The Luz district in São Paulo: anthropological questions on the phenomenon of gentrification [1]

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Abstract:

This paper will explore, from an anthropological perspective, the extent to which the concept of gentrification can be applied to current urban interventions in the district of Luz, situated in the inner city of São Paulo (population 11 million), and caught between the conflicting interests of the preservation of historical patrimony, the promotion of cultural consumption and the historical use of the area's public spaces by the working class. This question will be approached with emphasis on the following issues: the specific representations of patrimony found in a metropolis marked by a precarious and transitory urban landscape; local government policy on urban improvement and the stigmatization of areas occupied predominantly by the working class; the rethinking of traditional dichotomies, such as the (analytically divisive) polarity "politics of urban intervention" vs. "resistance of affected groups"; the multiple meanings attributed to the notion of *bairro* ('district' or 'neighborhood') and the definition of terms of comparison with other cases (avoiding a priori perspectives).

As is well known, the concept of gentrification has been an (oftentimes polemical) reference in the production of much research and reflection on urban phenomenon in cities and metropolises in many parts of the world. In summary, the term refers to the "creation of residential areas for the middle and upper classes in central urban neighborhoods, linked to processes for the control or expulsion of sectors of the working classes [3] and often related to the appearance of particular lifestyles and types of consumption. These processes lead to changes in the social composition of affected areas, together with specific types of socio-spatial segregation and the control of diversity" (Frúgoli Jr., 2006, 133-134).

Without attempting to trace an exhaustive genealogy of this concept, it is worth mentioning that the term 'gentrification' was created by Ruth Glass (1964) in reference to the phenomenon of socio-spatial change taking place in London at this time, [4] and

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[3] When we refer, in this paper, to the "working classes", we are in fact speaking of a much wider universe of people than this term suggests, including poor and low-income families, homeless people and those without a permanent occupation. Without a more inclusive term at hand, we still prefer this term over the North-American "underclass", which carries implicit moralistic connotations.

[4] Rubino (2003, 288) argues that Glass created this concept in order to explore the arrival of middle class groups in central, working class neighborhoods, or rather, that the concept originally referred to a phenomenon which related to social change, but not necessarily to significant physical transformations.

reached the height of its academic popularity in the work of Neil Smith (1996) and Sharon Zukin (1989, 2001), both working in the context of New York from the 1970s onwards. [5] In the work of the former, emphasis is placed on social practices, economic behavior and local government policy, and in the latter, on cultural and artistic activities and the ways they are linked to consumption and leisure. [6] Smith's hypothesis of a generalized gentrification expanding on a global scale (2003) has been critically examined in the light of research in other contexts, and on the basis of new readings attentive to the relations between the global and local spheres.

In this vein, a volume edited by Catherine Bidou-Zachariasen (2003), in dialogue with Smith's hypotheses, identified a series of processes of gentrification taking place in different European cities. In the majority of cases, these studies found the State playing a central role in these processes, and found the phenomenon more often linked to the occasional presence and consumption patterns of middle or upper class populations than to specific changes in residential makeup. [7]

According to the authors featured in this volume, such processes are also being reproduced in Latin American cities, albeit with certain specificities. This affirmation should be treated with caution, as such cities are of course home to very different socio-cultural realities than those found in the European context, and are extremely diverse among themselves. From an urban Brazilian perspective – which is the focus of our study – such questions bring new and distinct challenges. The best known works engaging with the theme of gentrification in Brazil have focused on interventions in central areas of north-eastern cities, such as Salvador and Recife, characterized by attempts to revalorize historical patrimony through urban interventions coordinated by the State, and concerned above all with the promotion of leisure activities, consumption and tourism. These projects have usually been developed to some degree in partnership with private entities. Once completed, such interventions have often attracted forms of re-appropriation in which new, elitist modes of use and consumption are interlaced with distinct forms of occupation by the working classes, putting 'gentrified' public spaces to uses other than those for which they were intended by local government (Leite, 2002; Arantes, 2000; Pinho, 2000; Sansone, 1995; Botelho, 2006).

In the case of a metropolis such as São Paulo, which currently has a population of approximately 11 million, [8] other considerations need to be taken into account in the investigation of these phenomena. São Paulo presents an urban context distinct from the aforementioned north-eastern cities. Its urban landscape is characterized by a rapid and ongoing dynamic of construction and destruction, noted by Lévi-Strauss (1996 [1955]) as early as the 1930s, who remarked then that it was as if the city had entered into decadence without having ever known its prime. São Paulo went through its first period of urban expansion in the passage from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, and it is today home to an eclectic mix of national heritage unprotected by the National Institute of Historical and Artistic Patrimony (*Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e*

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[5] The concept, as such, originated within a clear anglo-saxon context.

