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Shopkeepers and urban change: moving beyond gentrification studies?

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Abstract

Though the literature on commercial gentrification has grown considerably since the 2000s, it has several blind spots. Indeed, research has primarily focused on neighborhoods located in central areas, examining the retail landscape as well as consumer practices and identities. In this article, we discuss this literature and put it in dialogue with the literature on retailers and, more broadly, on independent professions. On this basis, we propose an analytical framework for studying commercial change from the shopkeepers’ perspective. The discussion is conducted in light of the concrete transformations of a commercial street located in a formerly working-class suburb of Paris. This case study illustrates the relevance of our approach, showing that even in an archetypal gentrified street, the profiles and paths of shopkeepers are varied, as is their relation to urban change.

Résumé

La littérature sur la gentrification commerciale s’est considérablement développée depuis les années 2000 mais conserve plusieurs angles morts. La recherche s’est principalement concentrée sur des quartiers centraux dont elle a étudié le paysage commercial, ainsi que les pratiques de consommation et leur dimension identitaire. Dans cet article, nous discutons cette littérature et la faisons dialoguer avec des recherches consacrées aux commerçants et, plus largement, aux professions indépendantes. À partir de là, nous proposons un cadre d’analyse pour étudier le changement commercial du point de vue des commerçants. Cette discussion est conduite au regard des transformations concrètes d’une rue commerçante située en banlieue parisienne. L’étude de cas illustre la pertinence de notre cadre d’analyse, en montrant que même dans une rue gentrifiée archétypale, les profils et les parcours des commerçants peuvent être très variés, de même que leur rapport au changement urbain.

Keywords

commercial gentrification, urban change, shopkeepers, entrepreneurial strategies, social networks, individual trajectories

Mots-clés

Gentrification commerciale, changement urbain, commerçant, stratégie entrepreneuriale, réseaux sociaux, trajectoire individuelle

Introduction

The notion of gentrification has generated extensive scholarship and debate since the 1960s. For many years, this field of research has focused on real estate and residential dynamics. When commercial dynamics were addressed, it was with more of an “epiphenomenal view of retail change” (Hubbard 2017, p. 3), where commercial transformations were viewed as a reflection of socio-economic transformations in a neighborhood (Ley, 1996). It was not until the 2000s that Anglophone researchers became directly interested in the “retail landscapes of gentrification” (Bridge & Dowling, 2001, p. 95) and began to address commercial transformations as essential components of gentrification processes.

Since then, academic literature on commercial gentrification has grown considerably. It has focused mainly on landscape, consumption practices and identities, with a particular interest in the central districts of large cities (Deener, 2007; Shaw & Hagemas, 2015; Hubbard, 2017). Although this area of research has diversified in recent years, few studies have been conducted on independent local shopkeepers (Zukin et al., 2015). Moreover, investigations devoted to them mostly focus on newly established retailers and/or on those specializing in a mid-to-high end offer, thus emphasizing categories which have become emblematic of commercial gentrification, such as booksellers or restaurant/café owners.

This literature is only a very partial guide to what is happening in those working-class neighborhoods we worked on, which are located north of inner Paris¹. They have been marked since the 1980s by an increase in poverty and in the proportion of populations with migration background, while being transformed locally by gentrification processes since the 2000s (Clerval & Delage, 2014; Raad, 2014). The retail landscape is just as heterogeneous. There are indeed a few art galleries, organic shops and cafés which are characteristic of gentrification, but these are very marginal and concentrated. The retail landscape mainly remains dominated by other types of businesses (Fleury et al., 2020).

In the course of our investigations, we quickly realised that pre-existing shopkeepers sometimes do benefit from gentrification, and that those most typical of gentrification are sometimes more economically fragile than others (Delage & Fleury 2020; Rollinde, 2017). In other words, it is not possible to predict which shopkeepers will take part in the process, and how. As soon as signs of gentrification can be identified in a neighborhood, it is necessary to engage with independent retailers, regardless of the type of product or service they sell. In so doing, far from considering the evolution of independent retail as a simple effect of gentrification, we suggest that the evolution has its own logic and temporality, and that it can therefore precede, align or be out of step with gentrification (Chabrol, Fleury & Van Criekingen, 2014).

From this perspective, shopkeepers are full-fledged actors in the evolution of the neighborhood and the city. An independent shopkeeper can be defined as a retailer who owns and operates a small store or shop; she or he personally manages purchasing, storing goods and receiving customers. To better understand their role in the gentrification process, we had to draw not only on the literature pertaining to commercial gentrification mentioned above, but also on other fields of research that

¹ This research was initiated as part of a collective project funded by the Mairie de Paris (2014-2016) and subsequently developed in several master's theses (including Rollinde 2017). We thank Sandrine Berroir, Matthieu Delage, Anne Clerval, Ulysse Lassaube, Lina Raad and Serge Weber. We dedicate this paper to Matthieu Giroud, to whom we owe a great deal.

looked more specifically at retailers. They provide us with a more diversified representation of retailers, as well as conceptual and methodological tools for analysing the perceptions they have of their business, as well as of their neighborhood, entrepreneurial strategies, and also their biographical and professional trajectories.

