonetheless they are displaced.' (p. 207)

What Marcuse called 'pressure of displacement' is a powerful and emotion-laden form of displacement, with potentially as much impact upon people as direct and exclusionary displacement; and hence it needs to be taken as seriously.

Similarly, and with and Heideggerian and Lefebvrian standpoint, Davidson (2009) suggests an understanding of displacement in terms of space/place dialectics, emphasizing the notion of 'place' in displacement as 'lived experience of space'. Importantly, Davidson argues that 'people can be displaced – unable to (re)construct place – without spatial dislocation, just as much as they can with spatial dislocation' (Davidson, 2009). Following Davidson, Stabrowski (2014) talks about 'everyday displacement' as 'the lived experience of *ongoing* loss of the security, agency, and freedom to "make place"' (Stabrowski, 2014. emphasis added). Cahill (2007), meanwhile, talks about 'cultural displacement' drawing on theories of place attachment to demonstrate how a sense of security and cultural belonging are developed in connection to the contingent environment: changes in this social and cultural context by processes of gentrification erode personal and cultural security and therefore provoke a lost sense of identity and self.

Finally, different authors have argued for a broader conceptualization of displacement and call for a more qualitative and phenomenological exploration of experiences of gentrification from the bottom-up (Lees, 2000, Cahill, 2006, Shaw and Hagemans, forthcoming). While it can be challenging to empirically research physically displaced tenants, due to the difficulty in tracking them down after they have left (Shaw, 2004), what *can* readily be done is to investigate the struggles of those who are still holding on to their homes despite the pressures to leave.

Emotions and encounters

I will argue that in the everyday encounter between long-time residents and newcomers gentrification as a 'site of differences' (Lees, 1996) and displacement beyond out-migration take place. Arguably, difference is performed and accomplished through diverse, sometimes conflicting embodied activities and consumption habits. In the encounter of "other bodies" and activities, feelings of displacement filter through and hence gentrification-led displacement emerges. This argument is informed by a number of key concepts, my understanding of which can be briefly elucidated now: emotions, embodied practices, and encounter from a constructivist structuralist perspective (Bourdieu 1989).

In Geography, the role of feelings, affects and emotions has been widely recognized. Perceptions, emotions and the body are clearly critical sites for studying gentrification since 'emotions fuel gentrification and gentrification is written on – and read off of – bodies as they move through and inhabit urban landscapes' (Kern, 2012). Yet, feelings and emotions connected to gentrification – where they originate from, what their impact is, and why they are relevant – are questions that are still relatively underexplored. The present paper aims to expand our knowledge of gentrification-led

displacement from a perspective that puts perceptions, feelings and emotions in the forefront, in order to highlight displacement beyond out-migration. From this perspective, the body and the encounter of different bodies are fundamental sites of understanding because they allow us to explore more complex and dynamic layers of meanings than does a focus on economic difference alone. As widely argued by feminist researchers in fact, social class and its intersections with gender and 'race' "are simultaneously subjective, structural and about social positioning and everyday practices" (Brah and Phoenix, 2013).

Moreover, this paper explicitly rejects the notion that long-time residents' perceptions – its main empirical focus – originate in a social vacuum. Rather, perceptions and actions are seen here as constituted in and constitutive of *objective* social structures and power positions. Indeed, this research has been conducted with the belief that "social sciences must take as its object both this reality and the perception of this reality, the perspectives, the points of view which, *by virtue of their position in objective social space*, agents have on this reality." (Bourdieu 1989:18. Emphasis added). Representations and perceptions of social reality, just like the feelings and emotions connected to these interpretations and representations, are socially subjected to structural constraints. Perceptions and emotions hence do not just tell the stories of individuals and their choices, but they also tell us about social collective (and objective) dynamics.

This paper adopts interaction and encounter in the urban spaces of the neighborhood as the privileged moments in which to explore perceptions of gentrification. These interactions (or non-interactions, as we will see) are not only revealing per se from an ethnographic perspective. The modalities of encounter and the emotions and perceptions they spur are seen as illustrative moments of relationality in *geographical* space between agents who have different positions of power in *social* space (i.e. the system of relations in which individuals are distributed according to the volume and structure of capitals they hold: economic, cultural, social and symbolic) (Bourdieu 1989). Moreover, since "nothing classifies somebody more than the way he or she classifies (others)" (Bourdieu 1989:19), rhetoric and discursive classifications (in particular that pertaining to "hipsters", as we will see later), along with a sense of 'being othered' and 'othering', will constitute central elements in the presentation and analysis of the empirical materials of this paper. The close urban encounter with 'others' does not necessarily entail positive interaction that deepens respect of differences (Valentine, 2008). Close proximity often aggravates or generates comparisons between different social groups about perceived access to resources and power (Ahmed, 2000). The geography literature presents various examples of tensions created in socially mixed neighborhoods over the uses of and modes of being in shared spaces (Andersson *et al.*, 2011, Valentine and Waite, 2012). In particular, whilst intergroup contact might be beneficial to reduce majority prejudice, it can be stressful for minority groups because of their experience of marginalization and discrimination (Valentine, 2008). Such is the case presented in this paper. The introduction of a relatively privileged population into a neighborhood that used to be a quite economically-homogeneous low-income immigrant area highlights and emphasizes social differences.

