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GENTRIFICATION IN EAST HARLEM, NY, AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Gentrification's implications for the social work profession in a low-income and multicultural neighborhood

BACHELOR THESIS

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This thesis is dedicated to the wonderful community of East Harlem. The openness of the people, their thriving culture, the unique history and the fact that it is situated in the greatest City in the world definitely make it one of the richest *barrios* in New York City.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to gain a social worker's perspective of gentrification taking place in East Harlem, NY (USA), a primarily low-income neighborhood with a high proportion of foreign-born residents and situated in a global metropolitan area like New York City. Although it is located only a couple of miles from New York City's Midtown, a world financial hub and an extremely wealthy area, East Harlem has been afflicted by a fair number of social problems and it is among the poorest neighborhoods of the City. However, in the past decade, East Harlem has experienced a wave of revitalization and it is becoming an increasingly attractive place to live, as the real estate market is booming, new cafés and restaurants are opening in big numbers and there is an increasingly appreciated art scene. The downside of this phenomenon is that the original residents face the threat of displacement due to the increasing rents and it is weakening its status as a Latin culture stronghold, in which a historically strong Hispanic community, which constitute the majority of the population, is slowly disappearing giving way to new residents, the so-called *gentrifiers*, who are able to afford the current rent prices. Through a vision of gentrification proposed by Marxist writers, I am going to analyze the development of this phenomenon from the point of view of social workers, who, given their involvement in the community, allow me to have a good insight of the main social problems afflicting the neighborhood and can thus contribute greatly to the gentrification debate. I discovered that the social worker's main cause for concern is the threat of displacement their client system face and, although gentrification is bringing as well positive changes to East Harlem, they fear that their clients will not be in the position to take full advantage of them. Additionally, I understood that expanding social services in a gentrifying neighborhood presents multiple challenges, mostly due to the opposition of the new residents, who argue that a greater number of social services would attract a problematic segment of the population, such as homeless and drug abusers. Through a content analysis of the transcriptions of three semi-structured interviews, I am going to identify which are the main points the social workers discuss when reflecting on gentrification and what are the implications of gentrification on the profession of social work.

Key words: Gentrification, Social work, Displacement, Sense of community, Revitalization.

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the 5th edition of the Oxford Dictionary of Human Geography, Gentrification is a

> *Middle-class settlement in renovated or redeveloped properties in older, inner-city districts formerly occupied by a lower-income population* […] *Positive impacts include new investment in areas often requiring significant land use and service improvement, the enhancement of the urban tax base, and the creation of new (though typically low-income) service jobs in such fields as the restaurant and arts sectors, home renovation, cleaning and security. But against this has been the massive loss of affordable inner-city housing for lower-income groups, an integral element of the polarization of life-chances in the global city.*
>
> (Gregory *et al*, 2009:273-274)

Since its inception in the second half of the 20th century, this phenomenon has emerged to become one of the most popular topics in Urban Studies, it can be found in many academic areas, in particular Human Geography, Social Sciences and Economics, it concerns many professions and disciplines and has attracted the attention of governments, architects and urban planners, media, historical associations and political activists (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008). While this phenomenon has been discussed for the past 5 decades, the academic study of gentrification has seen a staggering increase since the beginning of the 21st century, in a world that has become more globalized, cities are growing at exponential rates and urban social problems such as marginalization and economic disparities are becoming the norm (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008). Chris Hammett explains why gentrification has become such a topic of interest in both the academic and professional world: *"the gentrification debate is one played for high theoretical and ideological stakes"* and *"it has become an intellectual battleground between competing and radically opposed theoretical perspectives"* (1991:174-175). Hammett emphasizes that there have been lengthy debates in the literature about the reasons behind the development of gentrification, which evolve around two perspectives: *production-side explanations* and *consumption-side explanations* (Hammett, 1991), which are going to be outlined more specifically in Chapter 2.5.