[6] In brief, Smith developed arguments based in marxist references, with emphasis on the role of real estate capital – and later the State – in a process marked by distinct phases of expansion; Zukin seeks to understand the relations between strategies of consumption (including the visual consumption of urban landscapes) and those of production, in dialogue with the work of Marshall Sahlins (who sees the capitalist economy as a cultural order) (2003 [1978]) (Rubino, 2003; Bidou-Zachariasen, 2003; Frúgoli Jr., 2006).

[7] From another perspective, see the collection edited by Atkinson e Bridge (2005).

[8] According to IBGE (Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics), the estimated population of São Paulo in 2007 was 10.866.518 (see http://www.ibge.gov.br/cidadesat/default.php, consulted on 2/11/2008).

Artístico Nacional – IPHAN) (Rubino, 2005). Given its metropolitan dimensions, it is also set apart from other cities by a different scale of centrality, with a "historical" centre contraposed with other "sub-centres" of considerable importance. Against this backdrop, São Paulo's old city centre is characterized by practices and discourses that have, since the 1990s, been associated with the area's "revitalization", "requalification" and "reconstruction" (Frúgoli Jr., 2000).

The inner city of São Paulo is made up of several neighborhoods, one of which has been attracting growing visibility due to factors traditionally linked to the theme of gentrification. This is the neighborhood of Luz, an area marked by high urban and social density, which counts several buildings and cultural institutions listed as state patrimony within its borders. The first of these to be recognized for its historical importance was the Luz train station (*Estação da Luz*), whose current building was inaugurated in 1901, and whose recent renovation included the installation of the city's Portuguese Language Museum (*Museu da Língua Portuguesa*) on the station's site. In the area surrounding the station, a significant collection of cultural institutions have recently been renovated – such as the *Pinacoteca do Estado* [9] or partially reutilized, as in the case of the *Sala São Paulo* concert hall, which was constructed inside the old *Júlio Prestes* train station and is today home to the State Symphonic Orchestra. These institutions have drawn a new influx of middle and upper class people to the old city center for the purpose of cultural consumption (Bourdieu (2007 [1979]). A predominantly working class population however, has occupied the houses, streets and city squares of the region for many years. Luz is host to a significant number of *cortiços*, [10] and informal commerce, prostitution and the trafficking and consumption of crack cocaine are common in many of the region's public spaces. More recently, São Paulo's *prefeitura* [11] has identified this region as a priority area for a wider political program of urban requalification, lending continuity to a mandate set in motion by the State government two decades ago, with the intention of transforming Luz into a "cultural neighborhood". At the beginning of 2005, the area was subject to a series of interventions of repression, regulation, supervision and control, and at the end of the same year, local government announced a program of fiscal incentives entitled "Nova Luz*"* ("New Luz"), in an attempt to attract new businesses, services and commerce to the region. Around two years later, demolitions began to take place around the perimeter of the so-called "Nova Luz" (Frúgoli Jr., 2000; Folha de São Paulo, 3/9/2005; Prefeitura do Município de São Paulo, Dec./2005a and Dec./2005b; Kohara, 1999; Kara-José, 2007; Yázigi, 2006; Duran, 3/30/2007; Rigi, 3/10/2007; Credendio and Spinelli, 5/17/2007 and 5/19/2007; Folha de São Paulo, 9/9/2005; Leite, 11/23/2007).

The main objective of this paper is to present the first results of a collective ethnographic study carried out by ourselves in the Luz neighborhood, an area caught at the intersection between policies for the preservation of cultural institutions, urban

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[9] The Pinacoteca is one of São Paulo state's most important art museums.

[10] *Cortiço* refers to a type of illegally rented accommodation occupied by low income families, which has been found in Brazilian cities for many decades. *Cortiços* are typically large, dilapidated and over-crowded houses, inhabited by multiple families sharing bathrooms and cooking facilities. Living conditions in these houses are generally very unhealthy and insecure, and residents are at great risk from fire. The main advantage of *cortiços* is their central localization, as they are usually found close to opportunities for work and urban services and utilities.

[11] Administrative power in Brazilian cities lies in the hands of a central *prefeitura*, headed by an elected city mayor (*prefeito*). Smaller administrative regions (*sub-prefeituras*) are run by *sub-prefeitos*, who are appointed by the central *prefeitura*. J. Serra [Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira, PSDB – Partido da Frente Liberal, PFL (Democratas (DEM), from March 2007)] was the city's mayor from 2005-2006, and was replaced by G. Kassab, who continues to occupy the post.

interventions (including the recent demolition of houses and establishments traditionally destined towards a poorer sector of the population) and the diverse historical uses of the area by the working classes. Luz's current situation is further complicated by the existence of a large homeless population and of innumerous crack cocaine users, whose presence has added to the stigmatization of the area. Finally, we seek to draw attention to a series of questions concerning the wider applicability of the concept of gentrification, with reference to our (ongoing) ethnographic project and to the specificities of the case in question.