Drawing on our research experience, the aim of this article is not to present empirical results, but to discuss the existing literature on commercial gentrification and to put it in dialogue with the literature on shopkeepers and, more broadly, on independent professions. We are also convinced that cross-referencing the respective contributions of Anglophone and Francophone research can advance the debate. However, we have chosen to conduct the discussion in light of the concrete transformations of a seemingly archetypal gentrified street, which we identified during our surveys: Rue de l'Église in Montreuil. In the first section, we present the retail gentrification perspective, and reveal its blind spots. In the second section, we propose a decentralized point of view with respect to this dominant perspective, focusing more on the figure of the independent local shopkeeper. While there exist alternative approaches to the dominant one – which look at retail policies, for example – we claim that our approach, which examines individual practices and strategies in the face of gentrification and urban change, provides an original perspective on commercial change in these neighborhoods.

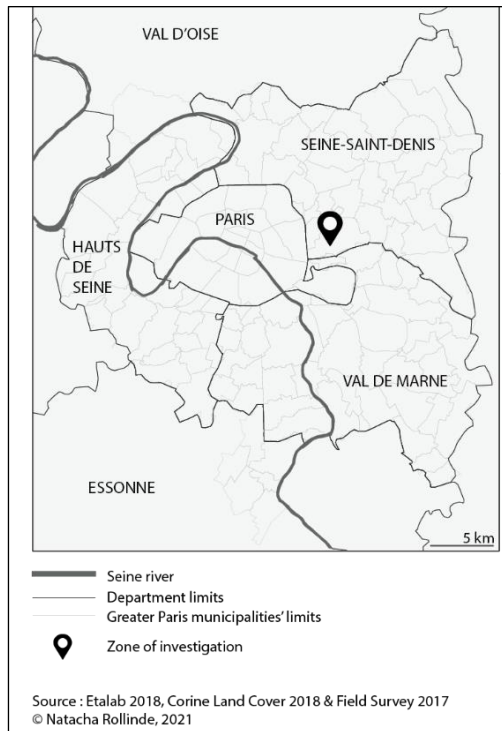
Introducing Montreuil and Rue de l'Église

In our research, we did not focus on one type or group of retailers, as is often the case in the literature, but on a given commercial area to survey retailers in their diversity. We define these commercial areas as perimeters gathering a continuous and coherent offer of shops: they can be streets or zones covering several blocks where the commercial offer is structured according to a logic of complementarity, even if the retail landscapes are very different in nature (i.e. more or less attractive, dense or specialized). The survey sites were selected because of their location in areas marked by major social and urban transformations (gentrification, real estate programs, new transportation infrastructure and public facilities, etc.).

Among the five communes² where we carried out surveys, we choose to focus here on Montreuil-sous-Bois. Like the others, it is located in the former “red belt” of Paris, but even more than the others, it has been marked by major socio-economic and territorial transformations over the last two decades (Figure 1). The proportion of executive and higher intellectual professionals has more than tripled between 1968 and 2017, while the proportion of manual laborers has decreased accordingly over the same period. This evolution, which accelerated from the 1980s onwards, can be explained by the classic residential gentrification process of housing rehabilitation by households with low economic but high cultural capital (Collet 2015). This process was concentrated within a few districts close to Paris well served by public transport, while others, often characterized by a high proportion of social housing, were marked by an impoverishment of their populations.

