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'Exotic commerce', French universalism, and the disruption of white space in Paris's 'Little Africa'

Carrie Ann Benjamin

Paris's working-class Château Rouge neighbourhood is popularly referred to as 'Little Africa' for its concentration of Afro-Caribbean shops, and derisively labelled an 'enclave' by politicians and white middle-class French residents who desire to replace the 'exotic commerce' with 'traditional' 'French' and 'Parisian' businesses. Urban spaces like Château Rouge are thought to challenge French universalism, which simultaneously seeks to erase differences between French citizens and marks any attempt to distinguish individuals or groups from the universal French nation as disruptive. Drawing on interviews with residents and archival documents, I demonstrate how urban planning and social mix policies have shifted from a focus on residential mix to a desire for commercial mix following decades of urban renewal in the neighbourhood. I argue that gendered and racialised French republican discourse is reproduced through local municipal planning aimed at maintaining an ideal 'mix' of white and non-white populations.

Keywords: whiteness, race, urban space, street vending, France

For much of the twentieth century, France has been a legally 'race-blind' country defined by three anti-racist laws that, in combination, have criminalised acts of racial discrimination, race-based violence, and the collection and storage of racial or ethnic statistics (Bleich, 2004).¹ While racial discrimination persists in housing, employment, education, and policing, the prohibition on collecting racial or ethnic data renders it impossible to know the full extent of discrimination within the country (Keaton, 2013). Instead, the popular and legal consensus is that all French citizens, whether through birth or naturalisation, are equal—granted, of course, that they have assimilated proper republican ways of being. This universalist paradigm seeks to make all immigrants institutionally and politically invisible once they have acquired citizenship, while simultaneously marking anyone who distinguishes themselves from the universal French nation and its Franco-Christian traditions, morals, history, culture, or political system as outsiders to the republic and its values. Those that fall outside the boundaries of universalist republican acceptability are racialised as 'foreigners', 'immigrants' even when born and raised in the country. Thus, from a political and social standpoint, France's race-blind legal system offers protection against racist discrimination and racist acts insofar as those acts are individual and not structural; to claim structural or systematic racism is to question the legitimacy of universalism and the foundations of the French republic.

Universalism emerged during the Enlightenment and is considered foundational to the contemporary French republic. Enslaved and colonised peoples used the language of universalism to demand freedom, and migrants and second-generation French nationals have appealed to universal values to decry racism and discrimination within France (Dubois, 2000). French feminists recently brought the gendered dimensions of universalism into question by demanding equal representation for women in government institutions and elected bodies. While initially derided for their supposed 'communitarian' demands that

catered to a specific group, feminists grounded their rhetoric and goals within a framework that sought to strengthen universalism rather than undermine it (Bereni, 2007; Scott, 2004). Although the campaign was ultimately successful, any call for justice or equality based upon particular identities such as gender, race, or national origin still risks provoking a crisis of universalism when individuals or groups are perceived to mobilise around communitarian rather than universal issues (Schor, 2001). Although universalism has expanded to include women—no longer focused solely on a universal male subject—migrants and racialised French citizens are still excluded from this paradigm, and they continue to experience obstacles in housing, employment, and education in France today (Beaman, 2017).

Viewed through this framework, universalism operates as a form of whiteness that seeks to conceal differences with the promise of equality (Stovall, 2003, p. 53). I employ the term 'whiteness' in this article to refer to a racialised and gendered hegemonic discourse that claims universality but which is 'invisible for those who inhabit it' (Ahmed, 2007, p. 157). As an aspirational claim to universality and legitimacy, whiteness asserts power through its self construction as normative and invisible—an invisibility that is further strengthened by race-blind discourse (É. Fassin, 2015; Gallagher & Twine, 2017, p. 1602). Universalism forms part of a French 'white vanguard narrative' (Michel & Honegger, 2010), which claims a culturally and historically superior position *vis-à-vis* non-Western European peoples and constructs a 'fantasy' (Hage, 1998) of white cultural dominance over the nation (Reynaud-Paligot, 2006). In so doing, universalism creates what Sara Ahmed (2007) has termed a 'white space', which equates judgments about the 'Frenchness' of certain bodies to judgements of their 'whiteness' and their ability to 'pass' through physical, political, and institutional spaces without disrupting or disturbing white bodies and institutions. Within this French white space, racialised migrants and citizens are perceived as 'disruptive' and anti-universalist when they speak languages, wear clothing, eat food, practice religions, or have names not typically attributed to Franco-Christian 'traditions', or when they engage in collective political or social actions that question the universality of the white subject. Perceptions of and reactions to such 'disruptions' are bound up in the production of the French nation and hence are always gendered (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989).