Choice of ethnographic focus

Bearing in mind the possible ethnographic approaches available to us in our study of Luz, we decided to begin by making observations and collecting accounts and representations from the local population, the residents, shopkeepers and people we encountered in the streets. [12] This approach was not, in any sense, an attempt to recreate a "local community", but to document the existence of a population that is almost invisible and often silenced within the wider discursive contexts of both the mass media and the available spaces of negotiation with local government. It was also intended to help us gain a perspective that goes beyond the polarized extremes through which the region is usually represented: the justifications offered by local government – with ample coverage from the press [13] – for its interventions in the area, which focus on the neighborhood's degradation and high levels of criminality, juxtaposed with discourses on the social marginalization of the area's crack cocaine users (many of whom are homeless men, women and children), drug dealers, prostitutes and transvestites, who together with corrupt members of the police force etc., configure the landscape of so-called "cracolândia" ("crackland"). [14]

In emphasizing the representations offered by the local population themselves, we seek to recompose the particular social territory of this central area, whose physical and symbolic boundaries with neighboring areas (such as Santa Ifigênia, Bom Retiro, Campos Elísios etc.) are fluid and uncertain, and subject still further to territorial fragmentations imposed by a variety of different government programs in the region (Carvalho and Schicchi, 2007; Kara-José, 2007).

At the same time, it was deemed necessary to begin a more systematic observation of the area conventionally known as "cracolândia", in order to go beyond the highly stigmatized representations of this area seen in the media. In this respect, we have been guided by the hypothesis that this part of the neighborhood can be understood as constituting a kind of "itinerant territoriality" (Perlongher, 1987 and 1991), despite having recently been conceptually "fixed" within a determined and specific territory (exactly that territory within which the local government intends to create "Nova

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[12] Based on earlier observations, we decided to begin our ethnography in the area surrounding the Luz railway station (in streets such as Avenida Cásper Líbero, Rua Mauá and Rua Gal. Osório, which are characterized by their numerous commercial establishments, urban utilities and busy pedestrian traffic), extending our research through leads offered by the interviewees themselves.

[13] Who are also quick to report on local government arguments for the "fostering of social diversity" in a region marked overwhelmingly by the "presence of poor people". Andrea Matarazzo, the current *subprefeito* of the Sé district, has said of the area: "As in all parts of the city, we need this diversity – the city centre should not be only for the rich or only for the poor, diversity characterizes the place" (Almeida, March-April/2006, 39).

[14] The first ethnography on "cracolândia" was carried out by Mingardi e Goulart (2001).

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Luz"[15]). "Cracolândia" has been a recurrent reference in local government discourse around urban interventions in the neighborhood. It has also been singled out as the target of a series of repressive police operations, such as the "Operação Limpa" ("Operation Clean-up") (Folha de S. Paulo, 3/9/2005), organized by local government and involving not only the police, but also health surveillance services, social services, health workers, waste collection and street cleaning services etc. [16] In the case of "cracolândia", our initial access to the field came about through an extended period of contact with "É de Lei", [17] an NGO working to reduce the risks associated with drug use among users of crack cocaine, which has regular contact with this population on the streets of Luz.

The combination of these two ethnographic approaches to the neighborhood, focusing firstly on parts of the local population encountered around the Luz railway station and secondly on individuals more directly related to the so-called "cracolândia" area, formed the starting point of our study of Luz. Both perspectives led to initial observations that revealed new questions for investigation, as will be discussed below.

First approaches

Our initial attempts to make contact with people on the streets of Luz were most successful when we approached people directly, and in this manner we were able to converse with shopkeepers, people working in other commercial establishments, people in bars and using other services, pedestrians on the sidewalks, private security guards and prostitutes. Our planned ethnography of the *cortiços* – the predominant form of housing in the neighborhood – proved to be more difficult, as it soon became clear that this would involve a series of negotiations with residents, despite the fact that we had already made some helpful contacts in this respect in one of the buildings occupied by the urban housing movements (Filadelfo, 2007). [18]

When asked what they thought of the Luz neighborhood, a significant number of people made immediate reference to the presence of the *"nóia(s)"*, [19] a recurrent native term used to describe the users of crack cocaine. This term was mentioned much more frequently than "cracolândia", a term often heard in media representations in newspapers and on the television. A typical response to our question was, in brief, as follows: "*apart from the 'noia(s)', it's a good neighborhood*", although the 'good' qualities mentioned by respondents slipped easily from those found in the *neighborhood* to those found more generally in the inner city, such as the train station, buses, the metro, bakeries, supermarkets, medical centers and the Santa Casa hospital. People also mentioned the many opportunities for work offered by the region (including the most

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[15] Whose perimeter is formed by the streets Av. Ipiranga, Av. Cásper Líbero, Rua Mauá, Av. Duque de Caxias and Av. Rio Branco (*Prefeitura do Município de São Paulo*, Dec./2005b, 7).

