Collective Memory and Gentrification in the Deeply Divided Cities of Belfast and Montréal

Christophe Davis

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the intersection of collective memory and gentrification, and the ways in which this intersection shapes urban landscapes and social dynamics in "deeply divided cities." Engaging with Henri Lefebvre's theories and contemporary debates on gentrification, this dissertation articulates how gentrification erases local memories and manufactures particular interpretations of past nationalist conflicts, promoting capitalist peace. It also examines "haunting" as a critical, yet underutilized, concept in the gentrification literature. Haunting, as an expression of subaltern agency, challenges dominant neoliberal narratives by conjuring up community histories that are being erased by them. It proposes the concept of "the right to urban memory" as a normative and ethical ground on which communities can reclaim their histories in the face of gentrification. I articulate this right through a comparative analysis of Montréal's Sud-Ouest and Belfast's Titanic Quarter (TQ). Both cities have been shaped by their colonial pasts and presents, and experienced deindustrialization, high unemployment, and social unrest resulting from nationalist conflicts. The rise of state-seeking nationalist movements in both cities is intricately linked to deindustrialization.

The fieldwork for this comparative research was conducted using a multidisciplinary qualitative approach, including walking interviews, visual analysis, and archival research. I gathered real-time insights and personal stories from residents through walking interviews, and visual analysis provided resources to illuminate how collective memory has shaped spaces in urban and symbolic landscapes within the boroughs under study, especially how, under the directive of neoliberal peace, it has been simplified and altered for marketization. Through archival research, I traced the histories of each city and the evolution of urban spaces.

The analysis of Montréal's Sud-Ouest demonstrates how nationalist restructuring during the Quiet Revolution transformed its memory landscape, and how the transition to a Québécois nation involved sanitizing working-class histories to appeal to gentrifiers, while also erasing the history of Black communities and Indigenous peoples in the neighbourhoods. In Belfast, the post-1998 peace agreement transition saw capitalist peace projects like the TQ, which sanitized the history of the working-class communities and limited their access to it. This gentrified memory landscape is now encroaching on East Belfast, further displacing historical working-class communities. This research underscores struggles over memory alongside other forms of struggles over neoliberal urban capitalism. Furthermore, it shows the evolving ethno-national and cultural power dynamics and the complex interplay of memory politics with it in gentrified/gentrifying places, illustrating the multifaceted nature of urban restructuring driven by gentrification.

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Chapter 1: Introduction: Gentrification – Material, Social and Memorial Transformations[2]

Walter Benjamin's interpretation of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* in *On the Concept of History* offers a profound critique of historical progress, one that resonates with contemporary discussions of memory, displacement, and urban transformation (Benjamin 1940, IX). In his ninth thesis, Benjamin describes the image of an angel caught in a storm, with his face turned towards the past while an irresistible wind propels him forward. This angel, whom Benjamin calls the "Angel of History," sees history not as a linear progression of human advancement but as an accumulating catastrophe, a wreckage of injustices that continues to mount without resolution. The storm, which Benjamin identifies as progress, does not allow the angel to intervene and stop the destruction it leaves in its wake. Benjamin's vision stands in a stark contrast to prevailing narratives that frame history as an unbroken advancement, exposing how modernity rebrands destruction as progress while obscuring suffering (Benjamin 1940, IX). According to Susan Buck-Morss, Benjamin's project is to dismantle the "triumphal procession" of bourgeois historiography, which legitimizes capitalism by attempting to erase the work and oppression from sanitized stories (Buck-Morss 1981a, 52–53). For Benjamin, the task of the historian is to disrupt the view of a continuum of progress to expose the dialectical images of the past that flash up in moments of present crisis, illuminating the revolutionary potential buried within them. These images, like the ruins of the Paris arcades, are not monuments to progress but allegories of its failures, where the dreams of collectivity remain unfulfilled.

Benjamin's approach is particularly relevant to the mnemonic dynamics of gentrification. Indeed, gentrification exemplifies the paradox that Benjamin pointed to: working-class

[2] This dissertation was linguistically revised with the assistance of Paperpal, an AI-based academic writing and language-editing software. Given that English is not my first language, this tool was used to improve grammar and syntax only. The intellectual content and scholarly responsibility rest entirely with the author.

neighbourhoods, shaped by industrial labour and collective struggle, are physically preserved yet socially erased, their histories commodified or discarded as wealthier newcomers redefine urban space. The place identity of these areas undergoes rupture, mirroring Benjamin's message that the transmission of history is never neutral but always complicit in power struggles (Buck-Morss 1981a, 63). As an alternative to bourgeois historiography, Benjamin devised a method of constructing dialectical images juxtaposing past and present to reveal the "now-time" (*Jetztzeit*) of revolutionary possibility (Benjamin 1940, XIV). This method offers a tool for reclaiming the submerged narratives of displaced communities. Just as the arcades' decline exposed the contradictions of capitalism (Buck-Morss 1981b, 79), gentrification demands that we recognize the violence of mnemonic erasure.

The two sites of this study, Montréal's Sud-Ouest (Figure 1.1) and East Belfast (Figure 1.2), exemplify how gentrification operates as an instrument of nationalist and capitalist revisionism, rewriting urban memories to serve dominant ideologies. Both boroughs were once industrial heartlands, rooted in working-class labour and collective struggle – the Sud-Ouest with its manufacturing industries and East Belfast with shipbuilding. As capital was reinvested in these areas, however, their histories were stripped of political resonance and repackaged as aesthetic commodities. Former sites of industrial labour were transformed into luxury living environments or repurposed as curated backdrops for cultural tourism and high-end redevelopment. While the physical and architectural remnants of industrial labour remain, the social meanings, class solidarities, strike actions, colonial and sectarian tensions that once defined these spaces are being erased. This "triumphal procession" of history (Buck-Morss 1981a, 52–53), in which the victors (here, an alliance of state-backed developers and nationalist elites) remake the past to naturalize their present-day dominance, obscures not only working-class struggles but also the complex entanglements of class and ethno-national identity in the present. In both Montréal and Belfast, deindustrialization did not just hollow out local economies; it laid the

groundwork for state-seeking nationalist projects that were intimately bound to urban redevelopment processes.

Gentrification does more than displace; it restructures the class/nationality matrix, fragmenting older solidarities and generating new, often uneasy, forms of alliance and division. In cities with histories of deep ethnonational cleavages, i.e. in so-called “deeply divided” cities, the reconfiguration of urban space intersects with contested narratives of belonging and historical injustice. As I show later, in both cases, state-seeking nationalism emerged in the wake of deindustrialization as a political response to mass unemployment and economic decline, positioning national revival as a pathway to social and economic renewal. Over time, however, this nationalism became entwined with urban redevelopment and neutralization of underlying ethno-national tensions, reorienting its focus from working-class empowerment toward attracting capital and affluent residents. As gentrification advanced, the traditional link between nationalism and the working class was ruptured and reconfigured; nationalist projects increasingly targeted upwardly mobile groups, using urban revitalization to reassert cultural identity while sidelining the class-based grievances that once animated their rise. Gentrification enabled new forms of alignment between middle-class aspirants and nationalist elites. This process camouflaged exclusionary redevelopment in the language of pride, tradition, and modernity. In turn, those who have experienced the industrial era and its downfall faced compounded forms of dispossession. Their presence was tolerated only insofar as it served a social-mixing performance of diversity and capitalist pacification of ethno-national conflicts, rather than as a claim to rights, memory, or ownership of history. Thus, gentrification in deeply divided cities cannot be understood merely as economic restructuring; it is also a political and cultural project that reorders collective identities and rearticulates who belongs in the urban future. These dynamics reveal

gentrification as a class struggle intersecting through memory. Control over whose past is recognized becomes a mechanism for determining whose claims to the city are rendered politically intelligible.

This dynamic is central to the argument presented in this dissertation. By examining the two boroughs mentioned above, I interrogate how gentrification functions as a spatial project of nationalist memory-making. It asks the following questions. Who gets to claim authenticity when the material past is preserved, but its messy or insurgent aspects are obscured? How does the rebranding of working-class spaces serve broader narratives of capitalist "progress" and nationalist cohesion? And what forms of resistance emerge when the marginalized insist on remembering what gentrification seeks to bury?

1.1 Research Puzzle

Gentrification has become one of the most debated processes in contemporary urban politics. Far from being a neutral descriptor of neighbourhood change, it is a deeply contested concept that structures public debates about displacement, housing affordability, and the social future of cities. Municipal governments and developers often frame redevelopment as revitalization or regeneration, emphasizing investment, heritage preservation, and economic growth. In contrast, community organizations, tenant movements, and many urban scholars have highlighted how the same processes can lead to the displacement of working-class residents, the privatization of public spaces, the commodification of local cultures, and the erosion of long-standing social networks. These competing interpretations reveal that gentrification is not simply an analytical backdrop against which urban transformation unfolds, but a terrain of political struggle in which questions of belonging, historical recognition, and urban justice are actively contested.

It is precisely this contested terrain that opens a further, often underexamined dimension of gentrification: the struggle over how the past is narrated, mobilized, and transformed in the process of

urban change. Gentrification is not merely an economic or demographic process but a dispute over narrative-making, one that seeks to strategically reconfigure the past to serve capitalist and nationalist projects. Building on classic accounts that frame gentrification as the displacement of working-class communities, this study emphasizes the mnemonic dimensions of urban change. In both cities, histories of labour, migration, and ethno-national conflict are actively overwritten through the symbolic and material reconfiguration of space. Gentrification here functions as what Porteous (1988, 75) termed "topocide": the killing of place-meaning, and simultaneously the vehicle of selective heritage-making, where commodified nostalgia replaces lived histories. The result is not only the loss of place, but also the loss of the narratives that once gave neighbourhoods their social and political identity.

In Montréal, the white francophone elite's redevelopment of the Sud-Ouest inscribed a sanitized Québécois form of nationalism while marginalizing the histories of former industrial workers, as well as Black and Indigenous communities. In Belfast, the transformation of the H&W shipyard into the TQ similarly aimed to erase working-class nationalist and unionist experiences of industrial labour and political struggle, repackaging the shipyard's legacy into a depoliticized maritime heritage. As scholars have noted, these forms of "creative destruction"[3] are not neutral; they reflect neoliberal and nationalist imperatives that reimagine history as a consumable product, stripping it of political complexity and contestation (Harvey 2006c, 23). Gentrification is not only a strategy of capital accumulation, but also a cultural project of historical re-legitimation.

[3] Although Joseph Schumpeter (2005, 81) was the first to coin the concept of *creative destruction*, later scholars have expanded its analytical scope. Most notably, drawing on Karl Marx, David Harvey extends the concept beyond firm-level or sectoral change to encompass the spatial, urban, and social reorganization of capitalism. In Harvey's work (2006c, 33), creative destruction operates through the built environment, producing uneven geographical development, displacing populations, and managing capitalist crises. In this dissertation, I follow Harvey's conceptualization of the term rather than Schumpeter.

Theoretically, this dissertation intervenes in debates at the intersection of memory, power and urban space. Drawing on Pierre Nora's (1989, 11) distinction between *milieux de mémoire* (living, embodied memory) and *lieux de mémoire*[4] (institutionalized sites of memory), this study shows how gentrification transforms the former into the latter, instances in which dynamic marginalized memories are converted into fixed and aestheticized relics. In effect, history becomes a branding strategy that is instrumentalized to increase real estate values, promote tourism, and reassert dominant ethno-national or class-based narratives. By spatializing history through selective preservation, gentrification functions as a form of cultural displacement, rendering entire communities temporally and narratively archaic.

This dissertation positions memory as a central analytical tool for understanding the spatial politics of gentrification. Memory operates on multiple levels: from above, through elite-led redevelopment projects; from the middle, through gentrifiers' selective valorization of neighbourhood history; and from below, through residents' contestations and vernacular memory practices. I adopt this multi-positioned lens to interrogate how memory is deployed in both top-down planning regimes and the everyday practices of belonging and exclusion. In Montréal and Belfast, where capitalist, colonial, and nationalist legacies permeate urban space, memory becomes a battleground over who is allowed to belong in the city's future.

In addition, a central contribution of this dissertation lies in identifying a gap in the gentrification literature: the general neglect of the nationalist dimensions that shape urban transformation in contested contexts. As the next chapter shows, I address this gap by connecting the scholarship on gentrification with that on "deeply divided cities," demonstrating that in Montréal and Belfast, the influx of capital cannot be understood apart from enduring struggles over sovereignty,

[4] I chose to use the French term *milieux and lieux de mémoire,* given its English translation, 'sites of memory,' doesn't fully correspond to Nora's intentions. For, a '*lieux*' represents more than the physical space that 'sites' imply. A *lieu* is something that is known. On the difficulty of translating the term, see Boer (2008).

language, and religion. Redevelopment does more than inflate real estate values; it reorganizes nationalist, racial, gendered, colonial, and class fault lines. These spatial shifts feed directly into nationalism studies: gentrification supplies physical settings, refurbished factories, themed heritage districts, and creative-class corridors, in which dominant groups can narrate the nation anew. By privileging certain architectural styles, toponyms, and public artworks, planners and developers subtly reproduce specific myths of national belonging while marginalizing Indigenous, migrant, and working-class communities' claims to the same ground.

I also engage memory studies to critique how these nationalist urban scripts rely on an "event-centred" view of the past that obscures slower structural processes such as dispossession, labour exploitation, and sectarian disputes (Wüstenberg 2023, 23). Treating memory as an ongoing social process, rather than as a calendar of anniversaries, reveals how the very infrastructure of gentrification (e.g., tax incentives, heritage branding, and cultural districts) becomes a tool for curating amnesia in the two cities and boroughs. Finally, I engage with hauntology, showing that what is repressed in historical processes never fully disappears. Spectral traces of erased pasts and suppressed resistance traditions surface in murals, oral histories, vernacular rituals, and conflicts over housing rights. These hauntings supply a vernacular counter-memory that activists mobilize to challenge the capitalist and nationalist authoring of urban memoryscapes, demonstrating that the past's unfinished business can disrupt the present power arrangements. Taken together, the dissertation reveals the process in which gentrification restructures divided urban space; nationalism scripts that restructuring as heritage; dominant memory practices legitimize the script; and haunting exposes the script's silences, reopening the political contest over whose city prevails, as capitalists seek to extract the past for value.

1.2 Remembering Places and Places of Remembrance in the Deeply Divided City

Before moving on to the analysis, some key theoretical elements require clarification. First is the concept of deeply divided cities. As mentioned, while the gentrification literature has extensively theorized real estate speculation, neoliberal urban governance and class struggles in connection with gentrification, it has paid relatively less attention to the role of nationalism and ethnonational divisions in shaping urban transformations. Yet, in cities like Montréal and Belfast that are marked by lingering conflicts over sovereignty, language, colonial violence, and cultural identity, urban redevelopment cannot be fully understood without situating it within broader nationalist projects. Gentrification in these contexts is not simply about neighbourhood revitalization or class reordering; it is also about remaking symbolic geographies, recoding urban space according to the imaginaries of dominant national and/or cultural groups. Theories of divided cities offer a crucial lens through which to see how gentrification operates not just as economic restructuring but as a re-inscription of power along 'extra-economic' lines.

Nevertheless, the concept of the "deeply divided city" has not gone uncriticized. Scholars have warned that the framework risks reifying divisions as static, essential, or symmetrical, obscuring the role of structural inequalities, enduring settler-colonialism, heteronormative ideologies and other oppressive systems in producing and maintaining these cleavages (Allegra et al. 2012, 563). It can also understate the agency of residents in resisting or reworking them. Rather than discarding the framework, however, I draw on these critiques to push the concept in a more dynamic and historically grounded direction. In this dissertation, I use the notion of a deeply divided city not as a fixed typology, but to explore how nationalist conflicts shape urban memoryscapes and become entangled in gentrification processes. Montréal and Belfast demonstrate how cities with histories of linguistic, religious, and anti- or de-colonial struggles experience redevelopment as both a material transformation

and a symbolic restructuring of identity. My examination of these two cities illuminates an overlooked dimension of gentrification: i.e. its ability to reignite national fractures, obscure vernacular pasts (while installing heritage in their place), and produce urban futures haunted by unresolved histories.

The field of nationalism studies has long debated whether nations are ancient, modern, or something in between. Primordialists claim that nations are natural and timeless, often grounded in common descent or ethnic origins (van den Berghe 2001). While still present in public discourse, such views are widely criticized for their empirical weaknesses and political dangers, particularly their alignment with exclusionary racist ideologies. Modernist theorists, by contrast, argue that nations are products of modernity, emerging alongside capitalism (Hechter 1977; Nairn [1977] 2003; Anderson [1981] 2006), secularism (Gellner 1983), or the rise of the bureaucratic state (Brass 1985; Breuilly 1994). Although influential, this approach has been critiqued for being overly functionalist and failing to explain the affective quality of nationalism (P. Anderson 1992). In response, ethnosymbolists like Anthony D. Smith have argued for a middle ground: nations are indeed modern, but they draw upon pre-modern cultural resources, myths, memories, and shared symbols that are reinterpreted to create a sense of historical continuity, fuelling belonging and passion (Smith [1991] 1993).

While I find value in the ethnosymbolist attention to memory and cultural narratives, it still risks reifying the nation as a coherent, enduring entity. By focusing on continuity and shared heritage, it may obscure the contingent and contested nature of nationhood. I emphasize how nations are constructed as memorial communities shaped by selective remembering and forgetting. From this perspective, nationalism is not simply about maintaining a shared identity but about actively constructing that identity through commemoration and mythmaking, in both official actions and everyday practices. This posits national identity not as fixed or self-evident but as fluid, performative, and embedded in, and contingent upon, power struggles over the past (Viggiani 2014, 14). From this

perspective, nationalism is a mnemonic project. It works by mobilizing narratives from the past to produce a sense of belonging in the present and project a vision for the future.

This perspective is particularly important in contexts marked by ethnonational divisions. Memory is not merely a backdrop to politics; it is a battleground where competing versions of the past underpin rival claims to identity, legitimacy, and territorial belonging. Nationalism draws its power from the emotional and symbolic weight of these memories, which anchor group identities in time and space. Urban space becomes a key site where these mnemonic struggles unfold, as the built environment, place names, and cultural institutions are enlisted to materialize and legitimize specific national narratives. Thus, understanding nations as memorial communities allows us to analyze nationalism as a dynamic and spatialized process of narrative construction and deconstruction. It shifts the focus from what a nation *is* to how it is remembered, performed and spatialized and by whom. This is crucial in cities where historical injustices, erasures, and spatial marginalization are politically salient. In such contexts, nationalism, memory and spaces are co-constitutive, shaping how people understand their identity and place in the world and how they contest or affirm dominant power structures. This approach also enables us to account for the exclusions and silences that accompany national memory and its spatialization (Taylor-Woods and Tsang 2013, 2).

Collective memory is not merely the aggregation of individual recollections; rather, it is a dynamic and socially embedded phenomenon that extends beyond personal experiences. Its collective nature does not stem simply from the number of people remembering but from the fact that memory is structured, transmitted, and shaped by broader social, cultural, and political dynamics. Even personal memories are never formed in isolation; they emerge within specific historical contexts, spaces, and power structures that confer upon them a collective dimension (Halbwachs [1950] 1997).

Building on this view and inspired by Pierre Nora's (1982) work on *les lieux de mémoire*, Jacques Mathieu and Jacques Lacoursière (1991, 20, my translation) define collective memory as follows:

> Collective memory is the knowledge a society has about itself. It defines 'what we are in light of what we no longer are' and what we sometimes acknowledge we no longer are. It serves as a point of reference through which we recognize and identify ourselves. This is a contemporary, social, and plural perspective, not detached from ongoing debates. It sees the past as a project of the present, turned towards the future.

This definition implies that memory is not an impartial repository of the past, but rather a socially constructed and inherently selective process. Collective memory does not neutrally record history; it filters, prioritizes, and reshapes events, elevating some narratives while marginalizing or erasing others. It is a historical, cultural, social, political, and economic construct that is fragmented, contested, and evolving in response to crises, power struggles, and shifting societal needs.

By situating collective memory within the material and symbolic dimensions of space, I illustrate how those who advance a particular version of nationalism seek to establish historical continuity through spatial practices, such as gentrification, embedding their narratives in the physical world in ways that appear natural or self-evident to the public. At the same time, I also highlight how marginalized communities and activists challenge these spatialized memories, reclaiming symbolic and material spaces, reinterpreting history through memorial protests and grassroots storytelling. In doing so, I show how the production of space is inseparable from the production of memory, making spatial analysis an essential tool for understanding the mnemonic politics of nationalism.

Taken together, this dissertation mobilizes four complementary theoretical lenses. First, theories of the deeply divided cities are used to situate Montréal and Belfast as urban contexts structured by

enduring ethnonational cleavages and the question of sovereignty. As shown in Chapter 2, I aim to critically rework the concept to foreground asymmetries of power and colonial legacies. Second, insights from the gentrification literature are extended beyond a more traditional class analysis to conceptualize redevelopment as a process that reshapes socio-economic relations and symbolic and temporal elements. Taken together, nationalism and urban studies reveal important points of convergence, and I highlight how, in deeply divided cities, they operate in a mutually constitutive way rather than as separate analytical domains. This intersection underscores how national processes are deeply embedded in spatial transformations, while urban change itself is shaped by competing narratives of identity and belonging. In this light, theories of collective memory and its spatialization provide the connective thread of the dissertation, allowing me to analyze how urban space operates as both a material and symbolic site where nationalist narratives are inscribed, contested, and transformed. By bringing these frameworks together, the dissertation develops a relational approach that understands gentrification in divided cities as a mnemonic and spatial process through which power, identity, and history are continuously re-negotiated.

1.3 Comparing Gentrification Processes

Over the past two decades, comparative urbanism has gained renewed attention in urban studies. Scholars have responded to calls for "thinking cities through elsewhere" (Robinson 2016, 3) to unsettle the dominance of Euro-American epistemics in urban theory and to promote more global, plural urbanisms. They have warned against imposing 'universal' frameworks that do not account for local specificities and advocated for comparative urban studies being relational and grounded, and attentive to historical and political contingencies (Brill 2022, 1755). Comparison can be most powerful when it emerges as a dialogue across cases rather than as a search for sameness and differences. The method for this kind of research is adaptive to the specificities of place and sensitive to the researcher's

positionality, and treats comparison not as a rigid, positivist framework but as a process of mutual interrogation. Rather than seeking to replicate existing theories, comparative urbanism advocated by this trend poses new questions that can only emerge through the juxtaposition of distinct urban experiences (ibid, 1755). When guided by grounded theory and a commitment to empirical nuance, this approach can reveal both shared mechanisms and divergent paths of urban transformation. I found this approach particularly useful for examining Montréal and Belfast, whose distinct trajectories illuminate broader debates about colonialism, industrialization, gentrification, and nationalism. In Montréal, the Sud-Ouest borough, once a centre of manufacturing, canal-based industry, and working-class francophone and immigrant communities, has undergone extensive redevelopment in the early 2000s. It transformed former industrial sites into residential lofts, cultural venues, and creative-economy spaces. In Belfast, a parallel transformation has taken place around the former H&W shipyard, where the development of the Titanic Quarter (TQ) has been rebranded from an iconic site of industrial labour and sectarian working-class identity to a flagship post-conflict redevelopment project oriented toward tourism, high-end housing, and knowledge industries.

On the surface, these two cities are shaped by different national contexts and colonial histories. However, both are sites of deep ethnonational division, contested memory, and uneven urban development, conditions that make them particularly suitable for exploring the intersections of nationalism, gentrification, and collective memory. Montréal's urban politics have long been shaped by tensions between anglophone and francophone communities, as well as by the ongoing colonial dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the marginalization of racialized communities such as the historically Black population of Little Burgundy. Belfast, meanwhile, has been structured by the enduring conflict between unionist and nationalist communities, whose divisions were violently expressed during the Troubles and continue to shape the city's spatial organization through segregated

neighbourhoods, peace walls, and contested commemorative landscapes. These two cities fall outside the ‘usual suspects’ of global urban theory and bringing them into conversation allows us to move beyond the urban hierarchy where some particular cities are more studied than others. While both cities occupy important positions within their respective national contexts, they rarely appear together in comparative urban research, making their juxtaposition particularly useful for examining how processes often theorized for global metropolitan centres unfold in mid-sized post-industrial cities shaped by specific colonial and nationalist histories.

Crucially, the comparison here is not intended to establish equivalence but to use each city to interrogate broader political concerns about each other. For example, what is the form and content of state-led historical narratives? How do state-led narratives of belonging shape the city, and how are they resisted in each city? What are the spatial expressions of conflict or post-industrial decline? How are urban transformations mobilized for post-conflict reconciliation? These kinds of questions can be answered not through abstract theoretical categories but by placing the cities in sustained dialogue, i.e. what Brill (2022, 1756) calls a “back-and-forth” comparative process. By focusing on each case’s specificities, the comparison reveals how they nevertheless confront similar dilemmas around whose pasts are remembered, whose spaces are valorized, and whose futures are foreclosed in the process of neoliberal gentrification. In Montréal, redevelopment strategies celebrate the industrial heritage of the Lachine canal while marginalizing the memories of displaced working-class, Black, and Indigenous communities. In Belfast, similar dynamics appear in the transformation of the shipyard into the TQ, where a carefully curated narrative of maritime heritage and technological achievement frequently sidelines the sectarian labour struggles, and political tensions historically associated with the site. In both contexts, redevelopment projects mobilize selective historical narratives, through the image of the industrious Québécois worker in Montréal or the heroic shipbuilding legacy associated with Belfast’s

Titanic, to legitimize urban transformation while rendering other pasts less visible. Through this comparison, my dissertation highlights how redevelopment logics that operate within very different mnemonic and political environments, produce comparable tensions around displacement, historical recognition, and urban justice.

Ultimately, the comparative study of Montréal and Belfast presented here demonstrates the value of thinking across differences without flattening them. This allows for a relational understanding of how such abstract processes, such as neoliberalization and gentrification, intersect with local struggles over history, identity, and space. And in doing so, I hope, my research contributes to the broader project of comparative urbanism, not simply to multiply cases, but to critically reconfigure how we theorize urban change from the ground up.

1.4 Chapters Overview

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical frameworks that guide my research. First, I review works on capitalist urbanization and its production of dispossession and displacement in the Western context. Particular attention is paid to deindustrialization in the 1950s and 1960s, the urban fiscal crisis of the 1970s, and subsequent economic restructuring. I examine the neoliberal and post-industrial development strategies that many municipalities adopted to tackle the crisis, including gentrification and megaprojects. I also examine the literature on gentrification, attending to major theoretical debates that have emerged in the field. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the effects of gentrification-induced displacement in inner-city neighbourhoods. The chapter further explains elements mentioned above regarding the relevance of studying gentrification in "deeply divided cities." Studies of gentrification and nationalism have rarely intersected, and I show how a study of deeply divided cities can offer interesting perspectives on this intersection. Finally, the

chapter discusses hauntology as a conceptual apparatus that can illuminate the mnemonic dynamics of gentrifying neighbourhoods and people's contestation over gentrification.

Chapter 3 presents the methodological framework of the dissertation. After reflecting on my positionality and its implications for my research, I explain the various methods I adopted for this dissertation. I detail how and why I employed observations, an analysis of photography and images from various archives, interviews, and walking interviews to answer the research questions that I laid out above. Finally, the chapter discusses the comparative framework employed to examine the two cities of my research, highlighting the merits of this comparison. I show that Montréal and Belfast went through similar histories of state-seeking nationalism, deindustrialization, and post-industrialization, although these processes evolved in distinct ways in these two cities.

Chapter 4 offers an overview of the histories of Montréal's Sud-Ouest and Belfast's shipyard, focusing on their colonial foundations and subsequent industrial development. It explores how industrialization shaped the economic and social fabric of both cities, emphasizing the significance of these industries at the local level and in broader national contexts. The chapter then examines the impacts of deindustrialization, showing how the decline of these once-thriving sectors contributed to social fragmentation and played a key role in the emergence and intensification of nationalist conflicts.

Chapter 5 examines the case of Montréal. It shows how the gentrification of the Sud-Ouest neighbourhoods has impacted the communities there. It examines how residents struggle with changing landscapes that are now not in line with their memories. I show how former industrial workers and their communities are now caught in an in-between era, in which their past is constantly referred to as the 'times before,' while the future they once envisioned is now never expected to arrive. The chapter also examines how the gentrification of Montréal's Sud-Ouest has reinscribed the nationalist myth of the

white francophone worker into the landscape. It examines how this myth not only commodifies the white working-class's past but also reinforces racist narratives, erasing the histories of Little Burgundy's Black communities and silencing the land dispossession of Indigenous communities.

Chapter 6 examines the case of Belfast. It analyzes the city's project to transform its former shipyard into a new luxury living environment called the Titanic Quarter or TQ. I demonstrate how this project has played a key role in Belfast's transition from conflict, being branded as the city's first true 'shared space.' I argue, however, that a 'shared space' specifically targeting and catering to the needs and tastes of affluent residents and tourists does not benefit the city's working-class communities. By analyzing residents' and activists' voices, I demonstrate that the TQ has reproduced the exclusion of the working class, this time also depriving them of access to their past and to a space central to their collective identities.

In the conclusion, I provide an overview of the research findings and the arguments presented in the dissertation. I also discuss some avenues of reflection regarding what could possibly be done to challenge the appropriation of memorial spaces by capital, based on the voices of people who have refused gentrification and sought to reclaim their own spaces and memories.

Chapter 2: Collective Memory and the Gentrification Debates

2.1 Introduction

In 1967, Henri Lefebvre introduced the "right to the city" (Lefebvre 1967), which has become one of the founding ideas of critical urban studies. In the same article, Lefebvre introduced a second idea – the city as an *oeuvre*. For him, the city as a space of urban life is the *oeuvre* created by individuals and groups, not a simple container of societal activities (Lefebvre 1967, 30). Lefebvre argues that, with the rise of modern capitalism, the city shifted more into a space for exchange value and capital accumulation coordinated by ruling elites and away from one for habitat, use value, creativity and transformative politics from below. He contends that urbanization expresses a profound change in society, the passage from an agrarian and industrial society to an urban society, which accompanied structural changes in the ways of inhabiting spaces (Lefebvre 1970, 89).[5] Through these transformations, the city has increasingly lost its status of *oeuvre* and has catered more to the imperatives of capital.

Lefebvre's Marxian reading of the city focuses on class relations in urban society (Merrifield 2002, 88). Ruling classes approach the urban as a commodity and a medium for economic profits, while for the working class, it is a site and symbol of oppression in and through which they are socially and economically marginalized and physically segregated. While class difference remains crucial in the antagonistic interpretations of the urban, another vector of identity comes into play in cities like Belfast and Montréal, both of which have been divided along ethnocultural lines that intersect with their own specific class divisions. The divisions in these cities are not only along the line of where people are

[5] For Lefebvre, "the urban" is much more than (the territoriality of) cities. It has two main meanings for him. First, as we see later in this chapter, the urban is a place of encounters, potentialities, and revolutionary hopes. Second, the urban is spatial processes rather than reified forms, i.e. processes that organize, reproduce and alter spatialities of production, consumption and politics (Lefebvre 1970, 90).

located within class relations, but also along ethnic/religious (Belfast) and colonial/linguistic/cultural (Montréal) lines. These fault lines shape the experiences of different groups in each city and are at the centre of contestations over sovereignty and political legitimacy. Each group has produced the city as its *oeuvre*, attaching meanings to landscapes, very often in contestation with one another. They are "rivals in their love of the city" (Lefebvre [1968] 2009, 17).

Taking Lefebvre's idea of the city as an *oeuvre* produced, appropriated and contested by its inhabitants as an entry point, this chapter discusses theories that shaped the key frameworks of this dissertation – that is, theories on gentrification, memory and nationalism. In the first section of this Chapter, I position this study within the various debates that have marked the gentrification studies. I discuss how scholars have explained multiple structural factors that make gentrification a global phenomenon and analyze various consequences that gentrification has had on the neighbourhood in which it takes place. In the second section, I show how theories of collective memory can help enhance our understanding of gentrification processes. Lastly, I introduce the concepts of hauntology and haunting, which are central to my analysis of the resurgence of the past in gentrifying areas in Belfast and Montréal.

2.2 Gentrification: "A Resilient Term"

According to Liz Bondi (1999, 279), gentrification is a "resilient term" in contemporary urban studies. Gentrification has consistently attracted scholarly attention since the inception of the term. Together with its long history, the scope of gentrification studies has expanded. It is widely accepted that gentrification is a multifaceted phenomenon that involves processes of consumption and production; it both implicates individuals' agency and broader structural processes and is driven by, and expresses, cultural and economic imperatives. Despite, or perhaps because of, what has been described as "the

chaos and complexity" of the concept of gentrification (Rose 1984, 57), it continues to be a key concept of urban studies and a powerful discourse of urban development and neoliberal urbanism.

The literature on gentrification has discussed this process in conjunction with other areas of urban research, such as globalization and world cities, housing policies, urban inequalities, privatization, public space and citizenship, and geographies of consumption. In other words, gentrification has become a conceptual apparatus through which to examine a variety of intersecting phenomena in neoliberal cities. The term has also made its way outside of academia and is now widely used in media, realpolitik and activism. The first section of this chapter thus examines definitions of "gentrification" and offers an overview of the central debates that have shaped gentrification studies over the last 60 years.

2.2.1 Gentrification: History, Definitions and Debates

Gentrification raises questions about displacement, inequality, and the restructuring of urban space. To understand its contemporary forms, it is crucial to situate gentrification within the broader political-economic shifts that reshaped Western cities after World War II. During this period, suburban developments expanded rapidly, with large residential projects emerging as new spaces of consumption and production. Meanwhile, inner-city industrial areas, once growing in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, entered a period of decline as capital (real estate, commercial, and industrial) relocated to suburban zones. Henri Lefebvre's concept of the "two circuits of capital" illuminates these transformations. The first circuit concerns production, where surplus value is generated through wage labour and reinvested to sustain accumulation. The second circuit, as Harvey (1978, 104) explains, involves "fixed capital": real estate, infrastructure, and other spatial assets, where accumulation occurs through property investment and speculation. These two circuits are closely intertwined (Harvey [1982] 2006, 238). The production of goods and reproduction of labour depend on physical spaces, which

demand investment in the second circuit. Furthermore, when profitability falls in the first, surplus capital shifts into the second, in what Harvey ([1982] 2006, 415) terms a "spatial fix," a process that would later underpin gentrification.

In the postwar decades, suburbanization became capitalism's spatial fix, supported by state-backed mortgages and highway construction that incentivized white middle-class flight and drained investment from city centres (Després & Larochelle 1998, 47). As deindustrialization accelerated, urban cores were hollowed out, property values collapsed, and landscapes of decay emerged, conditions that later made reinvestment attractive. By the 1970s, with neoliberal restructuring and the relocation of industry to suburban and offshore sites, real estate capital gained primacy in urban governance. Cities and capitalists exploited the "rent gap" (Smith 1987, 462) between depressed land values and potential land values after redevelopment in urban cores. Former industrial hubs like Montréal and Belfast illustrate this shift, as municipalities rebranded decaying neighbourhoods as "heritage" districts to raise potential profits and attract capital (Benali 2005, 3). In this light, gentrification was not a sudden urban trend but the culmination of decades of disinvestment, a spatial fix for capitalism's crises (Harvey [1982] 2006, 415).

This gradual revalorization of central cities unfolded alongside evolving middle-class attitudes towards urban life. In contrast to earlier decades, when inner cities were stigmatized as spaces of 'urban decay,' the 1960s saw the emergence of pioneer gentrifiers – e.g., young professionals, artists, women, and students – who sought out these neighbourhoods as expressions of their nonconformist lifestyles and rejection of postwar modernist planning paradigms (Lees et al. 2008, 234; Rose 1984, 68), a phenomenon which continued in the 1970s. This movement was less a rupture than a layering of social and economic transitions; i.e., reinforcing how gentrification is best understood as a slow-moving phenomenon. The transformation of working-class neighbourhoods into spaces of middle-class

consumption did not happen overnight, but rather through a long-term sedimentation of policies market shifts in accordance with accumulation cycles, and the gradual reimagining of urban space.

While British sociologist Ruth Glass first coined the term "gentrification" in 1964 (xviii) to refer to the spatial changes in the inner city, the term has undergone reconceptualization over the decades. As Clark (2008, 263) argues, gentrification has become an "elastic" concept. The process of gentrification has mutated over time and so has its definition. It is now acknowledged that Glass's definition is outdated (Lees et al. 2016, 8), yet it is perceived that gentrification is still a difficult phenomenon to define. Clark (2008, 258), for instance, defines it as a process by which a population of higher socio-economic status invests in a space traditionally inhabited by lower economic classes, which accordingly, entails changes in the built environment through reinvestment. He adds: "It does not matter where, it does not matter when. Any process of change fitting this description is, to my understanding, gentrification" (ibid., 258). This provides a capacious definition of gentrification, as it does not restrict the location of gentrification to the inner-city area. It lacks, however, a key pillar of gentrification: displacement. Gentrification is not just a process affecting real estate and landscapes, as Clark argues, but also a "displacement process" (Lees et al. 2016, 9). When higher-income residents invest in a traditionally working-class neighbourhood, they place pressure on the area's housing market. Accordingly, the housing/rental price will rise, and existing residents will have to leave the neighbourhood. In this dissertation, I understand gentrification as a socio-economic process whereby capitalists, public institutions and individual investors invest in neglected, poor neighbourhoods through housing rehabilitation, loft conversions, the construction of new housing, and the redevelopment of commercial areas and infrastructure, leading to the physical, political and symbolic displacement of the existing communities or common and accessible spaces of the neighbourhood.

Today, far from being an anomaly, gentrification is ubiquitous. It gained momentum in Western countries during the 1980s and 1990s and is now present in many major cities worldwide. In line with the evolution and generalization of gentrification, the discourses and approaches to gentrification have changed. Gentrification, or the perception of it, is "no longer about rent increases, landlord harassment and working-class displacement, but rather street-level spectacles, trendy bars and cafes, I-[Phones], social diversity and funky clothing outlets" (Slater 2006, 738). Nor is gentrification perceived as only geographically limited to the inner city or the central cities. New research on gentrification now speaks of "suburban gentrification" (Markley 2018; Jones 2020) and "rural gentrification" (Stockdale 2010; Nelson and Nelson 2011). Occurrences of capital (re)investment leading to displacement need to be understood as gentrification wherever it happens, whether in suburbs, rural areas or wilderness (Lees et al. 2016, 8). Gentrification needs to be theorized from every angle and engage with its multifaceted and multi-spatial enunciations, while continuing to contest capitalist reappropriations of the term, which trivialize its consequences.

2.2.2 Early Debates in Gentrification Studies

Since Glass's introduction of the term in the 1960s, gentrification has been one of the most extensively studied and debated topics in urban research. As argued above, gentrification was made possible and later facilitated by the restructuring of capitalist economies in the West, and in turn, it was a crucial component that enabled this restructuring. The end of the Fordist compromise, which indexed the rise in wages on that of workers' productivity, led to new forms of labour relations (Jessop 1992, 49). On the one hand, there emerged an elite class of highly qualified professionals with greater mobility and significant salary and financial advantages (Lees, Slater, and E. K. Wyly 2008, 103) and, on the other, a precariat with low-skilled, poorly remunerated and insecure jobs (which is mostly composed of racialized and/or gendered workers). The new economy in cities was simultaneously restructured to

cater to the advantaged groups, with city governments focusing on the provision of market housing for them located in well-served and advantageous locations, while people of a more precarious status were generally forced to fall back on the least appealing options (e.g., living in a large, under-invested social housing complex or unaffordable rental units, and/or being located further away in the urban periphery). On the one hand, due to the restructuring of the national governments through the double processes of decentralization and globalization, cities emerged as a new scalar point of capital accumulation (Brenner and Theodore 2002, 367; Sassen 2001, 34). On the other hand, the states' deregulatory drives led to increased interurban competition to attract capital, making the urban economy more volatile as cities ventured into speculative projects (Harvey 1989, 11). Brenner and Theodore (2002, 370) show how states have gradually abandoned the objective of fighting against the unequal development of their territory through spatial redistribution, focusing instead on enhancing their global competitiveness. At the same time, as cities were stripped of funds from federal or central governments under neoliberal restructuring, they have tried to fill the revenue gap by supporting real estate developments within their boundaries, as the major revenue source for cities, especially in North America, is property tax (Hackworth and Smith 2001, 470). All these structural changes paved the way for the gentrification of former industrial sites, their surrounding working-class neighbourhoods and other derelict areas.

Early studies on gentrification developed two main approaches. The first, a political-economic perspective, explained gentrification through a productionist lens, arguing that it was caused primarily by capital seeking profit. Neil Smith (1979, 538) argued that gentrification represented a "return of capital" rather than people, driven by cycles of disinvestment and reinvestment. His "rent gap" theory (Smith 1987, 463) shows how investors exploit the disparity between a property's current and potential value, buying undervalued buildings, renovating them, and profiting from resale or rent. For Smith,

capitalist exploitation of undervalued urban space, rather than cultural preference, was central to gentrification. The second, consumption-oriented approach links gentrification to middle-class cultural and lifestyle shifts. David Ley (1996, 53) associated it with the rise of a new middle class in post-industrial economies that rejected suburban living in favour of urban diversity. Richard Florida ([2002] 2019, 8) later described a "creative class" whose demand for vibrant and tolerant cities spurred urban renewal. From this perspective, the middle class appears as the primary agent of urban change, though critics noted that such accounts often downplay displacement and inequality (Slater 2009, 296).

The tension between production- and consumption-based approaches structured debates for over a decade. Chris Hamnett (1991) attempted to reconcile them, proposing that Smith's framework explained supply while Ley's captured demand, making gentrification a dual process. Yet Smith (1992, 111) rejected this synthesis, arguing that Hamnett falsely opposed structural explanations and cultural ones. For Smith, even middle-class residential choices are shaped by broader political-economic dynamics. While he gradually acknowledged the role of taste and cultural agency, he insisted that these factors alone cannot explain gentrification. Instead, gentrification results from uneven spatial development: capital reinvests in neglected inner-city areas once rent gaps widen, while middle-class cultural practices reinforce this shift (Smith 1996, 105-107). In this way, the "urban dream" replaced the suburban one, transforming cities into landscapes for post-industrial economies, consumption, and social differentiation.

Building on this debate, my dissertation examines how gentrification operates through shifting property values or middle-class cultural preferences, and through the symbolic transformation of urban space. Just as deindustrialization devalued land and opened it to reinvestment, the devaluation of industrial memory eroded its association with working-class struggles and collective identity. Once stripped of its oppositional meaning, industrial heritage can be reconstituted as an aesthetic and cultural

asset, mobilized by politicians and developers to attract investment the middle/upper classes and legitimize displacement. In this sense, the commodification of memory landscapes highlights how production and consumption are intertwined: capital accumulation depends on both uneven development and the economic restructuring of urban space, and the cultural reframing of its histories and the marketing of them. Gentrification, therefore, must be understood as a process whereby material reinvestment and symbolic appropriation converge within neoliberal urbanization.

Deindustrialization and state-led economic restructuring have played a central role in widening the rent gap, making abandoned or underutilized industrial spaces prime targets for redevelopment. Industrial landscapes once deemed obsolete or undesirable are now imbued with historical significance, but only in ways that align with market imperatives. Real estate capitalists, municipal governments, and cultural industries work in tandem to manufacture a curated nostalgia that caters to middle-class consumer preferences while erasing the social histories of working-class communities. The indicators of the industrial era – such as brick façades, factory aesthetics, and rail tracks – remain preserved as markers of 'authentic' place identity; however, the social relations and the labour that once animated these spaces are now conspicuously absent, as my later Chapters demonstrate. This logic follows what Fredric Jameson (1992, 56) describes as "the cultural logic of late capitalism," where histories are not preserved in their entirety but are selectively appropriated in conformity with a commodified, depoliticized milieu. The nostalgia for industry in gentrified spaces does not function as a genuine recognition of the past labour struggles but rather as a marketable aesthetic that neutralizes their political significance. In this way, memory becomes a speculative asset, much like property, subject to processes of abstraction, branding, and accumulation. The marginalized histories that originally gave these spaces meaning are paradoxically erased from the landscape, supplanted by sanitized, market-friendly versions of the past.

Ultimately, this dynamic underscores how gentrification is not simply about the physical transformation of space but also about the restructuring of urban memory. It reveals how historical narratives are actively shaped both by economic and cultural imperatives, through the dialectics of the rent gap and the middle-class taste cultures. Just as disinvestment and reinvestment cycles create the material conditions for gentrification, the production of historical simulacra functions as a parallel process that enables and legitimizes this transformation. As I argue later, the right to the city is also a right to memory, a collective struggle to resist the erasure of histories and challenge the uneven geographies of urban redevelopment.

2.2.3 Social Mixing: Diversity, Social Control and Gentrification

This section discusses a more recent theoretical development in gentrification studies: social mixing. I examine social mixing policies in general, and then in specific contexts of post-conflict transition in deeply divided cities. In an urban context of accentuated social and spatial divisions, the idea of 'social mixing' has been proposed as an alternative to the increasing segregation between the haves and have-nots in cities. However, empirical studies on social mixing have consistently demonstrated that social mixing facilitates the conquest of economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods by the upper classes and the displacement of current communities (Rose 2004; Lees 2008). It is a euphemism for gentrification.

Recall, for starters, that by aiming at social integration, the rhetoric of social mixing prioritizes a social bond between different socio-economic groups. The idea of social mixing assumes that by placing different social classes within the same neighbourhood, the most 'disadvantaged' among them – often Indigenous peoples, low-income workers, racialized immigrants, and other marginalized groups – will 'learn' socially acceptable norms, values, and lifestyles from more affluent new residents and thereby attain upward mobility. In addition to the problematic and paternalistic overtones of this

assumption, its objective has not been empirically validated. Numerous studies have shown that existing residents tend to leave socially mixed neighbourhoods, primarily due to inflated rental prices and the loss of the social amenities they once relied on for their social reproduction and political engagement. Butler and Robson (2003a, 111) also pointed out that in London, UK, very few interactions between different groups occur when they live side by side within a social mixing project. They even concluded that we can hardly speak of social mix in such cases. In the ethnically diverse district of Brixton, in south London, gentrifiers sought signifiers of a lifestyle on the margins and unique experiences, not genuine connection with the people living in the neighbourhood (Butler and Robson 2003b, 1797). Butler (2003, 2481) even shows that the gentrifiers live consciously apart from the original working classes, particularly regarding the schooling of their children. Middle-class families tend to avoid local public schools and instead school their children elsewhere, ensuring their social networks remain confined to their own class. In Butler's (2003, 2484) discourse analysis of gentrifiers' perspectives, their ignorance of working-class neighbours' realities is evident, and their primary concern revolves around security issues. Time spent in cohabitation did not translate into new perspectives for them.

Crucially, social mixing operates asymmetrically: it always implies the movement of affluent classes into marginalized spaces but never demands reciprocal redistribution, such as introducing social housing into wealthy districts. In this sense, the policy fails in its outcomes but also in its foundational logic. As Rose (2004, 279) observes, the supposed goal of facilitating interclass contact operates as a one-way street, an attempt to normalize the transmission of middle-class norms and values to working-class and racialized groups. The persuasiveness of the concept lies in its rhetorical ambiguity. Unlike gentrification, which now carries a public stigma, 'social mix' offers a discursive shield that frames the conquest of poor neighbourhoods by the middle class as improvement and market-led redevelopment

as moral progress. Slater (2006, 751) identifies this shift in language as part of a broader trend: "[gentrification] disguised as 'social mix' serves as an excellent example of how the rhetoric and reality of gentrification has been replaced by a different discursive, theoretical and policy language that consistently deflects criticism and resistance." In that light, the discourse of social mix is not simply "slippery" (Rose 2004, 280) but is actively ideological in that it reframes spatial inequality as cultural deficiency, and casts market-driven transformation as benevolence.

More recent research confirms and expands this critique. Jackson and Butler (2015, 2353) argue that gentrifiers often maintain spatial and symbolic distance from the working-class and racialized residents, even when they express appreciation for the 'diversity' of their neighbourhood. The authors offer the metaphor of "social tectonics," referring to the ways in which middle-class and marginalized groups may occupy the same space but move past each other with minimal contact (ibid, 2353). This insight complicates the dominant narrative that spatial proximity naturally leads to integration. In fact, as Annunziata, Lees, and Rivas Alonso (2021, 669) show, the rhetoric of social mixing, often central to urban policy, has become a vehicle for neoliberal redevelopment, promoting displacement and reinforcing socio-spatial inequality under the guise of inclusion. These policies frequently rely on the pathologization of poverty and the spatial stigmatization of working-class and racialized neighbourhoods to justify "positive" gentrification (Lees, Slater, and E. Wyly 2008, 195). These studies also show that the neoliberal city produces economic inequality and reshapes urban subjectivities through particular normative spatial imaginaries. Social mixing operates as a moral tool of governance, aiming to reconfigure marginalized identities to fit market logics, while rendering structural inequality invisible. For gentrification studies and urban political economy theories, this calls for reframing integration discourses as mechanisms of managed displacement.

In deeply divided cities, the idea of 'social mixing' adds another layer of complication, given that class disparities are anchored in ethnocultural divides.[6] Many divided cities are actively promoting social mixing to build meaningful contacts across ethnocultural divides. This is particularly salient in Belfast, where social mixing is an integral part of the TQ's conception, as I discuss in Chapter 6. More broadly, in deeply divided cities, social mixing theories are often equated to older theories promoting contacts and interactions between rival sides after a conflict. For example, intergroup contact theory, introduced by Allport ([1954] 1979) and further developed by scholars like Pettigrew and Tropp (2006, 753), posits that increased contact between conflicting groups will eventually usher in better intergroup relations with less prejudice toward each other: "[A]ll things being equal, greater contact and familiarity with members of other groups should enhance liking for those groups." For them, shared public spaces and mixed communities are crucial contributions towards post-conflict reconciliation processes, as they enhance intergroup rapport.

However, others have countered such a view and argued that the types of contact that occur in such public spaces or mixed neighbourhoods might not usher in a genuine reconciliation and union among groups previously in conflictual relationships (Forbes 1997, 210). Indeed, for some researchers, there is a danger in the disproportionate reliance on social mixing and contact theories. For example, as Forbes (1997, 210) warns,

> The most common intuition today is undoubtedly that contact, when it has any effects at all, has good effects. It destroys prejudices and stereotypes. This layman's contact hypothesis clashes with the vague but widespread suspicion that increasing contact must be counted among the causes of contemporary ethnic violence.

[6] I use the term social mixing both in the ways that it has been used in the urban studies field – i.e. the mixing of groups belonging to different classes – and the mixing of groups that belong to different nationalist and/or ethnocultural identities.

That is, it is equally plausible to assume that mixed neighbourhoods or shared public spaces, where different classes and ethnocultural groups cohabit and/or run across, may engender even more clashes and tensions, thereby adding greater volatility (Goodchild and Cole 2001, 116).

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* offers a useful framework for understanding why social mixing often fails to produce the integrative effects celebrated by intergroup contact theorists. In *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique*, Bourdieu ([1972] 2000, 225, my translation) defines habitus as a system of durable and transposable dispositions: "an immanent law placed in each agent by the fundamental education" that shapes how individuals perceive, judge, and act in the world. These dispositions, acquired through early socialization and continuously reinforced by social context, govern everyday practices such as speech, dress, tastes, comportment, and sensibilities. In *La Distinction*, Bourdieu (1979) further develops this concept by showing how taste and aesthetic preferences are not neutral or individual but stratified by class and used as mechanisms of symbolic domination. The habitus reflects social hierarchies and serves to reproduce them by legitimizing the cultural capital of dominant groups as 'natural' or 'refined,' while devaluing the practices of subordinate classes. This framework is especially relevant in the context of social mixing policies, where contact between differently positioned groups is presumed to foster mutual understanding. The disjuncture of classed habitus often results in tension, misrecognition, and exclusion.

Studies of gentrification have drawn on the notion of habitus to demonstrate how middle-class newcomers often enact forms of distinction that reproduce social distance despite physical proximity. Davidson (2012, 239), for instance, argues that gentrifiers' habitus manifests in subtle everyday practices, such as parenting styles, leisure preferences, or food choices, that differentiate them from long-time residents and reaffirm class boundaries. Similarly, Bridge (2001, 207) and Butler and Robson (2003c, 1799) show that gentrifiers' aesthetic sensibilities and consumption patterns are often

incompatible with the established cultural norms of working-class communities. These studies suggest that social mixing does not neutralize class difference but instead rearticulates it in new spatial forms. Rather than producing egalitarian interaction, it often fosters parallel lives structured by divergent habitus, in which proximity intensifies symbolic violence rather than dissolving it. As Dunn (2024) further underscores, the emphasis on contact alone neglects the depth of embodied class cultures, whose mutual intelligibility cannot be assumed.

Foucault's theory of discipline and surveillance also deepens our understanding of how social mixing operates as a regulatory technology rather than a path toward genuine integration. In *Surveiller et punir*, Foucault ([1975] 1995, 27-29) traces the historical shift from a sovereign power that relied on public spectacles of punishment to a disciplinary power that operates through the surveillance and normalization of bodies. Contemporary urban space reflects this latter mode of power: it is not simply governed through overt coercion, but through subtle mechanisms that shape conduct and define who belongs. In gentrifying neighbourhoods, this logic is evident in the increasing surveillance of public space and the moralization of behaviour. As one of my research participants in Montréal, Marie-Claude, pointed out while walking with me, homes adorned with surveillance cameras have become visual markers of exclusion, sources of anxiety that signal the presence of a watching gaze and reinforce the sense of being unwelcome. Karen Murray (2015, 279) captures this dynamic with her concept of bio-gentrification, which emphasizes that the production of urban value is not limited to built environments, but extends to the regulation of bodily comportment, aesthetics, and forms of life. Gentrification, in this sense, is not just a spatial project but a biopolitical one: it promotes ways of living aligned with neoliberal ideals while disciplining or criminalizing those who deviate from these norms. This disciplinary turn is often masked by the moral rhetoric of diversity and inclusion. As cities compete to attract capital and affluent residents, they increasingly deploy 'quality of life' ordinances

that criminalize behaviours associated with poverty, loitering, panhandling, public resting, and street vending (MacLeod 2002, 608). Such ordinances displace unhoused and marginalized residents, and produce a sanitized urban aesthetic tailored to the comfort of the gentrifying classes. Ironically, while these policies claim to serve freedom, individual choice, market access, and entrepreneurialism, they produce an increasingly punitive and regulated city for those made precarious by deindustrialization, welfare retrenchment, racial capitalism, and settler colonial dispossession.

Taken together, Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power illuminate why social mixing, far from attenuating tensions within urban life, functions as a mechanism to maintain and deepen social divisions. Habitus structures interaction at the level of disposition: the internalized tastes, norms, and bodily comportments that govern everyday conduct tend to reinforce class distinction and symbolic exclusion, even in shared spaces. Meanwhile, Foucault draws attention to the external regulation of bodies and behaviours in space. Surveillance technologies, urban bylaws, and aesthetic regimes make the poor hyper-visible as objects of control, while simultaneously rendering them invisible as legitimate urban subjects. These two forces, embodied differentiation and discipline, work in tandem to transform "social mix" into an urban fiction. What appears as integration is often a form of spatial juxtaposition without meaningful social exchange. As I will explore in subsequent chapters, these insights will frame my analysis of cross-community relations in Montréal and Belfast, helping to interrogate the political efficacy of social mixing-based gentrification.

2.2.4 New-Build Gentrification

The two boroughs under study here – the TQ in Belfast and *the Arrondissement Sud-Ouest* in Montréal – have experienced a specific form of gentrification called "new-build gentrification." As noted above, gentrification is a "resilient term," and its definition has evolved to include various forms, actors, and geographies beyond those denoted in the original definition of the term. "New-build gentrification" is

one such modification. The concept of new-build gentrification was first introduced by Davidson and Lees (2005, 1166) in their study of London Dockland neighbourhoods, in particular the districts of Shadwell and Wandsworth. The harbour wastelands and the land along the banks of the Thames have undergone extensive urban planning initiatives that developers have explicitly designed for wealthier populations (Davidson and Lees 2005, 1182). While gentrification originally meant the rehabilitation of existing buildings, new-build gentrification involves the demolition of old buildings and the construction of new ones. This contemporary Haussmannization of space is still defined as "gentrification," as it is characterized by the same dynamic of revalorization of urban spaces by and for the upper middle classes and the displacement of existing people, land uses and built environment, the same dynamic witnessed in the 'traditional' form of gentrification. It is a reinvestment of capital in neglected areas, ultimately leading to the removal of low-income residents, remnants of defunct industries or underused/derelict spaces.

As a concrete phenomenon, new-build gentrification has had revolutionary impacts. Capitalizing on the discourse of smart growth, it has accelerated the pace of gentrification and adorned urban landscapes with new skylines. Similar to the 'traditional gentrification' that found its origin in the crisis of deindustrialization in central cities, new-build gentrification finds its genesis in the global economic crises of the late 1990s. Hackworth and Smith (2001, 468) show how the 1990s recessions spurred the "third wave" of gentrification.[7] Led by large corporate and institutional investors and institutionally and financially supported by states at multiple levels, this third wave involved large-scale new-build developments. Urban space continued to serve as an essential "element" rather than a

[7] The first wave of gentrification represents a modest experiment of market operation in which the dominant discourse on cities was still one of ameliorating urban decline by "pioneer" gentrifiers moving into decaying urban areas in the late 1950s (Hackworth and Smith 2001, 466). The second wave of gentrification in the 1970s and the 1980s started when social programmes were scaled back, and gentrification took a deeper *laissez-faire* form, with individual homebuyers and corporations playing central roles in gentrification. In the second wave, gentrification also expanded geographically, permeating larger parts of the city, but also internationally (Hackworth and Smith 2001, 467-468).

mere “condition” of accumulation, to use David Harvey’s (1989, 5) terminology. In the third wave of gentrification, municipal governments have also moved away from the “roll-back” position to a “roll-out” one, in which they took on a far more proactive role in initiating and subsidizing urban developments (Peck and Tickell 2002, 389). Local governments cast aside their social and redistributive responsibilities and allocated public funds to projects which were of little direct relevance to the working-class people who were struggling with un(der)employment or precarious employment induced by the post-industrial economic transition and neoliberal restructuring. This new strategy by the state institutions was in striking contrast with the ones they pursued in the post-war period (e.g. the policies to minimize unemployment and increase social wages for workers). What emerged from cities’ attempts to overcome the economic recession of the early 1990s was a spatial fix. Gentrification – previously led by “pioneers” and individual property owners seeking economic advantages and a status increase, as well as yearning for diversity and tolerance hard to find in the suburbs – was now led more by corporations and governments. As such, while ‘traditional gentrification’ typically spans several decades (with old inhabitants driven out gradually by rising house prices), new-build gentrification is executed more rapidly, and displacement is immediate (Davidson and Lees 2005, 1186).

In the new-build gentrification, a place’s relationships with its past go through more drastic changes due to the rapid cycle of destruction and reconstruction. The marketers of this kind of gentrification often mobilize symbols of a place’s past in newly constructed buildings and spaces to enhance its place identity. History and mnemonic symbolisms are employed to legitimize the destruction of former landscapes. By retaining old street names or with various instances of façadism, new-build gentrification retains some connection to the past, which is also a process of commodification of that past. The hollow shells of industrial infrastructure are preserved to project a mythological and nostalgic past and to create a sense of “authenticity.” Such attempts to preserve or

patrimonialiser[8] are related to profit-making motives. While the specific elements of the past survive in symbolic forms, other elements considered less marketable vanish at the level of a building, a block or the entire neighbourhood in the case of new-build gentrification. Due to the sheer scale of the change, the socio-spatial memory of a place undergoes a more dramatic change in new-build gentrification. Specific pasts of a neighbourhood and the associated collective memory are altered, which often render the local sites unrecognizable to its residents. As I show later in Chapters 5 and 6, gentrification, in this context, signifies a type of erasure and triggers a cultural aphasia for those who used to live there. Their memories become misaligned with what is around.

Gentrification is a cultural as well as a political-economic process (Sassen 2001, 87). Fierce interurban competition has compelled cities to adorn themselves with iconic architecture and stylish amenities, thereby improving their aesthetic appeal to bolster their global image. Both Montréal's Arrondissement Sud-Ouest and Belfast's Docklands used to be vibrant working-class places, but in the early twenty-first century, they were transformed into 'urban villages,' "area[s] where people live, work and play" with "a specific set of aesthetic and social aspirations" tailored to the new middle class (Crinson 2005, 59). The 'villaging' of Montréal's Sud-Ouest and Belfast's Docklands not only priced out the existing working-class residents, but for those who remained there, modified the landscapes to the level of unrecognition. As Crinson mentioned (2005, xii), gentrified spaces present a "memory with the pain taken out." Historic sites and structures get denuded of meanings and social relations that went into their production, to the point that they hardly reflect history, which, in deeply divided cities, can easily precipitate a potential breaking point for some groups in these cities.

[8] I use the French term *patrimonialiser* since there are no equivalences in the English language for such a word. *Patrimonialiser* is the socio-cultural, legal or political process by which a space, a good, or a practice is constituted as sacred, as an emblem of the nation and a heritage, worthy of both conservation and restoration (Grange and Poulot 1997; Zubrzycki 2016).

2.2.5 Gentrification as Colonialism: Settlers, Gentrifiers and Land Claims

Residue, a movie directed by Merawi Gerima, tells the story of Jay, a young filmmaker who returns to his childhood neighbourhood in Washington, D.C. after many years. He intends to write a screenplay about his childhood environment, only to find it unrecognizable, transformed by gentrification and seeing his childhood friends scattered across different places. After watching this film, which speaks directly to the subject of this dissertation, I looked at some interviews that Gerima had given. In one of them, he answered a question by saying, among other things, "Gentrification is a polite way to say colonization" (quoted in Jordan 2022).

Some scholars have argued that gentrification can be understood as following patterns that parallel colonialism and internal colonialism (Atkinson and Bridge 2005; Kent-Stoll 2020; Parish 2020; Careless 2024). The discourses surrounding gentrification often echo colonial tropes of frontier, conquest, security, and a "civilizing mission." Dispossession is central to both processes. In each, "newcomers" or "pioneers" claim land, reshape it according to their interests, and displace existing populations. In both cases, an economically empowered minority acquires land, property, and cultural space, extracting financial gain and political influence at the expense of those in weaker economic positions. Like colonialism, gentrification is a form of invasion, although it is enacted primarily through market mechanisms rather than military force. Furthermore, both processes normalize and impose liberal capitalist categories, such as private property (Atkinson and Bridge 2005, 81), reinforcing systems of exclusion and unequal power.

Treating gentrification as a form of colonialism, however, risks giving a misleading sense of equivalence between these two processes. It can be one of the settlers' moves to innocence, as was famously argued by Tuck and Yang (2012, 3-4). As a means for settlers "to be made innocent, to find some mercy or relief in the face of the relentlessness of settler guilt and haunting" (ibid., 3-4), the

"metaphorical" use of colonialism is a dangerous move, disembowelling the true meaning of colonization and by extension decolonization. Recognition of this is even more critical in settler colonial contexts, such as Canada and Northern Ireland. While those displaced by gentrification include Indigenous peoples, anti-gentrification campaigns often overlook the fact that the land was stolen from Indigenous communities and that they have resisted the ongoing settler colonial oppression and dispossession, along with the hollow reconciliation promises made by settler states. Therefore, the right to the city must acknowledge that the land belongs to Indigenous communities, and how the Indigenous presence has sought to be erased within settler-colonial cities through the ideology of "*urbs nullius*" (Coulthard 2014, 277). So, it behooves urban scholars to reflect on how they approach anti-gentrification struggles in relation to the ongoing Indigenous struggles over land sovereignty.

Additionally, we must deconstruct the myth of *urbs nullius*, which remains pervasive in many settler societies. This myth imagines Indigenous peoples as belonging only to distant lands or reserves, spaces constructed as "natural" habitats for them, while rendering them incompatible with urban environments. In the Canadian context, this imagined incompatibility was not accidental but strategically produced. Cities, as Murray reminds us, are "mutually constituted domains of ever-changing relationships, representations, contestations, and identifications" (2023, 55). Precisely because urban space is socially and politically produced, it could also be reimagined through settler colonial logics as Indigenous-free. *Urbs nullius* thus functioned as an active project of erasure and removal, reinforcing the false notion that cities were inherently settler spaces. Martha Walls details how, in early 20th-century Sydney, Nova Scotia, "politically powerful residents" campaigned to remove a Mi'kmaw community, deploying gendered stereotypes that cast Mi'kmaw women as morally and physically "depraved" (Walls 2016, 549). The resulting Court hearing, ignored most positive testimony and ruled based on negative racialized characterizations of Mi'kmaw femininity, justifying

displacement as being in the “best interests” of the city (ibid, 545). According to Walls, this process needs to be understood as part of a “continental colonial project that stretched to the East Coast and well into the twentieth century” (ibid, 539). Lobo similarly argues that the relocation of Indigenous peoples has always been part of Canada’s urbanization processes (Lobo et al. 2013, 1807). The residential school system, analyzed by Karren Murray, functioned as a way to control Indigenous peoples and lands, physically removing children to sever kinship and territorial ties (Murray 2017, 748). This system was intrinsic to Canadian modern state formation, seeking to “quell Indigenous resistance and to secure recognition as a modern nation state” (ibid, 748). Federal and provincial governments viewed Indigenous kinship and community ties as obstacles to the consolidation of Canadian nationalism; severing these ties and excluding Indigenous peoples from settler spaces became a deliberate strategy. Such policies cemented the myth that Indigenous people and cities are incompatible, inscribing Indigenous identity as rural or remote, an image far removed from lived realities. The result is a reality where urban and reserve spaces are constitutionally and economically intertwined, yet segregation and erasure persist.

The significant urbanization of Indigenous peoples began earlier than often cited, with roots tracing back to the early 1950s (National Association of Friendship Centres 2021, 3). While historical government policies may have viewed this as a tool of assimilation, drivers for migration are diverse, including the pursuit of employment, specialized healthcare, education, and family reunification. By 2021, the Indigenous population in Canada had grown to 1.8 million people, accounting for 5% of the total population. This population is notably young, with a median age of 32.5 years compared to 41.8 years for the non-Indigenous population (Statistics Canada and Government of Canada 2023). It was also reported in 2021 that nationally, approximately 61% of Indigenous people (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) now live in urban settings (National Association of Friendship Centres 2021, 3). In Québec,

the 2021 census recorded 205,010 Indigenous people, with 46,085 residing in the Montréal metropolitan area alone (Government of Canada and Statistics Canada 2022). The growing and youthful presence of Indigenous peoples in Canadian cities unfolds within urban landscapes structured by settler colonial power, where dominant forms of memory-making actively tries to marginalize Indigenous histories and spatial claims. Memory work by settlers has pushed into forgetfulness the histories that are outside the settler teleology. It is an essential ideological superstructure that assists the ongoing abandonment and dispossession of Indigenous people (Fortier 2022, 259). Colonialism provides a critical lens for my analysis of gentrification in the two cities, but rather than approaching gentrification metaphorically, I discuss how it occurs on stolen land and how the nexus of settler colonialism and capitalism shapes it. I adopt an anti-/de-colonial lens in the analysis presented in later chapters.

2.3 Space, Identity and Memory

The identification of individuals with particular places, especially their living environments, is an essential part of their identity construction. To quote Grégoire Busqet (2017, 3, my translation), "far from being merely a neutral medium – or receptacle – of social activities," space is "a stake and a medium for conflicting social representations and strategies." Industrial spaces that are on the verge of being closed under the deindustrializing waves are not just spaces for transaction and a relic for post-industrial transformation but were and still are 'homes' for many people. These different readings of spaces tend to provoke contestations, as Busqet's quote indicates. The built environment is filled with historical and experiential memories, emotions and affects for those who lived in it. Space, memory and identity are intermeshed with one another. In this section, I examine this intermeshing in deeply divided cities and later discuss the idea of a "right to urban memory," as well as why this right matters in contexts where gentrification transforms memory landscapes.

2.3.1 Spaces of Memory and the Urban

Space is a central notion in geography, but it can sometimes appear as pre-given. Geographers have tried to debunk this idea, contending that space, as a given, masks its social construction. This is what prompted researchers to speak of the "production of space," *à la* Henri Lefebvre ([1974] 2000). According to Guy Di Méo (2013, 629), the production of space refers to "the idea that geographic space, as a terrestrial reality, does not constitute a natural given, but is, like time, a collective realization of societies." This further means that the production of space cannot be reduced to its material construction but entails the construction and contestation of meanings and values within the shifting social dynamic. Geographers have also argued that space is not a passive reality; it is a collective product reflecting the values of those involved in its production but also facilitating the realization of these values and mediating the construction of new values. David Harvey (1994, 127) argued that space as well as time cannot be considered politically neutral but are embedded in the structure of power. According to him, "[to] regard a particular version of space and time as 'natural' is to accept the social order that embodies it as also 'natural' and therefore incapable of change." The ways in which people connect with spaces and interpret them and how those spaces impact social life can be closely tied to empowerment or marginalization and the inclusion or exclusion of individuals. Consequently, it is essential to conceptualize space as a social construct shaped by social, economic, and political dynamics and conflicts.

The idea of the production of space provides an analysis of the city in the making. Conceptualizing the city as a produced space makes it possible to link political economy, everyday life, and struggles over meaning and memory within the urban fabric. Henri Lefebvre took an interest in alienation and everyday life, which further prompted him to study the city and the urban. Lefebvre devoted years to developing a critique of modern planning, which, for him, is a political process

through which the state and the capitalist system organize and rationalize space for capitalist commodity production, circulation, and reproduction (Merrifield 2002, 80). From the end of the 1960s, Lefebvre's theory started to attend to the broader spatial dynamics of capitalism. Indeed, he was among the first Marxists to systematically develop a dialectical conception of the capitalist political economy and spatial processes (ibid., 78). Furthermore, for him, space is a "question of both production and a political issue" (Lefebvre [1974] 2000, 37), and the result of contradictory and often antagonistic strategies, representations, appropriations and practices by different groups with specific interests (ibid., 53). He advanced the conceptual frames of "dominant" and "dominated" spaces, highlighting that space is not a neutral container, but a terrain of struggle shaped by unequal power relations and conflicting social interests (ibid., 43). The dominant spaces are those conceived and materialized by architects, town planners, and political leaders according to the logics of capitalism and the state bureaucracy. The dominated spaces are the contradictory and ambiguous lived spaces, those of representations and daily life, relegated to the background. Yet, everyday life is permeated with ruling class ideologies, which oppress and hamper the autonomy of subalterns and their spontaneous and creative practices. It is here that the possibility for revolutionary struggles arises. These struggles do not always take the form of overt political action; they can emerge through everyday practices that contest dominant representations of space and reassert use value over exchange value.

Lefebvre's theorization of space and the everyday is useful in understanding the memory politics of gentrification, particularly in relation to vernacular memories. This is especially the case when gentrification is understood as a process through which dominant spatial logics attempt to suppress or marginalize lived and vernacular forms of spatial meaning. These lived and vernacular memories are not simply traces of the past; they are practices that denaturalize the taken-for-granted rhythms of daily life and rehistoricize the present, exposing how what appears routine is in fact

historically and politically produced. Vernacular memories can act as a resource for empowerment, enabling communities to resist erasure and to articulate alternative attachments to place. As Donohoe (2016, 18) observed, the relationship between memory, tradition, and place is fundamental to lived experience. Place enables collective memory, and memory constitutes the traditions through which people locate themselves in specific spaces. A sense of belonging, whether to a neighbourhood or a community, emerges through these shared memories and through practices of both formal and informal heritage (ibid., 79). Memory and heritage thus serve to situate individuals within the collective while simultaneously tying the collective to the material and symbolic fabric of places. If memory cannot be disentangled from its spatial setting, then the production of space is also always the production, and often the contestation, of memory.

The strategic curation and commodification of memory are also carried out by capitalists and the state. In his thesis of the "society of the spectacle," Debord ([1967] 2008, 28, my translation) argues that capitalism had reached a stage where commodities no longer merely satisfied needs but have come to structure social life itself. Culture, ideas, and even public space became consumable, acquiring a price. The mobilization of memory for capital accumulation exemplifies this logic: elements of the past are simplified, aestheticized, and commodified, transformed into 'simulacra' that displace lived experience (Baudrillard [1981] 2017, 47). When the industrial imagery of a neighborhood is marketed to attract new residents while those who created its landscape are displaced, what is sold is an image without substance: a signifier detached from the signified. The society of spectacles distinguishes itself from the former consumer society; in the society of spectacles, Debord argued, it has been transformed from 'to have' to 'to appear having.' Our world "prefers images to things, copies to originals, representation to reality, appearance to being" (Feuerbach, cited in Debord [1967] 2008, 7, my

translation). What matters is not the object's mooring in lived local social relations, but how it appears to be so. The important thing is not that a place used to be industrial, but that it looks industrial.