Challenges to or disruptions of white space can provoke reactions ranging from denial and defensiveness to physical and political violence. Mustafa Dikeç contends that 'the republican imaginary is so white and so Christian that any manifestation of discontent [...] by the republic's darker non-Christian (or thought to be so) citizens quickly evokes concerns about the values and principles of the republic' (2007, p. 177). In particular, he notes that these 'concerns' have been foundational for French urban policy in the late twentieth century, in which the state has asserted absolute authority over the racially segregated working-class housing projects (HLMs) in the *banlieues* (suburbs). In France, the *banlieues* are imagined as sites where immigrants and their children self-segregate and reject any desire to integrate (Hargreaves, 1996), and their highly visible existence as the domain of Others is constructed as antagonistic to the ideals of universalism and the republic (Murray, 2006). However, the concern over urban 'enclaves' and spatial segregation speaks to a deeper anxiety at the heart of the universal nation. These neighbourhoods, whether in the *banlieues* or in the centre of the city, subvert white space and provoke feelings of 'foreignness' in the white French subject, who senses that these spaces are not 'theirs' (Stehle, 2006). This feeling of foreignness often manifests as fears of black, brown, and working-class masculinities and racialised masculine tropes—the 'urban youth', the 'rioter', the 'terrorist'—and result in aggressive policing and surveillance (D. Fassin, 2013). Yet white

discomfort is similarly provoked by the presence of racialised French and migrant women, who are gendered in ways that portray them as threats to French secularism, universalism, and the welfare state. Politicians and the media frequently depict Muslim women as either 'trapped' by their religion or as radicals who have rejected integration, and migrant women with large families are assumed to drain social services and welfare while contributing nothing to the economy (Rassiguier, 2004). Areas with large black and brown populations are thus portrayed as disruptive and 'dangerous' to the universalist project, and their presence is used to justify state interventions to break up 'enclaves' and preserve the integrity of the republic.

One neighbourhood that attracts a significant amount of political and media attention is Château Rouge. Located in Paris's eighteenth *arrondissement* (council), Château Rouge has been classified as a 'sensitive urban area' and subjected to numerous state and municipal interventions aimed at improving security, education, infrastructure, housing, and social mixing. It also has a high concentration of so-called 'exotic commerce' and is popularly referred to as 'Little Africa' for the large crowds of Parisian and *banlieue* customers who arrive daily seeking beauty supply stores, fabric shops, tailors, braiding salons, and a wide range of fruit, vegetables, meat, and fish that are difficult or impossible to find elsewhere in the region (Chabrol, 2014). The contemporary commercial character of Château Rouge began to take shape in the late 1980s, and residents and politicians have blamed local 'exotic' businesses for all manner of local ailments, including street vending, a decline in the quality and diversity of commerce, overcrowded public transport, and dirty streets. However, it is not just commerce that defines Château Rouge; the surrounding area is notable for its significant working class and immigrant population, and the area is still popularly referred to as one of the last working class neighbourhoods in Paris. Using Château Rouge as a case study, I argue that gendered and racialised French republican discourse is reproduced through local municipal planning aimed at maintaining an ideal 'mix' of white and non-white populations. I analyse how urban planning and social mix policies have shifted from a focus on residential mix to a desire for commercial mix following decades of urban renewal in the neighbourhood, and explore how middle-class white French women have used local associative structures as a tool to this end. I conclude that whiteness informs municipal governance in Paris both as a way to appease white middle-class French residents and as part of a broader national policy of breaking up 'enclaves' and assimilating Others into the white space of the French nation.