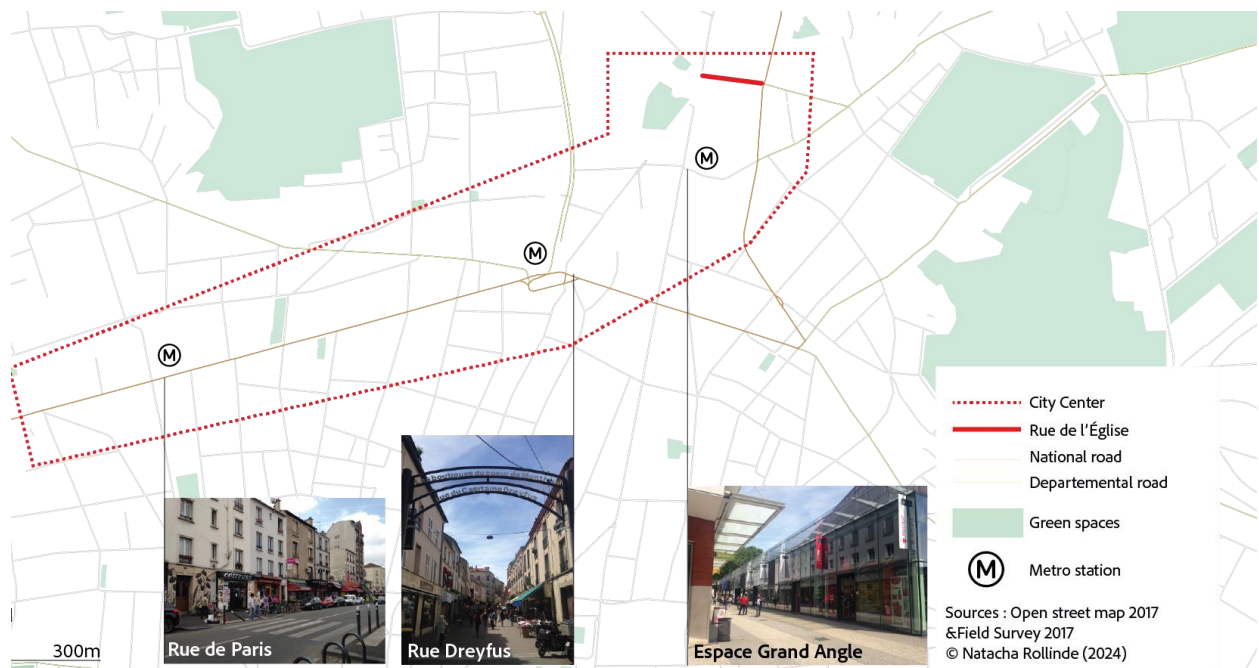
² From west to east: Saint-Denis, Aubervilliers, Pantin, Montreuil-sous-Bois, and Noisy-le-Sec.

Figure 1. Montreuil in Greater Paris



Montreuil downtown area stretches along an axis from the border with Paris to the town's historic church (Figure 2). On the Paris side is one of the capital's main flea markets and a regional shopping centre. This is where the lively Rue de Paris begins, with its high density of shops frequented by the working classes, particularly those with a migrant background. To the east, it opens onto a food market and a pedestrianised street, rue Dreyfus, which host independent food stores and restaurants. The latter then leads to Place de la Mairie, which underwent major redevelopment in the early 2010s, resulting in the construction of an open-air mall dominated by chain and franchise stores, unlike the rest of the town centre, which is primarily made up of independent stores. A few meters away, Rue de l'Église (Figure 3) is a smaller polarity, but it was undergoing major urban and social changes at the time of the field survey, which seemed to be part of a process of commercial gentrification.

Figure 2. Montreuil town centre and its commercial areas



The survey was conducted in 2017³ and covered the entire downtown area of Montreuil (see Rollinde, 2017). After an exhaustive inventory of businesses, all 611 retailers within the perimeter were asked to answer a questionnaire. The survey focused on their opinion about the neighborhood and, more broadly, about Montreuil and their clientele, but also on the changes over time. We also asked them about changes they made to their activity. 66 shopkeepers agreed to answer the questionnaire (including 6 in the Rue de l'Église) and we conducted in-depth interviews with eight of them (including 2 in the Rue de l'Église), in order to understand their personal and professional background and its articulation with their commercial strategies.

Figure 3. Rue de l'Église (2017)



Source: the authors

Analyzing commercial change through gentrification

As “gentrification” refers to the replacement of the working classes by the middle classes at the residential level, “commercial gentrification” refers to the replacement of existing small, often ethnic, low-end businesses with a new, often higher-end, range of shops and services (Zukin et al., 2009; Rankin & McLean, 2015). Since the early 2000s, research on this issue has intensified. Nevertheless, it remains globally focused on certain dimensions of commercial change, types of neighborhoods and categories of retailers, generating several blind spots.

Evolution of retail, consumption practices, and social identities

Commercial gentrification takes various forms from one city to another and even within the same city, where it shapes complex “micro-geographies” (Bridge & Dowling, 2001). Most often, however, it involves physical changes in commercial premises and revolves around the “ABCs of gentrification: art galleries, boutiques, and cafés” (Zukin et al. 2015, p. 13). For most researchers, it also corresponds to a gradual upgrading of businesses on a neighborhood scale, which is carried out

³ The timing of the survey explains why we limit our results to 2017.

according to a logic of invasion-succession or pioneer approaches. The replacement of small businesses by new stores would then only be a first step, since these would then be replaced by outlets of retail chains (Zukin et al., 2009; Mermet, 2017). Within this framework, commercial gentrification ultimately leads to the transformation of a neighborhood's landscape and identity (Deener, 2007) often increasing its attractiveness drawing in new customers or even new residents (Bridge & Dowling, 2001; Zukin et al., 2009).