One of the consequences of the society of spectacles is the creation of *non-lieux* (non-places). Within spectacular capitalism, space is increasingly produced to be consumed visually and functionally rather than lived relationally, creating environments seemingly detached from collective history and social attachment. The concept of *non-lieux* was first introduced by anthropologist Marc Augé (1992, 15), who described it as functional spaces. These places are standardized and dehumanized, carrying a break with what Augé called "anthropological" places where organic social connections are made and reproduced. Concretely and materially, *non-lieux* can be approached in relation to "two realities complementary, but distinct" (Augé 1992, 118, my translation). The first is reflected in architectural and town planning projects which set up ever more functional structures dedicated to efficiency and competitiveness in the global economic system. Here, we can think of train stations, airports, shopping malls, highways, and, as I intend to argue, gentrifying neighbourhoods. They all operate on a similar, pre-conceived model of rationality, accumulation and property ownership. Gentrifying neighbourhoods increasingly function less as lived places than as transitional and consumable environments designed for circulation, investment, and symbolic display. The second reality, which complements the first, is characterized by the relationship that users have with these spaces. A *non-lieux* cannot exist without the activity and the interactivity of the individuals who pass through it: "*non-lieux* mediate a whole set of relationships with oneself and with others which are only indirectly linked to their ends" (Augé, 1992, 119, my translation). The relationship generated and sustained in *non-lieux* is different from *lieux*; it is based on the alienating logic of bureaucracy and market calculus. "If a space can be defined as identity, relational and historical, a space that cannot be defined either as identity or relational and historical will be defined as *non-lieux,*" says Augé (1992, 100, my translation). Through the commodification of the

memory landscape, gentrification, in a way, undermines the existing relationality and identity of a place, transforming it into commodities, relations hinged on exchange value, and *non-lieux.*

Non-conforming memories in *non-lieux* are commodified and transformed into part of the spectacle. This is evident with monuments, ruins, old factory buildings, and other traces of history that are reworked into consumable images. Huyssen (2003, 21) contends that imagination and memorialization are increasingly "called upon to provide a bulwark against obsolescence and disappearance [and] to counter our deep anxiety about the speed of change and the ever-shrinking horizons of time and space." In other words, the very spaces that Marc Augé describes as *non-lieux*, anonymous, transient sites emptied of organic memory, are often reinscribed with curated fragments of the past in order to soothe anxieties about loss and accelerate their commodification. As Huyssen (2003, 25) notes, "The faster we are pushed in a global future that does not inspire confidence, the stronger we feel the desire to slow down." The spectacularization of memory thus becomes a cultural symptom of this desire, but also a strategy that real estate developers exploit to manufacture a sense of authenticity and attachment to spaces that would otherwise remain *non-lieux*.

In short, Lefebvre's idea of the production of space reveals how space is inherently political. In gentrifying neighbourhoods, space is restructured to align with the imperatives of the post-industrial capital, and memory becomes a contested point in this process. The transformation of industrial ruins, historical landmarks, and other traces of history into commodified spectacles reflects the logic of neoliberal urbanism, where even the past is repurposed as an asset within a competitive landscape of place-marketing and investment. This commodification of memory, however, does not merely alter the aesthetics of space; it reconfigures the meanings attached to it, privileging sanitized narratives that obscure histories of displacement and struggle. The *non-lieux* of gentrification are spaces of erasure but at the same time, spaces of selective remembrance, where memory is manipulated to legitimize new

spatial orders. What is remembered is aestheticized and depoliticized, while what threatens the legitimacy of redevelopment is rendered invisible. If gentrification thrives on the aestheticization of the past, reclaiming memory can become a means of resisting its exclusions and envisioning alternative urban futures.

2.3.2 Memory, Gentrification and Nationalism

Since Marx ([1849] 2019) and Engels ([1844] 2016), Marxist scholars have studied how political-economic processes have constantly produced and reproduced divided cities along class lines. Contemporary examples of similar analyses have flourished, but scholars have continuously broadened our conceptions of urban divisions. Some examples are the studies on the "dual" city (Mollenkopf and Castells 1991, 8), the "quartered" city (Marcuse 1989, 697), and the "shattered" city (Haumont, Lévy, and Bacqué 1998, vi), all of which tackle the issues of "division," "polarization," "break-up" or "segregation," pointing to social fragmentation corresponding to spatial partitioning within urban space. This proliferation of terms attests to the continuing (and probably growing) intensity of urban divisions and inequalities (Navez-Bouchanine 2002, 31).

For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I focus on the development of the "divided city" literature, which examines conflicts in contemporary urban contexts along the questions of nationalism and sovereignty (Calame and Charlesworth 2009; McEvoy and O'Leary 2013; Björkdahl et al. 2016; Gaffikin, Mceldowney, and Sterrett 2010; Gaffikin and Morrissey 2011; Bollens 2000; 2009; 2012). This body of literature has developed conceptual tools and theories for extreme forms of separation, enclosure, exclusion and violence arising from ethnonationalist conflicts. That said, the term "divided" is capacious and cannot exclusively be pinned down in that way. Cities under racist heteropatriarchal capitalism are fundamentally divided along class, gender, racial, ethnic and other lines, and therefore, it would be limiting to identify only certain cities as divided cities. And yet, there is a need to distinguish

the cities that have experienced a strong degree of ethnocultural and nationalistic division from the rest of the cities. In this dissertation, I use the term "deeply divided cities" as it was developed by McEvoy and O'Leary (2013, 6): "In deeply divided places these standard stratifications [gender, class, sexuality and many others] are superseded, or profoundly reinforced, by further divisions of nationality, ethnicity, race, tribe, language, or religion." Deeply divided cities are usually marked with symbolic or material partitions as a consequence of conflicts over claims to sovereignty and/or control of territory and resources (Anderson 2008, 18). Although spatial separations between groups exist in all societies, deeply divided cities tend to be politically volatile and have witnessed more explicit, and sometimes armed, conflicts among various ethno-nationalist groups. For some authors, these cities are the "culmination form of social, economic and political segregation of cities," and they are "the unfortunate final form of group conflict" (Kliot and Mansfeld 1999, 167; 196). Hepburn (2004, 2) uses the notion of "contested city" to refer to the cities "in which two or more ethnically conscious groups – divided by religion, language and/or culture and perceived history – co-exist in a situation where neither group is willing to concede supremacy to the other." They are cities "where two dreams collide" (Kotek 2000, 66), specifically the aspirations of self-determination and sovereignty.

Theories of the divided city centring on ethnonational divisions shed light on dynamics that have often been overlooked by urbanists. While this focus has been valuable, it has also led to the relative neglect of other fundamental urban fault lines, such as those shaped by class, race and gender within the theories. These fault lines do not exist in isolation; rather, they intersect with ethnonational divisions in ways that profoundly shape urban experiences and inequalities. To fully grasp the complexity of divided cities, the divided city scholarship must move beyond a singular focus on nationalism and develop a more integrated analysis, one that accounts for the entanglement of multiple forms of exclusion and domination within the urban landscape. As Fenton (2004, 179) argued: "[B]y

applying the epithet ‘ethnic’, it is as if the conflicts were already explained… In order to understand conflicts described as ‘ethnic’ we need to uncover the reasons why (in a given conflict situation), there is heightened awareness of ethnic difference.” In the same manner, Bannerji et al. (2010, 262) argued that “[the] linguistic/cultural [religious] focus had erased or ignored the complexity and material aspects of nationalism and imperialism.” I argue that class, race and gender relations have infrequently been afforded the historicization and social materiality they merit in the divided city literature.

Cities are sites where multiple, often conflicting, forces intersect and produce intricate divisions. As Gaffikin and Morrissey (2011, 79) argue, cities are “intensive microcosms for the wider societal tensions and fragmentation and their diverse related discourses.” They are palimpsests in which multiple temporal layers coexist, overlap, and sometimes clash. As Svetlana Boym argues in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001, 191), the urban environment functions as a repository of sedimented histories, where traces of past regimes, conflicts, and everyday life persist alongside contemporary transformations. While ethnocultural conflicts can divide entire nations, they often manifest more acutely in cities, where the compact nature of urban living intensifies the proximity between different communities. The urban environment thus magnifies these divisions, making them more conspicuous and often more contentious. However, this division is not solely the result of cultural or national differences; cities are epicentres for economic and political restructuring, where the forces of capital continually reshape urban spaces and the social relations within them.

This constant urban transformation aligns with what Harvey (2006c, 22) describes as “creative destruction,” the process by which capitalism relentlessly disrupts existing urban forms and social structures to create new ones. Yet, as Boym suggested (2001, xviii), processes of rapid urban transformation do not simply erase the past; they often produce new forms of engagement with it. The remnants of previous urban forms, whether preserved, repurposed, or left in ruins, can foster what she

terms a reflective engagement with memory (ibid, 17), in which the past is neither fully restored nor entirely discarded but remains present as a site of ambivalence and critical reflection. In her later work, Boym complicates this view by arguing that rather than forming coherent or linear narratives, urban spaces are marked by what she describes as "out-of-sync" temporalities where alternative pasts and unrealized futures coexist (Boym 2017, 5). Walls, monuments, and neighbourhood boundaries do not simply stabilize memory but expose its ambivalence, revealing what Boym calls the "porous nature of historical time," (ibid., 5) where multiple, competing visions of the past persist simultaneously.

Attending to these layered and disjointed temporalities foregrounds how urban space is not only continuously reshaped by capital, but also by the uneven persistence of past social relations and imaginaries within it. Cities are not static spaces; they are dynamic arenas where the intersections of class, gender, and ethnonational divisions are continually reconfigured by the ever-changing landscape of capital. The creative destruction of urban capitalism and its velocity can exacerbate conflicts among various groups. Therefore, understanding urban fragmentation requires us to transcend simple nationalist divides and recognize the role that broader economic and social processes play in redrawing the fault lines of the city. The interplay of various forces offers a more comprehensive understanding of how urban inequalities arise from identity-related ideologies and from the continuous restructuring of space itself. In short, if all cities are divided and if uneven development is fundamental to capitalist urbanization, not all are "deeply divided" in the sense that scholars in this field have argued. Yet, I want this dissertation to reflect on the complexity of urban processes, diving into urban divides that are often overlooked in the "divided cities" field of study. My study of Montréal and Belfast will demonstrate how people's identity has been influenced by ethnonational divisions and related memory politics, and yet this process cannot be disassociated from other divisions, and how collective memories work in and through different urban fault-lines and shape political landscapes in these cities.

This dissertation, through the questions it asks and through the cases it examines, aims to analyze how emerging political economic forces like gentrification unsettle or fortify existing national divides, a topic that has yet to receive much attention in either urban studies or the divided city literature. The divided cities scholarship has barely intersected with studies of gentrification, despite the enormous scholarly and political synergy that such an intersection could produce. Only in the last five years have academic inquiries attended to this interaction in depth (Rhodes 2021; Anderson and Daya 2022; Denoon-Stevens et al. 2022; Luz 2022). For example, examining cities in Israel, Yael Shmaryahu-Yeshurun (with Ben-Porat 2021; 2022a; 2022b) shows how, in a state of ethnonational conflict, gentrification serves as an institutional tool for the ruling faction to keep in check dissident forces, and achieve territorial and demographic control. That said, despite its growth, studies of gentrification in relation to nationalism remain limited to a very small number of cases, and this issue is rarely looked at in a comparative way. At first glance, gentrification may seem to have little bearing on nationalist dynamics, given that it is perceived as the unrestricted mobility of capital and is entangled with global financial circuits. On the other hand, some also perceive that gentrification would weaken national solidarity and commitment, as it promotes individualism and market competition. Scholars have consistently shown, however, that market processes do not necessarily undermine the power of nation-states and national identities. Contemporary neoconservative politics is a case in point (Pickel 2003, 109). Neoliberal states have often marshalled nationalism to camouflage or justify their disinvestment from the welfare state (Harvey 2005, 84-86). Here, nationalism serves as an effective rhetoric, where dismantling the Fordist-Keynesian regime is alleged to bring in benefits for the nation, i.e., the nation's economic advancement and revival of its past glory. This is even more so in many deeply divided cities, where certain nationalist groups competing for sovereign legitimacy have

strategically embraced or rejected neoliberal policies. Nationalism survives in the age of globalization in multiple forms of alliances with the free market.

Similarly, projects of gentrification, despite their partiality (in the sense that they only benefit certain people), are often implicitly or explicitly sold as benefiting the entire population across different ethnocultural subscriptions. For instance, as we shall see next, Belfast's TQ pushes the narrative even further, arguing that the new gentrified neighbourhood can act as a catalyst for post-conflict transition. In some cases, the economy of memory plays a galvanizing role in localizing gentrification, the latter of which is often perceived as being driven by non-local forces. A large condominium complex can be found anywhere, but by retaining the façade of an old building or naming the building after local heritage, the new construction is placed on the continuum of the local national history. This process further exposes Boym's notion of restorative nostalgia (2001, 46), whereby selective elements of the past are mobilized to create a coherent and marketable narrative of continuity. In this context, heritage becomes a strategic resource, allowing new developments to anchor themselves in localized identities while simultaneously advancing processes of capital accumulation. In both cities of my dissertation, memory landscapes are maneuvered, and gentrification acquires a national appeal, tempering the otherwise tumultuous procession of gentrification. Gentrification is not a neutral disembedding market process but anchors itself in existing social formations and ideological terrains, such as those related to nationalism.

2.3.3 The Right to Urban Memory

From this discussion emerges the need to theorize the right to urban memory. It is based on Lefebvre's concept of "the right to the city," which has been rallied as a catchphrase for urban dissident politics since its inception. The right to the city has been claimed to assert rights that are not warranted within the liberal legalism regime, such as the right to food, shelter, housing, a clean environment, public

space, public transit, and others (Fernandes 2007, 201–2). In recent years, the concept has also seen its reception by international institutions and national and local governing bodies.

Organizations like UN-HABITAT and UNESCO have embraced the concept of the right to the city as part of broader human rights frameworks. In 2016, this notion was incorporated for the first time into the UN's New Urban Agenda, a comprehensive twenty-year urban development plan endorsed in Quito, Ecuador (Minton 2017, 36). It has also been included in laws, political declarations, and charters at both the national and municipal levels in many countries. These milestones were the result of protracted negotiations involving national governments and civil society actors, the latter of whom united through the advocacy network known as the Global Platform for the Right to the City (2015). Notably, this was not the first time the idea gained traction in international discussions. The World Social Forum had already introduced the World Charter on the Right to the City in 2004, and the concept served as the central theme of the UN World Urban Forum held in Rio de Janeiro in 2010. The institutionalization of the right to the city, however, has largely diluted the original radical essence of Lefebvre's vision. Mayer (2007, 110) observed that while the radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s turned urban spaces into hubs of political activism, contemporary struggles are more focused on resisting poverty and exclusion rather than mounting more radical challenges to neoliberal urban policies. As neoliberalism has tightened its hold, structural resistance has become increasingly difficult to sustain.

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, Lefebvre discussed the "complete urbanization" of industrial societies and its political repercussions. For him, urbanization modified the mode and relations of production, turning the city into a commodity and away from an *oeuvre*. Capitalism has 'creatively destroyed' the urban fabric, continuously producing myriad forms of uneven development. Gentrification is one process that has generated and reinforced such uneven development.

As an ethical philosophy to contest the ruthless capitalist ravaging of cities, Lefebvre's concept of "the right to the city" is about people's entitlement to the production of, and participation in, the political, social and cultural life of the city (Lefebvre [1968] 2009, 27). It is about the legitimate power inherent in all the inhabitants of a city – both citizens and non-citizens – to have equal rights to urban life and to participate in decision-making processes concerning redistribution, the design of urban spaces, and access to them. It is a bottom-up process against the monopoly of decision-making by capitalists, bureaucrats, planners and architects (Lefebvre [1968] 2009; see also Marcuse 2009; Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer 2012). Levelling a criticism of Haussmannization, Lefebvre ([1974] 2000) argued that spaces have been overtaken by bureaucracy and market logic and turned into abstract spaces which conquer concrete spaces, the spaces of everyday life. The right to the city is "a cry and a demand" (Lefebvre [1968] 2009, 107) for people to take back the spaces from the elites, private property regimes, and ideologies of rationality and profit. Autogestion has been a central preoccupation of Lefebvre, and became a crucial undercurrent of the idea of the right to the city. Autogestion can be realized through appropriation and participation (Lefebvre [1968] 2009, 125). All these indicate that the right to the city is an egalitarian vision of urban life. In contrast to such a subversive version of the right to the city, liberal institutions and NGOs, in a close collaboration with governments, have misappropriated the term, diluting its radical potential and turning it into a policy agenda to be used to ameliorate the deleterious effects of neoliberal restructuring without challenging the fundamental structural dynamic that continues to reproduce inequalities.

A significant portion of the urban population is excluded from housing, access to decent health care and other infrastructure essential for its survival. Certain minorities have gradually seen their access to public spaces being restricted, whether they are the homeless (Mitchell 1997, 305), street vendors (Crossa 2009, 43), sex workers (Hubbard 2004, 1687) or other "undesirables" (Malone 2002,

158; Hae 2012, 95). Private property relations are privileged, and the logic of neoliberal consumerist spectacles replaces the normative ideal of public space, which hinges on equal access and free encounters of different individuals. Surveillance and punitive policing against 'unwanted' people, behaviours and politics are defining public space now, together with "revanchism" against them (MacLeod 2002, 609). Zero tolerance and quality of life campaigns are now seeking to sanitize public space for the benefit of the propertied class. I will argue that similar processes are happening in both Belfast and Montréal through gentrification.

Following Lefebvrian thought, and the right to the city, we may envision a similar concept of a 'right to urban memory,' a right for individuals and communities to see their collective memory, their myths and their histories represented in the landscape, and claim their places through them. In particular, I attend to 'vernacular memory' (Leerssen 2001; Lockerbie 2005; Stangl 2008; Beiner 2011; Mihelj 2013; Dellios 2015). Ordinary activities like taking a detour through a beloved park or street, riding a bike, making an impromptu stop at a local shop, and chatting with neighbours create spatial memories of our lived spaces. These vernacular memories are kaleidoscopic, contradictory and often amenable to power dynamics, as vernacular memory is not a univocal remembrance but an intersectional ensemble. However, like Lefebvre's take on the urban and everyday, they represent a terrain of possibilities (Lefebvre [1970] 2009a). More specifically, when the local growth machine aims to capitalize on local memories for real estate developments (Bélanger 2002, 89), people draw on vernacular memories to construct their own versions of history and put together resources to oppose the growth machine's appropriation of their histories and reclaim their spaces.

I suggest the right to urban memory as a frame through which to understand and politicize the collective memory. A right to urban memory may serve as an organizing principle through which to question whose memories are prioritized or omitted in popular discourses and public policies,

transgress the rules of dominant groups, and formulate alternative territorial projects, projects that challenge liberal capitalist teleology. These narratives can give meaning to actions and nourish the imagination of a different world. It can enable a "passage from memory to hope" (Harvey 1996, 306; 2006, 9).

2.4 Hauntology: Between Outcome and Possibility

Different collective memories enter a terrain of aestheticized, spectacularized neoliberal politics during gentrification. Local growth machines attempt to manufacture particular memories of place and prioritize them, authorizing commemorations of certain kinds (Sherman 1994, 186) and, by doing so, seeking to "[legitimize] authority and [impose] social cohesion" (Osborne 1998, 432; see also Till 1999; Nagle 2020). When changes are imposed on the memory landscape, what happens to people's attachment to its former form and their understanding of its meaning? Insights from hauntology and spectre studies may help answer this question. The displacement of people and demolition of built structures create conditions where the past surfaces to haunt the new landscape. In this section, I discuss the theories of hauntology, probing how they can help us understand resistance to changes brought by gentrification.

2.4.1 Hauntology: Concepts and Theories

Hauntology, a term coined by Jacques Derrida in his 1993 work *Spectres de Marx*, offers a theoretical lens for examining the lingering presence of ideas and systems declared dead but still influencing the present. While the concept of the "spectre" might initially seem an unconventional framework for engaging with Marx, it is deeply rooted in Marx's own writings, particularly the opening line of *The Communist Manifesto*: "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism" (Marx and Engels [1848] 2008, 15). Derrida's use of the spectre is not a mere rhetorical flourish or a diversion from

serious philosophical inquiry; rather, it is a deliberate attempt to grapple with the paradoxical nature of historical and ideological persistence. The spectre, as Derrida conceptualizes it, is a liminal entity that defies ontological categorization: it "is" and "is not" simultaneously. It is a presence that is also an absence, a "being" that does not exist in the conventional sense but nevertheless haunts the present with its "*revenance*" (the act of returning) (Derrida 1993, 68). This paradoxical duality underscores the spectre's role as a figure of both death and its opposite: it is a trace of what has passed but also a promise (or threat) of its return.

Derrida's hauntology is relevant in the context of neoliberalism's repeated proclamations of communism's demise. By declaring communism dead, neoliberalism seeks to consign it to the past, enabling society to mourn and move forward. Yet, as Derrida argues, this very act of repeated annunciation betrays a deep-seated anxiety about communism's potential resurgence. Communism, far from being eradicated, continues to haunt the present, embodying the possibility of its return (ibid, 31). This haunting reflects the unresolved tensions and contradictions within contemporary capitalist societies. The spectre's return is not a literal revival of nineteenth-century communism but a reminder of the enduring relevance of its critiques and aspirations (ibid., 69). In this sense, hauntology reveals how the past is never truly past; it lingers as a spectral presence, unsettling the present. Derrida's framework thus invites us to reconsider the ways in which ideologies persist, even in their supposed absence, and to confront the anxieties that their spectral returns provoke.

Extending this critique, Derrida (ibid, 37) takes aim at neoliberal thinkers, particularly Francis Fukuyama, whose *The End of History and the Last Man* ([1992] 2008) epitomizes the triumphalist narrative of liberal democracy and capitalism as the endpoint of history. Derrida contends that Fukuyama's declaration of victory is marked by the same incantatory symptoms as the repeated announcements of communism's death. Beneath the veneer of neoliberal confidence lies a profound

fragility, as Derrida observes: "[N]ever has this triumph been so critical, fragile, threatened" (ibid, 116, my translation). For Derrida, Fukuyama's triumphalism is paradoxically haunted by the spectre of communism, a "*revenance*" that undermines the very claim of finality (ibid, 165). The fear that communism might return reveals the impossibility of truly mourning its loss, as mourning requires dealing with something definitively past, something that cannot come back. Derrida's hauntology exposes the contradictions within neoliberalism's self-proclaimed *telos* of historical progress, offering a foundational critique of its attempts to foreclose the possibility of alternative futures. In doing so, he underscores how the spectre, as a figure of return, disrupts linear narratives of history and progress, forcing us to confront the unresolved and the irresolvable present.

The cultural critic Mark Fisher (2009) connects the early 1990s articulation of the "end of history" with what he called "capitalist realism"; the belief that there is no alternative to capitalism. Under capitalist realism, we are experiencing what Franco "Bifo" Berardi (2011, 13) called "the slow cancellation of the future." Fisher argues that in culture, politics, and, I would add, in urban planning, we seem stuck in the same loop. Since the 1990s, the advent of neoliberalism, the internationalization of capital and the marketization of planning have, in many ways, "altered the texture of everyday experience beyond all recognition" (Fisher 2014, 14). But at the same time, or perhaps because of these developments, "cultural time has folded back in on itself" (ibid., 14).

Fisher (2014, 17) states that popular culture up to the mid-20th century was seized by a "recombinational delirium, which made it feel as if newness was infinitely available." This spirit of innovation was not confined solely to music but extended to all parts of culture, including architecture and urban planning. For instance, at the height of its popularity, brutalism was equated to the style of the new post-war society, which aimed to be more just, progressive, and collective, but also more supervised and guided by scientific rationalism. This vision of a social 'utopia' was championed by a

generation eager to combat the inequalities brought about by the war. By positioning itself against the climate of decline, brutalist architecture became an emblem of modernity. Municipal buildings or university campuses designed in the brutalist style presaged a new, utopian world. Fisher envied this cultural moment, which reached its peak in the late 1960s and early 1970s before gradually being rolled back as neoliberalism dismantled the institutions of postwar social democracy (ibid., 26). The late 20th and early 21st centuries, then, became marked by what Fisher describes as "a crushing sense of finitude and exhaustion" (ibid., 14). This condition is not simply ideological but rooted in structural transformations. The dismantling of social infrastructures, squats, affordable housing, unemployment benefits, and tuition-free art schools has, as Fisher notes, "deprived artists of the resources necessary to produce the new" (ibid., 16). Under such conditions, creativity is increasingly subordinated to profitability, with capitalism supporting only those forms of innovation that can be immediately commodified. In a world where the future has been postponed or 'slowly cancelled,' society and culture are left recycling the past, compelled to rehearse and repackage the tastes of earlier generations (ibid., 15). This dynamic may help explain both the intensification of nostalgia in the contemporary West and the prevalence of cultural reboots and remakes, where what is presented as new is, in fact, a repetition of what has already been. This process can be extended to former industrial cities, in which gentrification has not produced genuinely new urban imaginaries but has instead relied on the commodification of a selectively curated past. In this sense, urban space, like culture more broadly, becomes trapped in a cycle of repetition rather than transformation.

This pattern of repetition, whether in culture or in urban redevelopment, does not simply flatten history; it also reshapes how different generations experience the present. For those who grew up in the Fordist era with full employment and socio-economic rights and privileges (mostly heterosexual white males), the subsequent periods are experienced as "unnatural" or "rigged." In Fisher's sense of

hauntology, which is reminiscent of Debord's idea of the spectacle, there is a pervasive feeling that the contemporary world has lost its cultural and political momentum, that everything exists as some kind of inert relapse under "capitalist realism." The idea that the persistence of capitalism renders it not just the only "viable" politico-economic system on offer, but in such a way that makes a real alternative unimaginable, is best captured by Frederic Jameson (1996, xi): "it's easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism." The politics of memory, then, takes on a special significance in the period in which a sense of a cancelled future is prevalent. Looking back on the past and reimagining the present may provide some insights into how to proceed into the future.

As Derrida (1993, 94) observes, "all questions about being [...] are questions of inheritance," underscoring that the past is never truly gone but always entwined with the present. Fisher (2014, 1–3) extends this insight to contemporary culture, describing a sense of "lost futures"; the idea that neoliberal capitalism not only dominates but also constrains our ability to imagine alternative social, political, and economic trajectories. The figure of the ghost embodies absent presences, atemporal entities that disrupt the assumed continuity and stability of the present and the foreclosed future. Living memories participate in spectral play, revealing both the persistence of history and the limits imposed by present-day capitalist structures, pointing to what has been lost or rendered unimaginable, and invoking utopian pasts that neoliberalism seeks to obscure or erase from collective memory.

2.4.2 Altering the Memory Landscape, and Summoning Ghosts

From a hauntological perspective, the physical erasure of buildings and neighbourhoods does not simply erase the past; rather, it produces spectral traces that continue to shape memory, experience, and the imagination of lost futures. When a building is destroyed and gives way to a new construction, the memories associated with 'what was' can come back as an obsession. As Feldman (1991, 67) mentioned, "ghosts are spectral traces, whose reason for existing (or persisting) is to call attention to

what happened in a particular place and to demand that that place does not pass from memory." We can argue that gentrifying neighbourhoods are haunted not only by the past but also by lost futures. Neoliberalism demands short-term market solutions and nurtures quick profits for investors, profoundly impacting how people's lives are organized, including their relations with the built environment and further how their futures are locked into brutal and disciplinary dynamics of neoliberal capitalism. With deindustrialization and successive economic crises, some spaces were categorized as "obsolete" and left abandoned. The future of those affected by this institutional divestment seemed locked into the cycle of deprivation and precarity, a lost future. The fix to such a decline, then, emerged in the form of neoliberal real estate redevelopment, which was simultaneously transfigured into speculative urbanism.

As Linkon (2018, 63) showed, even as industrial labour declined, local landscapes, social networks, institutions, as well as attitudes and cultural practices, "bear the stamp of history [of the industrial era]." Deindustrialization is not a stage lost in a linear process of history, but a slow cycle of remnants, losses, amnesia, and trauma. When industrial work leaves a region, workers are left with "mourning and nostalgia, but also economic insecurity" (Finkelstein 2015, 269). Finkelstein's research on Mumbai's cotton spinners demonstrates the continued precarity of workers who were formerly in the industry and how this precarity is augmented by the loss of stable working and living environments. She shows how, despite the seeming dominance of the post-industrial spectacle of the city, industrial memories continue to exist, if marginally. Being an industrial labourer still permeates conversations among workers, even as they have lost their jobs or are already primarily engaged in other kinds of labour. This leads her to adopt the term "allochronous space"[9] to describe Mumbai's mill area, where people keep their industrial labourer identity despite the industry's obsolescence and the transformation

[9] Finkelstein here refers to allochronic speciation, a term used in ecology to describe a situation where two biological entities (typically species) exist in the same area, but never interact. In the context of her research, it refers to the co-existence of the industrial and post-industrial time-space (The Audiopedia 2017).

of its surroundings. This is present in many post-industrial spaces. For former workers and their families, these spaces remain working spaces, even as the gentrified and 'modern' city of the 21st century has increasingly replaced or marginalized the industrial setting. Finkelstein does not use the term "haunting," but certainly alludes to the idea of a spectre of the 20th century urban industrial landscapes that can 'live' through the workers' memories. Similarly, Belfast's TQ and Montréal's *Arrondissement Sud-Ouest* are examples of "allochronically" experienced time-space, as I discuss later. As industrial production and related landscapes are perceived as relics of a time past, even if the past's expectations for the future have been "cancelled," they refuse to die in the memories of former workers.

The neoliberal, post-industrial processes of urban restructuring, which started in the 1950s and continue to this day, are a multi-generational experience. Hence, we can expect industrial working-class communities to perceive the present time as a seemingly never-ending interval. The industrial future they expected will not materialize, and the past industrial period is continually referred to as the time 'before.' The sense of being out of synch with the times, that the present is somehow mocking them, is experienced as a slowly unfolding trauma rather than a single event. Gentrification is one of a series of traumatic changes for them as it causes the loss of home and the place of attachment. As Mah (2012, 12) showed in their work on Newcastle-upon-Tyne, seemingly "ruined," abandoned industrial sites remain connected with residents. Kaika and Swyngedouw's research (2000, 129) on post-Soviet urban regeneration shows that, amid deindustrialization, most industrial settlements in Russia lost their worth, and as in many deindustrializing settings, the abandoned buildings were left to rot rather than pulled down or repurposed. They became an ever-present, haunting reminder of the familiar rhythms of the Soviet factory, which had guaranteed social housing, multi-generational employment, and other benefits (ibid, 129-130). Former workers have special feelings for these industrial "ruins," but these

ruins also remind them of a cancelled future. In Belfast and Montréal, the former industrial landscape and the memories attached to it have been restructured into a post-industrial landscape. It has become difficult for former industrial working communities to stick to the future that they used to envision in moments when they struggle with dislocation and trauma as 'their' past is used to sell condos and lofts. Indeed, making working-class communities' memories invisible and trivializing their experiences has been an active social process in post-industrial and gentrifying urban spaces, a process that effectively normalizes the teleological progress of history from industrial to post-industrial. Haunting can be a heuristic device for unpacking this process and unsettling that teleological cosmology. Despite the processes of deindustrialization, the present-day workers "are not relics of the past" and "their perspectives are relevant to contemporary understanding of deindustrialization" (Finkelstein 2015, 250).

Sharon Zukin (2010, 21) similarly analyzes a series of transformations of cities from spaces of production to those of consumption. In her analysis of the symbolic economy and the growing trend of lifestyle consumption, she shows that images of 'authentic' urban neighbourhoods have gained importance in marketing urban regeneration projects in North America. She points out a paradox of authenticity, that is, the desire for an authentic, 'original' place with a unique local identity that paradoxically leads to the upscaling of the place, the rise in local real estate prices, and the eviction of existing residents who created the original, authentic places (ibid., 53). 'Authenticity' contributes to increasing the attractiveness and the value of those neighbourhoods.

In deeply divided cities, 'revitalization' through property development often goes hand in hand with "conflict resolution" urban planning (Gaffikin and Morrissey 2011; Caner and Bölen 2016; Nagle 2017). Often, conflict resolution strategies advocate the idea that healing will prevail through "forgiving and forgetting" (Minow 1999; Barsalou and Baxter 2007; Caldarovic and Sarinic 2008;

Brito 2010; Samii 2013). With the ruling elites' push for forgetting and reconciliation without the rightful reparation for the victims of the violent past, however, the past resurges with a vengeance as a spectre haunting the present. The spectres disrupt "the reifications through which performances, narratives, and experiences of memory become fixed in space" (Edensor 2005, 929) and constantly throw into disarray what seems to have been settled. They are the reminders of unresolved pains. Containment and repression are always incomplete, as "what's been suppressed or concealed is very much alive and present" (Gordon 2008, 2).

Often, a significant amount of effort in deeply divided cities has been placed on strategies for transforming places that were the centre of intergroup conflicts. In Belfast's and Montréal's official rebranding campaigns, we see various attempts to either promote a unification narrative or try to neutralize these places with safe and conflict-free nostalgic images and the promise of commercial prosperity. As I show later, tourism-generating projects linked to local regeneration have replaced a more radical transformative reconciliation procedure. The contradictory valorizations and repressions of the past, as materialized in new spaces, can spur "transgenerational haunting" (Berthin 2010; Schwab 2010; Apprey 2019) and the (re)transmission of trauma and violence.

Ghosts and haunted places in deeply divided cities tend to upset attempts to silence the violent past and unaddressed injustices and turn partial histories into a resource to attract the capital. They evoke yearnings for justice to be served and for the right to the city and urban memory to be recognized. They are powerful reminders that if the violent past continues to be ignored, it will obstruct reconciliation processes. Ghostly presences in divided cities demonstrate that space can never completely be restructured according to the intentions of ruling elites in favour of transitional (as opposed to transformative) justice. They are symptomatic of an undercurrent of resistance by those

whose “home becomes unfamiliar,” whose “bearings on the world lose direction” (Gordon 2008, xvi), and who disapprove of how history is remembered, and space is programmed.

Landscapes are palimpsests where layers of the past and the present get inextricably intermeshed. People in neighbourhoods undergoing gentrification are unable to recognize themselves in it, although their memories are alive. Visibility becomes a key element in looking for haunting manifestations. This relates to what Gordon (2008, 16) stated with the phrase, “a kind of visible invisibility, *I see you are not there*” (original emphasis). To capture such (in)visibility dynamics, Gordon (2008, xii) argues that we need to adjust the method of our knowledge production so that our research comes to grips with political economic structures and the “affective, the cultural, and the experiential matters that haunt the present.” In the next chapter, I discuss a methodological framework that I adopted for such a knowledge production. Before concluding this chapter, however, there is one more crucial discussion of haunting to discuss: haunting as rebellion. The next section investigates haunting beyond its traditional ‘outcome’ or ‘consequence’ paradigm, arguing that haunting is a material, affect and platform for subaltern agencies.

2.4.3 Haunting: Counteracting Gentrification

Lastly, I want to suggest that people engaging in haunting are recuperating a form of agency that challenges the production of space. They are subject to the altered landscape and live and act within it. As Williams (2018, 772) argues:

> Haunting is affective, experiential, and always locative. It can be said that hauntings are one way to describe how we carry locations, how we carry geographies. The hollow places in words and objects are the space into which memories flood. It is a flooding that disrupts daily attempts to retreat from the world.

Space may act as a compass of meaning to the exercise of agency, and place is the immediate setting where agency and practice take place (Therborn 2006, 512). Agency in gentrification contexts was primarily ascribed to the middle class, as scholars subscribing to the consumption-oriented explanation of gentrification argued; and although it was acknowledged that, "while agency matters, it is an agency that is already structured by the rules of the field" (Ley 2003, 2541). Agency from below is sometimes considered unlikely as this statement by Wacquant (2008, 116, my translation) implies: "territorial stigmatisation [...] undermines the capacity for collective identification and action of lower-class families." However, many scholars have looked at the various ways gentrification is resisted across different time-spaces (Drissel 2011; DeVerteuil 2012; Garbin and Millington 2012; Slater and Anderson 2012; Kirkness 2014; Lees and Ferreri 2016; Lees et al. 2018). In this dissertation, I also explore how haunting confers agency on those who struggle with changing landscapes. Haunting is intrusive to, and disruptive of, normalizing gentrified landscapes, "transgress[ing] various borders that define everyday existence all at once metaphysical, temporal, and spatial" (Kinossian 2018, 2). I will examine something I term "vernacular hauntings," referring to the mundane memories lingering in and plaguing local areas. Haunting is one way that people can subvert imposed meanings and open up possibilities for change.

For Gordon (2008, xvi), haunting is tied to the grieving of what is lost, but it also gives rise to a sense of "something-to-be-done." Anti-gentrification resistance can be spectacular, but it can also be mundane. In times when people appear to be entrapped by the circuits of global capital, cut off from their memories, and inhabited by an obscure sense of tension and nostalgia towards the past, I argue that to keep referring to the past – for example, by using pre-gentrification street or park names, holding onto old photographs of past neighbourhoods, using the streets as spaces of genuine encounters instead of gentrified commercial spaces – expresses a politics of refusal. Central to the concept of

agency is the capacity to act relatively autonomously from material and social constraints. As a storytelling cutting across the past and the present, between victimhood and agency, between limits and possibilities, vernacular haunting can become a weapon to denounce the system.

Blomley's works on property are enlightening in this line of thinking. According to him (2004, xv), "spatial conflicts, urban development, urban planning, urban political identities, postcoloniality, and the construction of places are all partly shaped by and constitutive of property relations." Private property depends on and involves a whole set of social and political relations that have been normalized over many centuries. He invites readers to rethink and unlearn what we have internalized about property. In what he calls a "creative critique" (2004, 76), which echoes J.K. Gibson-Graham's work on capitalism ([1996] 2006, xviii), Blomley sees actually-existing property relations – mundane activities that constitute lived property relations – as a tool to transgress and unsettle the dominant ownership model of property that pivots on private property and the owner's right to exclude. Haunting can act as a "creative critique," too, as it decentres the widespread neoliberalist narratives of cities. Blomley attends to community activists who claimed a formerly abandoned department store in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside that was up for condo-conversion as "theirs," as a common property that poor people in the neighbourhood have cared for and are thus entitled to. Such "property like claims" to the building and further to the neighbourhood by poor community members "complicate[s] the settlements of property" (Blomley 2004, 50). Such a claim offers a powerful clue about how we imagine a world beyond the ownership model. Similarly, community members who are losing their presence in the current urban setting can set the scene for oppositional politics by interfering with, or haunting, the landscape of gentrification. To make sense of our world, we tell stories. Haunted narratives are subaltern stories, intercepting and destabilizing neoliberals' stories.

While it has received increasing attention in recent decades, hauntology continues to be unorthodox in scholarly fields and even more limited in political science and urban studies. I see haunting as a useful concept that can shed new light on the role that collective memory plays in urbanization processes and help us identify fissures and cracks in the neoliberal polity. This is especially the case in the study of places that have experienced ethnocultural conflicts. These cities are haunted by past and/or non-neoliberal temporalities and spatialities. Despite the ongoing drastic "creative destruction," the past remains 'alive' in these cities' physical, symbolic and emotive landscapes. The remembrance of 'what was' can constitute a critical affect through which discontent over gentrification can be mobilized. The literature on gentrification must take haunting into consideration when studying the ways long-term residents oppose urban revitalization projects. "What significance can be drawn from the multiple layers of time and materiality that have accumulated in these places and what type of haunted narratives can emerge from the discarded remnants of human occupation?" asked Armstrong (2010, 243). My research on Belfast and Montréal is a journey to answer this question.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the main theoretical frames that guide my research: critical urban studies, memory studies and hauntological studies. Gentrification is a salient contemporary issue, but the ways in which the politics of memory are enmeshed in the process, especially in the context of deeply divided cities, have received comparatively less scrutiny. Memory and memorialization provide an interesting perspective on struggles in cities that are undergoing transitions from conflict, as politics surrounding remembering can affect the path of transitions. How the politics of remembering has been affected by new urban changes, such as those brought by gentrification, is the central question that has led my research.

This research project seeks to expand the intellectual horizons of memory studies, which have often been confined to the analysis of symbolism and discourses surrounding objects of remembrance. By shifting the focus to urban transformations and the politics of nationalism, I aim to illuminate how memory operates as a dynamic force within contested urban spaces. Specifically, I explore how mnemonic fragments, images, and remnants of the past are reshaped and commodified by local growth machines in their efforts to revitalize cities, as well as how subaltern groups, particularly those involved in and impacted by ethnonational conflicts, mobilize collective memory to assert claims to urban spaces. This practice can be conceptualized as "the right to urban memory," a notion that underscores the political and spatial dimensions of memory in the urban public sphere, a contested terrain where competing spatio-temporalities vie for legitimacy. Through a comparative analysis of Montréal and Belfast, I demonstrate how these cities exemplify the ways in which urban memory is negotiated, contested, and reappropriated. By examining the strategies of both dominant urban actors and subaltern groups, this project reveals that memory becomes a tool for both legitimizing and resisting power, ultimately shaping the urban landscape and its symbolic meanings. In doing so, it offers a dialectical understanding of memory as not merely a reflection of the past but as an active, generative force in the politics of urban space.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

3.1 Introduction – Doing Memory Research

This research is situated within memory studies, which have gained increasing popularity over the last twenty years, and which have contributed to the revival of the study of cultural history. However, the popularity of memory studies has not been accompanied by commensurate conceptual and methodological advancements (Keightley and Pickering 2013, 2). Indeed, because of its interdisciplinary nature, in the field of memory studies, "questions of methodology have loomed large" (Dean et al. 2025, 2). Furthermore, most studies on memory focus on the representation of specific events by specific epistemic communities within geographical and political settings, barely reflecting on memory comparatively (Kubik and Bernhard 2014, 14). Comparative sensibility in the field can open the door to new intellectual developments, and my dissertation is an experiment in this regard. The methods I used within each city took on a mixed-qualitative approach, a combination of walks and observation, interviews and visual analysis. Qualitative research enables a detailed and in-depth analysis of behaviour, attitudes, perceptions and affect associated with memories and their landscapes.

In this chapter, I detail the methodologies of my research. In approaching my research subject, I take an interpretative approach to show how different mnemonic groups interpret, react, negotiate and resist changing neighbourhoods. I first introduce the theory of landscapes and show its relevance in investigating the politics of gentrifying memory. The second section then discusses the qualitative methods used for this research: walks and observations, photography and archival research, and finally, interviews. I discuss how these methods guided my research in various locations and the ethical questions that arose during this research. Finally, the third section explains the relevance of the comparative approach taken for this analysis. I also offer an overview of the two boroughs compared in my research.

3.1.2 Reflexivity and Positionality

Recourse to reflexivity is essential in advancing non-colonizing ethnographic research. There are several types of reflexivity and related practices corresponding to the use of this term. According to Bourdieu, the reflexive attitude allows the researcher to break with their own preconceptions and construct an objective point of view. Reflexive tools and practices aim to control and master the subjective relationship to the research object, fostering "one of the conditions of scientific objectivity" (Bourdieu 2003, 44, my translation). But Bourdieu's position is problematic, as it assumes the very possibility of reaching objectivity. Instead, others have developed a different vision of reflexivity, rooted in the epistemology of positioning. According to this perspective, viewpoints are always subjective, and subjectivities are inherent to the production of knowledge (Haraway [1988] 2006, 122), and the idea of individual attainment of universal objectivity is questionable (Harding 1991, 138). Researchers must be aware that research cannot escape unequal power relations. This awareness necessitates considering how our social positions affect our interactions with others in the field and what we see and hear. It is to understand how who we are as individuals influences how we conduct research (Ardoin and Martinez 2019, 6). In other words, reflexivity is about grappling with the fact that our knowledge is the consequence of our situation and, therefore, always partial (Bertucci 2009, 44). Reflexivity is required in a multiplicity of practices that unfold at every stage of research, from selecting the sites, participants, and methodologies, to interpreting the views of research interlocutors and publishing research outcomes (Nilson 2017, 125).

This section discusses the practice of reflexivity that I engaged in my research. Following the scholarly debates on positionality and reflexivity during my fieldwork and throughout different writing stages, I have tried to stay cognizant of the limitations caused by my own positionality, and aware of self-implication in the process of knowledge production (Grbich 2013, 113). I am a white settler,

cisgender, heterosexual, and francophone Québécois. My positionality, and my beliefs and biases formed accordingly, must have inevitably left an imprint on my approach to the subjects I researched, particularly my interactions with the various strata of disadvantaged people I encountered in my fieldwork. My intersecting identities shaped both my access to communities and the tensions I navigated.

For instance, my positionality led me to experience what Clark (2008, 955) termed "research fatigue" from people that I approached in both cities, a phenomenon which occurs "when individuals and groups become tired of engaging with research and it can be identified by a demonstration of reluctance towards continuing engagement […] or a refusal to engage with any further research." This was mostly prevalent in Belfast, where I frequently encountered people who perceived me as another outsider eager to hear their story of the conflicts that distressed the city. I had to work hard to gain the confidence of the locals while, at the same time, demonstrating that my research could be relevant and was not solely about the 'Troubles'. Here, reflexivity meant acknowledging my role as a temporary visitor and adjusting my methods. I prioritized informal conversations over formal interviews, which allowed for more spontaneous, reciprocal exchanges in which participants could guide the direction of the conversation and decide what aspects of their experience to share. In this way, informal engagement fostered a sense of shared presence and reduced the feeling that participants were merely sources of data. In Belfast, one of the challenges was to capture, in a relatively short span of time, a snapshot of the city and people's experiences via reflexive listening and conversation. My outsider status here carried both limitations (distrust) and advantages (curiosity about a "fresh" perspective), requiring me to constantly reassess how I was perceived e.g., as an outsider or a distant researcher, or a Canadian.

In Montréal, I needed to be aware of my settler status. Being on their lands required me to confront the ongoing violence of settler colonialism and my complicity in it, not as abstract concepts

but as lived structures shaping my interactions (Tuck and Yang 2012, 2). Following settler colonial scholarship, settler status is understood here not as an identity alone but as a structural position embedded in ongoing relations of dispossession and governance (see Glenn 2015, 53). My knowledge of the city was also the entry point of my research in Montréal. This familiarity shaped not only what I initially noticed in the city but also what risked remaining invisible to me without critical intervention. I sought to decentre the knowledge that I have internalized as a settler, and to unlearn a set of settler colonial ideologies prevalent in Québec. These ideologies tend to describe the dividing lines in the province's population as existing only between anglophone and francophone communities, ignoring the ongoing presence of Indigenous people in cities and their political claims to lands and sovereignty. This unlearning was not a one-time effort but a continuous process, often marked by discomfort. Rather than something to be resolved, this discomfort functioned as an analytic signal, revealing the limits of my own situated knowledge, as I describe below.

These questions of positionality and familiarity directly informed the comparative design of this research. It was a conscious choice for me to select a city extremely familiar to me (Montréal) and one that remains relatively unfamiliar to me (Belfast), despite having visited the latter city three times in the last ten years before I started my research. My position was, therefore, between proximity and distance, and I sought to take advantage of this difference in my comparative analysis to ensure that the cases studied enrich each other. According to Vigour (2005, 101–2, my translation), distance "gives a certain freedom in the gaze and judgement" and proximity "makes understanding possible," and these two traits together offer an advantage to researchers. But they also posed challenges, as I mentioned above, and I also realized that distance and proximity are unattainable categories. In the field, I navigated the unstable terrain between proximity and distance, a space where my positionality as both insider and outsider demanded constant reflexivity. Drawing on Narayan's (1993) concept of the "native/non-

native" researcher, I grappled with the paradox of researching a city I called home while confronting the amnesia embedded in that very sense of belonging. In Montréal, the city where I was basiacally raised, became a site of unlearning: I sought to denaturalize the social constructs I had internalized, the invisible architectures of settler colonialism that framed Indigenous erasure as inevitable and francophone-anglophone tensions as the city's primary divide. This required what Bhabha ([1994] 2012, 9–11) terms "unhoming," a deliberate estrangement from the familiar, where childhood landmarks were re-examined through a different lens. The process was not merely intellectual but also embodied and affective. I later document how my comfort in certain spaces was disrupted when participants narrated those same sites as zones of policing, exclusion, or resistance. These dissonant encounters mirrored what Pillow (2003, 192) calls the "failures" of reflexivity, moments when the researcher's assumptions fracture under the weight of lived difference. Rather than smoothing over such tensions, I treated them as evidence of the epistemic gaps between my settler subjectivity and the realities of those I researched. Through this process, my research acquired a sort of autobiographical meaning that wasn't exactly replicated in Belfast. Yet even this autobiographical dimension required caution: rather than centering my "awakening," I aimed to document how my positionality revealed systemic patterns otherwise obscured by settler narratives.

Milner's (2007, 392) work on race, culture, and researcher positionality underscored the necessity of critically interrogating my power as a white male scholar and the ways my identity might reproduce colonial logics through research. Building on critical race theory and feminist standpoint epistemology, Milner (ibid, 394-396) argues that positionality is not a barrier to overcome but a lens through which power dynamics must be actively confronted. He insists that researchers must acknowledge their racialized and cultural positionality, recognizing how it generates seen, unseen, and unforeseen omissions or distortions in knowledge production. Without this vigilance, research

outcomes risk perpetuating harm through epistemic violence, misrepresenting communities, legitimizing dominant narratives, and erasing marginalized perspectives. This framing pushed me to treat reflexivity not as a one-time confessional exercise but as an ongoing praxis of accountability. Barbara Applebaum's (2010, 2015) work on white complicity and vigilance also deepened my engagement with questions of positionality. Building on whiteness studies (Leonardo 2004; Gillborn 2005; Dottolo and Kaschak 2015), she rejects the idea of "neutral" research, arguing that white scholars must adopt a stance of "unsettled humility" (2015, 8), a reflexive practice that prioritizes structural critique over personal guilt.

To operationalize these insights, I adopted intersectional and decolonial frameworks to analyze my cases, constantly interrogating how my settler identity, masculinity, and francophone privilege intersected with the lived realities of participants. I understand that "decolonizing" research requires more than symbolic gestures; it necessitates epistemic disruptions, such as challenging Québec's dominant anglophone/francophone binary that obscures Indigenous sovereignty. In this vein, Pillow's (2003, 178) reflexivity of discomfort became a guiding element. Her critique of "comfortable reflexivity," where researchers perform self-awareness without confronting power, resonated with me deeply. I embraced a practice that "stays with the trouble" (Haraway 2016, 2), dwelling in the tensions of my complicity rather than resolving them. For example, in Montréal, this meant recognizing that my "ally" identity could easily slip into a colonial savior complex (Miller 2008, 16), while in Belfast, it required acknowledging how my outsider status sometimes rendered me a blank screen for participants' projections of trauma (Feldman 1991, 87). Ultimately, I hope this dissertation rejects the neoliberal appropriation of reflexivity as a box-ticking exercise. As Leonardo (2004, 140) warned, superficial acknowledgments of privilege often serve to absolve researchers rather than transform systems. I will further discuss my *in-situ* positionalities for each of the cities in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.2 Memorial Landscapes

Memory processes are essentially spatial as well as temporal. Memories associated with place – whether individual, community or national – go through changes over time, and changes are inscribed in the landscape. Therefore, landscapes are a source to discern fragments of the past. While the built environment undergoes transformations over time, the meanings previously attached to it do not vanish at the same rhythm; they may still retain significance for some residents. Theorizing landscapes and their evolution, therefore, constitutes an important part of memory studies. This first section discusses the relevance of landscapes in studying memory, commemorations, and remembrance.

3.2.1 Landscapes

While the study of landscapes has been a key area in cultural geography, its use in political science is relatively recent (e.g. Neumann 2011; Castiglioni and Ferrario 2018; Calderon and Butler 2020). In urban studies, landscape has been one of the key concepts for analyzing chronological interactions between people and their environment (Wieber et al. 2008, 25), as well as for discussing solutions for land use and urban planning (Masboungi and Gravelaine 2002, 55) or environmental preservation (Nassauer 2002, 241). There is a wide range of intellectual approaches to landscapes, but in this section, I discuss three prominent approaches among them: naturalist, social constructivist, and political economic.

The naturalist approach to landscapes emerged in the late nineteenth century with Paul Vidal de la Blache, who argued that geography should focus on landscapes as the material outcomes of human adaptation to nature (Claval 2012, 79). Renewed interest in this perspective arose in the 1980s alongside environmental research addressing planetary challenges, giving rise to landscape ecology. This field of study defined landscapes as interacting ecosystems forming recognizable spatial patterns,

emphasizing physical components shaped by human activities (Forman and Godron 1991). However, naturalist scholars paid little attention to the socially constructed nature of landscapes and the importance of perception, which became central to other approaches.

Using landscape paintings and "perspectives" that shape them, Dennis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (1988, 1) defined landscape as a cultural construct, arguing that landscapes should be understood as "a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring, or symbolizing surroundings." The landscape in this perspective highlights the interplay between representation and reality. Rather, they actively contribute to shaping our perceptions and interactions with the environment, mediating relationships between people, places, and power structures. Landscapes are both products and producers of social processes, continually evolving in response to historical, cultural, and political shifts. Landscapes, in this view, are not merely physical spaces but are deeply embedded in the discourses through which social groups articulate their identities, values, and power relations (Cosgrove 1998, 141). For example, the design of a cityscape or the preservation of rural areas reflects aesthetic choices and ideological and political economic priorities of that society.

The final perspective on landscapes, that of the political economist, which is one of the primary standpoints of this dissertation, views landscapes as a social construct just like social constructivists, yet it is closely related to the Marxist theorization of space presented in the previous chapter. For proponents of this perspective, such as Don Mitchell, the study of landscapes is inextricably linked to the analysis of capitalist accumulation and the dissident politics for socio-economic justice. Taking issue with thinkers who argued for the landscape's 'permanence' and 'fixity,' Mitchell shows that landscapes should never be considered permanent; that is, landscapes reflect and mediate fluctuating structural changes. Landscapes internalize capitalist social relations and always carry contradictions within them, he argues (Michell 2000, 91). They are constantly "creatively destroyed" and designed

anew according to structural imperatives, (re)producing social relations and legitimizing particular groups' ideologies, interests and moral authority (ibid, 92). But simultaneously, they are also the medium for desires to dismantle the structures of capitalism and other oppressive systems. For him, the landscape is "a site of struggle" and, therefore, in constant motion (Mitchell 2003, 240). Mitchell claims that the fixity of the landscape is an illusion and emphasizes the production of landscapes; "fetishized" and "mystified," the landscape camouflages "the very processes that go into its making" (Mitchell 2003, 241). Ruling elites attempt to naturalize landscapes, making them seem inevitable, apolitical, ordinary, and even necessary. This underscores the significance of looking beyond the apparent and immediate forms of the landscape and attending to the social labour that has contributed to its formation.

Sharon Zukin develops similar ideas in her book, *Landscapes of Power* (2000), in which she investigates social changes in cities in relation to the evolution of their landscapes. Places tied to an older form of production economy, like the former industrial sites of Montréal and Belfast, receded as the new landscapes of the service economy became dominant in many cities. Zukin (2000, 86) shows this mechanism through her analysis of gentrification, where "old ways of living" are replaced by new ones, and so are landscapes. And, gentrification operates as a cultural project that redefines how urban space should look, feel, and be inhabited. In the case of new-build gentrification, large condominium towers or commercial mega-structures promote an alternate way of living and experiencing the place, which in turn becomes naturalized as more new-build gentrification advance in the place.

Besides these three main approaches, scholars have examined landscapes from various standpoints and over different topics and contexts. A notable example is the study of landscape and memory. For instance, Sara McDowell and Máire Braniff (2014) approach landscapes through the politics of memory in the context of peace processes. Memory is central to the production of

landscapes; much of what we remember is framed within particular places, and our attachment to place is enacted through recollections of the past. For communities who underwent some form of tragedy, conflict, and/or displacement, places and place-making take on special meanings. Places get filled with affective territorial markers – those related to the commemoration of the violent past, and visual symbols and memorializing rituals also function to demarcate boundaries between "us" and "them," between the "chosen" and the "rejected" (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, 14). Both in periods of conflict and post-conflict peace, landscapes become instruments of social domination as "they communicate inclusion and exclusion as well as hierarchy, and they portray dominant and subordinate groups in particular ways" (Ross 2012, 7). The production of landscapes and the production of memory are part of a struggle between groups to gain control over space to produce and reproduce their identities and histories as legitimate. In deeply divided societies, territorial control is embattled, often entailing violent competition. The landscape plays a pivotal role in normalizing and contesting the histories and authorities of particular groups. It will be interesting to see how such contestations in divided cities are reshaped when cities go through neoliberalization, and gentrification becomes the norm of spatial restructuring.

In later chapters, I unpack the significations of landscapes by different ethnocultural, nationalist groups in Montréal and Belfast, and drawing upon the social constructivist and political economic approaches to landscape, interrogate them in relation to the political economy of evolving gentrification in these cities. Landscape production and reproduction are closely linked to the processes of social reproduction of capitalist cities, but landscapes are also a palimpsest, ruins, and remains that are *haunted* by the enduring past.

3.2.2 How to Read the Landscape

Lewis' *Axioms for Reading the Landscape,* published in 1976, introduced a simple guideline for understanding and interpreting landscapes. He proposed seven axioms, of which two seem relevant to my purpose here. First, the landscape is a clue to culture as it "provides strong evidence of the kind of people we are, and were, and are in the process of becoming" (Lewis 1976, 7). This is particularly the case with memoryscape, as it reflects cultures of different temporalities. However, Lewis' statement can also be problematic, as what is taken as the 'culture' of a group is ambiguous, ideological, and fraught with contestations, which Lewis does not seem to acknowledge. Second, landscapes are difficult to study "by conventional academic means" (ibid., 8). Instead, scholars need to turn to "nonacademic literature" (e.g., newspapers and promotional materials for the place). Most of all, we need to train ourselves to learn by looking and paying attention to visual evidence (ibid., 10). But meanings are not captured readily just by looking; they are hard to decipher due to the palimpsest nature of urban change. This is why it is necessary for researchers to hear from the people living with the landscape.

Therefore, expanding on Lewis's ideas, I argue that the landscape is part of the lived world of "the people" who have made it (Olwig and Olwig 2021, 2). This is why I dedicated myself to listening to the voices of people, especially marginalized people, in each city. Their voices have all taught me how the landscape is not just a means of the ruling elites; it is persistently appropriated by people who strive to counter the growing alienation they experience amidst the expanding neoliberalization of their environment and the circulating ideologies that endorse this process. The landscape is a concretization and, at the same time, a concealment of social relations (Mitchell 2008, 47). One of the roles of researchers is to make visible and decode the social relations that go into its making. To do so, they need to endeavour to explain the production of the landscape, its functions, its relation to broad and

specific socio-spatial processes, its history and evolution, and uncover how power has worked in and through it. I explain in the following section a set of methods that I used to understand and analyze the landscape of my two research sites.

3.3 Walking Methods: Findings on the Move

In this section, I introduce the theory of walking as a methodology. I will first introduce the flâneur, an aesthetic and theoretical figure that explores the city in its numerous layers. Secondly, I elaborate on the concept of walking as a method that assists a researcher in comprehending specific dimensions of socio-spatial processes at the street level, including gentrification and the memory component of such projects. Walking is relatively uncommon as a research method in political science, but scholars outside the discipline have used this method as part of their ethnographic research. Through walking, a researcher gets to have a general idea of the neighbourhood layout and the street level dynamics at play in this space.

3.3.1 A Brief Overview of the Flâneur Posture

The everyday is often perceived to be tedious, repetitive, monotonous and inert. Additionally, as is indicated in theories of late capitalism and the society of spectacles, the banality of the everyday leads to a perception that it is a space and time deprived of potential. Debord ([1967] 2008, 84) contended that, under the society of spectacles, the everyday had lost its capacity to inspire and had become synonymous with a lack of creativity. Yet, following Henri Lefebvre ([1958] 2009, 154), I want to present the mundane and the everyday as a space of contradiction and creativity. It is a space of both alienation and the possibility of revolt. It was not only Lefebvre who saw the transformative potential of the everyday. Michel de Certeau (1990, 11) highlighted the irreducible creativity of everyday practice and its transgressive and even emancipatory inventiveness. Maffesoli (1998, 31, my

translation) also extensively commented on the openness of everyday life: “Daily life in all its greyness and most banal aspects is always rich in the unexpected and open to multiple potentialities.” Daily life is the space and time where individuals negotiate with the system and advance subtle or explicit challenges to it.

One theoretical concept for disentangling the everyday is flânage. Originally, the flâneur was a bourgeois looking to be amazed by the beauty of the urban landscape. Karl Gottlob Schelle, for instance, who wrote a short essay entitled *L’art de se promener* (The art of taking a walk) in 1802, stated that walking is both the act of strolling and, at the same time, internalizing the beauties of nature (Schelle [1802] 1996, 22). According to him, an ideal walk would require a landscape of great beauty and a varied route. He imagined a city adequate for walking like this: it would not be too hilly, and it would have panoramic views, allowing one to go around it without getting too tired (ibid., 34; 101).

Walter Benjamin took offence to such a description of the flâneur. His main point of contention was Schelle’s de-emphasis on the everyday, the banal and the mundane. To grapple with the here-and-now of everyday space, he visited and studied working-class neighbourhoods and other ‘ordinary’ places of the cities. For him, *flâner* became a method to critique and overcome capitalist urbanization, especially in modern Paris, with its train stations, department stores, cafes, brasseries, theatres, debauchery of luxury, exoticism and electric lights (Benjamin [1982] 2002, 58–59). This was where Benjamin’s flâneur emerged. The flâneur goes with great determination and constant attention to “decipher profession, origin and character on faces” (ibid, 447). The flâneur is defined by the modes of visual attention, i.e. as a spectator of urban life. He is engaged in continuous visual activity, nourished by nearly uninterrupted movements in the city. The flâneur sought the slowness, the rhythm of the turtles that were walked by their owners in nineteenth century Paris and then disappeared with the construction of grand boulevards and the growth of transportation (Lee 2011, 125).

Capitalist urban planning sought to curb workers leisure strolling and free time by scientifically organizing spaces and controlling workers' movements. In this vein, the flâneur is an idle man for whom idleness is more precious than wage work. The flâneur is the opposite of the mechanical system of production (Benjamin [1999] 2002, 434), and "the idleness of the flâneur is a protest against the division of labour" (ibid., 437). The flâneur wanders through the ordinary and even forgotten parts of the city, places that are inhabited and lively but buried under capitalist urban planning. What Benjamin's mode of analysis reveals is that walking constitutes an instrument for reading and recomposing the city. Flânage, in that sense, is an important method of theorizing the city. In his poem "À une passante," Baudelaire (1855), himself a Parisian flâneur, described a typical situation of urban residents. The narrator in this sonnet wanted to speak to a passer-by, but her fast pace prevented their interaction. The sonnet embodies the strange feeling of individuals in the crowd where they still have the desire to interact with one another despite the reigning anonymity of cities. Benjamin analyzes this sonnet, showing how for the narrator and for other inhabitants of a big city, a crowd is not an antagonist, but an object of love. The crowd is presented as "the place where love fleeing the poet finds refuge" (Benjamin 2002, 70). The encounters of one with another in the crowd are the basic condition for collective possibilities, despite the atomization that cities produce.

The sense of place acquired through walking can be an instrument for interpreting and reimagining the city. But, there are several limitations of the traditional figure of the flâneur. The flâneur is an educated petit-bourgeois who can afford luxury and idleness because he usually earns some passive income. Therefore, despite the proximity he attempts to emulate, this character is materially distant from the popular classes, and he may remain as an onlooker. Another important critique must be addressed regarding the traditional figure of the flâneur. Through the numerous (deliberate) enunciations of he, his and him, the idea of the flâneur is male-centric and obscures the

reality of women strollers. What the flâneuse sees and experiences is different and much more dangerous than her masculine counterpart. For a long time, as Lauren Elkin ([2017] 2019) demonstrates, the flâneuse was described through the male gaze and was too often attached to the figure of the prostitute (ibid, 14). By studying writings from women of this era, Elkin shows how the flâneuse always occupied the streets but was barely taken seriously within an androcentric academia. Her existence has been left out of history. Elkin brings the flâneuse back to life, reinserts her into the urban, and redefines the masculine concept of the city inherited from the nineteenth century. In her reconceptualization, the flâneuse takes over urban space and appropriates it to make it a place of experience and creative power (ibid, 94). Elkin summons novelists (George Sand, Jean Rhys and Virginia Woolf), reporters (Martha Gellhorn) and visual artists (Sophie Calle and Agnès Varda) to create a matrilineal heritage of flânage (ibid, 28) and constructs a feminist approach to urban space. Far from being a reified fantasy, the flâneuse becomes a dynamic, visible and engaged being who carries the utopia of an unhindered space, the dream of an open city that is produced and appropriated by people of all genders, races and classes. In this sense, Elkin's essay joins numerous works in urban planning and geography, sociology and anthropology that have shown how walking in the street is a political and even subversive act as the following slogans make clear: "walking while female" and "walking while black" (Jarvis 2014; Dreis 2021; Faradji 2022; Rose 2025). Urban strolling can thus be linked to emancipation, protest and revolt. As women on the move, the flâneuses claim their "right to disturb, to observe (or not to observe), to occupy (or not to occupy) and to organize (or disorganize) space on their own terms" (Elkin [2017] 2019, 288).

In short, strolling disrupts the fast speed of capitalism and refuses major urban planning developments that have made the automobile the king of the streets. Owen (2019, 42) discusses the benefits of contemplative walking and mindful strolling. Slowing down, 'bumbling' (i.e., aimless

walking), and observing reveals to us multiple aspects and personalities of each space. They enable multisensory experiences of a place, and allow us to relive the urban (Amphoux 2004, 137). Of central concern for this dissertation in relation to walking is how we interact with time and memory while we flâne. In walking, we shift between memory and contemporary experience, between recollection and future anticipation. In this sense, while walking, an individual passes through collective senses intermeshed with different spatio-temporalities. Researchers can get a glimpse of how placemaking, identity-building, and making claims for belonging are made in and through landscapes (Duff 2010; Middleton 2018). Walking as a research method is an attentive and mindful practice, which requires a sensitivity to subtle as well as explicit signs. When it is made sensitive to intersectional positionalities of walking observers and their relationships to those observed, the observations garnered from walking can help researchers gain a better sense of a place, identifying various spatial practices and building a foundation to decode their meanings and the social relations behind them.

3.3.2 Walking as a Research Method

Walking enables researchers to traverse different symbolic and material boundaries in spaces (O'Neill and Roberts 2019b, 180). In my research, walking by myself allowed me to observe the landscape and numerous human practices in it, including those associated with gentrification, and particular histories of the place and their memorialization. During the walks, I saw how memories are etched into the landscape and consumed by people. Often, I saw how some *lieux de mémoire* were going through modifications or were re-signified as the neighbourhood was being gentrified. Walking research methods (WRMs) (Merriman 2014, 168) are not only about collecting information in research fields; it is the experiential aspect of walking that makes it a special research method. While walking, researchers identify and experience memorial rituals and practices of the place (Krzyżanowska 2016, 475). Through walking, researchers may pass through different temporalities of the place; through our

imagination, we may move backwards and forwards in time to events gone by or to come. For example, walking through a gentrifying neighbourhood in Montréal, a researcher will encounter traces of the area's industrial working-class past – old factories, façades. etc. – alongside symbols of an imagined bourgeois future, such as upscale developments and lifestyle branding. These spatial juxtapositions evoke a form of hauntology, where the past lingers and unsettles the present, allowing the researcher to experience multiple temporalities simultaneously. In another instance, passing through a historically contested site may activate both official and vernacular memories, enabling the walker to critically engage with how the past is memorialized or erased. Walking thus becomes a political and phenomenological method through which researchers challenge linear, progress-oriented narratives and instead inhabit a layered, affective temporality.

WRMs have, nevertheless, been criticized, first by intersectional feminist scholars who were concerned about researchers making inappropriately generalized truth claims based on their specific perceptual experiences (Schuurman and Pratt 2002, 294). As Weisbuch et al. mentioned (2017, 620), "gaze cuing depends on gazers' social identities." Furthermore, given that urban spaces are very often an expression of those who designed and developed them, it is mostly the 'default male' gaze – and with it, male needs – that have been hardwired into the spaces, and services and systems working within them (Beebeejaun 2017, 327; Sweet, Sanders, and Peters 2021, 1031). You find that persistent gender-based inequalities are set into the concrete urban fabric. For instance, public transport fare structures often give preference to traditional daily commuters, and disadvantage those making many consecutive journeys (referred to as trip-chaining). Women tend to make a greater number of the latter as they are disproportionately responsible for social reproduction, especially care (Turner and Grieco 2000, 130). The inequality is not limited to gender-based differences. Children, the elderly, the

2SLGBTQI+ community, people with disabilities, people of colour and many others must struggle to navigate a city that was not designed for and by them.

Overall, my observation consisted of visiting selected neighbourhoods and occasionally other parts of the cities, especially in Belfast, given that I was less accustomed to the city and general atmosphere. My walks were conducted on a regular basis at different times of the day and on different days of the week. I covered all days of the week over a period of about two months. Over the numerous hours I have spent there, a number of specific indicators and signs were identified, which informed me how such spaces are used by different communities on a regular basis. In total, I spent about 28 days walking in each borough, sometimes following a planned itinerary, and others with no plans in mind. I also observed gentrification in these two cities, in the form of condo towers, lofts and high-end commercial businesses, such as upscale cafés and restaurants, fine art galleries and boutique shops, and developed a sense of the size of new housing, the types of planning arrangements and the passage of vehicles.

Regarding memorial spaces in Montréal, more specifically, I spent the equivalent of five days following the *Circuits de commémoration du Sud-Ouest*, the commemorative path inaugurated in 2017 in the midst of the 375th anniversary of Montréal's 'foundation.' The parkour is composed of thirty stops that commemorate the history of the *Arrondissement Sud-Ouest*. Along the path, a strong emphasis was placed on the industrial heritage of the borough, as we shall see in Chapter 5. In Belfast, I visited the Titanic Belfast twice, spending in total more than six hours looking at the exhibitions of the flagship museum that celebrates the shipbuilding era. Here again, history and memories inscribed in the space by the city and developers were problematic, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Despite its merits as a research methodology, walking presented an inevitable quandary for me. What I made out of memoryscapes through my eyes during my walking can be visual narratives that bespeak ruling elites' or the majoritarian population's interests, and those of minority groups and disadvantaged communities may be elided. Therefore, WRMs alone are not enough to comprehensively grasp the urban totality and, therefore, I also utilized other research methods, such as photography, archives, and interviews, to fill the gaps. As I discuss in the next section, comparing the landscape across time was quite telling regarding how the place has adapted to deindustrialization and processes of revitalization.

3.4 Photographs, Archives and Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

The combination of photography and archival research is useful for visualizing the evolution of a neighbourhood that undergoes gentrification. Such an illustration provides the reader with a clear example of my arguments. In this section, I first discuss the benefits of using multiple snapshots of the same place across time in my research, and then discuss multimodal critical discourse analysis, the method I used to interpret these images.

3.4.1 Visual Archives: Analyzing Across Time

Visual archives, such as maps and photographs, provide viewers the opportunity to examine social spaces as represented in them with their own eyes (Jacobs 2013; 2016). Images contribute to sociological knowledge by offering an aesthetic and creative, as well as analytical, element of research and by transmitting emotions. This explains the frequent scholarly resort to methods of visual sociology. Urban and social spaces are replete with different types of signs and invested with meanings by different groups, offering clues to the social relations and struggles inherent to them. Moreover, as Barthes (1980, 57) suggested, a past photograph can relive an event or person that has been irrevocably

lost. This is particularly salient in the context of new-build gentrification, where a photograph may be the only visual relic of the pre-gentrification landscape, the incarnation of the spectre haunting the place. However, it is important to treat the image as one among many 'truths.' Photographs are taken and selected through conscious choices of the photographer who wants to communicate a particular message to viewers. The camera becomes a qualitative instrument for presenting a viewpoint. Yet, through the visual method, there is also a commitment of sincerity. Once a photograph is taken, it tells a story, albeit a partial one. Furthermore, while a photograph is a result of a particular angle captured and taken by the photographer, the interpretation of it by readers is not always bound by that angle.

Images can speak about society (as well as the photographer), albeit in a different way than words do. For example, visuals can help in the analysis of the evolution of gentrification in a neighbourhood, when combined with the analysis of people's testimonies and archival research. As Bourdieu (1965, 47; 1980, 88–89) and Sweetman (2009, 492) argue, photography can be used for exploring abstract concepts like the habitus. By capturing snapshots of the everyday we can construct narratives that inform us of the neighbourhood habitus. As a methodology, however, the downside of a photographic report is that it fixes a moment in time and may decontextualize the reality captured in photographs. As Becker (2001, 339) notes, photographs "derive their meaning from the context," and so I sought to supplement my photographic report with accounts of the context where particular photos are situated. Chaplin (1994, 86) argued that photographs are both taken and made. They are taken in the sense that they capture specific instances of space and time, which give researchers the information and details they need. But photographs are also made, since the photographer needs to make decisions on what to photograph, from which angle and focus and, in the case of a researcher, which photographs to handpick for analysis. Every picture I took had a meaning for me, and there was a thought process

behind every single image that I captured. They were deciphered and curated to reveal the specific signification that I thought the landscape carried.

I also looked at public and private archives to compare the landscape between pre-gentrified and gentrified eras. By comparing past and present images, I was able to identify how landscapes were altered. The added benefit of looking into archives is related to their constructed nature, that archiving is never neutral. Particular memories are encoded in the process of archiving, with the exclusion of others, which is a manifestation of the will to conserve and hand down particular pasts to contemporaries. Archiving is fundamentally political. The ways in which the archives are constructed prompted me to contemplate how the memory of the past is produced and reproduced in each place.

I used two forms of archives for my research: public archives and private archives, the latter of which are from my interview participants. My interviewees sat down and explained them to me. This helped me understand these photos and the landscapes in them from these people's perspectives and experiences, not only through my interpretations (Alnutt, Mitchell, and Stuart 2007). This allowed me to receive quite fascinating information from the participants. People were willing to open boxes of their photos that they had for a long time, but had rarely looked at, in order to revisit their past. I was also able to access documentation and marketing materials from private companies involved in the (re)development of housing in both Montréal and Belfast. These materials offered some insights into how these corporations have used history to sell their new developments.