Methodology

The research conducted for this article is part of a larger project on gentrification and belonging in Château Rouge and its surroundings. I conducted twelve months of fieldwork in 2013-2014, including archival research, formal semi-structured interviews with 32 individuals, and interactions with over 100 interlocutors through participant observation and discussions. This article primarily draws on interactions with seven white middle-class women activists through interviews in their homes and while walking through the neighbourhood. These women were all active and vocal founding members of the local association Action Château Rouge,² and were representative of the media-savvy and politically connected 'white-collar' population who began arriving in the late 1990s and who are still 'awaiting' gentrification in their neighbourhood (Bacqué & Fijalkow, 2006). As a white American woman, I found that these interlocutors felt comfortable speaking to me

about the 'problems' of the neighbourhood in racialised terms. This comfort with broaching the otherwise taboo subject of 'race' can be attributed to both their assumption that we shared a similar positionality and proximity to whiteness, and because they perceived me as a 'naïve' visitor who needed to understand the French context outside of the supposed Anglo-American preoccupation with 'race'. Additionally, archival data collected from local associations' bulletins, city council minutes, and personal archives from activists helped to map both the timeline of political action in the neighbourhood and changes in public opinion. Collectively, my theoretical approach forms part of a 'scavenger methodology' that circumvents 'disciplinary coherence' (Halberstam, 1998 p. 16; see also Wekker, 2016), drawing upon theoretical and empirical contributions from anthropology, urban studies, sociology, gender studies, and history to map the landscape of whiteness and racism in France.

Mixing Château Rouge

Since 1983, Château Rouge has been subject to significant renovations under successive state and municipal projects aimed at improving residential accommodation, constructing HLMs, and reducing the density of households in the area. In the 1980s, urban renewal targeted the southern part of the neighbourhood, where over 100 'unhealthy' residential buildings were demolished and replaced by new-build HLMs. After a successful campaign by local activists, long-time residents were offered rehousing in the neighbourhood. However from the mid 1990s, as renovations moved to the northern part of the neighbourhood near the Château Rouge Metro station, city planners offered rehousing with the intent to 'mix' the population. To replace the demolished buildings, the city built HLMs that were destined for the lower middle classes rather than the poorest households, and began to rehouse many residents outside of the neighbourhood. The demolitions in the 1990s and 2000s were not simply about renovating the neighbourhood to create better living conditions for residents that lived in Château Rouge; they were also part of a project to 'diversify' the population of this historically working-class neighbourhood by relocating the poorest households elsewhere in Paris and bringing in a new population of significantly greater socioeconomic means (Bacqué & Fijalkow, 2012).

The desire for a greater 'mix' of the population was not limited to socioeconomic means. For residents who lived through much of the later renovations, many recall the use of unofficial 'ethnic quotas' by city planners and housing associations. Abdoulaye, a Senegalese café owner who moved to Château Rouge in the mid 1990s, had witnessed the displacement of several friends as a result of urban renewal. He explained,

Yacine, who lived over by the fishmongers where I used to live, her building was torn down and she asked to be rehoused [in the neighbourhood]. What they want, the city, they say 'no we can't let you stay here in the HLMs, we have quotas. We don't want to do like before. All the Arab and black populations in the same neighbourhood? No' [...] Now she is in the nineteenth arrondissement. There is another woman who lived here, a Somali, [the city] had to house her and they said 'No, not in this neighbourhood' [...] Before, the population was Arab/black, now it is—there are lots of people who want to stay in the neighbourhood, lots of young people, a Franco-Algerian woman, lots of people. But when [the city] comes to

rehouse them, they say 'No, we can't keep you in the neighbourhood' (Interview 8 May 2014).