However, it is difficult explaining gentrification in one definition, because, as seen in the substantial academic literature and given the different impacts it has had on neighborhoods, gentrification has assumed contrasting meanings (London and Palen, 1984). While reading through the literature, I have understood that London and Palen's statement becomes more

evident. Some attribute this concept to the process of disinvestment and reinvestment in a particular neighborhood. Others use this term as a synonym of urban revitalization, such as residential and commercial improvements of urban neighborhoods. Otherwise, from a Marxist point of view, it is associated with the different social tensions that could arise as consequence of the actions stated above, such as the displacement of the population due to rent increases or the racial tensions if gentrification takes place in a neighborhood where a certain race or nationality constitutes a big majority. The multi-faced significance of this term requires choosing a definition specific to the area of study, in order to give sense to the whole paper. For the purpose of this research, the following is the definition I am going to adhere to, which I have found to be the most suitable to describe the situation in East Harlem and it is coherent with the theoretical approach of choice for this thesis:

> *Gentrification is a process by which higher income households displace lower income residents of a neighborhood, changing the essential character and flavor of that neighborhood.*
>
> (Kennedy and Leonard, 2001:5)

When considering this definition, the authors imply the following statements: firstly, that gentrification leads to rent increases, which prices people out of their homes; secondly, that the arrival of new residents changes the character and the traditions of the neighborhood, and it constitutes a menace to the cultural identity of the neighborhood (Kennedy and Leonard, 2001).

Already before coming up with the idea of writing a thesis on this topic, I was well aware that East Harlem and, more in general, the neighborhoods situated in the northern half of Manhattan (Harlem is the most notable example) have gone through a considerable phase of modernization in recent times. In addition, several boroughs in New York City have been touched by gentrification lately and it is becoming an increasingly contentious topic of debate for local urban planners and its population (NYU Furman Center, 2015). What is special about East Harlem is that, besides its proximity to Midtown Manhattan, it has a very high percentage of foreign-born residents and second-generation immigrants, and the average income per person is among the lowest in New York City (ACS, 2015). Hence the marginalization immigrants usually face in a foreign country and because of widespread poverty, there is a big need of social services, both physical and mental health institutions and this is why there is a great number of social services, both government-owned and not, aimed at serving the population's needs (DOHMH, 2012; DOHMH, 2015). Given the big presence of social workers and social services situated in such a neighborhood, it would be worthwhile finding out how social workers view and bring up gentrification in their discussions and if and how it is impacting the social work profession and the provision of services. In the literature, gentrification has been

written about from very diverse point of views, but, surprisingly, very rarely from the one of social workers. Social workers constitute a valid element of analysis for the following reasons: first, they work in very diverse contexts, such as hospitals, schools and for government-funded programs; second, they have a keen knowledge of what are the main issues of the location they work in, because, given the nature of their job, they are able get in touch with a large sector of people having different backgrounds and have the chance to understand their lives in depth; third, they often cooperate with authorities and governmental associations, which allows them to gain a clear perspective on the legal aspects and access to policy-making positions regarding their neighborhood (NASW, 2016; CASW, 2016). As such, with this thesis I set an additional goal, which is filling this gap in the literature.

Consequently, the purpose of this thesis will be answering the following research question:

What are the social workers' perceptions of gentrification in a low-income and very culturally diverse neighborhood like East Harlem, NY?

In particular, the following questions are going to be posed:

1) What are the most common issues raised by social workers in East Harlem? How have these issues changed over time? Why? Are they recent or were they always there? Which of these issues are related to themes of gentrification?

2) How do social workers understand gentrification and its effects? Which aspects do they bring up (which not) and why might that be?

3) How is/has social work being/been directly and indirectly impacted by gentrification in East Harlem? Why?

Although I am going to treat the answers to these questions strictly from a social worker's viewpoint, it is highly probable that what they say is strongly influenced by the type of individuals they work for. They could formulate opinions according to what is appropriate for their clients and have a specific view of reality that is deeply dependent on what they hear from their clients.