In the public archives, I collected both photographs and documents. In Montréal, I spent a few days in the various locations of the Bibliothèque et Archives national du Québec (BAnQ). I also visited the archives of the Ville de Montréal and the semi-public archives, such as the Société d'histoire de Saint-Henri and Société d'histoire de Saint-Paul-Émard. In Belfast, I spent a couple of days in the

Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), located within the TQ. This office holds both the national archives of Northern Ireland and the City of Belfast archives. I have also contacted the Historical Society of Belfast for a better overview of Belfast's history. Moreover, I spent a few days browsing maps and other archival documents in the Belfast Central Library. Online archives, including various museums' websites, were also utilized. Finally, I used the timelapse function from Google Street View. This function allowed me to access views of various streets of the studied neighbourhoods, making it possible to see up to fifteen years of urban changes in specific locations. But, as Neil Smith (1987, 482) told us decades ago, gentrification involves more than simply "physical changes to the housing stock." It is also interlocked with changes to the socio-economy of the area. While street view cannot give us this information, it still provided a rich database for my research, as it helped me to chronicle the streetscape of the neighbourhoods.

Finally, I also contacted NGOs, activist and community organizations, and trade unions to access their archives. The archives contained a substantial collection of documents pertaining to anti-gentrification campaigns, which turned out to be very useful for my research. They are critical due to their record of contested urban redevelopment, and also because their practice of archiving itself is a strategy of anti-gentrification, as a repository of poor people's voices against the ruling class. Archiving is to order knowledge and to anchor claims to authority and truth (Pell 2015, 34; 35; see also Foucault [1968] 2008; Taylor 2003). Archives have been controlled by privileged groups, who maintain their power by monopolizing information. It was thus important for me to go beyond the state-run archives. I also tried to understand the context in which different archives – private, public or activist – are produced and in which they take effect.

3.4.2 Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary movement that encompasses various approaches, each with its own theoretical models and research methods. The unifying element of these approaches is to dissect the semiotic dimension of power, injustice and politico-economic changes in society (Fairclough 2013, 12). This method emerged in critical linguistics in the late 1970s, and was based on the assumption that a speaker's choice of vocabulary and grammar is related to their habitus, history of socialization, and the ideological work they are influenced by. As Fiske (1994, 27) said, "Our words are never neutral"; they reflect the education, beliefs, identity and many other social systems that the speaker has internalized.

In the social sciences, CDA has its theoretical origins in the Marxist tradition, with the ideas of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault and the Frankfurt School. It was a critique of the social reproduction of capitalism enabled by liberal capitalist ideology. Gramsci (2012, 247), for example, argued that power goes beyond the coercive force of the state and requires the consent of civil society to be realized as a form of hegemony. Along a similar line, Althusser ([1970]1976, 79), following his structuralist vision, theorized how ideology materializes in the practices of social institutions, such as schools and individuals. Going beyond the structuralist ideology, Foucault ([1969] 2008, 141) emphasized the importance of discourse as a system of knowledge that informs individuals of social reality and produces subjectivities, thereby facilitating power. For him, discourse analysis should aim to explore the relationships between texts, events, practices, and power structures. Furthermore, critical discourse analysis for Foucauldians is "a form of intervention in social practice and social relationships" (Fairclough and Wodak 2009, 258). In other words, it is an analysis that aims to explore the relationships between, on the one hand, discourse, practices, events and texts, and on the other hand, socio-cultural structures and processes.

The multimodality of discourses was introduced by Kress and Van Leeuwen in their *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* ([1996] 2020) and *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication* (2001). They showed, in great detail, how discourses convey meaning through language and through visuals like images, colour, page layout, and even through physical objects and architecture. This perspective expanded the field of CDA in a whole new way (Machin 2013, 347). It allowed CDA to exceed the boundaries of linguistics and incorporate multimodality, developing CDA into "multimodal critical discourse analysis" (MCDA). MCDA maintains that language is only one semiotic resource out of many, and that non-linguistic forms of representations are equally discursive (ibid, 347), just as words, statues, murals, toponymy, graffiti, and architecture communicate messages. These objects are created through a series of choices to portray specific communicative aims. These choices, just like how we choose words, are motivated and ideological to background certain aspects and foreground others. Under MCDA, previously overlooked elements have become the objects of analysis. For example, in urban planning, the size of public space, the intensity of human interaction, the distance between spatial structures, building materials and others are all conscious choices made by the developers or designers, but they get to have meanings that go beyond the originally designed narrative of said object. The landscape is not simply the built environment, but meanings embodied. They are performative, and as such, they communicate, normalize and disturb ideas and values (Zubrzycki 2016, 21–23). Laying a commemorative plaque, erecting a monument for former industrial workers, or marketizing the place's past for redevelopments, as we will see in later chapters, present specific mnemonic narratives and serve particular testimonies about the place's past. They make the past speak and bring it back to the decors of the present. They are a symbolic, affective and social positioning of the place and its history. The commemorative actions are produced and sustained through a "labour of memory" (Allen 2015, 7), which takes on different forms

and contents for different people. When memories are commercialized, the labour of gentrifiers and tourists is consumptive and celebratory, but it can be a painful reminder for those who have lost or witnessed a change in the meaning of their *lieux de mémoire* through gentrification.

3.5 Semi-Structured Interviews

The last method of data gathering for this dissertation was semi-structured interviews. Interviews were central as through them, I was able to get more closely at people's lived experiences connected to particular spaces and landscapes, whether they were the attachment to memoryscapes or their indignation over changes to these landscapes. While my observation of the landscape gave me numerous clues about messages projected by the ruling elites, the interviews gave me a sense of the worlds of vernacular memories. I conducted 12 interviews in Belfast and 23 in Montréal.[10] Given the restrictions on in-person interactions during the COVID pandemic, which coincided with the time of my fieldwork, some interviews were conducted through online video conferencing or online messaging. An amendment to my ethics protocol was later approved so that I could conduct face-to-face and walking interviews with participants. Interviews with long-term residents of the neighbourhoods were crucial as these people have the knowledge of the space as they had the most to say about the changes to its landscapes. New residents (gentrifiers) were also interviewed to find out what led them to move there, as well as their interactions with the long-term residents and landscapes. Finally, I interviewed people in civil society institutions or in activists' circles, who shared with me the aftermaths of gentrification and how their role in this process.

[10] Two interviews in Montréal were not included in the analysis because they did not provide data directly relevant to the research questions. Moreover, the Terry Chipman interview was conducted over the phone, and I was unable to obtain a complete transcription, which limited their analytical value. In both cases, the material either overlapped with insights already captured in other interviews or addressed topics outside the scope of the dissertation, and thus their inclusion would not have further advanced the analysis.

For the recruitment of interview participants in Montréal, I used my contacts as the points of entry. A few of them now live in the study site, the arrondissement Sud-Ouest, and referred me to other residents of the different neighbourhoods. This type of recruitment of interviewees – i.e., the snowballing method – is said to work best in exploratory situations (Tenzek 2017). I tried to recruit demographically diverse interviewees, in terms of ethnocultural affiliation, gender, race and class. The time of residency was also an important factor, as I expected to find important differences between long-term residents and new middle-class gentrifiers. Recruitment was also done in various NGOs and activist circles in the neighbourhoods, and people in these circles also identified to me potential participants to interview. Also, both study areas have Facebook pages run by the residents, which I used for interviewee recruitment, specifically gentrifiers, who I expected are more actively present on social media (Gibbons, Nara, and Appleyard 2018, 473). These Facebook pages are currently used as a marketplace, for information sharing, and as a neighbourhood watch, but have also been a platform for activism, where calls for protests or petitions are posted.

The interviewees were questioned about their experiences of neighbourhood changes along several key dimensions, including: changes in the built environment; representations of collective memory; demographic composition; the nature and use of commercial services; the use of public and community spaces; and neighbourhood social networking, including among people identifying with different ethnolinguistic or confessional communities (see Appendix B). More time was spent on interviews with long-term residents (people who lived through the deindustrialization period and their children) and activist groups, as my work is more concerned with their experiences and contestation. All participants signed an informed consent form approved by the delegated ethics review committee of the Faculty of Graduate Studies of York University (see Appendix D). The interviews lasted from 45 to 90 minutes and followed a conversational approach.

3.5.1 Walking Interviews: Spatialized Knowledge

I asked some interviewees to conduct a second interview in the form of a walk with me around their neighbourhoods. “Walking alongside research participants” has a long tradition in ethnography (see, among others, Schratz and Walker 2005; Moles 2008; Springgay and Truman 2017; Lavoie 2021), and more recently “walking and talking” has gained further traction in social science studies (Evans and Jones 2011, 852). The method was useful for me to glean my participants’ sense of place and attachment to the neighbourhood, and to spatialize and visualize their neighbourhood memories. The aims of the walking interview for me were threefold: first, to understand how individuals conceptualize their neighbourhoods; second, to discern how they think about and articulate their memories and related practices within particular landscapes; and third, to understand how they locate their social networks and express their sense of community in relation to specific landscapes and places that are changing.

The walking interview has some advantages compared to static interviews. Perhaps the most important is that it allows participants to show rather than merely describe particular points that are of importance to them (Jones et al. 2008, 3). Participants’ narratives are also told in the very place, which can add detail to, and enrich, the researcher’s sense of the place. Moreover, unlike a sedentary face-to-face interview, talking while walking and passing through different points can lead to unexpected turns, yielding new, interesting findings for researchers. Additionally, as stated by Kinney (2017, 3), “Walking alongside a participant is regarded as an inclusive process compared with the traditional sit-down interview because it is viewed more as a partnership, thus reducing power imbalances.” While it would be a stretch to conclude that such a method can overcome power imbalances, an interview being conducted in a geographical location that an interviewee is familiar with can make participants feel more comfortable. Unnatural pauses that occur in a sedentary face-to-face interview are replaced with

natural occurrences in the walking interview. For example, when crossing the road, it would be expected that conversation would cease until we reached the other side, which gives time both for the interviewer and the interviewee to ponder what was spoken before and what they want to say next.

The interview format for such a walk was different from the sit-down interviews, resembling more of a life history or biographical interview. I did not offer a prescriptive instruction to participants about how the walking interview should be completed, so the interviews were carried out in a spontaneous manner. During the sit-down interviews, participants were informed in advance that the research could include a walking component following the initial interview if they were interested. Given that they were interviewed in a more 'formal' way prior to the walks, participants were already aware of the central problematic of my research. This proved very useful as some participants, without being told to, went beyond their own story to show me places they thought were relevant to the research. Prior to our departure, I asked my interviewees to take me to places that held important meanings to them, while emphasizing that the walk could be adjusted to their comfort. Participants chose where the walk began and ended, as well as the routes we would follow. As we walked, we talked about the places we were passing through and their relative significance to the participants. I recorded our walks, which proved difficult to transcribe given the high level of ambient noise, so some parts of the dialogue were inevitably going to be lost.

These walking interviews can generate "a 'neighbourhood commentary' consisting of participant narratives of their lives in and beyond the neighbourhood" (Emmel and Clark 2010, 2). Walking interviews also became a fascinating medium for me to access participants' memories; every step can be a reminder of something that they experienced in the past or are experiencing currently. Moreover, these walks made the participants confront the changing landscape, the landscape of new-build gentrification in both cities, and allowed them to express their indignation, frustration or

confoundment. It provided crucial information that I wouldn't have been able to catch from my own walks, sit-down interviews, or archival research. It was a revealing experience for me, enlightening me on how the landscapes are haunted by the past.

3.6 The Benefits and Originality of Comparison as Method

In this last section, I explore comparison as a heuristic device for studying memory's place in urban processes and ethnocultural divisions. I also discuss why I chose to study Belfast and Montréal by offering a brief history of each city and, in particular, those related to the deep divisions that have moulded their politics. I will first review the comparative framework that has guided my research and writing, and then explain why I chose these two cases for the comparison.

3.6.1 Comparative Framework

Over the past decades, discussions on the methodologies of comparative urban research have fluctuated in prominence. In 1972, William John Hanna edited a volume titled *Comparative Urban Research*, but it did not receive interest or funding (Palmer and Simon 2020, 20). It regained some momentum after the 2000s, but has remained a somewhat rare instance when it comes to the study of gentrification. When comparative studies of gentrification are conducted, they tend to focus on establishing metrics for comparison across spatial contexts (Lagendijk et al. 2014, 359). For some other researchers, such as Maloutas (2012, 41), comparative gentrification studies are an impossible task. He is critical of the idea that gentrification theories, which originated in the West, can be applied to myriad contexts. According to him, such an attempt and claims cause the concept to be decontextualized and to become increasingly abstract so that it can be used in other situations. He adds (ibid., 38–39) that abstract notions of gentrification lead to a disregard for "causal mechanisms and processes" at work in particular places that are brushed aside in favour of a flimsy emphasis on "similarities in results across

settings." Moreover, Maloutas (ibid., 35) contends that many of the concepts developed about gentrification are "provincial" (as opposed to being "universal"), in the sense that they are more properly applicable to cities like London and New York, from which many of these concepts were developed. Therefore, attempts to extrapolate this concept to other time-spaces require considerable caution since the circumstances vary in different places. He also contends that ideological efforts to spread gentrification to other contexts serve to project neoliberal framings across countries (ibid, 34). Maloutas is a proponent of individualizing each city experiencing gentrification, and anchoring theories in contexts. I agree that a contextually grounded approach to gentrification is a necessity, but as I showed in Chapter 2, common structural factors that facilitate gentrification across borders also need to be incorporated into our analysis.

Lees (2012, 156) also sought to produce a renewed theorization of comparative urbanism that would avoid the pitfalls of neocolonial epistemology. She stressed the need to consider fully regional contexts outside of the megacities of the West, to recognize significant regional variation in how gentrification processes manifest themselves, and to learn from postcolonial studies how to "decolonize the gentrification literature" (Lees 2012, 164). They launched workshops worldwide, which resulted in two books: the co-edited *Global Gentrification: Uneven Development and Displacement* (Lees et al. 2015), and the co-authored *Planetary Gentrification* (Lees et al. 2016). Lees et al. (2015, 7) criticized Maloutas' stance, which they argue fossilizes gentrification instead of contextualizing it by reifying its "contextual epiphenomena." While there are lessons to be learned from stances like Maloutas's, Lees et al. (ibid., 9) contend that "we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater." Instead, they argue we should "stand aside" from a "flat ontology" dedicated to the appreciation of difference in favour of an ontology focused on "social injustices and power relations," which are co-present across various

contexts. They argue that a significant number of empirical studies have pointed to "global regularities" in the causes and pathways of gentrification (Lees et al. 2015, 6).

The tension between universality and particularity has also transpired in the debates between Marxist and postcolonial urban studies. Some have argued for a universalizing perspective, often found in Marxist approaches, that portray gentrification as a single process cascading both 'laterally' across national borders and 'vertically' down "the urban hierarchy," until it reaches "small market towns" (Smith 2002, 439) or "rural settlements" (Atkinson and Bridge 2005, 16). These authors point to "imitative urbanism" or "fast policy" regimes (Peck and Theodore 2015, xiv), through which gentrification is emulated by policy-makers outside major global cities, including those in the Global South (Lees 2012, 156). According to comparative urbanists who have been influenced by post-colonialism (see Robinson 2006; 2011; 2016b), such totalizing and diffusionist standpoints are deforming lenses, imposing Occidental assumptions at the expense of specificities and differences. Robinson's comparative urbanism has been particularly important to postcolonial urban studies, and she calls for urban research that decentres theories of the Global North, and especially Marxist urban theories.

This dissertation seeks to combine Marxist structural analysis with postcolonial sensibilities to account for both context and experience. The two cases I examine are not located in the Global South, yet they remain deeply intertwined with the legacies of colonial systems. I draw on Marxist urbanists because the dynamics of capitalist urban restructuring, such as deindustrialization and neoliberalization, have been central to shaping gentrification in these contexts, and their theories provide crucial insights for understanding these processes. At the same time, I approach the structural pillars of gentrification as an open universality. They are not fixed laws but processes that intersect with local conditions. In this sense, gentrification emerges as a complex interplay of universality and

particularity, and my comparative analysis highlights the uneven and relational dynamics produced by these interlocking scales. The once dominant model of comparing cities as fixed, demographically bounded entities has given way to a new perspective. In line with recent developments in critical urban theory, this dissertation adopts a comparative approach not merely to juxtapose Montréal and Belfast, but to theorize from their interwoven particularities: distinct cities shaped by settler colonialism, state-seeking nationalisms, and the uneven spatial logics of global capitalism.

As Schmid (2023, 28) argues, urbanization is not a uniform, universal process, but a "territorialized abstraction," a general transformation that materializes in specific historical-geographical conditions. By comparing two 'singular' instances of gentrification in Montréal and Belfast, my analysis pursues a dialectical understanding of how structural forces, such as neoliberalism, colonial legacies, and nationalist projects, are mediated through local specificities. This means that I treat Montréal and Belfast not as analogues, but as interlocutors in a shared conversation about the political economies of memory, identity, and spatial justice in divided cities. These two cities are often read through frameworks that reduce them to their respective regional traditions, postcolonial Québec nationalism or Northern Irish ethno-sectarianism. Yet, such readings occlude the global circuits of capital, migration of policies, and ideology that traverse both sites. My comparison responds to the call for "unexpected comparisons" (Ferenčuhová 2023, 354), producing new insights not by presenting sameness, but by interrogating how different socio-spatial and political legacies interact with similar structural forces.

In urban political science, comparative strategies are often driven by a search for the causes of difference, identifying variables that explain variation across cases (Post 2023, 132). Such an approach is not designed to capture the relational and historical entanglements that shape urban processes in different places. By contrast, my dissertation pursues a process-oriented approach, aligning with what

Post calls "within-case analysis" across multiple sites. That is, each city is treated as a locus of intertwined processes, remembrance, nationalism, and gentrification that unfold through distinct but intersecting relations. Montréal's gentrification cannot be understood without grappling with Indigenous dispossession and Francophone nationalism; Belfast's urban transformation is inseparable from the spatial governance of sectarianism and post-Troubles redevelopment. Both cities reveal how historical violence resurfaces through the contemporary restructuring of space, and how collective memory and the contestation of space act as critical mediators in gentrification processes. Their comparison also sharpens our understanding of the "right to memory" as a spatial and political claim.

3.6.2 Montréal and Belfast: Setting the Grounds for Comparison

My research is a comparative case study of two boroughs [11] – that is, the *Arrondissement Sud-Ouest* in Montréal and East Belfast in Belfast. Both boroughs have been heavily affected by deindustrialization and have also historically been multilinguistic and multiconfessional, respectively. A comparative study of them will reveal the struggling processes of gentrification and the role memory plays in differently situated divided contexts. By investigating these two sites, my research seeks to develop a comparative framework that can be referenced in future research on the politics of memory, especially in divided cities. I hope to contribute to efforts to overcome a gap in memory studies, a field marked by "the paucity of systematic comparative studies" (Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik 2014, 9).

The *Arrondissement du Sud-Ouest in Montréal* used to be the heart of the industrial sector of the city. From the leather factories of the 17th and 18th centuries to the flour mills and tobacco factories of

[11] Boroughs and neighbourhoods differ in scale and administrative significance, with boroughs serving as the larger primary subdivisions of a city. These entities, such as Montréal's Le Sud-Ouest or East Belfast, they sometime possess formal governance structures. Within these broader boroughs lie smaller neighbourhoods, which are more localized and defined by specific cultural or historical characteristics. For instance, in Montréal's Sud-Ouest, Saint-Henri is a neighbourhood known for its working-class roots and evolving gentrification, while in East Belfast, the Titanic Quarter (TQ) is a specialized neighbourhood renowned for its maritime heritage and modern revitalization.

the 19th and 20th centuries, it was the centre of Canada's industrial beginnings (Ricard et al. 2018). It was a working-class borough until the 1960s, known for the cohabitation between predominantly French-Canadian descendants, Irish and Italian immigrants, and African descendants whose ancestors had been slaves in Canada prior to the abolition of slavery in 1834. With the rapid deindustrialization of the 1960s and 1970s, former industrial sites were abandoned and not repurposed until the early 2000s. Since the early 2010s, new-build gentrification projects have become widespread in the borough, accelerating the displacement of existing residents. In Chapter 5, I discuss the historically privileged position of anglophones in Montréal and how gentrification and Québec nationalism challenged this hegemony, inscribing white francophone myths into the landscape. This finding is discussed in relation to the realities of settler colonialism the city is founded upon. While many have argued that gentrification is a colonial enterprise and gentrifiers "pioneers" (see the discussion in Chapter 2), this statement resonates particularly well in Montréal, an unceded territory. It is important to remember that all the recent modifications caused by gentrification have happened on Indigenous land, land stolen by the Canadian and Québécois settler states.

In the case of the East Belfast docklands' neighbourhoods, from the second half of the nineteenth century until the late 1950s, Belfast harbour factories were among the most productive in Europe. The Harland and Wolff (H&W) company, which built the Titanic and many other ships, gave Belfast an international reputation for its expertise in constructing cruise ships. Yet, because of deindustrialization, the workforce in the H&W sites decreased from 25,000 to 7,000 between 1950 and 1980 (Chaline 1991). This left the harbour and the surrounding neighbourhoods in a state of decay. Elected officials in Northern Ireland have always wanted to repurpose these lands. Finally, following the signature of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and the Transitional Justice imperatives, the Belfast City Council and the government of Northern Ireland announced a project to rehabilitate the

waterfront. This massive public-private partnership envisioned the creation of a new district on the docks that would tap into important symbols of the previous era. The new district was named the TQ. This redevelopment was presented by decision-makers as a way of transcending sectarian divisions that defined the city in the past, as the district and newly gentrified neighbourhoods surrounding it would be a "shared space," as I discuss later. Many saw this as being ignorant of historical national and class struggles that had occurred in the space.

I will expand on the merits of comparing these two cases in the next chapter. As we can see from this brief description, however, the two boroughs under study have important histories in common. Both boroughs used to be the industrial engine of their territories, in which the white working class used to have more or less stable employment. Both boroughs experienced deindustrialization, declines and later gentrification, and started to be inhabited by the middle upper class. The period of deindustrialization also coincided with the rise of state-seeking nationalist movements in both cases and, in one way or another, the latter was shaped by the former. Finally, because of these strong nationalist histories, the politics of memory has acquired a very special place in the identity formation of people in both places. These similarities between the two places, which will be expanded upon in the next chapter, gave me the ground to venture into comparative research on them. I examine how landscapes there have been signified by people and haunted by the conflicting memories of their histories. It is a "comparison with an ethnographic sensibility" that defines my work (Simmons and Smith 2017, 126).

3.7 Conclusion

I used qualitative methodologies to show the emotions, perceptions and experiences of the people living in and struggling with the changing landscapes of Montréal's Sud-Ouest and East Belfast. The combination of interviews, observations, archival research and photo-taking offered insights into the

lived mnemonic world in the two places. I witnessed the processes of gentrification in these deeply divided cities, the commodification of histories, and the impact of these changes on collective memories entrenched in each place. Communities in these neighbourhoods are often deprived of their access to places that hold importance to them while, at the same time, seeing their past being sold to promote real estate developments. Moreover, while developers and officials speak in favour of social mixing in both cities, an in-depth view of the situation revealed to me how problematic these can be when the existing and shifting intergroup relations are simplified through this discourse. Social mixing promises social and economic benefits to all, but the working-class communities of Montréal and Belfast are still waiting to see them. Having reflected on this question many times during my research, I am convinced that social mixing is ephemeral unless the structural conditions that reproduce inequalities are tackled.

As we shall see in the next chapters, real estate development and urbanization policies were overwhelmingly perceived as harmful by working-class communities in these cities. The people interviewed expressed dismay at the lack of consideration on the part of politicians and real estate developers who are active in real estate developments that are beyond the affordability of working people. People immediately expressed signs of frustration and indignation as soon as I mentioned the word ‘condo.’ On the other hand, the people who lived in the condominiums often seemed disconnected from the reality of people living outside their bubbles, especially those living in social housing and who were sometimes called “welfare recipients” who, in their eyes, lacked the will to change their destiny. New condominiums produce social polarity, and the methodological framework I employed allowed me to capture the downside of the real estate booms in those places.

My observation of landscapes, either actual or captured in photos, provided an interesting overview of the changes that occurred in these two places over time. From my observations, it appeared

that manufacturing memory has become a crucial tool in the arsenal of the developers and the state to foster attachment to the new living environment and forward investment as well. In Chapters 5 and 6, I engage with findings from my fieldwork and explore how long-term residents and early gentrifiers experience and negotiate changes to the memoryscapes of their neighbourhoods. Before doing so, however, I want to present a brief historical background of these two places, discussing once again the relevance of such a comparison. I will address their industrial histories, and show how industrialism and deindustrialization have moulded nationalist politics and intergroup feuds.

Chapter 4: A History of Colonialism, Industrialism and Nationalism in Montréal and Belfast

4.1 Introduction

The industrial landscape and the nationalist histories of Montréal and Belfast overlap in various ways. This chapter discusses these overlapping histories while attending to the singularities of each case, simultaneously highlighting the significance of the comparison between them. This chapter is divided into two main sections, one dedicated to Montréal and the other to Belfast. In each section, I first discuss the beginnings of each city and the ways in which colonialism shaped them over time. Second, I introduce the role that industrialization played in the two boroughs. Both the Sud-Ouest and East Belfast were the industrial powerhouses of their respective territories, which also highlights the brutality of their downfall. Finally, I examine the processes of deindustrialization in each city and show how they were linked to the emergence of a form of state-seeking nationalism that moulded each city's landscape in ways important to the identity of each city.

4.2 Montréal: Colonial, Industrial and Cultural City

Despite being the second-largest city in Canada, the eighth largest in North America, and the fourth-largest francophone city in the world (World Population Review 2026), Montréal has not received the same level of sustained academic attention as other so-called 'global cities.' This dissertation seeks to address this gap by bringing Montréal more fully into critical urban scholarship as a contested geography shaped by overlapping histories of settler-colonial violence, Indigenous survival, and diasporic worldmaking.

The island of *Tiohtià:ke* (Montréal) has long functioned as a meeting place for the *Kanien'kehá:ka* (Mohawk)*, Anishinaabeg*, and other Indigenous nations. Their enduring presence disrupts the colonial fiction of a singularly "founded" city and unsettles the logic of *urbs nullius*, the

myth of urban space as empty, inert, and therefore available for settlement (Coulthard 2014a, 277). This presence precedes colonization and continues to challenge dominant urban imaginaries that render Indigenous peoples as out of place in the city or confined to reserves and rural spaces. Building on this disruption, Dorries (2023, 110) advances the concept of "Indigenous urbanism" as an analytic that foregrounds how Indigenous peoples actively engage with, contest, and reshape urban space. Rather than framing the city as either empty or inherently settler and colonial, this perspective emphasizes the co-production of urban space through Indigenous presence, resistance, and everyday practices. Indigenous urbanism thus offers a critical lens through which to understand Montréal not as a completed colonial project, but as an ongoing and unsettled urban formation.

Against this backdrop, the following sections introduce key moments in Montréal's urban history, including the colonial "founding" of the city, its successive phases of industrialization and rapid deindustrialization, and its entanglement with the political movement for Québec's independence. Together, these histories provide essential context for understanding how struggles over memory, space, and belonging continue to shape the contemporary city.

4.2.1 Colonial Empires in Montréal

The oldest traces of human occupation in *Tiohtià:ke* (Montréal) date back approximately 5,000 years. For the *Kanien'kehá:ka*, *Anishinaabeg*, and other First Nations, the island was a sacred geography, a site of diplomatic, economic, and convergent relations (Comat and Lévesque 2017, 82). Situated at the heart of the St. Lawrence River network, the island functioned as a nodal point linking the Iroquoian and Algonquian worlds, facilitating trade, alliances, and cultural exchange long before the arrival of Europeans. Contrary to colonial narratives of abandonment, Indigenous peoples never 'left' *Tiohtià:ke* in any absolute sense. The geopolitical shifts of the late 16th century, including the destabilizing effects of early European contact, disease, and conflicts, may have disrupted permanent settlements, but the

island remained a vital part of Indigenous territorial networks (Centre des mémoires montréalaises 2016). As Sioui (2023, 37) underscores in their critique of settler historiography, colonial accounts often erase Indigenous presence by framing mobility as disappearance. When French colonists established Ville-Marie in 1642, they did so on lands actively used by Indigenous nations for seasonal travel, hunting, and ceremonies, a fact obscured by the myth of *terra nullius*.

In the years that followed, French settlers deepened their presence on the island as the fur trade became a central driver of colonial expansion. The fur trade, often romanticized as a partnership between settler and Indigenous communities, became the economic engine of French colonial expansion and functioned as a system of extraction that relied on Indigenous labour and knowledge while accelerating territorial dispossession. Far from equitable, the alliances signed with the Mig'mawag, Anishinaabeg, and Wendats were strategically asymmetrical, as French settlers leveraged these relationships to consolidate their economic and spatial control (Gohier 2013, 63–64). These alliances were further complicated by what Poirier (2016, 2-4) identifies as a fundamental clash in "disjunctive valuations": whereas Indigenous kinship networks viewed exchange as reciprocal and sacred, French mercantilism reduced relationships, and even people, to commodified instruments of trade and conversion.

This disconnect extended to the missionary projects that accompanied colonial expansion. Framed as a 'civilizing mission,' these efforts sought to assimilate Indigenous peoples by severing ties to governance systems and land-based practices (Bigon and Njoh 2018, 936). As Poirier (2016, 10) further underscores, French authorities, whether traders or Jesuits, failed to grasp Indigenous worldviews, in which reciprocity, rather than profit, bound communities together. Instead, policies of *francisation* tried to enforce Catholicism, sedentary agriculture and Eurocentric norms (Bigon and Njoh 2018, 936-938).

Yet these interventions were neither passive nor uncontested. For instance, Poirier (2016, 6-7) highlights how Wendat women resisted baptism and manipulated kinship networks to preserve autonomy, a theme echoed in Noel's (2006, 49–50) study of the fur trade where Indigenous peoples subverted colonial economies through informal trade and cultural hybridity. Similarly, Daschuk (2015, 132) documents adaptive survival strategies, from strategic alliances to covert subsistence practices. Even as Trudel (2009, 29) notes the systemic erasure of Indigenous presence in colonial records, these acts of resilience reveal that New France was not an inevitable settler project, but a contested process where power was negotiated and resisted.

Amid colonial violence, the seventeenth century saw profound shifts in the sociocultural makeup of French settlers in the Montréal region. These changes have often been framed as the beginnings of a distinct 'Canadian identity,' (Leclerc 2026) but this narrative obscures how that 'identity' was itself a product of colonization. The very notion of Canada emerged through the expropriation of Indigenous lands and the suppression of Indigenous sovereignties. What took place was a settler adaptation shaped both by dependency on, and attempted erasure of, Indigenous presence. While colonial institutions reproduced French metropolitan models, survival and authority in the colony required negotiation with Indigenous knowledge systems that had long governed the region (Sioui 2023, 42). Settler culture reflects these contradictions. As Viau (2012b, 107) notes, colonial narratives began to selectively appropriate elements of Indigenous mythology, not to honor them but to construct a sense of belonging that justified settlement. For instance, in a 1630s entry, Jesuit missionary Jean de Brébeuf reinterpreted Wendat myths through the lens of the biblical Book of Genesis, presenting them as evidence of Christian universalism; that is, the idea that Christian truth is present in all cultures (Podruchny and Labelle 2012, 101). This process of cultural appropriation coexisted with *francisation* policies aimed at erasing Indigenous languages and lifeways (Cook 2013, 68), exposing

how settler identity was not a hybrid formation but a colonial one, consolidated through domination, mimicry, and attempted erasure.

These strategies of cultural domination under French rule set the stage for the transformations that followed the British conquest. The surrender of Montréal in September 1760 did not mark a simple transfer of power between European empires; rather, it initiated a complex reconfiguration of colonial relationships that reshaped social, political, and spatial orders. When French forces capitulated, they surrendered not only military control but also a system of colonial governance that had developed through 150 years of contested relationships with Indigenous nations. The Royal Proclamation of 1763, which renamed New France the Province of Quebec, represented Britain's attempt to impose a new territorial logic, one that ignored both the persistent sovereignty of Indigenous nations and the francophone colonial society that had developed (Viau 2012b, 98).

For Indigenous peoples, this transition marked the beginning of a new attempt at colonial governance, one that was increasingly articulated through British legal and bureaucratic frameworks. The Crown increasingly positioned Indigenous peoples not as sovereign political entities but as "wards" of the state, legally infantilized and politically subordinated. In the British colonial discourse and legal rhetoric of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, Indigenous peoples were often viewed as 'children' in need of protection and instruction in the norms of (British) 'civilization' (Viau 2012a, 232; Coulthard 2014b, 70–72). This discursive shift was foundational to the emergence of the so-called "civilizing" mission, wherein the Crown claimed responsibility for Indigenous education, spiritual conversion, and economic transformation – projects that would eventually include the residential school system.

The social landscape that emerged in early nineteenth-century Montréal was shaped by overlapping and uneven colonial interventions rather than a simple binary between colonizer and colonized. Francophone settlers, while increasingly marginalized by British imperial policy, continued to materially benefit from ongoing processes of Indigenous displacement. This contradictory position is evident in the simultaneous rise of French Canadian nationalist sentiment and continued participation in the colonial project, particularly through land settlement, urban expansion, and the normalization of Indigenous erasure within emerging political and civic institutions (Viau 2012b, 107). British rule reconfigured colonial logics, allowing francophone populations to articulate claims of political exclusion while sustaining their relative privilege within a colonial hierarchy premised on Indigenous dispossession.

The Act of Union in 1840 crystallized these tensions. While designed to politically subordinate francophones through forced assimilation and institutional restructuring, the Act simultaneously reinforced the colonial state's authority over Indigenous territories. This consolidation facilitated further land expropriation, administrative control, and urban development, particularly in and around Montréal, where each successive wave of Indigenous dispossession enabled new forms of economic accumulation and spatial domination. In this way, the Act of Union, which may have represented a moment of francophone loss, produced a social order in which competing settler grievances were reconciled through the continued exclusion of Indigenous peoples from urban space. The post-Confederation (1867) Indian Act of 1876 epitomized this logic of elimination, codifying Indigenous dispossession into law while advancing the settler state's territorial and economic ambitions. By consolidating earlier policies such as the Gradual Civilization Act (1857), the Indian Act sought to dismantle Indigenous governance, restrict mobility, and forcibly assimilate Indigenous peoples through measures such as the residential school system and the enfranchisement program (Greer 2019, 72).

Crucially, it defined reserves as spaces of exception that were ostensibly "protected," yet were systematically undermined by provisions allowing for land seizures, resource extraction, and state interference in community life (Coulthard 2014, 62-63). This legal framework mirrored the broader shift from imperial/commercial penetration to settler colonialism, as the Canadian state sought to replace Indigenous modes of life with agrarian settlements and capitalist property regimes. But, much of the northern and Indigenous-held land resisted agricultural conversion, paving the way for twentieth-century "extractivism" to become the dominant form of colonial intrusion (Greer 2019, 75–76). The Indian Act's legacy thus underscores the adaptability of colonial domination, where legal and economic instruments work in tandem to sustain what Coulthard (2014, 58) calls the "structured dispossession" of Indigenous peoples.

European invasion transformed the region into a French and then British colonial outpost, enforcing what Byrd (2011, 1) terms the "transit of empire," a dynamic and violent process through which colonialism continually reshapes space, bodies, and knowledge to serve its expansion. Land, intertwined with Indigenous kinship networks, was forcibly remade into a colonial economic outpost; rivers became trade routes, forests turned into commodities, and relational ways of being were replaced by capitalist extraction (Coulthard 2014b, 70). This transformation also depended on ideological frameworks that both sought to erase Indigenous peoples from dominant narratives and relied on their continued exploitation and dispossession to sustain colonial projects. Settler colonialism operates through the paradoxes of presence and absence. This logic was central to French and British colonial projects, where profit making depended on the erasure of Indigenous sovereignty while simultaneously relying on Indigenous knowledge and coerced labour. The result was what Byrd (ibid, 226) calls the "living dead of empire," where Indigenous peoples were rendered spectral in colonial narratives yet exploited in practice.

This legal-economic infrastructure unfolded alongside profound demographic and spatial transformations, particularly in Montréal. What began as a site of contested encounters, where Indigenous diplomacy, resistance, and survival shaped the very possibility of colonial settlement, was gradually restructured into a colonial urban center through successive waves of French and British domination. As imperial networks deepened in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Montréal evolved from a strategic fur-trading post into a key node in British commercial expansion. The city's spatial development thus encoded both the violence of colonialism and the contradictions of settler identities, particularly as French Canadians navigated their dual position as subjects of the British Empire and agents of Indigenous displacement. By the mid-nineteenth century, Montréal was expanding in size (Labrecque and Fougères 2012, 503), while consolidating a colonial order whereby land, labour, and memory were radically reordered to serve colonial ambitions. These colonial foundations shaped the conditions under which Montréal entered its industrial phase, embedding dispossession and uneven development at the heart of its urbanization.

4.2.2 Montréal, Industrialization, and the Rise of the Sud-Ouest

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, Montréal's merchants and capitalists sought to expand their influence further westward towards Upper Canada, which was undergoing rapid growth. To achieve this, Montréal was transformed into a trade centre. The city was favoured because of its geographical convenience, where the river routes meet, and new infrastructure, such as land routes and railways, converged (McInnis 2000, 61; Fougères 2017b, 307). The city was witnessing technological advances in transportation, the emergence of the liberal state, the growth of industrial capitalism and simultaneous access to foreign capital markets, all of which contributed to the city's accelerated expansion (Linteau and Robert 1985, 211; McInnis 2000, 63–64; Fougères 2017a, 399). The city also benefited from a specific political, economic, and international dynamic in which the British empire

was moving from a closed colonial economy to a free trade global economy with various sectoral tariff agreements. Finally, the establishment of the Canadian confederation in 1867 was accompanied by the desire for a strong Canadian economy; merchants and large corporations based in Montréal sought to develop the city with an ambition to engage with the Canada-wide market (Labrecque and Fougères 2012, 489).

To meet the growing demand from capitalists, the city built the Lachine Canal in the early 1800s, bypassing the Lachine's rapids, which accelerated navigation in and out of the city. The opening of the canal in 1824 marked the beginning of full-blown industrialization in Montréal, and in Canada as a whole. According to the Assembly of Lower Canada archives (1827, Appendix C), in 1825, there were a little fewer than 700 boats passing through the canal. The following year, this number exceeded 1,300. As demonstrated in figure 4.1, the canal passes across the southwest of the island through what is known today as the Sud-Ouest.

The canal became a real success and, in 1840, it had to be widened to accommodate the increased size of merchant ships and the frequency of their passage. These expansions were repeated in 1870 and 1880 in order for the canal to remain competitive. As investors seized the opportunity to start new businesses or increase the scale of production in their establishments, the Sud-Ouest became an industrial powerhouse. In 1856, there were 1,203 workers in various companies around the canal, and by 1871 the number increased to 2,613 (Petitclerc 2012, 549). Importantly, such industrial development was only made possible by local and immigrant labour (mostly the Irish, Italians and French Canadians). New neighbourhoods were created to accommodate the workers near the canal, such as Griffintown, Petite Bourgogne, Saint-Henri, Pointe-Saint-Charles, Côte-Saint-Paul and Ville Émard,[12]

[12] While this dissertation treats the Sud-Ouest as a coherent territorial unit, it does so with the recognition that it is first and foremost an administrative construct whose formal boundaries do not necessarily correspond to lived experiences or everyday forms of identification. In practice, residents tend to anchor their identities at the neighbourhood scale, where distinct histories,

all of which compose today's Sud-Ouest (see Figure 1.1). With time, however, they rapidly became overcrowded and unsanitary (see Figure 4.2), and these neighbourhoods "in the shadow of the mountain [Mont Royal]" (High et al. 2013, III) acquired a bad reputation that would follow them until recently, when gentrification changed the perception.

Overall, between 1890 and 1930, Montréal experienced great economic effervescence. Growth was rapid, and the city's business sectors expanded and diversified. The commercial register published by Chaput & Frères of 1890 (p. 8, my translation) claimed that Montréal was "the commercial metropolis of Canada," and "the richest and most considerable city of all the Dominion of Canada." All of this was possible because of the rapid creation and exploitation of a severely precarious working class. Indeed, beyond technical, financial and administrative advancements, industrial capitalism requires the presence of what Marx ([1857] 2004, 441) called a cheap "reserve army of labour" that is compelled to work to survive. The growth of this workforce was apparent from the mid nineteenth century, which witnessed the growth of the settler Montréal populations, but also a significant influx of migrants to Montréal. Prior to 1840, the growth of the urban labour force was largely driven by immigration from the British Isles and the United States, so most city dwellers were English-speaking (Petitclerc 2012, 546). Immigration was still very important after 1840, but was overtaken by the rural exodus of thousands of French-Canadian peasants who, when the seigniorial system was abolished, left overpopulated rural regions for the city. This massive influx of workers ensured a constant labour

socio-economic trajectories, and patterns of gentrification produce significant internal variation. My decision to mobilize the Sud-Ouest as a unit of my analysis is therefore primarily methodological. It provides a necessary scalar framework to ensure analytical coherence in tracing structural processes, particularly deindustrialization, urban redevelopment, and policy interventions, that operate across and beyond neighbourhood boundaries. At the same time, as showed in the following chapters, I tried to be attentive to the uneven, locally mediated ways in which these transformations are experienced and contested.

supply and, in most cases, even exceeded industry's needs. Capitalists obviously benefited from this at the expense of the working-class (ibid., 548).

Regarding wages, in the 1860s and 1870s, the wage of a day labourer, as was the case for one third of the workers living in the Sud-Ouest, was around one dollar a day (Bradbury 1995, 117). According to Bradbury (ibid, 118), it took between $275 and $300 per year to afford the bare essentials (i.e., fuel, rent, clothing and food) for a family. In short, the majority of the working population, which earned less than $300 a year, lived under conditions of serious precariousness. Most working-class families could fall into destitution if unemployment or illness struck them. Even when the wages of these workers improved at the beginning of the twentieth century, the sanitary conditions of working-class neighbourhoods were poor and conducive to the spread of so-called "diseases of misery" (Tétreault 1983, 507, my translation), which increased the risk of missed workdays and even death.

This precarious status of the workers, however, led to an increased solidarity among them, and within the community of the Sud-Ouest. This solidarity was expressed through mutual aid among residents, but also through the emergence of the first trade unions, which gradually served to improve the working conditions in factories (Petitclerc 2012, 558–67). In the 1930s and 1940s, however, the Christian-conservative Duplessis government led a virulent 'anti-communist' campaign, symbolized by the *Loi des cadenas* of 1937, and made life difficult for trade unionists (Union nationale et Assemblée nationale du Québec 1937).[13] Nevertheless, the solidarity among long-term residents of the borough remains true to this day, which I also witnessed and experienced during my fieldwork. Such an industrial history has been one of the key vectors of the identity of Montréal's Sud-Ouest, and it is

[13] The Padlock Act (*Loi des cadenas*), whose official name is the "Act to Protect the Province Against Communistic Propaganda," mandated the closing of a space used to propagate communism and Bolshevism "by any means whatsoever" for a period of one year. Used a few times against trade unions, this law was deemed unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1957. (Union nationale et Assemblée nationale du Québec 1937)

deeply inscribed in the landscape today. As the neighbourhood started to experience deindustrialization from the 1960s onwards, industrial decay also made its way to the everyday landscape of the Sud-Ouest.

4.2.3 Deindustrialization and State-Seeking Nationalism in Montréal

After the Second World War, the role of US capital in the Canadian economy grew, especially in manufacturing (Smardon 2011, 148–49), which served to facilitate the Fordist restructuring of the Canadian industries. Wage increases for workers followed, which elevated these workers to crucial consumers of the newly developing markets (Boismenu, Loranger, and Gravel 1995, 1124). In Montréal, and especially in the Sud-Ouest, this transformation initially reinforced the industrial importance of the Lachine Canal, which remained a critical artery for manufacturing production and distribution. In the late 1940s, the Lachine Canal was once again in need of an enlargement to remain competitive; however, it had become a prisoner of the dense industrial zone that it had generated, and could no longer be widened to accommodate larger boats. As a result, factories and industries in the Sud-Ouest rapidly lost competitiveness, leading to declining revenues and accelerating industrial disinvestment. The canal continued to struggle until the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959, which marked the end of the industrial era around the Lachine Canal and led to increased unemployment in areas that depended on the Canal. This situation was made worse by Québec's complete refusal to develop its welfare state and adopt Keynesian policies. Outside Québec, and especially at the federal level, Keynesianism was a key policy directive from the beginning of the Second World War. This was influenced, in particular, by Robert Bryce, a former student of Keynes who entered the federal public service in Canada in 1938. Some commentators even argued that the presence of Bryce and a few other of Keynes' former students in the federal government made Canada "the first country to commit itself firmly to a Keynesian economic policy" (Galbraith 1975, 137). In

Québec, however, politicians and economists argued that the very openness of the province's economy, especially in its natural resource sector that was largely entrusted to foreign investment, made Keynesian policies ineffective as the latter were designed for a relatively closed economy (Dostaler and Hanin 2005, 155). Additionally, Québec nationalism of the time was reactionary to the doctrines coming from England. The Catholic Church, working hand in hand with the government, also warned against ideas it considered associated with socialism (Davis 2022, 62). This reluctance on the part of the Québec state to institute Keynesian policies shaped the industrial landscape of the Sud-Ouest, as I discuss in the next chapter.

Unemployment further increased in the 1970s, as capitalists started to turn to automation and other technologies for increased productivity. The improvement of road transportation, as well as increased international competition, compelled capitalists to outsource production to the suburbs or internationally; by 1975, nearly 20,000 Montréal workers found themselves unemployed (Gouvernement du Canada 2017). Between 1959 and 1973, the Sud-Ouest lost 38% of its manufacturing jobs. In the years that followed, large factories closed or moved out of the city. Unemployment in the Sud-Ouest reached 19.8% in 1986 (High et al. 2013, III), and consequently, its population nearly halved between 1961 and 1991, from 120,000 to 66,000 inhabitants (ibid, III). Deindustrialization in Montréal was reflected in the city's socio-demographic profile and spatial organization. The closure of the factories had significant repercussions for the borough, which also saw several local shops close (Figure 4.3), leading to the gradual disappearance of community life with the closing of the factories.

The city's political elites were anxious to move it away from its industrial past and undertook major restructuring projects. In the 'race for progress' accompanied by a desire to 'shine' internationally, major urban renewal projects were initiated in the 1960s and 1970s. The archival

photos from the *Quartiers disparus* exhibition in Montréal's history centre show the brutality and violence behind this so-called "rational" and "objective" desire for "sanitation" (Bednarz 2013). Factories were closing without notice, leaving workers no time to adjust. People were forced out of their houses and neighbourhoods, and community spaces were destroyed and their memories removed from the landscape. In the early 1960s, the island experienced its first population decline in the twentieth century (Sénécal and Vachon 2012, 869).

This transformation was, in a way, anticipated by the ecological paradigm of the school of urban sociology at the University of Chicago, as developed in the 1920s (e.g., Park 1915; Burgess 1925; Wirth 1928). According to advocates of this paradigm, economic struggles would force urban centres to monopolize higher and ultra-specialized functions, while peri-urban suburbs would primarily become places of residence. In the Sud-Ouest, employees with management positions did leave for the suburbs or more peripheral boroughs of the city. But for the others, the rare working-class homeowners, they were 'stuck' in a deprecating environment, out of a job but unable to leave. For the workers who did not have the chance of being homeowners, many were evicted and forced to leave for less central districts or towards the less affluent neighbourhoods. It is estimated that more than 25,000 Montréalers were evicted or expropriated from their homes by the authorities (Centre des mémoires montréalaises 2016). Neighbourhoods were abandoned, and deep transformations awaited them. Pierre Perrault, one of Québec's most prolific movie directors, poet and radio host, provided a poignant summary of the situation in one of his radio theatre shows (Perrault [1965] 2009, 74, my translation):

> I live in a city that is inevitable, and yet we burn it, demolish it, push it back, move it, move it away, conceal it, and hide it to appease the conscience of mayors, millionaires, and

> emperors. I live in that city which embarrasses them and which they demolish, as if by destroying the houses, it was possible to eliminate misery.[14]

The consequences of deindustrialization did not impact all social groups equally. Its economy was predominantly controlled by an ethnocultural minority from Great Britain. For business, Montréal was an Anglo-Scottish city. In fact, of the 83 largest companies headquartered in Montréal, only 12% had French-speaking members on their boards of directors (Jamieson 1938, 76). Furthermore, according to data on workers in Montréal from the 1961 Federal government census – the first census to consider the language of the respondents – the average remuneration of a monolingual French-speaking worker was equivalent to half of that of a monolingual English-speaking worker. The situation was better for bilingual francophones, but they still received only two-thirds of the wage of a monolingual anglophone (Boulet 1978, 22). As Paul, a retired engineer and one of my interviewees, remembered, in the 1960s-1970s, it was extremely difficult for francophones to even be employed in some factories, let alone get a promotion: "My uncle got himself an interview at the Northern [Northern Electric]. He arrived there, and he was asked from the start, 'Do you speak English?' He replied, 'No.' Right away, they told him, 'Sorry, no job for you.'"[15] Deindustrialization in Montréal disproportionately affected marginalized communities, but its impacts were neither uniform nor neutral. While members of the capitalist class often had the mobility and resources to relocate or restructure their businesses in the wake of economic shifts, the burdens of industrial decline fell heavily on the city's francophone working class. This group, already historically disadvantaged, experienced job loss and downward mobility at a high rate. Yet, this narrative can obscure the intersectional dimensions of

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[14] Original: J'habite une ville inévitable et pourtant qu'on brûle, qu'on démolit, qu'on repousse, qu'on déplace, qu'on éloigne, qu'on dissimule pour apaiser la conscience des maires, des millionnaires, des empereurs. J'habite cette ville-là qui les embarrasse et qu'ils démolissent, comme si en rasant les maisons, il se pouvait qu'on élimine la misère.

[15] Original : Mon oncle s'était trouvé une entrevue à la Northern [Northern Electric]. Yé arrive là, on lui a demandé, drette en partant '*Do you speak English?*' Il a répondu 'non'. Bin tout de suite on lui a dit '*Sorry, no job for you*'

deindustrialization. Racialized workers, many of whom were employed in precarious industrial jobs, also faced compounded forms of exclusion, as their economic marginalization was shaped by systemic racism and their limited access to the province's nationalist political discourse. Québec's nationalist leaders often politicized the deindustrialization crisis by emphasizing francophone victimhood, reinforcing a settler colonial framing that marginalized Indigenous dispossession and the struggles of racialized communities. Thus, the restructuring of Montréal's economy in the post-industrial era reproduced class inequality and deepened colonial and racial hierarchies embedded in the city's urban fabric.

These structural transformations set the stage for deeper political and cultural shifts in Québec. The economic dislocation caused by deindustrialization not only exposed the vulnerabilities of the francophone working class; it also intensified calls for greater autonomy for Quebec and social justice. It was within this atmosphere of discontent and perceived structural inequality that a wave of societal change began to take shape. There is no official date for the exact starting time of the rapid changes in Québec in the 1960s, known as the Quiet Revolution. Some argue it started with the *Manifeste du Refus Global*[16] of 1948, the Montréal Riots of 1955, or the death of conservative Prime Minister Maurice Duplessis in 1959. Despite these differing views, there is a convergence of opinions that, from the 1960s to the 1980s, Québec experienced drastic societal changes and the emergence of a renewed collective national consciousness. This period saw the reorientation of the state, which adopted the principles of the welfare state and established a real separation of the Catholic Church and the state, which paved the way for the construction of a new Québécois national identity. It also became

[16] The *Refus Global* was an artistic manifesto published on August 9, 1948, by a group of 15 artists in Montréal nicknamed the Automatists (Borduas 1948). The text questioned the traditional values of Québec society, such as the Catholic faith and the attachment to ancestral values, rejecting their immobility and seeking to establish a new ideology of openness to universal thought.

instrumental in Québec's economic catch-up with other Canadian provinces and other countries over the next twenty years. The transformation from a French-Canadian nation, which had been driven by traditionalism, religion and rural life, to a Québécois nation revolving around culture, language and urban life was radical, and it manifested, among other things, in the desire to make Montréal the metropolis of this new *ethos* of the nation (Bell and De-Shalit 2011, 58). Levine (1990, 39) further argues that this national transformation was essentially a "Montreal-centered challenge" led by an emergent francophone "new middle class". For these nationalists, the reconquest of the city was a logical necessity; they believed francophones could never truly be "*maîtres chez nous*" (masters in our own house) as long as Montréal, the urban heart of Quebec, remained a symbol of anglophone power and the English language.

Indeed, this revolution was largely driven in and by Montréal. The government of Premier Jean Lesage in the 1960s put in place institutions of a modern state, almost all of which were located in Montréal: the *Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec* (1961),[17] the *Société Générale de financement* (1962),[18] the *Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec* (1965),[19] the *Régie des rentes* (1965),[20] as well as the head office of *Hydro-Québec* (1963). These state corporations were more than just administrative bodies; they were the "chief tools" (Levine 1990, 176) used by the government to dismantle the historical anglophone domination of the Montréal economy. For instance, the nationalization of Hydro-Québec in 1963 served as a crucial moment, signaling the end of the francophone community's "unqualified acceptance of anglophone power" (ibid., 47). Between 1961 and 1981, middle-class jobs in Montréal, mainly in the public services, grew from 5,200 to 19,200 (Bélanger 2007, 140). This new

[17] Québec Board of Health Care (my translation)
[18] General Society of Finance (my translation)
[19] Québec Deposit and Investment Fund (my translation)
[20] Québec Board of Pensions (my Translation)

middle class was largely composed of what Levine (1990, 45) termed *travailleurs du langage,* i.e., teachers, administrators, and policy analysts whose professional survival depended on the use of French. This shift reflected the trend that viewed the persistent status of English as the language of management in Montréal not just as a cultural slight, but as a direct threat to francophones' material interests. As a matter of fact, public-sector growth was one of the factors contributing to Québec's economic development and francophone middle-class expansion during the period (Levine 1990, 153; Swanstrom 1993, 66). The Quiet Revolution also facilitated the introduction of the Keynesian economy in Québec, which led to the restructuring of the province's redistributive policies. Moreover, by hiring francophone and bilingual employees, the state slowly replaced the private sector as the main employer of francophones on the island. This transition was even facilitated by the federal Prime Minister, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who established mandatory bilingualism for the federal public service in 1969. In the private sector, the introduction of Bill 101 in 1977 ushered in a drastic change.[21] Even if its objectives were not primarily economic, its effects were. With French being made the official language of work and business, francophones started to challenge the economic hegemony of the anglophone minority. Over time, the face of Montréal became French and economic disparities between the French-speaking and English-speaking middle and upper classes decreased. Census data from 1981 showed that, in Québec, the pay gap between bilingual francophones and anglophones no longer existed and that the gap between monolinguals had been reduced by two-thirds (B. H. Higgins 1986, 152). By the 1980s, these state-led interventions had successfully fostered a "dynamic and innovative Francophone managerial elite" in Montréal (Levine 1990, 150). While the power of anglophone capital did not

[21] Introduced by Camille Laurin (Minister of Cultural Development), the Charter of the French Language (1977), famously known as Bill 101, made French the official language of the state and the courts in Québec. French became the normal and usual language in workplaces, education, communications, commerce and business.

vanish, the economic reconquest of the city had fundamentally altered its linguistic division of labour, making French the primary language of the urban metropole.

For the working class, however, these benefits remained limited, and the above-mentioned reforms mostly affected the middle and upper levels of employment. As nationalism was growing in Québec in this period, many of the anglophone-owned businesses felt threatened, with some even leaving for Toronto or the greater region of Ottawa. It is estimated that more than 100,000 people left Montréal during the first referendum era (1976-1981) (Hamel and Jouve 2008, 22). Business owners rapidly left the island, leaving many workers out of employment, which accelerated the problems initiated by deindustrialization. As a result, Montréal's unemployment rates continued to remain above the Canadian average, sometimes reaching as much as 12% over the average (Polèse 2012, 986). This trend continued into the late twentieth century, and between 1989 and 1997, Montréal had the distinction of being one of the North American cities with the highest unemployment rate on numerous occasions (Thibodeau 1997, 30). The working class was a double victim of deindustrialization and, later, the departure of the anglophone capitalist class, a combination that drastically reduced the number of jobs available in the city's industrial sector.

The workers (almost exclusively men), however, were quickly co-opted by the political and cultural machinery that mythologized the French-speaking ordinary worker as the true hero of the Quiet Revolution. This period of profound social, cultural, and economic transformation in Québec relied heavily on the image of the industrial worker to galvanize a collective sense of pride and solidarity among francophones (Bourque and Laurin-Frenette 1972, 234-35). In numerous cultural artifacts, such as films, songs, and literary works, the figure of a francophone worker was depicted as the embodiment of resilience and resistance, triumphing over the Anglo-Saxon economic and cultural domination that had long shaped Québec's history. In a context where many francophone workers were experiencing

the harsh impacts of deindustrialization, nationalist discourse resonated deeply with them, as it provided them with a framework to interpret and articulate their suffering, often attributing blame to anglophone capitalists and factory owners who were perceived as the primary beneficiaries of the province's resources and labour (Polèse 2012, 981).

For numerous workers, this framing served as an economic analysis and as a means of reclaiming dignity and agency within a society where they had long been subordinated. Yet, this convergence between working-class experience and nationalist discourses should not be understood as evidence of a unified or coherent nationalist project. Québec nationalism must be approach as a heterogenous and internally debated formation rather than a singular or coherent project. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that it is articulated through multiple, and at times, competing registers from the elites, popular, institutional and grassroots factions, which generate tensions between different visions of the nation, notably between more inclusive and pluralist understanding and more exclusionary or culturally bounded ones (Dufour et al. 2020, 661; Salée 2022, 126). Evolving political and ideological trends, from the reconfiguration of party politics to debates over secularism and cultural policy, further underscore the fragmented and adaptive character of Québec nationalism in the 21st century (Laniel 2022, 160). Recognizing the plurality allows for a more nuanced understanding of nationalism as a field of negotiation marked by internal contradictions rather than a unified ideological project.[22]

This internal diversity is particularly important for understanding how nationalist narratives could simultaneously articulate working-class grievances while also serving broader political and institutional agendas. Nationalist leaders and movements adeptly tapped into this sentiment, positioning

[22] This dissertation primarily focuses on elite and institutional articulations of Québec nationalism, while also attending to how these are contested, reinterpreted, and mobilized by various social groups, each advancing distinct objectives and aspirations in relation to the national project.

the plight of francophone workers as central to the broader struggle for Québec's self-determination (Bourque and Laurin-Frenette 1972, 36; Bergman 2018). This political maneuvering fostered a sense of solidarity between the labour movement and nationalist politics. Moreover, this connection was reinforced by the linguistic and cultural dimensions of deindustrialization. The transition away from traditional industries made French-speaking workers, who were less likely to have access to education or opportunities in the burgeoning professional sectors dominated by bilingual or anglophone elites, particularly vulnerable. Nationalist rhetoric provided a scapegoat in the form of anglophone dominance and a vision of a future where francophone identity and culture could thrive, free from external exploitation (Saba 1972, 12).

The era of Québec nationalism also marked a pivotal and turbulent phase in the history of settler colonialism in Canada, particularly in the relationship between the federal government and Indigenous peoples. In 1969, the Liberal government under Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Minister of Indian Affairs Jean Chrétien released the *White Paper on Indian Policy*. Ostensibly framed as a progressive step toward equality, the White Paper proposed the complete dismantling of the Indian Act, the end of Indian status, and the transfer of federal responsibilities for Indigenous affairs to the provinces. Behind its rhetoric of "equality" lay a deeply assimilationist agenda, an attempted erasure of Indigenous nationhood, treaties, and inherent rights through the absorption of Indigenous peoples into the Canadian polity. This policy was not an anomaly but a continuation of settler colonial logic, repackaged in liberal terms, that aimed to eliminate Indigenous difference and sovereignty to clear the path for uninterrupted settler access to land and resources. Indigenous communities across the country saw the White Paper not as a break from the colonial past, but as its direct continuation, what Harold Cardinal ([1969] 1999, 128) called a "thinly disguised programme of extermination through assimilation." Cardinal's book, *The Unjust Society* (1969), written in direct response to Trudeau's

proclaimed vision of a "just society," became a touchstone for Indigenous resistance. Cardinal's critique exposed how the state's so-called equality could be achieved only by denying Indigenous peoples their unique histories, laws, cultures, and rights as self-determining nations.

The response to the White Paper by Indigenous communities was swift, widespread, and historically significant. Drawing inspiration from international decolonization struggles and the Red Power movement in the United States, Indigenous leaders and communities across Canada organized to reject the proposal. In 1970, the Indian Association of Alberta, under Cardinal's leadership, issued the *Red Paper* (officially titled *Citizens Plus*). The Red Paper argued that Indigenous peoples were not seeking "special treatment" (Indian Chiefs of Alberta 1970, 203), but the fulfillment of obligations already promised to them through treaties, agreements that the Canadian government had consistently violated. Importantly, the Red Paper reframed the settler-Indigenous relation from one of integration to one of nation-to-nation relationships. It underscored how Indigenous poverty and marginalization were not cultural deficiencies to be corrected, but the direct result of systemic dispossession and colonial policies designed to accumulate wealth and land for settlers (Indian Chiefs of Alberta 1970, 224). By challenging the legitimacy of the settler state's unilateral control over Indigenous futures, the Red Paper asserted Indigenous nationhood on political, legal, and moral grounds. This era witnessed the rise of a new generation of Indigenous leadership, community mobilization, and a growing national consciousness grounded in sovereignty, land rights, and cultural resurgence. Resistance to the White Paper catalyzed a pan-Indigenous political movement that rejected assimilation and demanded the recognition of Indigenous peoples as distinct, self-governing nations within and beyond the Canadian federation. The nationalism articulated by Indigenous communities in the late 1960s and early 1970s marked a new chapter in anti-colonial struggle in Canada.

Although Québec's Quiet Revolution was framed as a liberation from domination, its nationalist resurgence often failed to account for the colonial foundations on which it was built. Despite parallel processes of national reconstruction and state-seeking, Indigenous sovereignty and presence were largely excluded from Québec's collective reimagining. In Québec's emergent nationalist imaginary, Indigenous peoples were cast as distant others, confined to the remote expanses of the North, such as the James Bay region, territories seen as outside the temporal and spatial boundaries of modern Québec. This colonial distancing changed, however, when those northern territories became economically and strategically significant in the early 1970s (Gettler 2017, 12; Hirt and Desbiens 2017, 718). As state and corporate interest in natural resource extraction intensified, Québec redefined its relation to the North, not by recognizing its Indigenous inhabitants and their claim for sovereignty, but by incorporating their lands into the province's spatial and symbolic geography.

This shift was emblematic of a broader settler colonial logic. The slogan, "*Maîtres chez nous*", may have rallied a generation of Québécois seeking emancipation, but it simultaneously reproduced a settler relationship to land and power. The "house" in question was already inhabited. Québec's so-called "conquest of the North" mirrored the dispossessive strategies of the federal government's White Paper, as it prioritized the economic development and territorial sovereignty of the settler nation. As Sioui (2009, 87) argues, the North was appropriated as a new frontier for Québécois nationalism, a resource-rich space to be developed, domesticated, and folded into Québec's national narrative, while the Cree, Inuit, and other Indigenous nations who lived there were rendered politically invisible. This erasure was not only material, through displacement and ecological destruction, but also symbolic. Indigenous histories, political orders, and land relationships were overwritten by a nationalist myth-making that cast the North as part of Québec's historical destiny. In this light, Québec's decolonial

rhetoric was partial and exclusionary: it challenged Anglo-Canadian hegemony while perpetuating the foundational violence of colonial dispossession toward Indigenous nations.

In Montréal, the violent legacy and ongoing colonization were long ignored, but in the 1990s, they were brought to public attention through the 1990 Oka Crisis. The Crisis, while geographically situated in the Mohawk community of Kanesatake, was intimately tied to the urban dynamics of Montréal. The conflict erupted when the town of Oka proposed to expand a private golf course and construct luxury condominiums on Mohawk land that included a sacred burial ground (Carleton and Gabrielle 2018; St-Amand 2015, 34). Indigenous communities resisted this development, which was met with overwhelming force from the settler state; over 4,000 soldiers were deployed to suppress a 78-day occupation (St-Amand 2015, 43). While often remembered narrowly as a land dispute, the Oka Crisis must also be understood as an act of resistance against the violent commodification of Indigenous territory for the leisure and real estate interests of bourgeois Montréalers. The golf course extension was not simply a local development; it was a project that catered to the urban elite, and as such, symbolized a spatial expression of settler entitlement and gentrification, whereas public memory and mainstream commemorations of the crisis tend to depoliticize or erase this classed and urban dimension The narrative often frames the standoff as a tragic misunderstanding rather than as a deliberate act of resistance against ongoing settler-colonial urban expansion (St-Amand 2015, 188).

The crisis laid bare the structural contradictions at the heart of Canadian liberal democracy: the state's claim to reconciliation and equality coexists with its willingness to mobilize military force to protect private property and settler capital. Despite such glaring contradictions, Québec authorities and the city of Montréal have continued to opt for symbolic gestures toward reconciliation without challenging settler colonialism's material foundations. In 2017, during Montréal's 375th anniversary, the city added a white pine tree to the centre of its official flag, declaring that the new emblem

"recognizes the contribution of Indigenous peoples to the city" (Tourisme Montréal 2017). Yet, this tokenistic inclusion did little to address the deeper issue: the continued invisibilization of the Indigenous presence in Montréal. Today, nearly 46,085 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people live in the city, yet there is no major cultural institution run by Indigenous communities to represent their histories and cultures within Montréal's urban landscape (National Association of Friendship Centres 2021, 3). The few Inuit art galleries that exist in Old Montréal are largely commercial ventures, often run by non-Indigenous actors, and primarily serve the tastes and curiosities of tourists rather than Indigenous self-representation (Lecerf 2022). The lessons of the Oka Crisis remain as urgent as ever: reconciliation cannot be achieved through symbolic gestures alone, risking being simply another move to innocence (Tuck and Yang 2012, 9-10). It requires a radical rethinking of land relations, urban development, and the very structures that reproduce settler privilege in the spaces and narratives of the city.

In sum, the Quiet Revolution ushered in significant transformations. From the secularization of institutions to the expansion of the welfare state and the modernization of Québec's economy, it also reinforced the structures of settler colonialism and capitalism that underpinned the province's political order. Despite its emancipatory rhetoric, the rise of Québec's nationalist project did little to resolve the deeper contradictions wrought by deindustrialization. Unemployment persisted in many working-class communities, and the benefits of national renewal remained unevenly distributed, often bypassing those most impacted by economic restructuring. Far from constituting a rupture with colonial history, Québec's reassertion of territorial control extended the logics of dispossession, sidelining Indigenous nations in the pursuit of resource extraction and national development.

The Québécois project of becoming "masters in our own house" thus reconfigured, rather than dismantled, the foundational inequalities of the Canadian settler state. It reimagined Québec as a modern, autonomous nation, but one that continued the attempts to marginalize Indigenous peoples,

from the political community and from the spatial and symbolic landscapes being redefined in this era. These tensions were laid bare in events such as the Oka Crisis, where Indigenous resistance to settler encroachment was violently suppressed and later sanitized in dominant public memory. As the nationalist momentum waned following the referenda defeats of 1980 and 1995, a new political and economic paradigm emerged, one grounded in the logic of neoliberalism. In the decades that followed, Montréal would become a laboratory for this shift, as austerity, privatization, and entrepreneurial urbanism came to define city governance. In working-class neighbourhoods like the Sud-Ouest, the consequences of these transformations were made visible through the gradual intrusion of gentrification reshaping not only the built environment but also the class, racial, and cultural composition of urban life.

4.2.4 Concluding Remarks for the Introduction of Montréal

Through this brief and selective summary of Québec's history, I sought to show the relevance of Montréal for the purpose of this study. Its colonial past, industrialization, and deindustrialization provide the context for the state-seeking demands of the Québécois nation that emerged in the 1960s. Different parts of the city's history, settler colonialism, industrialization, and the growth of nationalism, are layered and intertwined in material manifestations of collective memory, and especially in its memoryscapes. Gentrification in recent decades would add another layer to that landscape, modifying the previously sedimented mnemonic ensemble.

While not extensively discussed above, Québec has been a place of struggle for other minority groups and indigenous peoples. However, there is a tendency in Québec's historiography to minimize or eclipse the histories of these groups, especially when it comes to studying nationalism and state-seeking endeavours. According to Brian Gettler (2017, 7), two theoretical positions in particular are responsible for such obscuring. These two are quite distinct from each other, but overlap and together

reproduce social exclusions. The first one, which can be described as "denialism," tends to refute the legitimacy of minority groups' claims for representation, sometimes going so far as to deny their very existence (ibid, 8). For instance, when it comes to Indigenous people, this rhetorical strategy makes the settler nation appear natural by questioning the historical authenticity of the colonized people. It further attempts to conceal territorial dispossession or present it as "normal and necessary" (Greer 2010, 697). The second, which Gettler (ibid, 11) labels "nationalist conservative," tends to romanticize the story of the Québécois, presenting them as "valiant, stubborn, determined people." This vision retains, for the most part, only the exploits of the "old stock" white *Canadiens-Français/Québécois* and the events in which they were implicated, silencing other histories. While not denying the grievances of other groups in Québec, this perspective tends to downplay or ignore dissonant voices by highlighting the history of *Canadiens-Français* in Québec, making the Québécois nation appear unified and natural. In short, there is no place for holistic and nuanced narratives under such a vision.

The approach that I took in presenting the history of Montréal may sometimes give the impression that I am falling into this second theoretical rhetoric. I do not want, in any case, to minimize or delegitimize the struggles of Indigenous and other minority groups. I am also aware that the theoretical concept of deeply divided cities favours such obscurity regarding the non-majoritarian groups. I want to overcome this drawback of the concept, so in my study of Montréal, I will examine Indigenous people, francophones and anglophones as the three main ethnocultural groups involved in the political arena for state-seeking nationalisms, while looking into the relationships between these groups and other minority communities. The next chapter engages with the voices of groups from various ethnocultural and intersectional backgrounds and the Indigenous people I met in my fieldwork.

4.3 Belfast: Colonial, Industrial and Troubled City

Belfast is an exemplary case of a deeply divided city, marked by protracted clashes between Nationalists and Unionists. The conflict in Northern Ireland finds its origins in a history dating back more than five hundred years. Since then, two ethnocultural groups, whose interests and religions diverged, have struggled to obtain or keep power and land. The Northern Irish conflict, sometimes mistakenly described as purely religious, has gradually evolved into a feud between Nationalists who seek to free Ireland from the British Crown and Unionists who wish to maintain ties with it.[23] This division between Nationalists and Unionists started in the seventeenth century, the Plantation period, when Great Britain allowed many English and Scottish Protestants to settle on the northeast of the island. The Gaels, an ethnolinguistic group native to Ireland, were dispossessed of their lands by the English in this process. The settlers also brought a culture and a religion different from those of the Gaels. Following this, religion became one of the main factors of identity differentiation, which remained salient throughout the phases of industrialization and deindustrialization.

4.3.1 Belfast from the Colonial Plantation to the Capital of Northern Ireland

In the second half of the first millennium BCE, during the Iron Age, the ancestors of the Gaels began to arrive and slowly populate the island of Ireland (Harbison 2002, 69). Around the year 130, Claudius Ptolemy, a Roman astronomer and geographer, drew up a list of the Gael peoples of Ireland, probably

[23] Before examining the Northern Irish conflict, some nomenclature referring to the two antagonist parties involved in this conflict needs clarification. I will, as much as possible, refrain from referring to each group as Catholics and Protestants, respectively. Such codification falsely implies that the conflict has solely revolved around the religious difference, while also erroneously implying that all Catholics and all Protestants have been taking part in it. Therefore, I rather use the terms Nationalists or Republicans to refer to people who believe in a unified Ireland free from British control, and use the terms Unionists and Loyalists to describe the people who want Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom. Historians and commentators suggest that Nationalists seek Irish reunification through negotiation and peaceful methods, while Republicans are more radical and may advocate violence. On the other side of the spectrum, Unionists support the existence of Northern Ireland, its ongoing union with Great Britain and its right to self-government. Loyalists hold a firmer pro-Britain position in the sense that they draw heavily on British nationalism, history, tradition and culture (For more details, see Dunn and Dawson 2000; Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN) 2022).

from the accounts of Gallo-Roman and Britto-Roman sailors who knew the rivers of the island and the geography of its east coast (Duffy 2012, 17). As the population grew, the Gaels established trading relationships with the Roman Empire's messengers, which would later lead to requests for Rome to send Christian missionaries to Ireland. This mission was entrusted to Saint Patrick, who, in 432, began the Christianization of the island. While this episode marked the beginning of external cultural influence and domination, it did not result in a settler colonial system. Roman officials and missionaries left the island after their spiritual and political aims were considered fulfilled (Bartlett 2011, 17).

Colonialism, as the Irish understand and experience it today, began about a millennium later, in 1541, when Henry VIII, King of England, officially assumed the title of King of Ireland.[24] The relationship between the English crown and the Irish people was increasingly defined by conquest, land expropriation, and repression (Bartlett 2004, 85). The Tudor conquest, accelerated under Elizabeth I and James I, imposed foreign rule through military occupation and the legal integration of Ireland into the English state (Bartlett 2011, 80-81). As part of this process, large-scale land confiscations were executed and plantations were imposed, particularly in Ulster, the region that would later become Northern Ireland. The colonial logic was explicit: to pacify and control the island, the English crown transplanted loyal Protestant settlers, mainly from Yorkshire and the Scottish Lowlands, onto lands confiscated from native Irish peasants. Henry VIII's political and theological break with the papacy intensified this colonial project (Bartlett 2011, 74–76). His attempt to reform the Irish Church and extend Anglicanism across the island failed to convert the majority of the population, particularly the

[24] As Stephen Howe argues (Howe 2002, 11), applying "colonialism" to Ireland is far from straightforward and has been the subject of intense debate. Howe insists on distinguishing between colonialism as a system of political rule and colonization as a process of settler implantation that produces enduring structures of inequality. This distinction is particularly useful in the Irish case, where the plantation system, especially in Ulster, aligns closely with colonization in the sense of "population movements… [that] gain significant privileges over other inhabitants" (ibid, 12).

peasantry, who remained steadfastly Catholic. Over time, Catholicism became not merely a religious identity but a marker of cultural and political resistance to foreign domination (ibid., 14). The association of Protestantism with the oppressive English administration intensified sectarian divisions that would echo into the modern conflict in Northern Ireland.

