



ARTICLE  
SPECIAL SECTION

# Constructing Local Belonging through Art and Activism in Context of Anti-Migration Politics, Stigmatisation and Gentrification: What Migration Studies can Learn from Belleville and Maddalena

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*Despite a decade of self-criticism, research perspectives on migration studies remain too often centred on national belonging (Glick Schiller & Çağlar 2011). Based on two empirical examples, self-organised fashion and music shows in Paris and Genoa, this article shows how “event lenses” can constructively replace “ethnic lenses” in the analysis of artistic practices that aim at changing political situations and living conditions. Wearing “event lenses” also helps us to question supposed homogeneities and to investigate common civic or political practices and interests by emphasizing multiple belonging processes in various social situations (Yuval-Davis et al. 2006, 7). I show how the research perspective of migration studies can be guided by the complexity of migrants’ multiple belongings and by situational analysis. The article presents results from my ERC project “ARTIVISM. Art and activism. Creativity and Performance as Subversive Forms of Political Expression in Super-Diverse Cities”, guided by an event-centred approach and multi-sensory audio-visual ethnography. The Parisian district of Belleville and the Maddalena district of Genoa suffer both from negative stigmatisations related to informal economical practices. I show how the super-diverse populations in these marginalised but gentrifying spaces creatively reverse xenophobic stigmata, by valorising their biographies and multiple belongings through fashion shows.*

## Introduction: Wearing “Event Lenses” Instead of “Ethnic Lenses”

Despite a decade of self-criticism, research perspectives on migration studies remain too often centred on national belonging (Glick Schiller & Çağlar 2011), which is only one aspect of multiple belonging processes. An exclusive focus on nationality reproduces methodological nationalism even in a transnational research setting and does not take into consideration how migrants manage to overcome those boundaries by creating local alliances thanks to their economic, political, social, and

cultural activities. Hence, social research on migration should implicate a profound reflection on sociological categories: Who defines who is a migrant and in which social situations? This question is particularly crucial during anti-migration politics, which often only concerns a specific type of migrants, depending on the economic, political, and social situation in the country in which the debate takes place. Expatriates are hardly concerned by certain stigmata and migrants who sustain the health

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sector are crucially needed, whereas refugees tend to be collectively rejected by populist governments and the press that supports their opinion.

This article provides a critical in-depth reflection on various ways of constructing local belonging through art and activism in a context of increasing anti-migration politics on a local, regional, and national level. Based on field studies conducted in Belleville (a district in Paris/France) and Maddalena La Superba (a district in Genoa/Italy), I will show how "event lenses" can constructively replace "ethnic lenses"<sup>1</sup> in the analysis of artistic practices that aim at changing political situations and living conditions. Wearing "event lenses" also helps us to question supposed homogeneities and to investigate common civic or political practices and interests by emphasizing multiple belonging processes in various social situations (Yuval-Davis et al. 2006, 7). As stated in Yuval-Davis et al. (2006), "Citizenship and identities, as well as 'cultures and traditions'—in fact all signifiers of borders and boundaries play central roles in discourses of the politics of belonging" (3). Politics of belonging are situated temporally, spatially, and intersectionally (2006, 7).

According to Lamont & Molnar (2002), "Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality. Examining them allows us to capture the dynamic dimensions of social relations, as groups compete in the production, diffusion, and institutionalization of alternative systems and principles of classifications. Social boundaries are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities" (168).

As I have mentioned in my ERC ARTIVISM project proposal as well as in a recently published epistemological article:

[a]rtistic expressions that illustrate political claims and demands for civil rights "become manifest in political, cultural, organised or spontaneous events celebrating belonging and non-belonging by "means of performance" [Pfaff 2011]. Typically, such events are carnivals [Salzbrunn 2011c, 2014], festivals [Salzbrunn 2011a, 2011d; Salzbrunn & von Weichs 2013], pilgrimages [Salzbrunn & von Weichs 2013], assemblies, and demonstrations. Events are therefore particularly suitable entry-points to the field of art and activism and to the public space that is appropriated by marginalised social actors and collective groups" [Salzbrunn 2010a, 2011a].

Furthermore, researching art and activism through events helps to avoid a limited perspective on pre-defined groups and widens the horizon to broader forms of

participation, including spontaneous, punctual or changing ways to join artist actions. A focus on events, combined with situational analysis and consideration of multiple forms of belonging [Yuval-Davis et al. 2006] also avoids reducing artists to a single cause since in many cases, several events mingle different issues and/or an individual can be engaged or sympathize with various causes (antifascism, environmental issues, feminism, LGBTQI+, education, anti-gentrification and anti-touristification claims, etc.). Nevertheless, the understanding of events created by artists also requires an in-depth understanding of their life-worlds through a share of everyday-life in a long-term research setting. (Salzbrunn 2021, 179-180)

When belonging is expressed through music, clothes and food, it expresses feelings and emotions. In the ERC project "ARTIVISM. Art and activism. Creativity and Performance as Subversive Forms of Political Expression in Super-Diverse Cities",<sup>2</sup> we have developed an event-centred approach and applied multi-sensory ethnography to various fields in Africa, America, and Europe (Salzbrunn 2015, 2016, 2021; Amiotte-Suchet & Salzbrunn 2019).