The results are going to be analyzed from a Marxist point of view of gentrification. Those recurring to social services mostly consist of low-income population, who tend to be those more negatively impacted by the effects of gentrification. The Marxist literature on gentrification centers on the problems and the struggles the population experience with gentrification and discusses the role of capital and the economic reasons behind the development of this phenomenon. In addition, Marxist gentrification literature discusses thoroughly class conflicts between the old and the new residents of a gentrifying area and social workers would allow me

to gain insight on how their clients are experiencing the increasing number of middle-class population moving into their neighborhood and make sure that the benefits of gentrification are distributed equally among everybody.

Chapter 1 will open the thesis, in which the subject is going to be presented, its scientific significance is going to be justified and the research question is going to be presented. Chapter 2 is going to contain the background necessary to the understanding of the results I extracted from the interviews thesis, with chapters dedicated to the description of East Harlem, the literature review on gentrification and an introduction to the profession of social work. Chapter 3 is going to be dedicated to the presentation of the methodology, that is, the data collection method and the analysis method and the reasons behind the choices of such methods. Chapter 4 is going to be the core section of the thesis, in which the results arising from the interviews are going to be presented and their content is going be analyzed. Chapter 5 is going to contain the discussion of the results and the analysis of the previous chapter. Chapter 6 is going to close the thesis, with the presentation of the conclusion. Chapter 7 is going to present the bibliography used for the redaction of this thesis. In Chapter 8, finally, annexes and the transcription of the interviews are going to be presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 East Harlem

East Harlem, also know under the names of "Spanish Harlem" and "El Barrio", is a neighborhood situated in northeastern Manhattan (New York City, USA) (See Photo 1 for a typical view of East Harlem) and it covers the Community District 11[1] (DCP, 2016). According to the 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates[2], the population amounts to 120'603. As with many neighborhoods in the city, East Harlem is characterized by a very diverse demographic situation, with 46,1% of the population defining itself as Hispanic (hence the names "Spanish Harlem" and "El Barrio"), 35,4% as African-American and the rest as Caucasian (28,4%) and Asian (7,4%). It is home to one of the largest Puerto Rican community in the United States (Ingenito, 2016), who constitute roughly 23,4% of the total population of the neighborhood. The foreign-born population amounts to 25,9%.



Photo 1: Lexington Ave, the main road crossing East Harlem

[1]**Community District**: for governing and statistical purposes, New York City is divided into 59 so-called Community Districts, each represented by a community board (DCP, 2016).
[2] The statistical information in Chapter 2.1 is taken entirely from the 2010-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (ACS, 2015), unless it is otherwise cited.



Photo 2: Map of East Harlem

Several social problems are currently afflicting East Harlem. 32,8% of the population live below the poverty line (in 2016 it corresponded to an annual income of $11'880 per individual) (US Census Bureau, 2015) (GPO, 2016), compared to New York City's 20,6% rate, making it one of the poorest districts of the City (Center for State and Local Leadership at the Manhattan Institute, 2014). This reflects a common trend clearly visible in the City: that poverty is mostly prevalent in neighborhoods where the majority of the population belongs to an ethnicity other than white (Center for Economic Opportunity, 2016). The median household income is $30'857, compared to $52'737 of the City. Between 1990 and 2013, the number of murders has declined of 89,4% and the crime rate of 68,9% (Center for State and Local Leadership at the Manhattan Institute, 2014). However the numbers of rapes, robberies and felony assaults still remain among the highest in New York City (Bellafante, 2013).

In spite of these problems, East Harlem has a fair number of attractive characteristics, as it is, for example, a melting pot of cultures, in which Hispanic, African-American, Asian and several other ethnicities live within footsteps from each other (Visitelbarrio, 2015). It can also count on a vibrant cultural life and it is home to a number of museums such as the Museo del Barrio and the Museum of the City of New York (Visitelbarrio, 2015). In addition, it is an increasingly known artistic area, with a growing number of artists choosing to move there and creating innovative art in the neighborhood (Schulz, 2015). East Harlem gave birth to a fair number of world-renowned celebrities, such as pop singer Marc Anthony, rapper Tupac and actor Al Pacino (Newyorkando, 2016).