Still, it is important to specify that the encounter with someone with a different (more privileged) social status does not constitute displacement per se. The actual geographical *place* where this

encounter happens is the crucial element of this dynamic. The fact that this encounter occurs in a place (formerly) experienced as 'home' is perceived as a threat to the sense of security and ease associated with that place: in other words, a threat to the very identification of that place *as* 'home'.

More substantively, this paper advances the argument that feelings of displacement are fundamental to understanding gentrification and displacement because they are the direct final expression of intersecting structural power dynamics, of which gentrification is a spatial manifestation. So, as physical spaces are transformed through the place-making capacity of dominant groups, embodied encounters are the sites where feelings of displacement beyond physical relocation emerge. The same advantages (ethnic, economic, cultural) empowering certain groups to take (physical) space in the neighborhood are the ones that cause emotional loss of place for disempowered groups. Therefore, exploring these feelings is an insightful yet overlooked field to learn about gentrification and its effects for long-time residents.

Methods and positionality

The present paper draws on extensive qualitative inquiry developed through mixed methods and conducted in Bushwick, a neighborhood in the northern part of Brooklyn, NYC. More information about Bushwick will be provided in the next section.

The first step of the fieldwork (2013) consisted of carrying out approximately forty in-depth interviews with individuals living and/or working in Bushwick. Aiming for richness and variation of materials rather than nominal "representation", the sample of interviewees sought maximum diversity in terms of genders, incomes, ethnicities, professions, ages, and time of residency in the neighborhood. Participant observation and participation at local events and meetings was also a fundamental component of this first phase of my fieldwork.

After verbatim transcription of voice-recorded interviews and a first analysis of the collected materials, the second step consisted of a series of participatory knowledge co-production and knowledge-sharing events (2014), hosted and arranged together with local organizations. For instance, in the first workshop of this second phase, a zine/pamphlet was created by a group of Bushwick residents, by composing a collage of quotes from some of the interviews I had collected (and made anonymous) in the first phase of my fieldwork, combined with additional comments and thoughts from the workshop participants. The resulting zine was reproduced in several copies and made available at different venues and events.

Although the collected empirical material is wider, the present paper specifically focuses on the perspectives of those amongst the interviewees (about half of the total) who have lived in Bushwick most of their lives, and who are referred to here as 'long-time residents'. I also draw on conversations with other key informants, such as social workers and educators in local community centers. Terms such as 'long-time residents', 'gentrifiers', 'newcomers' and similar are sensitive categories to define, and plainly do not render the fluidity and complexity of reality. Nevertheless, while presenting research it is necessary to apply labels, generalizations and simplifications, for the

sake of clarity if not for anything else. I hope the reader will bear with these categorizations in the text.

The interviews this paper draws on are composed as follows: 10 males and 10 females interviewees; four respondents between the age of 20 and 25, eight 25-35, three 35-45, two 45-60, three above 60 years old; 15 ethnically Hispanic participants (Puerto Rican, Dominican, Mexican), three African American, two with mixed ethnic background.

Four amongst this group hold a college degree, six completed high school education; the others have a lower level of education. Thirteen interviewees are employed or retired from blue-collar jobs (some of which in the now closed factories in the neighborhood) and in non-credentialled white-collar jobs such as sales or service sector; four have white-collar types of jobs with diverse qualifications; one owns an art gallery; the rest are unemployed or underemployed or did not specify¹. All of them are tenants in rental apartments, some of which are within public or rent-subsidized housing.

Bearing the embodied features of a white, European, highly-educated female researcher in her late twenties has arguably opened some doors more easily than others in my fieldwork. As a researcher, the looks of a white middle-class young woman in an up-and-coming neighborhood might make it more difficult to gain trust at first sight from long-time residents, because those are typically the looks attributed to the 'gentrifiers'. Indeed, on more than one occasion I sensed an attitude of suspicion while directly approaching long-time residents. Often, though, this swiftly transformed into a sort of sympathy for my work and myself when they realized I was European, visiting the city for a relatively short time, not living in Bushwick, and therefore represented less of a threat in relation to the gentrification of the neighborhood. In particular, my whiteness seemed to become less of an obstacle when contextualized in terms of my being an outsider in the neighborhood. As Jesse, 33, Bushwick resident with Puerto Rican background, towards the end of our interview put it:

Jesse: "I am so glad I've finally accepted to do this interview. You know, when I first saw you, I thought you were white. But you are not white, you are Italian!"

Author: "What do you mean with 'white'? You mean North American white person?"

Jesse: "Yes... white!"

Hence, being an outsider in that neighbourhood initially required more efforts to gain trust from people, but on the other hand put me in a more neutral position, and therefore facilitated opening up from participants. In order to overcome initial skepticisms and recruit participants, I used different channels: posters and flyers in local *bodegas*, supermarkets, Laundromats, parks and sidewalks; snow-ball sampling; a Facebook page with information about the research². Through these various channels, I was able to establish contacts with new research participants, who voluntarily responded to my call.