The events I will analyse, with their preparatory phases, their performativity (Turner 1988), their disruptive elements, and their post-phase can be considered as part of a general struggle for recognition (Fraser 1995). Each actor gives a particular meaning (Deleuze 1969) to her/his performances in a certain context (Rogers & Vertovec 1995) and in a given social situation (Clarke 2005), which in our case is during the fashion show. The study of the event allows us to observe how strategic groups emerge around a common political goal (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 1998) and a common political strategy. Finally, focusing the performativity of the events allows us to understand their interactive and transformative effects in the construction of symbolic boundaries of belonging.

Wearing "event lenses" instead of "ethnic lenses" also helps us to question supposed homogeneities and to investigate common civic or political practices and interests by emphasizing multiple belonging processes in various social situations. Following Yuval-Davis', Kannabiran's and Viethen's approach on the politics of belonging (2006, 7), boundaries need to be researched situationally, taking into consideration the space where they manifest and the way race, class, and gender are articulated. When belonging is communicated through music, clothes, and food, it expresses feelings and emotions. In the same way, belonging touches multiple senses, which requires the innovation of adequate methods like multisensory ethnography (Pink 2009). Hence, thick descriptions should include all kinds of sensory experiences (touch, smell, see, hear, taste).

These are considerably under-researched topics in migration and diaspora studies despite the emotional or affective turn which the social sciences are currently

undergoing (Bens et al. 2019). Furthermore, artistic practices in super-diverse societies (Vertovec 2011) remain a topic urgently needing more profound exploration after the pioneering works of Martiniello and Lafleur (Martiniello 2008; Martiniello & Lafleur 2009). The main epistemological challenge is to research super-diversity and multiple belonging without reifying individuals or groups to one single aspect (ethnicity, religion, etc.). Focusing on events in specific urban settings allows us to enter the field with an extremely open and wide perspective, and to observe which "politics of belonging" (Yuval-Davis et al. 2006) are performed in an interactive boundary-construction work.

Following the event-centred approach developed in previous publications, I will focus here on fashion shows in Genoa and Paris, organised by the local population in order to reverse stigmata. The Parisian district of Belleville and the Maddalena district of Genoa both suffer from negative stigmatisations related to informal economical practices (prostitution, drug dealing etc.). Furthermore, they are both part of top-down and bottom-up gentrification processes. For example, While the historical center hosts a larger immigrant population than other districts, its percentage of residents with a university diploma is also higher than elsewhere. This complex social stratification can also be observed vertically: In certain streets, the dark ground floor apartments are occupied by prostitutes while the sunny upper floor penthouses with rooftop terraces are owned by a wealthy educated population.

This situation puts into question the socio-cultural dynamics of the district which threaten certain residents with low income and/or a fragile juridical status. How does the super-diverse<sup>3</sup> population in these spaces react to these political economic processes in a context of growing extreme-right discourses or, in the case of Genoa, of populist and extreme-right governments with anti-migration and/or anti-refugee discourses and restrictive politics at the local, regional and national<sup>4</sup> level? In this context, populist discourses contribute to construct symbolic borders between desired foreigners (expatriates, tourists, etc.) and undesired immigrants, namely refugees.

Stigmatising articles associating Senegalese nationals to drug sales have appeared in the Italian press in recent years, particularly through news agencies. The xenophobic discourses of the Italian Minister for Interior Affairs in 2018 have also contributed to dissemination of racism and to downgrade refugees. Only recently and in another locality, the difficulties of the many Senegalese street vendors suffering from circulation restrictions due to the coronavirus were subject to a more benevolent article (ANSA Press Agency 2020).

We will see below how the local population valorised their biographies and multiple belongings in this context, as a creative response to excluding and shifting border

politics on a local, regional and national level (Shachar 2020). Independently, in both districts, the idea of reversing the stigma through a fashion show was born. The show valorises diversity and gives a positive image about the super-diverse population and its fashion-economy. Both studies provide insights on the way art and activism can create local belonging in a context of growing xenophobia.

Based on these empirical examples, I will show how the research perspective of migration studies can be guided by the complexity of migrants' multiple belongings and by situational analysis. This approach can become a productive advance for migration studies as well as for general social theory.

### **Migration and Diversity in Genoa in a Context of Xenophobic Politics**

When I arrived in Genoa in Autumn 2017 to carry out a long-term research project on art and activism, I was struck by the very negative headlines in the local press about the Senegalese population, which was described as a "mafia" flooding the streets of the old city with "crack" (Fregatti & Indice 2017). Having worked for some twenty years on the political-religious networks of Senegalese people and their translocal roots in Senegal, Europe, and the United States, I noted a particularly negative media coverage in Italy, which contrasts with the excellent image that the Senegalese immigrants enjoy in New York (Salzbrunn 2004; 2016) or those that they build up of themselves by performing publicly their religious practices in Geneva (Salzbrunn 2017). From the beginning, I was thus led to rethink the local, regional, and national logics of performances in a context of growing xenophobia. Moreover, the stigmatisation observed concerned not only groups of people, but also an entire district, the centro storico, one of the largest remaining historic centres in Europe, and more particularly the area known as the Maddalena. Having initially chosen the city of Genoa as one of the areas to be covered as part of my ERC ARTIVISM project, the discovery of the different representations circulating on the Maddalena, a neighbourhood that embodies all the diversity of Genoa's residents, thus echoed another project carried out in Paris, with the representation of oneself and others during public events, as a common issue. I wanted to understand how residents of these neighbourhoods dealt with and returned the stigma of being different, outside their country of origin (Goffman 1963). One way of returning these stigmata was the positive, joyful performance of difference *and* commonality during fashion shows in Paris and Genoa.