[16] The operation resulted in "2,216 people stopped and searched, 426 paper wrappers containing crack cocaine confiscated, 12 people caught dealing or carrying drugs, 3 hotels closed and their entrances sealed with concrete, 3 guns and 50 cell phones confiscated, 369 adults and children taken to homeless shelters, 2 wanted men arrested and 5,200 pirated CDs confiscated" (Folha de São Paulo, 3/10/2005).

[17] Which means, literally, "It's (from) the law".

[18] The "sem-teto'' (urban housing movements) are politically organized groups campaigning for the right to government assisted urban housing, principally through the squatting of empty buildings and large houses. Many of the participants in these movements previously lived in *cortiços*, but the two should not be confused, the housing movement occupations being distinct residential arrangements and less commonly found than the region's *cortiços*.

[19] The term "*nóia*", "is what the users of crack cocaine call the anguish and the feeling of persecution that accompanies the state of euphoria generated by the drug. It has its origins in the word paranoia. The users also refer to themselves as 'nóias'" (Monteiro, 9/3/2000b, our translation).

unstable and insecure kinds): informal commerce, the provision of various kinds of services, collection of recyclable material, [20] etc. While the region's prostitutes were not mentioned as a problem, some women we talked to complained about being mistaken for them. In these accounts, various neighboring central areas were mentioned, and spatial representations of *Luz* and *Centro* were often interwoven, even though the first category, as we have seen, was clearly linked in people's representations to the presence of the "nóias". These representations revolved around both the *nóias'* physical presence in the streets, and the symbolic associations that connected them to a series of stigmas, such as dirt, danger, threats to safety (principally at night), drugs, trouble, shame etc. In many accounts, people spoke of the "nóias" as a chronic, long-term problem, affecting the neighborhood over many years.

When asked about the recent demolitions on the perimeter of "Nova Luz", most people answered that these kinds of interventions wouldn't resolve the problem, and would only lead to dislocation of these groups to other areas. This allegation is backed up by innumerous press reports bearing witness to the fact that, faced with acts of police repression, crack users in the region have tended to migrate temporarily to neighboring areas, later returning gradually to the same spaces. [21] In the case of "Nova Luz", of course, the objective of local government is a "definitive" expulsion of these drug users, supposedly to be achieved through the construction of a new urban landscape. In general, the validity of the demolitions was not called into question by people we spoke to, rather our questions were met with doubts and interrogations about the extension of the demolitions and what would be built in their place. During our ethnography, some people also confirmed that the disappearance of the private security guards who had previously kept watch over the demolished buildings had, for the moment, left the streets even more dangerous. [22]

Many of the small shopkeepers interviewed – some of whom lived outside of the neighborhood – were resentful of other changes in the area, such as the subterranean integration between the metro and suburban train systems within the Luz railway station which took place some years ago, and which has diminished the flow of pedestrians passing by the shops on surrounding streets. Reinforcing the idea that Luz is marked by the presence of the "nóias", many of these shopkeepers, individually or collectively, had hired private security guards who were trying, as far as possible, to keep the drug users away from the areas surrounding the shops, in order to increase accessibility for the shops' clientele. We are aware that these attempts involve negotiations that we have not

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[20] The collection of waste material such as drinks cans, paper, cardboard, glass and plastics, which is then sold for recycling, is a common form of informal work among poor people, and especially the homeless, in São Paulo. Over recent years, this practice has become politicized, with recyclable material collectors ("catadores de lixo") forming associations to campaign for better legislation on their work.

[21] Even before these more systematic acts of repression were carried out – such as the "Operação Limpa" which took place in 2005 – smaller police operations in the Luz neighbourhood in 2000 tended to scatter drug dealers and users throughout other central areas, such as Praça da Sé, Rua Amaral Gurgel (underneath the flyover), Av. Liberdade (near the São Joaquim metro station), Rua da Glória and Ceasa (this last location being outside of the inner city). These places, as such, have already been known for some time as locations for the consumption of drugs, and the gathering of users in new locations, such as the Largo São Bento, Praça da República, Vale do Anhangabaú, Baixada do Glicério and Pátio do Colégio (Monteiro 9/3/2000a and 9/3/2000b), has added to this list. In addition, scenarios very similar to those found in Luz, (the presence of drug trafficking and prostitution in the streets), have already begun to characterize other neighbourhoods in the inner city, such as Santa Cecília (Folha de São Paulo, 1/23/2000 and Penteado, 1/25/2004).

[22] These themes clearly need to be explored in more depth. Accounts in the press have focussed on the fears of shopkeepers affected by the desappropriation of buildings in the area (Lage and Brito, 9/10/2005; Gallo, 4/5/2006; Rigi, 7/14/2007).

yet been able to investigate. As far as the demolitions are concerned, some shopkeepers told us that the presence of the newly deserted areas where buildings had been knocked down was currently keeping away even more customers.