Burdened by repression and displacement, the Irish nobility began to leave the island. The event known as the "Flight of the Earls" (see McCavitt 2002) in 1607 marked the collapse of Gaelic political authority and left Irish peasants even more vulnerable to the expanding colonial project. Within this political vacuum, the English intensified the process of plantation, especially in Ulster. These were not spontaneous migrations but deliberate colonial strategies (Bartlett 2011, 104). Lands were redistributed to Protestant British settlers to alter the demographic, cultural, and political makeup of Ireland. The result was an engineered settler society, deeply unequal and antagonistic. Yet, while the material effects of plantation clearly align with patterns of settler colonialism, the constitutional and ideological framing of Ireland within the English polity complicates any straightforward classification of its status.

Ireland occupied an ambiguous position within imperial typologies (Howe 2002, 20). Unlike overseas colonies, Ireland was often conceived by English authorities as an integral part of a composite monarchy rather than an external possession. According to Sean Connolly (p. 26 quoted in Aveyard 2023, 1144), Ireland is "too physically close and too similar to Great Britain to be treated as a colony, but too separate and too different to be a region of the metropolitan centre; inheriting an undoubted division between settler and native, yet without the racial distinctions that could make these absolute." This ambiguous status did not mitigate the realities of colonial domination on the ground. Rather, it enabled a form of rule in which Ireland could be simultaneously imagined as part of the metropolitan polity and subjected to practices of conquest, dispossession, and coercion more commonly associated with settler colonies. It is precisely in the translation of this structural contradiction into practice that

the coercive and often lethal dimensions of plantation became most visible. Many Irish peasants resisted the seizure of their lands and were brutally repressed. Arthur Chichester, one of the architects of the Ulster plantations, boasted in 1601 of the violence enacted in Belfast and its surroundings: “We have burnt and destroyed along the [Belfast] Lough […] we have killed above over one hundred people of all sorts, besides such as were burnt, how many I know not. We spare none of what quality or sex soever, and it hath bred much terror in the people” (quoted in McVeigh and Rolston 2021). His words expose the underlying logic of elimination that settler colonial theorists like Patrick Wolfe describe as constitutive of such projects: “invasion is a structure, not an event.” (2006, 388)

The subsequent centuries only deepened this colonial relationship. Irish culture and language were explicitly targeted by the colonial state. Irish speakers were marginalized, and Gaelic culture was delegitimized through education, governance, and religious suppression. The Irish language, once dominant, rapidly declined. In 1851, following centuries of marginalization and repression, only 12.7% of the population still spoke Irish (Ó Laoire 2005, 255). After the Great Famine, a tragedy in which colonial policy exacerbated natural disaster and resulted in the death or forced migration of over a quarter of the population, this number dropped further to an all-time low of 3.4% by 1891 (ibid 256). Moreover, the legal system was explicitly designed to privilege Protestant settlers. Penal laws and oaths of allegiance denied Catholics access to political rights, property ownership, and participation in public life unless they renounced their faith (McHugh 2015). This legal framework of exclusion established an enduring system of ethno-religious stratification that institutionalized Protestant dominance, a process that found strong echoes in the British colonial rule of Lower Canada (Rahman et al. 2017, 18). In many ways, this laid the groundwork for what would later become the systematic discrimination of the Irish population under the Unionist-dominated state, known as Northern Ireland, established in 1921.

Despite these deep-rooted colonial dynamics, the conflict in Northern Ireland is rarely analyzed through a colonial lens. In part because the trajectory of Ireland complicates any straightforward colonial analogy. Following the Act of Union in 1801, Ireland was formally incorporated into the United Kingdom, occupying an ambiguous position that blurred the line between colony and integral territory. Northern Ireland in the twentieth century was not juridically a colony in the classical sense and competing claims to self-determination challenged the notion of a singular anticolonial struggle. What emerged instead is a more complex and layered political formation, in which colonial legacies of dispossession and domination coexist with claims of constitutional legitimacy and national belonging (Dháibhéid et al. 2021, 314). In this sense, colonialism in Ireland persists less as a fixed status than as an ongoing cultural and political battleground, shaping disputes over identity, memory, and sovereignty. While the extent to which Ireland should be understood through a colonial framework remains the subject of ongoing scholarly debate, it is nevertheless clear that the historical colonial processes have profoundly shaped the divisions that continue to structure Northern Irish society today. Yet it is precisely this ambiguity, this refusal or difficulty in naming Northern Ireland as unequivocally colonial, that has enabled alternative framings of the conflict to take hold in both academic and popular discourse. Instead, it is often presented in terms of ethnic or religious sectarianism, as a conflict between two communities, often with ‘ancient hatreds.’ This framing obscures the structural causes of inequality and dislocation that stem from the settler-colonial foundations of the state. As McVeigh and Rolston (2021, 65) argue, the exclusion of colonialism from mainstream narratives is itself an act of colonial knowledge production, naturalizing and depoliticizing historical injustice. The selective forgetting of the past reinforces the myth that British rule in Ireland was civilizing rather than extractive and oppressive.

I believe there is thus a strong argument to be made that the Northern Irish conflict cannot be fully understood without reference to its colonial origins. The unequal distribution of land, the demographic engineering of Ulster through plantation, the legal and political disenfranchisement of the native population, and the cultural erasure of Irish identity all correspond to patterns recognized in other colonial contexts. From the imposition of oaths of allegiance to the denial of language rights, from forced displacement to the maintenance of an ethnically privileged settler elite, the case of Ireland, particularly in the North, bears the hallmarks of a sustained colonial enterprise whose legacies persist to this day.

Rather than seeing the conflict as an outgrowth of centuries of dispossession, demographic engineering, and systemic inequality, mainstream narratives tend to reduce it to a sectarian dispute between Unionists and Nationalists. This oversimplification erases the structural conditions underpinning the conflict and obscures the colonial foundations of the Northern Irish state. Overall, we see from this brief summary that the history of Ireland was deeply marked by colonialism and the enduring social inequality experienced by people of Irish descent, which continues to this day. In this light, the religious or nationalist divide that came to symbolize Northern Ireland and its conflict can be seen not as the root cause, but as a symptom and consequence of colonial strategies of divide and rule, demographic engineering, and cultural repression. That colonialism remains an under-studied lens in explaining the Northern Irish conflict speaks to what Former President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins (2021), called a “feigned amnesia” around the uncomfortable aspects of Ireland and Britain’s shared past. In a powerful reflection on the politics of memory, Higgins argues: “while it has been vital to our purposes in Ireland to examine nationalism, doing the same for imperialism is equally important and has significance far beyond British/Irish relations.” His comments resonate deeply with the key problematic of this dissertation: the idea that the colonial past continues to haunt the present,

particularly as Ireland transitioned through industrialization and later into post-industrial decline. Indeed, many of the spatial, economic, and cultural tensions that contemporary Northern Irish society is fraught with, i.e., segregated cities, unequal access to housing and employment, and disputes over historical memory and commemorative space, can be traced back to the settler colonial restructuring of land, labour, and identity imposed by the British state.

The neoliberal redevelopment of post-conflict cities like Belfast, as explored later in this dissertation, has perpetuated these legacies by reproducing spatial and economic inequalities along historically entrenched lines. Working-class nationalist communities remain disproportionately marginalized, while redevelopment projects frequently obscure or overwrite the histories of resistance and trauma embedded in the urban landscape. Bringing colonialism back into the conversation is, therefore, important politically and theoretically. It allows us to recognize how past injustices continue to structure the present, how the violence of colonization lingers in material and symbolic forms, and how contemporary struggles over space, memory, and sovereignty remain bound up with unresolved questions of decolonization. As this dissertation argues, attending to the "haunting" of colonialism, its spectral presence in everyday life, in contested narratives, and in the built environment, is essential for imagining a future that confronts, rather than represses, the structural legacies of imperialism in Northern Ireland.

4.3.2 Industrialism in Belfast: Shipyard and Sectarianism

Despite its geographical proximity, Northern Ireland did not experience the intensive Industrial Revolution that marked eighteenth-century Great Britain. Industrialization was delayed due to several factors, including the lack of raw materials, such as coal and iron, and the imposition of a plantation economy by Great Britain, which kept the country confined to its role as an agricultural annex of its metropolis (Connolly 2012, 40). Nonetheless, Belfast has been historically the most industrialized city

in Ireland, thanks to its strategic geographic location at the mouth of the Farset, a tributary of the Lagan (river crossing Belfast) and also because of its greater concentration of settlers and their economic ties to industrial Britain. In the eighteenth century, Belfast was transformed from a small village to a bustling provincial town (ibid., 41), and the presence of a major port facilitated exports to continental Europe. Belfast even briefly overtook Dublin as Ireland's largest city in the second half of the nineteenth century (Plöger 2007, 7). Belfast experienced an exponential growth of population, from approximately 20,000 in 1800 to 400,000 by the dawn of the First World War (McKee 2008, 91). The city developed its infrastructure to cope with the influx of population, and Victorian buildings were rapidly built, serving as symbols of the city's 'Britishness' and economic opulence, and influencing the landscape to this day. In 1888, it was even officially awarded the title of "City" by Queen Victoria (Rogers 2011, 900).

Belfast's economy was driven by the flax, tobacco, and heavy machinery industries, but it was above all the shipyards that would mark the industrial history of the city. Shipbuilding in Belfast started quietly in 1785, with the incorporation of the Belfast Harbour Commission (Belfast Titanic Society 2013). The creation of the Harbour Commission signaled an early institutional commitment to maritime infrastructure as a driver of urban and industrial growth. The harbour quickly expanded due to the Napoleonic wars between England and France in the early nineteenth century. With the Napoleonic continental blockade, Belfast proved to be a great supplier of ships for England (Lorraine 2018). The commercial exchanges between Ireland and Great Britain increased fivefold between 1785 and 1800 (Livesey 2013, 107), through which Belfast developed its iron industry and the production of large mechanical workshops. These industries were essential preconditions for shipbuilding, as they supplied the materials, skills, and technological capacities required for large vessels. From the beginning of the twentieth century until the end of the Second World War, Belfast contributed a third of the total

industrial production of the whole island (Hoppen 2013, 112). This concentration of industrial capacity made Belfast both an economic engine and a spatial outlier within an otherwise less industrialized Ireland.

In response to this industrial demand, Belfast's port was in constant growth, adding docks to accommodate the rapidly increasing demands. It was within this context of expanding infrastructure and imperial demand that capital consolidation occurred in the shipbuilding sector. In 1861, Edward Harland, an English businessman, bought the shipyard and struck a partnership with Gustav Wolff, a Germano-English entrepreneur, creating the Harland & Wolff (H&W) company, which went on to position Belfast as the shipbuilding city of Great Britain (see Figure 4.4). It had grand ambitions and initiated massive projects of liners that have, since then, become the anchor of Belfast's collective memory and acquired a worldwide reputation. Their most noteworthy creations were the Olympic (1910), the Titanic (1911), and the Britannic (1914). Overall, the H&W made a decisive impact on the material and symbolic industrial landscape of Belfast, structuring both the physical waterfront and the narratives through which the city continues to understand its industrial past.

Yet this industrial ascendancy unfolded within a political context that was far from stable. The imperial structures that sustained Belfast's shipbuilding economy were increasingly contested, and the industrial success collided with the crisis of British rule in Ireland. Following the insurrection of the Easter Rising in 1916, Irish Nationalists, especially in the South but also in Ulster, took the opportunity to extricate themselves from the British colonial empire. The Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) culminated in the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, which formalized the creation of the Irish

Free State, as well as a gerrymandered new state, Northern Ireland, of which Belfast was made the capital. The national question became a thorny and even deadly political issue through these events.[25]

Just like in Montréal, it affected all layers of society, but especially Belfast's industrial sector, which was always divided along ethnonational lines. Violence in the shipyard reached new heights amid the creation of the Northern Irish state. By the time of the Irish War of Independence, the owners wanted a "Protestant state for a Protestant people," echoing the old colonial narrative and openly opposing the growing state-seeking nationalism of Irish Republicans (Edwards 2021, 27). Edward Carson, Ulster Unionist leader, said in his Twelfth[26] speech of 1920, addressed to 25,000 Orangemen in Finaghy: "We must proclaim today clearly that come what will and be the consequences what they may, we in Ulster will tolerate no Sinn Féin[27] – no Sinn Féin organization, no Sinn Féin methods […] And these are not mere words. I hate words without action" (Quoted in Lynch 2008, 379). Following the speech and the appeal to violence, shipyard workers returning from the Twelfth holiday on July 21 were greeted with a notice of a meeting for all Unionist and Protestant workers. The meeting called for the expulsion of all "non-loyal" workers from the shipyards (Parkinson 2004, 33). Immediately

[25] For many Irish republicans, the partition of the island of Ireland has long been understood as tangible evidence of British colonialism. During the early decades of the new state, this interpretation was especially prominent and fuelled the beginning of the Troubles in the 1960, parallelling other emancipation movements worldwide (Howe 2002, 168-170). For more militant strands of Irish nationalists, the partition symbolized not only political division but also the continuation of an unfinished anti-colonial struggle. However, this discourse began to shift in the 1970s following the split within the republican movement, which produced the Official IRA and the Provisional IRA, alongside corresponding divisions in Sinn Féin (Rafter 2005, 99–101). While the Officials initially sustained a more traditional Marxist and anti-colonial take, the Provisionnals, which would become Sinn Féin evolving leadership, gradually moved away from this explicitly revolutionary rhetoric (Howe 2002, 172). By the late twentieth century, Sinn Féin had begun to reframe its political strategy, placing greater emphasis on electoral participation, institutional negotiation, and socio-economic policy. As I demonstrate in Chapter 6, this transition coincided with a broader moderation of its ideological language, including a reduced reliance on colonial analogies and an increasing openness to market-oriented, and at times neoliberal, policy frameworks.

[26] The Twelfth is an Ulster Protestant celebration held on July 12. It began in the late eighteenth century in Ulster, and celebrates the Glorious Revolution, the victory of Protestant King William of Orange over Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne (1690), which ensured a Protestant ascendancy in Ireland (BBC News 2024).

[27] Sinn Féin is the main Nationalist political organization in Ireland and is often used as a synonym for Irish Nationalism. For a long time, it was the political branch of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). As a political organization, it was founded in 1905 and fluctuated in relevance over the following decades. As of the elections, Sinn Féin is now the most important party in terms of vote percentage, both in the Republic of Ireland (2020) and Northern Ireland (2022). However, in neither state do they have a plurality of seats.

afterwards, a Unionist mob went on a riot looking for potential victims. Some Nationalist workers, fearing the worst, left before lunchtime. Some, more unfortunate, were severely beaten. Others, while swimming to safety across the Musgrave Channel, were struck by what was since labelled the "Belfast confetti," a euphemism introduced to the collective memory by poet Ciaran Carson (1989), which refers to iron nuts, bolts, ship rivets and pieces of sharp steel. Catholic relief organizations estimated that during this period known as the first Belfast pogrom, between 8,700 and 11,000 Catholics and some socialist Protestants ("rotten prods") were driven out of their jobs, 23,000 were forced out of their homes, and about 500 Catholic-owned businesses were destroyed (Parkinson 2004, 36). The people who went through these expulsions from the shipyard and their houses were rapidly radicalized and were important in the establishment of the first paramilitary groups stationed in Belfast.

Sectarianism in the shipyard diminished during World War II as a spike in the demand for industrial labour limited discriminatory hiring policies against Catholics (BBC News 2019). Northern Ireland declared itself neutral in the War, but its ports were used by the allies, especially the United States Army, as a place of protection for Atlantic convoys transporting troops, weapons and equipment. The shipyards in Ulster – those in Belfast, Larne and Derry – were also partly converted to manufacturing sites for weapons and war materials. In the H&W yards of Belfast, there were 7,300 workers in 1938, and the total rose to 20,600 by the early 1940s (McCluskie 2013, 89; also see Canning 2019). This heavy production explains why the city was bombarded in 1941 by German forces. In total, 56,622 houses in mainly working-class areas surrounding the factories were hit, 3,200 of which were demolished and another 3,952 severely damaged (Ollerenshaw 2007, 179). The German bombardments devastated Belfast, and the shipyard that dominated the city's landscape was in bad shape, but it was still up and running before the war ended. The demise of Belfast's industrial dominance did not come from wartime destruction, but the postwar reorganization of global production. With the end of the war,

maritime transport lost its privileged position as aviation expanded, and ship manufacturing increasingly shifted to more competitive sites in Asia, particularly Japan, where productivity was higher and costs were lower (BBC News 2019). This structural shift marked the beginning of deindustrialization in Belfast, ushering in widespread economic precarity for industrial workers. These material losses unfolded alongside – and contributed to – escalating ethnocultural conflict, compounding economic and political insecurity.

4.3.3 Belfast's Troubles: An Issue of Deindustrialization

The "Troubles"[28] left deep scars in Northern Ireland, and they remain at the centre of the historical study of this territory. But, just as in Montréal, a thoughtful analysis of the deindustrialization of Northern Ireland can add nuance, depth, and context to the study of this conflict, which is too often represented as a religious one. As in many economies of the Global North, World War II brought an economic boom to Belfast, which continued for a few years into peacetime. Scarcities right after the war created a seller's market for Northern Irish products (Rowthorn 1981, 4). This economic boom was paired with the emerging Keynesian welfare system adapted from the British model, although the social inclusivity of the Keynesian system existed alongside the state's repressive machinery against Nationalists and their social and economic marginalization (Overbeek 2022, 175).

By the late 1950s, however, economic instabilities resurfaced in Belfast. Agriculture, shipbuilding, and linen industries declined. In addition, Northern Ireland's policies of social redistribution were rapidly terminated, as the Keynesian state's welfare policies were funded by corporate taxes. This proved disastrous for working-class people (Cebeulla and Smith 1995, 81). The

[28] The term "the Troubles" is a euphemism used by people to describe the conflict between Nationalists and Unionists (1968-1998). The terms Troubles and Northern Ireland conflict have been used interchangeably (Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN) 2022).

industries in the city had a long history of keeping workers' situation more precarious than the national average, both in terms of wages and security of the working environment (ibid, 81-82). The industrial crisis in the late 1950s further deepened the working-class precarity and in a way fuelled the conflict between Nationalists and Unionists (Overbeek 2022, 178).

Belfast's industrial sector reached an all-time low in terms of employment. The unemployment rate in the 1950s ranged persistently from three to five times the national average. Income per capita in Northern Ireland was also less than two-thirds of the British average in 1959-1960 (Holmans 1965, 3; Steed and Thomas 1971, 346). The government was slow to recognize the extent of the problem and reluctant to intervene on an appropriate scale. Loyalist/Unionist politicians equated public support for businesses with public support for socialism (Birnie and Brownlow 2023, 1). They refused, for the first time, to bail out the struggling H&W and mistakenly hoped that there would be an economic opportunity for Northern Ireland's private sector to gain some momentum. However, local capital was unable to embark on the restructuring and recapitalization of the shipyard (McCusker 1975).

This incapacity was rooted in the historical trajectory of capitalist investment in Northern Ireland. The political conditions surrounding the creation of the Northern Irish state inhibited the emergence of a locally rooted bourgeoisie capable of sustaining autonomous economic development. Upper-middle-class families, predominantly Unionist, showed little interest in building an economy that could support either an "independent nation or a region within a nation" (Cebeulla and Smith 1995, 82). Instead, capital accumulation was oriented outward: investment flowed primarily toward England, where returns were perceived to be higher and political-economic ties more secure. As a result, Northern Ireland developed not as a self-sustaining industrial economy, but as a peripheral appendage of the British economic core. In response to this structural absence of local investment, successive Northern Irish governments prioritized the attraction of foreign capital, particularly from the United

States. By the early 1960s, foreign firms had come to dominate key industrial sectors, further entrenching patterns of external dependence rather than fostering endogenous growth (ibid., 82). This reliance on external capital limited the state's capacity to shape long-term industrial strategy and left the regional economy especially vulnerable to global market shifts.

Within this context, however, the primacy of the H&W shipyard in Belfast's economy could not be ignored. As one of the few remaining large-scale employers and a cornerstone of Unionist working-class identity, the shipyard became an exceptional case within an otherwise laissez-faire industrial policy. The H&W was therefore among the few firms to receive sustained state protection (ibid., 83). This intervention was driven by economic considerations, and by mounting political pressure from working-class Unionists, who increasingly expressed anger at governmental inaction and threatened to abandon the ruling Ulster Unionist Party if the shipyard were allowed to fail. Confronted with the risk of grassroots backlash, successive governments opted to preserve the shipyard through public support.

Rather than preventing industrial decline, this strategy produced what McCusker (1975) describes as a form of "soft" deindustrialization: a slow, state-managed contraction intended to delay closures, diffuse political responsibility, and shield public authorities from direct blame. While this approach temporarily postponed the most visible social consequences of industrial collapse, it failed to address the structural conditions underpinning economic decline, thereby fuelling entrenching long-term precarity and political instability. Successive governments did attempt to mitigate these effects by promoting the development of new industries, yet these initiatives proved insufficient to offset the scale of industrial job losses and subsequent outward migration. During the 1950s, fully one-third of all school leavers were compelled to emigrate in search of work (Rowthorn 1981, 5). Although this exodus affected both Protestant and Catholic communities, Catholics were disproportionately represented

among emigrants, reflecting the uneven distribution of economic vulnerability across the sectarian divide (ibid., 5).

The H&W was gradually downscaled, and the consequences were drastic, especially in East Belfast, where most of the workers resided. A quarter of the residents living in the factory's surrounding neighbourhoods had to move to overcrowded spaces (Lawson 2020, 52). As a result, and on account of growing discontent over the economic decline, the city witnessed growing clashes between the two majoritarian communities (Overbeek 2022, 178).

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the conflict in Northern Ireland descended into a civil war.[29] The proximity between Republicans and Loyalists on the land that they each claim as their own led to violent conflicts over the autonomy and independence of Ireland. The economic, social, and political discrimination suffered by Nationalists also triggered clashes. When unemployment figures are disaggregated into separate rates for 'Catholics' and 'Protestants,' it is not hard to grasp that "unemployment becomes a significant causal mechanism for the intensity of conflict" (Honaker 2010, 17). The outbreak of sectarian conflict, therefore, needs to be viewed in the context of the profound economic crisis that Northern Ireland went through in the 1960s, as well as the long-standing political turbulence surrounding colonialism and nationalism. It is no coincidence that the unrest has been more violent in Belfast and Derry, the two largest industrial centres in Northern Ireland. Job loss primarily affected heavy industrial neighbourhoods, such as Ballymacarrett, right beside the H&W shipyard, but also Ardoyne in North Belfast and the Shankill and the Falls in West Belfast, which would soon become the sites of particularly intense sectarian violence. The high unemployment levels in many

[29] The causes of the Troubles are widely debated in the literature and have been attributed to entrenched sectarian inequalities, residential and educational segregation, discriminatory state practices and constitutional disputes. While these factors are undeniably significant and often mutually reinforcing, the following analysis foregrounds deindustrialization as a critical, though comparatively underexamined, structural condition that intensified social precarity, reconfigured class relations, and amplified existing political and sectarian tensions.

working-class urban areas had a more direct impact on the conflict, as those unemployed workers represented a never-ending recruitment pool for the paramilitary organizations (Sheehan and Tomlinson [1999] 2020, 91). As more and more unemployed working-class members joined these organizations, the geographic proximity between members of the two conflicting communities became far more problematic.

With growing economic problems that fuelled armed conflict in the city, urban planning from the 1970s was reshaped in direct response to militia warfare and the state's security agenda. In order to 'contain' violence and limit the movement of hostile groups, local authorities, often working in consultation with British military planners, introduced "peace lines," physical barriers separating 'Catholic districts' from 'Protestant districts.' While officially presented as a pragmatic measure to reduce tensions, these walls were also embedded in a broader apparatus of state surveillance and spatial control. In many Nationalist areas, and particularly in working-class enclaves like the Short Strand in East Belfast, the urban landscape became a zone of constant observation. Watchtowers, army patrols, and CCTV were supplemented by the less formal, but equally pervasive, monitoring carried out by loyalist paramilitaries on the other side of the walls (Boal 2002, 693). For residents of the Short Strand, this meant living under a form of spatial siege, where everyday movements could be read as political acts and access to certain streets, jobs, or leisure spaces was constrained by both physical barriers and the threat of violence. These forms of surveillance and containment were not unprecedented; rather, they expressed a much longer history of coercive urban management in Belfast, from early twentieth-century sectarian riots to mid-century "slum clearance" schemes that disproportionately displaced Catholic communities (see McVeigh 1994 for personal accounts of surveillance in both communities). Paramilitary control over neighbourhood life, coupled with police monitoring, thus represented the continuation of older processes in which housing policy, policing, and territorial intimidation worked

together to regulate who could live where and under what conditions. Such spatial division also shaped labour markets. Employers, wary of crossing community lines, often avoided hiring from the 'other side,' thereby reinforcing economic segregation. As stated in the 2023 report, *The Cost of Division*: "many services in NI [Northern Ireland] are duplicated with estate agents, public houses, solicitors, chemists, banks, indeed virtually every kind of service, doubled up, with one serving each community" (Roulston et al. 2023, 2). For young men in both Nationalist and Unionist working-class districts, the lack of viable employment pathways made paramilitary work more attractive, not simply as a livelihood, but as a means of earning status and protection within the community. Across numerous working-class communities, this type of segregation translated into restricted routes to employment centres, duplicated and often underfunded social facilities, and a reliance on tight-knit community networks for safety and survival (Lawson 2019). Segregated districts became not just defensive zones but also repositories of collective identity, where the intergenerational transmission of historical memories was reinforced by the material reality of enclosure. This built environment became a living archive of conflict, encoding trauma and identity into the city's geography.

If the 1970s marked the highest level of armed violence in the city, the 1980s saw the conflict move to the political arena. Armed violence decreased in favour of a competition for political/electoral representation. Subsequently, and until the signing of the peace agreement in 1998, the conflict was fought mainly on the political scene, even if armed violence was still present. This shift had important consequences for the working class on both sides, and this transition proved to be difficult for both. As Roy Johnston (2006, 219) points out, until then, numerous members of the working class served as paramilitary soldiers, and these people struggled to embrace and adjust themselves to the new form of nationalist politics (Sanders 2009, 98). It was difficult for them to translate the respect they had earned through a paramilitary role into political votes.

The decreased level of violence and the overall shift towards a political fight, however, opened the door for the mythification and memorialization of each nationalist group. Just like in Québec, the working class, which was most affected by deindustrialization and the ethnocultural conflict, became the central group of the new nationalist mythos. Working class members appeared in numerous poems, songs, books and, of course, murals (Figure 4.5), although similar to Québec, the memory-making process was heavily gendered (McDowell 2008, 336). Women's role in the conflict and in the peace-building processes was often overlooked and buried in collective amnesia. As Janice Monk (1992, 124) argues, memory landscapes are inevitably gendered; they propagate specific ideas about men and women, assign their roles within the national polity, and naturalize heteropatriarchy. Commemorative landscapes – especially those related to war and conflict – are among the most gendered, as they tend to be preoccupied with the experiences and narratives of men (Muzaini and Yeoh 2005, 466). National memories, as Cynthia Enloe ([1989] 2014, 93) makes clear, are often a "masculinized memory" revolving around "masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope." Such a tendency is ubiquitous in every modern nation-state, but it is especially strong when nations emerge from conflict. These countries often attempt to restore the ideals of masculinity (Ashe 2006, 151), such as physical strength and bravery. As I examine in Chapter 6, Belfast's 'post-conflict' landscape conveys heavily gendered narratives.

Belfast has become a terrain where opposing memories coexist and strive for legitimacy. People who identify with one of the two opposing ethnocultural groups have sought to appropriate and occupy urban space to manifest their identities and make their memories and their version of the past visible in the city. Despite the signing of the peace agreement, the nationalist conflict remains alive and salient. Because of memory's relevance in Belfast, paramilitaries and their political counterparts have tried to seize the commemorative landscape. As Graham and Whelan state (2007, 492), each group has

produced “fixed and permanent memorials to their partial, selective, ethnonationalist narratives that integrate the Troubles into a linear discourse of the struggle of an oppressed people.” In doing so, the working class’s history has been inscribed into landscapes, with workers represented as national heroes, prisoners of the industrial era, members of the paramilitary, and/or prisoners of the armed conflict.

4.3.4 Concluding Remarks for the Introduction of Belfast

The social and cultural legacies of deindustrialization were closely intertwined with those of the ‘Troubles,’ and the study of deindustrialization has much to add to the present understanding of their origins, outcomes, and legacies. The modern history of Belfast should be understood as the history of a city which suffered through two simultaneous, interconnected tragedies. The history of Ireland and Belfast has been fraught with strife between the two majoritarian communities, stemming originally from the conflict between settlers and the colonized. Researchers demonstrated that the conflict in Belfast, even if it has rested on a religious opposition, is far from being only theological. It was also driven by colonial-capitalist dispossession and resultant uneven development. As in Montréal, deindustrialization deteriorated the already conflict-ridden ethnocultural relations in Belfast, and the massive unemployment of the 1960s and 1970s allowed the ‘Troubles’ in Belfast to reach the proportions we know today. In a state where social policies had not been fully developed and where prime ministers like Margaret Thatcher further undermined the already faulty welfare state by cutting services, the paramilitary service was appealing to the unemployed. Economic historian Jim Tomlinson (2016, 76) contends that deindustrialization should be approached as the “meta-narrative” of post-war British history. As I have shown, the impact of deindustrialization is not only in the remaking of the UK economy, but also in the reshaping of society, politics, and culture. It has torn communities apart, changed the physical landscape beyond recognition, and accelerated pre-existing ethnic, racial, class and gendered inequalities. As we shall see next, neoliberal redevelopment projects like the TQ,

designed to be physical manifestations of the ‘peace dividend’ in Belfast, are the quintessence of the cultural politics of deindustrialization (Hodson 2019, 226); these projects often exploit the appeal of industrial heritage and nostalgia while excluding working-class communities from the very spaces that they helped build. These sites are the perfect encapsulation of the complex ways in which the legacies of the ‘Troubles’ and post-industrialization are intertwined in contemporary Belfast.

Chapter 5: Gentrification and the Politics of (In-)Visibility in Montréal's Sud-Ouest

Un peu d'éducation
Mais manquant d'affection
On d'vient des endurcis
À Saint-Henri[30]
- Raymond Lévesque

5.1 Introduction

À Saint-Henri le 26 août, a documentary released in 2011, illustrates the social and physical changes in *Saint-Henri*, a working-class neighbourhood and the most populated of the Sud-Ouest borough in Montréal, observing its "fast-paced gentrification" (Fesdjian 2017, 47; my translation). Combining the work of sixteen different cinematographers, this colourful journey through the semi-industrial neighbourhood pays homage to Hubert Aquin's 1962 film, *À Saint-Henri le 5 septembre*, itself inspired by Gabrielle Roy's novel *Bonheur d'occasion* (Tin Flute, 1945). It was filmed on a single summer day, capturing the daily life of the bustling working-class neighbourhood. People are shown moving through Saint-Henri's streets, steam tunnels, train tracks, and the central canal. The documentary addresses gentrification and the livelihoods lost in an empathic way. When compared with its inspiration, Acquin's film, the differences are striking, not only in landscapes, which have drastically changed since 1962, but also in the diversity of stories that are told. Acquin's documentary and Roy's novel both tell the story of the white French-speaking Québécois and their struggle to challenge and adapt to deindustrialization. These two *oeuvres* have been central to the social image of the Sud-Ouest, which has been perceived as one of the main sites of struggles for Québécois nationalism. The 2011 documentary challenges this perspective, integrating a diversity of voices in the neighbourhood into its visual narratives. We hear from Indigenous and Afro-descendant people who have always been present

[30] Too little education / Missing a lot of affection / We become tough / in Saint-Henri

in Montréal's Sud-Ouest, but who until then had been excluded from the collective memory of the neighbourhood. Inspired by the documentary, I have two objectives in this chapter. First, I examine the gentrification of the borough and the ways it has been challenged by activists and working-class communities of the Sud-Ouest. Second, I disentangle the relationship between nationalism and de- and post-industrialization in this geographical context. As mentioned in Chapter 4, during the Quiet Revolution, white francophone workers were elevated to mythical figures, symbolizing resistance to the hegemony of English-speaking capitalists. This nationalist narrative has placed them at the centre of the struggle for Québec's economic and cultural emancipation. This mythification, however, seems to have obscured the structural reality of their condition. I employ the word 'myth' here as it represents a constructed narrative that elevates the symbolic role of white working-class Quebecers in the post-Quiet Revolution era, often at the expense of acknowledging the material realities they faced. Myths are not necessarily falsehoods; rather, they are selective interpretations of reality that serve ideological purposes.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. First, I present my thoughts and expand on my positionality in Montréal, followed by an examination of the accelerated gentrification in the Sud-Ouest and the city government's role in it. Second, reflecting on interviews and photographs I took during my fieldwork, I analyze the repercussions of gentrification on the landscape and working-class communities of the borough, which have seen substantial alterations to their 'ways of living,' and have still developed both subtle and more explicit ways to problematize gentrification. Third, I discuss how this white francophone workers' myth is inscribed into the landscape and deconstruct the nationalist, colonialist and neoliberal undertones of this mystification.

5.2 Fieldwork in Montréal: Colonialism and Other Challenges

If academics like Beaud and Weber (2010, 54) urge researchers to delve into self-analysis, it is because the nature of fieldwork involves certain methodological and epistemological biases on the side of researchers. These biases emanate from the place they occupy in the field and in relation to the people they interact with. Some believe that conducting research in a *milieu* known by the researcher, so-called "insider research" (Dwyer and Buckle 2009, 56), could potentially attenuate the distance between the researcher and research objects and biases arising from it. But, as I discussed in Chapter 3, biases are inherent to any academic work, so understanding their effects on research is essential, whether it is insider or outsider research. This section discusses the issues arising from my dual position as a researcher and a community member. Working in 'your own backyard' comes with great advantages and just as many inconveniences and complexities. Below, I want to show how being a 'local' provides interesting opportunities, but obscures power dynamics between the researcher and the researched (Narayan 1993). I also engage with the unlearning process that I had to go through regarding my settler status. Lastly, I address the complexity of leaving the fieldwork.

My position as a 'local' often reduced the distance between researcher and the researched, which sometimes had crucial benefits. Some people were more eager to share their experiences with me because I was a 'local,' but the duality of my position also led to more comments on my unique status. Interviewees often reminded me of my semi-stranger position, though most often in the form of humour. One interviewee (C. Taylor, Interviewed June 15, 2023) remarked, "Anyway, you're only here to observe, right!" Or, when a word or gesture went beyond what the interviewees would normally say in a more formal setting, it took the form of injunctions, such as "You don't put that in your report, haha!" With all that said, I believe there are still practical advantages to studying your own city. I obviously benefited from the various contacts I already had. While I did not interview any friends or

relatives, they generously put me in contact with people that they knew could either serve as participants or help me gather information. My relatives and friends in Montréal became the starting point of a "snowball" methodology that grew much more rapidly than it did in Belfast. Those that I interviewed earlier also recommended other potential participants: "Have you thought of reaching out to Action Gardien"[31] (M-C Rose, Interviewed November 26, 2021), or, "Yeah, I think my former colleague could help you with this. Let me give him a call" [32] (A-M Rideux, Interviewed December 14, 2021). When I first contacted some participants, especially francophone ones, they were hesitant to speak to someone "from Toronto." When they learned that I grew up in Québec, however, some rapidly changed their stance and were willing to talk to me.[33] This contrasts with my experience in Belfast, where, as I discuss in the next chapter, residents were more hesitant and reserved when I approached them, probably because of my status as an outsider and due to their research fatigue.

On the other hand, I was also a source of ambiguity, leading some participants in Montréal to draw a somewhat strong line between themselves and me. My position as an "insider" researcher should not obscure other processes of differentiation that exist between my research participants and me. Coming from or living in the same town does not attenuate power dynamics ingrained in unequal gender, racial, class and other relations (Narayan 1993, 671). This was the point made by Malian anthropologist Mamadou Diawara (1985), who developed the concept of "mechanistic vision" According to him, "Africanist research navigates between two pitfalls: that of classical ethnology, for which distancing is the source of objectivity, and that of nationals who claim the monopoly on

[31] Original: As-tu pensé de contacter Action Guardien
[32] Original: Ouais, je pense que mon ancien collègue pourrait t'aider. Je peux l'appeler.
[33] Getting in contact with francophones proved to be a little bit easier. Out of the 22 interviews I completed in Montréal, 16 were with francophones. My linguistic situation surely played a role in this outcome. Given my education and socialization as a francophone Québécois, I always contacted community organizations in French without really thinking about it. I was also naturally more aware of community organizations known and used mostly by the francophone community. Even if most community organizations and private businesses in the Sud-Ouest are effectively bilingual, it was more convenient for me to make the first contact in French.

scientific truth, in the name of their very cultural belonging" (ibid., 17). He called these two approaches a "mechanistic vision" of the relationship of the researcher and the researched, rejecting the validity of both. That is, he refuted the idea that insider research could mitigate biases, or that outsider research guarantees objectivity. At the beginning of my field research in the two cities, I fell into these beliefs, but as I read more on the topic and deepened my field research, it became clear that the degree of belonging to a society is a relative question, and the dichotomy between insider and outsider is debatable. It cannot be a stable opposition. Narayan (1993) spoke against the distinction between "native" and "non-native" researchers. She showed that, whatever the link they share with the people they study, researchers are necessarily in contact with diverse identities in their fields, and that the familiarity of the location where the study is conducted cannot be seen as reducing power imbalances. It reminded me that it must be acknowledged that other researchers, who are not white cisgender men like me, do not benefit from the same 'insider status' I had, even if they are also from Montréal (ibid., 677). Furthermore, Augé also argued that opposition between insiders and outsiders reifies the idea that studied communities are homogeneous wholes (Augé 1989, 18). A researcher's bond of belonging to a society cannot mean that the researcher shares the entire cultural space of the respondents, nor that the researchers can only place themselves in a relationship of otherness or proximity to the society they study and not in-between. These scholarly inquiries into the insider/outsider dyad helped me approach the field with greater sensitivity to my own positionalities and those of my research participants.

More practically, researching your own city also comes with some pitfalls. I came back to my city with preconceptions about certain events and discourses. It became necessary for me to try to bring out the unknown from the usual or the expected and go beyond familiarity with the field. To achieve this, I focused on reflexivity, questioning myself about what, at first glance, might seem obvious and indistinctive to me. The standpoints and interpretations that my research participants shared with me

during interviews helped me unlearn what I thought I already knew. In this way, 'obvious' and 'trivial' elements at the start of the research subsequently turned out to be fundamental for the reproduction of nationalist discourses. I have also endeavoured, as Garfinkel (2001, 35, my translation) suggests, to always be attentive to the "overwhelming mass of details" in field research and to deconstruct it. Having been socialized within Québec's educational system, I was taught and nurtured by a very narrow and nationalist historical viewpoint. I do not single out Québec's educational system in this process, as I believe every national education curriculum is designed to promote particular nationalist interests as universal ideals of a given territory. In Québec, and arguably most states, these historical narratives take on particularly patriarchal, racist and settler colonial qualities. I started to deconstruct those narratives while I was in CÉGEP[34] and throughout my university studies, and I am still unlearning some 'myths' innate to these narratives. Deconstruction of these biases is a never-ending process.

Regarding these nationalist narratives, the representation of the Sud-Ouest borough is a perfect example of problematic myth-building. Today, under the catch-all and problematic term '*quartier populaire*' (people's neighbourhood), the Sud-Ouest is presented as *the* historic area where the white French-Canadian working-class overcame exploitation and oppression by anglophone industrialists. As I point out later in this chapter, this interpretation is a key trait of the place identity sought by gentrifiers, and it explains why the memory landscape of the Sud-Ouest is as it is. As landscape theorists have demonstrated, the landscape is a physical manifestation of societal ideologies, such as national ideals. And in the case of the Sud-Ouest, the myth is of the white francophone industrial

[34] CÉGEP is an acronym for *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel* (College of General and Professional Education). It is a public educational establishment where the first level of higher education is provided. Contrary to the other provinces of Canada, in Québec, the last year of high school and the first year of university have been combined to provide a new preparatory program to enter either university programs or the job market.

worker. As I argue later, this framing of history centring on the white francophone workers silences the historical presence of marginalized communities, such as Afro-descendant families and Indigenous people, and the roles played by working-class women. Deconstructing these myths requires a long-term engagement with the community that persists long after the formal data collection ends. This ongoing connection highlights the distinct ethical challenges faced by the insider researcher.

For Drew, the insider researcher cannot simply drop in, take what they need, leave a mess behind, and let someone else deal with the ripple effects of their research, like an outsider researcher, although it cannot be said that exiting fieldwork is easy or requires fewer preparations for an outsider, either. An insider researcher *may* be more invested in the community and hope to remain a part of said community after their research is completed. Exiting the fieldwork in Montréal revealed issues that I did not experience in Belfast. Ortiz (2004), for instance, developed strong relationships with his participants, so much so that he became increasingly absorbed in his research subjects' experiences and turned into a compulsive data collector who refused to leave his field. I did not reach such a level of proximity, yet I still went walking in the Sud-Ouest every time I was back in Montréal until 2023 in case I missed something. I am also still in contact with some participants who sometimes send me emails checking in or forwarding newspaper articles that they think could help my research. For instance, Benoît, who oversees a newsletter on the history of the neighbourhood, has sent me copies of the newsletter from time to time. I realized that doing research in one's own city calls for a more thoughtful way of exiting one's fieldwork because there is a chance that the researcher will reencounter some participants. Before returning to Toronto, I made one final round of emails and phone calls to participants to let them know I was leaving and to see if they wanted to add something to their interviews. Some of them shared their thoughts about the future of the research and the city. That did facilitate my departure, especially given they knew I would be back in Montréal at some point.

5.3 Gentrification in Montréal's Sud-Ouest

Gentrification became part of the urban landscape of the Sud-Ouest since the 1970s (Lavoie-Ricard et al. 2017, 7). In the early stage of gentrification, sporadic renovations of old housing was prominent, but from the 2000s, with the implementation of major development projects aimed at revitalizing public spaces, gentrification accelerated (Renaud et al. 2006; Bélanger 2010; Twigge-Molecey 2014). These urban transformations brought in middle- and upper-class people into the neighbourhood and had deleterious consequences for existing working-class communities, such as the reduction in affordable housing, the increase in rent prices, the closure of social services, and the increase in social tensions. These are still a significant source of concern for working-class people of the Sud-Ouest today (Solidarité Saint-Henri 2020; P.O.P.I.R 2021), especially as the demography of the place has rapidly transformed with a massive displacement of economically and socially vulnerable populations (Twigge-Molecey 2014; Solidarité Saint-Henri 2014; 2020).

By compiling data from various researchers, community organizations, and Statistics Canada (Solidarité Saint-Henri 2014; 2020; Twigge-Molecey 2014; Ville de Montréal 2021), Étienne Tardif-Paradis (2021, 24–26) charted the demographic changes in the borough over the last 30 years. According to his research, in Saint-Henri the percentage of residents holding a university diploma increased by 32.6% from 1996 to 2016. The growth in average income per household exploded by 102.9% and the number of homeowners grew by 214.6%, while renters increased by 19.2%. The distribution of households according to their income group also shows a growing inequality in the neighbourhood. Households earning $80,000 or more increased by 21.4% between 1995 and 2015,

while households earning less than $20,000 experienced a significant decrease of 34.2% over the same period, a trend signaling a significant displacement of the existing communities (ibid, 24-26).[35]

These transformations are not incidental but structurally mediated. The following sections examine how municipal policies, from zoning incentives to cultural district branding, have actively accelerated this process, aligning Sud-Ouest with Montréal's neoliberal urban agenda. For the borough, this has meant the erosion of its working-class identity and the fragmentation of its social fabric; for this dissertation, it exemplifies how gentrification operates as a state-led project, where nationalist narratives (e.g., Québécois 'revitalization') and capitalist imperatives converge to reshape urban space. By tracing these dynamics, the analysis challenges depoliticized accounts of gentrification, revealing instead how it is orchestrated through policy and contested through grassroots resistance.

5.3.1 Montréal's Sud-Ouest: Nationalist Ideals and Social Sanitization

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the deindustrialization of Montréal is best understood as a long, uneven process that continues to evolve, reflecting broader global trends while also retaining local particularities. The process of deindustrialization in Montréal began in the 1950s, as the city faced significant economic shifts. Once a thriving industrial hub, Montréal had developed a strong manufacturing base during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its factories and ports were central to the Canadian economy, producing goods for both domestic and international markets. However, the post-war economic landscape ushered in new challenges. The decline of traditional industries, the rise of global competition, and the relocation of manufacturing to lower-cost regions signalled the start of Montréal's gradual deindustrialization. During this period, many factories began

[35] While these data refer only to Saint-Henri, the most populous neighbourhood of the Sud-Ouest, other data also show that a similar process has been happening in the other neighbourhoods of the Sud-Ouest.

closing or relocating, leading to significant job losses and urban transformations. The 1970s and 1980s accelerated these changes as technological advancements and the globalization of trade reshaped the city's economy. Key industries like textiles, steel, and machinery, which had dominated Montréal's industrial output, faced growing competition from overseas. At the same time, suburbanization and the construction of major infrastructure projects, such as highways and bridges, contributed to the decentralization of industry. Companies moved to suburban areas, other provinces, or abroad, leaving behind vacant factories and run-down neighbourhoods, accompanied by a significant rise in unemployment.

Unlike in other industrial cities, however, Montréal's industrial sector never completely disappeared. The city's economy diversified, with growth in the service and technology sectors in the late twentieth century. Still, pockets of industrial activity persisted, particularly in areas like the east end port and refineries and some of the manufacturing areas along the Lachine Canal, with a significant number of workers in manufacturing, food processing, and logistics. Today, while Montréal is no longer the manufacturing powerhouse it once was, remnants of its industrial past continue to shape its economic landscape. This chapter reflects on this partial and uneven process by foregrounding the experiences of multiple generations of industrial workers. Echoing Walter Benjamin's *Angel of History*, it argues that deindustrialization in Montréal must be understood not as a completed rupture but as a slow-moving and intergenerational process. The transition from an industrial to a post-industrial city has therefore not been linear: mixed-use developments coexist with active industrial sites, and remaining industrial operations continue to provide employment while sustaining material and symbolic links to the city's industrial past. This ongoing coexistence helps explain why some residents seek to protect both the memory and the continued presence of industry, and why they challenge narratives that portray Montréal's transition to a post-industrial economy as complete.

Yet this ongoing coexistence of industrial continuity and post-industrial transformation did not shield workers or neighbourhoods from the profound social and economic dislocations produced by deindustrialization. The economic hardship was worsened under Mayor Jean Drapeau in the late 1960s, whose regime is viewed as a precursor to neoliberal urban governance (Paul 2004, 574). It is almost as if he foresaw the restructuring of municipal finance and administration that occurred in response to the accelerating global interurban competition that would become widespread and fiercer in the 1980s onwards. Throughout his tenure, which spanned from the 1950s to the mid-1980s (with a 3-year break in between), Drapeau's main mantra, as expressed in numerous speeches, was to transform Montréal into a true "international city" (Drapeau 1967, my translation). He successfully ran the campaign to host the 1967 World's Fair (i.e., Expo 67) and the 1976 Summer Olympics, which are still perceived as successful feats in Québec's collective memory. What is too often left out of the collective memory, however, is the harsh process of sanitization that preceded those two mega-events. Between 1960 and the opening of the Expo in 1967, Mayor Drapeau embarked on a drastic transformation of the Sud-Ouest borough. For instance, his team expropriated and razed the neighbourhood of Goose Village to make way for a new stadium and parking. The team also created the "morality squadron" (*Escouade de la moralité*), a special police unit that enforced 'good morals' in the city. This squadron's presence was concentrated mainly in two places, i.e., *The Village*[36] in the Centre-Sud borough and some neighbourhoods in the Sud-Ouest (Lapointe 2019). An intense wave of repression against gambling houses, bars and taverns followed. Violent raids on bars in the Village and the Sud-Ouest were frequent and arbitrary arrests were numerous.

[36] Initially a working-class area, the Village gained popularity among the gay and lesbian community as a result of the relocation of numerous 2SLGBTQ+ people and businesses there from other areas of the city in the 1960s and 1970s. The area has seen tremendous gentrification, in part because of major investment from all levels of government and the tourism promotion of the 2SLGBTQ+ community in Montréal. The squadron accounted for numerous raids in gay bars following Mayor Drapeau's openly homophobic discourses.

These developments all stemmed from the idea that the Sud-Ouest needed to transition quickly from an industrial to a post-industrial borough. Drapeau worked hard to convince the federal government to hand over control of the areas surrounding the shores of the Canal Lachine so that he could change its land use. Despite Drapeau's appeal, the Federal government retained control of the Canal shores and transformed them into a national historic site: a park and a commemorative trail titled *The Cradle of Industrialization*. While it kept control of the shores, the Federal Government also agreed to let go of some of the land to the City (Parc Canada 2014; Agence Parcs Canada 2024). The 1989 CREESOM[37] report describes numerous zoning deregulations between 1981 and 1986, altering the land use from industrial to residential, thereby paving the way for condo developments (CREESOM 1989, 257). City Hall also entered the real estate market directly when it acquired the main Stelco facility to the east of the Atwater market, which it later sold to a private residential developer at a hefty profit. In addition, the City gave out vacant lands in the city to developers as part of its "Opération 20,000 logements" (Operation 20,000 units), a strategy that was enacted in 1979 and extended through 1987, to encourage access to property, especially for the new urban middle-class that had emerged during the 1970s (Service de l'urbanisme, Ville de Montréal 1983). The Sud-Ouest accounted for over 20% of the new-build construction in this scheme, mostly in the form of factory rehabilitation (CREESOM 1989, 275).

Montréal's transformation under Mayor Jean Drapeau was inseparable from the nationalist restructuring that swept Québec during the 1960s. As noted earlier, the nationalist renewal was marked by a decisive departure from rural farmlands toward a concerted investment in the urban core, symbolizing both economic modernization and cultural self-assertion. For many nationalist intellectuals, the large-scale interventions in the Sud-Ouest were framed as 'necessary evils' for

achieving the vision of a modern Québécois nation. This logic was not unique to Québec; much of the Western world was undergoing a structural shift from manufacturing to service-based economies (Broadway 1995, 2–4) in this period, elevating post-industrial development as the supposed *telos* of national progress. As Benoît Larouche, retired political science professor from the University of Ottawa, later reflected, "For the ones behind the Quiet Revolution, the city was not just the engine of the economy; it was the receptacle in which the modern Québécois identity would be forged. But like any receptacle, it destroys more than it preserves" (Interviewed November 17, 2021, my translation).

Many working-class communities in the Sud-Ouest found themselves at the sharp end of this shift. The closure of factories like the Canada Malting plant and CN's Pointe-Saint-Charles shops brought unemployment and social dislocation, yet the nationalist narrative offered by the Parti Québécois (PQ) reframed these losses as the inevitable outcome of an exploitative Anglo capitalist class. This framing resonated deeply with workers who had long experienced discrimination in Anglo-dominated industries and saw themselves as part of a broader struggle for national liberation. The paradox was stark: while the PQ's rhetoric channelled working-class anger toward a convenient external enemy, it obscured the provincial government's own unwillingness, or inability, to intervene meaningfully to protect industrial jobs. The economic policy largely favoured post-industrial strategies, privileging service growth and urban redevelopment over manufacturing retention. As Benoît Larouche observed, "The genius of the PQ's discourse was that it could absorb working-class grievances without altering the economic course. By keeping the Anglo as the villain, they sidestepped hard questions about their own complicity in the dismantling of industrial Québec"[38] (Interviewed November 17, 2021, my translation). In practice, many workers in Pointe-Saint-Charles or Saint-Henri could

[38] Original : Le génie du discours du PQ c'était sa capacité à intégrer les problèmes de la classe ouvrière sans modifier le cours de l'économie. En gardant, tsé, le capitaliste anglo comme le méchant, ils négligeaient les questions difficiles concernant leur propre complicité dans la déconstruction du Québec industriel.

simultaneously mourn the loss of their livelihoods and cheer for a sovereigntist project that promised symbolic dignity, even as the material basis for that dignity eroded.

In sum, nationalism in Québec has been a critical vector of social transformation. Montréal wanted to 'turn the page' on its industrial past. This transformation required the sanitization of working-class neighbourhoods already struggling with deindustrialization. As I discuss later, this disavowal of the industrial era faded later and was replaced by a fascination with this forgotten era. Before delving into this point, though, I will look at a more recent municipal development that facilitated the gentrification of the Sud-Ouest: the introduction of social-mixing policies in the early 2000s.

5.3.2 Montréal's Sud-Ouest: Social Mixing or Social Exclusion?

The desire for social diversity in new and renovated urban environments has long been a leitmotif in the normative paradigms of urban planning. The desire to promote mixing across different social strata has also been frequently reiterated by politicians, activists, and real estate developers (Lees et al. 2008; Bridge et al. 2012), and the notion of diversity now occupies a central place in urban renovation and rehabilitation projects. For example, in France, the LOV (*Loi d'Orientation sur la Ville*) implemented in 1991 aimed at promoting social equity and containing socio-spatial polarization by imposing a (hitherto rarely respected) threshold of 20% social housing in every new construction (Kirszbaum 2008, 39). Likewise, social diversity is also recommended in the United Kingdom, as a measure to mitigate segregation, especially along racial lines (Rose et al. 2013, 443). Belfast, as we shall see later, has a strong history of social housing yet remains segregated. Similarly, Canadian urban policies have also mobilized "diversity" and "mixity," particularly in the largest metropolises such as Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver (Dansereau et al. 2002, 54). These experiences share a desire to "house all

social strata in new communities combining private market housing, whether rental or ownership, with various forms of social housing" (Dansereau et al. 2002, 19, my translation).

Today, in Montréal, the notion of social mixing permeates planning and policy principles. From public to private actors, from community organizations to real estate developers, the need for mixed urban spaces seems to be in a consensus. Jackie Andreoli, a community organizer at Saint-Columba House in Pointe-Saint-Charles, said to me, "It's everywhere, it's all they talk about, and I don't blame them… how can you be against [social mixing]? It has come to a point where you can't even voice any opposition to their program." According to her, economic diversity has become the preferred solution for policy-makers and urban planners to combat social inequalities. However, she is not convinced by the effectiveness of social mixing: "I know times are difficult for everyone, but some new people in the Pointe [a nickname for Pointe-Saint-Charles], they come here as if we owed them something. We've been in the neighbourhood for over 100 years, we've seen the highs and lows, but these new residents, like you, can't be that oblivious. You know that others much more require our services than you."

In the era of globalization, cities around the world are mobilizing their economic resources and innovative strengths to remain competitive at the international scale (Martinez-Fernandez et al. 2012). Neoliberal restructuring has caused fiscal crises in municipalities, as responsibilities were offloaded to them despite their limited revenue sources. Some would argue that neoliberal decentralization increased the autonomy of governance for Canadian municipalities by enabling them to be independent and exercise power in urban management. With the downloading of responsibilities and reduced funding from their provincial/state governments, however, municipalities have faced fiscal crises and have been compelled to support more real estate development to overcome these crises (Bélanger and Gaudreau 2013, 36). Montréal has also increasingly seen property development as the path to achieving world city status, for which it established "three pillars": economic development, environmental conservation,

and social justice. Increasing social housing stocks has been one of the means to achieve social justice, but it has proven to be particularly difficult to implement as, unlike cities like Belfast and Paris where social housing and social-mixing projects are implemented as part of the national housing programs, in Montréal, housing projects are the result of negotiations and compromises between public and private sectors and various levels of governments (Germain and Rose 2010, 22).

One of the first concrete actions taken by the City of Montréal to promote social mixing was the *Stratégie d'inclusion de logements abordables dans les nouveaux projets résidentiels*, adopted in 2005. At the time, the City was facing a severe shortage of low-rent units, with "more than 300,000 tenant households with low or very low incomes" and vacancy rates for units under $600 at only 1.2% (Ville de Montréal 2005, 8). Yet the policy framed this problem less as a crisis of affordability and more as a need to "preserve – or even strengthen – two of Montreal's major assets: an enviable social mix and a housing pool that meets all needs" (ibid., v). The stated rationale was that "the excessive concentration of poverty in certain neighbourhoods" created social problems that could be alleviated by attracting higher-income residents (ibid., 6). Rather than focusing on protecting the existing affordable housing stock or expanding non-market supply, the City's approach centred on leveraging private real estate investment in "marketable" working-class neighbourhoods via social mixing. The strategy explicitly aimed to "encourage the development […] of a diverse range of housing" and to ensure that "15% of new units […] are social and community housing" while another "15% […] are made up of affordable housing from private initiatives" (ibid., 15). The proposal was, however, entirely voluntary. The city mentions that "Quebec law does not allow the mandatory inclusion of affordable housing [in new housing developments]" (ibid., 15), leaving participation contingent on developer goodwill and municipal incentives. As the CREMIS[39] noted, this vision of social mixing

[39] Centre de recherche de Montréal sur les inégalités sociales, les discriminations et les pratiques alternatives de citoyenneté

became a narrative that avoided addressing structural inequalities, turning inclusion into a vector of socio-spatial transformations which, under the guise of integration, reinforced exclusion (Guindon 2009). By embedding the language of social mixing into the machinery of urban redevelopment, the *Stratégie* transformed an anti-poverty concept into a growth-oriented planning tool. The result, as both the policy text and subsequent outcomes reveal, was a strategy that failed to match the scale of housing need and instead often accelerated the very displacement pressures it claimed to address.

In 2019, the City of Montréal replaced the voluntary 2005 *Stratégie d'inclusion de logements abordables* with the *Règlement pour une métropole mixte*, which now serves as the central tool for promoting social mix in new developments. Unlike the 2005 approach, which relied on developer goodwill, the *Règlement* makes inclusion mandatory for any residential project of more than 450 m², requiring "20% social housing, 20% affordable housing and 20% family housing" (Ville de Montréal 2019, 4). The City framed this shift as a decisive step to "ensure the construction of affordable and social housing throughout the city" and to "meet the needs of all households" (ibid., 2). However, while the proportion requirements are higher than in 2005, the regulation maintains a market-driven definition of affordable housing. It is defined as accommodation with "rents 10% lower than the median rents in the sector" (ibid., 7), a threshold that remains inaccessible to many low-income households.

More critically, the regulation's flexibility clauses have severely undermined its impact on actual social housing delivery. The *Règlement* allows developers to meet their obligations through off-site construction or by paying a financial contribution to the City instead of including social housing in their projects (Ville de Montréal 2019, 11). Francis Dolan, of the *Regroupement Information Logement* confirmed to me that these requirements are rarely met (Interviewed January 24, 2021). The City's official data demonstrates that paying the fine has become the norm. In the two years following its

adoption, only 5 of the 150 partnerships signed resulted in the creation of non-market housing (Bataillé 2023). A staggering 97% of developers opted to pay compensation, totalling $16.5 million, rather than integrate social units on-site. According to Montréal's open data (Bataillé 2023; Ville de Montréal 2025), the summation of all partnerships signed between the City and private developers covered 5,985 units. According to the *Règlement*'s stated targets, 1,200 units should have been allocated to social housing, but only about 330 were completed. This gap illustrates the limits of a contribution-based model and reveals how the *Règlement*, despite its stronger legal footing, perpetuates the core flaw of the 2005 *Stratégie*. That is, it embeds the language of social mixing within a framework that leaves deep affordability largely unmet and, at times, enables gentrification under the banner of inclusion.

According to activists in the *Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain* (FRAPRU),[40] the *Règlement* has failed utterly to achieve its aims. With the rapid demographic growth that the city experienced in the 2010s, they estimate that the city is still missing 50,000 social housing units, 8,500 of which are missing in the Sud-Ouest alone (J. Sirois, Interviewed February 17, 2022). These activists were unequivocal; the *Règlement* has developed and accelerated the process of gentrification. As it is the case in most cities, the cheapest lands available for developers are found in poor and/or deindustrializing neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods become the centre of grand-scale constructions that have brought a lot of gentrifiers that replace existing communities. If the explicit objective was to bring "social cohesion" (Ville de Montréal 2019, 19, my translation) to the poorer boroughs, the results have suggested otherwise.

[40] Founded in 1978, FRAPRU (Popular action front in urban redevelopment) is a national grouping for the right to housing, whose priority of action is the demand for more social housing. It is also active on urban planning issues, the fight against poverty, and the promotion of social rights. https://www.frapru.qc.ca/

Policies of social mixing have facilitated the gentrification of former industrial neighbourhoods. Danielle Pagé, a retiree who has been living in the Sud-Ouest over the last 71 years, shared with me how she feels in the neighbourhood now:

> Danielle: [Saint-Henri] has changed; it is no longer how it was. People used to know one another. You know, you would have come here 15 or even 10 years ago. At this hour [5 p.m.], every front yard would be filled with people chatting with one another, asking about the kids and their job. That was our daily meeting. Today, none of that. Everybody comes back from work and enters their apartments and we don't talk anymore.
>
> Christophe: How does that make you feel?
>
> Danielle: It saddens me. You know, I grew up with my neighbours. Now they are all gone, except Lise down the street. It's like each year, we lose someone who finds a new apartment somewhere else. I still manage to see them, but it's not like before. Times change, I guess, but it really saddens me. It isn't Saint-Henri anymore.[41]

With gentrification in her neighbourhood, which was initially hidden as social mixing, she has painfully seen her neighbours leave. People like her who remained are now living on the margins of society, they are excluded from the social networks of the new neighbourhood and cut off from the social ties that used to give them the sense of social belonging: "The excluded no longer participate in anything, no longer maintain relationships with the environment which connects [them] to the world"

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[41] Danielle : [Saint-Henri] a changé, ce n'est plus comme avant. Les gens se connaissaient. Tu sais, il y a 15 ou même 10 ans, tu aurais pu venir ici. À cette heure-ci [17h], toutes les cours étaient remplis de gens qui discutaient entre eux, qui demandaient des nouvelles des enfants, du travail. C'était notre rendez-vous quotidien. Aujourd'hui, plus rien de tout ça. Tout le monde rentre du travail, rentre chez lui et on ne se parle plus.
Christophe : Qu'est-ce que ça te fait ?
Danielle : Ça me rend triste. T'sais, j'ai grandi avec mes voisins. Maintenant, ils sont tous partis, sauf Lise en bas de la rue. C'est comme tous les ans, on perd quelqu'un qui trouve un nouvel appartement ailleurs. J'arrive encore à les voir, mais ce n'est plus comme avant. Le temps change j'imagine, mais ça me rend vraiment triste. Ce n'est plus Saint-Henri.

(Goguel d'Allondans 2003, 8). Gentrification produces a double exclusion, a double rupture: the loss of home and social ties.

I argue that Danielle's neighbourhood has become a *non-lieux* for her, a space deprived of its identity. The neighbourhood she knew is now mostly gone, and interestingly, the most crucial change she deplores isn't the alteration of the material landscape or the old factory buildings. What leads Danielle to claim "It is no longer how it was" is the loss of her way of life and the relationships she had nurtured in the place. When I asked her if she was in contact with her new neighbours, she responded:

> Danielle: Yes, we say 'hi,' but there is nothing more than that. That's our only interaction.
>
> Christophe: Why do you think that is?
>
> Danielle: Oh! I don't know. I guess we just don't really have a lot in common. Also, they are working. They don't have time. I am old stock, retired and don't have much more to do.[42]

Danielle's inability to reproduce friendly relationships with her new neighbours led her to feel out of sync with the times. She feels like "old stock," not truly belonging in the gentrified present of her lived space. The feeling of not being at home anymore and being out of place in one's neighbourhood resonates with what Schulman (2013, 162) calls "the culture of gentrification," in which "personal happiness at the expense of other people's deprivation is a normative standard." Becoming older in a gentrifying neighbourhood translates into a succession of losses (Torres 2020, 3). Torres says that for retired people who have already lost their "second place" of attachment – i.e., their work environment

[42] Original : Danielle : Oui, on se dit « bonjour », mais il n'y a rien de plus. C'est notre seule interaction.
Christophe : Pourquoi penses-tu que c'est comme ça ?
Danielle : Oh ! Je ne sais pas. Je suppose qu'on n'a pas grand-chose en commun. En plus, ils travaillent. Ils n'ont pas le temps. Je suis une vieille peau, retraitée et je n'ai plus grand-chose à faire.

– gentrification often means losing their "first place" of attachment, the place of their living (ibid, 3-4). In addition, retirees experience a slow erosion of their "third place," social communities. For many residents that I interviewed, the loss of these "third places" is almost a daily grief. As Danielle's husband, Pierre, remarked to me, "There are always people moving, something closing." Social mixing facilitates the arrival of residents who, to take Danielle's words, "have little in common" with the long-term residents. Social mixing ends up being, at best, mere cohabitation, with minimal interaction between different social groups, casting doubt on its alleged benefits for poor residents. One might wonder why social mixing remains the preferred approach among policymakers despite all the evidence contradicting its stated goal. The next section delves into how gentrification is experientially registered among long-time residents and is challenged by them. I also discuss the development of a "cancelled future" in Montréal's Sud-Ouest and the consequences this has on the locals.

5.4 Commodification of Montréal's Industrial Heritage

The past is everywhere in the Sud-Ouest. It is in the legacy of industrial architecture, abandoned factories and numerous monuments, and commemorative trails that run through the borough. Most importantly, it is also in the memories of its residents. As I discuss in this section, what residents perceive as "the past" is rooted in their class denomination.[43] For gentrifiers, the Sud-Ouest's history recalls the myth of the phoenix: a space of darkness, yet rising from the ashes toward a bustling, successful future. For survivors of deindustrialization and displacement, their children, and for other working-class residents, this space has a different meaning. Their sentiment is steeped in nostalgia for the "better" bygone times and a perpetual anxiety about the ongoing changes. The working-class identity in the Sud-Ouest is complex and multi-generational, encompassing both long-term residents and younger descendants of industrial workers. While senior residents might express a deeper

[43] There are also gender, race and language differentiations that I explore in subsequent sections.

connection to the industrial era due to their lived experiences, younger generations often inherit this connection symbolically.

For both groups, the industrial past is a point of pride and a source of anxiety as gentrification erases or commodifies it. This sentiment aligns with the work of Svetlana Boym, who distinguishes between restorative nostalgia, focused on reclaiming a lost past, and reflective nostalgia, which critically examines the past's meaning in the present (Boym 2001, 42; 51). Both long-term residents and younger generations suffer from the effects of gentrification, albeit in different ways. Seniors often face direct displacement or rising costs, while younger working-class residents confront the erasure of their community's history and identity. The industrial past becomes a contested symbol, representing both pride in their heritage and a painful reminder of displacement. This duality illustrates Mark Fisher's theory of *hauntology,* where the past lingers as an unresolved presence, shaping the present and future in contradictory ways.

In this section, I examine how the City, in alliance with developers, has commodified the industrial memory landscape of Montréal's Sud-Ouest. By examining various commemorative trails and a range of industrial architecture, I demonstrate how gentrification has been entangled with a narrow understanding of industrial history that mostly revolves around the successful entrepreneurship of factory owners. Using photographs that I collected, as well as information I garnered from interviews, I highlight the perceptions of gentrifiers and working-class residents experiencing this commodification. I then present an analysis of the former Canada Malting Factory. This factory building has been left abandoned since the 1980s and has recently seen the efforts of its rehabilitation by two groups, one led by a real-estate firm and the other by community activists. This case exemplifies two distinct visions for the neighbourhood's future.

5.4.1 Who is the Past for? Appropriations of Industrial Memory

In the early stages of my fieldwork in Montréal, I came across a documentary, *Algo, Polly & Turcot*, produced by the CBC (Sheldon 2017). The film tells the story of two falcons, Algo and Polly, whose lives were unsettled by the destruction and rebuilding of the Turcot Interchange in the Sud-Ouest. The story of these two falcons was a touching metaphor for the changes happening in the Sud-Ouest and for how people were adapting to socio-spatial changes there. At the very beginning of the documentary, we are introduced to Corey Shapiro, a 'famous' Montréal entrepreneur known for his eyewear shop frequented by various celebrities. With the capital accumulated from his business, Shapiro started many other ventures, almost all of them in the Sud-Ouest. With his larger-than-life personality and sizeable economic capital and real estate power, Shapiro himself became a local celebrity in the borough, which might explain his presence in the documentary. In the first minutes of the film, Shapiro uttered a sentence that I recall often, almost haunting my thoughts, and which perfectly exemplifies the key idea of this dissertation. One of the first questions the documentary director asks Shapiro is whether he lives in the neighbourhood, given his numerous business ventures in the area. He replied, "Me? Pfff. No, I am from the future, bro! Hahaha. This is the past." Hearing this disregard for and temporal detachment from the present of the city made me curious about the multi-temporalities of the present lived by different groups in the city and how they construct their identity in this period of substantial spatio-temporal change, when the past is being discredited or (as I show soon) objectified and commodified.

For instance, I had the chance to meet and interview a construction worker who worked on the transformation and rehabilitation of numerous shops and restaurants on Notre-Dame Street (the main commercial street in the Sud-Ouest). He was, among other things, impressed by the similarity of the interior design of the different shops he worked at:

> Oh my god, was I laying some bricks. It was as if all the owners were working together to have bricks in their restaurants. Either you installed a brick wall, or you exposed an old wall that had been covered with drywall. Bricks everywhere! Like, I understand that the brick looks nice, but they all look the same, hahaha! Do you want to go to the brick restaurant, or the other brick restaurant, hahaha! But hey, I did the work and that's all."[44]

Obviously, red brick, or brick in general, is a popular reminder of Montréal's Sud-Ouest's industrial past. Former factories, sheds, houses, and dive bars were made of brick. It is a peculiar distinction that the Sud-Ouest has, as the overall colour tone is much more red tinted there than in other parts of the city (Figure 5.1). The red brick is associated with the might of the industrial era, which may explain its abundance in the new trendy and upscale restaurants and shops. The red brick has become popular among business owners as they are eager to cater to the taste of the gentrifiers for an 'authentic' sense of place. The brick thus becomes an inexpensive way of signalling a lineage with the industrial era and to benefit from the capital of gentrifiers flowing into the neighbourhood. The past is encapsulated in the brick in a synecdochical way. During my interview, I heard comments such as: "This place is steeped in history"; "There is something special about this neighbourhood. You can see how it changed"[45]; and, "See on this brick, you can see that a cat left its paw imprints. It's crazy to think that you can touch history here!"[46] There is thus an economic advantage in having your shop, restaurant, or hotel for dogs (Figure 5.2) appear industrial and rooted in history.

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[44] Original : Esti que j'en ai-tu posé de la brique. C'était comme si tous les proprios s'étaient parlé pour avoir de la brique dans leur resto. Sois tu installais un mur de brique, sois tu exposais un vieux mur qui avait été couvert avec du gyproc. De la brique partout! Tsé je comprends là ça fait beau de la brique, mais là les endroits sont genre tout pareil hahaha! Tu veux allez au resto de brique ou au resto de brique hahaha! Mais bon moi je faisais les travaux pi c'est tout. »

[45] Original : Il y quelque chose de spécial avec le quartier. Tsé tu vois que le temps a passé. »

[46] Original : Tu vois sur les briques, il y a des empreintes de chat! C'est fou de penser que tu peux toucher l'histoire ici. » There is an old building in Griffintown (63 De La Montagne Street) where cat paws can be found on some of the bricks.

This tendency is so widespread in the borough that some residents ironically came to equate this aesthetic with a luxury beyond their means. Jean, a 45-year-old handyman who grew up in the borough and worked all around it, commented, “It isn’t complicated. If the place is renovated, it means it is too expensive for me.”[47] Residents who survived the periods of industrialization and deindustrialization, whose offspring are presently employed in the service sector, now find themselves unable to afford their past. The descendants of industrial workers have inherited an economic landscape altered by deindustrialization, in which their parents’ stable, well-compensated jobs have been replaced by precarious employment in the service sector. Despite their distance from the direct experience of factory work, the industrial heritage remains a marker of identity and a source of pride for them, although it is often mythologized and appropriated through gentrification. This has led to the sentiment of being left out, as if they had been erased from their own past. There is an obvious psychological trauma in witnessing your community’s erasure from a familiar landscape. Skeggs (2003, 121–24) discusses class struggles waged at the symbolic level. Skeggs contends that working-class culture is appropriated by the middle class, with its use value metamorphosed into exchange value and becoming the feed for the cultural capital and moral authority of the middle class. While certain aspects of the working-class past are glorified and commodified, many other working-class histories are treated as backward or shameful, while those associated with the middle class are presented as dynamic, inclusive, and therefore progressive. The contrast made in this way legitimizes gentrification, the conquest of historically working-class spaces by the middle class.

One of the best examples of such development is the *Circuit de commémoration du Sud-Ouest*, a commemorative trail introduced in 2017 for the 375th anniversary of Montréal’s so-called ‘foundation.’ The objective of this attraction was to have people “[discover] the abundant identity of the South-West”

[47] Original : C’est pas compliqué si l’endroit est rénové, c’est que c’est trop cher pour moi! »

(Ville de Montréal 2017), an objective in line with place branding strategies targeting gentrifiers and tourists. This commemorative trail adds to the already rich commemorative landscape of the Sud-Ouest, which includes the *Canada Park commemorative trail* dedicated to the industrial history of the Lachine Canal shores and the *Quartiers du Canal: Commercial heritage trail*, which talks about the commercial history of the Sud-Ouest. *Circuit de commémoration du Sud-Ouest* has 32 stops, across all the different neighbourhoods of the Sud-Ouest and, surprisingly, only a few overlaps with the above-mentioned existing trails. Of those 32, 17 are related to the industrial history of the Sud-Ouest, 8 focus on the cultural life of the borough, and 7 are dedicated to religious institutions. Each of the commemorative stops has a small information panel with a short descriptive text (only in French, with a QR code to access the English version and more extensive information) and a couple of archival images showing what the building or character used to look like (Figure 5.3). In many cases, the industrial history presented on the panels glorifies entrepreneurship. To avoid any association or celebration with anglophone entrepreneurs, the City adopted an intriguing discursive strategy that almost always de-personifies the story presented. Yet, interestingly, the panels don't shy away from including the names of francophone historical figures (Charles-Joseph Coursol in Figure 5.3, among others), as they fit the nationalist narrative. Of the 17 panels dedicated to industrial history, 2 anglophone entrepreneurs were mentioned, compared to 8 francophones, which is disproportionate, especially given the much larger number of anglophone factory owners who shaped industries in the borough.