In these French and Italian "super-diverse" cities (Vertovec 2007), characterized by a diversity of social, economic, and legal statuses, as well as a high number of countries of origin of the residents, I followed the organisation<sup>5</sup> of fashion shows in working-class

neighbourhoods with a very rich history of migration. The use of visual methods allowed me to analyse how body language reflects a process of empowerment during the self-presentation in the preparatory phase (documented by filmed interviews) and at the time of the fashion show. In Paris, in the Sainte-Marthe district, the Senegalese designer Sadio Bee launched his "Mix-Tissages" collection using both professional models and neighbours from various countries. In the Maddalena district of Genoa, a group of Ivorian, Senegalese, and Ligurian tailors, in collaboration with vintage shop owners, organised three fashion shows in order to reverse the stigma of delinquency that weighs on this district and on some residents, especially those from sub-Saharan Africa. In contrast to the latter, residents of Latin American origin (of which Ecuadorians are by far the largest group) are more positively represented and even have a dedicated page in Spanish in the daily newspaper *Il Secolo XIX*.

In the framework of our project, we followed how the actors valorise their respective migratory journeys, both through discourses in front of the camera and symbolically, using fabrics, cuts, and make-up that refer to multiple affiliations (Yuval-Davis et al. 2006). Each actor gives a particular meaning (Deleuze 1969) to his or her performance (Butler 1993) in a certain context (Rogers & Vertovec 1995) and in a given social situation (Clarke 2005). The encounters and filming before and during the event, carried out interactively with the actors and actresses, allows us to capture as many nuances as possible in the staging of oneself, one's body, and one's trajectory (Salzbrunn 2020). When I wrote the project, I focused on art and activism, knowing that Genoa was one of the most interesting cities, not yet "museified" and damaged by mass tourism. However, the event analysed here, the *Défilé Maddalena*, was created after I received funding. The very open event- and space-centred approach allowed me to integrate this event in the research setting. Together with a key actor whom I met at the beginning of my fieldwork, we have conducted interviews as well as informal talks, lived and gathered in the district during the whole year (and during follow-up stays over five years).

We will see further on how the proud, valorising posture of the tailors and mannequins, in search of recognition, contrasts with the images disseminated by the local Genoese media (*Il Secolo XIX* newspaper) and some Italian media and discourse on migration, particularly from Senegal.

### **Accessing Migration and Diversity through Public Events**

Despite a decade of self-criticism, research perspectives on migration studies remain too often centred on national belonging (Glick Schiller & Çağlar 2011), which is only one aspect of multiple belonging processes. This

aspect is often over-exploited in excluding migration politics, for example, by selecting nationalities that merit protection and those that are considered 'safe countries'. Nationalities are excluded independently of the particular situation of the refugee or migrant.

We propose an alternative by starting our research in specific places, during specific events, applying a much-needed return to situational analysis (Rogers & Vertovec 1995; Clarke 2005). The focus on religious (Salzbrunn 2017), political, and/or artistic practices in a specific social situation instead of focusing a pre-defined group reduced to one aspect of belonging provides a constructive answer to the (self-)critiques expressed against (trans)nationalism. Hence, we study artistic performances as social statements and vehicles for claims. In particular, we study two fashion shows translocally, taking into consideration each specific context and changing opportunity structures and following our definition of translocal social spaces as those that result from new forms of delimitation that consist of but also reach beyond geographic or national boundaries. These spaces become the new sources of identification and action within specific local and global reference systems (Salzbrunn 2011a, 171). For instance, several inhabitants of La Maddalena have strong connections to the district of La Plaine in Marseille and express a certain form of belonging to these protective micro-spaces of solidarity, rather than to a national reference. In the Parisian district of Sainte Marthe, part of Belleville, a long-term immigrant said during a participative Conseil de Quartier Meeting "I don't know if you can ever become French but you can become Bellevillois". This means that you can feel like a local and be perceived as such, independently of your origin. Nevertheless, the local dynamics, thanks to a diverse population, have another side of the coin. In a context of increasing gentrification and restructuring processes of localities, diverse actors contribute actively or "malgré eux" to rescaling cities or districts (Glick Schiller & Çağlar 2011; Salzbrunn 2011).

### **The Hidden and the Public Transcript: Resistance to Anti-Migration Politics**

In the context of domination, actors develop "the arts of resistance" through hidden transcripts (Scott 1990). Confrontations between the powerless and the powerful are laden with deception—refugees without a legal status are not free to speak up in the presence of State power because they risk being arrested. These subordinate groups instead create a secret discourse that represents a critique of power spoken behind the backs of the dominant. Speaking up publicly is rather possible collectively, during events, when the massive presence of actors and supporting media protects them from abuse. At the same time, the powerful also develop a private dialogue about practices and goals of their rule that cannot be openly avowed.