Although the use of such quotas would be in direct violation of French anti-racism laws, they have frequently been used to restrict access to HLMs for 'visible minorities' and facilitate the 'integration' of immigrant households (Simon, 2002). Indeed, in a national context where racialised migrant women are depicted as 'hyper-fertile' producers of large families (Sargent & Larchanche, 2007), it is perhaps unsurprising that local social mix policies in Château Rouge have had a significant impact on migrant working-class families (Bacqué et al., 2011). However, rather than promote mixing or social proximity, social mix policies can create or exacerbate socio-spatial distance and isolate migrant families through their forceful eviction when middle-class households are brought in to 'diversify' working-class areas (Blanc, 2010).

While many households were displaced as a result of residential mix policies, public spaces in Château Rouge remain largely dominated by migrant social and economic practices. The neighbourhood's commerce attracts thousands of customers from Paris and the *banlieues* every day, and those crowds have in turn attracted dozens of unlicensed street vendors. The street vendors, most of whom come from West and Central Africa, set up stalls on cardboard boxes acquired from the local shops and which they can quickly abandon when the police approach. While their presence can give the impression that migrants make up the majority of the neighbourhood's population, Abdoulaye explained, 'If you only see the people who arrive in the neighbourhood during the day to do business, you would think that the neighbourhood is really [Arab and black]—but no. It's people who come to do business in the day. At night, they leave'. Nevertheless, the visual presence of African street vendors and Afro-Caribbean commerce has led many local white activists to conclude that the area is not 'mixed', but rather that it had degenerated into a 'ghetto' or an 'enclave'. For this group of middle-class residents, Château Rouge is a neighbourhood that subverts French white space and challenges universalism; it is a neighbourhood where they feel like outsiders whose needs and preferences are not met.

Complaint as whiteness

Urban renewal in the 1980s and 1990s led to a significant demographic shift in Château Rouge. The promise of improvement in the socioeconomic and physical character of the neighbourhood attracted a number of middle-class residents who sought comfortable, centrally-located private housing in a 'neutral' or 'normal' neighbourhood—one with a variety of local 'traditional' French shops that catered to their tastes (Bacqué & Fijalkow, 2006). Amongst these new private sector tenants and homeowners were some who became dissatisfied with the area, finding that life in the neighbourhood was dominated by 'exotic commerce' and all of the people and practices it attracted. They watched as the number of businesses catering to Afro-Caribbean customers grew, drawing large crowds of street vendors selling goods and services that complemented the official shops but which were not offered with the white middle-class French patron in mind. In response, residents formed local civic associations to draw attention to their plight and to combat the 'degradation' of their neighbourhood that they believed had become a 'ghetto'. Early associations like Droit au Calme (DAC), active from 1999-2004, took issue with the perceived 'ghettoisation' of the neighbourhood, which they attributed to the proliferation of 'exotic commerce'. With a sizeable membership base of politically savvy residents, DAC exerted public and political

pressure, combined with significant coverage by local media outlets, demanding that the government intervene to create a commercial balance that met the needs of local (white middle-class French) residents. With the simultaneous expansion of middle-class households and 'exotic commerce', residents who felt they no longer lived in a 'normal' neighbourhood became self-appointed advocates for the restoration of a 'traditional' commercial 'mix'.

Subsequent local associations continued offering a space for residents to raise complaints, including Action Château Rouge (ACR), which was founded in November 2013. ACR included some former DAC members still resident in Château Rouge, and while ACR's members were reportedly more mixed in terms of age, class, ethnicity, and nationality, the most active members with whom I spoke were exclusively middle-aged, white, home-owning (or those in rented private accommodation) French women. While previous associations like DAC courted sensationalist media coverage and emphasised the racialised 'ghetto' stereotypes of Château Rouge, ACR worked closely with lawyers to bring a legal complaint against both the City of Paris and the Prefecture of Police. ACR collected formal testimonies from members about the living conditions on their streets and compiled a substantial dossier to present at trial. The first part of the complaint, directed at the police, concerned safety and public circulation, both of which are guaranteed in the French constitution. The 'hostility' of street vendors, the slippery trash-filled streets, and the obstructions to pedestrians' and drivers' movement caused by abandoned cardboard boxes, out-of-hours deliveries, and unauthorised shop extensions were all cited as violations of these two legal rights. The second part of the complaint was brought against the city, which is responsible for maintaining clean streets and enforcing business health codes. Members' concerns over shops that violated health codes and illegally extended their displays onto the pavement were attributed to street vendors and the state of lawlessness they engendered. I was informed in nearly every interview with activists that local businesses 'took advantage of' the disorder caused by street vendors to break laws themselves. But rather than direct blame at street vendors, businesses, or residents, ACR used their collective power as an association to hold the city accountable for the 'decline' of their neighbourhood. Although they used indirect actions to push for change in their neighbourhood, ACR's goals were the same as many of their predecessors: to make the area comfortable for a new population of white middle-class residents and to remove the racialised people who caused 'disruption' in their neighbourhood.