2.2 History of the neighborhood: from humble beginnings to gentrification

2.2.1 Early history

In 1658, Dutch settlers funded the village of "Nieuw Haarlem" in the northern portion of Manhattan Island (Photo 2), which was formerly occupied by farmsteads (Gill, 2012). This area gradually started assuming more of a suburban character in the early 1800s, as many immigrants who were arriving in New York decided to settle here, so many buildings were being constructed to match the increasing number of residents (Bell, 2010). The turning point of East

Harlem's history is represented by the construction by Irish immigrants of a railway line connecting this neighborhood with the rest of Manhattan, in 1837 and because of this easier means of transportation, many people desiring to live close to the center of New York City decided to move here, especially German and Irish immigrants (Wood, 2011). African-Americans were coming as well in large numbers. These different populations settled in different areas; for example, the African Americans are mostly in the area along the East River and the Germans in Yorkville (Wood, 2011).

The demographic growth, coupled with the improvement of the railway link, which provided an easy access to the rest of Manhattan, and the ideal geographic position have transformed East Harlem in an increasingly thriving neighborhood and a desirable place to live: buildings and sprung up everywhere to meet the fast-increasing demand for new housing due to the flood of immigrants and were mostly overcrowded and in poor conditions (Bell, 2010). As a result, land speculation was in full swing. Catholic, Methodist, Episcopalian and Jewish places of worship were multiplying to meet the needs of an ever-growing diverse religious community (Wood, 2011). Towards the end of the 19th century, waves of Italian immigrants settled in the area, giving birth to a flourishing community and making it East Harlem's biggest nationality in the 1930s (reason why at that time the area was known as "Italian Harlem").

2.2.2 The 20th century: from decadence to revival

East Harlem's demographic growth continued at a fast pace, but the different ethnic communities did not live in peace with each other, there were growing social conflicts among them and each new arrival of an ethnic group was met with hostility (Bell, 2010). The first half of the 20th century brought in the first wave of Puerto Rican immigrants, because in 1917 they were granted American citizenship (Martinez, 2015). Given the legal advantage they have had over the other immigrant populations to reside in the United States, their community grew very quickly in only a few years, especially between 116th and 145th Street, thus replacing the Italians and other immigrant communities and, by the 1940s, East Harlem was known as "Spanish Harlem", a nickname it still holds today (Green, 2016). Furthermore, East Harlem's growing Latin American flavor was fueled by the arrival of immigrants from Mexico, Central America and the West Indies (Gill, 2012).

However, the combination of the economic downturn of 1929 with overcrowding and the disputes among the communities put a halt to the economic growth of the neighborhood, and the filthy conditions of the area and the deteriorating conditions of the buildings, in which more and more newcomers are crammed, brought this once thriving neighborhood to a period of decadence (Bell, 2010). The issues which afflicted the neighborhood were brought to the attention of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), whose goal was to bring East

Harlem back to normality (Wood, 2011). The NYCHA ordered the demolition of the numerous slums present in the area and old buildings, a process that continued until well after the end of World War II (Wood, 2011). This revitalization project included the construction of public housing that would replace the old tenement buildings and the development of high-rise buildings (Jacobs, 1993). Despite the NYCHA's good intentions, these changes were not met with consent among the majority of the population, as the main concern was that those ineligible to live in public housing would face the threat of being evicted from the neighborhood or to become homelessness, a fact that led to numerous protests, with the aim to block the destruction of the old buildings (Jacobs, 1993).