Scott's (1990) notion of (hidden and public) "transcripts" represent established ways of behaving and speaking that fit particular actors in particular social settings, whether dominant or oppressed. Resistance is a subtle form of contesting "public transcripts" by making use of prescribed roles and language to resist the abuse of power, including things like "rumour, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures, anonymity" (137). These methods are particularly effective in situations where violence is used to maintain the status quo, allowing "a veiled discourse of dignity and self-assertion within the public transcript... in which ideological resistance is disguised, muted and veiled for safety's sake" (ibid). These forms of resistance require little coordination or planning and are used by both individuals and groups to resist without directly confronting or challenging elite norms. Individuals subject to racism have to deal with downgrading attitudes and, in case their legal status is fragile, with a continuous threat of being imprisoned and sent to their country of origin. Those who benefit from a secure legal status still have to cope with non-verbal and verbal signs of exclusion and therefore desire to return these stigmas through counter-performances. Being physically present within the public space as an undocumented migrant represents a symbolic transgression of borders, since they have been shifted from frontiers to the inner territory (Shachar 2020).

As part of the two research projects dealt with in this text, I filmed the events and the event preparation, as well as the actors' general reflections on the context and their biographical trajectory. Moreover, in both cases, the fashion shows were nowhere to be found in my research projects for the simple reason that they were invented after the start of the project. What interested me in the ARTIVISM project, in the wake of Richard Schechner (2013, 127), was performativity, "the human capacity to behave reflexively, playfully", using art as a means of political expression and resistance. It is therefore necessary to remain open to the unexpected, to surprises, to the instinct and emotions that also guide our work, since it is essential to follow the actors' creativity in resisting against the actual political power.

In our latest book (Amiotte-Suchet & Salzbrunn 2019), we discussed different ways of dealing with 'the (un) foreseeable event', following my earlier proposal to focus research on an event that takes place in an (urban) space rather than starting from a group (pre-) defined by the researcher (Salzbrunn 2015, 2017, 2021). This approach, which takes the event, organised and/or disruptive, as a starting point, allows us to observe the ways in which the actors stage their multiple affiliations, among which origin can play a role. It should be noted straight away that nationality, religion, or migratory background do not necessarily come into play in the social situation observed. We shall see later on that migration is not always the subject of discussion as such, since we wanted to avoid opening the exchange with

this subject. Indeed, the people filmed emphasise more spontaneously their belonging to their neighbourhood of residence as well as their professional skills and spoke less about their past migratory trajectory. The research therefore focuses on political commitment and the expression of local belonging as well as on the unifying event that is being prepared. This does not exclude to notice the way in which other affiliations are staged (through make-up, fabrics, body language, etc.). Those interactive performances include a play with symbolic boundaries of belonging such as expressing bodily signs of community-building through make-up or dance.

Following the internal dynamics of the event and the speeches of the people involved, I did not focus my shots and my questions around the national origin. As we will see later, multiple belonging (particularly the Senegalese origin of some of the tailors) can be mentioned but it is always in relation to the neighbourhood, the profession, and the event. During the latter, the symbolic border is around the local district of La Maddalena: as engaged activists, residents or friends of the community, the protagonists belong to this place, regardless of their legal status.

Although daily life is peaceful in these two neighbourhoods, which function as micro-spaces of solidarity, the general atmosphere towards certain categories of people, conveyed through a significant part of the media, has a negative impact on the self-esteem of the people I met. They all made a clear difference between self-help, solidarity, and the feeling of living in an urban village in everyday life and the feeling of suffering from negative and devaluing, even criminalising stereotypes outside this microcosm. The second part of this article goes more into detail about these representations of self and others, on two ethnographic terrains in Paris and Genoa.

### **Staging Diversity through Mixed-Tissues Fashion Shows in Paris**

I came to the decision to work on the Parisian district of Sainte-Marthe at the end of the 1990s. I was writing my thesis on a completely different subject and I heard live music from my balcony so I decide to follow it. As I walked down the street, I soon realised that this music was intended to represent the migrations and diversity of the neighbourhood's inhabitants, in images and sounds, and was part of a struggle to save the human and material aspects of the neighbourhood, which was threatened with destruction. In the 1980s and 1990s, several districts of the former village of Belleville, now located in the 19th and 20th arrondissements of Paris, were largely destroyed in favour of the construction of housing (social, intermediate, and owner-occupied) with six or more floors. The argument of insalubrity was a recurrent justification for this destruction, in addition to the stigma of (petty) crime that weighed on these socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

I reproduce here field notes and an analysis carried out from 1998 until the 2010 years, before moving on to the interview with the Senegalese fashion designer Sadio Bee, carried out a few years later in this same district. In Sainte-Marthe, I did all the image and sound shots alone, having been for a dozen years both a researcher and a resident.

One Sunday in April 2010 in the north-east of Paris: from afar, you can hear a guitar and a djembe accompanying a Malian singer. Closer up, you can hear the laughter of children taking part in the painting workshop set up on the Place Sainte-Marthe, in the 10th arrondissement, near the Belleville metro station. In a corner of this picturesque square, which looks like a provincial village centre, potted flowers are waiting to be bought by neighbours who want to embellish their balconies and brighten up the neighbourhood. Next to the flowers, a large stand, run by the association Les Quatre Horizons, offers visitors oriental pastries, tabbouleh, pancakes and mint tea. In a neighbouring street, rue du Chalet, a renovated industrial premise hosts the summer collection of the Senegalese designer Sadio Bee. The latter will present his latest creations during a fashion show in the square. At one of the corners of the square, on the walls of the building of the evangelical mission that welcomes the homeless, are glued the children's paintings: a picture shows a young girl in a yellow dress greeting the visitor, next to her is an elegant silhouette of an adult woman doing the same gesture—except for one detail, she is wearing the Niqab, the full veil. A neighbouring drawing shows linked lines representing a root—the child has added the caption "we all come from the same root". It is the spring festival in Sainte-Marthe, organised by the president of the association Les Quatre Horizons, in collaboration with a theatre programmer, a music producer and an artist. (Salzbrunn 2010b, fieldnotes, 25 April 2010)