Historical development and contemporary everyday displacement pressures

Bushwick is a neighborhood in the North part of Brooklyn, at the border with Queens, and hosts circa 82,000 inhabitants. According to 2010 CENSUS data, Bushwick³ comprises 70% Hispanic residents, 17% black, 8% white and a growing (2%) Asian population. The percentage⁴ of foreign-born residents here is 34.4%, a rather high figure if compared to the 22.2% in New York as a whole. The median household income in 2011 was \$33,933, while it was \$55,246 across the city more widely. One third of the population lives below poverty level (a frequency twice as high as the rest of New York, at 16%).

Founded in the seventeenth century by Dutch and Scandinavian settlers, by the 1830s Bushwick had become a primary destination for German and Italian immigrants working in the surrounding shipyards and manufacturing plants. European immigrants gradually built up Bushwick as a neighborhood made of two- and three-family homes, factories and warehouses. By the mid-1960s, waves of impoverished African Americans from the Southern states, and Mexican and Puerto Rican immigrants, started moving to Northern urban areas, including Brooklyn. White working classes, encouraged by speculative real estate, fled Bushwick. At that time, thanks to federal mortgage programs ('Great Society') that insured home loans to low-income buyers, many newcomers could access loans that they could not afford to pay (Malanga, 2008). This resulted in defaults, abandonment, vacancies, the fall of local property values and a stop in investments. Moreover, some owners and tenants started torching their own buildings to collect on insurance money (ibid.). By the 1970s, Bushwick's landscape was desolate and frequently compared to a war zone (Meisler, 2014). The NYC blackout of 1977 signaled a milestone in Bushwick history. The blackout rapidly evolved into a destructive explosion of riots, vandalism and violence in the neighborhood. "On Broadway alone that night, looters pillaged 134 stores and set 44 of them on fire, burning some (...) to the ground. After a decade of disorder, Bushwick had hit bottom—whole blocks were now abandoned and destroyed. On some streets, the only thing left standing was the local church" (Malanga, 2008).

What followed was further disinvestment, flight of the damaged businesses and of the better-off population. By the early 1980s, nearly half of the population lived below the poverty level, and soon the neighborhood became a major center for drug dealing and gang violence, hosted by vacant lots and deserted streets. During the 1990s, anti-crime city policies, growing civic engagement and local social networks like block associations contributed in pushing much of the criminal activities out, or at least decreased their visibility on the streets. When housing prices started to skyrocket in NYC at the end of the 1990s, and the neighboring Williamsburg had reached its gentrification peak, low-income artists, writers and students started to move into Bushwick. Indeed, the North-West part of Bushwick, close to the L train stop and adjacent to Williamsburg, was renamed 'East Williamsburg' by real estate agents eager to attract newcomers to Bushwick, 'the new frontier'. In a recent article, Zukin and Braslow (2011) identify Bushwick as one of the latest NY centers of artistic production. Particularly in its industrial northwest section, where the availability of affordable loft living was widespread, and the connection to Manhattan was convenient with the L subway line, artists have created an enclave with vibrant street art, studios and galleries. The typical gentrification cycle started at the beginning of the 2000s has abruptly accelerated in the past few years, where restaurants and

bars have followed, imparting an appeal for people in their 20s and 30s seeking the latest trends in art, music and lifestyle. To accommodate that population, hundreds of apartments have been created, by converting former warehouses into loft apartments, renovating and subdividing residential low-rise buildings, and building new condos, including some luxury ones with private amenities and doormen. This had an impact on housing prices as a whole in the neighborhood. The increase in prices and its speed has been defined as ‘abnormal’ and ‘incredible’ even by veteran real estate agents (Hoffman, 2013). From 2013 to 2014⁵, for instance, all unit type rents increased dramatically leading to Bushwick having the highest overall average rent increase throughout Brooklyn (17.6%). In 2014, renting a studio in Bushwick cost on average \$2,300; it was \$1,700 just a year before; considering that in 2009, a Bushwick studio ranged from \$900 to \$1,200 – and that this was up from \$500 to \$800 just a few years before – the pace and depth of the change are astonishing⁶.

This trend in the housing market creates everyday displacement pressures above all for long-time residents. From the interviews, different strategies for pushing low-income tenants out of rental housing and private apartments emerged.

In Bushwick there is quite a high concentration of rent-stabilized housing stock. However, the number of rent-regulated units had fallen to 32% in 2011 from 43% in 2002⁷. According to rental guidelines, apartments can legally be detached from rent regulation under determined changed conditions⁸. By far the most common way an apartment converts to market rate, is when it becomes vacant and the landlord is allowed vacancy- and improvement-related increases that raise the rent to or over \$2,500 a month. In gentrifying neighborhoods where increasing amounts of people can afford double or triple the stabilized rent, many tenants face pressures to move out, so that landlords can declare the apartment vacant, make improvements that raise the rent to over the threshold of \$2,500 and hence switch to market rates, or simply sell it to large developers. This strategy is recurring more and more in Bushwick. A common tactic used by landlords to push tenants to leave is by withholding needed maintenance and not renewing leases. In this respect, the story of Carlos, graphic designer, 36, father of three, with a Mexican background, is similar to various stories that I heard during my interviews:

“My landlord is trying to get all the families out of their apartments to rent them to hipsters. He doesn’t renew leases, he doesn’t want to fix things, and by this you get tired. And eventually some people leave: three apartments have already left, so it’s only a few of us who are still there. What most landlords right now are doing is taking two-rooms apartments like mine and cut them in half to make studios. And so they get double rent. This is happening a lot in Bushwick”.