These business transformations have been investigated primarily from the consumer's point of view. In line with work that has examined links between gentrification and lifestyles (Ley, 1996), existing research analyses retail and associated consumption practices as vectors of social distinction (Zukin & Kosta, 2004). Commercial gentrification then reveals itself as a process by which consumption and entertainment spaces that emerge reflect the tastes and preferences of the middle and upper classes. Through these terms, gentrifiers affirm their identity as a social group (Bridge & Dowling, 2001; Karsten, 2014). Zukin thus emphasized the authenticity sought by a young and cultured clientele in breaking away from mainstream middle-class consumption practices. "Authenticity shopping" (Zukin, 2008, p. 745), which draws on the social and industrial history of neighborhoods, is for her one of the driving forces behind commercial gentrification.

Another part of the Anglophone studies, more akin to the radical approach (Smith, 1996), has also highlighted the transformation of power relations that accompany commercial gentrification, but still from the consumers' point of view. Long-term residents, belonging to low-income or racialized social groups, rarely visit new businesses and services because of "racial 'symbolic boundaries' and socioeconomic barriers" (Sullivan, 2014, p. 30). As the process gains ground, they may feel "out of place" in their own neighborhoods or even be encouraged to leave certain streets (Deener, 2007). Eventually, the working classes may be led to "relocate where retail and cultural facilities are more in keeping with their tastes and budgets" (Hubbard, 2017, p. 6). At the same time, other long-established residents welcome this, such as the Dutch residents of the Amsterdam district studied by Ernst and Doucet (2013), who valued their neighborhood's commercial transformation because it attracted a non-immigrant population.

Without always referring to gentrification, Francophone research has developed similar analyses. In the 1980s, Chalvon-Demersay (1984) and Authier (1989) were already drawing attention to the new businesses and services appearing in older districts of Paris and Lyon. Research was updated a few years later (Van Criekingen & Fleury, 2006) as the trend continued. Francophone researchers have also described the exclusion of former residents from some gentrified streets which have become scenes of intense neighborhood life (Lehman-Frisch, 2002). More than in Anglophone research, there is a focus on the relationship of gentrifiers to existing low-end or ethnic businesses that resist the change: in Paris and Montreal, researchers have examined their negative perceptions (Rose, 2006) and their avoidance practices (Chabrol, 2011; Bacqué et al., 2014). Shopping streets located in working-class neighborhoods are often the subject of actions aimed at accelerating commercial change (Bacqué & Fijalkow, 2006; Rosenfeld & Van Criekingen, 2015) orchestrated by gentrifiers with the support of public authorities. Finally, these analyses reflect a broader vision of the place of retail in social and residential transformations than Anglophone research. It is therefore not surprising to find in them avenues to explore the issue in greater depth.

Commercial change and retailers' strategies

Commercial change is not only related to local demand and consumption patterns but is more broadly explained by a range of factors, including the structure of the sector, the political and legal

environment, and the specificities of the urban context. The two avenues explored in both Anglo- and Francophone studies are those of public policy and retailer strategies. Due to lack of space, we will not go back over the first,⁴ but focus only on the latter, in whose wake our reflections fall; a body of work that is relatively small but growing.

The work of Authier (1989) is little known internationally, even though it was truly groundbreaking. Based on the study of backgrounds and relationship to neighborhood, Authier profiled retailers in a Lyon neighborhood undergoing gentrification as “defeatists,” “resistants” or “opportunists.” Until the mid-2000s, little Francophone research was carried out following Authier’s trajectory, apart from Van Criekingen and Fleury (2006). They, based on a comparison between two neighborhoods in Paris and Brussels, sought to “identify the protagonists of commercial gentrification” and to “shed light on their investment strategies in these two spaces” (Van Criekingen & Fleury, 2006, p. 121). The research marking a change in the Anglophone perspective was conducted in New York by Zukin et al. (2009). It proposed a typology of actors in commercial gentrification, in this case centered on the origin of capital (“new entrepreneurial,” “corporate,” and “local”).

Subsequently developed Anglophone research offers a fairly accurate portrait of new retailers and the way in which they practice their trade. Whether barman, barber or butcher, each showcase the quality of their products and services by creatively reinterpreting *savoir-faire*, enabling a higher income and social status than those of predecessors (Ocejo, 2018). They are helped in this by the many resources available to them: expertise in the fields of architecture, the arts or advertising; professional or friendly networks; equity capital, etc. (Rankin & Delaney, 2008). In addition, they often live in the neighborhood where they do business. From New York to Berlin to Tokyo, young city dwellers acknowledged that if “there are no businesses to provide a certain kind of good or service which they themselves consume, they decide to open it themselves” (Zukin et al. 2015, p. 17). For many of them, opening a business is combined with an attachment to the neighborhood and an investment in local public life (Rankin & Delaney, 2008).