2.2.3 Recent history

Between 1950 and 1999, the population dropped from 210'000 to 110'000, and housing stock decreased from 72'000 to 42'000 units, mostly due to the NYCHA's programs (East-Harlem, 2016). A further element of decay was the closing of the East Harlem's Washburn Wire Company, one of the largest industrial plants in Manhattan and one of the borough's largest employers, where nearly 1000 workers lost their jobs (Bell, 2010). However, rehabilitation efforts in the neighborhood continued, with public and private companies investing in the construction and renewal of the buildings (Bell, 2010). In recent years, gentrification started bringing further noticeable changes to the neighborhood, transforming it from a once decaying area to one of the most desirable places to live in New York City (Schulz, 2015), but it is still afflicted by many social problems such as poverty, crime and substance abuse (Bellafante, 2013).

2.3 Gentrification in East Harlem

As seen in Chapter 2.2, development and renewal efforts are not new to this neighborhood, but the goals of those previous projects were to create more livable conditions for the residents, through the replacement of old and dilapidated buildings with new housing projects that would comply with new federal housing standards (Jacobs, 1993). Today's stage of development that East Harlem is experiencing, however, is different in many ways. High-end buildings are on the rise, new luxury shops are popping up everywhere at the blink of an eye, new businesses are moving in and the demographic component is changing rapidly (Schulz, 2015). There are several elements that could explain why East Harlem has been nominated by the New York Times as one of New York City's "next hot neighborhoods" (Higgins, 2016). The proximity to downtown Manhattan, the average rents being lower than the rest of New York City and the efficient transportation system are some of the explanations that make this neighborhood ripe

for development (Higgins, 2016). The richness of the cultural life of this community and the architecture of the buildings are other reasons that render it a desirable place to live, especially for artists (Ingenito, 2016), who by many are considered as being gentrifiers (Saffery, 2006).

The evolution of rent prices serves a good indicator to quantify gentrification (Smith, 1986). As in most of the neighborhoods of New York City, the rents in East Harlem have been increasing constantly over the years, in some areas at a slow rate, in others at an fast pace (NYU Furman Center, 2015). East Harlem has experienced an almost exponential growth of the rent prices since the beginning of the 21st century: according to the data upon which the map in Photo 3 is created, East Harlem's average sale price/sqft registered an increase of 80%, from $468/sqft in 2004 to $842/sqft in 2014 (Baicenau, 2015). As seen in Photo 3, other neighborhoods experiencing strong price increases include Harlem, Williamsburg, Carrol Gardens and Park Slope.

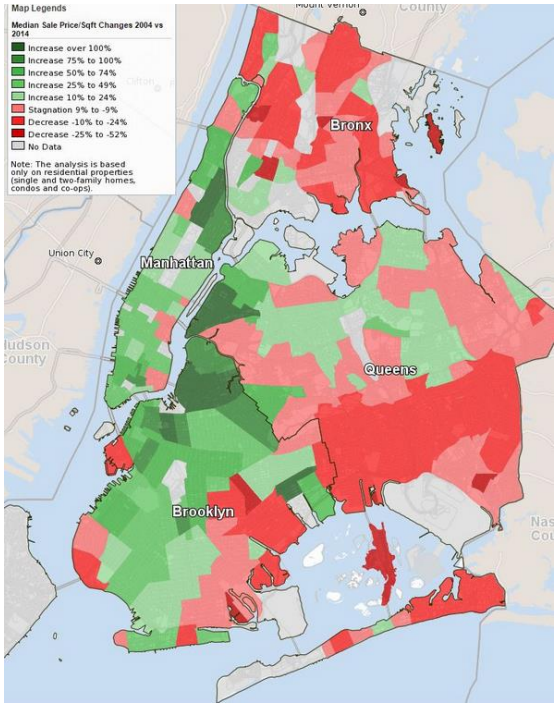


Photo 3: Average sale price/sqft increase between 2004 and 2014 (USD)

The following statistics speak for themselves: in 2015, the average rent was 21% higher than in 2012, with an annual growth rate of 6,5% (Kimyagarov, Cushman and Wakefield, 2015) and the median rent in the period 2005-2009 was $724 and in the period 2010-2014 was $869, which is an increase of 20,1% (NYU Furman Center, 2015). As of 2013, 49% of the population spent at least 30% of their income on rent (New York City Department of Health, 2015) and in 2014 the median rent burden (the percentage of annual income spent on rent) was 30,9% (NYU Furman Center, 2015).