It should be noted that the local population do not often use the neighborhood's cultural institutions. Some people couldn't even tell us where they were located, despite the fact that we were often standing very close to them. [23] Some told us that they went to the Parque da Luz (Luz Park) at the weekends, although we would need to discover more precisely how they use the park, knowing as we do that this space has traditionally been used for the practice of prostitution. [24] On the last Saturday of every month, an event called the Rua do Samba Paulista (São Paulo Samba Street) takes place in the public square Largo General Osório. The event is organized by the Projeto Cultural Samba Autêntico (Authentic Samba Cultural Project) and the NGO Unegro (União de Negros pela Igualdade – Black People's Union for Equality), and is attended by a predominantly black audience. We have not yet been able to confirm if the majority of people participating in this event live in Luz or come from other neighborhoods (a more likely hypothesis). Our research team observed this event for a short time, and heard complaints from the musicians and organizers that the State government was gradually reducing its support – supposedly due to the "revitalization" program currently in progress – but we were assured that the organizers intended to continue holding the event and "promoting culture" ("which is not only what happens in the Luz concert halls"). [25]

In light of the recurrent representation of the "nóias" heard among residents and people in the streets of the neighborhood, our own observations among the users of crack cocaine, as described below, lead to new questions and reflections on this population. In an interview with Marina dos Passos Sant'Anna, coordinator of the project "É de Lei", [26] we learnt that this project was originally an initiative of the Psychology Department of the University of São Paulo, in the area of policies for the reduction of risk among drug users. The project was originally aimed at users of injectible drugs, and in 2000 changed its target group and began to work with users of crack cocaine, working in direct contact with people on the streets of the Luz

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[23] It is illustrative of this situation that Nelson da Cruz Souza, resident of one of the neighborhood's *cortiços* and one of the leaders of the Movimento de Moradia da Região Centro (MMRC – Central Region Urban Housing Movement), when asked whether he ever visited the neighborhood's cultural institutions, answered: "Well, I've never been. The other day I was walking in the street and a car stopped and the people inside asked me how to get to the Portuguese Language Museum. I didn't know where it was! I told them to ask at the newspaper kiosk, because I never tell people to go and ask the police, the police will mess you around, they'll tell you to go the wrong way. Afterwards I found out that it's in the Luz Station. Seriously? I've never been there! I walk through the Luz Park, like we did just now to get here, and I go straight past it. I live just there, but I've never been to a museum and I'm not planning on going, because I don't have time. I'm here now with you, but I've got another meeting straight afterwards, so I don't have time" (interview conducted on 6/22/2007).

[24] This practice takes place here on such a large scale that even the revitalization of the Pinacoteca do Estado (situated inside the park) has had little effect on it (for details see Maciel, 2005).

[25] For more information about such events, see Vianna (8/31/2007). On this day, our research team stopped for lunch in a restaurant near the "Rua do Samba Paulista", on the corner of Rua do Triunfo and Largo General Osório (on the ground floor of a building which houses the "Ateliê Amarelo" ("Yellow Studio"), a project run by the State Secretary for Culture under the curatorship of the artist Maria Bonomi, which provides an onsite studio space without charge to a different group of artists every year). We sat at a sidewalk table, and were approached by various people passing by, asking for money or food. One of these people, who asked insistently and insulted a number of other customers, was asked to leave and then physically removed and beaten by a waiter; even after this, he returned and carried on doing the same thing, until another waiter from the same restaurant violently removed him a second time.

[26] Conducted on 5/10/2007.

neighborhood [27] and in the project's reception center. [28] Previously, "É de Lei" used to distribute wooden pipes for the consumption of crack cocaine, in substitution of the commonly-used metal ones, usually fabricated out of car antennas. Currently, they distribute silicone cigarette holders, lip salves made from cocoa butter and condoms, as well as leaflets with information about the reception center and about forms of prevention of various diseases. At first, their work was made extremely difficult by the continuous negative reactions of the police and the distrust of the users themselves, who today are generally friendly towards the project workers. During the already mentioned "Operação Limpa", the NGO was contacted by local government and asked to "collaborate". They refused to do so, which made their activities in the region even more difficult (despite the fact that the project does not depend on municipal funds). In Marina's words, "… cracolândia does exist. It's not just a geographical space. It's the world of crack. It's 20 people surrounding you, fissuradas, [29] strung out on the drug".