Moreover, some of my interviewees have experienced or witnessed illegal buy-out attempts such as the one described by Katy, 33, teacher, from Australia:

“What landlords are doing to get tenants out is paying them like \$3000 to get out. For these people it’s a lot of money, so they take the money and go. I’ve witnessed it a lot, I don’t know where they go, but many times they are paid to go”.

The profiteering conduct of many landlords makes it hard for low-income residents of all types to find affordable and reliable accommodation. Yet, it seems that Hispanic and African American tenants are further discriminated against in the rental market, even by landlords with similar ethnic backgrounds, who prefer to rent to nominally higher-paying tenants, as explained by Carlos:

“My brother doesn’t rent to Hispanics. He rents strictly to hipsters. Because they are single, they use less water, less heat, less everything. So to rent to a family of four who uses more water, more heat, more noise, it costs more for him as if he rents to hipsters who only sleep there, they are like three roommates and he does not spend much resource on them. Plus, they can pay more”.

Tyrelle, 28, an African American woman born and raised in Bushwick, confirmed this self-discriminatory tendency:

“I know many black homeowners who do not rent to black people. They only rent to whites because they are a more secure investment”.

Lisa, a real estate agent living and working in a town-houses business in Bushwick, described the behavior of many of her fellow realtors as greedy and profiteering: “People are sleazy and Bushwick is the Wild Wild West of real estate”. She, as well as others amongst my interviewees, received unfair buy-out offers. Real estate groups are buying homes at prices below their actual value by offering homeowners quick cash for their properties—with the prospective of developing the land into expensive rental units. On a daily basis, blocks are blanketed with flyers offering to buy homes for cash. And this is just another form of everyday pressure low-income homeowners are facing to leave the neighborhood.

Emotional, affective and psychological (reactions to) displacement

Although the causes of gentrification are ascribable in significant part to housing market dynamics and to the role of institutional regulations and zoning, my empirical research shows that the triggering event that engenders immediate and visceral feelings of displacement for long-time residents is the encounter with newcomers. David for instance, 27, from California, living in Bushwick and working as an art educator for teenagers, pinpointed the link between gentrification and the visual, perceptible features of newcomers in a sentence:

“When I say you SEE the gentrification, I mean you see it in the prices, in the colors of people’s skins, the clothing people wear, the things people talk about, the languages spoken.”

He connected the visual expressions of gentrification not to changes in the built environment or in the housing market, but rather to the kind of individuals moving into and/or spending time in the neighborhood, their ethnic profiles, their semblances and their lifestyles. In other words, David, like several other interviewees, connects gentrification to the embodied dispositions of the newcomers. Gentrification is hence revealed instantly through the visibility of a variety of identity locations such as race/ethnicity, sexuality, gender, consumption habits, in addition to class and/or socio-economic advantage. As will become more evident in the following paragraphs, the description of the newcomers by long-time residents are seldom related only to income. Rather, they are related to cultural norms and above all race. Privilege is built on intersections of these dimensions and that is

why the introduction of people holding this privilege into the neighborhood through gentrification is so frustrating, provoking and hurtful.

In what follows I will illustrate more specifically the effects of the appearance of newcomers into a low-income neighborhood through the process of gentrification. The first reaction highlighted is that of feeling “othered” – even though often not intentionally – by the newcomers in the most gentrified spaces of the neighborhood. This feeling entails a shifted sense of place and belonging, and therefore is a crucial component of displacement. At the same time and, arguably, in response to the experience of feeling othered, most interviewees articulate displacement and gentrification by discursively othering the newcomers through stereotypical representations of ‘hipsters’. My interpretation is that this discursive device serves as a defensive positioning and resistance against the threats represented by the in-movers. In fact, the encounter with the newcomers in the neighborhood spaces is perceived as threatening because it does not simply consist of an encounter between individuals: it is an encounter of legacies shaped by racialization and exclusion in the history of the neighborhood and of Northern American cities more broadly. Hence, the feelings and emotions brought to surface in these encounters are the most immediate expression and outcome of deeper intersecting grids of power.

[FIGURE 1]: “Your luxury is our displacement”: Stencil art found on the streets of Bushwick during Arts in Bushwick 2014 event. Source: author

Feeling othered by the newcomers

Like in every gentrifying area (see also Zukin 2009), the introduction of a new social group has brought along a whole set of new activities and venues to Bushwick to accommodate new needs and preferences. The sidewalk space is the showcase of the new activities and businesses. Juice bars, organic markets, craft beer stores, bike shops, and above all coffee shops and restaurants have been popping up at an incredible pace, with a noticeable acceleration in the last three years. The additional

people and hence 'eyes on the street' (Jacobs, 1961) attracted by the new activities have contributed to a livelier and allegedly safer environment.