The association Les Quatre Horizons, as its name suggests, presents a whole programme, which is eminently political, as it strives not only to safeguard the architectural heritage but also to maintain social and cultural diversity. Its logo consists of an image of planet Earth around which four children hold hands: one of the children is of Asian descent, the other wears a cap and is dark-skinned, the third has a dark brown complexion and wears a long ponytail, and the fourth is lighter-skinned. This image is in fact an enhancement of the origins of the inhabitants. The festive events organised by Les Quatre Horizons follow this logic of representing otherness through the music styles selected, the dishes and pastries sold, and the decorative elements (notably the fabrics) chosen to embellish the stands. This staging of diversity and difference leads to essentialisations as well as hybridizations on the part of various actors. Thus, the president, of Algerian origin, was subjected to exclusionary remarks such as, "this is not Algeria here" after proposing a menu composed of couscous méchoui

and tabbouleh (Salzbrunn 2011b)—although couscous is now the most popular dish in France. I come back later to Sadio Bee, a tailor who expresses hybridisation through his trademark, "MixTissage", by combining fabrics from different origins. The name is a plaidoyer to overcome boundaries.

In addition to this, the content of the musical messages partly refers to contemporary debates on the colonial era or on slavery. These political elements contained in the musical performance are also expressed in the choice of instruments: the Caribbean group "Alonzidon" used moulds on several occasions during the festivities in St. Marthe's Square, which were used to transmit encrypted messages during the colonial era. During the performance, the leader of the group explained the principle of sending subversive information that was illegible to the coloniser.

The fashion show of Senegalese designer Sadio Bee, who has his studio in the rue Sainte Marthe, is part of one of the many festivals organised throughout the year (Spring Festival, Music Festival on 21 June, Giant Couscous in July, Back to School Festival in September, and the Storytelling Night in winter to name a few). As the name of his "Mix-Tissage" collection indicates, the combination of fabrics of different materials, origins, colours, patterns, and weaves is his trademark. Moreover, diversity is also expressed voluntarily through the choice of models, most of whom are amateurs (some of whom live in the neighbourhood). Sadio Bee alternates models appearing alone with pairs, often composed of a woman and a man, of different phenotypes. He would illustrate great diversity by pairing different couples together such as a blonde woman with a young black man from West Africa or a woman of Asian origin with a European man. A group of percussionists playing the djembe accompanies the parade. On its website, which has just been completely redesigned, there are still mannequins of different origins wearing her creations. The latest photos were taken in the rue Sainte-Marthe, in front of the colourful shops and restaurants.

As Getrud Lehnert (2013, 8) points out, clothing must be staged and performed in order to become fashion. Sadio Bee has chosen the environment of the aesthetic and material creation of the clothes—the street in front of his workshop—to showcase his collection. For some years now, this area has been not only his workplace but also his living space. In an interview I conducted for my film *Sainte-Marthe en fêtes* (Salzbrunn 2015), he explains what he likes about this place:

It's a neighbourhood that I like very much because it's mixed, it's blended, and to see these colours is pleasant. It reminds me a bit of my neighbourhood, where I was born and grew up in Senegal. You have the same movements, the same atmospheres, the same colours and that's why I love this neighbourhood, I love this street. It's full of artists, full of bars, you can really feel

good. You feel at home. (Extract from the film *Sainte-Marthe en fêtes* by Monika Salzbrunn, minute 32)

The diversity of colours relates not only to the origins of the inhabitants and the many arts and crafts represented, but also, from a purely aesthetic point of view, to the architecture: the colourful facades of the shops, craft workshops, restaurants, bars, and dwellings in this district. Thanks to the staging of this diversity through the celebrations organised by the association *Les Quatre Horizons* (which also made it its programme) and thanks to the latter’s militant work with the *Saint-Louis Sainte-Marthe* association, the district was saved from destruction. The overall political situation (favourable to the staging and marketing of diversity) and the political victory of the left in Paris in 2001 (which had appropriated many rehabilitation projects, particularly in north-east Paris where the left had controlled the 10th district since 1995) made it possible to enhance the diversity of its inhabitants, which had previously been depreciated or left indifferent. The multicultural environment has even been used by real estate agents or restaurant owners as a sales and consumption argument to promote the district and their businesses. Finally, due to its long history of immigration and the resulting social, linguistic, and religious diversity, the *Belleville* neighbourhood as a whole has been a much followed research topic for two decades (Simon et al. 2000; De Villanova & Deboulet 2011; Salzbrunn 2011a & 2011b; Raulin et al. 2016). The tension between the commercial valorisation of diversity and the destruction of its social and economic bases is addressed in particular through the rise in rents and consumer prices leading first to the exclusion of the inhabitants of certain bars and restaurants and then to their eviction to outlying districts or departments.