In a manner similar to that used in Anglophone research, Francophone investigations focused on retailers emblematic of commercial gentrification. In particular, it examined the rebirth of certain businesses that had previously been in decline due to competition from retail chains. Cheese (Delfosse, 2017) and wine shop owners (Delamarre, 2019) have adapted to demands of proximity and “gastronomy”, proposing new commercial settings and developing new discourse imbued with contemporary values around their goods. Much attention has been paid to the strategies of these “gentrifying retailers,” which correspond to “a particular way of appropriating the city” and appear to be “a means of staging their social values and lifestyles” (Leblanc, 2017, p. 87). This work shows both the extent to which the practice of a profession is intrinsically linked to transformations in the city, and the extent to which shopkeepers participate in that evolution by aligning the commercial landscape with residential developments.

⁴ French-speaking researchers have long emphasized the role of public authorities in commercial gentrification (Bacqué & Fijalkow 2006; Chabrol 2011; Fleury & Fol 2018). By diversifying the case studies, Anglophone research has highlighted the many discourses and strategies of public authorities as well as their effects on the commercial fabric (Rankin & McLean, 2015; Zukin et al. 2015; Hubbard 2017).

Rue de l'Église, the archetype of a gentrified street?

In 2017, Rue de l'Église lied at the boundary between working-class neighborhoods (to the east) and gentrified areas (to the west). The street itself has undergone socio-economic, urban, and commercial transformations since the mid-2000s. Between 2008 and 2017, the share of blue-collar workers in the population fell. Meanwhile, the proportion of employees continued to rise, but the share of executives and professionals grew faster (Table 1). This can be attributed, among other reasons, to the construction of one building and the renovation of another by a private developer, Nexity, between 2008 and 2010. Creating 130 new accommodations in place of a car garage, these developments contributed to increasing homeownership in this historical street. In addition to changes in housing, public spaces have been redeveloped to facilitate pedestrian circulation and enhance livability (Figure 4).

Table 1. Changes in socio-professional categories in the Rue de l'Église neighborhood (2008-2017)

	2008	2017
Craftsmen, shopkeepers, and business owners	4 %	4 %
Executives and higher intellectual professions	22 %	29 %
Associate professionals and technicians	30 %	20 %
Employees	22 %	27 %
Blue-collar workers	15 %	13 %
Others	7 %	7 %
Total	100 %	100 %

Sources: INSEE RP 2008, INSEE RP 2017

Figure 4. Rue de l'Église in 2008 (left) and 2017 (right)

Source: Google Street View



While the number of ground-floor premises has remained stable, significant changes in commercial activity further transformed the urban landscape (Table 2). Out of the 25 premises inventoried during our research field, only 4 already existed in 2008: 2 were destroyed, while 2 new constructions followed street renovations, and 2 premises previously occupied by charities were converted into shops. While the street was home to associations and a fairly wide variety of retailers targeting low-income inhabitants in 2008—fast food restaurants, mini-markets, press house—it has become specialized in activities related to culture and leisure, and high-end food. Among them La Petite Épicerie, a greengrocer with a short supply chain, opened in 2017. It incorporates high-end retail elements in its layout (Van Criekingen & Fleury, 2006): large, uncluttered display windows, a low volume of merchandise, and the use of natural materials, for example wood from pallets. This shop, with others (two bookstores, a record store, a beer store, and an organic bakery), transform the landscape in a way that seem typical of commercial gentrification. Moreover, new shopkeepers' trajectories and strategies reflect those of gentrifiers studied in other contexts (Zukin et al. 2009; Leblanc 2017). Before becoming managers, the founders of La Petite Épicerie worked in the arts and culture sector. Further down the street, Amélie⁵, a Montreuil inhabitant, opened a bookstore in 2016 after identifying a need within her social circle, which consists of residents with high cultural capital.

From this perspective, Rue de l'Église appears to be an emblematic area of commercial gentrification, driven both by the arrival of new profile of shop and shopkeepers, changes in housing and the redevelopment of public spaces. However, alongside these new retailers, other long-established shopkeepers have remained on the street, showcasing contrasted strategies in response to urban change.

Table 2. Changes in commercial activities on Rue de l'Église (2010-2017)

	2010	2017
Food	1	4
Home equipment and clothes	2	1
Culture and leisure	0	3
Health and beauty	3	3
Coffee and restaurant	6	6
Services	2	2
Vacant premises	7	3
Other (including charities)	4	2
Total	25	24

Sources: survey (2017), Google Street View (2010)

⁵ All names were changed.