Most of the long-time residents I interviewed appreciated the positive effects of the new businesses in amplifying livability and security on the neighborhood streets. Only very few of them, though, actually frequent and enjoy the new businesses. A small minority of the interviewees see the changes light-heartedly and, despite not feeling completely at ease when going to the new restaurants (for reasons I will explain in a moment) they also claim that they are willing to overcome their reluctance in order to enjoy what the new places have to offer. Some others are curious about the new activities and people coming in: "It is amazing how the neighborhood is becoming...", but they worry about the effects on rents and prices: "...but everything has become more expensive" (Maria, 51 y.o., moved to Bushwick from Dominican Republic in 1985, factory worker).

The most recurring viewpoint in our conversations, however, was that long-time residents do not feel that the new businesses are catering to them. The reasons why were well explained by Miguel, 36, a Bushwick native with Puerto Rican background, and teacher in a local high-school:

"Around the corner where I grew up, where my mother still lives, there is a bar that opened up, and you pass by and you see that the business is flourishing, and it probably flourishes because the new people that are moving to the community support those businesses. But the people that have lived in the community all their lives don't feel that those businesses really would like to cater to them. Because you go in and they might be serving brunch, but brunch is really expensive, whilst people here are accustomed to go to the corner store and get a breakfast for two or three dollars. So now if you go to certain businesses, they cater to people who can afford particular prices, and the people of the community who still live here, who grew up here, are very aware of that".

Many long-time residents find prices in the new businesses unaffordable and feel they are catering to a different target base of customers, wealthier customers living in the neighborhood or coming to enjoy its amenities. Nonetheless, prices are not the only obstacles discouraging long-time residents from spending time in the new restaurants and cafés. Miguel continued:

"Even those who might have a decent income, might not necessarily hang out there because there is nobody like them there, there is no people from the community they grew up with". (Emphasis added).

In Miguel's experience, long-time residents tend to feel uncomfortable in the new businesses not only for the kind of services offered and their prices, but also because they feel 'other' from the people who frequent those establishments. A similar sense of discomfort while being in the new restaurants and cafés was reported by other (young) interviewees with Hispanic backgrounds, who felt "watched in an uncomfortable way" (Mario, 26 y.o., Mexican origins, born and raised in Bushwick, living in public housing) while entering these places.

Activities like brunch and the places that serve it represent shifting attitudes towards social status, leisure time, and consumption performed by the middle class and for the middle class (Micallef, 2014). Moreover, it has been shown that even artistic activities can be complicit in exclusionary gentrification dynamics, particularly in the production of spaces of white privilege (Shaw and Sullivan, 2011, McLean, 2014). These activities and venues are changing the face of Bushwick at an

incredibly high pace, yet seem to leave the majority of its population feeling left out. Feeling 'out of place' in a venue that caters to a higher economic capital – and perhaps a different cultural capital – is perceived as displacement, a 'loss of place', when it occurs in a formerly familiar environment.

The introduction to the neighborhood of new faces, new life-styles, new activities, and a new economic status, calls into question habitual practices and raises questions about one self and one's identity. Anna, 24, Dominican single mother born in Bushwick, employed in service sector, talked about how everyday encounters with the newcomers have changed her sense of 'feeling at home' in the neighborhood:

"When you see these new people around, you feel different from how you felt before. You become more aware of yourself, you watch how you behave and how you speak, not to fulfill a stereotype. Before it wasn't like that, before you could speak a fucked up English, nobody cared, because everybody was the same".

Anna explained that when she walks around the Morgan Avenue subway stop to take the train, i.e. the area where most lofts, art galleries and new businesses are concentrated, she does not feel welcome and at ease. She feels like she is being continuously judged by the people on the streets for being a young Hispanic single mother 'from the hood', and reproducing a stereotype of low-income young women with a similar background. She therefore feels that she has to behave accordingly in order to escape negative judgments, for instance by speaking a 'proper' English. Later in our conversation, Anna recognized that this sense of being judged might just be a subjective impression and self-persuasion; still, it is an indicator of power dynamics at play in those interactions and of a shifted sense of place and belonging. The encounter with new faces in the neighborhood brings to the surface internal conflicts about one's positionality within structural and subjective dimensions of class, ethnicity, gender and culture.

Othering "the hipsters"

It is certainly not one of the aims of this paper to provide a definition of the 'hipster' type (on this topic see: Aiello and Shultz, 2003, Cowen, 2006, Greif, 2010, Michael, 2013). However, since this is a key discursive element in popular gentrification debate in New York and also a recurring expression in the interviewees' accounts, I find it insightful to elucidate what the research participants mean by 'hipsters' and what these interpretations entail. In the context of gentrifying Bushwick, 'hipsters' are stereotypically seen and represented as the embodied expression of social, economic and racial privilege. Moreover, the ideas of 'hipsters' and 'gentrifiers' most often overlap in these accounts⁹. Indeed, I will show that the 'hipster' label is used as a discursive tool for 'othering' the newcomers in order to reiterate the traditional working class identity of the neighborhood and reclaim its belonging to the various non-white communities living there for decades.