In the case of *Sainte-Marthe*, the performance of diversity is not only a performance of desired living conditions, in the sense of Butler (1993), but above all the staging of a proudly lived reality: in the 10th *arrondissement* of Paris 16% of residents have a foreign nationality, while this proportion reaches 28% in the *Sainte-Marthe* neighbourhood (l’INSEE 2016; City of Paris 2020). As Deleuze (1969) reminds us, each actor gives a particular meaning to his or her performance: here, Sadio Bee tells how much and why he feels at home. His mannequins, with their multiple colours and weaves, parade in different pairs to represent a diversity of styles, couples, and origins. This performance of diversity is both an individual and collective semantics in that it embodies a real political counter-project: the residents, workers, and shopkeepers of this neighbourhood want it to be maintained, not only architecturally, but above all sociologically. The fear that renovation rhymes with destruction and expulsion of the most fragile people has been the driving force behind a common struggle to safeguard the human and architectural heritage. As I have shown elsewhere (Salzbrunn 2011a; 2011b), the struggle was far from peaceful and unanimous,

and the joy of the victory was short-lived, because the enhancement of the district has had its price in terms of day and night life, much more expensive than before. The enhancement of the material and cultural heritage has thus had the unintended consequence, for most of the players, of accelerating the gentrification process. The enhancement of the district through cultural events such as the “*MixTissage*” fashion show and the conduct of several OPAHs (Programmed Housing Improvement Operation) has therefore made it more attractive to tourists and developers. The *Société immobilière de Normandie* (SIN), owner of a very large part of the housing and shops in *Sainte-Marthe* and *Jean Moinon* streets, has been put up for sale in November 2019, which potentially weakens the tenants.

The monitoring of politico-artistic struggles, including the fashion show around Sadio Bee’s creations, revealed that migration and origins—in the national and even nationalist sense—play a minor role. They are highlighted collectively in order to defend the common living space and thus contribute to turning around the stigma that weighs on certain populations. In the second empirical example, I show how this reversal of stigma occurred in the Genoese district of *La Maddalena*.

### **Défilé La Maddalena Genoa: Transforming Legal and Social Orders through a Fashion Show**

The Genoese district of *La Maddalena*, near the port, has some similarities with the Parisian district of *Sainte-Marthe*. It too is marked by a very large diversity of its population, the highest in the city. In the larger *Centro Est* district to which *La Maddalena* belongs, only 12.1% of the residents have a foreign nationality. According to the statistical atlas of the city from 2008, more detailed, the district of *La Maddalena* hosts 21.3% of foreign residents (Comune di Genova 2021). Like *Sainte-Marthe*, located in the same district as two large Parisian railway stations, and therefore historically linked to the immigration which has spread around the transport nodes, *La Maddalena* has seen the settlement of workers from the nearby port as well as from all the industry and business, both formal and informal, found in the port cities. Today, *La Maddalena*, which is part of the *centro storico*, the largest old town in Europe. As the tourist office likes to remind us, this area also has the highest percentage of inhabitants with university degrees. In this sense, it already reflects a process of gentrification of which artists and intellectuals are the ambiguous precursors. However, real estate pressure is less in *Genoa* because, over recent decades, the city’s population has decreased by 30%. Specifically, from 1971 to 2019 the population decreased from 816,872 inhabitants to only 565,752 (Comune di Genova 2021). This change can be attributed to demographic reasons and because of the decline in the local (steel) industries which left dozens of dwellings vacant and/or occupied by people living in

precarious conditions. Indeed, Genoa is not only named "La Superba", but also the "South of the North" since it has the lowest birth rate and the highest rate of elderly residents (Comune di Genova 2021).

As I pointed out at the beginning of this article, the image of La Maddalena is being mishandled by the local press, who regularly blames the "Senegalese mafia" for flooding the neighbourhood with drugs along with other negative claims. At the entrance to one of the streets leading to the centro storico, there are still remnants of a warning addressed to soldiers dating back to the Second World War warning them against sexual diseases transmitted by prostitutes as well as against the general violence in the area. Some contemporary tourist guides also warn of the risks of walking through the small lanes, some of which are almost too narrow to let more than two people through. These material and discursive border signs have discouraged tourists and residents in the wealthier outskirts from going in to certain parts of the historical centre.

The refugees who reside in this district have a temporary permit if they are still waiting for the decision made on their application for asylum. If their claim is rejected, they perceive national borders everywhere: even though they had managed to cross national borders, the shift of border controls to the interior territory threatens them daily (Shachar 2020). Therefore, the local network of solidarity who includes them in their activist events allows them to feel an emotional and morally legitimate belonging to this place. The new right-wing municipal team, elected after decades of left-wing domination in 2017, has "militarised" the historic centre in response to security concerns. On the other hand, more and more groups of cruise tourists are passing through the historic centre due to its proximity to Via Garibaldi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site with many museums and palaces from the Renaissance period.

As in Sainte-Marthe, there are many craftsmen's workshops in La Maddalena, including a dozen or so dressmakers of West African (Senegal, but also Ivory Coast) and Ligurian origin. In addition, a number of vintage shops have opened, working for charities or individuals and catering to a wide variety of customers in terms of purchasing power. In 2017, the designers and managers had the idea of getting together to organise a fashion show on Maddalena Street, which runs through the neighbourhood. One of the motivations was the desire to turn around the stigma of crime and danger that weighs on the neighbourhood, and to value the diversity of its residents, regardless of their origin, status, or social class. I followed the preparations for the second Maddalena parade in Genoa, which took place in autumn 2017, with Raphaëla von Weichs (the senior researcher of the ERC ARTIVISM project) and Pascal Bernhardt (a Frenchman living in Genoa, who was working as a cameraman on our team at that time).