If Québec nationalism explains the reticence of the city to celebrate anglophone entrepreneurs and the over-representation of francophone historical elites, we need to investigate class divisions to explain why the francophone working class is erased from these panels. In the same way that workers are misrepresented in the Titanic Museum in Belfast, as we see in the next chapter, workers and working-class communities are moved to the background, to a contextual role, if they are mentioned at

all in these panels. The narrative avoids the story of workers' struggles, such as unionization, and the dismal history of factory shutdowns. As Burrill (2021, 20) notes, erasing industrial labourers from place memories contributes to the construction of a post-industrial structure of feeling, attributing historical authenticity to the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois classes independent of industrial production. This erasure reinforces the idea that the Sud-Ouest was devoid of francophone working-class communities as well as Indigenous and black people, as I discuss later, and is therefore open for the new urban pioneers (Smith 1996). The place, in this way, becomes a blank canvas upon which the gentrification growth machine can inscribe its own worldview in the landscape, legitimizing the displacement involved in this process.

This strategy seems highly efficient. Jean-Claude Poitras, an associate in banking institutions downtown, told me when I asked him about the contradiction of gentrification: "It's not all bad. You know, before gentrification, there were only old factories here. It would have been a shame to lose them. At least now they are refurbished [so] we can appreciate them."[48] Mark Clayton, 34-year-old lawyer, similarly argued: "This is the place to be now. Every business wants to open in the neighbourhood. There was nothing here before. It [gentrification] really brought life to the neighbourhood." The idea that the Sud-Ouest used to be empty came up frequently among new residents whom I interviewed. Comments like those of Jean-Claude and Mark make gentrification appear necessary and progressive, oblivious to the presence of people prior to gentrification and to the transformations it brought to these people.

Gentrification affects the identities of residents and the expression of selves in spatio-temporal terms. As it marauds, it also triggers trauma (Moskowitz 2017, 17). Danielle found herself deprived of

[48] Original: C'est pas juste mauvais tsé, avant l'embourgeoisement il y avait juste des usines ici. T'imagine si on les avait perdues. Au moins la sont rénovées et on peut les apprécier.

her social ties. It was a difficult change: "You know, it's tough. We feel trapped inside. We can't really go to eat outside, [and] access to the park is blocked. I've been here since I was a child, and I tell you, I could never have foreseen how it would change. I grew up down the road from here, and now I just don't recognize it. Everything has changed. I mean, fuck, even the tavern now has a karaoke night."[49] This sentiment is echoed by Irene Johntson, who grew up in different neighbourhoods of the Sud-Ouest, left it in adulthood, and returned to Saint-Henri in retirement. She now lives in the former Stelco factory, where her mother used to work. This places her in an in-between situation, being both a long-term resident and a gentrifier. I went on a couple of walks with Irene and her husband, Paul, in the neighbourhood. She brought me to the street where she grew up and was saddened to see how it had changed:

> Irene: I don't have the words, oh my god, everything changed. On the corner there, there was a gas station [it is now a café/bike shop], and this is where I lived. The other side of the street used to be similar houses, but they started to get demolished in like 2005-2006, right, Paul?
>
> Paul: Yes, that is about right, 2006-2007.
>
> Irene: Yeah, and now it's all condos. I mean, I get that things change, but this is drastic. The city really turned the page.

Walking confronts you with gentrification's imprints; it forces you to compare the landscape you are seeing with how you remember it. Small details, like the position of a bench and the colour of a roof, become visual clues of a lost past. Memories of long-term residents become a key reference for

[49] « Tsé c'est *tough,* on se sent quasiment prisonnier du quartier. On ne peut pas vraiment aller manger au resto pi le parc est bloqué. Je vis ici depuis que je suis petite. Pi jte le dis, jamais je n'aurais cru que ça en arriverait là. J'ai grandi tout près pi là je ne reconnais plus, toute à changer. Criss même la taverne est rendue avec une soirée Karaoké [Taverne La Chic Régal]. »

alterations to the landscape. For instance, Irene kept me informed of her struggle to keep the window frames of her loft in the Stelco factory green:

> [November 26, 2021] Historically, all the window frames in Saint-Henri were green. In the Pointe it was red. That's just the way it was. […] When we bought our loft in the Stelco, I was so happy that they kept the frames green. It meant a lot to me. It showed that they did some research and cared.
>
> [December 21, 2021] […] there is a petition to change the frame to black. The movement has been growing in the building for the last four years, and I feel it is increasing with every new resident. I mean, I get that the green frames aren't the most aesthetic or pleasing, but they are true [to the history].
>
> [June 24, 2022] Oh Christophe… the vote just passed, [and] we will get black window frames soon. It saddens me, really. It represented something. It's our past that we are forgetting with such decisions.
>
> [December 24, 2023] I passed in front of the Stelco and the frames were black.

While anecdotal, the situation Irene deplores is representative of a trend that characterizes the Sud-Ouest of Montréal, catering to gentrifiers' tastes. Similarly, the story presented in the commemorative trails, devoid of working-class presence, has become the metanarrative of the borough's history. For reasons that I discuss later that are related to Québec's nationalism, this narrative has become central to how gentrifiers qualify and understand their living environment. As such, elements that are outside this narrative become a lesser concern. It is not just the colour of the window frames; other components associated with the crucial part of the working-class history have been curtailed. With the commodification of industrial memories, some pasts are judged useless,

unaesthetic, unprofitable and overall unappreciated under the new spatial economy of the place and, accordingly, are made to disappear from the landscape or are de-historicized.

A restaurant called Joe Beef, an institution for fine dining in Montréal that opened in 2005, also exemplifies this. It routinely appears on lists of the best restaurants in Canada and was named the 81st best restaurant in the world in 2015. Joe Beef and its 'sister' restaurants – the Liverpool House, the Vin Papillon and the McKiernan pub – are now destinations for high-end dining. The restaurant's name comes from Charles McKiernan, aka Joe Beef, an Irish immigrant who came to Montréal in the 1860s after being discharged from the British army. He established himself in the Sud-Ouest, more specifically in the Pointe on Liverpool Street (M. Roy, Bantey, and Ville de Montréal 1967) (Figure 5.4). Joe Beef was a tavern owner known in the city for never refusing to serve anyone and for giving free meals to people in need (see Fennario 1991). Joe Beef's tavern functioned not simply as a place of consumption but as "a source of aid in times of unemployment, sickness, and hunger" (DeLottinville 1981, 10). The current owners of Joe Beef appropriated this historical character, only using his restaurateur attributes to sell high-end dining experiences, something that Joe Beef would, arguably, never have done. In the nineteenth century, Joe Beef's tavern was described as a "stronghold for working-class values and a culture which protected [its patrons] from harsh economic times," (ibid., 10) where working-class people created and sustained their own systems of support and values in opposition to dominant norms. The contemporary branding of Joe Beef thus reflects a selective remembering, in which the solidaristic and redistributive dimensions of working-class culture are erased in favour of a depoliticized, aestheticized past; what could be understood as a form of heritage commodification. What is being appropriated is not just a story, but an entire working-class social system that is fundamentally incompatible with the exclusivity of contemporary high-end urban

consumption (ibid., 27). There are other histories capitalized upon in gentrifying neighbourhoods that are also out of sync with the high-end nature of what they have become.

In this changing landscape, memory work and memory activism are important for enabling a sense of agency among residents from the previous era or their children, through which they express their grievances and assert their claims to the neighbourhood's history. Historically, many working-class spaces, such as Joe Beef tavern, acted as a refuge for the community (DeLottinville 1981, 11). Their disappearance, or transformation into elite spaces, can therefore be understood as a loss of vernacular public spheres, reinforcing the need for memory activism as a compensatory practice through which marginalized groups reclaim narrative authority. As I mentioned above, when a building is destroyed and gives way to new construction, or when a building is repurposed, the memories associated with 'what was' can come back as an obsession. People and communities are shaped by their histories even after said stories are long gone. Factories that were turned into luxury condos and lofts are visible reminders for the former working-class communities of the precarity of their lives and the exclusion that they have experienced. A few of the interviewees in my research expressed this kind of limbo that they are forced into. Jean told me: "Our old factories have turned into condos. You know, before it was abandoned, I could go there and look, like reliving the past, but today it's full of rich people who would call security if they saw me, with my not very clean clothes."[50] Working-class residents can perceive the present as a seemingly never-ending interval. On the one end lies the expected industrial future, which is never to arrive, and on the other end lies their past, which is continually referred to as the time 'before.' Denis, whose uncle worked in the Canada Malting Factory (Figure 5.5), told me, quite angrily: "Fuck! The only real factory left is the Canada Malting, but the

[50] Original : « Nos anciennes usines sont rendues des condos, tsé avant quand c'était à l'abandon je pouvais m'y rendre pi checker, genre revivre le temps passé, mais aujourd'hui c'est tout plein de riches qui appelleraient la sécurité s'ils me voyaient, avec mes guenilles pas super propres. »

owners in Toronto don't want to save the building. It's falling apart and they don't care, but it would hurt us to lose it."[51] He continued:

> My uncle used to love working there. I remember when he was let go in the 1980s. I was young, but I remember how it affected my dad [his brother]. You know, he wasn't young, my uncle, but he still needed to work. It's tough to find a job at like 60 years old. In any case, today, I feel a strong connection with this building every time I see it. I am reminded of my uncle and my dad.[52]

Their relationship with them goes beyond the aesthetic rapport; these buildings are embodied memories and evocative of lived experiences.

Working-class communities – whether they are former manufacturing workers or their descendants – have taken issue with the city growth machine's appropriation of this history, and its branding of neighbourhoods as "revitalized" or "rising from the ashes." The industrial era serves as a cultural reference point through which working-class people express their discontent, but the meaning of the industrial past differs across generations. For long-term residents, it represents lived history and material loss. For younger residents, it signifies a lost promise of stability and pride, making it a potent yet ambivalent symbol in the fight against gentrification. By framing their resistance around this shared history, both groups challenge the neoliberal narratives that celebrate urban "renewal" while ignoring the displacement and precarity it causes. Remembrance in the context of gentrification often takes the form of activism; it forces haunting onto the landscape. Former employees of factories and their

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[51] Original : « Criss, la seule vraie usine qui reste c'est la Canada Malting, mais les proprios à Toronto veulent pas sauver l'immeuble. Y tombe en ruine pi ils s'en sacrent, mais nous ça nous ferait de la peine de perdre ça. »

[52] Original : « Mon oncle adorait travailler-là. Je me souviens quand ils l'ont renvoyé dans les années 1980, j'étais jeune, mais je me souviens à quel point cela a affecté mon père [son frère]. Tu sais, il n'était pas jeune, mon oncle, mais il avait quand même besoin de travailler, c'est dur de trouver un travail à genre 60 ans. En tout cas, aujourd'hui, je sens un lien fort avec ce bâtiment. Chaque fois que je le vois, cela me rappelle mon oncle et mon père. »

children whom I interviewed expressed melancholic nostalgia towards the past. They talk proudly of these spaces, reappropriating them as community spaces. These memories summon the ghosts of the past and manifest a refusal of gentrification. Such a longing for the past and a reluctance toward the present may breed a spirit of rebellion against gentrification, even though they remain ephemeral and haven't coalesced into action yet.

Nick Blomley (2004, xv) argues that property depends on and involves a range of social and political relations that warrant critical inquiry. He invites a rethinking of what property is, what property ought to be, and, therefore, who has the right to the city. In what he calls a "creative critique" (ibid, 76), Blomley argues that offers a tool that unsettles the dominant model of property, i.e. the ownership model. He points to actually existing property relations that are not captured by the ownership model (ibid, 76). I argue that haunting can act as a "creative critique" in Montréal, as long-term residents reclaim their own histories through non-dominant memories and, therefore, their existence in this space. Spectral spatial stories here question the legitimacy of post-industrial, neoliberal narratives and their omissions of the labour that went into the making of landscapes. "Goose Village," "Stelco," "MacFarlane,"[53] and others are spaces that have disappeared from the landscape or have been repurposed and, for the most part, remain unknown to gentrifiers. Yet, they are continuously 'summoned' by long-term residents in my interviews. The same is true for the descendants of the industrial workers; their collective memory of the industrial era acts as a marker of identity, although it is often tinged with nostalgia. They face economic insecurity while seeing their neighbourhood's industrial heritage commodified by gentrification. That heritage, once rooted in labour struggles, is now an ambivalent symbol of pride and loss.

[53] This was a former shoe manufacturer in Montréal.

In this section, I examined the ways that the city, private developers and entrepreneurs have appropriated, simplified, manipulated and commodified memories of the working class. The commemorative trail is a good example of a marketized transformation of the past. The narrative that the new urban growth machine has contrived glamorizes the previous industrial era, while toning down the presence of workers. The same narrative is used to reinforce the position of today's entrepreneurial class, which appears as a successor to the historic capitalists. At the same time, it silences the contribution of working-class communities, pushing them into amnesia. The space upon which gentrification takes place is presented as formerly unoccupied or long abandoned, legitimizing the destruction of the existing built environment and the arrival of gentrifiers. This exclusion from representation effectively restricts the agency of the working-class and long-time residents. Haunting may be one of the few tools for these people to reinscribe themselves into the landscape. As I discuss below, denunciation of gentrification can also take a more organized form when community groups come together to ensure their representation in the landscape.

5.4.2 Canada Malting Factory: Imaginations, Hopes and Possibilities

The Canada Malting factory has become a symbol of Montréal's deindustrialization. The Canada Malting Limited company (formerly Canada Malting Co.) built a malt house in 1905 on the banks of the Lachine Canal. Cereals were germinated there, especially barley, which was used in beer production. It was a major supplier of raw materials for Montréal's renowned brewing industry. The building was composed, to the west, of eleven buildings and six silos, all dating to the company's origin in 1905 (Contexture 2012, 35). Made of prefabricated terracotta modules with stone foundations, these silos were built by a company from Minneapolis in the United States, a city known for its innovations in grain silos. The terracotta silos remain to this day, as the last of their kind in North America. To the east, the factory has 18 concrete silos that were added periodically until 1963

(ibid, 35). The whole building is monumental and enriched with many construction details, including neo-Romanesque inspired motifs in the arched windows of the façade, the upper floors of the rear part, and the brickwork on the cornices between the floors (ibid, 35). The building is representative of industrial architecture, bringing together the work of architects and engineers. With the construction of a new factory in the Port of Montréal along the Bonaventure Expressway in the 1980s, however, the factory complex became obsolete, ceasing its activity in 1985 (Heritage Montréal 2020). This massive industrial complex is now unused and has deteriorated beyond repair. The place was left vulnerable to water infiltration, which has caused serious damage to the structure of the building.

Despite its decrepit state, the structure remains an emblematic landmark in Montréal and was designated for protection in 2012 (Laberge 2012). For several years, a real estate developer and a collective of citizens have proposed two distinct projects for its rehabilitation. First, the real-estate developer, Renwick Development, has sought to develop 220 housing units, 30% of which would be social or affordable housing. The project also includes the development of around sixty artist studios and several green spaces (Renwick Development 2022). Second, *Collectif à nous la Malting* (Malting to Us Collective), formed in 2013, wishes to develop an entirely community-driven project. The collective demands the construction of a minimum of 200 social housing units, a daycare, community gardens, a market, a café co-op, and even a greenhouse above the silos (Collectif À nous la Malting 2020). The two groups say they want to preserve and restore several elements of the Canada Malting Co. This section investigates these two groups' visions and the mnemonic politics tethered to each.

The Malting company has been in the Sud-Ouest landscape for over a hundred years. If it fell into social amnesia after the late 1980s, the battle for its rehabilitation brought it back to the public's attention, making it the site of a struggle over the historical representation and social justice. Public attention to Malting reached a high in 2019, when an unknown artist painted a little house in a vibrant

shade of pink on the top of the crumbling factory (Figure 5.6). The artwork, which was dedicated to the neighbourhood of Saint-Henri, became a trend on social media, appearing in many Instagram posts and on mugs, T-shirts and many other everyday objects. It reminded residents of the value of such an industrial site. The little pink house atop the former factory made visible the industrial landscape and let out the ghosts it contained, as a reminder of the past that could have been and the future that never took place. Or as Denis puts it: "I have a history with this building. To me, it was always important, but this pink house made it seem important to everyone else. The building has become a work of art, and I believe it is here to stay now."[54] It is unlikely, though, that this optimism will remain, as the Renwick Development project has sought to transform the building into a piece of real estate for gentrifiers.

Renwick Development is a real-estate firm, known for urban rehabilitation in many neighbourhoods of Montréal. It developed numerous luxury housing projects in Westmount and Old Montréal. On Renwick Development's promotional webpage, which is now defunct, the malting project is presented as a revival, with the building to be "reborn" (Renwick Development 2023). One thing that drew my attention was that a remark on the webpage differs in the French and English versions of the website. In the French version, it reads: "An encapsulation of the history of the Lachine Canal, Canada Malting now exists as a reminder of a lost era having courageously withstood the passage of time since its abandonment" (my translation). Meanwhile, the English version says, "Embodiment of the history of the Lachine Canal, Canada Malting will be restored and resume its role as a dynamic point of convergence for the community of Saint-Henri and for Montréal" (my translation). I found it interesting that they chose two different statements for their website's different languages, and that an emphasis was put on the "lost era" in the French version. As I discussed above,

[54] Original : « Comme tu sais, j'ai une histoire avec ce building-là, il a toujours été important pour moi, mais la maison rose l'a rendu important pour les autres. L'usine est devenue une œuvre d'art et je pense qu'elle est là pour rester. »

Québec's nationalist discourse on the Sud-Ouest also follows the *mythos* of a lost era. That said, the two statements are similar in pushing comparable ideas of the role of the Malting company in Montréal's industrial era.

These statements are also accompanied by a timeline of the Canada Malting Factory, which can be divided into three eras. The first one concerns the industrial history of the factory, with its construction in 1905 and the addition of the new silos in 1935. The second era focuses on deindustrialization. The timeline of that historical period lists the closure of the Canal Lachine (1970), the closure of the factory (1980s), numerous factories in the neighbourhood closing or relocating elsewhere (1989), and the disrepair status of the building (1990-2007).[55] The overlaps between the fate of the factory and the neighbourhood work here to conjure up a sense of equivalence between the two, as if the problems faced by the Malting company were a representation of what was happening in the neighbourhood. This can be translated into an idea that Renwick Development's project to convert the building into a condominium complex is not only an act of saving the building but also the entire neighbourhood. Finally, the third era of the timeline focuses on Renwick Development's project to acquire the factory and rehabilitate it. They position themselves as the only defenders of the factory (Renwick Development 2023), completely omitting the proposal made by *À nous la Malting* in 2013:

> [2008-2015] A 'moratorium' is placed on Canada Malting and the government is asked to fund a social redevelopment of the complex. No project is ever proposed. Renwick places the site under option and submits a unique mixed use development proposal.

[55] Also, the timeline, as a whole, erases the workers from its history, reproducing the tendency in the neighbourhood depiction of the industrial era as I discussed before.

> [2016] The Montréal Commission for Public Consultation (OCPM) concludes that the community wants to see Canada Malting redeveloped and the buildings saved. The provincial and federal governments state that public funding is not possible. The City of Montréal declares that, if the site is to be saved, it must be done through the private sector (Renwick Development 2023).

Finally, the website's inclusion of numerous photos of the Malting factory in its decrepit condition merits discussion (Figure 5.7). These images encode two meanings. In a sensationalist manner, the images reinforce the idea that the former factory is in a run-down state that is 'beyond repair,' thereby legitimizing their project of rehabilitation. The use of black and white in the images is particularly noteworthy, which has been extensively studied in various contexts (Barthes 1980; Flusser 2000), including those associated with gentrification (see Blair 2010; Beil 2015; Price 2023). Sometimes, black and white images are used to project nostalgia for pre-gentrification spatio-temporality, in ways illuminating what Davidson, Bondi, and Smith ([2006] 2016, 2-3) call the "emotional geographies" of gentrification. In the current case, however, the choice of black and white has the effect of relegating the factory to the past, to a closed chapter of history, echoing the words of entrepreneurial landlord Corey Shapiro, as previously mentioned. These images contrast with the vibrant colour rendering of the envisioned project by the real estate firm. Due to the copyright issue, I cannot add these images here, but will describe them. They feature slick condominium buildings, green spaces, and well-manicured pedestrian streets; these images, where the factory is beyond recognition, cast a vision of a fully reimagined site where the factory is beyond recognition. The contrast between the black and white pictures and the colourful renderings cast a vision that rehabilitation will bring light and life to the neighbourhood. Affect is central to legitimizing gentrification and its associated displacement. Renwick Development's project, despite its disguised rhetoric of rehabilitation, is part

and parcel of gentrification. It hopes to transform the factory into a mixed-use living environment, including 250 new privately owned or rented units, of which 67 would be social or affordable housing (Renwick Development 2023).[56] The social housing component seems to be a recent addition to the developer's proposal as they state their thoughts evolved in the aftermath of the pandemic when housing needs skyrocketed in Montréal and the housing crisis accentuated:

> With the devastating effects of the pandemic now coming into focus, it should be expected that the provision of many essential services will be progressively and continually shifted from governmental institutions onto community-based organizations. This being an ultimate necessity in helping to support the economic requirements that such services represent. The above having been said, the responsibility of caring for our fellow community members rests with us all and it is for this reason that a new approach to the providing of social and affordable housing is needed – perhaps now more than ever. The redevelopment of *Canada malting* is needed and together we will answer this call. With our "complete community" approach and by placing the provision of social housing at the core of our development concept, *Canada malting* will far exceed the percentages required[57] in this regard and do so in an entirely inclusive manner. (Renwick Development, 2023)

Sixty-seven new social or affordable housing units are proclaimed as a community benefit by the developer; however, as Jonathan Sirois at a neighbourhood organization for tenants' rights said to me, "Seriously, 60 units? That is a water drop in the sea of our needs. We are missing 4,000 units! In such a

[56] The website claims it would be 67 social housing units, but also claims that the rehabilitation budget would be "entirely private funded," which makes the claim to social housing dubious.
[57] Renwick development's project aims to include 27% of "social housing." The Arrondissment Sud-Ouest ask that all condominium constructions include 20% affordable housing in their project. As in many other jurisdictions, many ways exist to circumvent these requirements.

big space, 60 units is almost giving the middle finger to the neighbourhood."[58] According to Jonathan, the transformation of the Malting into another condominium complex would inevitably accentuate the gentrification of the Sud-Ouest:

> The Malting has always been part of the neighbourhood. It is a symbol and, as such, I have no doubt that it will be an extremely popular development. Most of the loft conversions in the neighbourhood have been immense successes, and they didn't have the fame of the Malting. It scares me, it scares me a lot, to be honest… It has the potential to be ten times more problematic than the other rehabilitation because I fear much richer people will be willing to buy an apartment in this complex.[59]

Renwick development's project also plans to include 65 artists' workshops, commercial spaces, an underground parking complex and an integration centre for adults living with autism. It also includes a playground and a small park, which overall brings more to the neighbourhood than most condominium construction. Yet, these alleged benefits did not quell opposition to the project. Indeed, the opposition to this project was one of the fiercest among those that emerged in the borough. The Malting is such an icon that many residents were taken aback by the plan to transform it into another loft complex. As Jonathan remarked, "They have not planned and do not plan to ask their [existing residents'] opinions."[60]

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[58] Original : « Sérieux, 60 logements c'est une goutte d'eau dans le lac que sont nos besoins. Il manque genre 8000 logements. Avec tout l'espace qu'ils ont 60 logements c'est un peu comme envoyer chier le quartier. »
[59] Original : « La Malting a toujours fait partie du quartier, elle est un symbole et en tant que telle, je sais que sa transformation sera extrêmement populaire. La plupart des conversions de lofts de quartier ont été d'immenses réussites et ils n'avaient pas la renommée de la Malting, ça me fait peur, ça me fait très peur pour être honnête… Ça a le potentiel d'être dix fois plus problématique que les autres réhabilitations, parce que je crains que des gens beaucoup plus riches soient prêts à acheter un appartement dans ce complexe. »
[60] Original : « Ils vont même pas leur demander leurs avis. »

Residents like Denis understand that saving the building would require important alterations to its physical and symbolic aspects. When I showed him the rendering proposed by Renwick Development, however, he wasn't impressed: "I don't like it. I don't know, the history is lost […] Oh and they've cut the pink house. That won't pass."[61] Projects like Renwick's evoke a sense of vague architectural pastness that serves the cultural economy of gentrification, and "provides new middle classes with the collective identity and social credentials for which they strive," while dehistoricizing landscapes and pricing out low-income households (Zukin 1987, 143).

Renwick Development's vision is drastically different from the plan proposed by the *Collectif À nous la Malting*, the latter of which openly opposes the transformation of the industrial artifact into condos: "The proportion of condos continues to increase in the neighbourhood, while the proportion of families decreases due to the transformation of family housing and the significant increase in rents. Rooming houses are also threatened with closure and conversion, increasing the risk of homelessness for their clientele" (Collectif À nous la Malting 2020). The *Collectif* is composed of activists, scholars and residents of the Sud-Ouest. They recently produced a 73-page document that highlights the housing problems faced by the borough and underlines the remembrance of working-class communities in the neighbourhood. As Fred Burrill, a scholar and a member of the *Collectif*, mentioned, their project was an outstretched hand to the working-class populations (Collectif À nous la Malting 2020, 85). The group invited residents of the borough to discuss their needs and voice their concerns in the development of this project (ibid, 85). The conclusion of these consultations was that the Malting still holds relevance for the long-term communities and the borough. The *Collectif* incorporated into its project residents' demand for more social housing, the walkability of the area, and

[61] Original : « J'aime pas, je sais pas, l'histoire est perdue […] Oh pi en plus ils ont enlevés la maison rose, ça ne passera pas. »

the need for basic amenities and green spaces, as well as their wish to reappropriate their memories and to reinscribe themselves into the memory landscape. The project proposed by the *Collectif* calls for a rethinking of ownership, placing it in the hands of working-class communities. It proposes 200 social housing units, a pharmacy and a post office, a daycare, a café-cooperative, a bike shop and a data centre (which will be used to heat the building during the winter). The plan also includes a series of greenhouses on the roof of the building that will provide fresh produce. All of these elements will be community-owned and operated. Embracing greater equity for housing, community well-being and climate, this project comes close to what Lefebvre called "the right to the city."

Importantly, the project also brings to life the "right to urban memory." It proposes to include a "Working-class history centre," in response to strong demand from those consulted. According to the *Collectif*'s report (2020, 85, my translation), "During the very first day of consultation, as part of the Popular Development Operation for the western sector of Saint-Henri, the idea of creating a museum on the Canada Malting site was proposed." From there, a heritage committee was formed, which was composed of community members, including people who had worked in the Malting or other surrounding industrial buildings. From this committee emerged four pillars of the working-class museum:

(a) preservation of the industrial heritage of the site itself, integrating (to the greatest extent possible) elements of the Malting building and industrial artifacts from the Malting and other manufacturing sites in Saint-Henri;

(b) collection and archiving of the collective memory of residents of Saint-Henri and the life stories of those who worked there;

(c) programming and installations around the neighbourhood that highlight the industrial and social history; and

(d) promoting exhibitions that relate to the overall history of Saint-Henri (e.g., art) (Collectif À nous la Malting 2020, 85, my translation).

The objective is to counteract the selective commodification and effacement of working-class histories in the landscape: "Currently, […] the working-class history of our neighbourhood is quickly being erased by the construction of infrastructure and real estate projects. It's difficult to know, while walking the streets of Saint-Henri today, that our neighbourhood was, not so long ago, the heart of industrial production in Canada. Where the industrial past is invoked, it is often in the form of architectural facade used to sell condos. Deindustrialization and neighbourhood gentrification go hand in hand" (Collectif À nous la Malting 2020, 86, my translation). When I mentioned the idea of the working-class museum to some of my interviewees, they were excited. Among them, Denis was also quite pleased to learn that the Collectif intended to preserve and highlight the little pink house atop the working-class museum, when I showed him the renderings. For him, this signified that the Collectif understood the sentimental value this building had among locals.

The Collectif's proposed project, as such, has the potential to transform the mainstream approach to social-mixing into a social-mixing-from-below (Kipfer 2022, 206). The "new middle class" (Ley 1996) or the "creative class" (Florida 2019) has been key to urban revitalization, which also accompanied a turn to a new political economy of heritages, where heritages become more speculative than educative. In this process, the working class's living memories of the industrial era are either erased, modified or referred to as the 'times before' to break away from. The museum dedicated to working-class history, has the potential for working-class communities to present their past and present in all their diversity and complexity, as well as to stake a claim that they are an important part of the identity of the place. It also offers an opportunity to denounce their representation in ruling elites' memory projects.

The museum will be frequented and cherished both by gentrifiers and existing residents. Many of the gentrifiers I interviewed said the history of their neighbourhoods or buildings was among the reasons they chose to move there. The museum may become a meeting place between gentrifiers and non-gentrifiers, where gentrifiers learn about less well-known histories of people in the neighbourhoods. Or, conversely, the way that history is encapsulated in the museum and the fact that the museum may turn into a tourist destination may contribute to the reification and instrumentalization of history for the marketing of the place. Or, the museum may fall into the same nationalist pitfalls of glorifying only or mostly the white francophone historical figures. It is hard to foretell the outcome, as the museum only exists as a plan, and there are no further details of what approach it will take.

5.5 National Memory and the Gentrification of Montréal's Sud-Ouest

Many have attempted to explain the resurgence of Québec nationalism in the 1960s and its persistence since then, which is today a debated subject. The explanations range from Québec's reaction towards the political centralization of the federal government (Pelletier and Tremblay 2018), constitutional conflicts (Nevitte 1996), the inability of "monochrome liberalism" to accept the distinct character of Québec (Laforest 1992, 57), the categorical refusal among English-Canadians to consider Canada as anything other than an entirely British adjacent country (F.R. Scott in Berger 2017), the unwillingness of Quebecers to recognize different approaches to national belonging (Taylor 1992), the federal government's failure in representing a strong nation-state (Kymlicka 1998), to name just a few.

Whatever the answers, discussions of Québec nationalism often disengage from the question of class, though economic disparities have been considered in some accounts of the rise of Québec nationalism (Breton 1964; Rocher 2002; Graefe 2005; Balthazar 2018; Bourque and Légaré 2019). My analysis in Chapter 4 isn't estranged from this perspective. Yet, for the most part, the question of class

remains peripheral in studies of Québec nationalism. One key exception is Coleman (1984), who argued that three groups of French-speaking Quebecers – i.e., the working class, the intellectual class, and the middle class – sensed, for diverse but complementary reasons, a failure of Canadian federalism in the post-war period. They coalesced for the sovereignty of Québec, seeing there an adequate solution to their respective forms of social insecurity. Regarding this subject, one of the most relevant scholars to my project is Jane Jacobs, who argued ([1980] 2011) that the rise of Québec nationalism was a reaction to the economic decline of Montréal to the benefit of Toronto in the post-war period. The transition from an industrial to a post-industrial world coincided with the transfer of the position of the economic powerhouse from Montréal to Toronto, which has consequently reduced Montréal to a "regional Canadian city" (ibid., 19). Jacobs argued this partly explains the increased social and cultural tensions in Québec that stoked the independence movement (ibid, 21). Jacobs's explanation provides context for an argument that I made in the introduction of this chapter: that the redefinition of Québec nationalism was accompanied by a strong desire to 'reconquer' Québec's cities, and Montréal in particular, as the economic centre run by francophones.

To me, however, one of the lacunae in Jacobs's and Coleman's examinations of Québec nationalism is that they fail to analyze how francophone political elites strategically used this historical context. Instead of reflecting on their own ineffective policies or acknowledging the broader structural transformations of global capitalism, these elites attributed the province's economic decline solely to anglophone capitalists. Yet, the reality is more complex: it was the broader process of deindustrialization, rather than the actions of any single group, that devastated working-class neighbourhoods. As mentioned, it dismantled the manufacturing base that had historically provided stable, well-paying, and unionized jobs to the working class. As factories closed or relocated between the 1960s and 1990s, many former industrial workers and their families were pushed into the growing

service sector. These service jobs offered significantly lower wages, fewer benefits, and little job security compared to the industrial positions they replaced. This shift mirrors broader economic trends in post-industrial cities, where stable manufacturing economies gave way to fragmented, low-paying service work, exacerbating economic inequality and leaving many families struggling to maintain their standard of living.

Despite this, in Montréal, anglophone capitalists took most of the blame. They rapidly became the antagonistic 'other' in every nationalist discourse. Out of this discursive recourse to blaming the anglophone ruling class, a new national hero was born: the white French-speaking industrial worker, of which the Sud-Ouest is the symbolic *locus*. In this section, I investigate the various manipulations that transformed white francophone workers into agents for bourgeois nationalist ideals. I examine the commodification of the industrial working-class symbols by gentrifying agents, and the ways in which they are represented in the memory landscape of the Sud-Ouest and perceived by both gentrifiers and long-term communities. I then discuss how the ways of celebrating the industrial past have reshaped the character of the divided city in the borough and how they have restricted the expression of marginalized pasts and pushed them into collective amnesia.

5.5.1 Quartier Populaire: Materializing Nationalist Myths

As Québec entered its process of national redefinition in the 1960s, it became clear that it needed to 'update' its collective mythos. With the new national identity circling around questions of language and culture, Jean Lesage, Québec's Premier at the time, sought to stimulate the art scene (Coutié and Robert 2023). To do so, he founded the Québec Film Board (Office du film Québécois) in 1961, which began producing movies and documentaries, some of which addressed the issue of nationalism. According to architecture historian André Lortie: "The Quiet Revolution seemed to be a cultural revolution, not only involving intellectuals, writers and artists, but occurring as well in the new mass media of film and

television" (Lortie 2004, 45). The Québec Film Board was instrumental in this transformation, as many of its documentaries addressed the issue of economic inequalities, focusing on the oppression faced by the white francophone industrial working class. This became the *leitmotif* in Québec's expressive cultures (Coutié and Robert 2023). In addition to the documentaries, numerous songs, poems, novels, and theatre plays mobilized this *mythos* to varying extents.

The novel *The Tin Flute* by Gabrielle Roy (1945), the song *À Saint-Henri* by Raymond Lévesque (1960), and the poem *Speak White* by Michèle Lalonde (1968) are among the most renowned cultural works to emerge from, or to take as their setting, Montréal's Sud-Ouest, particularly the neighbourhood of Saint-Henri. These works, steeped in themes of hardship, solidarity, and working-class resilience, cemented the Sud-Ouest's place in the Québécois cultural imagination. Yet, by the 1980s, the very mythos that had celebrated working-class life became instrumental for gentrification, as the Sud-Ouest emerged as one of the fastest gentrifying areas of the city. In public discourse, the Sud-Ouest shifted from a *quartier ouvrier* [working-class neighbourhood] to a *quartier Populaire* [people's neighbourhood], a subtle but telling change that romanticized "the people" while erasing labour struggles, industrial decline, and material poverty that had defined the area.

When Jean, a former handyman, tells me, "This is our neighbourhood," and Jean-Claude, a gentrifier who works in a bank, says, "They did a great job preserving our history," both deploy the same collective pronoun "our," but they do so to invoke very different communities. Jean's "our" is grounded in lived, material experience, decades of social networks, labour histories, and place-based identities forged through industrial work, tenant struggles, and collective resilience. By contrast, Jean-Claude's is a symbolic claim to a history he did not live, mediated instead through walking paths, heritage plaques, and curated aesthetics that make this past accessible and palatable for middle-class consumption. In similar ways, when another gentrifier, Jenny, an accountant who moved into a new

condo unit in the former Montréal's Children's Hospital, told me, "I love that the neighbourhood still has that authentic vibe […] it feels like I'm part of something bigger here, like I'm carrying on the story," it exemplifies how this symbolic ownership operates. The story she imagines herself continuing is not the unfiltered history of deindustrialization, poverty, or working-class organization, but a distilled narrative that foregrounds charm, grit, and character while omitting conflict, dispossession, and marginalization. The "authentic vibe" that she refers to is rooted in working-class histories that have been reinterpreted, sanitized, and rebranded for contemporary consumption. This selective appropriation of memory allows gentrifiers to feel anchored in a past that is not their own, even as their presence, and the urban transformations accompanying it, contribute to displacing those who embody that very history.

The gentrified memoryscape collapses materially different pasts into a shared "heritage" blurring the boundaries between those who inherited the neighbourhood through lived struggle and those who arrived through market opportunity. This represents a rearticulation of place-based identity so that newcomers' symbolic claims as valid as those of long-standing communities. Sharon Zukin (1987, 133; 2010, 21) discusses the symbolic economy of gentrification, where cultural memory is commodified for those with the economic power to reshape a neighbourhood. In a similar way, Pierre Bourdieu's (Bourdieu 1979, 86) concept of cultural capital helps explain why gentrifiers cling to working-class histories; they derive social prestige from associating with 'authentic' history, even as their presence dilutes it. The result is a palimpsest of memory where original stories of labour and resistance may remain visible, but they are overwritten by a new narrative that serves the identity-making projects of the privileged. Ultimately, the endurance of Sud-Ouest mythos in the face of gentrification is not a sign of preservation but of appropriation. The stories endure, but their meanings shift, and are no longer testimonies of struggle; rather, they become décor for a new class of residents.

When gentrifiers speak of "our" past, they engage in a subtle act of dispossession, while distancing themselves from the present-day consequences of their presence. The true contradiction, then, is not just between memory and erasure, but between who gets to claim the past, and who gets to call Sud-Ouest home.

This issue is perhaps most visible in the way cultural figures are memorialized. One of the best examples of the dichotomous interpretations of 'our' past is in the celebration of 'national heroes.' The celebration of Gabrielle Roy, one of the most important figures in Québec and Canadian literature of the twentieth century, exemplifies this. Roy was born in 1909 in the French-speaking area of Saint-Boniface in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She settled in Saint-Henri in 1939, where she worked as a journalist while writing her first novel, *Bonheur d'occasion* (*The Tin Flute*), published in 1945. The novel was named "the Book of the Month" by the Literary Guild of America and remains one of Québec's most read novels. The novel was also published in France and won the prestigious Femina Prize in 1947. That same year, the book received the Governor General's Prize, and Gabrielle Roy was admitted to the Royal Society of Canada (Éditions du Boréal 2023). As the first French-Canadian novel set in an urban setting, the novel takes place in Saint-Henri. The book tells the story of the francophone working-class Lacasse family and its struggles in adapting to the living conditions of an anglophone city. It depicts the experience of poverty through the eyes of the mother, Rose-Anna, and her daughter, Florentine, portraying the hopes and dreams of these women while also focusing on the harsh material reality that they faced, especially the social reproductive responsibilities that they bore, which prevented them from realizing their dreams. The city plays a crucial role in the protagonists' faith as it is the space of possibilities as well as the source of hardships.

The book and its author have become staples of Québec's collective national imaginary, garnering various tributes to the novel throughout the province and especially in the Sud-Ouest. From

my walks in the borough, I counted five spots dedicated to the novel: a monumental art display in the subway station *Place Saint-Henri*; a small place with benches including an official plaque dedicated to *Bonheur d'occasion*; a new trendy, high-end restaurant (which opened in February 2023) named *Bonheur d'occasion*; a self-guided walking tour, including maps and archive images relating to places and topics covered in the book; and a house that was one of the inspirations for Gabrielle Roy when she wrote the book. We can also find evocations of the novel in general information panels found throughout the neighbourhood celebrating her and her work. For instance, when Danielle and I scheduled our walking interview, we agreed to meet on the mezzanine of *Place Saint-Henri* subway station in front of the art display dedicated to *Bonheur d'occasion* (Figure 5.8). When she saw the mural, we had the following exchange:

> Danielle: Do you know Gabrielle Roy, or are you too young?
>
> Christophe: Oh, yes, haha! I do know her, and I've read a couple of her books in high school and Cégep.
>
> Danielle: Yeah, she is so important to us. You know, she really managed to tell our stories to show others just how difficult it was for people of this neighbourhood at a certain point in time. And you, haha! I am too young myself, but my grandfather told me about her. He was so impressed by her and the lengths she went to in writing her newspaper articles and later her books. You know, she really spent time here, she taught children of the neighbourhood, and she wasn't afraid to be associated with us, unlike so many others who,

> even in the 1980s, wouldn't dare to come to *Saint-Henri*. Every time I pass in front of this mural, I feel nostalgic. She really was a great lady.[62]

I honestly didn't think much of this interaction at first. Like many other Québécois having been schooled in the province, I knew Gabrielle Roy and I knew her importance in the nationalist memory. Roy was a staunch defender of francophone rights. When she arrived in Montréal, she said, "I was discovering my brothers, by blood and language, they lived in an inferior condition, in a second-class atmosphere compared to English Canadians" (Roy in Novelli 1981, 131, my translation). At this point, when Danielle, a 71-year-old retired woman who had been working on and off in a cleaning company at various factories, talked to me about Roy, she was also referring to her place in the nationalist memory. However, my conversations with gentrifiers (and these gentrifiers were mostly francophone), including one about Gabrielle Roy, reminded me of the above-mentioned conversation that Danielle and I had on the mezzanine of *Place Saint-Henri* subway station. What if, when Danielle said, "She [Roy] wasn't afraid to be associated with us," she was not talking about francophones in general but specifically the working-class francophones?

Indeed, when I interviewed gentrifiers and the discussion diverged to talk about Gabrielle Roy, I never felt the same "closeness" that Danielle expressed with the author. For gentrifiers, what seemed to matter most was the fact that Roy had written about the neighbourhood: "[*Bonheur d'occasion*] describes Saint-Henri in so many details" or "This is the house that was the inspiration for the family in the novel."[63] These statements differ from Danielle's. For her, it was appreciation; while for gentrifiers, it was the appeals, authenticity and the fame that the novel brought to the neighbourhood.

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[62] I wasn't recording yet as we were just meeting in the subway for our walk. The quote here is translated from memory; maybe the phrasing and words aren't entirely accurate, but the general idea is.

[63] The house in question was, ironically, on sale when we were walking there. The seller was asking 1.65 million dollars, almost double the average for a similar size house in Montréal.

For Danielle, Gabrielle Roy's importance stems from her attention to the people and conditions of living and working: "She wasn't afraid to be associated with *us.*" What appeals to gentrifiers, by contrast, is that a book about the neighbourhood has received so much literary and popular recognition, adding to the symbolic worth of their living environment. This difference may be anecdotal, yet it reveals how national memories are differentially encoded and decoded. Gabrielle Roy has, over time, become a symbol of Québec nationalism, as her books offer concrete and comprehensive narratives to commemorate and celebrate the figure of the white francophone industrial worker. Through gentrification, however, the focus on industrial labour is moderated; Roy's sensible depiction of working-class reality has been eclipsed in favour of her commodification to boost the neighbourhood's 'authenticity.'

There are other similar examples in Montréal's Sud-Ouest, where class struggles or the radical politics of historical figures are silenced, and they become empty signifiers that are mostly connoted as national icons or appeals to places. The figures of Madeleine Parent and Louis Cyr are such cases. Madeleine Parent was an activist, defending labour, women and Indigenous rights. She was one of the key figures of the 1946 textile strike in Montréal and, overall, was deeply involved in the unionization of numerous factories in Montréal and other cities in Québec and Ontario (A. Lévesque 2003, 17). In 2012, after her death, the Arrondissement Sud-Ouest officials decided to create a park in her honour along the banks of the canal. Despite having worked most of her life in the factories of Saint-Henri, the administration of the borough decided to place this new green space in the neighbouring Pointe-Saint-Charles across the canal, as there was no free space along the north bank of the canal. More specifically, the Madeleine Parent Park was built on the abandoned Séracon candle factory (Burill 2021, 24), which has an interesting history. In 2009, it was squatted by locals and activists from the

Pointe-Saint-Charles Autogestion Social Centre,[64] who attempted to reclaim the building for the community. After the squatters were evicted by the police, the Sud-Ouest administration granted a construction permit for the transformation of the factory building into luxury condos. The Madeleine Parent Park became part of this "revitalization" project, mostly to ease tensions in the community and to 'protect' access to the canal (Burrill 2021, 25). This also allowed the developers to circumvent the borough's requirement for affordable, social housing. The condo project called *Walter sur Atwater* became another example of new-build gentrification in the area. Jonathan Nezri, the developer of this condo, was open about the project's purpose in interviews he gave to the newspaper at the time: "We mainly target a population aged between 35 and 65, seeking second purchases" (quoted in Roulot-Ganzmann 2012). It is paradoxical that the park named after Parent was premised on the displacement of working-class people, a community that she fought for her entire life. What Madeleine Parent fundamentally stands for – radical labour politics – was censored, with her memory embodied in the park legitimizing gentrification. Commemorating her work and life next to a demolished industrial building where activists squatted and were ruthlessly evicted is a form of symbolic as well as material violence that is not rare in the Sud-Ouest.

There was something surreal at play when I visited this park in the fall of 2021. The landscape was beautiful on the banks of the canal overlooking the Atwater market on the other side with Mount Royal in the background. In the park, many young people were chatting and drinking beers at the picnic tables, and the bike shop attached to the *Walter on Atwater* condo was full of people, while others were walking their dogs or jogging – a typical scene of a warm fall evening in a gentrified neighbourhood of Montréal. To me, and as pointed out by Fred Burril (2021, 28), the surreal aspect of

[64] Centre social autogéré de Pointe-Saint-Charles (CSA) was founded in 2007 and serves as an independent meeting point for residents of the neighbourhood. What differentiates CSA from other community centres is its autonomy from the State, its refusal of hierarchy and illegitimate authority, and self-management through direct democracy (Ma communauté, 2025).

this scene stems from the particular maneuvering of Madeleine Parent's legacy, whose militant heritage is muted, and the signifier of Parent herself is used to materialize "green gentrification" (Gould and Lewis 2012; Rigolon and Németh 2020). Parks started to appear on the banks of the Canal in conjunction with the condo conversions of old buildings and factories. While these parks were mostly frequented by condo residents and other middle-class members, others barely considered the manicured canal banks accessible green spaces. Today, because of class differentiation, working-class residents tend to avoid these gentrified parks, as they stand out amid a crowd of gentrifiers. It is further west along the banks, where there are still abandoned factories and remnants of the industrial era, that you will find almost exclusively working-class residents playing cards or dominoes. This may be another example of the contradictory fallout of the social-mixing policy. Rather than mixing, these kinds of projects promote division (Bélanger 2010).

The final example that embodies a similar contradiction is the case of Louis Cyr (Figure 5.9). Born in 1863 in Saint-Cyprien de Napierville, about 40 km South of Montréal, Louis Cyr grew up poor and left school at 12 years old to start working as a lumberjack. His family later left for the United States to work in the textile industry (Ohl [2005] 2013). As he grew up, Cyr started to notice his incredible physical strength and became renowned in the Northeast United States and across many Canadian provinces as "the strongest man on earth" (Figure 5.10). He went on tour with anglophone producer Mac Sohmer, who took advantage of his illiteracy and scammed him into signing a contract that practically deprived him of any income during his strength shows. This motivated him to start his own touring company with his wife, which brought him wealth. (Ohl 2005, 428). In Québec's collective memory, Louis Cyr represents the figure of a superhero. His strength, coupled with his difficult, working-class upbringing and his troubles with the anglophone promoter, are all at the centre

of his legend. These have frequently been underlined in Ohl's biography of him, as well as in the biographical film about him released in 2013 (Roby 2013).

What is odd, however, is the desire to honour Louis Cyr in Montréal's Sud-Ouest, where, besides the statue (Figure 5.9), a park, plaques, and a street are also celebrating him. Unlike Gabrielle Roy or Madeleine Parent, Louis Cyr's tie to the neighbourhood is slim, to say the least. He did briefly serve as a police officer in the borough between 1883 and 1885, but he never lived in the Sud-Ouest, nor was he particularly attached to it. As soon as he left the police, he also left the city altogether, establishing himself in a rural town. There are arguably more pertinent sites to commemorate his legacy than the Sud-Ouest. Overall, the presence of Louis Cyr in the Sud-Ouest is explained by his *mythos* to it; he is *the* historical figure that best exemplifies the nationalist story of the white francophone worker. What is commemorated is not his working-class upbringing or his labour, but rather his overcoming of his struggles with an anglophone promoter, echoing the general story of a francophone's 'reconquest' after an era driven by anglophone ownership. The heavy presence of Louis Cyr in the borough, despite its thin historical lineage, also stems from gendered stereotypes. Man and manhood are much more prevalent in the *mythos* surrounding industrialism, which was – and still is – seen as a predominantly male-driven environment. The presence of Louis Cyr in the memoryscapes of the borough reinforces and reproduces such a perception. The silencing of the presence of women in and outside factories, without whose reproductive (and productive) labour this model of capital accumulation would not have reached this size and importance, is prevalent in the borough.

In sum, we can see how both nationalist drives and gentrification appropriate working-class history and transform it for their needs in Montréal. In the next chapter, through an analysis of Belfast's H&W cranes, I show a similar process, i.e. how industrial working-class icons have been reappropriated by political elites, depriving them of their working-class content and radicalism and

transforming them into marketable urban and national symbols. Montréal's transition from a "*quartier ouvrier*" to a "*quartier populaire*" necessitated the working-class *mythos* and history to follow a similar pattern. Yet, as Stuart Hall argues (2018, 238, in Burrill 2021, 133), "The term 'popular,' and even more the collective subject to which it must refer – 'the people' – is highly problematic," as it is constructed by unequal power relations and struggles along the lines of language, race, gender and colonial vectors.

5.5.2 New Landscape, Same Division?

As I discussed earlier, the former industrial history and working-class past have been used to promote their consumption by the new francophone bourgeoisie class, which became part and parcel of the nationalist project. For political and economic elites, the gentrification of Montréal's Sud-Ouest was a success, as the new landscape successfully attracted francophone gentrifiers from the 1980s to the late 2000s (Ville de Montréal 2024). In the 2010s, however, developments have paradoxically challenged this trend. Despite the massive investments made to transform the borough into a salient space of nationalist mythos, the Sud-Ouest has been the most rapidly anglicizing borough in Montréal (Ville de Montréal 2024). This phenomenon is even more prominent in Saint-Henri, historically the most francophone neighbourhood in the Sud-Ouest. In this section, I examine this paradoxical development.

Even if the division between Montréal's two main linguistic communities (anglophones and francophones) has diminished over time, it continues to define the lives of people. Intergroup relations in Montréal appear far more stable than in Belfast, as intergroup tensions have rarely escalated into violence in recent years.[65] Yet, recent developments such as the implementation of restrictive language

[65] The most recent episode of violent conflict happened on September 4, 2012. On election night, the nationalist *Parti Québécois* held a party in a concert hall in downtown Montréal. During the evening, an armed man entered through the back entrance of the venue. He opened fire, hitting two technicians and killing one of them. He was soon subdued and arrested by the police. On his way out of the venue, he shouted at the numerous television cameras "Les Anglais se réveillent (The

policies, the rise of nationalist discourses, and the ascendance of neo-conservative politics suggest that the relationship between francophones and anglophones is likely to deteriorate in the near future. The linguistic division is extensive, with separate schools, news outlets and cultural centres, leading anglophone and francophone communities to live in largely separate social spheres. These divisions have been so entrenched that such terms as "cultural apartheid" (Rioux 2018) have been used to describe the socio-political reality of the city. This separation has reduced cross-community cooperation and interaction in recent years, following consecutive state reforms that have provided greater protection for the French language. Jackie Andreoli of the Saint-Columba House in Pointe Saint-Charles stated in an interview with me that "many of our institutions, of course, are separate, and for a number of years now, especially education. The educational system is split up, [and] many people live, in fact, in a monolingual environment. And only a few institutions have remained bilingual outside of federal buildings." Luba Kolomycky also said to me, "Once you are in one system, it's actually very difficult, I think personally, to be open to the other. So, all the information that you get via the school is English information. You go to that social club, you have this association, but it's an English association. You have the afterschool care that's also in English. It's all in a one-community network." Montréal's civil society organizations have been very critical of this institutional separation, arguing that it creates a lasting division.

The Sud-Ouest, however, has the historical particularity of having a strong connection to both linguistic communities. Through various waves of demographic change, the borough saw the early arrival of English settlers, the massive influx of French-Canadians during the industrial era, the suburbanization and the 'white flights' of the early 1960s from the central cities, and the arrival of

English are waking up)" and "It's gonna be fucking payback." On November 18, 2016, he was sentenced to life in prison, having to spend 20 years behind bars before he can apply for parole.

gentrifiers since the 1990s. In a newspaper article published in 2017, however, journalist Étienne Paré (2017, my translation) wrote: “According to the 2001 census, nearly three out of four people spoke French at home in Saint-Henri. 15 years later, only 60% of them speak the language of Gabrielle Roy at home.” The mobilization of Garbielle Roy here is noteworthy; the report clearly frames the decline of francophones through a nationalist lens. That said, we can indeed notice a decrease in the number of francophone residents since 2006. If we take the data for the whole Sud-Ouest instead of only for Saint-Henri, it is 55% of residents who claim French as their mother tongue (Ville de Montréal 2024).

At first glance, the borough’s latest anglicization may seem at odds with the idea that gentrification serves as a tool for the nationalist reinscription of the urban landscape. However, this paradox underscores the complexity of gentrification as both a cultural and economic process. While the demographic outcome may be an increased presence of English speakers, the process itself remains deeply tied to a nationalist logic. Gentrification does not solely function through the linguistic composition of its residents but also through symbolic and spatial transformations that reinforce a Québécois cultural order. The promotion of French-language institutions, the valorization of historical figures like Gabrielle Roy, and the prioritization of francophone heritage in urban redevelopment all contribute to this nationalist urban vision. At the same time, the economic realities of gentrification attract a mobile, professional class that includes many anglophones, demonstrating that the nationalist project is shaped by, and sometimes constrained by, the logic of capital.

Most of the non-francophones in the borough have not come from the British Isles, other provinces or the neighbourhoods of the city where English is the most spoken language (Ville de Montréal 2024). Rather than being imposed from outside, this shift results from francophone gentrifiers adopting English as their working language, a choice that naturally extends into their social lives. The francophone “creative class” (to borrow Richard Florida’s term) has been especially quick to adapt,

embracing English in professional circles where innovation, entrepreneurship, and cultural production connect with transnational markets. Drawing from Pierre Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital (Bourdieu 1977, 17), we can understand the decline of French in professional settings not merely as a matter of individual or communal choice, but as a reflection of the market-driven valuation of languages. English, as the dominant language of global capitalism, connects better with the world of exchange value in key economic sectors, incentivizing its adoption among those seeking upward mobility.

In addition, the neighbourhood has seen a massive influx of students coming to study at the new Concordia University campus (opened in 2010), just North of the Sud-Ouest borough, as well as recent immigrants. Concordia is one of the three anglophone universities in Québec, which led to the arrival of mostly anglophone students. There is a wealth of studies on the relationship between studentification and gentrification (D. P. Smith 2004; D. P. Smith and Holt 2007; Hubbard 2008; Chatterton 2010; Moos et al. 2019), including studies specifically focused on Montréal (Jolivet et al. 2023). Interestingly, the arrival of students didn't seem to be a significant source of concern for my interviewees. Immigration, on the other hand, was. Because of its high concentration of social housing and HLM[66], the highest in Canada, the Sud-Ouest saw a significant influx of refugees and immigrants, which heightened tensions amid the social and political anti-immigration zeitgeist in Québec.[67] There

[66] HLM are low-rent housing. They are publicly owned and managed by municipal housing offices (OMH). They are primarily intended for low-income households. (FRAPRU 2026)

[67] As I mentioned earlier, the contemporary Québecois nation appeared during the Quiet Revolution, and one of the key tenets of the Revolution was a firm rejection of the Catholic heritage. This resulted in an increased refusal of all religions, but this secularist orientation has very often ended up legitimizing xenophobia. During the second referendum evening party in 1995, the Prime Minister of Québec, Jacques Parizeau, said that the defeat of the referendum was attributable "to money, and the ethnic vote," (Chaîne du Québec 2013, 3min30) implying that immigrants were at fault. In 2019, the CAQ government passed Bill 21 which prohibits state employees in positions of authority, such as judges, police officers, prison guards and teachers, from wearing religious symbols while at work. Under the guise of secularism, this law mainly affects members of religious minorities who have more visible religious symbols. It also disproportionally targets women, who are statistically more present in the education sector. Québecois nationalist discourses closely follow the dynamics of cultural nationalism (Hutchinson 1987) which underscores the national language and Québecois culture as the true components of

was, indeed, a widespread racist, xenophobic discourse towards these immigrants circulating among both long-term communities and gentrifiers, francophones and anglophones. Immigration remains a major target of "othering" by white supremacists, whether they are Québécois nationalists or Canadian nationalists.

Still, many residents I interviewed still feel uncomfortable with the growing anglicization. While many voiced their concerns about this trend, francophone gentrifiers were most vocal on the issue. For Maxime, a gentrifier who arrived in the borough in 2009, the situation had become "unbearable." As she remarked: "All the new people in the building speak English, same things in the store. It's changing so fast."[68] Marie-Claude Rose, a sociologist and a coordinator at the self-managed grocery store *Le Detour* in Pointe Saint-Charles (who arrived in the borough in 2010) told me the following:

> As I told you, there are people in the grocery store who arrive at the checkout and speak to you in English. You tell them "Bonjour" as they arrive, and they respond, "Don't speak French." Ayoye [response of astonishment]! There is a form of arrogance that I have never seen before in Pointe-Saint-Charles. There were always English speakers, but they could at least say "bonjour." There is an English/French tension which was not there at all when I arrived. So, you see, we even had to create a policy on language. So, let's be clear: we work in French in the grocery store."

Long-term residents, on the other hand, seemed more resigned and accepting of what some describe as just "another wave" of anglophone influx. Danielle said, "You know, that's how it is. Actually, if

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the nation. The reality, however, is that Québec nationalism is also strongly influenced by tendencies of racial nationalism, based on French heritage and therefore whiteness.

[68] Original « Sans bon-sens, tous ceux qui arrive dans le building parlent anglais, pareil dans les magasins. Ça change vite. »

anything, it is back to how it was long ago!"[69] When I asked Danielle's husband, Pierre, the same question, he responded with a hint of anger: "That's what they [anglophones] do, you know. They are buying houses everywhere. Soon, the city will be English once again." [70]

These responses, though anecdotal, point to a distinction in how different groups perceive the temporal dimensions of gentrification. The contrasting temporalities employed by francophone gentrifiers and long-term residents in Pointe-Saint-Charles reveal distinct ways of understanding the neighbourhood's demographic and linguistic shifts. The two francophone gentrifiers interviewed framed these transformations as an urgent, immediate threat to the future, emphasizing the rapid pace of change and the need for proactive measures to curb the growing dominance of English. Their discourse reflects an anxiety over the fragility of the francophone presence in urban spaces, positioning gentrification as a potential accelerant of linguistic displacement rather than a tool of cultural reclamation. By contrast, long-term residents adopted a historical perspective, interpreting these changes less as a rupture than as a return to an earlier *status quo*. For them, the current shifts are not unprecedented disruptions but rather a cyclical recurrence, reminiscent of previous waves of anglophone dominance. This tone is somewhat that of resignation, as though the process is unfolding according to a well-worn historical script, one in which francophones, especially working-class francophones have always had to struggle to maintain their presence in the city's most desirable areas.

This contrast underscores how urban and economic transformations affect the collective and individual psyche. As Jay Emery (2018, 81) argues in his work on coalfield communities in Nottingham, the trauma of deindustrialization shapes how individuals process the present and how they transmit these experiences to future generations. Similarly, in the Sud-Ouest, residents' temporal

[69] Original : « Tu sais, c'est comme ça. En fait, on revient à ce que c'était il y a longtemps ! »
[70] Original « C'est ça qu'ils font, tsé. Ils achètent des maisons partout. Bientôt, la ville va redevenir anglophone. »

frameworks reveal that these demographic and linguistic shifts are not experienced merely as abstract policy concerns but as deeply personal and affective realities. While francophone gentrifiers perceive an impending cultural erosion and thus call for defensive measures, long-term residents, drawing on their historical memory of past upheavals, interpret these changes with a mix of fatalism and frustration. Their responses reveal the pattern of how communities make sense of and deal with the destabilizing forces of structural change, not just in terms of who occupies space, but in how the past, present, and future are made sense of through lived experience.

This complex relationship between past and present in the Sud-Ouest's linguistic and cultural landscape extends beyond the divide between gentrifiers and long-term working-class communities. While concerns over anglophone resurgence shape how francophones interpret gentrification, they exist alongside broader anxieties about demographic change in the city, especially those driven by the influx of economically disadvantaged immigrant populations. Just as gentrification is seen as a process that threatens the cultural integrity of francophone spaces, other forms of socio-ethnic transformation are also framed as disruptive. According to Leloup (2007, 274), given rapid technological changes and improvements in public transportation, recent immigrants are now more evenly dispersed throughout the city and its suburbs than they were in previous generations. The expression of non-white racial and ethnic differences in public spaces provoked white communities to more frequently decry the loss of their social space to immigrant groups rather than the transformations brought by gentrification. Comments glorifying the past and blaming immigrants for the changing times, or for the fact that "it isn't how it was any more," were numerous (Interviews: Benoît Larouche; Paul Laliberté; Denis Gagnon; Luba Kolomycky; Danielle Pagé)

The linguistic landscape of the Sud-Ouest has become increasingly anglicized, but it has also been peppered with numerous other languages (Leimgruber and Fernández-Mallat 2021). Interestingly,

my francophone interviewees seemed to indicate that their hostile stance towards immigrants should be separated from their refusal of the anglicization of the borough. For many of them, the possible return of anglophones is as alarming (or even more alarming in some cases) as the influx of immigrants of colour and their undermining of what is perceived to be Québec's cultural integrity.

The growth of such an outcry among francophone constituents prompted the city and the provincial governments to reinforce nationalist symbolism over the memoryscapes of the Sud-Ouest. For instance, on June 23, 2020, one day before Québec's national day, the then mayor of Montréal, Valérie Plante, announced that the new station for the city's transit system would be named Griffintown-Bernard Landry (Goudreault 2020). Landry was a former Premier of Québec for the Parti Québécois, the main nationalist party in Québec, and was a former economist, specializing in free trade, and led the government from 2001 to 2003, solidifying Québec's transition to neoliberalism. While he never represented nor lived in any Montréal riding, Landry was a key architect of neoliberal policies in Montréal, championing initiatives such as the Cité du Multimédia.[71] In this project, participating companies benefited from specific fiscal incentives, including a five-year tax holiday and credits covering 40% of salaries and the cost of certain equipment for three years (Desrochers 2002, 11). These policies catalyzed redevelopment in the Sud-Ouest, especially in the gentrifying Griffintown, demonstrating how nationalist memory can coexist with, and even mask, the material impacts of capitalist urban restructuring. Recognizing these dual dimensions underscores that urban symbols like the transit station encode both nationalist narratives and the economic decisions that have shaped Montréal's contemporary landscape.

[71] The Cité du Multimédia in Montréal was a large urban revitalization project from the 1990s that transformed former industrial buildings into a business district hosting numerous information technology companies.

Similarly, in April of 2024, the mayor of Montréal announced that Bassin Wellington would be rehabilitated and that a new neighbourhood would be built (Société immobilière du Canada 2025). Copying the neighbouring Griffintown, the models and renderings suggest another round of new-build gentrification, which triggered uproar from the anti-gentrification activist collective in the neighbourhood (ICI.Radio-Canada.ca 2024). In this new neighbourhood, some of the streets will bear the names of nationalist politicians, Bernard Landry once again, but also Pierre Dupuy and possibly Maurice Richard. Some of these changes did not sit well with the anglophone community. As Fergus Keyes of the Montreal Irish Monument Park Foundation said in an interview regarding the REM station (quoted in Corriveau 2020): "We have nothing against Bernard Landry, but he has no connection with Griffintown. He did not live there and was never elected there. There are many other places that could recall his memory." He continued, "It is totally unacceptable, and we will continue to oppose it as long as we can." Fergus Keys further argued that Griffintown represents "the heart of the Irish community in Montréal" and, as such, the name of Griffintown, commemorating Mary Griffin,[72] should stand on its own (Goudreault 2020). The desire to further link the Sud-Ouest to Québec's nationalist imagination shows just how important the borough has become in terms of national symbolism.

At the provincial level, the CAQ government passed Bill 96 in May 2022, an amendment to Bill 101, the *Charte Québécoise de la langue française*, which reinforces the primary position of the French language in the judicial and educational system and civic life. This amendment has been vehemently denounced by the anglophone communities in Québec and other parts of Canada. The Task Force on Linguistic Policy even took the CAQ to court over this development. According to an opinion

[72] Mary Griffin, and her family, were among the first Irish landowners in the neighbourhood since the late eighteenth century (Encyclopédie du MEM 2017).

in the *Montreal Gazette*, “The Government of Québec has created and promoted the social climate where the use of the English language is restricted and disdained and is considered to be a threat to the survival of the French language and identity in Québec” (Caddell 2024). On the other hand, 78% of the francophones claim that they are worried about the future of French in Québec and wish the government would do more to protect the French language and francophone cultures (Bellerose 2021).

Amid these rising linguistic tensions in Québec, however, few acknowledge the material, structural factors driving the anglicization of Montréal. Instead, the nationalist discourse tends to blame historical anglophone communities or immigrants of colour, framing linguistic decline as a cultural betrayal rather than a structural phenomenon. I demonstrated above that language disparity is inseparable from economic and social inequalities. The francophone middle and upper classes have been among the quickest to abandon French in professional settings, adapting to the dominance of English as the global language of business and technological innovation. This adaptation is not merely a pragmatic response but reveals a fundamental contradiction at the heart of Québec nationalism: while nationalist discourse positions itself as a bulwark against linguistic and cultural erosion, it largely refrains from confronting the neoliberal economic structures that actively erode the primacy of French in the workplace. In this regard, Québec’s nationalist project aligns with what Brenner and Fraser (2017) termed “progressive neoliberalism,” wherein cultural identity is affirmed rhetorically while economic structures that sustain inequality remain unchallenged. A genuine defence of French in Québec would require addressing these structural inequalities, but such an approach would necessitate political actions that the francophone ruling class is unwilling to embrace, as it would entail resisting the economic imperatives of neoliberal capitalism and revealing how economic power remains concentrated in elite hands, beyond just anglophone institutions. This suggests that the real fault line in

the linguistic question is not simply between French and English speakers, but between those who benefit from existing economic structures and those marginalized by them.

Ruling elites rather routinely resort to a playbook that deflects from these material realities by blaming marginalized communities and reinforcing a narrow nationalist narrative. This strategy extends beyond their language politics to the realms of memory and urban space, where nationalist history and symbols are superimposed onto the landscape with an exclusionary effect. Alternative memories, whether tied to Indigenous histories, immigrant experiences, or working-class struggles, are actively stifled in favour of a purified nationalist vision. In this milieu, the cultural and racial exclusions embedded within Québec nationalism are maintained and even deepened, as the discourse around linguistic decline becomes a tool for reinforcing hierarchies of belonging. The next two sections explore how this exclusionary memory landscape manifests in urban transformations, further illustrating how nationalist anxieties over language are entangled with broader processes of gentrification and socio-economic restructuring.

5.5.3 Little Burgundy's Black Communities: Silencing and Erasure Under Nationalist Gentrification

The drive to inscribe francophone history onto the landscape was carried out alongside the white reconquest of the city, silencing and erasing other marginalized groups' memories. In the following sections, I look at two examples of such processes: first, the English-speaking black communities of Little Burgundy in the Sud-Ouest that have historically been industrial workers and their families but have seen their presence reduced to their jazz music contribution; and second, Indigenous communities whose symbolic inclusion in urban landscapes has been part and parcel of a reconquest of urban space by the enduring settler colonialism.

One of the most common myths in Québec is that black communities of Montréal are the result of recent immigration. Although a large portion of the black population in Québec is recent immigrants

from the Caribbean and African *Francophonie*, the history of black communities in Québec spans more than 400 years. In 1606, the first free black man, Mathieu Da Costa, arrived in New France to act as an interpreter between the French colonizers and the Indigenous people, and not so long after, in 1628, Olivier Le Jeune, the first black slave, arrived in Québec (Williams 1997, 17). After that, nearly 3,000 black slaves landed in Québec against their will during the era of New France and the subsequent British colonialism (ibid, 18). Since then, thousands of black people have resided in Québec. The presence of black populations in Montréal grew and diversified at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries due to the growth of the railway industry. The majority of them worked for the railroad companies as sleeping car porters, dining car employees, and red caps (High 2017, 23). This period marked the anchoring of an English-speaking black community in Saint-Antoine, now Little Burgundy, because it was close to both the Windsor and Bonaventure train stations (ibid, 23). As black employment stabilized, black workers' families moved there, and from 1870 onwards Little Burgundy became the hub of black communities in Québec and even in Canada (Williams 1997, 59). It would remain that way for an extended period as blacks faced discriminatory practices by real estate agencies, which, through legal and illegal mechanisms, forced black people to remain in this specific neighbourhood. Little Burgundy became the vibrant centre where various practices of the black communities flourished and radical black consciousness was formed and nurtured (High 2017, 23). For example, the Coloured Women's Club (CWC) was founded in 1902 to bring together black women from Little Burgundy and to support and mobilize them in the face of white women's movements that were campaigning to exclude minority women from public spaces and limit their access to social programs (Williams 1997, 50). In 1907, the Union Congregational Church was created and served as one of the key points of socialization for blacks in Montréal, where they developed mutual aid and self-empowerment to fight against the racial discrimination they were facing

(ibid., 54). In 1918, black workers created the first black union in North America, the Order of Sleeping Car Porters (OSCP) (ibid 63). Its main objective was to defeat the Canadian National Railways' internal racism, which saw black people as a disposable and inexpensive labour pool deserving of no employment protection. OSCP managed to secure employment contracts in its first two years, which guaranteed wage increases and improved working conditions for all workers, both black and white. In 1927, the Negro Community Center (NCC) was also created to meet the social needs of black communities and as a locus for radical self-help and community resiliency (ibid, 52). In short, the neighbourhood was the key node of blacks' organizing for labour and social reproduction and where a "infrastructure of dissent"[73] (Sears 2014, 4-6) was nurtured. Clearly, black communities had strong ties to this neighbourhood, going back centuries. Visiting Little Burgundy today, however, such a history is not discernible.

The period of deindustrialization left an irreparable mark on the Sud-Ouest, which did not spare Little Burgundy. The economic downturn was reflected in the neighbourhood's built environment as well, and Little Burgundy was quickly identified as a "slum area" (Paré 2017). All of this coincided with rising suburbanization. Thus, as governmental budgets prioritized the construction of roads and highways as well as suburban homes for white households, the divestment in the inner-city accelerated. Production moved to the suburbs, and automobiles and trucks, rather than trains, became the primary industrial means of mobility, spurring spatial restructuring at the metropolitan scale. Many porters were laid off. While the inner city was in decline, the municipality also embarked upon urban renewal in some inner-city areas (High 2017, 24). As shown in the documentary *La P'tite Bourgogne* (Bulbulian 1968), more than 14,000 people were displaced in the neighbourhood between 1965 and 1967 to make

[73] Sears (2011) defines an infrastructure of dissent as "the range of formal and informal organizations through which we develop our capacities to analyze (mapping the system), communicate (through official and alternative media channels), and take strategic action in real solidarity."

way for urban renewal and to "modernize" the area. A sizable portion of the area was destroyed to create room for a brand-new public housing development and for infrastructure for automobile transportation, such as the *Ville-Marie* express tunnel, a highway that runs under Montréal's Mount Royal. Black families faced pressure to relocate, sometimes on multiple occasions, before they left the borough for good (Williams 1997, 114). The displacement ruptured the social ties that black communities had established in Little Burgundy. Many of the community hubs and organizations mentioned above ceased their activities and filed for bankruptcy. This was the case of the NCC, the heart of the Little Burgundy's black community, which officially ceased its activities in 1993, 66 years after its opening. While other buildings, predominantly used by white people, received patrimonial status and protection, most black institutions did not (Bauer 2015). The NCC offices were not even recognized as a cultural heritage. Suffering from this blatant dismissal and negligence, this space of communion deeply treasured by black communities was finally destroyed in 2014 (Currie-Williams 2021, 64). Today, the plot of land is still vacant (Figure 5.11). This empty strip of land is a spectre haunting the social amnesia of the black heritage in Montréal. As High (2017, 25) points out, "[the] geographic dispersal of the Anglo-black community, and the undermining of black-owned businesses and institutions, weakened their contemporary link to Little Burgundy." Indeed, very few remnants of previously vibrant black communities are visible in today's landscape, with the problematic exception of those related to jazzmen and jazz music. As I argue next, for reasons tied to francophone white nationalism and gentrification, the history of jazz in Little Burgundy became a compromised commemoration, catering to the interests of both.