In my conversations with research participants I intentionally avoided using the word 'hipster' because of the pejorative sense commonly attributed to it, and to avoid influencing the responses with value judgments. Nevertheless, in almost every exchange, interviewees brought up the word themselves. The respondents did not use the word 'hipster' as a fashion style holding onto specific individuals that could belong to just any social class. Rather, they specifically used the 'hipster' label

to refer to an imagined community of disproportionately white, young types moving into the neighborhood in recent times and with enough money to pay relatively high rents and frequent costly restaurants and bars. Beyond its largely stereotypical character, this notion entails the assignation of shared embodied dispositions to the new residents moving into Bushwick: identity locations such as 'white', 'young', 'artsy', 'economically privileged' tended to intersect and conflate in long-time residents' descriptions of newcomers.

The encounter of different subjectivities ("hipsters") in the neighborhood space produces a variety of reactions amongst long-term residents. Most interviewees took a defensive position against the change by 'othering' and dis-identifying themselves from the stereotypical 'hipster' described above, and putting an emphasis on racial aspects, economic difference, or dissimilar cultural values, like religion, sexuality or education norms. For example Carlos, who was introduced before (36, married, father of three, Mexican background), stressed purported values and lifestyles differences between imagined communities of Hispanic and hipsters:

"We Hispanic are religious people, family people. The hipsters are not family people. One thing I've noticed where I have lived is that hipsters don't stay. They come here two-three months and then they go. They are like nomads, they wander around. And they have no families. They like to party and drink all night. (...) It's not that we don't like the hipsters, but what is happening is affecting people who have been living here all their lives".

Janet, the director of an historical indoor market in Bushwick, whose vendors and customers are largely Hispanic elderly, while talking about the (non-)relationship between the vendors and the newcomers, reported about cultural divide and alleged resentment:

"I see a simmering resentment. I think they [the vendors] resent these people [hipsters] and anything they represent. They say to themselves: what are these young kids going around all day doing nothing when they have to pay 3000\$ a month rent? To them they are not real people. These are people who struggle every day to feed their families, and they don't get these people".

Amongst other similar accounts, Juan, 28, an art gallery owner from Queens with Latin American origins, described 'hipster' as an attitude:

"After all, what is the clear definition of a hipster? I feel that hipster is somebody that think they know what the neighborhood wants, and think that nobody knows what they know, and they don't think they like what is popular, and they are just too cool for life. But in reality they are looking for inspiration."

Juan connects the 'hipster' notion with patronizing and condescending attitudes associated with privileged cultural and ethnic assets, and in particular to whiteness. Talking about the gallery he owns, which is mainly a venue for hip-hop culture events, but also a space where activities like art classes for children and victims of domestic abuse are organized, he continued:

"I've had a lot of white people coming here, and they are trying to be my friends and it's funny: when you see one white person coming to this kind of setting they have to talk about how they are white, they talk about it, I don't know where it comes from, and they go like: "You know, I live in Myrtle¹⁰ and I'm a hipster" and I'm like: "No, you are not a hipster, don't call yourself like that" and I say: "Play the music you wanna play" and they go for Lauryn Hill!

[Laughs] *And that's the thing, you know, I think they all feel the guilt of being a gentrifier or something. But ultimately, guilt does not exist if you contribute to the community".*

From Juan's points of view, the "guilt of being a white-gentrifier-hipster", or in other words, the anxiety of privilege (Sennett, 1991) allegedly felt by some newcomers would be atoned for by actively contributing to the existing 'community'.

But the ideas both of a univocally recognized existing community and of a 'gentrifier' role need to be problematized. For instance, Juan himself is not a Bushwick native; he comes from Queens and he moved to Bushwick a couple of years ago to open his gallery. Nonetheless, he does not consider himself as a gentrifier for he comes from a public housing project and he has Latin American origins. Therefore he sees himself as sharing the same economic, cultural and ethnic background as most long-time residents of Bushwick, which he refers to as 'the community'. He claims his prerogative to live in the neighborhood without being a gentrifier by emphasizing his belonging to the Hispanic population, by supporting hip-hop culture, and ultimately by taking distance from white people's 'guilt'. From this perspective we can see that being considered a gentrifier – or considering oneself as such – does not always correspond to being a newcomer in a chronological sense. The identification with the role of 'gentrifier' does not have a univocal neutral correspondence with the time of moving into the neighborhood. Thus, just as labelling someone as 'hipster' does not correspond to a style, othering the newcomers as 'gentrifiers' is not automatically based on a time-of-moving-in criterion. Instead it is a complex interpretation that draws on the intersectionality of multiple identities and the interconnected ways power operates through them.