Having arrived in Genoa to work on art and activism, and having chosen to leave as much room as possible for surprises, discoveries, and the unexpected, I quickly came across the existence of this fashion show. From the outset, it seemed to me to be a form of political performance, a staging of self and otherness, a way of staging diversity and commonality (the common point of being attached to this neighbourhood, whatever the reasons). As Lehnert (2013) points out, what happens at the moment of the staging of the clothes by the body or of the bodies by the clothes. According to her, fashion clothing changes the body and produces new bodies, the fashion bodies, which are neither just clothes nor just wearers of clothes. The transformative power of this experience has been expressed by several participants, as I will show below. Namely, it legitimizes their presence within this space, during the event, regardless of their legal status.

During the preparatory shots, we asked the models, none of whom were professionals, what effect the covering of these clothes had on them. After putting on a silk suit from the 1960s, one young man of North African origin who had had a few setbacks in his adolescence replied, "it makes me feel important". The camera allowed us to observe the way his body straightened up and stretched out until he reached a proud, dignified, and respected posture. The young man gradually inhabited his clothing, blending in with the symbolism of the important person, with responsibilities that emanated from the very materiality of the costume: the shirt, the scarf, the jacket, the trousers and so on. All the experiences of rejection, of the depreciation he had been subjected to at times during his youth, seemed to have faded behind the joy of wearing a signifier representing another status. The exchange took place in great complicity with the cameraman who, having seen the young man evolve, shared his pride in having overcome his difficulties, and in embodying his success through this precious costume. Another actor in the situation, Patrick, a former political refugee and well known in this neighbourhood for his generosity, also radiated joy and pride, telling the camera "I am very happy that I am in Italy and that I am in Genoa", then declaring his love "more than anything" for the neighbourhood, La Maddalena. Patrick has lost an arm but is now used to doing most tasks with one hand. On the way to the parade catwalk he wore a jacket, but took it off on the way back so that his missing arm was visible. Applauded very warmly during his appearance, kissed by the next mannequin, he had a very moving moment.

Later on, Cheikh, the Senegalese boss of a sewing workshop, proudly retraced the 24-year long migratory trajectory of his family of dressmakers: Senegal, Ivory Coast, Italy. For him, the fashion show was above all else an opportunity to show his creations to everyone. We filmed Cheikh in his workshop, while he was working concentrated on a costume:

It's a job I grew up with. It's now been 28 years in the trade. I started in our country, Senegal, and I did it in many African countries before coming here. We did it in Mali, we even had a sewing workshop there. We did it in Togo, Nigeria, Cameroon, we did it in many countries. In Africa, everyone can see that this is Senegalese work. (Bernhardt & Salzbrunn 2018)

Sambou, who at the time had worked in Italy for two years and six months, has been trained in Senegal and in Italy. He has just opened his second tailor workshop and store. Reflecting on the parade he said:

It suits us well, really, through this we can show our product to everybody... We are happy with this, because we had already done it once, and we can see that it has brought us customers and relations, really, and it makes this via, which is Via della Maddalena, become alive too. Really, it's good. (Bernhardt & Salzbrunn 2018)

As one of the motivations of the people gathered around the idea of the parade was to value the sewing work, the common trade emerged as a rallying point, more important than the origins or religious affiliations of people who do not appear as such during the event. They were nevertheless mentioned when we conducted interviews with the tailor Cheikh. The question of religious practices was raised in the spring of 2019 when the parade fell during Ramadan. Enthusiasm for maintaining the public showcase of these creations eventually outweighed the criticism of the choice of date. On the other hand, a critical attitude towards the globalised fashion industry and in favour of local creations and second-hand circuits brought the participants together.

Just as the individual shots triggered statements about the way body and mind inhabit clothing, the shots of the event itself reinforced the staging of the self. Dances, acrobatics, exotic make-up with white strokes on the cheeks, all kinds of gestures of joy and greetings were performed theatrically by all the residents and friends of the neighbourhood who were transformed into daytime models. Certain participants had painted their faces, referring to West-African patterns. Others have presented vintage clothes in order to critique consumerism and the capitalist fashion industry.

In the end, a strong point emerged as the representation of oneself, of one's attachment to the district, to the locality—a much more important aspect than the performance of the origins, which was rather emphasised during the interviews in preparation for the parade. Nevertheless, throughout the filming process (interviews, preparations, catwalk) there was a tangle of national and local references within the staging of hybrid elements. Vintage clothes were highlighted as well as contemporary creations, similar to Sadio Bee's, which combined patterns common in Europe with pieces of Malian fabrics or wax. In the memory of the inhabitants,

this event strengthened the ties between the people and the neighbourhood, as well as the inhabitants' feelings of attachment towards the neighbourhood. Living and performing with the joy and pride of being a participant in the parade of a day in the La Maddalena district allows one to affirm one's place in this place, which is particularly important for people subject to the growing racism in Italy, especially (former) refugees, many of whom took part in the parade. The reinforcement of the attachment to the local community strengthens local borders and allows to cross national borders situationally, during the activist event. The othering process does not implicate the criterium of nationality, but belonging to the place. In this context, cruise-ship-tourists or bourgeois residents from the outskirts are clearly those who do not belong to the place and are the object of jokes or disregard. A collective place-making process goes along with the reinforcement of internal borders (of the activists' community) during an interactive boundary-making process with those outside (tourists and wealthy residents from the outskirts).