Jacqueline first moved to the neighbourhood in 1996 and was a member of both DAC and ACR. Initially drawn to the area by affordable property prices, she recalled that there was once a 'non-halal butcher', a florist, a bakery, and one of the neighbourhood's five newsagents, all of which began to disappear around 1998 when Congolese migrants began to open shops and alter the social and commercial dynamics of the neighbourhood. According to Jacqueline, the entire aesthetic of the neighbourhood changed as African clothing stores and 'exotic commerce' replaced the 'traditional' Parisian shops. She hoped that continued renovations in Château Rouge 'would bring about a true social and cultural mix', but these did not produce the desired results. Instead, she noticed that the proliferation of African businesses was accompanied by the appearance of street vending. While the disappearance of 'traditional' commerce forced Jacqueline to shop outside her neighbourhood, it was the presence of street vendors made moving around in Château Rouge difficult. Speaking about her motivation for joining ACR, Jacqueline reflected on the potential for violence created by street vendors:

There are verbal exchanges, a little aggressive. But you have to be careful, as soon as there is misconduct the situation can degenerate. Shoving, all that. You get treated like a racist. It's a problem [...] The Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, normally they are very nervous. They don't look for confrontation [...] With the Africans, it is more complicated. The women are more aggressive than the men—because it's the women who sell. It's really *their* territory. There are some men who are just there to earn a living, so they don't pose a problem. But the problems that I have had, they have all been [with] women (Interview 28 August 2014).

Jacqueline's experiences are not isolated; other ACR activists had similar stories of aggression perpetrated by women vendors and shared a sense that living conditions in the neighbourhood had gotten progressively worse as a result. Men were viewed as 'breadwinners' and deserving migrants trying to earn money, while women were painted as aggressively exploiting the 'lawlessness' of the neighbourhood and asserting dominance over the street. Claire, resident since 2010, explained,

In the beginning [street vending] did not bother me. I love Africa a lot, so it did not disturb me at all in the beginning. I thought it was fun [...] But after—what bothered me was that when I went to visit the vendors and see what they sold, they were not nice at all. That discouraged me. The men are nicer [...] Actually it is the African women who—because I love Africa a lot—were not nice. So that irritated me. It was nice to go see their dresses, all that. But they insulted me, called me *sale blanche* (dirty white woman), *et cetera*. At first it was fine, but oh well (Interview 28 August 2014).

As the situation in Château Rouge had 'deteriorated' with the increase of vendors, some residents raised concerns over potential electoral implications. Two activists noted that their motivation for joining ACR stemmed from their socialist political engagement, as they came to view the relationship, or lack thereof, between African women vendors and white residents as antagonistic, isolating, and potentially volatile. Stéphanie, who had lived in the area since 1993, noted,

We watched everything change. And moreover, the changes were disturbing because, well, we have a responsibility as leftists, far leftists. And it also creates a danger [...] that people will be herded by extremists as a reaction to, if you will, all the vendors who are all black [...] We don't want the situation to push people to the far right or to the National Front (Interview 25 August 2014).³

While it is not my intent to deny the experiences of residents who had aggressive exchanges with street vendors, I do want to explore how such experiences are mobilised as a move of whiteness. Violent reactions to perceived violations of universalism are less about individuals and their activities and more about the people who perform these actions and embody black subjectivities, as they 'perform a blackness that disturbs and confuses the somatic and spatial norm of the French republican national discourse' (Thompson, 2016, p. 59). Shirley Anne Tate states, 'Black bodies have a disruptive impact at the level of the nation [...] Whether docile or not, in the 21st century we continue to be in the grip of the spectacle of Black women's racialized bodies alongside their invisibility' (Tate 2015: 15–16).