"Gentrification comes after": loaded interactions, embodied power relations

Ultimately, reactions to the encounter with newcomers deserve attention precisely because, from the point of view of long-time residents, these encounters make social inequalities and power imbalances visible and obvious straightaway. This point, whilst present in various interviews, was most eloquently expressed by Rosa, 26, social worker and college student, born in Bushwick to Dominican parents. Rosa wrote a letter to a local magazine expressing her anger about gentrification and how this feeling bursts at the sight of new individuals moving in. In her letter, Rosa wrote:

"[...] I see the gut renovation my landlord did as soon as we moved out and feel disgusted. I see my best friends and families having to move to Cypress Hills and East New York and I am livid. I feel such an unending wave of anger and frustration. Sometimes I get off my train station on Morgan Avenue and feel suffocated by this rage when I see a sea of new faces and new businesses. I feel anger that the home that my family tried to carve out of this horrible little slice of earth called Bushwick is not mine anymore. Or rather, that the fruit now ripe for picking isn't ours. [...]"

I contacted Rosa through the magazine where she published her letter and met her in person for an interview. There she explained what the arrival of new people in the neighborhood means to her as a long-time resident:

"In a neighborhood that is gentrifying and changing so much, every interaction is loaded. Everything is heavily weighted, because the stakes are just so high. I'm losing my home because I don't make enough to live here. Because there are people who looked different than me, who have more money, and supposedly put more value just by WHO they are."

What I am is not valuable enough. I don't mean shit. That's what makes people so angry. I don't mean anything, my likes and what I think don't have a place at the table here anymore, even if I've been here when it was so shitty and tried to make something of it".

Rosa explained that the new “faces” moving in are living embodied reminders of structural inequalities. Having to compete in the housing market with someone who carries “more value just by WHO they are” – in other words, by virtue of having a more advantaged position in social space based on ethnicity, gender, and volume and composition of capital – creates a sense of anger and frustration because it calls into question matters of power and one’s own subjectivity in power structures. Yet, by struggling with herself to overcome her gut feelings, Rosa made the effort to rationalize and look beyond some of the stereotypes and prejudices surrounding newcomers, and in particular about whiteness:

“I personally saw with my own eyes it was not only white people, it was Asian people, black people, Hispanic people, from all over the country that are moving here because there is a great art movement here, this is a neighborhood where it's great to live in, it's a lot of change going on, the environment is really good for creativity and making things happen. But I think the reason people choose to have that feeling [anger towards white newcomers] is because it's easy, because it's packaged in one face and you can just face it, you can look at it, and not like it.”.

Rosa implied that there are wide social issues and structural inequalities “packaged in one [white] face” that embodies privilege. She recognizes that beyond the individual there are social and structural inequalities to be blamed for gentrification.

Indeed, the roots of gentrification as a ‘neighborhood expression of inequality’ (Slater, 2009) stretch back to the marginalization resulting from segregationist policies and white flight and avoidance, which have created economically and racially segregated neighborhoods in the first place. As Tyrelle, 28, African American woman mentioned earlier put it:

“Gentrification comes after. There is something deeper, which is racism and segregation and our own people's mentality of feeling inferior and not trusting or putting value in each other”.

Territorial segregation and stigmatization affect “the residents of defamed districts by corroding their sense of self, warping their social relations, and undercutting their capacity for collective action (...)” (Wacquant *et al.*, 2014). The racialization and stigmatization of Bushwick has shaped the place’s identity as well as the self-identities of its residents. In fact, place identity is a fundamental component of a person’s self-identity formation (Proshansky, 1978, Proshansky *et al.*, 1983): “questions of ‘who we are’ are often intimately related to questions of ‘where we are’” (Dixon and Durrheim, 2000). At the same time, identity can only be defined by locating who and what we are not: the construction of the ‘Other’ through representation is crucial in the construction of one’s identity (Coward and Ellis, 1977).

Arguably, the strategy of ‘othering the hipsters’ as exposed in this paper is an attempt to reinforce a subject position for groups whose identity has been wrought by marginalization and exclusion. The territorial segregation of poor neighborhoods like Bushwick was created by constructing material, symbolic, spatial and discursive boundaries to exclude minority groups, to ‘other’ them. In the cycle

of abandonment and gentrification (Marcuse, 1985), the latter is once again the affirmation of the power of making space of hegemonic groups, i.e. the same power that has created segregation to begin with. White middle-classes flight and avoidance have created the stigmatized Bushwick. White middle-class arrival is now creating the gentrified Bushwick. The encounter with the middle-class and the power it represents is embodied by the contemporary encounter with the 'hipster' in the neighborhood spaces. This encounter, as illustrated, brings up feelings of exclusion, resentment, frustration, relative deprivation and anger because it embodies the power relations at play in society as whole.

And the feelings provoked by the encounter are so jarring because of their spatial component. *Where* the encounter happens is crucial. Gentrification disrupts the feelings of attachment and belonging of long-time residents who have struggled to build a sense of home despite the conditions of impoverishment and abandonment of the place. With gentrification, they feel they are getting deprived of their sense of place, on top of compelling threats of material displacement.