## Conclusion

In general, the event approach of the ERC ARTIVISM project, starting from events within the urban space in order to grasp how art is mobilised as a political act, made it possible to avoid the trap of groupism denounced by Brubaker (2006), or that of the reproduction of methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002) by the very conception of a research project. Arriving in a field to understand what is at stake requires accompanying residents and craftspeople in their daily concerns and activities (Fontorbes & Granié 2018), in order to understand the local issues: on the one hand, the safeguarding of the architectural and human heritage in all its diversity and, on the other hand, the promotion of local craftsmanship, alternative economic models, and the reversal of stigmas based on the origin of residents. In both cases, representations of migration were performed implicitly through make-up and fabrics during the event, but sometimes explicitly mentioned during the interviews: diversity was valued, staged, but in a playful and theatrical way (through make-up, dance steps and fabrics combined) and rarely in an essential and reifying way. The playful way of playing with fabrics and make-up is a way of returning the stigma that weighs on these two neighbourhoods and on some residents, who are sometimes insulted on the basis of their respective origins. In other (rare) cases, such as that of the Senegalese tailor Cheikh who talks about his migratory trajectory, the know-how of a profession (tailor) has been proudly linked to a country (Senegal). This appreciation of one's own origins does not exclude a strong attachment to the current neighbourhood of residence or cooperation with tailors from Ivory Coast and Liguria, working in the same neighbourhood. The analysis of individual life-courses, day-to-day routines in a specific urban setting as well as the planning and

conducting of events has allowed me to grasp the complexity of multiple belonging processes and their performativity.

Working with the camera on events also made it possible to highlight the transformation of the filmed people's body postures at the time of dressing in Genoa. The straightening that took place the moment when the garment and the wearer became one, transforming themselves for this very special fashion show, is striking. Finally, the camera as a research tool triggered deliberately accentuated performances at the time of the events, especially the fashion shows, but also during the interviews. Thus, the filmed people became actors and actresses, co-producers of the images that circulated about them. In a context of stigmatisation and rejection of entire urban neighbourhoods and/or of the population living there, conveyed by the media, especially since the strong increase in the influence and political responsibility of the extreme right in Italy but also in some places in France, the desire to return the stigma, especially by enhancing their particular creative potential through fashion, is greater than ever among the target people. Talking about professional trajectories, as the Senegalese tailor does in a context of stigmatisation linked to the drug trade in the neighbourhood where he works, is a way of counter-performing the self-image in the individual sense, but also collectively, because not only has the Maddalena neighbourhood been negatively connoted by the local press, but also "the Senegalese". The camera thus reinforced the staging of self and solidarity around a common political objective. Being a community in front of the camera and being aware of the stakes involved in media coverage is part of this media battle of which we researchers are part.

Throughout the whole research process, event lenses have replaced ethnic lenses in order to leave a maximum degree of liberty to the expression of individual and collective dynamics which are staged during public performances as well as during individual filmed interviews and informal talks. Triangulating various methods allowed us to study these belonging processes situationally, and to understand their interactive and performative articulation.

During the above studied fashion shows, belonging to a circumscribed local territory have been performed. Refugees who are vulnerable because of their status could cross physical and symbolic borders, feeling legitimate on the local territory. The attachment to those districts had an empowering effect on them. Nevertheless, it does not prevent them from feeling excluded from other urban or regional public spaces, where boundaries are interactively constructed with regard to skin colour, economic or symbolic capital and legal status, so that intersectional exclusion process are still ongoing.

## Notes

- 1 On the critique of "ethnic lenses" see Nina Glick Schiller and Ayse Çağlar's constructive suggestions on "Locating Migration" (2011). Rogers Brubaker (2006) also criticised "groupism" in social sciences.
- 2 This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (ARTIVISM—grant agreement No 681880). I would like to express my deepest thanks to my interlocutors in Genoa and Paris who generously offered their time. The present text benefited a great deal from stimulating discussions with Catherine Delcroix who invited me to address the keynote during the ESA Sociology of Migration meeting in Strasbourg, peer speaker Monica Massari, the editors of the present special issues, Catherine Delcroix, Kenneth Horvath, Lena Inowlocki and Elise Pape, and my ERC team, Raphaela von Weichs, Federica Moretti, Sara Wiederkehr, Pascal Bernhard, Lisa Zanetti, Blaise Strautmann, Maura Soupper, Michèle Jaccoud Ramseier and Natalie Emch.
- 3 According to Vertovec's definition of super-diversity (2011), diversification of immigrants' origins is also increasing in various European countries. In the case of Genoa, this means that the number of significant countries of origin of the residents has increased from five twenty years ago to a dozen today. While in 2000 Senegal and Morocco were the most important countries of origin, today it is Ecuador and Albania. In the centre-east, of which *La Maddalena* is a part, however, Ecuador, Morocco and Senegal are the most represented countries of origin on 31 December 2016 (Comune di Genova 2021).
- 4 On a local and regional level, police control and the number of instances of the expulsion of refugees who squatted empty buildings have increased. On a national level, xenophobic discourses, laws and the boycott of refugee support organisations and rescue boats have considerably increased when Matteo Salvini was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Affairs (from 1.6.2018 until 5.9.19).
- 5 In both places, I did immersive long-term fieldwork during several years, living in the district where the events have been created. I followed the local actors in their day-to-day routines as well as during the concrete planning of the events. I took part in several shows, filming and interviewing the participants, and was also part of follow-up meetings. Before the lockdown in 2020, the Maddalena Défilé took place in Spring and Autumn from 2017.

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