A change of perspective: shopkeepers' experience as vantage point

In commercial gentrification research, “pre-existing” local retail appears as a blind spot. However, both qualitative and quantitative analyses show that many businesses hold their own despite gentrification (Meltzer, 2016; Bacqué & Fijalkow, 2006). One may thus wonder how these retailers experience the transformation of their neighborhood, why they decide to leave it or manage to stay there. Furthermore, focusing on gentrification often leads to underestimate the diversity of urban change processes. In the same street, different forms of urban change can coexist (Giroud & Ter Minassian, 2016): gentrification, impoverishment, immigration, “touristification,” or even studentification. Given the sensitivity of commercial activity to change, especially when already economically fragile, it is important to grasp all its dimensions. In order to address these two blind spots, we argue that it is necessary to re-explore the complex relationship between commerce and urban change via shopkeepers' representations and strategies, without prejudging their involvement in these changes. We base our approach not only on commercial gentrification studies, but also on long-standing research on shopkeepers and, more broadly, independent professions.

Bringing together shopkeepers' trajectories, their social networks, and urban change

In Francophone literature, sociological studies have explored the role of independent shopkeepers, seeking to understand the contemporary transformations of this professional category and how they anticipate or adapt to these changes. Socio-historical research provides frameworks linking these individual trajectories to broader transformations (Gresle, 1981; Péron, 1991; Mazaud, 2009; Zalc, 2010). Based on in-depth interviews, Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame (1980) demonstrated how bakers' professional practices were closely tied to familial, social, and economic structures. This, according to the authors, explained the profession's resilience, even as large retail corporations expanded in France. By employing ethnomethodological “life stories” (*récits de vie*), the authors provided insights into the way shopkeepers respond to change.

More recently, the sociology of entrepreneurship (Chauvin, Grossetti, Zalio, 2014) has offered valuable perspectives. This research is in line with traditional comprehensive sociology in seeking to understand and interpret the motivations of individuals who embark on entrepreneurial careers, but it also identifies the resources and networks mobilized to achieve entrepreneurial goals. The latter are defined as those “social practices that involve a project of transforming the existing and entail both a reflexive attitude and a willingness to take risks” (Chauvin, Grossetti, Zalio, 2014, p. 22). This field therefore offers conceptual tools that are particularly relevant for understanding the strategies of shopkeepers—even if they are not all related to the entrepreneurial figure—and their relation to social change. Within that field, research on ethnic entrepreneurship (Dubucs, Endelstein, Chabrol, 2019) offers stimulating insights in order to understand the links between trajectories, shopkeepers, and territory. This subfield emerged in the United States (Light, 1972), and was also developed in Francophone studies (Body-Gendrot, Hodeir & Ma Mung, 1992). These studies examine the link between the migration path of foreign retailers and the social resources and networks they mobilized to develop their activities. They highlight the diversity of business models, which in turn leads to a diversity of relationships with the territory.

Researchers rooted in the field of interactionist sociology and ethnology have also focused on so-called ‘exotic’ shops. The symbolic economy and aesthetics specific to gentrification are appropriated unequally by local retailers, depending on the resources they have at their disposal to interpret certain social codes (Semi, 2005; Garnier, 2009). Thus, as cosmopolitanism has become a powerful lever for revalorizing neighborhoods (Aytar & Rath, 2012), the migrant trajectory and the

resources associated with it represent a means of distinction for some. Stock and Schmitz (2019) demonstrate this by studying two restaurants located in two gentrifying neighborhoods of Berlin. Through the layout of the commercial premises and the adaptation of recipes, the restaurant owners stage their origins in order to broaden their clientele. Their choices reflect “different self-positionings, both in terms of ethnic representation and in the context of gentrification” (Stock & Schmitz, 2019, p. 7). We see how the diversity of shopkeepers’ migratory backgrounds influences their reaction to gentrification, making it possible to overcome the oversimplified opposition of pioneer vs. victim of gentrification. Using the notion of “mixed embeddedness”, Lees and Sakizlioğlu (2019) analyse how foreign origin shopkeepers balance their sense of ethnic belonging with their necessary integration into a constrained economic market.

The contribution of these researches is twofold. Firstly, it includes an exploration of the relationship of entrepreneurs with a territory, and more specifically with their experience of urban transformations, enriching our knowledge of the latter. Secondly, in contrast to a homogenous vision of shopkeepers’ role in urban change, the research reveals the diversity of their trajectories, representations and strategies.