Concluding remarks

The paper has argued that lived experiences of displacement beyond outmigration are precipitated by material and psychological pressures acting on the individual. The external material forces causing displacement even before outmigration happens consist of a series of everyday pressures to leave. Besides continuous increases in rents in the private market, pressures also occur in rent-stabilized apartments (e.g. landlords abuse and buy-out attempts), and therefore specifically impact low-income tenants.

I have argued that psychological and emotional components of displacement deserve particular attention. Feelings of displacement are triggered for low-income residents in gentrifying areas from their encounters with individuals and groups with different (and relatively privileged) social positioning, in the places previously experienced as home. The accounts of gentrification provided by long-time residents show that: (1) Long-time residents feel 'othered' by the newcomers and feel that the hidden and overt power relations at play prevent them (directly or indirectly) from frequenting some neighborhood spaces. Their ability for taking and making place is surpassed by that of the newcomers. (2) Identity locations such as 'white', 'young', 'artsy', 'economically privileged', 'highly educated', tend to intersect and conflate in long-time residents' descriptions of newcomers, commonly referred to as 'hipsters'. Long-time residents assume a defensive position against the neighbourhood changes by 'othering' and dis-identifying themselves from the stereotypical 'hipster' in the attempt to reinforce their own vulnerable identities. (3) The newcomers identified through the above-mentioned attributes convey structural assets which tend to position them in a better off position in society (and, vitally, in the local residential market) compared to the low-income long-time residents. Therefore, for long-time residents, newcomers are living embodied reminders of structural inequalities and unbalanced power relations. (4) Since identity is relational and tightly connected to place, the encounter with somehow privileged individuals in one's home neighborhood calls into question personal identity and subjectivity, and therefore it can be a particularly tense

experience for economically weak subjects because it can become loaded with senses of frustration and even anger.

The illustrated perspectives, at any rate in their most radical standpoints, seem to reflect a quite strong 'us versus them' logic. The intention of the paper, however, is not to demonize the newcomers or to assume the 'otherness' of gentrifiers (Redfern, 2003), nor to treat them as a culturally, economically and ethnically homogeneous group. Indeed, as shown since the beginning of gentrification studies (Rose, 1984, Zukin, 1989, Ley, 1997), early gentrifiers also experience a lack of available alternatives affordable to them. In North American cities, rampant neoliberalism, the buildup of student debt, the decline of social mobility, increases in temporary employment, and growing social inequalities and polarization, put even those with a relatively privileged background in a situation of instability and precarity. As observed by Rose (1984): "Much of what are alternatively referred to as "alternative lifestyles", reduced to exogenous "fashions" by neoclassical theorists and viewed pejoratively by some Marxists in fact symptomize attempts by educated young people, who may be unemployed, underemployed, temporarily employed (or all three simultaneously), to find creative ways of responding to new conditions". Yet, while the motivations of the gentrifiers and their struggles might be similar to those of the long-time residents – i.e. defining and preserving identity in conditions of modernity – the means at the disposal of each group are significantly different (Redfern, 2003). Sure enough, the displacement (as out-migration) of early gentrifiers is a part of the typical life-cycle of gentrification (Zukin, 1989). Still, as shown by the present paper and others long before it (Fried, 1966, Marcuse, 1985, Fullilove, 2009), the effects of displacement for low-income residents are even more disruptive because they strongly affect individual identity perceptions and because, ultimately, gentrification is just another expression of a powerfully racialized and segregating urban history.

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¹ In this paper, the definition of class is based on a combination of income, professional profile, education, and family background. These measures are not unrelated, and they often intersect with the time and status of immigration. In relation to professional profiles, with working class I refer to both craft and skilled labour blue-collar and not-credentialed white-collar workers (e.g. sales and service employees). Middle class includes professionally credentialed white-collar workers, as well as individuals with a college or higher education who might not necessarily be fully-employed in a traditional white-collar job (e.g. importantly in this context: artists).

² Human Geographies of Bushwick <https://www.facebook.com/bushwickresearch?fref=ts>

³ 2010 Census data. Department of City Planning. City of New York. URL http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/census_2010.shtml accessed 2014/09/25

⁴ The statistical data are from city-data.com: <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/Bushwick-Brooklyn-NY.html#ixzz3ELILM48v> accessed 2014/09/25

⁵ Source: mns.com accessed 23/9/2014 http://www.mns.com/pdf/brooklyn_market_report_aug_14.pdf

⁶ Source: mns.com accessed 23/9/2014 http://www.mns.com/pdf/brooklyn_market_report_aug_14.pdf

⁷ Source: Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy at New York University

⁸ "A rent stabilized apartment may be deregulated in two different ways: 1) when the apartment has a legal regulated rent of \$2,500 or more per month AND the apartment is occupied by persons whose total annual household income exceeds \$200,000; 2) A rent stabilized apartment *which becomes vacant* and could be offered at a legal regulated rent of \$2,500 or more per month is no longer subject to rent regulation". (New York City Rent Guidelines Board 2014) <http://www.nycrgb.org/html/guidelines/decontrol.html>

¹⁰ Myrtle avenue in Bushwick, area with a high concentration of lofts, art galleries and "hipster" venues