We were given the opportunity to participate in one of the project's "field visits", [30] which take place weekly between 3pm and 6pm, when two or three people from the project team visit the areas already mentioned on foot. The first place at which we arrived with a significant concentration of drug users – around 25 people – was situated at the corner of the streets Rua dos Protestantes and Gusmões, within the perimeters of "Nova Luz" and opposite the site of a recently demolished block. Many people were sitting on the ground smoking crack, leaning against the walls and wrapped in blankets (which help to hide the drugs). Most asked for the cigarette holders mentioned above, and also accepted the lip salves distributed by the team. As we interacted with the group, a local security guard [31] shouted from afar and shortly afterwards walked along the sidewalk, ordering the drug users to move away. The group began to disperse, but immediately returned to the same place as soon as the security guard had left the area. A second stop was made at the Praça Júlio Prestes, a public square where we counted around 15 users, some sitting on the grass and smoking, others sleeping. One block ahead, on Alameda Dino Bueno, we spoke to two women: one told us that she collects empty drinks cans (of beer or soda) that she later sells for recycling, and that as this earns her enough to eat but not to pay for a hotel, she sleeps in the street. The largest concentration of drug users encountered on our visit was observed on Rua Helvetia, near the place we have just mentioned. On the corner of this street with Alameda Dino Bueno we encountered around 13 users, all men except for one woman. On the other side of Helvetia itself, however, was a very large group of around 40 people. The project team did not approach this group, telling us that it was too big to warrant any kind of effective contact within the objectives defined by the project, and we remained on the other side of the street. Here we spoke to two users, one of whom the project team already knew, and as we did so, two young men from the bigger group

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[27] Initially in the area later identified by the *prefeitura* as "cracolândia", and later, after "Operação Limpa", in the Júlio Prestes and Princesa Isabel public squares and in the Parque da Luz and its immediate surroundings, where these groups had 'migrated' to after the police operation.

[28] The project's reception center serves a limited purpose, as it is located in a small gallery of shops whose access is controlled by private security guards, who often prevent "typical" looking crack users living in the surrounding streets from entering. As a result, most direct contact between project workers and local drug users takes place on the streets, with the center reserved for administrative activities and occasional visits from ex-drug users in recuperation.

[29] The term "fissura", in this case, refers to the "crisis of abstinence experienced by the drug user" (Monteiro, 9/3/2000b).

[30] Which took place on 12/18/2007.

[31] Identified by the project workers at "É de Lei" as "Paulo Paulada", this security guard apparently earned his nickname through the violent means he uses to deal with the local homeless population and crack cocaine users ("*paulada*" is the Portuguese word for a heavy blow).

crossed the road to talk to us. After some time a police car (which some of the users referred to as the "loira" [32]) drove quickly around the block, without stopping to make any kind of intervention. Moments later, for some reason unknown to us, the group dispersed in a question of seconds. Further along Helvetia, between Rua Piracicaba and Avenida Rio Branco, the project team stopped to attend to a group of eight people. We had already met one of the young men, probably in the same street, which suggested that we ought to be cautious in the informal calculations we had been making as we accompanied the team, [33] and that we should take into account the possibility that some users might be circulating between the places we had observed. [34]

In general, the majority of crack users we encountered were black or mixed-race, predominantly male, of various ages and, some of them, tattooed. Their appearance was not distinguishable from many of those who make up the area's homeless population. This visit enabled us to confirm that this population continues to inhabit the public spaces of the neighborhood, having moved only a short distance after the recent urban interventions.

Initial reflections

Bearing in mind what has been observed up until now, and that the present research is still in progress, a number of issues have arisen that bring into question conventional approaches to the concept of gentrification. This is especially the case with regards to the question of change, particularly in relation to alterations in the social composition of particular places. It could be said, returning to a critique that has already been developed in the literature through other examples, that the case of Luz is not characterized by any kind of alteration in residential terms brought about by the arrival of new middle or upper class populations, [35] despite the fact that local government has invested in the area's cultural institutions and, more recently, has been attempting to create a hub of businesses, services and commerce "anchored" around these "revitalized" institutions themselves. In principle, this might lead us to accept, as in previous cases cited in the literature, the hypothesis of a gentrification based on middle and upper class use and consumption. This interpretation, however, seems problematic. Firstly, it would depend on a verification of the hypothesis that the neighborhood's public spaces have begun to be occupied by new groups, which seems a remote possibility, seeing as the increased presence of these groups has been noted almost exclusively in the use of the cultural institutions and not in the public spaces surrounding them. The aforementioned Sala São Paulo concert hall, for example, attracts a middle and upper class population at night, almost all of whom arrive in their cars, which they then leave in the building's own parking lot. The Pinacoteca also attracts a considerable number of visitors, but the majority of these arrive at the museum by way of the metro station located on the other side of the street, without any necessity

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[32] Literally, this term refers, in Portuguese, to a blond girl or woman.

[33] On this day, we counted around 105 users.

[34] For details on the new territories created after "Operação Limpa", see Mena (4/7/2005) and Capriglione and Gallo (9/3/2006). It is possible that there are a small number of crack users who consume the drug during short stays in hotel rooms in the region (including some establishments that sell the drug themselves (see, in relation to this, Monteiro, 9/3/2000c)).