In France, where white femininity is normalised, black women's bodies become hyper visible along with their actions, emotions, and words, and thus cross the boundaries of acceptable femininity. African women who street vend are viewed as aggressive, violent, or rude while their male counterparts are portrayed as polite, accommodating and 'nicer'. Contrary to the image of *banlieue* masculinity, it is black femininity that becomes the most disruptive and dangerous to the comfort and security of white women and which risks pushing white residents to the far right. Gendered tropes of male breadwinners 'who don't pose a problem' because they 'are just there to earn a living' are deployed to demonstrate the white activists are not being unreasonable; these activists *understand* the economic conditions that force some people into unlicensed street vending. Instead, it is the women vendors who assert territorial possession, and who are not assumed to be there in order to 'earn a living', that abuse of activists' goodwill. In so doing, these street vendors are assumed to contribute to the 'degradation' of Château Rouge and prevent the neighbourhood from becoming truly 'mixed' or 'universal'. In order to prevent people from turning to overtly racist political projects, according to these activists, racialised people needed to be hidden. White women activists thus used complaint as a method to reassert their own socio-political claim to the public and economic spaces of Château Rouge—a claim rooted in the national project of universalism.

Municipal responses

Activists in DAC and ACR knew how to access, mobilise, and exploit municipal resources, including neighbourhood and city council meetings, local press outlets, and judicial procedures, and could thereby assert their positions as representative of the larger residential population and pressure politicians into action. In February 1999, under local pressure, the city council passed a motion to relocate Château Rouge's 'exotic commerce' to the *banlieue*. Much in the way that residential spaces were 'diversified' and 'mixed' through the displacement of poorer migrant households, the city proposed relocating local 'exotic' businesses to create a 'Five Continents Market' on the periphery of Paris. The market would both solve the 'problems' that these shops were thought to create—including attracting crowds of street vendors—and open up space for 'traditional' French commerce. The Five Continents Market has reemerged in local politics periodically during the 25 years since its initial proposal and is now often dismissed by some disillusioned activists as merely 'a dream'. Nevertheless, the project has regularly been presented as a panacea for white, middle-class voters, since it aims to convert Château Rouge into a 'normal' Parisian neighbourhood. However, in a November 2008 neighbourhood council meeting on the topic of 'Commerce in the quarter', city council representatives noted that merchants could not be 'forced' to relocate outside Château Rouge, but that the city would instead accept 'volunteers' who wanted to move to an area with increased floor space and less traffic congestion. Based upon interviews with residents, the owners of Afro-Caribbean shops have consistently stated that they will only relocate if all 'exotic' businesses move at the same time and if the city guarantees that no 'exotic' business will be allowed to reopen in the neighbourhood. Larger floor space and improved access for patrons means nothing to these businesses if their customer base does not follow. Since the city cannot forcefully replace 'undesirable' private businesses with 'traditional' shops, the viability of the project is still uncertain.

However, the city has found other ways to encourage a 'mix' of commerce that compliments the demographic changes brought about through urban renewal. In 1998, the city proposed offering ten ground floor commercial spaces in new HLM buildings at below-market rates to several independent fashion designers. Opened three years later, the shops and showrooms were located on a single street, nicknamed 'Rue de la mode', in an attempt to create a traditionally Parisian fashion hub in the heart of this multicultural neighbourhood. While the street remains open, many of its shops are unaffordable for local, low-income residents. In 2003, as part of urban regeneration in the northern sector of the neighbourhood, the city recruited the public-private developers SEMAEST to diversify and improve the commercial offering in the neighbourhood. SEMAEST oversaw the rental of ground floor commercial spaces in new-build HLMs, offering low rents to encourage small businesses and artisans to open shop. SEMAEST's intervention saw several new local businesses open, including a florist, a craft brewery, and a few small designers, although many of the ground floor spaces were eventually given to local associations and charities when it became difficult to recruit 'traditional' or boutique businesses into an area away from their typical middle-class customer base. More recently, local politicians from the centre-right Union for a Popular Movement lobbied to include Château Rouge in the Vital'Quartier project, which seeks to revitalise commerce. In a motion presented to both the Paris City Council and the Council of the Eighteenth Arrondissement in 2015, they argued that the project could 'contribute in an efficient manner to the social diversity' of the neighbourhood. Collectively, these projects have not been intended to close off commerce to outsiders, but rather to draw in new customers from wealthier Parisian areas and discourage crowds of *banlieue* shoppers.