From commercial gentrification to urban change as seen by shopkeepers

In the Anglophone literature, several works have studied the diversity of shopkeepers’ positions in the face of gentrification and the public policies that accompany it (Sutton, 2010; Zukin, Kasinitz & Chen, 2015; Parker, 2018). They are in line with older (Authier, 1989) and more recent (Maltais, 2016; Rollinde, 2017; Delage & Fleury, 2020) Francophone studies. In a similar vein with the research devoted to ethnic entrepreneurs mentioned above, these studies seek to go beyond the “caricatured representations” opposing “new conquering entrepreneurs” to “outdated former shopkeepers” (Maltais, 2016, p. 149) to recognize the heterogeneity of retailers’ profiles and strategies in a context of gentrification, in terms of length of installation, career path, type of activity or economic situation. This is essential given that commercial success is not determined solely by the date of arrival in a neighborhood: some pre-existent retailers maintain their businesses because their low income and immigrant customers remain despite gentrification (Chabrol, 2011). Conversely, newly established retailers may be put in difficulty because of a lack of sufficient customers or because new inhabitants continue to consume elsewhere (Authier, 1989; Delage & Fleury, 2020).

This approach seems particularly relevant as the gentrifying neighborhoods themselves are marked by contradictory processes (Giroud & Ter Minassian, 2016). Parker (2018), by studying the relationships of retailers to the reputation of gentrified neighborhood, Wicker’s Park in Chicago, demonstrated how acknowledging retailer diversity makes it possible to strengthen the understanding of gentrification as an indeterminate, nuanced and constantly renewed process. This invites us to explore other contexts of urban change. Some works (Miller, 1998) in ethnography and English-speaking urban sociology have examined “ordinary streets” marked by “‘messier’ processes of transformation which cannot be boiled down to mere gentrification or segregation” (Hentschel & Blockland, 2015, p. 221). By distancing themselves from the framework of gentrification, which implies at the very least a positioning of retailers in relation to the reputational context conveyed by the process (Parker, 2018), these studies make it possible to identify widely diverse visions of the relationship between commerce and territory. Based on a survey in two Berlin streets at the heart of public urban renewal projects, Hentschel and Blockland (2015) showed that shopkeepers were little involved in their neighbourhood, not because they rejected gentrification, but rather because they focused on the economic dimension of their activity and had few ties there.

However, this work remained focused to some extent on identifying potential discrepancies between the aesthetics of gentrification and the vision of retailers, although it also showed the ambivalence of this. We consider that the mobilization of this approach in other contexts of urban change enriches the scientific field by allowing us to emancipate ourselves from the preponderance of gentrification. A few works in the Francophone literature have laid encouraging groundwork by studying the strategies and discourses of all the independent shopkeepers in a given area, focusing on how their perception of business and their role in relation to the territory shape their positioning with regard to urban change (Maltais, 2016; Lelévrier & Rivière, 2020; Fleury & Mayadoux, 2019). This approach also invites a dynamic questioning of the relationship between independent retailers and urban change: on the one hand, shopkeepers gained social resources in the course of their lives before settling in a neighborhood; on the other hand, territorial transformations around their shop often make these resources unsuitable or offer them new ones (Rollinde, 2017).

The shopkeepers of Rue de l'Église: three contrasted trajectories

Our survey provides insights into how the diversity among shopkeepers, in terms of their trajectories, resources, and relationship to the territory, can explain the ambivalence and heterogeneity of their relationship to gentrification. Our survey All but one of the shopkeepers interviewed considered that their neighborhood had undergone significant transformations. They explained it both by the existing changes in the customer base — 40 percent felt that their clientele, primarily local residents, was wealthier than before — and by the major morphological transformations the neighborhood had undergone, which gave them hope of attracting new clients. Without explicitly mentioning gentrification, they anticipated that the latter would have higher purchasing power. These transformations were therefore part of the elements that they considered when outlining their future development prospects. However, this finding did not translate into homogeneous strategies from the retailers surveyed. Several elements, especially those linked to their background, help to understand and illustrate this diversity of strategies.

Even though many shopkeepers arrived on the street as a result of the neighborhood's transformations, others have had a long-standing presence and chose to adapt their commercial strategy to attract a more affluent clientele. This is the case of Harold, who opened a tailor shop in 2011. He was born in Togo into a well-to-do family and studied sewing in Lomé, then worked for three years in Niger before joining his brothers in France. He experienced this immigration as a downgrading, as he was forced to accept several odd jobs, particularly in the construction sector. In 2011, after being employed in a tailoring and alteration shop, he opened his own store in Montreuil. At the time of our interview, he was offering alteration services and ready-to-wear, but was economically challenged by the nearby shopping center. While he was considering selling his business, changes in the street prompted him to stay. He decided to switch to a fashion design business, moving from a survival activity to a more artistic profession that was socially and economically valued. Thus, urban change led Harold to realign his professional and personal aspirations with the realities of his commercial activity, allowing him to value professional skills that were undermined by his migration to France. Certain characteristics of the gentrifying retailer figure can be seen in the practice of the trade (Ocejo, 2018) or in the sense that the business becomes “a bearer of social capital to be reinvested in a gentrified neighborhood” (Leblanc, 2017, p. 95). In Harold's case however, this opportunity presented itself *after* his installation rather than justified it, and in this sense, we can see him as a shopkeeper turned gentrifier.