[35] The State government has recently announced (but not confirmed) plans for the construction of two apartment buildings for low-income residents in the area. See the announcement made by the Secretaria Municipal de Coordenação das Subprefeituras de São Paulo on 10/27/2007 (http://www6.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/noticias/sec/subprefeituras/2007/10/0024, consulted on 2/11/2008).

for interaction with the rest of the neighborhood. [36] While it cannot be denied, therefore, that there has been a change in the population that frequents the neighborhood (circumstantially or occasionally), and most notably among those attracted by cultural events or institutions, this does not signify, in principal, a change in the public life of the area in question.

The focus of our research, however, indicates another possible reading, which calls attention to the dynamics of the relation between continuity and change. We are inspired here by a consideration of the relation between structure and conjuncture, in the terms established by Marshall Sahlins (1990, 1997a, 1997b). Sahlins critiques the idea that the advent of modernity should lead to a continuous dissolution of traditional cultures or ways of life, emphasizing instead how these "native orders" accommodate the modern within existing structures, interpreting and intervening in new forms from their own points of view. With the necessary mediations, a perspective inspired by this approach enables us to reconsider certain narratives linked to the idea that the elites have periodically tried to *take back* central urban areas, as though the streets had effectively *belonged* to them in the past (Frehse, 2005). It is more plausible, based on what we know of the urban history of many Brazilian cities, that city streets are structurally characterized by their popular (working class) usage, with, rather, specific areas being marked at particular times by attempts at elite control and intervention.

Bearing in mind the arguments outlined here, the interviews and observations we have collected suggest that particular changes in the urban landscape of the neighborhood, which are gradually taking place as a result of recent interventions and demolitions (characterized by their repressive nature), have not had a significant impact on the social composition of Luz, whose working-class character is recurrently presented as a long-term fact and one that would be difficult to change. These interventions, as such, are not being interpreted by people in the area as events that could lead to significant changes, despite the fact that local government has been trying, at least on a semantic level, to transform the area currently known as "cracolândia" into "Nova Luz". [37]

What we can, it seems, learn from this population – most of whom are living in very difficult circumstances in terms of access to housing, employment and services – is that a long-term characteristic of the neighborhood, and one made conspicuous by the presence of the "nóias", is its combination of, among other factors, extreme poverty and established drug trafficking. This is a characteristic that does not lend itself to simple, short-term solutions, or those sought solely through interventions in the urban landscape. [38]

This question relates to processes seen in other Brazilian cities, where many urban spaces which have undergone interventions have not in fact been subject to significant changes in their social composition and in the ways in which they are used by the urban population. Even in the case of Pelourinho, in Salvador, seen as an emblematic example of urban gentrification, a recent decline in investment on the part of local government into the area's cultural activities and infrastructure, and the gradual

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[36] This, evidently, is another theme for a longer and more detailed investigation. Paula de Souza Delage Faria, a member of our research team, is currently researching these questions in the neighborhood.

[37] Local councilors have made repeated attempts to symbolically associate this part of the Luz neighborhood with the idea of "cracolândia". In a recent visit to the operational base for the repression of drug trafficking and the consumption of crack cocaine in Luz, the city mayor Gilberto Kassab lit a pipe used to smoke the drug to "see how it works". A photograph of this incident was reproduced on the front page of the Folha de São Paulo newspaper (6/9/2007, A1 e C4). On more recent occasions, on the other hand, the mayor has claimed that "cracolândia" no longer exists (Gentile e Spineli, 12/15/2007, C9).

[38] On the sale and consumption of crack cocaine in New York, see Bourgois (2003).

abandonment of the area by local commerce, already seem to be signaling the return of practices such as begging and prostitution, which were previously far more visible and common in the neighborhood's streets (Francisco, 7/15/2007). [39]

These observations also suggest the need for more systematic reflection on the role played by local government in scenarios of gentrification. In the Luz neighborhood, we find a case in which the urban changes in question have been explicitly proposed by the State, in ways similar to those seen in the majority of cases of "requalification" presented in the Latin American literature and discussed at the beginning of this paper. In this context, the attempts of local government to introduce a series of changes to the neighborhood might be understood as an endeavor on the part of the State itself to "gentrify" the region. In relation to this question, we should remember that urban interventions on the part of the State do not automatically signify processes of discrimination against low income populations. The type of urban intervention proposed by local government will depend on that administration's political position and interests in relation to the population present in the urban space in question. [40] While we should not, therefore, imagine that every process of urban intervention proposed by local government will *always* be synonymous with the expulsion and intimidation of the working classes, we must recognize that, in the case of Luz, the current local administration (PSDB-PFL) appears to explicitly value interventions designed to attract middle and upper class populations to the neighborhood, while simultaneously prioritizing the expulsion of certain sectors of the current population of the region. [41] Furthermore, we have observed little effort, on the part of local government, to confront the problematic socioeconomic issues affecting the majority of people currently living in the neighborhood.