Pivoting on the elevation of the white francophone industrial worker to a mythical figure, Québec nationalism relies on the silencing and forgetting of non-white, non-francophone labour histories. As I discussed in Chapter 1, nationalism is constructed through the inclusion of selective

histories and the exclusion of others. In her famous poem *Speak White* (1968), Michèle Lalonde described the subordination of francophone workers to English-speaking elites, who tell the former to "speak white and loud/so we can hear you/from Saint-Henri to Saint-Domingue" (my translation). The implicit equation between francophone Quebecers and blacks, in this case Haitians (Haiti was formerly Saint-Domingue), has been a profoundly problematic leitmotif in Québec nationalist tropes. To Michèle Lalonde's poem, we can also add Pierre Vallières's (1974) biographical essay *White N***** of America*,[74] in which he again explicitly compared the situation of Quebecers to those of black Americans. For Vallières, Québécois working-class people are the "sub-proletariat, slaves" of Anglo-Saxons, like black Americans who, in his eyes, still lived through a form of slavery in the United States.

> Were they [the francophone Québécois] not, like black Americans, imported to serve as cheap labour in the New World? What differentiates them [is] only the colour of their skin and their continent of origin. After three centuries, their condition remained the same. They always constitute a reservoir of cheap labour that the owners of capital have complete freedom to employ or reduce to unemployment according to the latter's financial interests, [and] to whom the owners have complete freedom to pay poorly, to mistreat?" (Vallières 1974, 26, my translation)

This decontextualized identification between white Quebecers and Haitians (or black Americans) problematically conflates the history of each group, especially each group's different position within the property regime and the history of slavery. Such statements, while always problematic, were more accepted in the late 1960s and 1970s in Québec, as such a tactic could bring home the submissive

[74] The official book title isn't censored, so I decided to censor oppressive slurs when they are told by white people.

position of white francophone workers. One thing that was clear was that this sort of identification between the two groups never motivated white francophone workers to build a united front with blacks to fight English colonialism and capitalism. Indeed, it was the reason behind the reluctance of francophone whites to commemorate and celebrate the black communities of Little Burgundy (Nicolas 2020, 45).

In his documentary *À Saint-Henri le cinq septembre*, which I briefly mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, Hubert Aquin, the director, similarly argues that the misery of the poor does not exist in the same way between Europe and Québec. According to him, the situation of poverty in which the French-speaking workers of the Sud-Ouest found themselves is much worse than that of European workers because the latter are not subject to the whims of foreign ruling elites. Aquin describes the black communities of Little Burgundy as follows (my translation): "Saint-Henri has its black reserve, but there is little segregation there. Firstly, because the N***** are in the minority there, they live on the same streets, and above all, supreme reassurance, they speak English (21min 55 sec)." To garner attention for the misery of the Québec francophone communities, he elevated black communities' conditions of living and working. To establish the saga of the trials that white francophone working communities as heroes and vanguards of Québec nationalism went through, it was imperative to look away from and even blatantly distort the unequal racial relations between them and blacks and acquiesce to slavery. As pointed out by Émilie Nicolas (2020, 43), Québec nationalism was interested in its black communities not for the latter's history, the political lessons of their organizing, and potential for solidarity with them, but rather as a defective comparison for its own history and challenges.

The failure of the 1995 referendum did not mark the end of a political project but rather motivated Québec nationalism to adopt a mode of self-representation compatible with global

competitiveness. In this recalibration, the oppositional nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s gave way to a heritage politics that could appeal to both internal audiences and international investors. This shift coincided with gentrification's third wave, during which municipal governments, stripped of federal and provincial transfers under neoliberal austerity, turned to culture-led redevelopment as a growth strategy (Hackworth and Smith 2001, 453). In this climate, fragments of Montréal's Black history, particularly its jazz heritage, were selectively mobilized to craft a cosmopolitan image. Jazz has been one of the iconic brands of the city since the 1940s, and nightclubs and cabarets, such as Café Saint-Michel and Rockhead's Paradise, have marked the history of jazz in the city (Québec toponymy Commission 1994). Montréal has also been home to the world's biggest jazz festival since 1980, which now puts on more than 300 shows featuring bands, quartets and solo artists (Festival International de Jazz de Montréal 2025). In 1994, a new park called Jazzmen Park was unveiled in the Sud-Ouest to celebrate the music history of the city; and in 2009 and 2011, a park and a mural were dedicated to Oscar Peterson (Commission de la toponymie du Québec 1994; 2009; Pendon 2011). Oliver Jones was commemorated with a mural in 2014 (Buller 2014). Lastly, in 2019, another park, until then commemorating Rufus Rockhead, the owner of the jazz club, Rockhead's Paradise, was renamed to honour Daisy Peterson-Sweeney, a pianist, organist and music teacher who was central to the growth of jazz in Little Burgundy, although she is too often remembered only as Oscar Peterson's older sister, restricted to the role of 'sister of.' (Commission de la toponymie du Québec 2019).

Such a partial inclusion manages to protect the centrality of the white industrial worker myth, by not recognizing other experiences of industrial labour. In my conversations with the residents of Little Burgundy – both long-term residents and gentrifiers, and both French-speaking and English-speaking – the historical black communities of Little Burgundy are perceived almost exclusively through their contributions to jazz. When I asked Jean, a white man, for his perspective on the City's

job of telling the history of the neighbourhood, he highlighted "our history of the Lachine Canal, the factories and the industrial revolution, but also, […] the black communities' contributions to jazz in Montréal […]."[75] We can sense the implicit distinction that Jean makes here; black communities are all about jazz and foreign to the era of the industrial revolution and militant labour struggles in the city, which is racially constructed as being "our" (or his). In similar ways, when Jean-Claude, a white man who moved to Little Burgundy in 2013, was asked about what he thought the City should further highlight in promoting the neighbourhood, he replied: "I think they should really focus on what makes Little Burgundy unique, like the jazz history and the famous musicians. The industrial stuff is interesting, too, but that's more about Montréal as a whole. Jazz is what gives this area its uniqueness." Like Jean's statement, Jean-Claude's comment constructs industrial heritage as belonging to a "universal," implicitly white Montréal, while confining Black history to the sphere of expressive cultures. By framing jazz as the neighbourhood's "uniqueness," he inadvertently echoes the commodification logic that reduces Black heritage to an aesthetic asset for gentrified urban branding, bypassing Blacks' integral role in the area's industrial economy and labour struggles. In this logic, Blacks were not revolutionaries, but musicians. This narrowing of historical recognition is precisely what Joseph André, a Black man who has lived in the neighbourhood since the 1980s and now directs Little Burgundy's Athletic Centre, sought to challenge when he told me, "[Blacks] were more than jazz musicians. They were so important."[76] André's words cut against the grain of the gentrifier narrative, insisting on the centrality of Black industrial labour, community organizing, and political leadership, dimensions of history that remain excluded from the City's heritage branding.

[75] Original : "l'histoire du canal Lachine et de la révolution industrielle, mais aussi, pour voir l'apport des communautés noires au Jazz à Montréal, on peut continuer longtemps. Il y a plusieurs couches à tout ça."
[76] Original : Ils étaient plus que des Jazzmen, ils étaient vraiment importants.

Indeed, we must think beyond the visible to understand the political implications of these new *lieux de mémoire*. How Black history is included in the city is not an act of historical redress. The choice to commemorate figures like Oscar Peterson, Daisy Peterson-Sweeney, and Oliver Jones did not stem from a willingness to confront the city's deep racial inequalities, the displacement of Little Burgundy's residents, or the destruction of its community infrastructure. Rather, these commemorations functioned as sanitized signifiers, safe for tourists and gentrifiers' consumption and compatible with a nationalist canon that has long excluded non-white, non-francophone working-class histories. Where earlier nationalist discourse had appropriated the Black experience as a metaphor for francophone oppression, collapsing starkly different historical trajectories, the post-referendum era commodified Black culture as an apolitical marker of urban revitalization. As Joseph added in our interview, "You know, it's nice to see our people's faces on murals or parks, you know, but that's not the same as bringing back what was taken from us. They put up a picture, but they don't put back the community."[77] His observation cuts to the heart of the matter: symbolic recognition without structural restitution risks reinforcing the very inequalities it purports to address.

The case of Little Burgundy is yet another example of how memory politics in gentrifying, post-industrial cities can function as both a tool of recognition and an instrument of erasure. In the Sud Ouest, the selective inclusion of Black icons into the nationalist narrative after 1995 did not signal a rupture with the historical exclusions embedded in Québec's heritage politics. Instead, it marked a transformation in racial relations, from outright neglect and invisibility to a carefully curated, depoliticized visibility that celebrates aesthetic contributions and serves the interests of both neoliberal urban development and a post-referendum nationalism eager to present itself as open and cosmopolitan

[77] Original : Tsé c'est agréable de voir nos visages sur des murales ou dans des parcs, tsé, mais ce n'est pas la même chose que de nous rendre ce qu'on nous a enlevé. Ils affichent une image, mais ils ne redonnent pas la communauté.

without unsettling its foundational myths. Such selective remembrance distorts the past; it also actively shapes the present by legitimizing gentrification, naturalizing racialized inequalities in the urban landscape, and foreclosing alternative futures.

In this sense, the case underscores the urgency of the "right to memory" as theorized in this dissertation, a collective right not merely to be symbolized in the heritage landscape, but to inhabit it materially, socially, and politically. The Little Burgundy example thus illuminates a broader dynamic in neoliberal urbanism: how diversity can be celebrated in form while erased in substance, reinforcing capitalist and nationalist hegemonies even as it appears to challenge them. As I explore in the next section, these dynamics are even more acute for Indigenous communities in Montréal, whose histories and presences receive far less recognition in the city's memory landscape.

5.5.4 Legacies and Repetition: The Commemoration of Settler Colonialism in Montréal's Sud-Ouest

In Canadian cities, the politics of Indigenous presence is often shaped by a dual process of hypervisibility and erasure. Urban spaces where Indigenous people gather – whether for cultural, social, or survival purposes – are frequently subject to public scrutiny. At the same time, Indigenous histories, land claims, and cultural contributions have been omitted from the official narratives embedded in the urban landscape. This paradox reflects a broader colonial logic in which Indigenous people are acknowledged only in ways that do not disrupt settler claims to land, and where the recognition of the Indigenous presence is filtered through paternalistic or commercial frames rather than grounded in restitution, sovereignty, or justice.

In Montréal, these dynamics are sharpened by the city's history as a colonial hub, its ongoing role in administering services for northern Indigenous communities, and its embrace of gentrification-driven urban redevelopment. As I discuss in this section, projects like the Cabot Square transformation,

branded as a “renewal” or “revitalization,” often coincide with increased policing and the displacement of Indigenous people, further limiting their access to gathering sites and social networks.[78] While official heritage discourse may occasionally acknowledge the Indigenous presence in symbolic terms – for instance, through plaques, place names, or public art – it rarely addresses the material realities of dispossession or the enduring significance of these spaces to Indigenous life. Cabot Square, located at the intersection of downtown Montréal and the Sud-Ouest, has become one of the most visible and contested of these spaces.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the federal government gradually set up medical ‘clinics,’ barely providing essential care, in the Indigenous communities of Northern Québec. Then, following World War II, responsibility for health services for Indigenous communities was transferred from the Department of Indian Affairs to the new Department of Health and Social Services (Lux 2025). In this transition, “central functions of a regional board had been assigned to Montréal General Hospital, including responsibility for public health and patient transportation services” (Torrie et al. 2005, 95). Following this decision, the number of air evacuations between Indigenous communities in the North and Montréal increased rapidly. Emergency flights were argued to be less costly than building and maintaining clinic operations in Indigenous communities (ibid., 95). Following the epidemic of tuberculosis which ravaged the Nehiyawak [Cree] communities in 1980 and the subsequent gastroenteritis epidemic that affected the Inuit children acutely, a new partnership between the federal state and Montréal Children’s Hospital was set up (Torrie et al. 2005, 101). The hospital,

[78] Strictly speaking, Cabot Square lies just outside the administrative boundaries of the Sud-Ouest. Nevertheless, its inclusion is analytically relevant for two main reasons. First, the square is located in immediate geographical proximity to the study area (see Figure 1.1, where Cabot Square is identified by a green dot). Second, as discussed in this section, the recent rehabilitation and securitization of Cabot Square have been widely criticized for contributing to the displacement of Indigenous people who had previously used the space. Several observers and community organizations have argued that this process has resulted in a greater Indigenous presence in neighbouring areas, including parts of the Sud-Ouest, thereby linking the transformations of Cabot Square to the social dynamics examined in this dissertation.

located on the border of the Sud-Ouest and downtown, became the primary site of medical care for the First Nations and Inuit, who were flown or driven into Montréal. There was a paternalistic intimation when the Children's Hospital was assigned as a primary site of care for the whole Indigenous population, including adults (Breitkreutz 2014, 46-47). But more than that, the colonial decision to prioritize flights towards urban centres rather than intra-community care meant the uprooting of many Indigenous people, as they sometimes never returned to their communities. Many left the hospital, either too soon or without having received adequate care and were left alone in a city they never knew. Some found shelter at the YMCA and the Batshaw Youth and Family Centres, located one block from the hospital, while others were forced into houselessness.[79] Over time, the area surrounding the Children's Hospital and, in particular, Cabot Square[80] became a place of residence/encampment for the First Nations and Inuit people.

Several organizations serving houseless Indigenous people have emerged in the immediate vicinity of Cabot Square, reflecting the ongoing displacement and marginalization of Indigenous communities in urban spaces. Recently, however, these organizations have suffered from a lack of funding and rising rents. The Open Door, for instance, provided essential services to many houseless individuals during the renovation of the Square. But its closure in 2017, following the sale of its host church to condo developers, illustrates the cyclical nature of dispossession in gentrifying cities (Marceau et al. 2023, 321). The withdrawal of services for houseless Indigenous people mirrors the logic behind the city's interventions in Cabot Square itself, where revitalization efforts have functioned

[79] Activists and scholars have started referring to people without a physical address as "houseless" or "unhoused" in recent years. Recent research (see Springer 2000; Kidd and Evans 2011) shows that people experiencing houselessness see themselves as having a 'home.' Home refers to more than a roof; it describes communities, social connections and feelings of belonging. I thus chose to employ the term houseless in this dissertation as it recognizes that, despite not having a socially acceptable place to live, they still have ties to the larger community. The places where houseless people live are their homes. In the spirit of the right to the city, they should be recognized as such and treated with the same legal protections as conventional, property-based homes.

[80] Cabot Square is located just north of the Sud-Ouest borough. It also borders the city centre and Westmount.

more as exclusionary tactics than as support. As Camilla Hassan, a street worker at *Chez Doris*, put it, the renovations were designed to sanitize the park: “Every time the city renovates or builds something new, it’s like they’re trying to push people away. Our clients don’t just end up in Cabot Square by accident. They’re here because there’s nowhere else to go”[81] (Interviewed August 21, 2022). She followed, “It’s crazy, what people call revitalization often just means relocation for everyone but the developers. Services close, shelters get pushed out, and the women we work with are left to navigate a city that’s never been built for them.”[82] The experiences described by workers like Hassan reveal how gentrification and the erosion of urban support networks are not just spatial processes but deeply gendered, racialized and colonial ones.[83] While organizations such as *Chez Doris* provide essential services, they do so within a cityscape shaped by systemic neglect and targeted displacements.

Yet to frame Cabot Square solely as a site of marginalization would obscure the ways in which Indigenous people have actively reappropriated the space, transforming it into a locus of presence, belonging, and cultural continuity. Over the years, Indigenous people have staked their claims to the Square, embedding it with cultural references and using it as a ground for socializing, gathering, and mobilizing (Margier 2014, 79). For many, it has been perceived as a relatively safe place, symbolically charged and resonating far beyond Montréal itself – extending into northern reserves and villages

[81] Original: Chaque fois que la ville rénove ou construit quelque chose de nouveau, c’est comme si elle essayait de tasser le monde. Nos clientes ne se ramassent pas à Cabot Square par hasard. Elles sont là parce qu'elles n'ont nulle part d’autre où aller.

[82] Original: C'est fou, tsé, ce qu’on appelle revitalisation ça veut dire souvent relocalisation pour tout le monde, sauf pour les promoteurs. Les services ferment, les centres sont poussées, et les femmes avec lesquelles on travaille doivent se débrouiller dans une ville qui n’a jamais été construite pour elles.

[83] To fully understand why Indigenous people, and Indigenous women in particular, are disproportionately present in places such as Cabot Square, it is necessary to situate their urban marginalization within the enduring legacies of colonial governance, economic dispossession, and patriarchal state violence. The gendered and classed effects of colonial policies, most notably the Indian Act of 1876, profoundly disrupted Indigenous social structures by systematically undermining the political and social authority of Indigenous women, especially those who married outside their communities, while simultaneously producing conditions that pushed many into urban poverty (Peters 1998, 674). Rather than reflecting a voluntary or linear process of urban integration, Indigenous women’s presence in the city must therefore be understood as the outcome of settler colonialism.

(ibid., 91, 124). In this sense, Cabot Square has echoed the dynamics of Inuit nomadic camps, where kinship, alliances, ritual partnerships, and community-building were reconstituted in urban form (Stuckenberger 2006, 97). Its material features also contributed to this role: the central location, the recognizable monument to Caboto, the shade of trees, the shelter of the metro entrance, and the accessibility of picnic tables and grassy areas all fostered Indigenous use of the park (Breitkreutz 2014, 86). Yet, gentrification has eroded much of this materiality. The metro entrance remains but offers little privacy, while picnic tables and grassy areas have disappeared, undermining the very conditions that once made the Square an Indigenous gathering place.

As such, the municipal government's transformation of the western edge of Montréal's downtown, and particularly Cabot Square, cannot be understood solely as a question of "public safety" or "urban renewal." It is also embedded in the ongoing settler-colonial project of redefining urban space to reflect dominant narratives of belonging, civility, and national identity. By framing drug consumption, public drinking, violence, and houselessness primarily as security concerns, the city and its partners mobilized what Smith (1996, 122) called "revanchist urbanism," a form of neoliberal spatial governance that reclaims urban space for affluent and desirable populations while vilifying those who do not conform to the vision of a modern, orderly metropolis and even blaming them for causing urban decline. The media played an active role in this discursive framing, long before the renovation. Newspaper coverage constructed Cabot Square as a threatening, degraded space, which an area police officer referred to as infamous for drug use, fights and public drinking (Curtis 2016), and another individual called it a place "to avoid, especially at night" (Meagher 2015). One Montréal Press article introduced the case of an Indigenous person who used to frequent Cabot Square when he first arrived from Nunavik but has avoided the park in recent years after witnessing some "violent incidents" (Okeke 2015). Another said, "For as long as many Montrealers can remember, Cabot Square

was somewhere to avoid, especially at night when the few who entered were either homeless or cops on patrol" (Meagher 2015). Phyllis Lambert, President of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, was quoted as saying, "Around the square, it's a dump, you cross it and that's it. Yet it is a nerve centre, it is the entrance to Westmount in Montréal. We have to make the place pleasant and lively for the neighbourhood" (quoted in Doyon 2008), highlighting the lack of order and prestige in the park. Jenny, who lives in one of the new condo towers that have sprung up on Cabot Square in recent years, told me: "I hesitated for a long time before putting in my offer for the apartment. I hesitated because of the park and the drug use, but when I saw the city plans to renovate the park, I thought it was worth the risk." These imaginaries place the Indigenous presence in the city as an aberration, a problem to be corrected. They echo the nationalist urban narrative that Montréal's public spaces should signal cultural refinement and prestige, not the social realities of dispossession. The anticipated removal of visible Indigenous poverty made her purchase "worth the risk." Later in the interview, she added, "Now it feels like a park I can bring my family to. It's so much cleaner and open, like, you don't feel like you're intruding on someone else." This remark unintentionally reveals the core violence of such urban "clean-ups"; the space was someone else's, home to many Indigenous people experiencing houselessness. But the renovation redefined legitimate belonging so that newcomers felt welcome while previous users were rendered out of place.

All of these comments and the desire for sanitization led the City to launch a 'rehabilitation' project in Cabot Square. The construction work cost the City $6.3 million and was carried out as part of a broader public-private redevelopment strategy linked to the luxury condo tower replacing the old Montréal Children's Hospital (Meagher 2015). In the park itself, the renovation's physical changes included removing grass, installing anti-houseless armrests on benches, repositioning seating to the park's edges, and replacing the subway's concrete entrance walls with transparent glass. All of these

changes were designed to eliminate ambiguous, occupiable spaces. They mirrored what Margier (2014, 382) terms a "soft dispersal," limiting the visibility and social presence of marginalized residents while rendering the park more legible to its intended middle-class users. Camilla Hassan, from the Chez Doris organization, succinctly described the result: "The transformation of the park led to another displacement for people who considered the park as their home." In this way, Cabot Square's gentrification was not simply an urban design intervention but a continuation of the politics of dispossession, spatial erasure, and nationalist memory-making that have shaped Montréal since its origin.

Despite the hostile transformations of the park, the City claimed the renovation would benefit everyone and act as a meeting space for Indigenous and settler cultures. In a press release, the City claimed: "Cabot Square has benefited from a spectacular makeover to make it a welcoming green space for neighbourhood residents and visitors." They continued:

> Throughout the planning of the project, the borough paid particular attention to users' feelings of security and the needs of people experiencing homelessness or at risk. Thanks to new lighting, more intensive cultural and recreational programming, free Wi-Fi, a higher maintenance frequency and the addition of a café, a social economy project managed in collabouration with *L'Itinéraire*,[84] Cabot Square will be more welcoming and friendly. An office hosting a team of specialized workers is also on site and will make it easier to intervene with vulnerable clients (Ville de Montréal 2015).

[84] *L'Itinéraire* is a magazine whose objective is to contribute to the social reintegration of marginalized people. Half of the magazine content and its selling is done by people who were excluded from the traditional job market, and have experienced houselessness and dependency on, or suffering from, physical or mental health problems. https://www.itineraire.ca/

This statement completely disregards the fact that the transformation of the park actually displaced the communities that it claimed the transformation was for. Furthermore, the "user's feelings and security" to be insured by an increased police presence contradicts the claim that the City is taking the "needs of people experiencing homelessness" seriously. By reducing the visibility of Indigenous people, these renovations contribute to settlers' reconquest of the park. The project overwrote the Indigenous history of Cabot Square with a sanitized aesthetic aligned with the city's neoliberal and nationalist branding. This can also be sensed in the selection of events the city put in place for the park. For example, the City initiated periodic events about Indigenous culture in the park, with the objective of "break[ing] down barriers between white and Indigenous people" and critically evaluating "the folklorization of Indigenous people" (Goudreault 2017). Yet, this objective would not serve anyone other than middle-class people, since the actual Indigenous people were not there anymore, having relocated to other parks and parking lots in the surroundings, as well as to shelters, returning there only to find a drastically changed space. If anything, these informative activities reinforce the folklorization of Indigenous realities.

After the renovation of the park, many Indigenous people moved further into the neighbouring boroughs like Westmount and the Sud-Ouest. Their presence in these more residential boroughs was not welcomed, as expressed in accounts such as this newspaper article:

> [Cabot Square] was just one of many in downtown Montréal to undergo relandscaping last summer, displacing the homeless to surrounding areas like the Atwater Market, metro and library. As a result, Westmounters who avoided Cabot Square now find themselves more often in contact with the homeless. A few of the fifteen residents present at the library voiced their concerns about this situation. "I don't feel safe around them, even if they do not seem to do anything reprehensible," explained a woman attending the meeting. "I

> rarely see police officers around. What can the police do to make sure subways and parks remain safe?" (in Herbert-Dolbec 2015)

Similarly, residents in the Sud-Ouest feared the influx of Indigenous people in 'their' neighbourhoods, often perceiving their presence as an intrusion into spaces they imagined as settled, ordered, and properly belonging to the settler population. Many seemed to consider Indigenous people "out of place" there, as if their presence disrupted the normative social order of the neighbourhood. A long-term resident told me as follows when asked about the increased presence of Indigenous people in Saint-Henri (J. Lavoie, Interviewed December 5, 2021): "The bums are everywhere, even if there are many police officers already patrolling. Most of them are completely drugged or drinking." Such a statement, echoing the newspaper excerpts above, operates as a form of colonial NIMBYism, where the exclusion of Indigenous people is framed not as an extension of dispossession, but as a matter of community protection and order. As Margier (2014, 87) notes, and as echoed in my interviews, residents felt their "home" was infringed upon, a sentiment that crystallized around Cabot Square and radiated outward into surrounding residential areas. For many of these residents, the growing number of houseless Indigenous people was not read as a symptom of displacement or the collapse of social infrastructure, but rather as an "unjustified occupation" of space, a taking of "my" or "our" property, both private and public. This rhetoric of a threatened home is inseparable from the settler colonial logic that underpins Montréal's urban history; the very land on which these homes stand is unceded Indigenous territory, appropriated through centuries of dispossession and urban development aimed at securing settler futurity (Tomiak 2017, 937).

Yet, houseless Indigenous people also claim Cabot Square as home, albeit through practices that disrupt settler prescriptions of space. As a frontline worker at *L'Itinéraire* explained, "the city

treats Cabot Square as a space that needs to be cleaned up, but for many, it's the only place [Indigenous people] feel at home"[85] (Lisa Gravelle, interviewed 23 August 2023). Although houseless Indigenous people may lack a fixed, privately owned property, they have forged attachments through communal life and repeated use of space. The park is not just a survival space but a home for them; through daily use, mutual care, and cultural presence, they inscribe new meanings onto the space. These everyday practices of occupation and care do more than sustain life in the present; they render visible the unresolved violences embedded in the urban landscape and transform Cabot Square into a space where colonial histories are actively confronted rather than settled. For Indigenous people, occupying the park also carries the symbolic weight of returning to stolen ancestral lands. Such occupation defies the spatial exclusions of settler colonial urbanism and asserts what Léonard et al. (2023, 281) call a "palimpsest of colonialism and resistance," in which each attempt at erasure is met with renewed Indigenous place-making. The struggle for Cabot Square is not merely about access to public amenities; it is about sovereignty and belonging.

While we can argue that Cabot Square is a site haunted by the unresolved violence of settler colonialism, Indigenous-led initiatives in the Square also constitute acts of haunting that refuse the settler demand to "move on," and they demand redress. In reclaiming public space through memory, Indigenous communities in Montréal articulate a politics that resists both capitalist spatial reordering and settler historical amnesia. This insurgent presence has not only disrupted symbolic erasure but has also forced the city to adjust its policies. Montréal's *Stratégie de réconciliation 2020-2025* appears responsive to such demands. Yet, the policy remains fraught with contradictions. While it promotes Indigenous "visibility" through street renaming and cultural programming (Ville de Montréal 2020,

[85] Original: La ville considère Cabot Square comme un espace à nettoyer, mais pour plusieurs, c'est le seul endroit où ils se sentent bien.

39), it also sidesteps the material roots of dispossession and the issues related to Cabot Square. In addition, while the policy places a strong emphasis on consultation with members of the First Nations and Inuit, it is done in such a way that mirrors what Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012, 10) term "moves to innocence." The *Strategie* frames consultation as a cornerstone of reconciliation, pledging to "[d]evelop collaborative processes respecting the right of peoples to self-determination guaranteed by Articles 3 to 5 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and officially recognized by the City" (Ville de Montréal 2020, 38, my translation). Still, it includes the caveat that all actions must align with "the applicable legal framework and parameters" (Ville de Montréal 2020, 50, my translation), which is problematic given the colonial legal system has enabled Indigenous dispossession. In addition, nowhere does the strategy question municipal authority over unceded land; instead, it reduces Indigenous sovereignty to a matter of advisory input. All demands for land restitution or autonomous housing governance from the Indigenous organizations were rejected. Instead, the City installed the winter "heat-halt." It responded to immediate need while obscuring its own failure to act on its vague commitment to "support culturally appropriate Indigenous social housing projects" (Ville de Montréal 2020, 45, my translation).

And yet, the violence of gentrification in Cabot Square did not go unchallenged. Despite urban interventions that sought to displace, invisibilize, or neutralize Indigenous presence, Indigenous-led initiatives have actively resisted them by reclaiming space, asserting memory, and challenging settler-colonial urbanism. The struggle for Cabot Square is not merely about access to public amenities, it is about sovereignty, belonging, and the right to shape the urban future. Since 2019, the development of new shelters and, more recently, the planned opening of a community centre near Cabot Square in 2025, jointly organized by the Ville de Montréal and local Indigenous organizations, has responded directly to the systemic displacement of Indigenous people caused by gentrification and over-policing

(Ville de Montréal 2024). But, these spaces do more than offer essential services: they act as nodes of collective memory, asserting Indigenous continuity in the city. Indigenous communities have also hosted protests and rallies, such as the 2012 Idle No More demonstrations, the 2015 vigils for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and the 2020 rallies in support of Wet'suwet'en land defenders, as well as annual celebrations like National Indigenous Peoples Day in Cabot Square and other public spaces of the city. These gatherings, alongside seasonal events like Indigenous Fridays and craft markets, re-inscribe Indigenous histories and futures into the urban landscape. In 2020, Indigenous activists also led the City to the construction of the *Sanaaq* community centre, named after Mitiarjuk Nappaaluk's eponymous Inuktitut novel. Although its opening has been delayed, its development marked a significant break from earlier top-down approaches. Unlike the earlier redesign of Cabot Square, the planning of *Sanaaq* included consultations with local Indigenous communities, including houseless individuals (Ville de Montréal 2024). The centre, which finally opened in the spring of 2025, includes an agora, a performance hall, an exhibition space, a culinary laboratory, and a library housing over 750 Indigenous works. While its actual impact remains to be seen, it stands as a testament to what Indigenous resistance has already forced the city to imagine. The struggle over Cabot Square, and ongoing projects like Sanaaq, show that the Indigenous presence is not simply enduring; it is also generative, rupturing the colonial urban logics, insisting on justice, belonging, and futurity beyond the settler state and shaping alternative urban imaginaries. In reclaiming space, asserting memory, and reimagining urban futures, Indigenous activists and community members challenge the intertwined forces of gentrification, neoliberalism, and settler colonialism (Cobbett Labonté 2024, 81).

5.6 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I interrogated Québec's nationalism and its manifestation in the urban landscapes of Montréal's Sud-Ouest. Even if the national question isn't as much at the forefront of the political

discussions as before, it is deeply ingrained in the landscape, adapting itself to the changing accumulation logic, modes of regulation, social norms and spatial structures. Focusing on the *Arrondissement Sud-Ouest,* I examined the construction of the myth of white male francophone workers in Québec nationalism, which took root in the borough and has been commodified in a particular way in recent years. Deindustrialization was extremely harsh in Montréal, which had been Canada's industrial powerhouse until then. Through a combination of several political and economic circumstances, the 1960s saw both the rise of state-seeking nationalism in Québec and Montréal's transition to a post-industrial global metropolis. It is in such processes that the Sud-Ouest was transformed from an industrial powerhouse into the home of industrial heritage. These heritages have been mobilized through the branding of the borough for gentrifiers. Industries have almost disappeared from the Sud-Ouest, but industrialism survived as a simulacrum of the past for new urban developments. The contemporary celebration of the industrial era took place through the displacement of former working-class communities and the usurpation of working-class histories. By looking into the *Circuit de commémoration du Sud-Ouest* and the rehabilitation projects of the Canada Malting factory, I also showed how the industrial memories revolve around the entrepreneurialism of industrialists rather than working-class communities themselves. Even when the working-class mythos is commemorated, as in the cases of Gabrielle Roy, Madeleine Parent and Louis Cyr, it is done in a decontextualized and depoliticized way. I argue that all of this speaks to the transformation of nationalism in Montréal, which has paradoxically celebrated working-class history, while orienting its discourses and objectives towards urban bourgeois audiences.

The last two sections of the chapter focused on two communities on the margins in Montréal: the anglophone black community of Little Burgundy and the Indigenous people living in the city. As the city moved away from its industrial era and as the white francophone myth was embedded in the

landscape of the neighbourhood, the histories of these two communities were effaced by the racist and colonial processes of gentrification. If a very narrow understanding of the black community's contribution to the neighbourhood was introduced to publicize Montréal links with jazz music, this community's labour struggles were put in amnesia. Similarly, the Indigenous presence on the territory – which had never been truly acknowledged – was further marginalized. The rehabilitation of Cabot Square demonstrates the continuity of settler colonialism and its violence, which hinders the "right to the city" for those who are living in a racist colonial present.

Chapter 6: Belfast's TQ: A Capitalist Peace Project

6.1 Introduction

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement marked a watershed in the Northern Irish conflict. Following the collapse of the 1994 ceasefire, nationalist and unionist parties, with the diplomatic involvement of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, and the United States, signed during what was heralded at the time as "a moment of history" (Guardian Archival Department 1998). The Agreement formally ended thirty years of the "Troubles," a violent struggle rooted in competing nationalist projects: Irish nationalism seeking a reunification of the Republic of Ireland and British unionism defending Northern Ireland's constitutional link with the United Kingdom. While it brought an end to large-scale political violence, the post-Agreement years unfolded under what Nagle (2010, 18) has described as a trajectory of "capitalist peace" or "neoliberal peace." Here, the consolidation of peace was inseparable from strategies of market liberalization and economic growth, with foreign direct investment and property-led development promoted as both a symbol and a mechanism of stability. In Belfast, this approach translated into ambitious urban redevelopment schemes designed to attract real estate capital, multinational corporations, and a share of the tourism boom that was then transforming the Republic of Ireland's economy (Teague and Henderson 2006, 1088). These projects targeted spaces that were historically industrial and often deeply marked by the social geography of the conflict, reframing them as flagship zones of a 'new' Belfast.

The Good Friday Agreement also ushered in a new phase in the politics of memory, where commemoration became entangled with market imperatives. The unresolved nature of nationalist–unionist tensions meant that collective memory remained contested, yet it was increasingly reconfigured as a cultural economic resource. Two discernible strategies emerged, both still evident today. The first stemmed from the desire to remember the suffering of the Troubles: to preserve the

physical traces of the conflict, to honour the dead, and to acknowledge the grievances that fueled it. Murals, memorial gardens, and plaques dedicated to paramilitary militias, political prisoners, or civilian victims were maintained or newly created within working-class nationalist and unionist districts. This preservation often overlapped with forms of "dark tourism" (Lennon and Foley 2000), where these memorial sites were opened to visitors through guided tours, educational initiatives, and media promotion. Such tourism was not marginal; it became a recognized niche within the broader strategy to brand Belfast as a culturally distinctive, post-conflict city. Tourist agencies, independent guides, and the state's Department of Tourism all participated in promoting these memoryscapes, particularly in areas west of the city centre, such as the Falls Road (nationalist) and the Shankill Road (unionist). These spaces, once battlegrounds for opposing national projects, were transformed into 'must-see' destinations, with their walls, memorials, and peace lines now serving as commercialized urban attractions. In this way, the transformation of Belfast after 1998 was not simply a story of political settlement; it also involved a reorganization of space, capital, and memory, in which the legacies of nationalism were negotiated within the logics of a gentrifying, neoliberal city. The contradictions of this first strategy have been well documented (Lennon and Foley 2000; Skinner 2016).

The second strategy, which I examine in this chapter, seeks to sanitize or even erase the conflict's contentious legacies. Unlike the first approach, which risks exploiting painful histories, this latter strategy attempts to sideline uncomfortable memories altogether, reshaping post-conflict Northern Ireland's narrative in ways that avoid confrontation. With government support, Belfast began a significant spatial transformation aimed at bringing the city into "civic modernity" (Hodson 2019, 224), projecting an image that moved beyond or obscured the nationalist divides that had defined its urban geography for the previous thirty years. This was not simply about rebuilding physical infrastructure but about rebranding the city through the temporal and ideological framework of the reconciliation

paradigm, which cast the past as a finished chapter and called for a forward-looking orientation (Bevernage 2012, 40). Under this logic, urban redevelopment became an instrument of transition; physical transformation worked in tandem with a political narrative that Northern Ireland was "post-conflict," even if the spatial and social legacies of the Troubles remained deeply entrenched in the city.

Two flagship regeneration projects embodied this approach: the Waterfront Hall and the Titanic Quarter (TQ). The Waterfront Hall, initiated during the first ceasefire of the early 1990s, quickly became a symbol of hope, marketed as a visible marker of the "new" Belfast. Its significance went beyond providing a modern concert venue, as Hilton Hotels joined the project as a partner. Hilton Hotels was the first major international chain to invest in Northern Ireland in decades. For Robert Fitzpatrick, then involved in the project and now CEO of the Odyssey Trust, the decision by a global corporation to build in Belfast was "the sort of catalyst for the redevelopment of the city," signalling to investors that the city was open for business and ready to compete internationally (Interviewed May 11, 2022). He recalled that Hilton's arrival "showed people here, and people outside, that Belfast was changing for good." Read together, these remarks underscore how private-sector confidence was framed as both a consequence and a driver of peace, reinforcing the neoliberal peace narrative in which foreign investment is not just an economic boom but also a legitimizing proof of reconciliation. As the reconciliation paradigm demands, such visible signs of "progress" allowed political elites to reframe the conflict as firmly in the past, while economic modernization became the primary proof of reconciliation.

Helped by the Waterfront Hall's success after its 1997 opening, public authorities moved to an even more ambitious redevelopment, transforming the former shipyards into the TQ. The timing was opportune. The 1997 release of the film, *Titanic*, amplified the ship's global cultural capital, creating an internationalized sentimental connection to Belfast's industrial heritage. Yet the TQ was not simply a

heritage project; it was a paradigmatic exercise in capitalist peacebuilding, marketed as offering the first “shared space” in the city. This was a carefully crafted claim, aligning with reconciliation discourse that prioritizes “safe” shared spaces over confronting the divisive legacy of the conflict (J. S. Robinson 2022, 90). The shift to a neoliberal economic model – via privatization, deregulation, austerity, and commodification – reconfigured Belfast’s social and spatial frameworks, privileging market-driven growth over public welfare.

Such strategies align with what J. S. Robinson (2022, 56) describes as the reconciliation paradigm’s particular temporal dimensions, by showcasing a gleaming, depoliticised urban future as a symbol of unity. As Bevernage (2012, 34) argues, transitional contexts often leverage redevelopment to diminish the past into an “ontologically inferior” position, making it less real and less urgent than the imagined future. In Belfast, flagship projects like the TQ transformed areas associated with the industrial past and working-class history of both nationalist and unionist identities into zones of consumption and tourism. This rebranding did not dismantle the underlying structures of inequality. Instead, it often displaced or marginalized the very communities whose histories were being selectively celebrated for global audiences. While urban revitalization functioned as both a spatial and narrative technology of reconciliation and materialized the post-conflict imaginary, it consolidated neoliberal urban doctrines, ensuring that the political economy of peace was inseparable from the politics of memory and place.

This chapter draws upon my fieldwork interviews and observations to highlight the problematic memory politics anchored in and mediated through urban regeneration projects in Belfast. To do so, I first review the challenges I encountered during my fieldwork, and how they spurred me to reflect on my positionality. In the second section, I go over the historical developments of the TQ through archival images and documents. I interrogate the contradictions of the “capitalist peace” and, in

particular, those related to the politics of remembering. A key aspect of this transformation has been the extensive privatization of public assets and services. In particular, housing, once a cornerstone of social stability in the post-war era, has been increasingly commodified. In the third section, I dive deeper into residents' perception of this new space. Finally, the fourth section discusses the built environment and the politics of memories haunting the TQ. Here, I closely examine Titanic Museum exhibits as well as the overall landscape of the neighbourhood to demonstrate how, despite numerous attempts to erase the working-class lineage of this space, it still lingers in the memories and lives of Belfast's residents.

6.2 Fieldwork in Belfast: Challenges of Research Fatigue

When I arrived in Belfast in April of 2022 and reached the apartment that I rented in the Shankill, I rediscovered the city. It was my third time in Belfast, yet on previous occasions I had come as a tourist and stayed in the less divided borough of South Belfast. Arriving in West Belfast, especially the Shankill, was challenging, although I was aware of its reputation as Belfast's most ardent defender of the Unionist identity. I candidly anticipated a change, considering that the city was, after all, more than 25 years past the signing of the peace agreement. I was impressed, if not shocked, by the sheer number of depictions of Unionism on its landscape. Going up Shankill Road, I counted 14 murals, all but one depicting either British symbols (e.g., Queen Elizabeth II, King William III of Orange, or Saint Paul's Cathedral in London) or military/paramilitary scenes featuring soldiers. I also counted three war memorials dedicated to the victims and soldiers of the Troubles, two of them gated. Finally, there were an uncountable number of Union Jack flags and many other symbols of Unionism, such as the red hand and the crown.

This offered a stark contrast to other parts of the city where, with the hesitant return of civil peace, public spaces were being restructured to foster the sharing of urban space. As I elaborated earlier, spaces are a palimpsest of memories. The landscapes of traditional, older neighbourhoods, such

as the Shankill, are heavily marked by the memories of conflict, as perhaps it is still too soon to completely move away from its embattled past. Yet, this is not desirable for city planners and politicians, who are eager to usher in a new era and spaces free from signs of old conflicts and expressive of a peaceful present and future. Indeed, at the extreme opposite of the Shankill, you have the TQ, which was designed to be a 'shared' or 'neutral' space, with no symbols of either ethnocultural group. Yet that doesn't mean that the TQ is free of lingering tensions, quite the contrary. Over the two months I spent in Belfast, I gradually learned that what was given to be seen in the landscape rarely told the whole story, whether in the TQ that embodied the "peace" or in the Shankill with a deeply divided memoryscape.

My field research in Belfast was conducted from April 22 to June 10, 2022, including my observations of neighbourhoods, archival research, and several interviews. The observation period totaled 37 days, mainly in the TQ area and its surrounding neighbourhoods in East Belfast and the city centre (see Figure 1.2). Similar to field research in Montréal, observations were made at different times of day and on various days of the week. I also had the opportunity to attend specific events: May Day, Election Day on May 5, the Northern Ireland Centenary Parade on May 28, and Queen Elisabeth II's Platinum Jubilee from June 2 to June 5, all in 2022.

Doing fieldwork in Belfast was not easy. I noticed an interesting dynamic while conducting interviews there. Corporations, civil organizations and unions were much more willing to sit down and speak with me; the opposite of what I experienced in Montréal, where residents were more than happy to participate, and corporations and developers rarely agreed to an interview. In Belfast, businesses and corporations seemed happy that an 'international entity' would be interested in their projects. The CEO of the Odyssey Trust, Robert Fitzpatrick, even made numerous comparisons between the interview we were doing and those he had previously given to American media outlets, such as ABC or NBC. Many

of the business interviewees thanked me for my interest in the TQ, "especially from all the way in Canada." This sentence struck me as odd, as it sounded as though I was doing them some kind of publicity abroad. It was different in Montréal, where corporations and developers were initially unwilling to participate, perhaps similarly and mistakenly afraid of bad local publicity. If it was generally easier than expected to persuade corporations to participate in the study, Belfast residents were, by contrast, much more difficult to convince.

This reluctance from local residents was striking, particularly when contrasted with the openness of corporate entities. I had envisioned such difficulty; my status as an outsider must be alienating to locals. That said, what I gradually discovered was that, in many cases, it wasn't specifically me or my research project that people kept themselves away from, but research altogether. A woman I met near the East Belfast Network Centre told me she doesn't "want anything to do with research anymore," implying that it was not the first time she had been approached by a researcher. Many other residents, just like her, refused to participate even before learning about what my project was about. I could sense a certain fatigue, even frustration, from some participants who simply did not want to talk about the Troubles. One of the first things Peter Rooney, a former shipyard worker I interviewed, said to me was: "At least you are not focused on the Troubles." I cannot say that this feeling was shared by all participants; some were more than willing to speak about their experiences of the conflict, but even Peter, while eventually discussing his life during the Troubles, initially expressed relief that my interest lay elsewhere. Other participants, while not avoiding the subject, voiced irritation at being asked the same questions over and over again by a succession of researchers. This was a tangible manifestation of research fatigue (Clark 2008; Way 2013; Karooma 2019; Ashley 2021; Jacquet et al. 2021), a phenomenon particularly acute in Belfast, given that the Troubles have been among the most intensively researched conflicts in the world. As Hammersley (1995, 112) reminds us,

"research has material effects" and "[p]eople's lives may be affected by being researched, and by being in a context that is affected by research findings." In Belfast, decades of academic inquiry have continually made residents the object of study, asking them to repeatedly revisit painful memories. As Clark (2008, 955) observed, such repeated engagement can be perceived to be "intrusive" and "emotionally exploitative," especially when there is little evidence that the research offers benefits to research participants or their communities. The sense of being "mined for data" (Woodward & Pattie 2000, 40) can lead to resentment towards researchers, particularly when residents perceive that the same narratives are endlessly extracted, repackaged, and circulated without tangible change.

Scholars have stressed the need for reflexivity on why certain communities are repeatedly targeted (Neal et al. 2016; Koen, Wassenaar, and Mamotte 2017; Pascucci 2017). According to Choissière et al. (2021, 8), overstudy can occur anywhere, but it is more likely to concentrate on groups with the following traits: "marginalized groups" as defined by poverty, racialization, gender identities, indigeneity, or ethnic or religious minority statuses; those who have experienced political crises and have mounted notable resistance; and those living in locations that are accessible (geographically or politically) to foreign researchers. In a context of overstudy, researchers are required to reflect on their positionalities and their research practices, and they must reckon with the potential consequences of their engagement with the people and situations studied, when people are still struggling with the impacts of previous or repeated research. I faced the same situation in Belfast. The realization of the fatigue among people in Belfast forced me to recalibrate my methodologies and reflect on my place in the field. Whenever possible, I strategized to distinguish my research from that of others. I made it clear that my research was not specifically about the Troubles, but rather the industrial memory of the city, which, it seemed, was generally welcomed by people.

This situation also made me think more deeply about the role of emotions and subjectivities in my fieldwork. Long dismissed in social sciences for supposedly undermining "distance" and compromising the "objectivity" of the investigation, emotions have in recent decades acquired a new legitimacy in academia (Widdowfield 2000; Anderson and Smith 2001; Guinard and Tratnjek 2016). Recognizing that emotion is not limited to studies of communities that have experienced trauma, but when such histories are present, as in Belfast, research engagement inevitably becomes emotionally charged. In these contexts, the way researchers navigate participants' grievances and traumas becomes an ethical issue. Research fatigue does not just come from the repetition of similar research; it is an emotional response to being constantly targeted and objectified by research, to the repeated extraction of narratives that require considerable emotional labour to share. As Celeste Jacobs, a resident of East Belfast, told me: "It's not that I don't care about my story, but every time I repeat, it can be exhausting, you know, and then I'm left thinking with what I have said, how I said it, and why, just rethinking about the whole thing." Her words point to a power asymmetry embedded in the research encounter. Participants are left to carry the emotional weight of retelling, while researchers walk away with material to analyze and publish. This forced me to ponder how research shapes research participants' memories and relationships to the past, often in ways the researcher cannot fully fathom and predict.

Faced with this reality, I felt compelled to rethink not only my questions but my entire approach to the relationships that I forge in the field. Engaging with overstudied communities requires more than procedural ethics; it demands a practice of care, respect, and reciprocity that goes beyond the extraction of stories (Aiken 2022, 15). I tried to respond by creating space for participants' agency. I made it clear at the outset of each interview that they could refuse to answer any question or leave at any point, and I always tried my best to explain the full scope of my research: its purpose, scope, and focus on Belfast's industrial memory rather than the Troubles specifically. Before recording began, we had informal

conversations in which I introduced myself, shared why I had chosen this city, and invited interviewees to shape the trajectory of our exchange. This pre-interview space was also where I tried to demonstrate preparedness, not just with the general history of Belfast, but with detailed knowledge of East Belfast and the H&W shipyard's place in the city's collective memory. These pre-discussions, which I deliberately kept off the record, proved helpful, it seemed. They allowed participants to voice expectations, add context, or raise themes they felt mattered, sometimes leading to insights that were new and eye-opening for me. They may also have helped to create a sense for interviewees that the interview was a collaborative act rather than a one-sided extraction. I also concluded the interview with a 'debriefing' session. They were meant as an opportunity for participants to revisit their own words, clarify meanings, or share reflections sparked by our exchange. In this way, I hoped the interview would be less about my arrival in the field to collect data and more about building a space, however limited, where participants could 'own' the narratives we were shaping together.

While the above approaches did not eliminate fatigue, they helped to distinguish my project from those that my participants had encountered. My experience in Belfast also helped me realize that reflexivity must translate into tangible changes in method and tone. This means making space for empathy as an epistemological and ethical stance. It is also what allowed some interviewees to bring forward thoughts unrelated to my original questions that later became significant for my analysis. Trust and care did not just enrich the data; they transformed the research relationship itself.

6.3 Belfast's TQ: An Exemplification of Capitalist Peace and Transitional Justice

In this section, I trace the history of the TQ. Expanding on Chapter 4, I review the genesis of this massive urban project, conceived during negotiations at the end of the armed conflict in 1998. I show how the TQ was promoted as an essential project for the transition from conflict in Belfast. The peace

process, framed by the principles of transitional justice and capitalist peace, bred the need for a flagship project that would transform international perceptions of Belfast and attract foreign direct investment. While this strategy was 'successful,' I question at what cost? To answer this question, I examine the notions of transitional justice and capitalist peace to demonstrate how a process of peace transition that emphasizes economic recovery, political compromise, and amnesia is bound to create new forms of division along class lines. First, I review the ideological foundations of the Northern Ireland Peace process and show how the TQ materializes them. This will be followed by an examination of how memories were mobilized in this process of transitional justice and urban regeneration projects in troubling ways.

6.3.1 Peace Process: Transitional Justice and Capitalist Peace

Since the 1990s, transitional justice (TJ) has become a versatile mode of managing post-conflict societies. Many countries grappling with the aftermath of civil wars or the injustices of former authoritarian regimes have adopted TJ to get out of a violent past but, more importantly, to ensure reconciliation between groups embroiled in the conflicts and ultimately establish economic and political stability (Buckley-Zistel et al. 2013). Faced with the severity of the crimes committed, along with the incapacity of national judicial institutions to respond adequately to and remedy the troubled past, new procedures have been developed. As Freeman and Djukic argue (2008, 217), in the context of TJ, the term "transition" refers to a formal transition from a state of war to a state of peace, or from an authoritarian regime to a democratic regime. The concept of "justice" in the context of TJ was defined by UN as follows:

> … an ideal of accountability and fairness in the protection and vindication of rights and the prevention and punishment of wrongs. Justice implies regard for the rights of the accused for the interests of victims and for the well-being of society at large. It is a

> concept rooted in all national cultures and traditions and, while its administration usually implies formal judicial mechanisms, traditional dispute resolution mechanisms are equally relevant (UN Secretary-General 2004, 4).

This definition refers to the implementation of various practices, ultimately aimed at creating the conditions for national reconciliation and democratic stabilization in countries emerging from violent conflicts or episodes of massive repression. In this context, the construction of "democracy" is presented as a safeguard against the recurrence of human rights violations. Specifically, TJ entails particular procedures: identification of a context of significant or generalized breaches of human rights, the beginning of a transition towards a democratic rule of law, and the establishment of measures or mechanisms specifically aimed at dealing with these violations in order to prosecute those responsible and provide reparations to their victims (Buckley-Zistel et al. 2013, 5). The measures taken under transitional justice are articulated around three objectives aimed at satisfying the rights of victims and society: the right to justice, the right to the truth, and the right to obtain redress (Teitel 2002, 14; Leebaw 2008,27).

In the recent past, however, many instances of TJ focused on the development of market infrastructure that would serve to attract foreign direct investment, echoing older theories of modernization (for the latter, see Rostow 1956; Lipset 1959; Huntington 1968; Fukuyama [1992] 2008; Acemoglu et al. 2019). Under this framework, TJ presents peace as a dividend of capitalist growth. That is, peace is achievable not only by laying the groundwork for the rule of law, democracy, human rights and civil society, but also by instituting economic liberalization and a free market (Richmond and Franks 2009, 3). Building a capitalist-liberal state is foregrounded under the doctrine of TJ:

> The liberal state provides the framework for the creation of peace at local, state and international levels through governmentalism and its relation to institution building. This has become the most common form of peace, applied by international actors through a methodological peacebuilding consensus in conflict zones (Richmond and Franks 2009, 6).

Still, according to Richmond and Franks (ibid., 188), "liberal peacebuilding automatically assumes it carries the technical and normative legitimacy to bring peace – despite the fact that this is a western, liberal, state-centric narrative of peace with all of its related ethical meta-narratives." The normative framework for peacebuilding is based on perceived "universal" ideals, even though it is "provincial," i.e., embedded in the Western liberal worldview. This paradigm has become a "single dominant notion of peace" (Richmond 2008, 127) and has informed most types of institutions of peacekeeping and post-conflict rebuilding. It has become, as Richmond (2008, 105) describes it by drawing on Gramsci, the "peacebuilding consensus." While TJ principles do not go as far as to blame conflict transitioning states for their lack of substantial democratization, it insists that capitalism and capitalist growth are necessary conditions for a peaceful society (Paris 2004; Richmond 2006; Simalchik 2019). This paradigm often requires external funds (or loans), as, emerging from decades of conflict, the states undergoing the transition to peace lacked the resources to finance the transition processes. Conditions imposed by foreign countries and international financial institutions on these funds have forced transitioning countries to open their markets to foreign capital (Richmond 2006, 297). The underlying assumption here is that the problem is internal, but the solution is external.

A number of states have established projects of economic development as central components of their post-conflict transition: South Africa, Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Columbia and many post-communist countries (Horne 2017, Selim and Murithi 2011, Velasquez 2016). The uses of foreign

investment vary across contexts, but one thing they have in common is that the developments they finance target cities, since, as previously mentioned, the compactness of urban spaces and contentious public spheres stoke the rapid and intense spread of intergroup conflicts. Belfast is no exception. As I present in the next section, the Northern Ireland peace process was deeply shaped by the tenets of TJ and capitalist peace. And the TQ in Belfast became a crucial spatial symbol of Northern Ireland's transition to peace.

6.3.2 Belfast's Capitalist Peace Project: The TQ

The conflict in Northern Ireland accelerated in 1968 and spanned over thirty years, during which 3,700 people lost their lives, more than 40,000 people were injured, and tens of thousands of displacements were reported. In some parts of Northern Ireland where the conflicts were intense, 80% of the population commented they knew at least one victim of the conflict, dead or injured (Darby 2017). From 1969, the number of incidents involving firearms stood at 38,000 and more than 17,000 bombs were detonated. Police statistics also reveal that, since 1972, a total of 20,165 individuals have been charged with terrorism (Darby 2017).

The Provisional IRA ceasefire was reached in 1994, and intense political negotiations culminated in the 1998 peace agreement, the Belfast Agreement, signed by representatives of Northern Ireland's eight main political parties, the Irish Government and the British Government. The Agreement catalyzed political and legal reforms and provided a framework for transitional justice in Northern Ireland. It explicitly recognized that "[t]he tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering" and urged its signatories to "[achieve] reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and [protect and vindicate] the human rights of all" (Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Government of Ireland 1998, 2). In concrete terms, the Agreement included clauses for the release and reintegration of political prisoners, a

program to disarm paramilitary groups, the reform of the police and the criminal justice system, enhanced protection of human rights, and the creation of entities to meet the needs of victims and survivors. The Agreement was validated by 71% of Northern Irish voters in a referendum. The overwhelming majority (about 93%) of the Nationalist minority in favour of the reunification of the island of Ireland voted in favour of the peace agreement (Hayes and McAllister 2001, 82). The support of the Unionist majority, attached to the maintenance of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom, was more moderate (57%) (ibid 2001, 82).

From a critical perspective, however, the Agreement did not dismantle the structural relations that had underpinned the conflict. Instead, it exemplified capitalist peace, a settlement that neutralizes armed conflict and political instability while preserving the fundamental capitalist structures. Its institutional framework channelled political demands into a consociational system that entrenched elite power-sharing rather than class transformation. The TQ redevelopment, with its luxury apartments, corporate headquarters, and tourism-driven regeneration, stands as a paradigmatic example of such a neoliberal economic agenda: a flagship project of the "peace dividend" whose benefits largely bypassed working-class communities (Portland Trust 2007, 10-11), transforming former sites of industrial labour into zones of elite consumption and speculative capital. In this way, the Agreement's promise of economic renewal became a vehicle for gentrification and dispossession, reconfiguring urban space to serve capital and ruling elites rather than those who had borne the brunt of the conflict.

At the same time, Northern Ireland has been far from being at peace with its past. Figures published by the Police Service of Northern Ireland showed that, since the signing of the Belfast Agreement, 158 deaths can be attributed to paramilitary operations (Winters 2022). According to an investigative journal, *The Detail*, in the first five years that the UK Terrorism Act 2000 was in effect (2001-2005), 1,254 people were arrested in Northern Ireland as security threats under section 41 of the

Act, and a total of 394 people, 31% of those arrested, were later charged (ibid.). This number decreased with time, yet between 2017 and 2021, 82 individuals were arrested and subsequently charged with terrorism, all of whom were implicated in paramilitary activities (ibid.).

Another striking omission in the application of the transitional justice model has been the absence of a formal truth-seeking process. A truth-seeking mechanism would impose accountability on those participating in violence to reaffirm the rule of law, respond to the needs of victims and survivors, question dishonest denials, and expose the range of forensic, personal, and social truths of the conflict (Bell 2003, 1097). The Belfast Agreement did not consider it necessary to create a formal entity for the search for truth. It was considered too contentious for a peace process at the embryonic stage. In her book *Truth, Denial and Transition*, Cheryl Lawther (2014) uses a photograph of graffiti in Belfast as the book cover, which states, "The government and our people wanted peace! This was delivered! Don't disrupt our present and our future by digging into the past!" This image reflects well the argument of the book, showing just how difficult it was to look into Northern Ireland's past and how the peace agreement failed to offer a full exploration of the wider context and consequences of the conflict. Many felt that it perpetuated and reinforced ethnocultural hierarchies among victims, lacked structure, delayed information, and rekindled trauma in individuals (Lawther 2014, 77). Some mechanisms were included, such as public inquiries, criminal prosecution, the opening of police files by an investigation team, and investigations into police misconduct by the Office of Police Ombudsman. Yet, there was nothing addressing the grievances and memories of residents and victims. This is what Bell (2003, 1097) called a "piecemeal approach to the past." Crucially, the overlooking of truth-seeking enterprises was accompanied by decision-makers' preoccupation with economic growth as a tool for conflict transition. In other words, peace was to be built through the market, and neoliberal urban redevelopment projects like the TQ were celebrated as signs of "normalization," even as they

displaced the very communities whose labour and history had shaped the city and who bore the brunt of the conflict. As Bell (2003, 1091) argues, the post-conflict peace of the Belfast Agreement rested on three pillars – i.e., economic regeneration, institutional containment, and selective forgetting – all of which served to stabilize, rather than transform, the socio-economic order.

This prioritization of institutional stability over historical reckoning was codified further in the 2006 St Andrews Agreement.[86] While St Andrews successfully restored the political institutions through complex adjustments to power-sharing procedures (UK Government et al. 2006, 1), it mirrored the Belfast Agreement's selective forgetting. The document frames "Human Rights, Equality, and Victims" as secondary confidence-building measures designed to facilitate a "fixed timetable" for devolution (ibid., 2-3). By emphasizing a "favourable possible financial climate" and a "financial package" for the newly restored Executive (ibid., 3), the St Andrews Agreement reinforced the neoliberal assumption that economic growth could substitute for a formal truth-seeking process. The focus remained on "economic transformation" and "capital investments" (ibid., 14), effectively treating the grievances of the past as administrative issues to be managed by a Victims' Commissioner rather than obstacles to a shared memory. Consequently, St Andrews did not disrupt the "piecemeal approach" evoked by Bell; it merely refined the institutional containment required to keep the peace process moving forward without digging into the past, legitimizing the mnemonic approach undertaken for the approved TQ which would start construction two years later.

[86] The St Andrews Agreement was signed in 2006 by the British and Irish governments along with major Northern Irish parties, notably Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin. It became necessary after the collapse of the power-sharing institutions established by the Good Friday Agreement, amid ongoing mistrust and political deadlock (BBC News 2006). The agreement aimed to restore devolved government by securing commitments on policing, justice, and cooperation between unionist and nationalist parties (BBC News 2006). It ultimately paved the way for a renewed power-sharing executive, marking a significant step in stabilizing post-conflict governance following the Troubles.

Belfast's deep-rooted ethnonational divisions intersected with neoliberal economic policies that have deepened existing inequalities. Privatization and austerity have disproportionately harmed working-class communities, exacerbating socio-economic divides. Redevelopment efforts often prioritized areas marketed as 'neutral' or 'global,' such as the city centre, or the former shipyard, while neglecting neighbourhoods more closely tied to specific communities. This selective approach to investment reinforced socio-spatial segregation, making genuine social integration increasingly difficult. Austerity-driven budget cuts have further strained the city's most vulnerable populations by weakening the public sector's ability to provide essential services. Cuts to healthcare, education, and social welfare programs have widened income disparities and fractured communal support systems (Kelly 2012, 47). As state assistance dwindled, working-class neighbourhoods have faced growing hardship in navigating an economy that promotes precarity. Manufacturing employment was replaced by low-wage, precarious jobs in retail, hospitality, and other service industries.

Against this backdrop of deepening austerity and socio-economic restructuring, which widened disparities and left working-class communities reliant on unstable and precarious jobs, the city's flagship redevelopment schemes must be understood as being explicitly embedded in institutional frameworks that linked economic growth to post-conflict stability. The TQ, and corporative entity the TQ Ltd., are a direct successor to the Laganside Corporation, a public entity created in 1989 to develop the Lagan River banks but later mutated into an institution for post-conflict transition (OECD 2000, 32). As the OECD report (2000, 11) on Belfast's peace transition states, the Laganside Corporation aimed at "linking environmental improvement, infrastructure for economic development, and social cohesion." This tripartite mission, however, was steeped in neoliberal logic, framing economic growth as the panacea for division. These objectives aligned with the broader vision of *Strategy 2010*, a report initiated by Northern Ireland's Department of Economic Development in 1997, which became a

cornerstone of the peace process. The report explicitly prioritized economic growth as the primary vehicle for stability, stating: “The existing arrangements for social partnership in Northern Ireland should be reconsidered and ways to address the issue of social cohesion through a new social partnership initiative with an exclusively economic focus should be explored” (Department of Economic Development 1999, 147). As we can see here, the Strategy 2010 underscores the neoliberal logic underpinning the peace process, one that reduced social cohesion to a byproduct of market-led development, sidelining structural inequalities in favor of private investment. The Laganside Corporation’s role in this was pivotal, as it embodied the state’s shift from direct intervention to facilitating private capital. The *Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001* highlighted this transition, noting that Laganside’s strategy was designed to “maximis[e] the existing potential of location and buildings,” ensuring economic viability rather than addressing deeper socio-political fractures (OECD 2000, 29). This reveals how regeneration was framed as a technical, depoliticized discourse, one that masks the privileging of corporate interests over community needs in the policy directive.

Under this economic peace paradigm, Queen’s Island, the former shipyard site, became a prime target for developers. The area had long been stigmatized as a space of “industrial and economic decline,” with the polluted river serving as “a reminder of what Belfast once was” (OECD 2000, 29). This dereliction was the result of decades of state neglect and capital flight, which rendered the land cheap and ripe for speculative investment. As the peace process advanced, developers seized on the area’s low land values and proximity to the city center (echoing Neil Smith’s notion of the “rent gap”), with planning policies actively encouraging the “pacification” of these downtown spaces through commercial redevelopment (OECD, LEED Program 2008, 69). The Laganside Corporation’s own mission evolved to reflect this, broadening its aims to “contribut[e] to the development of a positive image of Belfast leading to increased investment and encouraging tourism” (OECD 2000,

33). Here, peace is equated with marketability, where stability is measured in tourist presence and corporate relocations. Various government bodies provided substantial aid to the Laganside corporation. According to the official OECD report, the Corporation boasted of leveraging "£55 million in government grant-in-aid" and "£29 million from the European Regional Development Fund" (OECD 2000, 33) to remediate land for developers. Such figures highlight the state's role as a broker for capital, using peace dividends to increase profit rather than redress deprivation. Indeed, the same report (ibid., 51) admitted that Laganside's success was measured by "private sector confidence," not community ownership or decrease in unemployment or improved housing situation – a stark illustration of capitalist peace in action. As land values rose, so too did the rebranding of the area, with the Titanic narrative commodifying Belfast's industrial past while obscuring its contested history. The Laganside Corporation's legacy thus lies not just in physical regeneration but in institutionalizing a peace model where profit, not people, dictates urban futures.

This institutionalization of a profit-driven peace reshaped the city's physical landscape and set the stage for parallel political realignments, influencing how both Unionist and Nationalist actors reimagined their economic priorities in the post-Agreement era. Importantly, this broader shift toward redevelopment and market-driven urban planning was mirrored in the political transformations of the period. Just as Unionist elites embraced neoliberal policies to reshape Belfast's post-industrial landscape, Sinn Féin and the broader nationalist movement also recalibrated their economic outlook. Once aligned with Marxist and anti-capitalist rhetoric, Sinn Féin's leadership gradually abandoned that position in the wake of the Peace Agreement, reflecting the growing influence of a Catholic "middle class" that had long been wary of 'economic radicalism.' This transition was not merely ideological but deeply embedded in the material transformations reshaping Belfast (McRedmond 2022). Before the ceasefire of 1994, when Sinn Féin was excluded from formal politics, its leadership sought to balance

its left-wing rhetoric with a pragmatic pursuit of a political settlement. After the signing of the Belfast Agreement, however, maintaining this balance became increasingly difficult. Key figures within Sinn Féin, such as Mairtín Ó Muilleoir[87] and those involved in Partnership Boards across Northern Ireland, started to strongly support private-sector-led urban regeneration (McAllister 2004, 126). They argued that the determination once directed toward leftist armed struggle should now be channelled into economic development in nationalist communities, including through rehabilitation projects (ibid 2004, 127). Sinn Féin wanted to replace the SDLP.[88] To do so, however, it needed to appeal to the new Nationalist petit-bourgeois and bourgeois, by presenting itself as a party capable of delivering economic growth and stability (Kelly 2012, 48). This approach mirrored trends in other nationalist movements, where economic pragmatism has gradually replaced radical political positions once formal political participation became viable for them, like in Québec. The idea that economic prosperity could facilitate Irish reunification also indicated a key ideological shift. Sinn Féin moved away from a strictly anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist stance toward a belief that capitalism, if properly managed, could dissolve historical divisions.

Sinn Féin supported the TQ at the height of the global economic crisis of 2008. In an interview with independent journalist Alan Meban in 2010, Niall Ó Donnghaile, Sinn Féin MP of the new Titanic constituency, said: "as a community, East Belfast, […] whether they be from Dee Street [a historically Unionist street] or whether Mountpottinger Road [a historically Nationalist street], has the benefit tangibly from these developments [in TQ]" (Meban 2010). As we shall see, there is substantial evidence that contradicts this statement. Working-class communities, on both Dee Street and

[87] Mairtín Ó Muilleoir was a high-profile nationalist figure, owner of the *Andersonstown News* paper in West Belfast.
[88] The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) has historically been the main Nationalist party in Northern Ireland, until the 1990s when Sinn Féin overtook them. Their political philosophy was more liberal, and they always condemned armed struggles.

Mountpottinger Road, are simply unable to benefit from the new consumerist district. It is also important to note that over time, as Sinn Féin's popularity grew, even winning the national elections in May of 2022, its position on the TQ was cemented. During the electoral campaign that year, Sinn Féin voted in favour of the construction of a new apartment complex within the TQ, a project that did not secure social housing (The Newsroom 2022). As we shall see next, Sinn Féin endorsement of neoliberal urbanism did find support among Nationalist elites. Yet, the support was not received from working-class residents of Short Strand in inner East Belfast, who had historical ties to the H&W, leading them to doubt that they could ever benefit from this project. While political and economic elites saw an opportunity to reshape Belfast's image and attract investment in the redevelopment of TQ, working-class communities of the Short Strand remained unconvinced that these projects would address their needs. The scale of public and private investment pouring into Queen's Island underscored the extent to which urban transformation was being driven by external capital and government-led initiatives rather than by local communities themselves.

The majority of investments first came from public funds. From Northern Ireland's grants-in-aid to Tony Blair's Millennium Fund and the European Union PEACE III initiative, public spending amounted to at least 200 million GBP for phase 1 of construction alone (OECD 2000, 35). Northern Ireland and the City of Belfast saw a favourable opportunity to revamp the city's image through the creation of a new neighbourhood that would be both an expression of modernity and an emblem of a 'shared space' To achieve this objective, the Titanic Quarter Ltd. (formally Alto Property Management Ltd.) was incorporated on March 23, 1998 (Companies House 2023). Former Belfast City Council Chief Executive Peter McNaney (quoted in Herbert 2007, 17) stated in 2007: "The development [of the TQ] fits the council agenda of how the city needs to grow, bringing in investment, and substantially

adding to the city's wealth base, drawing in residents, workers and those coming for recreation." An employee of the Titanic Quarter Ltd. echoed this vision, telling me that:

> [The city and the state] are involved in terms of planning and investments, and seeking investments. We work very closely with the Belfast City Council and a whole lot of private investors. There is like a delegation that goes out globally to like attract investments into the city.

As we can see, the idea that economic growth is in itself an asset for peace found strong echoes in the way corporate actors and public officials approach the TQ. Indeed, the presence of international private businesses, such as Amazon, Citibank, or Subway, and public institutions, like the Belfast Metropolitan College and the Public Records of Northern Ireland, within the TQ is perceived positively by these actors.

Yet this apparent success story reveals deeper contradictions, as the very model of growth celebrated in the TQ depends heavily on public financing to sustain what is ultimately a private-sector–driven project. While framed as a symbol of post-conflict renewal, the heavy reliance on public funds to finance the TQ raises fundamental questions about the state's role in underwriting urban transformation that primarily serves private capital. Public investment, especially when drawn from peacebuilding funds, was mobilized to subsidize infrastructure and support speculative real estate ventures, thereby socializing the costs while privatizing the gains. Lisa Longstaff, Deputy Head of Real Assets Investment for the United Kingdom's Department of Business and Trade, mentioned that: "Over the next decade, the TQ site should benefit from Belfast Region City Deal initiatives, with £1 billion co-investment. Public sector investments help further de-risk this opportunity and provide stimulus for occupier demand" (UK Department for Business and Trade and Longstaff 2024). In this

model, the state acts as an agent of capital accumulation, channelling resources into projects that inflate land values and attract corporate tenants, but do little to address housing shortages, precarious employment, or socio-economic inequalities in the city. As Harvey (1989, 9) argues, such urban entrepreneurialism transforms the city into a commodity, in which public policy and fiscal spending are deployed to create investment-friendly environments. This dynamic is emblematic of 'neoliberal roll-out,' where state institutions become active architects of market-driven redevelopment, such as gentrification, under the banner of peace and modernization. The kind of gentrification that has unfolded in the TQ was made integral to the post-conflict political economy institutionalized by the Belfast Agreement and later formalized through the St Andrew's Agreement.

Walking through the TQ, we are left wondering who benefits most from these investments (Davis 2024, 16). The TQ as a peace project has generated new forms of social exclusion as it has failed to tackle the socioeconomic disparities that were both a cause and a consequence of the conflict (Etchart 2008, 32; Hodson 2019, 227). Neoliberal urban regeneration augmented disparities, but its manifestation took on a peculiar feature as it was tethered to the post-conflict peace process. The public-private partnership that led to the TQ was an attempt to discipline urban space into pacification by incentivizing foreign direct investment and promoting gentrification. It outsources reconciliation to market actors, where economic growth is presumed to generate social harmony. The TQ thus stands as a case study in how the capitalist peace, when operationalized through neoliberal urbanism, produces a carefully managed coexistence that is more about securing investment climates than addressing the structural injustices at the heart of conflict.

6.4 TQ: Impact on Gentrification

As previously mentioned, TJ and its conflict transition projects, like the TQ, politicians have striven to restructure urban spatialities away from ethnocultural division and intercommunal warfare (Murtagh

2011, 215). To overcome the conflictual legacies, the images and identities of the places must be reinvented as liberal, modern, and harmonious. This is exactly what was planned for Belfast's TQ. The central idea for the new neighbourhood, which emerged during the peace process, was that the TQ would become a 'shared space' of different communities. A lot of effort was put in place by public and private actors to ensure that the landscape of the neighbourhood would remain neutral. Yet this vision of neutrality and shared space unfolds within a deeply uneven urban context, where long-standing inequalities in social housing continue to structure everyday life across Belfast, while flagship developments like the TQ promote a selective form of social mixing that often remains disconnected from these broader housing realities.

6.4.1 Housing Issues in Belfast and the TQ

Housing has been a central issue since the formation of the Northern Irish state in 1921, and it remains salient on today's political terrain. Following the independence of the Irish Free State, the post-partition Northern Irish government entrusted the construction and management of social housing to the municipalities councils (Melaugh 1994). At the time, only property-owners and their spouses were allowed to vote in council elections, and tenants, subtenants, lodgers, and individuals living with their parents were not. Therefore, housing served as a means of disenfranchisement, especially against Catholics, who were more likely to be tenants. Municipalities were often controlled by Unionist parties who discriminated against Nationalist applicants in the allocation of social housing and building permits (Melaugh 1994). Housing became a cause that unified Nationalist groups and emerged as a key demand of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and the People's Democracy.[89]

[89] The People's Democracy aimed initially to achieve civil rights in Northern Ireland, demanding reforms like "One man, one vote," an end to gerrymandering, and fair allocation of housing and jobs. Evolving beyond these initial demands, the movement later adopted a more socialist and Irish republican ideology, viewing full civil rights as only achievable through the establishment of a socialist republic for the entire island of Ireland (Arthur 1974, 53).