In conjunction, these policies not only appeal to middle-class white voters and the women activists of ACR, but also contribute to the broader project of converting Château Rouge into a normative white space. At a city council debate in December 2012, Daniel Vaillant, mayor of the eighteenth arrondissement, stated, 'If we won the gamble of urban renewal and are poised to win the fight against substandard housing in this neighbourhood [...] with regard to public space, for the problems encountered, we need to recognise that the situation has not improved'. Referring to the persistence of criminal activity in the neighbourhood, including drug trafficking, unregulated business practices, and street vending, Vaillant's words highlight how political focus has shifted from residential issues to concerns over commerce and consumption. However, the belief that relocating Afro-Caribbean commerce outside the neighbourhood will allow 'traditional' French and European businesses to return 'completely overlooks the operation of businesses in immigrant centralities which rely on the local residence of immigrant populations while addressing a wider clientele' (Clerval, 2011). Furthermore, while the majority of Paris's cosmetic stores and beauty salons cater to white customers, the shops and street vendors in Château Rouge meet a need in the diverse capital. By labelling these shops 'exotic', vendors, shop keepers, and customers are symbolically placed outside the borders of the nation as 'foreign' and constructed as a barrier to the comfort of white French residents.

Conclusion

The discussions about 'exotic commerce' in Château Rouge are entangled with national debates about universalism. While universalism has expanded to include white French women, racialised migrants and citizens are still only conditionally welcomed into the

fold. Any actions that question the inclusiveness of universalism or that are perceived to be 'communitarian' mark racialised subjects as hyper-visible and disruptive. Hence, Château Rouge—Paris's 'Little Africa'—has been labelled a 'problem' because it is visible, different, and not intended for the 'universal' white French population. It is placed in opposition to the other 'traditional' Parisian shopping areas, which, within the white space of the French nation, are unmarked and assumed to cater to everyone. The existence of the market and the prevalence of black and brown bodies—particularly women's bodies—that populate and shape this space as customers, residents, merchants, and vendors, disrupt the whiteness of French urban space and the comfort of white bodies. In response, white middle-class women activists have used associative spaces to amplify their discontent with the neighbourhood. They have blamed African women vendors for the area's 'problems', and labelled these vendors as 'aggressive' and threatening to the political status quo. As such, the plan to relocate the market and open up space for 'traditional' commerce is also a plan to relocate racialised people outside the city and into the *banlieue* where they are thought to belong. Making the neighbourhood 'normal' is thus a desire to make the neighbourhood 'white'—or at least white enough that diversity can be comfortably consumed as 'interesting' and 'exotic' without being threatening to white middle-class women. Transporting and transforming the 'African market' of Château Rouge into a 'world market' on the periphery of the city thus seeks not just to uproot an 'African community' in Paris, but to convert it into something with universal appeal and thus restore white comfort in and with the neighbourhood.

Notes

¹ I use 'race blind' rather than 'colour blind' as the term 'colour blindness' conceals the underlying issue of 'race' (Keaton, 2010).

² Names of interlocutors and contemporary associations have been changed.

³ The National Front is a far right nationalist party in France.

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Information about the author: Carrie Benjamin is an ethnographer and urban anthropologist interested in the role of urban public space in reshaping local and national debates on inequality, immigration and 'race' in France. She is a Teaching Fellow in the Department of Anthropology & Sociology at SOAS, where she completed her PhD in 2017, and a Research Assistant for the Centre for Migration and Diaspora Studies.