Unlike other cases presented in the literature, however, Luz presents an ambiguous scenario, in which a numerous, heterogeneous and firmly established local population – almost entirely made up of very low income, working class families – seems to make a rapid transformation of the urban landscape along the lines proposed by local government practically impossible. The neighborhood, however, does not seem to be subject to a process of everyday and public "contra-usos" (counter-uses) of urban space, like that identified by Rogério Proença Leite (2007) in the case of Bairro do Recife in northeastern Brazil, nor does it appear to present a classical example of popular resistance to the intentions of the State.

In the post face to the second edition of his book, Leite (2007, 361-375) returns five years later to the 'gentrified' spaces in which he had carried out his research, and finds a deserted landscape, or in some cases, the return of groups who had occupied the region before the interventions. These areas seem, as such, to be passing through a process much like that already mentioned in relation to Pelourinho (Salvador) of the "emptying out of the middle classes" or the "return of the working classes". In explanation, this author puts forward the hypothesis of the State's abandonment of policies for cultural investment in these areas, but also asserts that this could be the result of aforementioned "contra-usos", understood as reactions to the processes of gentrification. From a different perspective, which rejects the unilateral idea of

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[39] An interesting article by Cabral (11/17/1999) argues that, in effect, the poverty of revitalized neighborhoods in many Brazilian cities simply migrates to other urban areas.

[40] The Master's research project currently being carried out by Carlos Filadelfo, one of the members of our research team, shows for example how negotiations around the issue of public housing between local government and the urban housing movements in São Paulo's city centre have taken on very different characterizations over recent years, depending on the administration in power.

[41] For more details see Frúgoli Jr. (2006).

resistance and reactions, [42] a (in our view) more plausible hypothesis could be suggested, namely that these areas are historically characterized by their working class character, and have been merely subject to sporadic episodes in which other groups attempt to appropriate them.

In the case of Luz, we seem to see a situation in which the diverse populations present in the neighborhood – from the most politically organized (such as the housing movements and the collectors of recyclable material) to the most "marginalized" and vulnerable (such as the "nóias" and the homeless population) – appear to be "complicating" the intentions of local government to "gentrify" the area, whether it be intentionally (that is, as part of a explicit political strategy of resistance [43]), or not. As such, the scenario observed in Luz does not fit neatly into the models of gentrification presented in the literature discussed in the introduction to this paper. While the area does not find itself in the midst of a process of change brought about by the arrival of the middle and upper classes or by new configurations in the real estate market – as has been seen in many European and North American cases – neither does it seem to be subject to a simple process of the expulsion of its current population, as so often seen in other Latin American examples.

Should we, therefore, conclude that gentrification is a process that can only take place with the gradual movement of people from the middle and upper classes to working class neighborhoods, and is therefore impossible to bring about "artificially" through the imposition of State intervention? Or could it be that the case of Luz presents such a unique landscape in its complex makeup of extreme poverty and popular political organization, that the operations of expulsion and intimidation designed by local government are simply not able to meet their objectives?

Without being able to look into the future, it is difficult to predict the ways in which this story will unfold. The continuation of the current campaign of intimidation and stigmatization of the population of Luz could result in the eventual migration of large parts of this population to other parts of the city, as has happened in other Brazilian cases, or alternatively, local government could, at some time, give up on its project for the area, directing its attentions to other parts of the city.

And we must always bear in mind the possibility that some future local administration might redesign the current project for the requalification of the neighborhood in such a way as to effectively include and provide for the needs of the area's existing population. Without knowing which of these possibilities will become a reality, it is difficult to reach a conclusion about the urban processes underway in this region. We can, however, conclude that greater reflection and further ethnographic study around the concept of gentrification are clearly necessary, as in the context of contemporary São Paulo, this concept appears to assist and restrict in equal measure our understanding of the case under investigation.

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[42] And that also refutes, in consequence, Smith's metaphor (1996) for gentrification as a kind of "urban frontier in expansion" (like "successive waves"), whose similarities with the expansion of the capitalist frontier through colonial action are self-evident.

[43] A discussion of the political engagement of local government with the urban housing movement and other social movements in the area (such as, for example, the *Fórum Centro Vivo* (Alive Inner City Forum), which is currently being researched by Marina Capusso, one of the members of our team of researchers, and the politically organized section of the region's recyclable material collectors) around the question of the "requalification" of the region is beyond the limits of this paper, but is an important factor in the scenario we are investigating here.

Finally, we must also consider the relations between events of long and short term duration, in order to develop our hypothesis that the urban and central areas in question have an eminently working class character, despite the fact that they may be subject, during short periods, to changes and impacts that look as though they will be enduring but later reveal themselves to be transient. This argument, in any case, equally reveals the necessity for new ethnographic approaches that will enable us to develop the ideas presented here.

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