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), the governmental landlord entity, was created in 1971 and took on the responsibility of constructing and renovating social housing in Northern Ireland (Ballif 2012, 73). At the height of its action, in the early 1980s, the NIHE built about 7,000 social housing units per year, dramatically improving the population's access to social housing (Adair, McGreal, and McKay 1989, 218). According to the latest data available, that number dropped significantly over the years (Statista 2022), which, according to James Moore, my interviewee, was insufficient. Moore specified that in East Belfast, "[t]he Northern Ireland housing executive would say that, according to their record, there is a demand for 89 new [social] housing units. At the time that the TQ was being built [2008], I think that it was 88 new units missing. So, they needed to take care of 88 social housing units and didn't build any since then." Apparently, NIHE has changed from a proactive public housing provider to an entity that, whether by mandate, funding constraints, or strategic reorientation, deprioritizes the very mission on which it was founded. In redrawing its priorities, the NIHE appears to have ceded ground to market-driven development. The reduction of social housing units occurred precisely as Belfast urban redevelopment projects received substantial public backing. Moore's testimony thus reveals more than a budget shortfall; it signals a broader ideological shift in which public agencies increasingly function as coordinators and facilitators of neoliberal urban development, rather than guarantors of social welfare. This reorientation aligns with what has occurred elsewhere and with what critical housing scholars have identified as the neoliberalization of public institutions, in which public institutions have transformed from agents of redistribution into partners in gentrification (Byrne and Norris 2022; Byrne 2024). Today, Northern Ireland lacks sufficient social housing units for its population. While Northern Ireland's overall housing situation fares well compared

to other OECD countries,[90] the *ethos* of providing housing as a universal public good in Northern Ireland has been eroded in favour of policies that increasingly lean on market-led regeneration.

The inter-group inequalities in social housing have also continued. The NIHE assigns housing based on two criteria. The first is "housing need." Each applicant receives a points total depending on how urgent their situation is; this includes the condition of their current accommodation (such as safety, sanitation, the number of rooms relative to the family size, etc.) and their social circumstances (e.g., income, disability, domestic violence) (Northern Ireland Housing Executive 2023). The second criterion is their preferred place of residence. Residents must choose two geographical areas for their residential preference as defined by the NIHE. Given the legacies of conflict, people tend to stay in their religious-nationalist areas, but it also reproduces discrimination as treatment by public services remains unequal. For example, a social housing applicant who declares himself to be "Protestant" waits a median of 9 months, while one who declares himself to be "Catholic" waits 15 months (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland 2017, 20). This difference can be attributed, in part, to higher demand for social housing among Catholic households. Indeed, a 2013 survey of family resources shows that 22% of households that identify as "Catholic" are in a situation of poverty, compared to 17% of those who identify as "Protestant" (Knox 2016, 489). Moreover, 16 of the 20 most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, according to the deprivation indicator, are occupied mostly by people declaring themselves to be "Catholic" (ibid.). Conversely, only 6 of the 20 most privileged neighbourhoods are mostly occupied by people declaring themselves "Catholic" (ibid.). Housing has become a thorny legacy of the conflict.

[90] According to the *Northern Ireland Housing Statistics 2021-2022* (Department for Communities and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2022, 2), 9% of the total population rented a property through NIHE, which is far above the Canadian average, which stands at 3.8% (Statistics Canada 2022) and 6% for the OECD countries (OECD Housing project 2022).

The TQ's rise must be understood not in isolation but as part of a broader restructuring of the city's urban policy landscape, one in which state-led housing provision recedes while high-profile development projects claim the mantle of urban renewal. Yet, this retreat from public housing delivery has also reinforced segregation. Allocation patterns, shaped both by historical loyalties and systemic inequalities, continue to reproduce spatial divisions between Unionist and Nationalist communities. In such a fragmented urban fabric, the creation of spaces that can genuinely be shared across the divide is exceptionally rare. As we see next, the TQ emerged as a flagship project, presented as Belfast's first and only truly "shared space" since the Troubles. While the city fails to meet even the social housing needs of its most disadvantaged communities, it invests heavily in a waterfront development designed to attract tourists, high-income residents, and international capital.

6.4.2 The Shared Space Objectives of the TQ

Robert Fitzpatrick, CEO of the Odyssey Trust, told me that the TQ was "doomed to become neutral because of its geography." He continued, "Bordered by the river and having only one way in and one way out, [the TQ] is the closest development that has, in many respects, by default, created a neutrality of space. That has been by default. That hasn't been because somebody decided and said, 'This is what we will do.' No, it was more by accident than by design. But it has worked" (Interviewed May 11, 2022). According to him, the geographical location of the new neighbourhood, situated on a former industrial site that had been unused for decades, made it neutral, since nobody had lived there and could claim this space as their own. Yet, he quickly reversed such a position, saying that the troubled history of the shipyard, which was heavily marked by intercommunal feuds, still affects how the place is signified:

> Robert: […] there are many people from West Belfast that still won't come over the bridge [separating East Belfast from West Belfast]. That is just historical insecurities.

Christophe: Yeah, of course…

Robert: Oh, absolutely. There is still a culture of insecurity surrounding that. It's been broken down to the point where it is not as overt, but if you go up to Pembroke or Ballymurphy and say, "Listen, there is a free show on at the Odyssey, do you want to go out?" There is a good chance the person you ask would say no. You know, they don't tend to leave their areas. There is still a degree of polarity, social polarity, across certain sections, not all, but certain sections. But then that is to be expected. You can't expect people to be cheering only after 30 years.

What Robert mentions here is interesting. Despite the total transformation of a physical space to make it a 'neutral' or 'shared' space, it is still haunted by the previous times. The people from "Pembroke or Ballymurphy" are unwilling to visit the TQ because of insecurities, but it can also be explained as the effect of decades of prejudices that were transmitted to them through "postmemory" (Hirsch 2012).[91] The younger people did not experience the conflicts themselves but have internalized the stories of the conflict and experienced discrimination resulting from the conflict.

The unease and lingering divisions described above suggest that the official, planned neutrality has failed to take root. Indeed, archival documents indicate that developers and public authorities were not simply describing the TQ as naturally "neutral," but actively working to frame it as such. In the 2004 Belfast Masterplan, the TQ was described as providing "high quality, high-density and affordable housing in neutral territory close to the city centre" (Belfast City Council and Colin Buchanan and Partners 2004, 47). At first glance, this phrasing might suggest that neutrality was inherent to the site.

[91] The term "postmemory" describes the relationship that the next generation maintains with the collective and personal trauma experienced by those that preceded it (Hirsch 2012). It is about experiences that this next generation "remembers" through stories, images, rituals and other practices they grew up with. These experiences have been transmitted to the next generation in such a deep and affective way that they seem to constitute this generation's memory.

Yet, given the shipyard's history and long-standing association with Belfast's Unionist working-class, such a designation reveals an effort to overwrite these legacies and project the space as detached from sectarian divisions. The very act of branding the TQ as "neutral territory" underscores how neutrality had to be deliberately manufactured in planning and promotional discourse in order to attract cross-community residents and investors. In a similar vein, the Northern Irish Community Relations Council has published 18 iterations of its "shared space" research series since 2004, a periodical publication launched by the state in partnership with scholars to study various aspects of policy and planning in Northern Ireland. From the beginning, the project had clear intentions. Referring to the Belfast Agreement section 75(2), the researchers mentioned:

> section 75 indicates a strong commitment to move beyond the passive co-existence model of benign apartheid and physical divides toward a pro-active community relations agenda that actually encourages people to challenge the sources of those divisions. … [It] develop[s] policies that might lead to the removal of sectional symbols, flags and emblems, thereby making areas more suitable for mixing and more welcoming to the members of both communities. (Russell and Northern Ireland Community Relations Council 2004, 29–30)

By linking the Belfast Masterplan's designation of the TQ as "neutral territory" to the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council's call for the proactive removal of sectarian markers, we can see how the urban development and peacebuilding policy share a common spatial strategy: to depoliticise contested urban ground by stripping it of visual and symbolic cues that would anchor it to either Unionist or Nationalist identities. It was designed to manage political conflict through spatial design (Purcell 2002, 101). Such manufactured neutrality was an active re-scripting of place identity in which

architectural form, branding, and the regulation of symbolism work together to project an image of openness and inclusivity, even as the underlying social and political tensions remain unresolved.

The projection of "neutrality" into the TQ can be found in its promotional documents, where it is claimed that the TQ was a "shared space for the people of Belfast" (Titanic Quarter Ltd. and Sweeney 2015, 4), or a space "open to everybody" (Titanic Quarter Ltd, and Herbert 2007, 17). In a similar way, Nikki McDowell, an employee at Titanic Quarter Ltd., shared with me policies put in place to project the idea of a neutral space, saying, "None of our communication would say Titanic Quarter, East Belfast. Even if East Belfast is on our doorstep." The TQ is technically located in East Belfast, but the latter has a reputation for being overwhelmingly Unionist, which explains the developers' reticence to link it with the TQ. She also mentioned, "There are no flags flying, and it will remain like that as long as Titanic Quarter Ltd. is in charge here." As previously mentioned, it reflects the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council's shared space policy, which sought to strip the site of any markers that could align it with one community over the other (Russell and Northern Ireland Community Relations Council 2004, 30). As I mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, flags are highly visible in Belfast and throughout Northern Ireland. Flags are one of the most tangible, lasting symbols of the divide in Northern Ireland; people use the Union Jack or the Irish Republic flags to claim their "territory." Therefore, removing and forbidding symbols of division does project the idea of neutrality (Gaffikin and Morrissey 2011, 102). Patrick Abbott, a community organizer in East Belfast, was skeptical as he told me: "I am never really sure about how people define a shared or neutral space. Because they are only shared or neutral if something doesn't happen on it. […] I mean, I am sure that when they have events on the Titanic slipways, I would doubt that there is a checklist to see if this event infringed on our ideas of shared and neutral space." Abbott's skepticism points to a critical gap in the shared space literature. While planning and policy frameworks often define neutrality through

the removal of symbolic markers or the design of inclusive public realms, they rarely address how such spaces are used and contested in practice. As a result, "shared" or "neutral" designations risk becoming static, aesthetic categories that overlook the ways in which space can be reclaimed, politicized, or made exclusionary through various embodied ways. There is certainly a disconnect between the planned symbolism of neutrality and the lived realities of use and access, as I discuss below.

In the TQ, the very policies and design choices intended to produce a "space open to all" coexist with social and economic dynamics that limit who can genuinely access, and participate in, it. Bradley and Murtagh (2007, 5) expressed concern about what they see as an emergent dual city. On the one hand, there are the new 'neutral spaces' where the consumerist middle-class can afford to transcend ethnocultural divisions. On the other hand, there are deprived working-class neighbourhoods that are territorialized in ethnocultural terms and look very much the same as they did twenty years ago. The capitalist market regime is not compatible with the genuine and transformative 'shared spaces,' as it feeds on uneven development and recreates divides along class lines. The consumerist nature of the TQ makes it difficult for poorer individuals to access and benefit from its 'neutral attributes,' as they often lack the financial means to do so.

The marketization of space in favour of the middle and upper classes is also visible in the housing developments of the TQ. As stated, Belfast has a long history of social housing, and yet none exists in the TQ. This new neighbourhood is a prime example of new-build gentrification, in which an old industrial site is revamped into luxury condominium living. The shared space agenda is also central in the housing developments here, presented as an impetus for post-conflict transition. Developers explicitly designed this space to offer "politically neutral neighbourhoods, with integrated living space open to everybody. The mixture of housing, from very exclusive to affordable, will celebrate the cultural mix" (Herbert 2007, 17). The term "affordable" housing as was developed in the TQ, however,

requires careful unpacking. We can argue that the developers in these promotional documents carefully selected the term ‘affordable’ to describe the apartment complex that we can find in the TQ. As Donal O’Cofaigh, the communication and press officer for Unite the Union Northern Ireland campaign, pointed out, the term ‘affordable housing’ recently saw its definition altered by the Executive Office of Northern Ireland: “affordable housing had a specific definition. It had to be sold below, like 20% below, market value. They changed it, now, to mean housing that is sold less than the market value but doesn’t specify how much less.” As in Montréal and elsewhere, ‘affordable housing’ has been rendered a catch-all concept, encompassing both housing provided by the private, public, or non-profit sectors as well as all forms of housing tenure. In other words, the term ‘affordable housing’ can refer to any part of the housing continuum, from subsidized housing to market rental housing and market homeownership, as long as it sells or rents below market value. While the adjective ‘affordable’ frequently appears in the TQ’s promotional materials, there is no mention of ‘social’ housing.

Yet, even this claim to affordability has barely materialized. The process of building apartment complexes has been delayed, and there is not a single ‘affordable’ unit in the TQ. As of today, after the completion of phase 2 (out of 5), there is actually only one apartment complex built in the TQ, The Arc, which includes 474 units, which can’t be categorized as affordable, as I detail shortly. With so few units, private developers can advance a contention that the inclusion of less profitable social housing is “bad business,” to borrow a phrase from James Moore, community organiser in East Belfast. In an interview with me, Moore even recalled the meetings that he had with both the Northern Ireland Executive Office and the private developers of the TQ:

> [P]eople who were on the housing waiting list saw the opportunity at the time of Titanic to be able to solve their problems. … Yet, it was a sort of, “Would you mind building housing

> for those 88 families, building houses for them." And at that time, we pushed hard for those social housings to be built, to be a proper part of the new development.

There was even a time when James and his team thought they had convinced the developers to include some affordable housing. Yet, it became clear that the developers' intention was really to avoid building them. As Moore continued, "Originally, they wanted to … have a section of the land with apartments on it and then another part of the land with affordable housing units on there. We said no, 'why would you identify the poor people?'" And as soon as Moore and other community organizations voiced their opposition to this plan, affordable housing was off the table and never came back.

Today, The Arc consists of one- to three-bedroom apartments, generally smaller than the average square footage in Belfast. While the development brochure frames this as "European-style urban living," such branding can be read less as a lifestyle choice and more as a profit-maximizing strategy (Titanic Quarter Ltd et al. 2006, 9). By reducing unit size, developers can increase the number of apartments per building footprint, thereby maximizing total rental income per square metre. This logic reflects a wider global trend in which existing or potential larger units are subdivided into smaller, higher-yield apartments, often marketed under the guise of urban sophistication or efficient living. When first released, the cheapest apartments in The Arc were offered at £1,000 per month. By spring 2022, four available units were listed at an average of £1,315 per month. In January of 2026, 3 units were up for rent, all two-bedroom apartments priced between £1,400 and £1,550. With a median monthly income of £2,995 in Belfast (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2025), these rents require over half of the average household's earnings, placing them firmly in the category of unaffordable housing as defined by standard affordability thresholds. The Northern Ireland Executive's data confirm this disparity: the Titanic Quarter ranks among the most expensive areas in Belfast for renting a two-bedroom apartment, with average rents roughly 40 percent higher than the citywide

median of £775 (Ulster University and Northern Ireland Housing Executive 2022, 13). Obviously, the developers' target was the affluent class, and their plan for luxury apartments succeeded. According to the *Future Belfast* website, which "independently document[s] Belfast's changing built environment" (Potter 2022), The Arc sold 80% of all its units prior to finalizing its construction back in 2007.

Despite the need for social housing in East Belfast, and despite the promise that there would be "a mixture of affordable and exclusive housing" (Herbert 2007, 17), a quick evaluation of the housing stock within the neighbourhood attests that the former never materialized.[92] Patrick Abbott stated during our interview, "Unless you call private developers that bought the apartment down there and then rented it out, maybe this is what the [housing] executive considers social housing! […] The cheapest one will be £1,000 a month. That, to me, isn't affordable. I have a good salary here with this job. I would never want to pay £1,000 a month to rent somewhere. You know it is just crazy!" The result is a neighbourhood priced beyond the reach of most Belfast residents, effectively transforming what was once an industrial working-class space into an exclusive residential enclave. This exacerbates existing housing inequalities and sets a precedent for the city's waterfront as a site of speculative investment rather than a space addressing Belfast's broader housing needs. In this sense, The Arc mirrors the dynamics of global 'luxury urbanism,' where design language and marketing gloss conceal the structural reality in which concerns for affordability are replaced by a drive for financialized real estate returns.

[92] In September 2021, Belfast City Council officially added "social housing" to the second phase of housing construction in the TQ (Canning 2021). The introduction of social housing in the form of 20% of a new 800-apartment luxury tower was definitely welcomed. Yet, as we have seen in numerous other instances, nothing is set in stone when it comes to social housing, especially as regulatory mechanisms that enforce and monitor the pledges by developers are largely absent. Most of my interviewees who work in the community sectors were not particularly hopeful that the 20% mandate would be complied with by the developers.

6.5 Gentrification in East Belfast

Due to its geographical proximity to the shipyard, East Belfast has historically served as the primary source of supply for shipyard workers. The predominance of Protestant households in this borough facilitated their employment in the shipyard, which implemented sectarian hiring policies. However, East Belfast now houses many of the city's most economically disadvantaged communities (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2018). In Ballymacarrett, for example, located along the waterfront's southern edge, among residents aged 16 to 74, nearly half (46%) are economically inactive—that is, neither in paid employment nor actively seeking work, a category that includes individuals affected by long-term illness, disability, caring responsibilities, or early withdrawal from the labour market. Only 43% are in paid employment, and 61% have no or low-level qualifications (Boland et al. 2017, 123). Out of 582 wards in Northern Ireland, Ballymacarrett ranks 6th in terms of Education and Training Disability and 18th for overall Multiple Deprivation (ibid., 123). Despite its proximity to the Titanic Quarter redevelopment, there is little evidence to suggest that local residents have meaningfully benefited from that investment; quite the contrary (ibid., 123–124). As I show in the later, the affective tie between the residents of East Belfast and the H&W shipyard remains significant to this day. Residents remain proud of the history of the shipyard, and the landscape of East Belfast is replete with depictions of those industrial times. For the time being, however, I want to examine how the new-build gentrification in the TQ prompted a more 'traditional' form of gentrification in East Belfast, and its consequences.

6.5.1 The Indirect Consequences of New-Build Gentrification

The TQ development sparked pockets of gentrification in the surrounding neighbourhoods, historically inhabited by industrial working-class communities. Based on various testimonies I gathered, rent prices and property prices have steadily increased since the 1990s. According to Patrick Abbott, the last 10

years witnessed a steeper rent increase in the area, which spurred some people to leave the neighbourhood for the first time in generations. There are no statistics that prove this, but people that I interviewed in East Belfast have connected the gentrification of their borough with the arrival of more affluent families in the neighbouring TQ. In 2012, The Arc apartment complex and the Titanic Museum opened, so such a connection is not ungrounded. The most affected area in East Belfast is the vicinity of Newtownards Road, the main commercial street that runs all the way through the borough. According to Patrick, this is where most of the displacement took place.

Gentrification on Newtownards Road is unmistakable, with the recent opening of third wave coffee shops, two microbreweries and high-end clothing stores. While often locally owned, these shops take the place of more affordable options, as they target more affluent demographics. Newtownards Roads is also experiencing the closure of its local shops, which are often being replaced by multinational corporate brands. According to my interviewee, Robert Fitzpatrick, this is an example of "buffer zones development": "Because of the conflict… we've witnessed what I would call pocket development, where you got an extreme line of demarcations [between communities] with buffer zones [in-between]. The only place to develop is the buffer zone. So, you develop the buffer zone, actually more in hope than expectation." These buffer zones often take the form of the main commercial streets and become one of the main *foci* for developers. While these transformations are frequently framed by planners and developers as neutral or even necessary forms of post-conflict regeneration, they also produce more subtle forms of displacement, reshaping the built environment and residents' affective and economic relationships to place.

Sedimented changes in the landscape over time transform its relationship with residents. Jane Henderson, a 68-year-old resident of East Belfast, recalled her experience of Newtownards Road:

> It used to be my favourite place in the city. This is where I would meet my friends, where I would do my shopping and take a coffee. Now I feel it has lost its soul. We see big business coming in, taking the place of local businesses, and everything is more expensive. I feel for my son, who is a baker. Things are difficult for him right now.

Jane's reflection captures more than a lament over rising prices or the influx of corporate businesses; it reveals a sense of displacement in time. Her phrase, "it lost its soul," suggests a rupture in the phenomenological continuity between self, space, and memory. As Newtownards Road transforms, Jane no longer recognizes the place that once anchored her everyday life; for her, it is not only inhospitable economically but also mnemonically. Gentrification, in this context, acts as a form of collective amnesia, a redefinition of space that erases working-class histories and daily experiences. Jane's past is overwritten and rendered unintelligible within the new spatial logic. Moreover, her son's case shows how gentrification disrupts the reproduction of cultural and economic practices across generations. The local bakery, once a cornerstone of community life, becomes precarious amid the dominance of corporate bakeries and chain cafés. Jane's narrative shows how gentrification is spatio-temporal; it undermines the continuity of memory and spatial belonging by reconfiguring space to favour new consumers, whilst leaving long-term residents with a sense of loss and disconnection.

The contradictions of neoliberalism are evident in East Belfast. In the late 1970s, incapacity benefit claims were 74% higher than the national average, private sector wages lagged those in the public sector, and nearly 43% of households either lived in poverty or were at serious risk of falling into it (Kelly 2012, 51). Economic neglect, coupled with decades of political instability, has left many communities trapped in cycles of deprivation. Limited access to secure employment, underfunded public services, and rising living costs have further exacerbated these hardships, deepening poverty and making economic mobility increasingly elusive for working-class families. As gentrification began

to take shape in East Belfast recently, rent prices have gradually risen in the formerly working-class neighbourhoods, locally owned shops have closed and been replaced by multinational franchises, and displacement has also become apparent. Given the strong presence of social housing institutions in Belfast, gentrification is likely to be a bumpy road. As Jane's quotes above express, however, the landscape has been changing, and people may find themselves out of place and out of time during the process. This can give rise to tensions in a city that only recently began to 'turn the page.'

Gentrification in Belfast has reshaped the city's landscape, reinforcing existing social and economic inequalities. While marketed as a symbol of Belfast's economic renewal, the TQ has primarily catered to affluent professionals and foreign investors rather than addressing the needs of the city's working-class communities. Despite significant public investment through government grants, tax incentives, and infrastructure spending, those who historically lived and worked near the docks have seen little benefit. While the project was touted as a catalyst for job creation and economic opportunity, a substantial proportion of the employment it has generated has been temporary, low-wage, or concentrated in precarious service sector jobs, rather than secure, long-term employment. Brian Kelly (2012, 48) traces the investment of *Invest NI*, a government-funded agency established in 2002, to secure investments and funds for Northern Ireland's population. One of Invest NI's first actions was to allocate £15 million in public funds to Valence Corporation for a battery manufacturing plant in Mallusk (a small town in the suburbs of Belfast), with the expectation that it would generate 600 jobs. Only 400 positions materialized; however, most were temporary roles filled through staffing agencies before the company shut down operations and relocated to China. Similarly, Invest NI provided £2 million to the Bank of Ireland to create 150 jobs, but only 20 positions were ultimately established. More recently, the agency awarded £250,000 to the London-based law firm Allen & Overy, but instead of generating the promised 300 jobs, the firm primarily used the funds to transfer

existing staff from London rather than hiring locally (ibid., 51). According to Kelly's conclusion (2012, 45), the vast majority of jobs Invest NI ever produced were "low-paid, dead-end jobs in call centres and the service industry."

Public investments through Invest NI or through mega rehabilitation projects like TQ are in line with the broader shift towards a neoliberal strategy of urban development across the world, where cities compete for investment to cater to elite interests rather than the social needs of working-class communities. In Belfast, neoliberalization coincided with the city's drive for post-conflict economic revitalization. Invest NI's funding promised economic renewal to take the city beyond the sectarian warfare, but ultimately deepened inequality. Just as public money was funnelled into multinational corporations with little return for local workers, significant public investment in urban regeneration has primarily served private developers and corporate interests rather than the communities most in need. Market-driven growth was prioritized over equitable development, leaving Belfast's working-class residents to bear the brunt of rising costs and economic instability.

6.5.2 Developers' Take on East Belfast

The developers I spoke with were proud to describe the TQ as one of the few shared spaces in the city. Yet, when questioned about the concrete benefits the TQ offers, their answers were, to say the least, defective. The primary point made by corporate actors is that foreign capital investment in the TQ and the tourism generated by this neighbourhood bring revenue to the state and city, which can be reinvested in dedicated peace programs. Joe, an employee at Titanic Quarter Ltd., touted the benefits of a shared space as follows: "There is no political background. No political affiliation is necessary to get here. We just sit in the middle of the city, between East Belfast and West Belfast, and we are 'plumped' in the middle. Because of that [perceived apolitical nature], we attract a lot of foreign direct investments." It has also been widely documented that most of the money coming in from various

government levels for the TJ process in Belfast was redirected to programs that facilitate the flow of foreign direct investments (Nagle and Clancy 2010; Nagle 2013). Neutrality, which in Belfast is the exception rather than the norm, can be a critical component of the transition process, opening the door to communal access to urban spaces and inter-group interactions. This potential, however, is compromised, as such rare 'shared' spaces are offered primarily for consumption and tourism. As Judith Owens, CEO of Titanic Belfast, acknowledged: "85 per cent of our visitors are coming from outside Northern Ireland… Titanic Belfast has proved to be a shining example of how a significant tourism investment, public and private, combined with passion and belief, can be a catalyst for economic growth and help positively position a destination on the worldwide stage" (NI Connections 2018). It is contradictory, however, that while the TQ is constantly touted as a shared space, people from Northern Ireland do not patronize it. The failure of the enactment of shared space is explained by Joe's comment above, that the discourse of neutrality is not aimed at the people living nearby but at foreign investors, reassuring the latter of the security of their investments. This exclusion is not only discursive or symbolic; it is materially embedded in the spatial and infrastructural organization of the TQ itself, which renders the neighbourhood practically inaccessible to the very communities it claims to include.

For example, the spatial configuration surrounding this new neighbourhood contributes to its isolation from East Belfast. The state and the city planners are responsible for this pitfall. People from East Belfast, despite being located right next to the TQ, have seen their access dramatically restricted over the years, partly due to the opening of the M3 motorway in 1998. Historically, workers came walking from all corners of East Belfast to the H&W gate to work for that day (McCluskie 2013, 1808). Today, there is one walkable bridge that overpasses the M3 motorway, and it is situated at the very end of the TQ, far from the core of its activities. The only other route bypasses the M3 through

other regional roads, greatly facilitating accessibility for those who have a car (see Figure 1.2). Public transit does reach the TQ, yet despite the geographical proximity, there are no direct bus routes from East Belfast to the TQ. Everyone wishing to visit the new neighbourhood needs to transfer through the city centre, as the only public transit route that reaches the TQ is G2, Belfast's latest line that only runs between the city centre and the TQ.[93] The other option requires a long walk from the Queen's Bridge bus stop. There is no question that access to the TQ is even more challenging for people with disabilities or the elderly. This is problematic when you brand the new neighbourhood as a shared space and a conflict transition tool. The benefits of alleged neutrality, communalism and openness are lost since the place is not accessible for those who do not have the means, financial or locomotive, to get there.

Moreover, when I asked an employee of the Odyssey group if the shared space program had any impacts on East Belfast, he responded: "uhh… the answer to that is no... East, West and North are still high deprivation, low education, low development, and the comparable housing stock in each of the three parts of the city is still, some would even say, pre-historic, with no ability to gentrify even a little bit. None." His response contains an evident derogatory undertone, indicating that people from working-class areas are to blame for not gaining advantages from this space or the gentrification machine, as though they are too impoverished and uneducated to be motivated to improve their neighborhoods in response to the changes in the TQ. This kind of demeaning attitude towards working-class communities seems to be accepted by other developers of the TQ. When asked the same question, another highly ranked employee at the Titanic Quarter Ltd. told me that they have developed partnerships with various schools in the city so that students can learn about the history of the shipyard,

[93] This is a problem for all of Belfast. All the bus lines coming from the East, West, South and North boroughs of the city all meet in the city centre. Very few bus lines run within a given section of the city, and no buses run between the various sections of the city. Almost all bus lines depart and come back to the city centre.

including the H&W and the Titanic. She said, “It isn’t true to say that only people with money can come to the TQ, that only people with money can stay in our hotels. That is just not true. The space is just open to anyone.” These educational outreach programs are useful, but their impact remains limited. They often function primarily as symbolic gestures of inclusion rather than mechanisms of substantive access. Occasional, organized school visits do little to mitigate the everyday economic and mobility constraints faced by residents of East Belfast, particularly in a context where public transit routes require indirect travel through the city centre and where the neighbourhood is oriented toward consumption. By conflating the formal openness of space with its actual accessibility, such claims amount to a form of false advertising of “shared space,” in which openness is defined juridically rather than socially or materially.

This discursive strategy allows elites to acknowledge exclusion while simultaneously disavowing responsibility for it. If the space is technically open, then absence can be framed as a matter of personal choice rather than structural constraint. In doing so, the rhetoric of shared space masks how the TQ reproduces classed and spatial inequalities under the guise of post-conflict reconciliation. These alienating discourses, when combined with the infrastructural barriers discussed above, have consequently engendered resentment and discontent among residents of East Belfast, for whom the TQ stands less as a shared urban future than as a reminder of their continued exclusion from it.

6.5.3 East Belfast’s Take on the TQ

East Belfast’s residents had high hopes when the construction of the TQ was announced. It was presented as an integral element of conflict transition, but these people also expected that it would be instrumental in catering to their needs. “We were lacking housing; we are lacking a new community centre and a park,” Peter, a resident of East Belfast, told me. He added, “I thought the new development could at least provide us with a park, but they chose otherwise.” Indeed, there are no

green spaces in the TQ. The plan for phase 3 of construction includes parks, but they won't be completed until 2035, more than 25 years after its inauguration (Turley and Associates 2008, 2). The discrepancy between the expectations of East Belfast's residents for the TQ and the visions of the developers and city officials is glaring. This disconnect, it seems, has much to do with the sentiment of attachment that residents of East Belfast have maintained with the H&W and the space upon which it was run. Judith Kelly, who is married to a former shipyard worker, told me, "I think a lot of people who worked [in the shipyard] felt enraged that they weren't involved more in what the history [how they redeveloped the shipyard] of the place was." The shipyard was the major employer of many generations of East Belfast residents. Patrick Abbott recounted: "When my brother left school in 1962, he didn't have to look far to get a job. Just like my father, he went to the shipyard." For years and years, the shipyard was synonymous with "a good job" for East Belfast communities. James Moore further added: "[A]t one stage, there were 44,000 people [in H&W], and you would be guaranteed that at least 2/3 of them lived in East Belfast… It was extremely rare not to know someone who worked at the H&W." With deindustrialization, however, employment at H&W declined and the employment prospects for the entire borough shrank. James Moore illustrated this by saying, "I can remember within the last 6 months of my school life, from January to June of 1979. We went from our career class going from talking about going to work for the shipyard, to the career class saying don't even think about going to work in the shipyard. In 6 months, that happened. So yeah, that was a rapid deterioration." Despite the eventual disassociation of the company with the locals, the latter's pride in the shipyard has not diminished, it seems. While conversing with people in East Belfast, it quickly became obvious that many of them still attach great importance to the history of the shipyard, which makes them feel even more bitter about the development of the TQ.

My interviewees' testimonies are not just nostalgic recollections of the shipyard's past. They speak to a deeper sense of ownership of the history of the shipyard and identity stemming from it. The H&W shipyard was not just an industrial employer; it was the economic backbone and symbolic heart of East Belfast's working-class life for much of the twentieth century. As Patrick Abbott's account illustrates, employment in the yard was intergenerational and almost automatic; sons followed fathers into the same gates, and the shipyard provided a clear, stable path from school to skilled, unionized work. This continuity fostered a sense of community rooted in shared labour. So, for people like Judith and her husband, the redevelopment process that transformed the yard into the TQ has been a disappointment. The refusal to consider the former workers in the rehabilitation process was a form of symbolic displacement for them. The TQ's redevelopment reframed the shipyard's identity for external audiences while sidelining the lived experiences of those who had built its legacy. Rather than a matter of poor consultation, it reflects the neoliberal logic of urban regeneration, in which local histories are commodified without granting the originating community meaningful control over how those histories are told.

In this light, the statements from the interviewees reveal an underlying tension. For East Belfast residents, the shipyard is inseparable from a proud, hard-won working-class identity, but that was not reflected in the TQ. The result is that the TQ, while geographically in East Belfast, remains culturally (as well as socially) distant from many of its neighbouring communities. The discontent among residents reveals that the TQ's "shared space" image is haunted by the living memories of industrial labour and the communities formed through it. It also highlights that the redevelopment is not simply about creating new uses for old land, but about reshaping who has the authority to tell the story of the shipyard, and by extension, whose claim to the space is recognized in the city's future.

This disconnect between the TQ's curated narrative, and the lived memories of neighbouring communities also manifests in more immediate, everyday forms of exclusion, as residents' accounts reveal how the redevelopment's social and cultural distance is reinforced by its economic inaccessibility and tourist-oriented design. In most of the interviews I conducted with the community members of East Belfast, two issues stood out that explain the locals' disengagement with the TQ: prices and tourism. Locals often lamented: "It's too expensive," "There isn't much to do for locals," "I already know the history," "It's too crowded," "Why would I visit there?" For many residents, the question of prices quickly became a deterrent to visiting the TQ. As mentioned above, the TQ lacks social or affordable housing, which is unusual compared to other areas of Belfast. In addition to that, the commercial scene is filled with costly shops and restaurants that are out of reach for East Belfast communities. The Titanic Belfast, a museum and the main attraction of the TQ, has an entry price of £25, which, for instance, is twice as expensive as the *Louvre* in Paris and more expensive than the Beatles Museum in Liverpool, which targets the same kind of audience. A regular cinema ticket for the theatre located in the TQ also costs £2 more than its counterpart in the city centre. The higher prices for most activities reinforce the perception that working-class communities are not welcome there. Jane Henderson, an East Belfast local, told me: "When they closed down the shipyard, the site was still accessible. I remember going there with my friends, by the river. It was nice. Today, I avoid it. There is nothing in my budget. I prefer to stay here [East Belfast]." Even when closed and abandoned, the former shipyard was still considered more 'worth' by some East Belfast locals because it was accessible.

Regarding tourism, there is no denying that an important proportion of the people found in the TQ are tourists. The museum, the Odyssey complex, the indoor skydiving complex and the hotels all target and attract tourists. I was also surprised to see a lot of tourists when I visited the Public Record

Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) located in the TQ. Joe, an employee of Titanic Quarter Ltd., told me that the decision to move PRONI to this new neighbourhood was also a strategy for tourism. The state officials knew that more and more tourists of Irish heritage (mostly from the US) are keen to find out about their family history and visit the public archives for answers. That being said, there are obviously not only tourists on this site; students, workers, and other locals are also present, but they do appear in fewer numbers, especially outside working/school hours. For the residents of East Belfast that I interviewed, the TQ is synonymous with tourism, which acts as a deterrent to visiting the space: "There are too many tourists there. You cannot move" (C. Jacobs Interviewed June 5, 2022). The Titanic Quarter Ltd. originally forecasted that 500,000 people would visit the Titanic Belfast in its inaugural year (2012), and they exceeded expectations with 700,000 visitors. In 2019, there were more than 900,000 visitors, and while the number dropped during the pandemic, it has been recovering in post-pandemic times (Breslin 2022). There were, indeed, a lot of tourists when I visited the museum, coming in tour buses from all over the world. According to the CEO of the Odyssey Trust and the employees of the Titanic Quarter Ltd. whom I interviewed, the objective is to double the number of tourists by 2035. A lot of effort has been made to market Belfast as a prime tourist destination, with official campaigns featuring various images of the TQ.

While interviewees did not reject tourism outright ("we need tourists"), their remarks were consistently accompanied by frustration over the disproportionate emphasis placed on visitors in the design and purpose of the area. As a result, the TQ is widely experienced as a space in which residents feel they have little stake or presence ("there is nothing for us there"). A comment by Donal O'Cafaigh, the campaigns communication and press officer for Unite the Union in Northern Ireland, captures this sentiment of the locals:

> The TQ had a big impact in terms of tourism. Films and actors have located themselves out there.[94] But again, the way it's been done has prioritized the interests of the developers, and it lacks accountability. There is no involvement of working-class people in the management of these facilities. While it may be positive, I think that the whole model is something we would want to be changed. We would want workers to be involved, workers' voices to be heard and public housing, which isn't part of any plans.

As Cochrane (2015, 51) demonstrates, tourism is paradoxical in many post-conflict settings. Tourism poses particular challenges when heritage is produced for external consumption, as the narratives of the past presented to visitors often marginalize local forms of remembrance and lived historical experience. Tourism, or any process of marketing a place or a history, involves simplifying the contexts and narratives of past conflicts, which can be troubling for those who experienced the conflicts and/or remember them. In the conflict transition process, tourism is often a "beneficiary of [it] rather than a catalyst for its occurrence" (ibid., 53). By removing contextualization and engaging in sanitization, the touristic drive creates situations where maintaining mnemonic histories and adapting them to the tourist economy become difficult to balance. Tourism creates simulacra of what happened in the past and may even adds a quasi-playful dimension to it. This often involves the erasure of sufferings associated with the past, such as the Troubles in the case of Belfast (Stone 2006, 146). Witnessing painful parts of their past and lingering questions of justice expunged from the tourist spectacles of the TQ, East Belfast communities aren't able to appreciate the place as a true shared space. This sentiment is articulated through everyday practices of critique and resistance that challenge the spectacularized narratives of the TQ.

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[94] In the rehabilitation of the shipyard, the decision was made to build new film studios, the Titanic Studios, where many movies and series (e.g., *Game of Thrones*) were produced.

Figure 6.1 shows an information panel that explains the revitalization of a former school into what the East Belfast Network Centre is now. Two interesting points captured my attention on this panel. The first and more obvious one is the graffiti overwritten on the panel, which tweaks the original title of the panel from "an iconic building" to "an ironic building-mess," an obvious expression of disgruntlement over the transformation the building has undergone. The second interesting point is the decision to include "A Titanic Connection" on the information panel. The "connection" has, however, nothing to do with either the former school or East Belfast Network Centre; it just states that one of the electricians on board the Titanic when it sank grew up on a nearby street. It seems to be a marketing gimmick, banking on the renown of the ship. We are thus left wondering why this "Titanic Connection" was added and whom it is directed to. Since the information panel was installed, which is surmised to be between May 2015 and April 2017 (according to Google Street View timelapse function), it seems that the reference to the Titanic was a consequence of the success of the TQ. Can't East Belfast exist without it being positioned in relation to the TQ? This was a thought that passed through my mind when I read the panel. This seems to be yet another example of a questionable connection between the TQ and East Belfast. There are many events, people or locations that could create a legitimate bridge between the two spaces, but they would necessitate more than a footnote on an information panel and acknowledgement of the difficult heritage of the shipyard.

Overall, what I have sought to demonstrate in this section is that the Titanic Quarter's exclusive spatial configuration has left behind many of the communities it was ostensibly designed to serve. While marketed as a place to "live, work, visit and stay" (Titanic Quarter Ltd 2023), the reality is that those who do so are rarely from the working-class districts that might most benefit from genuinely accessible shared spaces. The Belfast Agreement is often presented as a catalyst for economic development, credited with reducing unemployment and stimulating investment and consumption. Yet,

the TQ has come to embody a new form of polarization; class-based polarization added to the long standing nationalist divide. Belfast's urban geography still bears the imprint of deep-seated segregated tendencies, even a quarter-century after the Agreement. In East Belfast, historically segregated neighbourhoods still remain physically and socially cut off from each other, despite their proximity. The latest census data confirm these enduring divides: Ballymacarrett is 97.5% Protestant and the Short Strand 91% Catholic (Streetcheck 2023). Peace lines, mutual distrust, and long-standing patterns of avoidance mean that residents on one side rarely cross into the other, even for everyday needs. On the other hand, the TQ's religious makeup is 65% Protestant and 17% Catholic, representing better integration than in other neighbourhoods by comparison. This partial religious desegregation, however, does not translate into meaningful reconciliation. The TQ caters to those with disposable income, creating a filter that excludes much of the surrounding working-class population, whether Protestant or Catholic. Just as residents of Ballymacarrett won't cross into the Short Strand, many from either community find little reason, or financial ability, to engage with the TQ. The ongoing forms of ethnonational separation and (newer) forms of class exclusion reveal the limits of the "shared space" rhetoric. The TQ ultimately incarnates a political project that situates conflict transition within the frame of capitalist peace, where symbolic gestures toward reconciliation coexist with the (re)production of boundaries through market logics.

6.6 Titanic Quarter: Impacts on Memories

As discussed in Chapter 4, the history of Belfast's shipyard has been shaped by several sequences of violent struggles. The shipyard and its history have many qualifiers, but "peaceful" is not one of them. As such, it still occupies a crucial place in the city's collective memory. Both Unionists and Nationalists encoded meanings into this space, albeit opposite meanings. For Unionists, the H&W remains a comforting symbol of the familiar rhythms of the factory, which guaranteed multi-

generational employment and other social benefits. This sentiment is reflected throughout East Belfast in various murals, posters, and even in the logos of numerous businesses and public institutions referencing H&W. East Belfast's people have good reasons to remain proud of the company; their sweat and toil went into establishing H&W as the most important shipbuilding company in Great Britain. For Nationalists, however, their relationship with the H&W is a more ambiguous history, as the shipyard represented a toxic work environment. The company was one of the major symbols of the intercommunal divide and the oppression of Nationalists. For most Nationalists, the site was a disturbing *lieux de mémoire*. They have been making sure that this darker time would not be forgotten in the Unionists' celebratory narrative of the shipyard (Foster 2013, 28).

The prominence of the history of the intercommunal divide in the city has overshadowed its intersection with a class divide. Hadden (1995) points to the "complexities of the national question" in Northern Ireland: "Accepting the sectarian divide as a permanent feature, [it] tends to explain events solely as a product of this divide. … The key to understanding history and to unravelling the complexities of the national question is one and the same – a class analysis" (Hadden 1995, 5; 9). The class structure of Northern Ireland has been intertwined with the sectarian divide, and the intricacy of this intersection manifested itself in the development of the TQ. In the next section, I discuss this subject in relation to the memory politics of the TQ. I examine how TQ has marketized collective memories and discuss the irreconcilability between East Belfast people's pride for 'what was' and what now remains of the industrial heritage of the space. I then examine the architecture and the spatial configuration of the new neighbourhood aimed at reshaping narratives about Belfast and how the new narratives of Belfast may further marginalize working-class communities. Lastly, my analysis focuses on the main attraction of the TQ, the Titanic Belfast.

6.6.1 East Belfast: Dual Usages of Industrial Heritage

The shipyard's and its remarkable achievements have fostered a sentiment of pride among East Belfast's residents, even though deindustrialization from the 1960s was harsh for them. Interestingly, since the opening of the TQ, the focus of commemorative landscapes in East Belfast, including murals, has shifted from the H&W, the company, to the Titanic itself. This is most discernible in the private sector. When I was in Belfast in 2022, I saw four bed and breakfasts referencing the Titanic. The new microbrewery on Newtownards Road served me a Titanic beer with a Titanic coaster. Souvenir shops in East Belfast carry, almost without fail, Titanic-themed items. The commodification of the Titanic as an authentic industrial heritage of the city appears to have begun with the gentrification of the shipyard (Hodson 2019, 231), and public authorities were deeply involved in this process. The 'seal of approbation' apposed by public authorities also legitimizes the spread of Titanic memory outside of the originally planned TQ, which constantly clashes with the working-class memory in East Belfast.

The city and the state, often collaborating with private developers, have been promoting the Titanic. For instance, a sculpture named 'Titanic people' (Figure 6.2) on Newtownards Road was unveiled in the same year as the Titanic Museum opened. James Moore and other community activists insisted that they call it "People of the H&W," but their requests were ignored; the city wanted this filiation with the symbolism of the TQ. Similarly, there are two murals dedicated to the Titanic in East Belfast (Figures 6.3 and 6.4). One of them appeared only after the opening of the TQ (6.4). The other one (6.3) was already there, but it was restored in 2015 after the opening of the Titanic Museum. Interestingly, this mural (Figure 6.3) now carries the official seal of the Executive Office of Northern Ireland, one of the few in the city to have this, perhaps indicating the importance that the Northern Irish government places on the history of the Titanic. The Titanic and, by extension, H&W are an affective industrial past for East Belfast people, but in official memorialization the Titanic is given precedence

for the purpose of city marketing. These contrasting approaches to the heritages of the city can also be found in the dichotomous representation of the two shipyard cranes, which have become icons of the city.

Even if they were only 'recently' erected – in 1969 and 1974, respectively – the two massive yellow cranes, Goliath and Samson (Figure 6.5), have become endeared symbols of the city. They are amongst the most enormous shipyard cranes in the world, and their bright yellow colour makes them noticeable from almost everywhere in the TQ, East Belfast and the city centre. In my observation, more than any other structures, the two cranes have become the most represented 'architecture' in Belfast's landscape. More than the cranes themselves, what you see when visiting Belfast is the representation of the cranes. Representations of them are everywhere, from the city's promotional materials to stamps, flowerpots, toys, and Belfast Eats (Figure 6.6), a smartphone app specializing in food delivery and takeout orders in the city. When I asked Robert Fitzpatrick, CEO of the Odyssey Trust, what the cranes represented, he said, "These cranes are Belfast." That is, what the cranes signify is no longer industrial objects, but a synecdoche of the city. The transformation of the yellow cranes into a symbol of the city was the result of the collaboration between city officials, scholars and marketing teams. In 2006, a group of artists, with the assistance of the City and Ulster University, organized an art exhibition called "Yellow Spaces" (Sheridan et al. 2007). The brochure of the exhibition reveals displays, filled with everyday objects painted in yellow, aimed at transforming our perception of said objects. The brochure states:

> Yellow is used as a sign for things that are particularly useful and for things that it has been agreed to share. Yellow is the colour of consensus, utility, and access. If the colour White can be

> thought to represent the ‘“passive” neutrality of surrender, the colour Yellow denotes what could be called an “active neutrality” – a common ground created through usefulness – a Yellow Space. (Sheridan et al. 2007, 10)

For the artists, the colour yellow is synonymous with sharing, the quality that Belfast was desperately seeking during its post-conflict transition. Moreover, specifically relating to Belfast, yellow is also the common colour between the Green of nationalists and the Orange of Unionists. The exhibitions continued, by showing photographs of various Belfast landmarks, such as the Hilton Hotel, the Victoria Square Mall, the offices of the Laganside corporation, but also other spaces – e.g., a vacant slot, a highway, etc. In each of these pictures, some part was highlighted in yellow to evoke the possibility or the potential of sharing this space (Sheridan et al. 2007, 18).

The yellow cranes were also attributed this shared symbolism. Once symbols of the thriving industry and brought pride to working-class communities, as well as sectarian violence and labour exploitation, they were thus stripped of their industrial significance. Contemporary place branding taps into social differentiation, taste cultures and niche markets tied to the upper-middle classes. Prominent urban stakeholders, like real estate developers and local politicians, have increasingly sought to capitalize on unique traditions, cultures, histories, atmosphere, ‘vibe’ and particular memories that a place offers (Slater 1993, 151), sometimes even being willing to invent them. The yellow cranes in Belfast’s marketing materials are mobilized as a unique history that offers a distinct identity to the city. Like many other commodities, they have become a fetish in the Marxist sense; that is, the commodification of these cranes is accomplished through the concealment of the labour involved or associated with them. The past associated with these cranes magically disappear. This applies to Samson and Goliath but also to many other industrial icons in the city.

In the midst of this mobilization of industrial icons in the service of the urban revitalization economy, alternative mnemonic representations of the industrial past have remained, haunting the new post-industrial drive to commodify industrial remnants. I was brought to one such example by Brendan and Kelly, a young couple from East Belfast. Brendan works as a construction worker and Kelly in a call centre; both grew up in the area and know its streets and stories intimately. They led me to numerous locations throughout their neighbourhood, one of which was a large mural, painted by a resident of East Belfast. This four-part mural titled *A Better Future* captured my attention (Figure 6.7). I remember telling Brendan and Kelly that I found it rare for a mural to focus on 'the future.' Brendan responded, "Aye, I thought you would like it. You know, you can't have a future if you forget where you came from. That's why it's all here. You see the past, you see who built this place, and then you can think about what's next." The mural is divided into four sections. On the top left is subtitled *War*, which is about the Battle of the Somme during World War I,[95] which holds importance for the Unionist community of Northern Ireland. To its right is a depiction of the post-war peace, which includes the parliament building whose construction began in 1921, shortly after World War I, as well as the H&W's yellow cranes. The latter is an anachronism as the cranes were built in the late 1960s and 1970s, yet for East Belfast people both are symbols of economic success and a time of relative peace as the war was over and Unionists benefited from an advantageous social and political position in both the Parliament and the H&W. The mural then moves on to the Troubles in the bottom left, under the subtitle *The Past*, and concludes with a scene filled with hope for *The Future* in the bottom right with a few terms, such as "human rights," "culture," and "employment." Interestingly, the word "employment" is written directly on the H&W yellow cranes. For those who have experienced or heard of the hardship of

[95] The Battle of the Somme is important for loyalists of Belfast because of the participation of many members of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). It became a founding, legitimising myth that demonstrated Ulster's loyalty to Britain and its right to remain within the United Kingdom.

deindustrialization, the cranes, while they are ruinations, still epitomize the lost past of the industrial boom.

Our discussion then moved on to various topics, including the TQ and how it fits into their conception of 'the future.' Brendan paused for a moment before saying, "The TQ is shiny, I'll give them that, but it's not for us. It's for people passing through. Not many people live there. It's funny. It's like this [referring to the mural] is the vision we envisioned, and the TQ is what we got." Kelly nodded, adding, "Yeah, hahaha! It's true. You can see it's not the same, not the same visions." Their comment situated the mural as a counterpoint to the glossy, consumerist vision of the future promoted by the TQ, one rooted instead in a working-class, place-bound sense of continuity. Kelly's reflection underscores a critical divergence between the two memoryscapes; while the TQ's selective remembering erases uncomfortable aspects of the past in order to present a sanitized, marketable future, the mural insists on keeping history present, even when it is contested or politically charged. One of the key signifiers of this divided memoryscape has been the cranes. For many people of East Belfast, the H&W was "[their] company," as mentioned by Peter Rooney, a 62-year-old man who worked for 17 years there as a machinery operator. For former workers and their communities, the cranes are more than mere landmarks; they are integral to their lived and embodied pasts. When I further asked Peter Rooney what the cranes evoked in him, he said, "I would always remember one of my first days at the H&W. As a kind of initiation, you know, all the new employees were brought to the control room on top of the Samson crane. The view from there, unmatchable. Yeah, that is something I will never forget." For people like Peter, the cranes are less related to Belfast as an aspiring global city. People like Peter campaigned to protect the cranes against demolition: "We've pushed hard for Samson and Goliath to be protected, and we did. Now they are here to stay" (Peter Rooney, Interviewed May 29, 2022). Indeed,

in 2003, the city of Belfast and the Northern Ireland Executive designated the Samson and Goliath cranes as a patrimonial heritage.

The cranes carry a range of affects for people in East Belfast; pride, but also melancholy and trauma, as they evoke the painful loss of their beloved workplaces. The industrial 'good old days' and the bitterness of their closure haunt East Belfast in the midst of the spectacular makeover of the shipyard. The contrast between the old and current state of their former workplaces can be distressing to witness (Meier 2013, 479). People's reaction to the makeover of the shipyard and other industrial landscapes, however, may have something to do with their nationalist allegiance. The city's redevelopment efforts have attempted to recast the cranes as neutral symbols of a shared future, free from sectarian divisions. According to Neill's (2006, 114) study, some of the more radical Unionist East Belfast residents felt that the cranes' revised meaning exemplified "the decommissioning of the yard as Protestant space." Repositioning Samson and Goliath within the city's symbolic maps of meaning in the current post-industrial, post-conflict era would, indeed, necessitate a prohibition of the sectarian appropriation of the landmark.

Unlike Unionist critiques, which focus on the erasure of an industrial past and the transformation of H&W from a symbol of Unionist working-class identity into a sanitized, neutral space of post-industrial development, Nationalist skepticism towards the redevelopment stems from different concerns. For middle-class Nationalists, the refurbished TQ represents the kind of shared space that aligns with Sinn Féin's new vision of a modern, prosperous Northern Ireland. The party's support for the project, reflecting its broader embrace of neoliberal economic policies, has led many within the Nationalist middle class to view the TQ as an opportunity for prosperity rather than as a cause for concern. However, working-class Nationalists, particularly those from areas like the Short Strand and West Belfast, view it far more critically. In the Nationalist enclave of Short Strand, the TQ

is regarded with suspicion because of its role in erasing sectarian history. The H&W shipyard was long associated with Unionist domination, a workplace where Nationalist labourers were systematically excluded or intimidated. The redevelopment presented itself as a symbol of reconciliation, but some argue that it has conveniently omitted this darker past. In an open letter published in the *Andersonstown News*, Short Strand resident and Sinn Féin politician Niall Ó Donnghaile (2020) voiced his anger at this selective remembrance of the history. He argued that "in the context of reconciliation and the decade of centenaries, it would be a welcome step forward if a truthful reflection of the darker side of the H&W Shipyard was told to the many locals." His statement reveals a deep tension between the lived historical experiences of working-class Nationalists and the official narrative of the TQ, the latter of which fails to acknowledge that for much of the twentieth century, the shipyard was marked by discrimination and sectarian division.

Ó Donnghaile's criticism also points to a broader pattern in post-conflict Northern Ireland, where economic redevelopment often serves as a means of depoliticizing space. By rebranding the TQ as a neutral, forward-looking site of investment, the complex historical realities of the shipyard are flattened into a simple narrative of progress. For Nationalists in the Short Strand, this can represent yet another instance where the burden of 'moving on' falls disproportionately on their community. The question remains: how can there be reconciliation without a full reckoning of past injustices? Without acknowledging the shipyard's sectarian legacy, its transformation into a 'shared space' risks being little more than a cosmetic change, one that benefits the city's image but does little to address historical grievances. This erasure is historical and contemporary. In June 2011, when UVF[96] paramilitaries launched an attack on the Short Strand, concerns over riots damaging Belfast's rebranding efforts seemed to outweigh concerns for those under attack. Despite sustained gunfire, petrol bombs, and

[96] The Ulster Volunteer Force is a loyalist paramilitary group in Northern Ireland, founded in 1966.

bricks thrown at Nationalist homes, government officials and business leaders were busy framing the unrest primarily as a threat to Belfast's economic revival rather than as an urgent security crisis for the people under siege (Bowcott 2011; Kelly 2012, 52). This reaction reflects a wider neoliberal approach to urban redevelopment where the city's appeal to investors and tourists is prioritized over the lives of people.

Beyond the Short Strand, the economic disparities reinforced by the TQ's development have further fueled Nationalist working-class discontent. Newspapers in West Belfast, another predominantly Nationalist area, have highlighted stark funding imbalances between different parts of the city. In 2011-2012, Invest NI allocated £13.3 million to industries in East Belfast, home to the TQ, compared to just £4.2 million for West Belfast. This disparity is even more glaring when factoring in flagship projects like the £75 million Titanic Centre, the £44 million Belfast Metropolitan College Campus, and the £30 million Public Records Office, all of which are located in East Belfast (Kelly 2012, 57). Such figures illustrate a pattern of uneven development, where the areas most in need of social investment, such as West Belfast where people struggle with precarious employment and underfunded public services, are overlooked in favour of high-profile projects designed to attract global capital. For working-class Nationalists, the TQ exemplifies how resources are unequally allocated in ways that reinforce existing disparities. While middle-class Nationalists may see the TQ as evidence of Northern Ireland's economic normalization, for working-class Nationalists it is yet another reminder that the peace process has been partial.

This divide within the Nationalist community highlights a key contradiction in Belfast's post-conflict urban development. On the one hand, Sinn Féin and other Nationalist elites promote projects like the TQ as a sign of progress and a departure from the sectarian past. On the other hand, for many working-class Nationalists, these same projects serve as evidence that economic inequality has simply

taken new forms. The shipyard may no longer be a bastion of Unionist supremacy, but the economic structures that have replaced it do little to improve the lives of those on the margins. For Unionist critics, its transformation negates a key part of Belfast's industrial heritage, whereas for working-class Nationalists, it serves as a poignant reminder that peace and prosperity remain out of reach for them. While the TQ may have been envisioned as a space of reconciliation, for many, it remains yet another example of how Belfast's economic future is being built in ways that deepen, rather than bridge, the city's historical divides, albeit in new forms.

Neoliberal appropriations of the cultural heritage of cities have contributed to transforming public spaces into anything but "neutral" or inter-communal ones. Through gentrification, public spaces and symbolic architectures have gradually lost their historical contexts and their role as dialogical places for exchanging views. People in East Belfast face these industrial symbols daily and are reminded that their emotive attachment to the shipyard belongs to a different time-space, while those in the Short Strand and West Belfast see the continuation of historical injustice. In the next section, I discuss how the TQ was designed by the planners and developers to be a rupture from the rest of the city, and those who used to work in the shipyard, by examining how planners and developers have advanced particular modes of remembering former working-class communities in the TQ.

6.6.2 Deindustrialization, Gentrification and Postmemories: Legacies of Trauma

Postmemory, as theorized by Marianne Hirsch (2012), describes how the trauma of one generation is transmitted to the next through imaginative engagement, projection, and identification. For Hirsch, postmemory (2012, 5) is not a method or theory but a structure of transgenerational return, where the unresolved trauma of the past shapes the present, allowing the next generation to confront, reinterpret and reimagine historical trauma in ways that are both tied to and transformative of the past. Postmemory is both a destabilizing force and a generative structure.

Since Hirsch first coined the term postmemory, it has been employed as a framework to explain a range of social phenomena (Serpente 2015; Tadeo Fuica 2015; Pence 2018; Aguilar and Ramírez-Barat 2019; Kazanova 2022). In this scholarly development, Northern Ireland and Belfast have attained significant prominence, continuously referred to as sites where postmemory is a key vector shaping social relations. There, the material reality of ongoing segregated living, visual representations of past armed struggles, and other manifestations of intergroup hostility have germinated fertile ground for postmemory. Most of the literature on postmemory in Northern Ireland focuses on the legacy of the Troubles, but in this section I discuss how "slow events" (Wüstenberg 2023, 58), like deindustrialization, can reproduce traumas and grief across generations.

East Belfast communities inherit not just the economic consequences of industrial decline but also the psychological and cultural weight of a vanishing way of life. When industries that once provided stable, well-paying jobs disappear, it causes a rupture in the social and cultural continuity of a place, as well as a loss of financial stability. The memory of factory closures, strikes, and economic displacements is passed down through family stories, community oral histories, popular culture, and the material remnants of the industrial eras, such as abandoned/repurposed buildings, rusting machinery, or derelict blocks around now-defunct workplaces. As Fetzer and Valeria assert (2025): "From job losses to worsening health, the impact of deindustrialisation runs deep, with scars that stretch across generations." Indeed, younger generations who did not personally experience industrial prosperity or its collapse still inherit memories and memoryscapes, which can create a sense of melancholic attachment to a past that they never lived but still perceive as lost. This often manifests as a feeling of dislocation, as they navigate landscapes and economies that no longer reflect the stories of prosperity they have been told about. In some cases, this inherited trauma can be mobilized into political action, as younger generations seek to resist further economic marginalization or reclaim their industrial heritage. In other

instances, it fosters resignation or cynicism, reinforcing the idea that the security and dignity once associated with industrial labour are irretrievably lost (Thomas et al. 2022, 83).

The transformation of the H&W shipyard into the TQ can be interpreted as a triggering of postmemorial processes, wherein the rupture between past and present is both material and psychological for those who experience them (Hirsh 2012, 23). Indeed, as in many other contexts worldwide, the repackaging of industrial heritage into a commodity spectacle has distanced younger generations from the lived experiences of industrial labour, leaving them to navigate an urban landscape that simultaneously commemorates and erases their familial histories (ibid., 47). This tension raises broader questions about how societies remember and make sense of structural transformations, such as deindustrialization, that unfold over long periods. While much of memory studies has focused on political violence of limited temporality, such as wars, revolutions, or genocides, the experience of deindustrialization highlights the need to consider more gradual forms of social and economic upheaval.

Postmemory can be useful in studying (traumatic) experiences of slow-moving historical transformations. The decline of industry is diffuse, unfolding across decades through factory closures, job losses, and the erosion of working-class institutions. Yet, for those affected, its consequences are no less traumatic, as deindustrialization reshapes not only economic structures but also family dynamics, social networks, and cultural identities. This calls into question the event-based framework that has dominated much of memory studies, as scholars such as Robin Wagner-Pacifici (2015, 22) have emphasized the study of memory as the study of events. While this approach has been useful for understanding how societies process extreme moments of violence and their outcomes, it struggles to account for historical shifts that occur gradually but still fundamentally alter the fabric of everyday life.

As Wüstenberg (2023, 58) argues, slow-moving, dispersed developments, such as climate change, shifting gender relations, and deindustrialization, demand new approaches to memory studies, ones that move beyond the spectacle of singular events to consider how gradual structural transformations are remembered, internalized, and transmitted across generations. The trauma of deindustrialization in Belfast, like in Montréal, functions as a generational wound that continues to shape people's identity and social relations in ways that are often overlooked. Understanding how postmemory operates in these contexts allows us to recognize the profound psychological and cultural effects of industrial decline, not just on those who lived through it but also on the generations that follow, who inherit the memory of loss and the unresolved questions of what was taken from their communities and what futures remain possible. For example, as James Moore noted, he was the first man of his family not to work for the H&W. His grandfather, father and two older brothers all worked in the shipyard in one way or another; yet when he reached the age to potentially be hired, deindustrialization was well underway. James saw his father being laid off and how difficult it was for him and his family: "In the shipyard, you worked long hours, but my father was happy with it, and he was able to provide for us at that time. [Afterwards] things got more difficult." We cannot assess how James's memories of his father's struggles to find work shaped his life choices and his views on the changing city. Yet, as he mentioned, "I was so happy when I was able to sit at the consultation table for the TQ. It was a way of continuing my father's work." Even if he never worked in the shipyard, James felt a sort of bond with the place, perhaps a bond tied in his memory through the mechanism of postmemory. Obviously, this also explains why he was critical of the rehabilitation project in East Belfast, taking issue with the invisibility of former workers in its planning and development. To be sure, James's situation is in no way unique in East Belfast.

Many residents in East Belfast have had similar experiences *vis-à-vis* deindustrialization and the massive layoffs in the H&W. I haven't had a chance to interview two generations of the same family during my fieldwork in Belfast, but every long-term resident of East Belfast that I interviewed either had their family members once employed by the H&W or knew someone who had such members. All my interviewees are thus linked through memory or postmemory to the shipyard. Most of them still feel affinity with the history of the shipyard and of the space upon which it used to run its activity. Residents of East Belfast continue to have a strong sense of attachment and belonging to the H&W, not the Titanic, as demonstrated in the numerous murals and narratives of my interviewees. But, the grievances have "slowly" been sedimented through the violence of layoffs, deindustrialization, neoliberalization and gentrification. The advent of a post-industrial consumerist space in the TQ is alienating to East Belfasters and can engender anger among them.

The gentrification of the TQ raises the question of how to commemorate slow memory, how to commemorate events inscribed in the *longue durée*. As Nixon (2013, 7) argues:

> Attritional catastrophes that overspill clear boundaries in time and space are marked above all by displacements – temporal, geographical, rhetorical, and technological displacements that simplify violence and underestimate, in advance and in retrospect, the human and environmental costs. Such displacements smooth the way to amnesia, as places are rendered irretrievable to those who once inhabited them, places that ordinarily pass unmourned in the corporate media.

Victims of slow and structural violence are often ignored by memory politics. Traditional methods of what we may call 'fast' commemoration – e.g., monuments, plaques, toponymy, museums – also often do not capture the complexity and multi-dimensional displacements that slow violence causes. The TQ

prioritized a false peaceful narrative, and it also pushed ‘fast’ commemorations, which bypassed layered grievances embedded in the socio-spatial landscape.

Sanitized peaceful memory, or what Bull and Hansen (2016, 392) call “cosmopolitan memory,” magnifies the sentiment of loss and trauma among people whose memories of the complexity of the shipyard heritage are oppressed. Rather than engaging with this complexity, the TQ presents a sanitized, depoliticized version of commercially viable memory that aligns with liberal cosmopolitan ideals, promoting a non-conflictual history. As argued above, the Titanic itself serves as the ultimate vehicle for this process. Rather than being remembered in its historical specificity, as a product of Belfast’s industrial economy, built by a workforce shaped by sectarian divisions and class tensions, the Titanic is transformed into a universalized, depoliticized symbol. As I discuss later, the dominant narrative centres on human ambition, the adversity that was surmounted, and technological accomplishment, making the ship an emotionally resonant but politically neutral icon. This universalistic framing further distances the Titanic from its Belfast origins, reinforcing a memory that is detached from the realities of the city’s social history, and presenting a peaceful past, free of frictions and readily marketable. The creation of the TQ exemplifies how liberal cosmopolitan memory operates in practice (see Coyles 2013, 335). The cosmopolitan mode of remembrance seeks to advance a new, manufactured sort of universalism by de-contextualizing the past and moving beyond historical particularism. The cosmopolitan memory found in the TQ acts as if a consensus has been reached for the future that the TQ embodied. The affluent class has indeed embraced the peaceful landscape of the TQ, while the working classes, who are perceived as ‘primitive’ for their continued ‘clinging to’ sectarian ideologies, do not.

As Olick (2007, 148) argues, however, learning from the past “means listening to both victims and perpetrators, and not to judge absolute truth or even to sympathize with either but to learn from

their experiences and perspectives." Bull and Hansen propose a concept, "agonistic memory," following Chantal Mouffe's (2016, 64) notion of agonistic politics. Chantal Mouffe's concept challenges the idea that democracy should strive for full consensus or harmony. Instead, she argues that political conflict is inevitable and even necessary for a vibrant democracy. In her view, society is inherently shaped by power struggles and competing interests, which cannot be fully resolved (ibid., 67). Rather than suppressing or eliminating conflict, a democratic system should channel it productively by creating spaces where adversaries can engage in open, structured debate without resorting to violence. Mouffe distinguishes between antagonism and agonism. Antagonism refers to conflicts wherein groups see each other as enemies to be destroyed, whereas agonism frames these conflicts as legitimate disagreements between political adversaries who recognize each other's right to exist and speak (ibid., 78). Mouffe's theorization challenges traditional liberal democratic thinking, pointing out that it ignores the fact that societies are structured by power relations and hegemonic struggles (ibid., 78). Every political order is based on exclusion; certain groups and ideas are privileged while others are marginalized. Rather than masking these stratifications with a pretense of universal equality, agonistic politics insists that democracy must remain open to contestation, allowing different groups to articulate their interests and challenge dominant ideologies.

White (2022, 71) also employs the notion of agonistic politics to challenge neoliberal capitalism, showing how ostensibly technical economic decisions – e.g., austerity, privatization, and deregulation – are in fact ideological choices that suppress contestation and consolidate elite power. By repoliticizing these decisions, agonistic democracy creates space for counter-hegemonic actors, from labour unions to anti-austerity coalitions, to articulate alternative visions of redistribution and social justice (White 2022, 74). Yet, while White productively mobilizes Mouffe's framework, recent scholarship has pointed to important limitations in her theorization of agonism. As August (2022) and

Augst and Westphale (2024) argue, Mouffe offers little guidance on the dynamics of conflict – i.e., how conflicts escalate, de-escalate, or harden into antagonism. For them, she tends to assume that actors can shift from antagonism to agonism without accounting for the mechanisms, institutions, or cultural conditions that facilitate such transitions (August 2024, 187). Her conceptualization, therefore, may be limited, especially in contexts where identities are deeply entrenched and where conflicts carry long historical legacies, as in Belfast. Nonetheless, these criticisms do not negate the usefulness of agonistic politics; rather, they clarify the need for a more empirically grounded account of conflict. Agonistic politics still remains a valuable tool for illuminating how conflicts in 'post-conflict' cities, such as Belfast, can be channeled into productive democratic contestation rather than suppressed.

Indeed, what Bull and Hansen (2016) called "agonistic memory" can be mobilized in post-conflict settings. Agonistic memory would insist on preserving and engaging with contested interpretations of history (Bull and Hansen 2016, 394). Rather than smoothing over uncomfortable pasts, it would acknowledge that memory is political and that societies must confront their conflicts, without glorifying or masking them. Agonistic memory recognizes that different groups may have irreconcilable perspectives on historical events, but instead of coercing a single narrative, it encourages dialogue and public debate about these tensions (ibid, 395). Agonistic memory in the TQ would challenge the sanitized narrative by creating space for contestation, ensuring that the voices of those historically excluded from dominant memory, particularly working-class and Nationalist communities, are acknowledged. The TQ could have been developed as a living historical space, where debates over labour history, economic injustice, and sectarian exclusions are actively engaged with, rather than silenced, as we shall see in the next section. Titanic Belfast's exhibitions could have foregrounded the struggles of shipyard workers, while public forums or community-led projects could have fostered discussions about the legacy of economic inequality and sectarian conflict in Belfast. By embracing an

agonistic approach, the TQ could have transformed from the site from a depoliticized, market-driven space into a genuinely democratic arena where historical conflict is neither erased nor passively remembered but actively confronted and grappled with in light of contemporary struggles. As I show next, however, the TQ exemplifies cosmopolitan memory, where both representation and access to memory are selective.

6.6.3 Cosmopolitan Memory and Urban Planning: Narratives of Transition[97]

Privileging cosmopolitan memory, the TQ has failed to include working-class memories. For instance, Belfast City Council proposed an oral history project, "Voices from the Yard," which aimed to archive and reflect on the impact that the H&W workplace divisions had on inter-community relations (Moloney 2014, 9-10; Dawson 2016, 154). The project could have served as a cornerstone for addressing community grievances and paving a pathway toward reconciliation and reparation, an essential memory work toward peace. However, the initiative was abandoned five months after its launch due to "complex power dynamics and questions of trust within the group and pressures brought to bear upon it by both cross-community and intra-community politics" (Dawson 2016, 154). Incorporating Nationalist standpoints in the project made Loyalist leaders fear that the shipyard legacies, as they had envisioned them, would be tarnished (Hodson 2019, 227). The fear of conflicting memory becomes explicit in the memory landscape of the TQ. Due to this pressure, "They [the city] have sanitized it," as James Moore puts it in our conversation.

The TQ's sanitization of the area's industrial heritage is explicitly managed through its physical landscape, which employs a strategic visual contrast to promote a selective version of history. While the immense yellow cranes, Samson and Goliath, are deliberately preserved to dominate the skyline

[97] This section of the chapter is a revised version of a published article entitled "Restricted Access to Remembrance: Problematic Usages of Industrial Memories in Belfast's Titanic Quarter" in *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Davis 2024).

and function as powerful, iconic reminders of past shipbuilding might, this celebration of industrial prowess is immediately contradicted by the vast surrounding wastelands visible to the east and north of the development (Figure 6.8). Stretching to impressive lengths, these undeveloped fields visualize the poignant ruinations and embody the difficult, ongoing process of deindustrialization, a reality that contrasts sharply with the glossy modernity of the developed quarter. The current state of these wastelands, coupled with the fact that the majority of old industrial buildings were demolished for commercial profitability, signifies a broader erasure of working-class histories and memories inscribed within the shipyard.

This process of appearance over substance is further evidenced by plans for future phases. By the time new construction is completed (2035), these ruins will be transformed into neoliberal, post-industrial buildings, perhaps retaining only the occasional façade as an indicator of the site's past (Richards 2014). As Paul Goldberger (1985, 1) noted of a similar practice in New York, "To save only the façade of a building is not to save its essence; it is to turn the building into a stage set, into a cute toy intended to make a skyscraper more palatable." By retaining only the historical ornament, developers save the appearance but evacuate the substance, creating a pseudo-spirit of the place, and transforming the industrial heritage into a mere décor, a theatrical spectacle deprived of its identity. As David Harvey (2006, 24) warns, "Once the city is imaged by capital solely as a spectacle, it can then only be consumed passively, rather than actively created by the populace at large through political participation." Those who once worked in the shipyard are left to view manicured snippets of their past while being excluded from its design, leading them to increasingly feel out of place in a landscape that only commodifies their memory.

In a similar fashion, the Titanic Hotel is perhaps the best example of façadism in the TQ. After two years of renovating H&W's old drawing offices and with more than £28 million of investments,

the Titanic Hotel opened its doors in 2017 (Figure 6.9) (McDonald 2017). Like the rest of the neighbourhood, the hotel was branded as an integral part of the shipyard heritage. From the pictures available on their website and other tourist websites, the rooms are filled with modern industrial décor, with walls adorned with metal sheets and ship rivets. Moreover, as mentioned, the Titanic Hotel did conserve a part of the old drawing office's façade, two drawing rooms, reception offices, and a telephone booth (presumably the first landline in Europe to receive the notice of the Titanic sinking) (Titanic Hotel 2025). John Doherty, the Creative Director at Harcourt Developments, said on the opening day of the hotel: "To be finally ready to open this historical and authentic hotel is another mark in the history of Queen's Island. Titanic Hotel Belfast is a hub of heritage and legacy, and we're delighted to open the doors to the public and our first guests today" (quoted in Belfast Telegraph 2017). Yet, this heritage is only accessible to those who can afford a room in the luxury hotel or a drink at its expensive bar. Extending this logic of selective access, the hotel developers also invested in meticulously reconstructing the offices of Lord Pirrie, Thomas Andrews, and Charles Payne. But these rooms, presented as historically faithful, were ultimately transformed into private meeting spaces available only for rent. During my visit, I was denied entry and told that, if I was a guest, I could "always book a 'free' tour with the concierge." Heritage here becomes not a shared civic resource but a scarce commodity, valued because it is withheld from the majority. As several scholars have shown, this dynamic is common in contemporary heritage-driven redevelopment, where exclusivity, spectacle, and selective nostalgia work together to alienate working-class residents (Gravari-Barbas and Guinand 2017; Pinkster and Boterman 2017; Navarrete Escobedo 2020; Iloranta 2022).