Other retailers were acknowledging gentrification, but without planning any transformation. Brahim, for example, has been in business since 1997. The staging of his activity and his method of

supply are classic: fruit and vegetables bought from wholesalers and displayed in the form of a stall in the store. In 2017, La Petite Épicerie (mentioned above) opened in the neighboring premises, creating a striking contrast between the two offerings and the values they convey (Figure 5). However, Brahim has not changed the way he operates his business, because, as he explains, he is close to retirement. He relies on a loyal customer base that is less sensitive to the principles of short food supply chain than to the diversity and low cost of fruit and vegetables. This example clearly shows the interest of jointly considering the temporality of urban change and of the shopkeepers' professional careers (Varanda, 2005). In this case, the shop was established before commercial gentrification began. Its survival depends on an unchanged clientele of low- to medium-income customers who still live in the less gentrified parts of Montreuil. Brahim's representation of his business, shared with his customers, remains the same as when he first opened his shop: offering the widest variety of fruits and vegetables at affordable prices. Ultimately, this example illustrates the consumption practices specific to low-income shoppers (Giroud, 2007; Chabrol, 2011) and that the retailers who benefit from them (Fleury & Mayadoux, 2019) continue to exist despite gentrification.

The nuanced relationship to urban change even appears among shopkeepers who are seemingly the most emblematic of gentrifiers. Amélie, the bookseller mentioned above, grew up in a working-class district of Montreuil. After chaotic schoolyears, she obtained a vocational certificate in bookstore management. While working as an employee in a bookstore in Paris, she then completed her initial training with a vocational high-school diploma. In this sense, even if the type of shop she opened, and the customer she seeks are in line with commercial gentrification, setting up her own business represented professional continuity rather than a fork in the road, a pattern that is recurrently found among "gentrifying retailers" (Leblanc, 2017). Moreover, if her installation in Montreuil was based in part on her analysis of urban change, it also relied on the fact that it was simpler for her, a resident, to identify structures that could help her with her project: On the advice of her mother, also a resident of the commune, she approached the municipal housing office, which rented one of its premises to her; she was also able to benefit from the support of a parapublic agency specializing in helping entrepreneurs from working-class neighborhoods.

Figure 5. Brahim's greengrocer shop (in the background) and La Petite Épicerie (in the foreground)



Source: the authors

Conclusion

In the end, the cases of Harold and Amélie clearly show the processes and logics by which two independent shopkeepers can benefit from gentrification more than their initial path would suggest. Conversely, the case of Brahim shows that shopkeepers in operation before gentrification can remain despite and through major urban changes, either by relying on an old and loyal clientele, or by encouraging new customers to adapt. These three cases clearly show the complex ways in which urban change can be adapted, as well as the ambivalence of gentrification. Thus, the study of the strategies of shopkeepers over the course of their biographical and professional career allows us to look at the research on (commercial) gentrification in a different way. Our approach is based on a dialogue between the results of our fieldwork and the literature on commercial gentrification, as well as that which focuses more specifically on retailers. In our view, it provides a more detailed understanding of the shaping and forces of commercial change in contexts of urban change, including more peripheral neighborhoods than those usually studied.

In this article, we have only been able to give an overview of the different ways in which independent retailers are positioning themselves in relation to urban change. Strategies such as adaptation (Stock & Schmiz, 2019) or collective organization, which is much rarer (Authier, 1989; Sutton, 2010; Varanda, 2005), are well known, others less. Research shows that some shopkeepers make their departure an act of resistance (Guerry, 2009; Fleury & Mayadoux, 2019) or that some fail while actively participating in the gentrification process (Chabrol, 2011; Delage & Fleury, 2020).

This is a research project to be pursued, particularly in less central working-class neighborhoods and by diversifying the cities studied beyond the major cities of the Anglophone world. The challenge is all the more important because urban renewal policies are being conducted in a growing number of these neighborhoods, and many of them are aimed at restructuring the commercial fabric (Rankin & McLean 2015; Zukin et al., 2015; Hubbard, 2017; Fleury & Fol, 2018). As a result, retailers must face off with urban change adapting, or sometimes resisting public policies unfavorable to them, rendering their ability to mobilize the resources and networks, acquired along their professional and biographical trajectory, absolutely crucial.

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