This privatized and exclusionary approach to heritage is closely linked to the logic of façadism, a strategy that enables developers to undertake far more permissive interventions behind preserved exteriors (Richards 2014, 7). By maintaining the visual veneer of authenticity, developers can produce

an entirely new commercial product that satisfies market demands while simultaneously appealing to heritage tourists (ibid., 76). In doing so, façadism contributes to a broader process of heritage mythification, one in which the past is reconstructed not to preserve historical complexity, but to project a curated fantasy. As Philippot (1982, 370) cautions, such spaces risk becoming open-air "Disneylands" – sites where history is not preserved in the present but transformed into a stylized simulacrum, a "special variety of faking."

This logic of aesthetic fabrication extends beyond individual façades; it shapes the wider architectural language of the TQ itself. For example, the TQ has introduced a new type of landscape to the Belfast skyline, namely the 'high-rise' (Figure 6.10), which had previously been little appreciated in both English and Irish planning and architectural fields. This created a discontinuity between the architectural landscapes of the TQ and the rest of Belfast, i.e., a distinction between the reconciliatory present and a troubled past. That is, the architecture in the TQ acts as a rupture point with the 'conflictual Belfast' of Victorian houses, peace lines, murals, graffiti and local businesses, none of which are present in the TQ. In the TQ, the housing is only present in the form of large condominiums and ethnonationalist symbols are forbidden. Architecture here is a metaphor for Belfast's successful peace process, materialized in the (post-)modern architectural expression. In such a context, memory and heritage plays a crucial role; it is used to sustain the continuity, to tie the new neoliberal architecture to the history of the H&W. In particular, the Titanic and its associated industrial era were selected to evoke a sense of belonging that would otherwise be missing, given the architectural incoherence between the TQ and the rest of the city.

The Titanic Belfast, the museum, is another case in point. Sitting next to the Lagan River, it showcases captivating architecture of impressive size (Figure 6.11). Built on six levels, the sides of the museum are on the scale of the Titanic and its exterior walls are covered with three thousand

asymmetrical aluminum panels sparkling under the sunlight. “It’s our Guggenheim,” said a first-time museum visitor from Bangor, a more affluent city in Northern Ireland, during our conversation. The museum has become an emblem of an urban renaissance, inserting Belfast into the network of cities with world-class cultural institutions and landmarks. Museums and other cultural facilities have played a significant role in the transition of deindustrialized cities into post-industrial ones: industrial sites have been repurposed into cultural attractions, drawing tourists and catalyzing economic regeneration (Lyth 2006, 3). Similarly, the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao revitalized the city by leveraging its iconic architecture and contemporary art collection to attract international visitors, sparking the “Bilbao Effect”[98] in the city’s regeneration process, though questions about accessibility and the displacement of local communities have frequently been raised.

The Titanic Belfast’s introductory section is dedicated to the city’s industrial heritage, featuring a large-scale display that presents images of industrial-era Belfast with animated silhouettes drifting across factory floors (Figure 6.12). These shadowy figures appear to move in tandem with visitors, subtly synchronizing their steps and lending the exhibit a kinetic rhythm. Yet beyond this practical and aesthetic effect, the figures resemble spectral remnants of a bygone era – evocations of labour that remain strangely hollow. Strikingly, among all the images cycling through the display, only one depicts actual workers: a photograph of women in a linen mill (Figure 6.13). Its inclusion was unexpected, given how rarely women appear in the official memory of the shipyard. Workers, especially female workers, are almost entirely absent from the commemorative landscape of the TQ, making this lone representation all the more notable, and all the more revealing of the broader erasures shaping the site’s reimagined industrial past. As in Montréal, industrialism is more associated with men, and female

[98] The Bilbao effect is the phenomenon of a city experiencing significant urban transformation, revitalization, and economic growth primarily through the construction of an iconic, architectural landmark, exemplified by the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao (Moore 2017).

workers or women who carried out reproductive work for working-class households and communities are definitely underrepresented. In the museum, besides the above-mentioned particular displays, the only other women I encountered as part of the exhibits were those who boarded the Titanic and survived its tragic fate. In short, women's productive and reproductive labour, which were pillars of the successful shipyard industry, were absent from the commemoration of the past, and when women were present on one of the two occasions, they were only shown to reinforce the bravery of the man who saved them from their distress.

National museums are usually filled with nationalist discourses that portray 'the best' of the nation. The main narrative that I got from my visit to the Titanic Belfast was the story of how the city managed to come together to build one of the wonders of modern engineering, such as the Titanic. This narrative revolved around several myths that told tales of bravery, sacrifice, and resilience in the face of danger and adversity. The Titanic Belfast is part of the national project of peace transition, and the ideals of bravery, resilience and sacrifice are mostly attributed to men, leading to an over-representation of men and *clichés* of masculinity in the museum (Grever 2003). That itself is problematic, but what I found further troubling is that those characteristics are not even primarily attributed to the working men who literally risked their lives in building the ships. They are instead used to describe the managers, directors and high-ranking employees of H&W. According to the museum's narrative, it is they who risked everything in order to achieve what was at the time deemed unattainable. The stories of working-class communities – both men and women – are absent in the Titanic Belfast. In a study of women's portrayal in Australian collective memory, Anna Reading (2019, 300) introduces the terms "mnemonic value" and "mnemonic capital," which resonate well with what I observed in the Titanic Belfast. She argues that what is erased from the memory landscape is what is conceived to lack value, not being worthy of remembrance, revealing class-stratified, gendered and racial contradictions of

memory work (Reading 2019, 300). The photograph in Figure 6.13 shows female workers, but the way it was curated and situated within the overall exhibit of the museum becomes a metaphor for the deficient mnemonic capital attributed to female workers. On the rare occasions when they are present, visitors pass by them just like the shadowy figures on display, barely noticing this part of history. There was no information panel for this display either.

Also omitted from the museum exhibits was conflict. While it was hinted that the shipyard hadn't always been peaceful, the narrative wrongfully places workplace conflicts as a consequence of what was happening elsewhere in the city. There was a section of the first exhibit pointing to the Belfast pogrom, but there was no explicit statement that the conflict was a consequence of what happened within the shipyard. This gives a misleading impression that the shipyard was a victim of the Troubles, which originated and intensified elsewhere. But as discussed in Chapter 4, H&W's discriminatory labour relations were, in fact, one of the sources of sectarian conflict that propelled the unrest in the city. Perhaps, such an omission or twist of history is key for the authorities in concatenating the fictive past and the now renewed TQ, adding another justificatory layer to the shared space narrative of the latter. Those who went through the Troubles in the city, however, are painfully aware that the industry in the shipyard was a catalyst for, and even an active participant in, the sectarian warfare. What was exhibited in Titanic Belfast specifically is a perfect example of cosmopolitan memory. Its particular historiography evacuates the memories of both the conflict and the labour of working-class communities that went into the prosperity of the shipyard. By magnifying the industrial success and relegating the ethnonational conflict to a distant context, the museum joins in the city's boosterish drive that seeks to ease tensions and bring the Northern Irish people "together" around the industrial memory of the city and a shared future embodied in newly refurbished urban space.

Similar to the decision to abandon the "Voices from the Yard" project, working-class communities were also initially invited to work as guides for visitors in the museum and share their stories and memories; but again, this initiative was dropped (Hodson 2019, 238). Yet, this memorial exclusion may enable a more unified narrative to be presented to visitors. It contrives a sense of equivalence between the "ingenuity of the H&W" and the entrepreneurial spirit of today's decision-makers who took up the challenge of overcoming the Troubles and building a shared space. The economic and political elites of the city have managed a *tour de force*, turning the Troubles into a blank canvas on which urban regeneration can today be presented (Ramsey 2013, 164). The memory of the shipyard is sanitized to create a new "commercial memoryscape" (Grey 2017, 60). A quick scan of the museum gift shop also testifies to the way in which the Titanic label has been attached to all sorts of unlikely objects – from teddy bears to fudge, key rings to fridge magnets and ashtrays to a "Titanic rock" (Davis 2024, 62).

6.7 Chapter Conclusion

Through the examination of the TQ, I highlighted the problematic memory politics within Belfast's conflict transition process. In this specific urban project, the hollow shells of former industrial infrastructure have served to create a nostalgic mythology that bestows the place with an identity and an aura of 'authenticity' amenable to property development and tourist boosterism. These traditions and the historical "authenticity" that were brought to new buildings were 'invented.' The urban growth machine involved in the TQ development has worked hard to privilege some memories over others and make these selected memories remembered as *the* commonsensical and normative memory of the place (Bélanger 2002, 87). The TQ presents itself as a *telos* of Belfast's post-conflict transition, but in doing so, it has obscured and disconnected working-class communities from their history. The memoryscape of the TQ thus sits at the juncture of remembrance and forgetting, as some histories were commodified

to attract more affluent visitors, while vernacular working-class memories were pushed into social amnesia, restricting their access to this shared space. The neoliberal peace has manifested itself in the ongoing gentrification of the TQ. Regenerated and commodified, the site of the former shipyards boasts its chic historical styles to appeal to gentrifiers' taste culture (Chevalier 2014, 11).

This is not to say that working-class communities are passive bystanders to what's happening in Belfast. Following Nagle (2009), I want to conclude with a few events that illuminate the agentic instantiations where people defy inter-communal divides and the neoliberal capture of the conflict transition. I am talking here about the community-driven May Day and Pride parades. I was no longer in Northern Ireland at the time of the Belfast Pride parade, but I did attend the May Day parade on April 30, 2022, which was organized by trade unions and community groups. The march took place in the city centre, not in the Titanic Quarter, and therefore was not subject to the restrictions on overtly nationalist or unionist symbols that characterize the TQ redevelopment area. During the parade, each trade union carried its own banners and flags, symbols associated with labour representation rather than sectarian identity. What struck me was how these labour union flags created a visual and political contrast with the forms of flag-waving typically associated with the conflict. Instead of reinforcing nationalist codes, the parade reoriented these flags and their public display toward shared economic demands and collective struggles for better working conditions, momentarily displacing the sectarian logic that usually structures the display of flags in Belfast. Ethnonational affiliations surely existed in the event, but the united cause seemed important enough to overshadow ostentatious ethnonational divisions. This is perhaps closer to *the* shared space objective that is key to conflict transition and liberation from violence, unlike the top-down shared space of the TQ. According to Donal O'Cofaigh, the communication and campaign manager of Unite the Union, this trend extends even beyond special

events, such as May Day. He acknowledges that the city's ethnocultural divisions complicate labour solidarity, but he also made the following remark:

> … at the same time, we do succeed in bringing people together across those divides. … And I think the key point to really where I'd be coming from is that it's the material conditions that determine the consciousness of people. So, if we can succeed in bringing them together in struggles, in the workplaces, where they live their lives day to day, well eventually, this will translate to a coming together in other forms and bridging of gaps that have been created.

When the Good Friday Agreement was signed, few were confident that it would last. Today, more than 25 years later, Belfast has become a different place. Paramilitary violence has been almost non-existent, and the city's economic status is higher than before the peace agreement. The benefits of such development, however, have not trickled down. Despite the growing need for better redistributive policies, the state and the city are doubling down on projects like the TQ to create new "shared spaces" in the city, aligning with neoliberal post-industrial ideals. Besides the TQ, the city has embarked on the development of the Cathedral Quarter and Queen's Quarter, which have both spurred gentrification across the city. The Linen Quarter should be the next major development in the city. As Nikki McDowell said, "Developers have already secured the funds to acquire buildings they want to refurbish," hinting that gentrification will probably hit another part of the city in the next few years. According to Shapiro (1997, 22), institutionalized forgetting is part of the construction of social memory. It will be interesting to trace how amnesiac reconstructions of new spaces of capitalist peace will be met by people who are pushed into the margin through these reconstructions.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This dissertation has critically examined crucial dimensions of neoliberal, post-industrial urbanization in Belfast and Montréal as deeply divided cities with histories of colonialism and nationalism. At the heart of this study was how gentrification processes in the latter years of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century have been shaped by the politics of memory in cities marked by deep ethnonational divisions, and to what effect. Exploring this question, I have documented and theorized how gentrification in deeply divided cities operates as an economic transformation but also as a political and mnemonic project and shapes national narratives in ways that bury histories conflicting with capitalist urbanization while fostering new modes of urban belonging, historical legitimacy, and claims to urban futures. Through this research, we have seen how, in the post-industrial landscapes of Montréal and Belfast, nationalist movements that once drew strength from working-class mobilization have become entangled with pro-market redevelopment drives in ways that erase the stories of working-class or otherwise marginalized peoples. This convergence between nationalist and market directives has transformed the relationship between nationalism and the communities it once claimed to represent, reconfiguring who is deemed to have a rightful place in the city. The research has also shown that the struggle over urban space cannot be separated from the struggle over time, that is, from the contest over which pasts are remembered and preserved and in whose interests.

This is one of the contributions made in this dissertation. If space has been a crucial element of urban studies, the relationship to time has received comparatively less attention. Through mixed qualitative methods, including interviews, observations, archival research, and walking methodologies, I showed that gentrification in divided cities is about the physical transformation of neighbourhoods, but also the temporal reorganization of urban life. Redevelopment projects replace old buildings with new ones, but at the same time, they alter the city's relationship to the past, filtering collective memory

through narratives that support dominant political and economic agendas. In both Montréal and Belfast, the redevelopment of historically working-class districts involved the selective preservation of heritage while erasing any reference to exclusionary practices and political struggles that once defined these spaces. Urban capitalist memory building is a process that recasts the past as a neutral, consumable resource rather than a contested inheritance. This invention of urban memories makes it easier to project a coherent image of reconciliation, peace and progress, even in the absence of any efforts at transformative justice. Urban space is fashioned to align with the demands of the present and further with a carefully curated vision of the future, one in which working-class communities and intersecting marginalized groups are rendered peripheral or absent altogether. This temporal reframing has intersected with struggles over identity and belonging, and this was evident in contexts where historical narratives have been politically charged, such as Belfast and Montréal. In these cities, the question of a peaceful present and future remains unsettled.

One crucial objective of the dissertation was to show how nationalist formations and class relations evolve through gentrification. As I have argued, nationalist projects rely heavily on the construction and performance of identity, entailing selective processes that valorize certain identities, and often stripping them of the conflicts that shaped them. In this way, gentrification produced new urban landscapes that align with particular nationalist narratives and was harnessed as a tool for projecting a particular national story as universal, glossing over contested histories. In turn, nationalist frameworks can legitimize gentrification by framing it as “revitalization” or “restoration,” rendering displacement invisible behind the veneer of cultural pride. In this way, nationalist discourse can recode gentrification as a defensive cultural project, rendering its exclusionary effects politically acceptable or even necessary. Yet, acknowledging this dynamic also requires a degree of analytical caution. While this dissertation has treated nationalism as a structuring force in urban transformation, it could have

highlighted the multiple forms it takes in the Québec and Northern Ireland's contexts. This limitation reflects both the scope of the project and the need to maintain analytical coherence across the comparative framework. Future research will seek to more systematically unpack these differentiated nationalist formations and examine how they unevenly shape engagements with urban space, memory, and gentrification. Such a refinement would not displace the argument advanced here, but rather deepen the understanding of how nationalism operates across uneven social and political terrains.

Taken together, these dynamics point to a broader analytical blind spot in existing scholarship. Nationalism and gentrification studies remain too often siloed, a separation that obscures key intersectional dynamics of contemporary urban transformation. This dissertation intervenes in this divide by demonstrating that nationalism and gentrification are not parallel or incidental processes, but mutually constitutive forces that reshape cities. Read together, they reveal how urban space becomes a crucial site where neoliberal accumulation and nationalist projects converge, producing not only material displacement but also the marginalization and reconfiguration of identities in service of new political-economic imaginaries. As my research on Belfast and Montréal shows, nationalist divides frequently intersect with class formations. I showed how segments of the francophone middle class often adopt an ambivalent stance toward gentrification in Montréal: while benefiting from urban revitalization and rising property values, they simultaneously express anxieties about cultural erasure and the perceived anglophonization. Here, nationalist concerns about linguistic and cultural survival do not necessarily oppose gentrification; rather, they can coexist with, and at times legitimize, forms of urban redevelopment that disproportionately displace racialized and working-class residents. This occurs when redevelopment is framed as a means of protecting or revitalizing a threatened national culture, through the promotion of "authentic" neighbourhoods, heritage branding, or francophone commercial landscapes, thereby masking class-based displacement behind narratives of cultural

preservation. In this way, nationalist discourse can recode gentrification as a defensive cultural project, rendering its exclusionary effects politically acceptable or even necessary. In Belfast, a parallel yet distinct dynamic emerges. In the TQ, Unionist elites have tended to frame gentrification as a technocratic and forward-looking project of post-industrial and post-conflict regeneration, emphasizing economic growth, global competitiveness, and a depoliticized narrative of shared prosperity. Nationalist elites have also accommodated or endorsed this redevelopment as a pragmatic post-conflict strategy, viewing investment, tourism, and international visibility as pathways to stability and political normalization, even when this meant sidelining working-class claims to space and memory. As a result, sectarian divisions may have receded within the TQ, but they have been replaced by a class-based divide in which elite consensus across nationalist lines legitimizes marginalization of working-class communities from both traditions.

By placing collective memory at the center of this analysis, the dissertation further demonstrates how nationalism and gentrification operate through shared practices of selective remembering and strategic forgetting. Nationalist projects draw on curated histories to naturalize political claims and produce cohesive identities, often sanitizing conflict and exclusion. Gentrification similarly mobilizes heritage and memory, as developers and municipal authorities repackage urban pasts to attract capital and consumption. This is evident in the depoliticized industrial nostalgia of Belfast's redeveloped waterfront and the celebration of a consumable, cosmopolitan Montréal that obscures marginalized memories. My dissertation argues that to study nationalism or gentrification in isolation is to miss how they reinforce one another and shape the lived realities of urban residents in durable and unequal ways. In doing so, it underscores the importance of theorizing cities as arenas where identity and memory are negotiated, and struggles are constantly waged.

7.1 Comparative Urban Theory

By juxtaposing Montréal and Belfast, this research has demonstrated both common structural patterns, such as (settler) colonialism, neoliberal urban capitalism, and its resultant and ongoing power asymmetries, and context-specific dynamics. Comparison provided me with theoretical insight, namely that urban transformations are contingent on the intersection of structural and situated historical legacies, governance systems, and local agency, and that understanding these contingencies is essential for both scholarly and practical engagement with urban inequality and hopes for just urban futures.

In Montréal, settler-colonial structures continued to shape who is recognized as a legitimate urban inhabitant, and whose histories are deemed worthy of preservation, ensuring ongoing settler colonial power over the representation of Indigenous people. At the same time, neoliberal logics have commodified racialized histories and working-class contributions to the city. In Belfast, post-conflict governance has channelled ethnonational memory into narratives of reconciliation and economic renewal, aligning redevelopment with political agendas that aim to stabilize ethnonational divisions while promoting consumption-oriented urban imaginaries. By bringing these cases together, we see that, across national contexts, gentrification functions as a political project that involves both spatial transformation and the reframing of collective identities, pacifying historical and ongoing grievances and political discontent. Together, these findings contribute to debates in critical urban studies and nationalism studies by showing how colonial structures and nationalist forces are rearticulated through contemporary changes in the political economy, particularly gentrification.

This comparative analysis also illuminates the complex dynamics of social mixing and shared spaces in divided cities. In Montréal, the redevelopment of parks, markets, walking trails, and murals often adopted an aesthetic of inclusivity, while leaving intact deeper exclusions rooted in race, class, and colonial history. My interviews with residents exposed antagonistic visions of the city. Social

mixing operated as a concrete solution to smooth out social divisions, while actively structuring them anew. My analysis of the Sud-Ouest revealed that new "mixed" spaces, from housing to community events, were economically or symbolically inaccessible for a vast array of marginalized residents who felt unwelcomed. The so-called "shared spaces" of newly developed districts in Belfast, like the TQ, are similarly fraught. They are officially promoted as neutral and welcoming, yet they remain overshadowed by the city's sectarian geography, where social mixing is manufactured for affluent residents to keep out the historically marginalized. In both cities, we see how social mixing, through housing or shared spaces, was never neutral, but rather favoured the new middle class across sectarian divides. In both cities, it was shown that initiatives that claimed to promote social integration could, without historical awareness and community-led governance, reproduce the very divisions they ostensibly were set up to dissolve.

The comparative approach I used in this research also revealed both differences and similarities in the strategies people employed to resist or negotiate urban transformations in each city. In both cases, bottom-up remembrances, such as community-led mnemonic projects, challenged dominant redevelopment narratives, insisting on fuller and more complex accounts of the city's history and present. Resistance took place through direct protest but also through alternative storytelling and re-signification of everyday spaces. In explaining the power of the refusal and resistance that ordinary people engaged in. Through small actions, like speaking about a derelict factory, refusing the rebranded names of certain spaces or holding onto old photographs of the neighbourhoods, marginalized residents summoned the spectres of erased or suppressed pasts back into the urban landscape, unsettling the sanitized visions of developers and state actors. Such hauntings operated as a refusal to let everyday and experiential memories be completely buried. They reinserted ostracised voices, hidden memories, and alternative claims into the city's symbolic and material fabric. These spectral interventions compel

a recognition of the past in its fullness, creating fissures in the hegemonic temporalities of gentrification and colonial urbanism that attempt to replace complex pasts with commodified futures. By tracing everyday practices of resistance across two different urban contexts, this dissertation sought to contribute to urban scholarship on agency, memory, and the politics of space. I wanted to show that, even amid the pressure of neoliberal redevelopment and ongoing colonial and nationalist injustices, communities have carved out openings for alternative urban futures, mobilizing memory not only as a record of loss but also as a resource for resilience and political possibility.

Taken together, these insights illustrate that gentrification is multi-faceted, involving economic, mnemonic, political, social, and spatial dimensions; it is an open process where outcomes are never wholly settled. And in this space lies hope for just futures that bring forth the needs of ordinary people in the face of capitalist takeovers of the urban. By combining an ethnographic sensibility with insights from comparative urban studies (Simmons and Smith 2017), I hope that my dissertation offers a framework for understanding urban inequality, the political economy of gentrification, and contested belonging that can inform both scholarship and policy in diverse urban contexts.

7.2 On the Consequences of Mnemonic Erasure

The findings presented above show that mnemonic erasure is not simply the passive loss of memory but a reconfiguration of political life. People are denied recognition and are further forced to exist in a state of categorical indefiniteness, where the boundaries of inclusion are left unsettled (Eley 2011, 560). In urban contexts, this indefiniteness strips communities of the secure footing from which to pursue political claims, leaving them in a condition in which memory is neither acknowledged nor overtly repudiated. I witnessed this mnemonic ambiguity in both cities, where marginalized groups' pasts were either sanitized or appropriated without being fully incorporated or openly disqualified. They were simply absent from the official story. The dissertation shows that this indefiniteness is never neutral.

Memory work overwhelmingly bends toward affirming the status quo, especially when it is orchestrated by state or market actors (Eley 2011, 561). Where erasure prevails, the result is not a vacuum but the proliferation of legitimized narratives that replace the presumed absent ones. In Montréal, Black communities have never been recognized as a vital part of the city's industrial history and labour struggles, and instead have been depicted as mostly associated with the city's musical history. Indigenous presence and the celebration of their communities in the city have been primarily mobilized to underline the city's cosmopolitan cultural inclusivity, which effectively veils Indigenous displacement and land dispossession. In Belfast, the symbolism of the city's industrial success in the past is rampant in the TQ, but not that of labour exploitation or sectarian discrimination in the shipyard behind that success. This inclusion-through-exclusion, or the categorical ambivalences, facilitates the smooth functioning of institutional narratives that advance capitalist objectives and drive gentrification forward.

These processes can weaken the infrastructural and cultural resources available to sustain alternative stories over time, thereby reducing the capacity for self-advocacy for people with different past experiences. Marginalized groups are left with scarce tangible reference points that could be mobilized for political or legal claims. The interplay between these perspectives suggests that the consequences of mnemonic erasure are recursive; the more absent a memory becomes from the visible urban and cultural landscape, the harder it is to reintroduce, because the categories, narratives, and physical sites that could sustain it have already been stripped away. Erasure thus narrows what is perceived as possible, contracting the political imagination for the future. That is, the absence of marginalized memories restricts what is politically claimable in the present and what is thinkable for the future.

However, community members, including people with long ties to the areas studied, have not resigned to reconcile with what's unfolding in the city. They have undertaken and nurtured counter-memories that challenge hegemonic narratives. They have continually practiced unsettling the curated silences embedded in urban landscapes. Like haunting, such refusals have sought to trace absences and omissions, mobilizing vernacular memories as disruptive presences. In Montréal and Belfast alike, the spectres of displaced Indigenous communities, excluded working-class people, and marginalized racialized communities linger in street names, architectural remnants, and other affective geographical realms, even when invisible from the officially sanctioned story (Davis 2025, 1880). They also linger in community archives, graffiti, protests, and the everyday workings of community organization.

7.3 The Right to Urban Memory

In response to the dynamics of mnemonic erasure identified in this dissertation, I proposed the notion of a "right to urban memory" as a framework for reclaiming the past as a collective resource. This is not a call for nostalgic attachment to an imagined golden age, but for an active, democratic engagement with memory to build more inclusive and just cities. Such a right insists that urban spheres reflect the full diversity of experiences and struggles that have shaped them, prioritizing urban memories from below over those driven by dominant economic interests. Framing memory as a right can offer a way to counter gentrification and nationalist appropriation of working-class histories. Collective memory, as a social and political construct, is always shaped by power relations. Under neoliberal urbanization, it is often shaped by market imperatives, reinforcing existing inequalities and creating new forms of marginalization, while nationalist alliances seek to naturalize particular visions of the nation while sidelining others. Read alongside Lefebvre's right to the city, the right to urban memory is thus a political demand to include marginalized pasts and aspirations within the memory landscape, and further allow groups left out by neoliberal and nationalist urban machine not only to be remembered,

but to actively shape the city's symbolic, material and political present and future. A right to urban memory would require a fundamental reconfiguration, embedding historical narratives in participatory structures that open the definition of the city's past to deliberation and contestation. In both Montréal and Belfast, such a right can provide a framework to challenge the directives of capitalist peace and the neoliberal logic that commodify memory and reduce heritage to a tool for pacification as well as urban branding and speculative investment. It expands the terrain of urban democracy and strengthens the critique of capitalist peace.

The right to urban memory seeks to disrupt the established order through both visible acts of protest and quieter, everyday refusals that unsettle dominant norms. Public urban spaces have long served as arenas for these interventions from below, making visible the injustices that official narratives obscure. As Judith Butler (2016, 53) argues, the act of assembling in public space is itself a performative assertion of political existence. Bodies gathered in the street do not merely represent a people but actively constitute one through their presence. Revolts, assemblies, demonstrations, and other forms of occupation generate counter-spaces in which alternative social relations are demanded and often enacted, temporarily suspending the authority of dominant spatial and mnemonic practices. At the same time, resistance is not just practiced through dramatic rupture but also through everyday practices, such as complaining about and rejecting official memories at the microscale of ordinary spaces, small acts of appropriation of official spaces, and routine community rituals. Through these practices, cultural memory is preserved but actively reproduced as a living resource, enabling inhabitants to imagine futures grounded in alternative collective histories. In this sense, memory is a performative force that transforms the present and expands the horizon of what the city can become.

The right to urban memory can be read as a direct response to the historical paralysis diagnosed by Walter Benjamin through the figure of the Angelus Novus (Benjamin [1940] 2003), the story that I

began this dissertation with. The angel of history is propelled irresistibly toward the future while gazing upon the accumulating wreckage of the past, unable to intervene, repair, or redeem what has been destroyed. Progress, in this sense, appears not as emancipation but as a foreclosure of political agency in relation to historical catastrophe. Contemporary neoliberal urbanism, similarly, promulgates redevelopment as an inevitability, transforming sites of social struggle, labour, and violence into sanitized landscapes of consumption while rendering past injustices aestheticized or forgotten. The right to urban memory may serve as a foundation to halt this forward propulsion and assert memory as a site of intervention rather than passive contemplation. It insists that the past is neither closed nor merely an object for mourning, but can be actively mobilized through embodied practices, collective remembrance, and spatial contestation. In doing so, it offers a way of resisting the temporal logic that condemns urban inhabitants to spectators of dispossession. Against the storm of capitalist progress, the right to memory reclaims the possibility of interruption, thereby reopening the city as a space where history can once again be acted upon rather than merely endured.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Figures

Figure 1.1 Map of Montréal, with highlight of the Arrondissement Sud-Ouest (Red shape) and Cabot Square (Green dot)

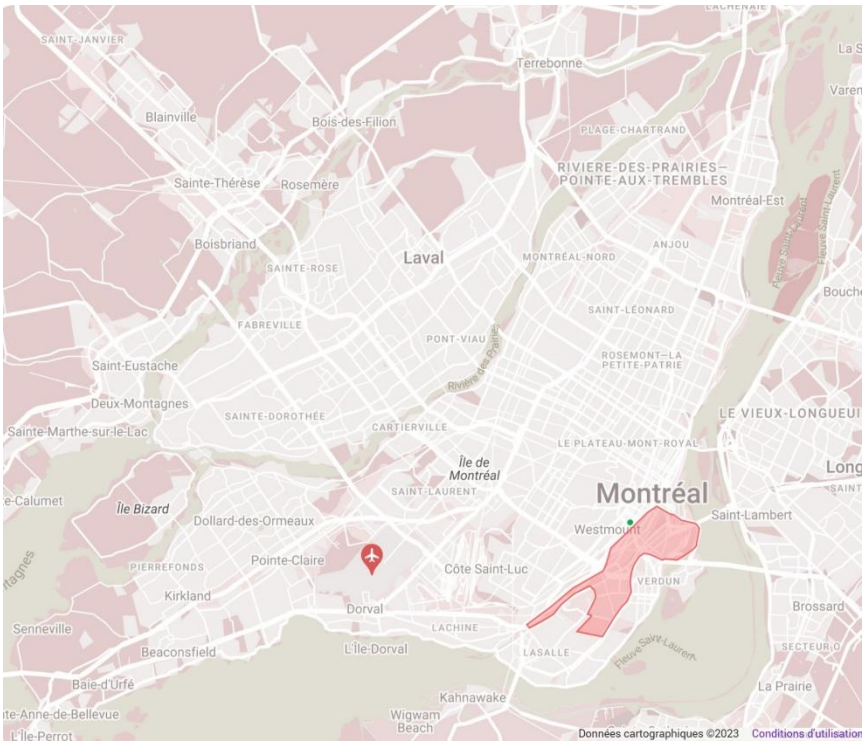


Figure 1.2 Map of Belfast, with highlight of East Belfast (Yellow shape) and the Titanic Quarter (Red shape)

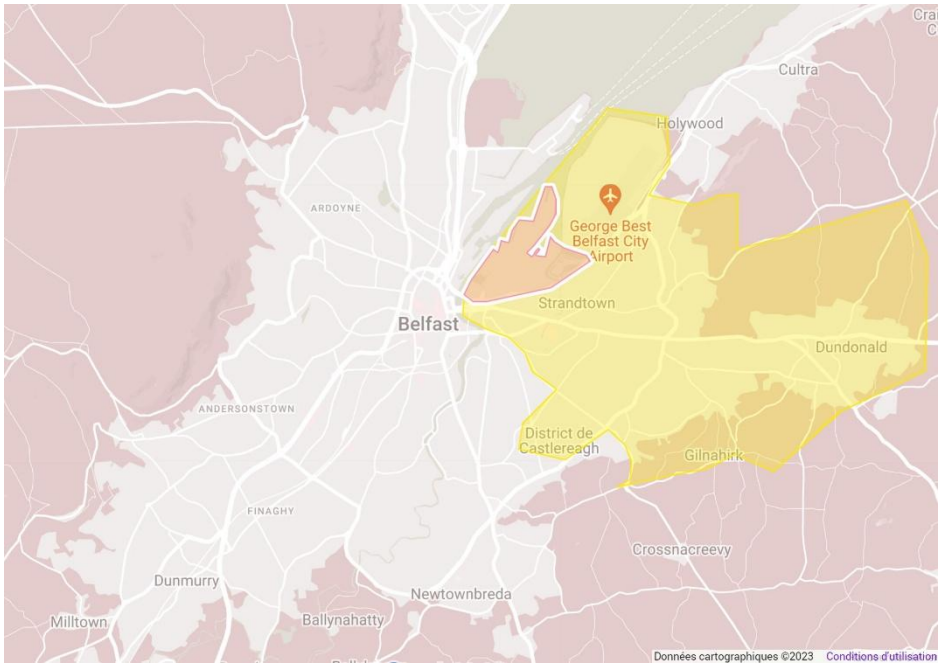


Figure 4.1 : “Canal de Lachine, île de Montréal”



Figure 4.1 : “Canal de Lachine, île de Montréal” by Lamma726, Creative Commons

Figure 4.2 : “Vue de Montréal depuis la cheminée de la centrale de la Montréal Street Railway”



Figure 4.2 : “Vue de Montréal depuis la cheminée de la centrale de la Montréal Street Railway” (A View of Montréal from the Montréal Street Railway Station’s Chimney). 1896. VIEW-2944. © Musée McCord

Figure 4.3: "Victoriatown."



Figure 4.3: "Victoriatown." 1963. VM94-C312-011 © Archives de la Ville de Montréal

Figure 4.4: "The rush home of workers from the biggest shipyard in the world"



Figure 4.4: "The rush home of workers from the biggest shipyard in the world" by Robert John Welch. 1910. © National Museums NI, BELUM.Y13190 . Courtesy of National Museums NI

Figure 4.5: “Working-Class Heroes”



Figure 4.5: Mural titled *Working Class Heroes* by artist Seosamh Mac Coılle © Extramural Activity
https://extramuralactivity.com/2014/11/15/working-class-heroes/

Figure 5.1: Examples of red brick usage in Montréal's Sud-Ouest



Figure 5.1: Examples of red brick usage in Montréal's Sud-Ouest © Christophe Davis 2021

Figure 5.2: Dogsville Hotel de Luxe



Figure 5.2: Dogsville Hotel de luxe (Hotel/Nursery for dogs) © Christophe Davis 2022

Figure 5.3: Information Panel Circuit de commémoration du Sud-Ouest



Figure 5.3: Information Panel *Circuit de commémoration du Sud-Ouest* © Christophe Davis 2021

Figure 5.4: Article on Joe Beef's Tavern published in the magazine Montréal in 1967

old three-storey building at the corner of Common and De Callière streets. There it remained in his lifetime and there it remains today.

In his time, he kept 150 beds in the upper storey and a *ménagerie* in the basement. On the floor between he operated his saloon, dispensing free food to the poor with one mighty fist and keeping order with the other.

For the entertainment of his guests he kept a trained bear on the premises which, for a pint of beer, would shinny up a pole. For a quart it would do a reasonable version of the *Sailors' Hornpipe*.

He kept another bear in one corner of the room which did little else than look vicious. It was. Patrons were expected to keep their distance without having to be warned.

The *ménagerie* boasted other livestock from time to time: Monkeys, an alligator, raccoon, porcupines and others. Among the others was a moth-eaten buffalo which could be detected by its pungent odor a block away from the saloon.

McKiernan's many feuds with civic authorities, the clergy and, for that matter, anyone of any importance in the city, are legendary.

Probably the longest lasting and most vigorously waged was one between the outspoken saloon keeper and John Dougall, publisher of the long-defunct *Witness*, a daily newspaper with heavy religious overtones.

In 1876 *The Witness* launched a campaign for increased capital through a bond issue of $10, $50, $100 and $500 lots payable in five years at seven percent interest.

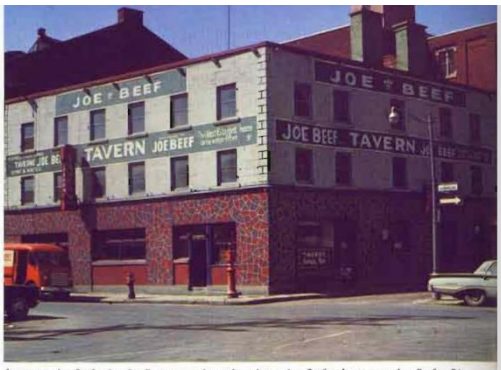
Almost immediately McKiernan had cards printed bearing the message: "Any citizens, this day, having any of their Bonds in Hand, will please call at my office from 10 a.m. daily, or at next door, the Rag Store, and they will get their full value, as far as old paper goes."

Even so, it was *The Witness* that got in the last blow of the feud. Its obituary on Joe Beef read, in part:

"For twenty-five years he has enjoyed in his own way the reputation of being for Montreal what was in former days known under the pet sobriquet of the wickedest man.

"His saloon . . . was the resort of the most degraded men. It was the bottom of the pit, a sort of *cul de sac* where thieves could be coralled."

Chances are McKiernan would have laughed heartily at the obituary had it not been for the reference to the "most degraded men." This, it is certain, would have filled him with awe-inspiring wrath.



La taverne Joe Beef • Joe Beef's tavern today • La taberna Joe Beef • La taverna Joe Beef • Die Joe Beef - Taverne.

And it would have been righteous wrath at that: Joe's beloved "bumbs" — he always spelled it that way — included many hard-working laborers, poor-but-honest citizens, sailors "on the beach" between ships and more than a couple of Remittance Men trying to keep body and soul together between allowances from the Old Country.

Joe Beef took care of them all in his own rough way. Countless unfortunates were given free supper, free lodgings and free breakfast. Joe insisted, however, that each take a bath before leaving his saloon.

When they fell ill, he sent them off to hospital and paid the expense. It was always the Montreal General Hospital for McKiernan held it in deep respect.

So much so, in fact, that he kept an iron box on his bar and continually encouraged donations for the hospital through it. Old records kept by the hospital show entries identified as "proceeds of iron box, bar room, Joe Beef's."

He dispensed his generosity in many ways: When laborers working on the Lachine Canal went out on a three-day strike in 1877, 500 gallons of soup and 3,000 loaves of bread arrived promptly from his saloon. He also financed the trips to Ottawa of two delegations chosen to intercede for the men.

One of the most recounted stories of Joe Beef concerns his wife's funeral. Mrs. McKiernan predeceased her husband in the early 1880's and Joe, who still held a commissary function in the militia, arranged for a regimental band to play at the service.

It is reported that on the way to Mount Royal Cemetery the band played *The Dead March* from Saul but on the way back joined in that lively army tune, *The Girl I Left Behind Me*.

Joe Beef's own funeral had all the trimmings of a state occasion. Few firms bothered to open for business on that day and a contemporary account of it reads:

"The lines stretched for blocks, being thoroughly representative of all sorts of humanity.

"A larger crowd has seldom, if ever, gathered to see a funeral. Millionaires rubbed shoulders with mechanics, the 'bumbs,' plain and simple, were there in sincere sorrow."

Joe Beef's good works continued on a more temperate basis after his death. The Salvation Army took over the building, gave it a thorough cleaning, then opened it as a hostel for the needy.

In 1907, Sam Lubin reopened it as a hotel with a dining room, then, in 1921, transformed it back to a saloon. His son, Ben, operated it as such until earlier this year when he sold it to a group which

plans to operate it on the same theme — a saloon.

This news, naturally enough, was greeted with a mixture of satisfaction and relief by the patrons of Joe Beef's whether they were on Montreal's waterfront or on the docks of other seaports around the world.

Joe Beef's patrons are a much different type than were those who frequented the place in the era of its founder.

So is Joe Beef's, for that matter. You can wander along Common St. within a block of the tavern without detecting the scent of Beef's beat-up buffalo, to say nothing of Beef's earthier clients.

"Even the mariners are different today," says Ben Lubin rather wistfully. "They no longer come into the tavern covered with coal dust.

"It's a push-button way of sailing and the sailors who push the buttons are better educated these days."

He thought that over for a moment, then added, "Some of them thought I was Joe Beef."

He wasn't, of course.

la taverne de joe beef

À Montréal, là où la rue de Callière arrive sur le port, au coin de la rue des Communes, en plein centre du plus grand havre intérieur du monde, s'élève depuis plus de cent ans la taverne de Joe Beef.

La réputation de cette centenaire, qui se porte bien et continue à prospérer, est transmise aux quatre coins du globe par les marins qui à l'escale ne manquent pas de venir y échanger le verre de l'amitié.

Les récits de ceux qui ont fait le tour du monde, leurs discussions, parfois leurs bagarres, n'arrivent pourtant pas à estomper l'ombre de celui qui fut son premier propriétaire, l'extraordinaire Joe Beef.

Aucune histoire n'est plus savoureuse, plus riche en couleurs que celle de Charles McKiernan, cet Irlandais qui s'appelait lui-même *l'enfant du populo*. Un enfant du peuple, né le 4 décembre 1835 dans le comté de Cavan et venu à Montréal par les hasards de la guerre.

Après avoir étudié à l'école d'artillerie de Woolwich en Angleterre, la guerre de Crimée lui permettait de gagner ses galons de sergent fourrier. Il apprenait alors sur le champ de bataille à trouver des vivres et du logement pour ses compagnons d'armes et mettait déjà à l'épreuve cette débrouillardise qui le mènera plus tard à loger et à nourrir toute une cohorte de malheureux, de pauvres, de sans abri.

Mais n'anticipons pas, et suivons McKiernan, le sergent artilleur — il n'est pas encore Joe Beef — alors qu'il s'embarque avec l'Artillerie royale vers le Canada, à une époque troublée où la guerre entre l'Angleterre et les États-Unis semblait inévitable.

L'Artillerie royale campait tous ses soldats sur notre île Sainte-Hélène, et McKiernan se voyait confier la tâche de pourvoir à leur approvisionnement. La libération des vivres ne connaissait pas encore la vogue dans les armées qui recouraient plus volontiers au chapardage, un art dans lequel Charles McKiernan passait bientôt maître. Il s'en allait aux provisions la nuit, chipant ici et là, rapportant sur son dos robuste des quartiers entiers de boeuf *empruntés* à des régiments mieux partagés.

C'est ainsi qu'il acquit son surnom, qui lui n'était pas volé, un surnom qui ne devait plus le quitter et lui resta même après sa mort.

Las bientôt de cette vie militaire qui ne répondait guère à son indiscipline foncière, McKiernan *achetait* sa démobilisation en 1860 et ouvrait une première taverne, face au Marché Bonsecours, rue Saint-Claude, dont il disait pompeusement qu'elle faisait face à la Mairie; le Conseil municipal se réunissait en effet dans l'un des bureaux au-dessus du marché. Ainsi lancée, sa réputation de tavernier à panache ne devait que croître et embellir.

En 1870, lors de l'élargissement de la rue Saint-Claude, Joe Beef déménageait dans l'immeuble que nous connaissons encore aujourd'hui. Une lourde maison de pierres de trois étages, où l'on servait à boire et à manger, taverne doublée d'un hôtel de 150 lits et d'un zoo, car Joe Beef témoignait autant d'affection et de générosité à ses frères inférieurs qu'aux humains.

Aux plus beaux temps de la ménagerie, deux ours erraient en liberté parmi les clients, des singes, un alligator, des ratons laveurs, des porcs-épics vivaient là et l'on dit même qu'un vieux bison y finit des jours tranquilles.

Cette originalité, jointe à une façon souvent insolente d'exprimer des sentiments, qui pour être généreux n'en étaient pas moins, à l'époque, révolutionnaires, mettaient parfois Joe Beef au ban de la société et l'entraînaient à des conflits tant avec les autorités municipales qu'avec le clergé.

Il fallait être Joe Beef pour oser à la fin du 19e siècle des théories presque anarchistes et pour déclarer officiellement qu'il ne craignait *ni Pape, prêtre ou religieux, ni le roi. Ma seule ambition est l'argent.* Il aimait aussi à claironner qu'il faisait confiance à Dieu en été, pour le vivre et le couvert, *mais vienne l'hiver, le gel et la neige, je ne crois qu'au dollar tout puissant et aux bonnes bûches d'érable pour me tenir chaud.* N'affirmait-il pas aussi que Montréal *avait bien assez d'églises et de chapelles, de prêcheurs et de harangueurs.*

La voix forte, la stature imposante, il ne faisait peur pourtant qu'aux riches et aux snobs. Pas un clochard qui n'ait trouvé abri chez Joe Beef, pas un ventre creux qui n'ait reçu la soupe, pas un frigorifié qui n'ait trouvé du feu. Providence des malheureux il n'est pas surprenant que le jour de ses funérailles, Montréal ait pris l'allure d'une ville en deuil, et les comptes rendus de l'époque affirment qu'en cette journée du 15 juin 1889, les rues n'avaient jamais vu tant de tristes visages. Se croisaient sans doute ces ouvriers du Canal Lachine qu'il nourrit gratuitement pendant leur grève de trois jours et tous ceux qui grâce à ses dons avaient pu se faire soigner dans les hôpitaux de la ville. On peut encore aujourd'hui voir dans les registres de l'Hôpital général de Montréal, par exemple, des dons portés au crédit et provenant de Joe Beef.

Le travail de ce patron des gueux devait être continué pendant un certain temps par l'Armée du salut qui transformait la taverne en hôtellerie pour les hommes dans le besoin. Mais Montréal évolue et comme les autres grandes villes perd ses clochards. En 1907, la taverne rouvrait ses portes. Sam Lubin, son propriétaire d'alors lui redonnait son nom et sa destination première. L'homme et sa légende reprenaient leurs droits de cité et les quais de Montréal s'enorgueilliront encore longtemps de la *Taverne de Joe Beef*.

Figure 5.4: Article on Joe Beef's Tavern, Published in the magazine *Montréal* in 1966 © Archive de la ville de Montréal
https://www.calameo.com/read/0002032745bcdb540e56a

Figure 5.5: What remains of the Canada Malting Factory + New trendy bar at the base of the former factory



Figure 5.5: What remains of the Canada Malting Factory + New trendy bar at the base of the former factory. © Christophe Davis, 2022

Figure 5.6: The Little Pink House, on top of the Canada Malting Factory



Figure 5.6: *The Little Pink House*, on top of the Canada Malting Factory © Christophe Davis, 2021

Figure 5.7: Inside the Canada Malting Plant



Figure 5.7: Inside the Canada Malting plant © Jarod Dumouchel

Figure 5.8: Mural of glazed bricks spelling the words Bonheur d'occasion



Figure 5.8: Mural of glazed bricks, spelling the words *Bonheur d'occasion.* By artist Julien Hébert © Christophe Davis 2022

Figure 5.9: Louis Cyr's statue



Figure 5.9: Louis Cyr's statue (1970) by artist Robert Pelletier © Christophe Davis, 2022

Figure 5.10: Promotional poster for Louis Cyr's show, produced by John Robinson

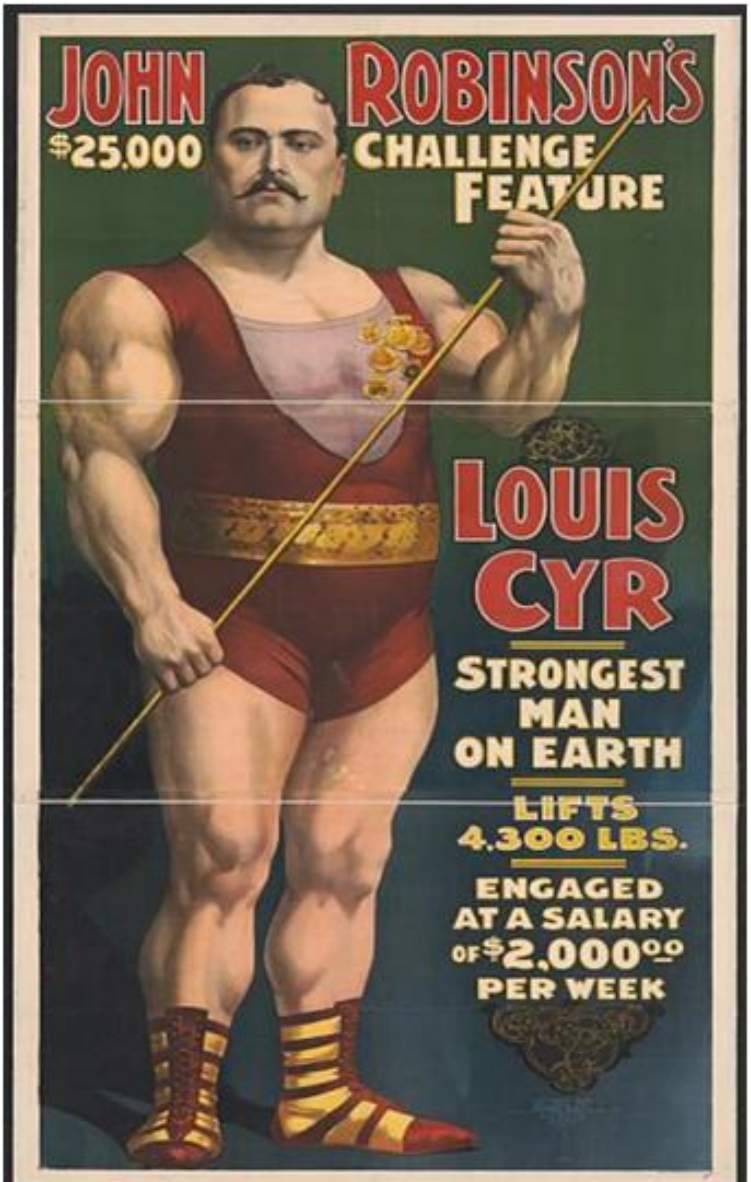


Figure 5.10: Promotional poster for Louis Cyr's show, produced by John Robinson © Library of Congress (LC-DIG-ppmsca-55129)

Figure 5.11: Empty space where the Negro Community Centre used to be



Figure 5.11: Empty space where the Negro Community Centre used to be © Christophe Davis, 2023

Figure 6.1: Information Panel Placed in Front of the East Belfast Network Centre (Templemore Ave)

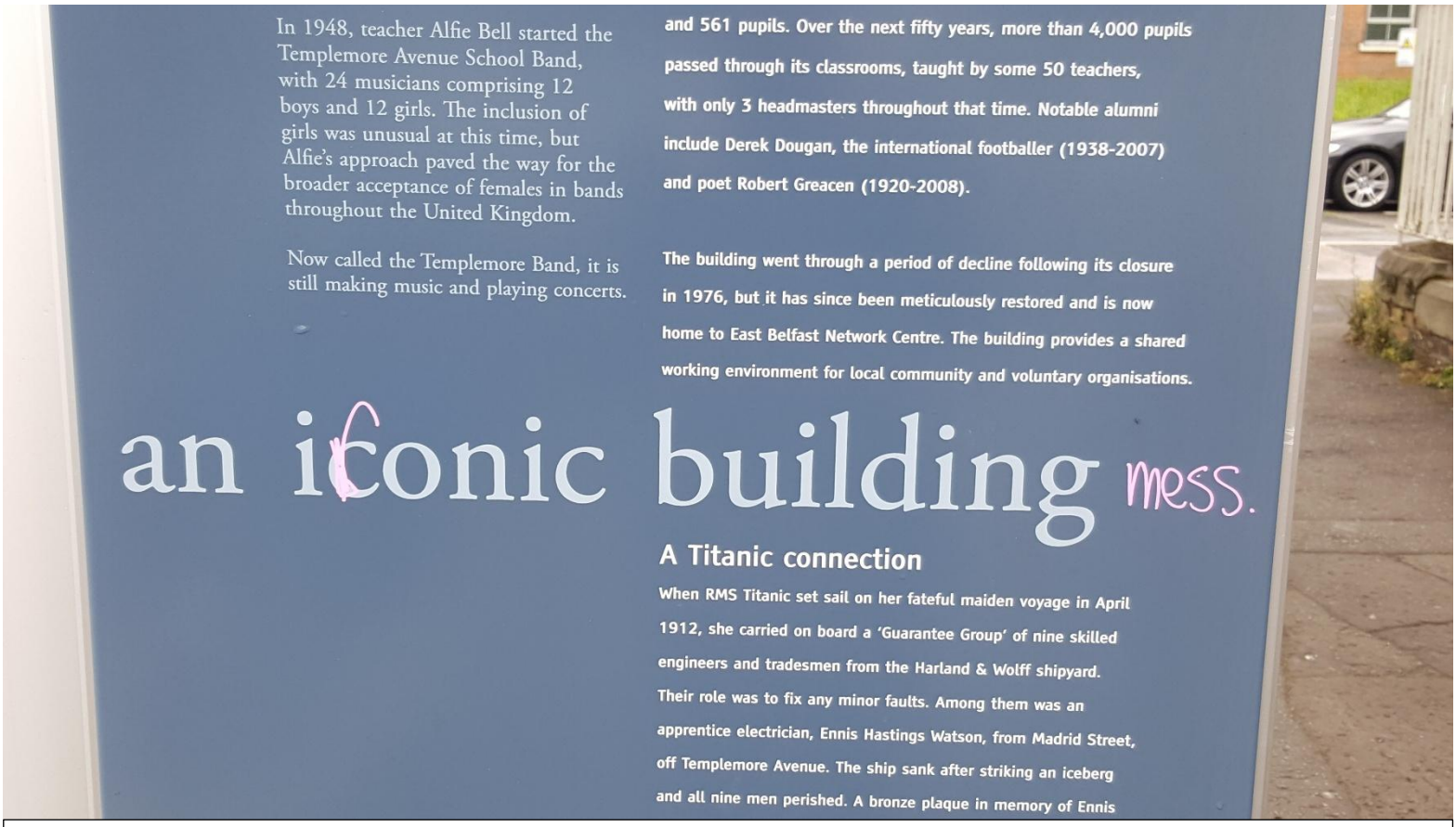


Figure 6.1: Information Panel placed in front of the East Belfast Network Centre (Templemore Ave.) © Christophe Davis 2022

Figure 6.2: Titanic People statue



Figure 6.2: Statue titled *Titanic People* on Newtownards Rd. (East Belfast) by artist Ross Wilson © Christophe Davis, 2022

Figure 6.3: Titanic Mural on Dee St. (East Belfast)



Figure 6.3: Titanic Mural on Dee St. (East Belfast) by artist John Stewart 2015 © Christophe Davis 2022

Figure 6.4: Titanic Mural on Kenilworth Pl. (East Belfast)



Figure 6.4: Titanic Mural on Kenilworth Pl. (East Belfast) by artist Ross Wilson 2010 © Christophe Davis 2022

Figure 6.5: Harland and Wolff cranes nicknamed Goliath (Foreground) and Samson (Background)



Figure 6.5: Harland and Wolff cranes Samson (background) and Goliath (foreground) © Christophe Davis, 2022

Figure 6.6: Marketing Banner for the Belfast Eats food delivery application, focus on its logo



Figure 6.6: Marketing banner for the Belfast Eats food delivery application, focus on its logo © Christophe Davis, 2022

Figure 6.7: A Better Future Lendrick Street (East Belfast)



Figure 6.7: Mural titled *A Better Future* on Lendrick St. (East Belfast) © Christophe Davis 2022

Figure 6.8: Example of Wasteland within TQ



Figure 6.8: Example of Wasteland within the Titanic Quarter © Christophe Davis, 2022

Figure 6.9: "Harland and Wolff Drawing Offices and Headquarters in the 1940s" + "Revitalized Drawing offices, Titanic Hotel"



Figure 6.9: "Harland and Wolff Drawing Offices and Headquarters" (HOYFM.HW.5079) © National Museums of Northern Ireland . Courtesy of National Museums NI



Revitalized Drawing offices, Titanic Hotel © Christophe Davis 2022

Figure 6.10: “The ARC apartment complex”



Figure 6.10: The ARC apartment complex © Christophe Davis, 2022

Figure 6.11: Titanic Belfast



Figure 6.11: Titanic Belfast © Christophe Davis, 2022

Figure 6.12: Titanic Belfast exhibits: "Photograph of Albert Memorial Clock and Queen's Square"



Figure 6.12: Titanic Belfast exhibits: "Photograph of Albert Memorial Clock and Queen's Square" © Christophe Davis, 2022

Figure 6.13: Titanic Belfast exhibits: "Women in the Linen Mills"



Figure 6.13: Titanic Belfast exhibits: "Women in the Linen Mills" © Christophe Davis, 2022

Appendix B – Sample of Interview Questions

Basic personal information

1. What is your name (for my own confidential records in case I need to contact you again)?
2. Tell me about yourself.
3. Where were you born?
4. Where were your parents born?
5. Where were you educated?
6. Where have you lived during your life?
7. What kind of work/ study do you do?

General information on the neighbourhood

8. Tell me about your history with this neighbourhood (TQ / Arrondissement Sud-Ouest).
    a. *How long have you lived here?*
9. How would you describe this neighbourhood?
10. What aspects of this neighbourhood do you like best/least?
11. Do you feel at "home" in this neighbourhood?
    a. *What elements makes you feel/prevents you from feeling at home?*
12. What places within this neighbourhood hold a lot of meaning to you? Why?
13. (For long-term resident.) What does this neighbourhood represent for you?
    a. *Why is this neighbourhood important to you?*
14. (For Gentrifiers.) Why did you move in this neighbourhood?
    a. *What attracted you to this neighbourhood?*
    b. *How does it defer from your previous living environment?*
15. (For real-estate developers.) What makes this neighbourhood an interesting investment in terms of time and resources?
    a. *Particular histories associated with it that make it more valuable?*

Information on Gentrification in the Neighbourhood

16. How has your neighbourhood changed over the past 10-15 years?
    a. *How have the surrounding neighbourhoods changed?*
17. Is there anything the neighbourhood needs?
18. Tell me about project of development X. How does it affect you? How does it affect the neighbourhood? What lasting effects will it have upon the neighbourhood?
19. How, in your opinion, has the landscape changed with the renewal projects?
20. (Long-term residents) People have different ways of viewing the way their neighbourhoods and communities' function. How would you compare the way you view the neighbourhood where you grew up, to the way newcomers view that neighbourhood?
    a. Can you tell me more about what makes you think that you have a different or similar view of your neighbourhood than gentrifiers?
21. (Gentrifiers) People have different ways of viewing the way their neighbourhoods and communities' function. How would you compare the way you view the neighbourhood where you grew up, to the way long-term residents view that neighbourhood?
    a. Can you tell me more about what makes you think that you have a different or similar view of your neighbourhood than long-term residents?

Question on the changing nature of memory in the neighbourhood

22. Tell me about your memories associated with this neighbourhood.

23. How would you describe the historical legacy of this neighbourhood?
24. How is this history represented in the names, landscapes and spaces of the neighbourhood?
    a. *Have those spaces changed with the numerous gentrification projects?*
25. How will the meaning that projects have for you affect your feelings toward this neighbourhood?
26. Some people have expressed concern that gentrification, particularly changes resulting from new housing development, has displaced low-income residents who have had to move out of the community. Has this been the case in communities with which you are familiar?
    a. If yes:
        i. *In your opinion, has displacement occurred in one community more than others? Which one?*
        ii. *What was the impact of this displacement on the neighbourhood? (Positive? / Negative?)*
        iii. *How did displacement affected you feeling of belonging in this neighbourhood?*

Question on the neighbourhood and identities

27. Sometimes a common experience, language, or way of being led a group of people to identify as a community. For example, there are some people who identify as part of a cultural group because they share a common experience. Is there a community with which you identify?
    a. *What makes you identify with that community?*
    b. *How did you know that you also belonged to ____ (name of community)?*
    c. *When did you realize that you identified with that community?*
28. How would you describe the relationships between the two major communities of your city?
29. Given the political situation in Belfast/Montréal, how have these projects affected the cultural dynamics of this neighbourhood?
    a. Has your affiliation with a given community change due to the various gentrification projects?
30. What does this renewal projects represent to you and how do you perceive its potential impacts on the divided communities?

Last Questions

31. Do you feel anything has been left out?
32. Is there anything else they would like to say?

Appendix C – Letters of Invitation

Email

Dear _____,

My name is Christophe Davis, and I am a PhD Candidate in the Department of Political Science at York University in Toronto. I am conducting research into the changing memory landscape in the cities of Belfast and Montréal. In particular, I am interested in how gentrification affect such landscapes and how residents of the TQ and the arrondissement Sud-Ouest reacts to the changing memory landscape.

I am contacting you because I understand that you are _____. I would like to request an interview with you, to gain insights into the relations and living experience you have with the neighbourhood.

If you agree to participate in the study, I will ask you to answer questions related to the research during a 45 to 90 minute interview. The length of time can be adjusted according to your availability. If we are unable to do the interview in person at a mutually agreed location that is comfortable and safe (e.g., a coffee shop), we will conduct the interview by video conferencing software (e.g., Zoom, or another software preferable to you and agreeable to the researcher). Prior to beginning the interview, I will ask you to confirm in writing or verbally that you consent to the interview. I will send you a copy of the Informed Consent Form in advance of the interview. I will ask you to read it over carefully. The interview will only take place if you provide your consent. I will ask you to either: (a) to sign and date the Informed Consent Form and scan it back to me; or (b) to indicate in an email to me that you consent to the interview based on the conditions outlined in the Informed Consent Form; or (c) to consent verbally to the interview at the time scheduled for the interview, but prior to the start of the interview.

I would also like to suggest if this is something that could interest you. To complete the interview while walking in the neighbourhood. These walks would take the same amount of time, depending on your availabilities and would be extremely useful to see how you relate your memory to the built environment. Finally, you may also be asked to provide the researcher with photographs related to the research, should you wish to share them temporarily with him (e.g., private archives of images portraying the neighbourhood). If you have, and are willing to share, such photographs, another form of *Photography Consent / Release Form* will need to be signed as well.

None of the information you supply during the research will appear in any oral presentation, report or publication without your consent. Also, should I with your consent include information from the interview in any presentation, report or publication, I will protect your identity by excluding your name and any other information that might identify you, if that is your preference. You may decline to answer any interview questions that make you feel uncomfortable, and you may withdraw your consent to participate in the study at any time. If I do not hear from you within one week from today, I will follow up with you either by phone or by email.

My hope is that this research will help to advance knowledge of the broader influences that memory can have our everyday life. Moreover, because gentrification represents a growing field of urban studies, a more comprehensive and politically informed understanding of this phenomenon can be valuable, especially in cities studied less, like Belfast and Montréal.

Sincerely,

Facebook

Dear _____,

My name is Christophe Davis, and I am a PhD Candidate in the Department of Political Science at York University in Toronto. I am conducting research into the changing memory landscape in the cities of Belfast and Montréal. In particular, I am interested in how gentrification affects such landscapes and how residents of the TQ and the arrondissement Sud-Ouest react to the changing memory landscape.

I am contacting you, because you are the administrator of a Facebook group dedicated to the neighbourhood _____, that interests me for my research. Given your position, I wanted to first, formally ask if you or any of your acquaintances would accept to participate in an interview. If you agree to participate in the study, I will ask you to answer questions related to the research during a 45 to 90 minute interview. The length of time can be adjusted according to your availability.

Moreover, I would like to get your permission to publish, on the Facebook group you administrate, a similar message inviting those interested in participating in this research to contact me.

Sincerely,

Appendix D – Informed Consent Forms

Written

Informed Consent Form (Une version française est également disponible)

[Date]

Name of the Study: Uses of Memory in Urban Renewal Projects: A Critical Assessment of the Relationships Between Collective Memory and Gentrification in the Deeply Divided Cities of Belfast and Montréal

Researcher: Christophe Davis, S672 Ross, York University, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, Ross Building South, ON M3J 1P3, Canada, cdavis8@yorku.ca
Supervisor: Laam Hae, S672 Ross, York University, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, ON M3J 1P3, CANADA, lhae@yorku.ca

Purpose of the Study: The dissertation identifies and examines the ways in which memory is directly linked to gentrification processes and assesses the impacts that changing memory landscape can have in cities of Belfast and Montréal. Specifically, the research will be conducted respectively, in the TQ and the arrondissement Sud-Ouest. These two neighbourhoods have been the centre of urban renewal projects that have greatly modified the memorial landscapes of the two cities.
My research identifies and assess the usages and the significance of memory in gentrification projects. It aims to demonstrate how gentrification, on the one hand, uses memory as a way to legitimize and benefit from gentrification. And how, on the other hand, specific understandings of local history push alternative pasts and memories into oblivion. By delineating a framework for theorizing the connection between collective memory and gentrification, it will illustrate how collective memory works in conjunction with political economy, culture, and representation elements to contribute to understandings of a community.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: You will be asked to answer questions related to the research during an interview lasting 45 minutes to 1.5 hours, depending on your availability. The research might ask you if you would accept to conduct the interview outside, while walking in the neighbourhood, you can accept of decline his offer. You may also be asked to provide the researcher with photographs related to the research, should you wish to share them temporarily with him (e.g., private archives of images portraying the neighbourhood). If you have, and are willing to share, such photographs, another form of *Photography Consent / Release Form* will need to be signed as well.

Risks and Discomforts: The risk to you is minimal, as the present document will explain. However, a few of the questions asked during the interview may be perceived by some as somewhat politically sensitive. You may decline to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: I do not foresee any direct benefits to you in participating in the research; however, there may be some indirect benefits. In particular, the completed study may help participants to better understand the broader influences that memory can have our everyday life. Second, because gentrification represents a growing field of urban studies, a more comprehensive and politically informed understanding of this phenomenon can be valuable. Finally, the research may also give you an opportunity to reflect on your own identities and values.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researcher or with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you decide so. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will not appear in any oral presentation or any report or publication of the research without your consent. At this time, you are being asked to give your consent to participate in the research project. You are also being asked to give your consent to having the information you supply during the research appear in reports or publications of the research either: (1) associated with your name; OR (2) without association with your name and without identifying information. During interviews, the data will be collected using a digital audio device and handwritten notes. This data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only research staff will have access to this information. The data will be

stored for 5 years, after which it will be destroyed. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. Being able to check handwritten notes taken at the interview against an audio recording greatly aids the researcher's efforts to ensure that the record of your interview is complete and accurate.

Questions About the Research?: Professor Laam Hae is supervising the study, which has been approved by the Review of Ethics Board at York University in accordance with the Government of Canada Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct of Research. This statement is publicly available and can be viewed at: https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique_tcps2-eptc2_2018.html. (FRENCH WEBSITE FOR THE TRANSLATED VERSION.) If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, at York University. They can be reached by telephone at [number] or via e-mail at [email]. You may also contact me and/or Dr. Hae at the email addresses provided above.

If you are interested in receiving a copy of the research, in whole or in part, you may contact me at the email address above. I expect to have a full-final draft of the dissertation prepared [Date]. If you consent to participate in this research, please sign and date this form in the space provided below. If you are returning this form electronically, please write 'I consent to participate in your research' in the text of your email, with this form attached.

Legal Rights and Signatures: I_____, consent to participate in the study conducted by Christophe Davis. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent to participate.

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Participant

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Principal Investigator

I_____, consent to have the information I have supplied during the research appear in reports or publications of the research either (please select from the following options):

- ☐ Associated with my name
- ☐ Without association with my name and without identifying information

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Participant

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Principal Investigator

I_____, consent to (please select from the following options):

- ☐ To having the interview audio recorded and handwritten notes taken as well
- ☐ To having only handwritten notes taken during the interview

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Participant

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Principal Investigator

Verbal Consent

Verbal Consent Form

I am asking for your informed consent to be interviewed for the study: Uses of Memory in Urban Renewal Projects: A Critical Assessment of the Relationships Between Collective Memory and Gentrification in the Deeply Divided Cities of Belfast and Montréal

My name is Christophe Davis. I am the Principal Investigator for this study and PhD candidate at York University in Toronto, Canada. You can contact me at S672 Ross, York University, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, ON M3J 1P3, CANADA, cdavis8@yorku.ca. The research is under the supervision of Dr. Laam Hae, professor at York University. If you wish to contact her, her contacts are S672 Ross, York University, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, ON M3J 1P3, CANADA, lhae@yorku.ca.

Purpose of the Study: The dissertation identifies and examines the ways in which memory is directly linked to gentrification processes and assesses the impacts that changing memory landscape can have in cities of Belfast and Montréal. Specifically, the research will be conducted respectively, in the TQ and the arrondissement Sud-Ouest. These two neighbourhoods have been the centre of urban renewal projects that have greatly modified the memorial landscapes of the two cities.
My research identifies and assess the usages and the significance of memory in gentrification projects. It aims to demonstrate how gentrification, on the one hand, uses memory as a way to legitimize and benefit from gentrification. And how, on the other hand, specific understandings of local history push alternative pasts and memories into oblivion. By delineating a framework for theorizing the connection between collective memory and gentrification, it will illustrate how collective memory works in conjunction with political economy, culture, and representation elements to contribute to understandings of a community.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: You will be asked to answer questions related to the research during an interview lasting 45 minutes to 1.5 hours, depending on your availability. The research might ask you if you would accept to conduct the interview outside, while walking in the neighbourhood, you can accept of decline his offer. You may also be asked to provide the researcher with photographs related to the research, should you wish to share them temporarily with him (e.g., private archives of images portraying the neighbourhood). If you have, and are willing to share, such photographs, another form of *Photography Consent / Release Form* will need to be signed as well.

Risks and Discomforts: The risk to you is minimal, as the present document will explain. However, a few of the questions asked during the interview may be perceived by some as somewhat politically sensitive. You may decline to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: I do not foresee any direct benefits to you in participating in the research; however, there may be some indirect benefits. In particular, the completed study may help participants to better understand the broader influences that memory can have our everyday life. Second, because gentrification represents a growing field of urban studies, a more comprehensive and politically informed understanding of this phenomenon can be valuable. Finally, the research may also give you an opportunity to reflect on your own identities and values.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researcher or with York University either now, or in the future.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you decide so. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will not appear in any oral presentation or any report or publication of the research without your consent. **At this time, I need to ask you to give your consent to participate in the research project. Note that you do not waive any of your legal rights by providing this consent. Do you consent to participate in this research project? Also, I need to ask whether you give your consent to having the information you supply during the research appear in reports or publications of the research associated with your name, or if you prefer, without association with your name and without identifying information. Which option do you prefer?**

With your consent, during interviews, the data will be collected using a digital audio device and handwritten notes. Being able to check handwritten notes taken at the interview against an audio recording greatly aids the researcher's efforts to ensure that the record of your interview is complete and accurate. This data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only research staff will have access to this information. The data will be stored for 5 years, after which it will be destroyed. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. **Do you consent to me audio recording this interview as well as taking**

handwritten notes? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me using the contact details at York University I have provided.

Questions About the Research?: Professor Laam Hae is supervising the study, which has been approved by the Review of Ethics Board at York University in accordance with the Government of Canada Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct of Research. This statement is publicly available and can be viewed at: https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique_tcps2-eptc2_2018.html. (FRENCH WEBSITE FOR THE TRANSLATED VERSION.) If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, at York University. They can be reached by telephone at [number] or via e-mail at [email]. You may also contact me and/or Dr. Hae at the email addresses provided above.

If you are interested in receiving a copy of the research, in whole or in part, you may contact me at the email address above. I expect to have a full-final draft of the dissertation prepared [Date]. If you consent to participate in this research, please sign and date this form in the space provided below. If you are returning this form electronically, please write 'I consent to participate in your research' in the text of your email, with this form attached.

Appendix E – Participant information

Montréal

1. Benoît Larouche, Retired Political Science Professor at UOttawa, Interviewed November 17, 2021
2. Mark Clayton, Lawyer, Interviewed November 21, 2021
3. Irene Johntson, grew up in the Sud-Ouest and came back for her retirement, Interviewed November 26, 2021
4. Marie-Claude Rose, Founder and Coordinator of *Le Détour Épicerie Autogérée,* Interviewed November 26, 2021
5. Paul Laliberté, Retired Engineer, Interviewed November 27, 2021
6. Denis Gagnon, Construction worker, Interviewed December 2, 2021
7. Jean Lavoie, Handyman, Interviewed December 5, 2021
8. Luba Kolomycky, Civil servant for the city of Montréal, Interviewed December 14, 2021
9. Caroline Bruyère, PhD Candidate in archeology University College Dublin, Interviewed, December 15, 2021
10. Joseph André, Director of Little Burgundy's Athletic Centre, jonaInterviewed December 29, 2021
11. Francis Dolan, Community Organizer for the Regroupement Information Logement, Interviewed January 24, 2022
12. Jonathan Sirois, Community Organizer for the FRAPRU, Interviewed February 17, 2022
13. Jean-Claude Poitras, Associate TD Bank, Interviewed February 19, 2022
14. Jackie Andreoli, Coordinator at the Saint-Columba House, Interviewed March 3, 2022
15. Camilla Hassan, Street worker/finance coordinator for the civil organization Chez Doris. Interviewed August 21, 2022
16. Danielle Pagé, Retired, Interviewed June 12, 2023
17. Pierre Tougas, Retired, Interviewed June 12, 2023
18. Lisa Gravelle, Street worker/liaison for the *Café coop de L'itinéraire* in Cabot Square., Interviewed August 23, 2023
19. Jenny Parenteau, Accountant at Deloitte, Interviewed August 26, 2023
20. Maxime Gervais, Lawyer, Interviewed March 25, 2024

Not mentioned in the dissertation

21. Terry Chipman, Retired, Interviewed November 30, 2021
22. Cindy Taylor, Coordinator YMCA Westmount, Interviewed June 15, 2023

Belfast

1. Donal O'Cofaigh, Communication and Campaign Officer for Unite the Union Northern Ireland, Interviewed April 30, 2022
2. Robert Fitzpatrick, CEO of the Odyssey Trust, Interviewed on May 11, 2022
3. Patrick Abbott, Adviser for the East Belfast Independent Advice Centre, Interviewed on May 13, 2022
4. Jane Henderson, Former seamstress in East Belfast now retired, Interviewed May 14, 2022
5. Nicki McDowell, Marketing and Communications Executive for Titanic Quarter ltd., Interviewed on May 24, 2022
6. Joe Jordan, Development Manager for Titanic Quarter ltd., Interviewed on May 24, 2022
7. Brendan Donavan, Construction worker, Interviewed June 4, 2022
8. Kelly Donavan, Receptionist, Interviewed June 4, 2022
9. James Moore, Employee for the East Belfast Community Development Agency, Interviewed May 25, 2022
10. Peter Rooney, Former Machinery Operator for the H&W now retired, Interviewed May 29, 2022
11. Judith Kelly, Retired, Interviewed June 5, 2022
12. Celeste Jacobs, Resident of East Belfast, employment unknown, Interviewed June 5, 2022