Another major first indicator of gentrification in the area could be traced back to 2003, when the Department of City Planning's project of rezoning[3] 57 blocks was approved, the biggest revision of East Harlem's zoning in over 40 years (Schulz, 2015). This encouraged the expansion of existing buildings in order to house more people and spurred the development of new businesses and schools, such as the Hunter College's Silberman School of Social Work (Storm, 2013).

[3]**Zoning**: the action of a public administration to divide a geographic area in different zones corresponding to a specific category of land use. This instrument of urban planning is used, for example, to determine which areas are buildable and those that are not, or to determine in which areas a specific type of building can be built (Gregory *et al.*, 2009).

Regarding new apartment buildings, a major current topic for debate is the plan to construct three high-rise residential buildings developed by the Blumenfeld Development Group, located on top of the East River Plaza shopping mall, which would house 1100 apartments (Kochman, 2014). The buildings are to be 36, 42 and 48 stories high (the tallest 585ft) and the developers promised that 25% of the apartments will consist of affordable units (Solis, 2014). The population fears that the presence of this new complex will only worsen rent spikes in the area, thus causing potential displacement of residents (Kochman, 2014). Plans for the project include as well 30'000 square feet of cultural space (Kochman, 2014). The latest on this and on other real-estate developments in East Harlem can be found on the Curbed New York website[4].

Another clear indicator of the progress of gentrification is the opening and closing of shops, in particular of "mom and pop shops[5]" (Davidson, 2012). The latest development involves the closure of Pathmark in November 2015, a store that sold food and groceries at affordable prices, which led to 236 employees being laid off and the land where this building is sitting on has been sold to make way for the construction of luxury apartments (New York City Food Policy Center, 2015). Because of this, there is now a serious lack of places providing healthy and affordable food options and could further increase weight-related issues among the population (New York City Food Policy Center, 2015).

The most recent development related to gentrification is the highly contested Mayor Bill de Blasio's plan to rezone a number of neighborhoods of New York City, as part of a 10 year plan to create 80'000 new affordable housing units and to preserve the already existing 120'000, a project known as Mandatory Inclusionary Housing and this plan would require a share (roughly 30%) of new housing to be permanently affordable, which would be accessible to low-income people (Wishnia, 2016). This plan is going to roll out in East Harlem, in addition to East New York, Long Island City, the Jerome Avenue corridor in The Bronx, Flushing West and the Bay St corridor on Staten Island (Tcholakian and Zimmer, 2015). By "affordable", de Blasio means that the annual income must range between 60% and 80% of the AMI (Area Median Income, an index of median income per resident in New York City), so between $47'000 and $62'000 for a family of three (Housing New York, 2016) . The main point of criticism of this plan, however, is that in East Harlem the average income of a family of four is roughly $33'600, thus making these new affordable housing units out of reach for most of the current residents (Solis, 2015). Furthermore, the population fears that this rezoning plan will incentivize the construction of luxury apartments and put pressure on the current population and small businesses (Roberts, 2015). On February 3, 2016, the project has been approved by the City Planning Commission

[4]Curbed New York. http://ny.curbed.com/neighborhood/1388/east-harlem [Consulted on February 22, 2016].

[5]**Mom and pop shop**: small and not franchised family-run business, with very few employees (McIntosh, 2013).

for review and consideration by the City Council and finally, on March 22, 2016, the City Council formally approved the project and it is going to take effect immediately (Goodman, 2016).

2.4 Opposition movements to gentrification in East Harlem

The determination of the population to resist gentrification efforts in their neighborhood is perhaps one of the most noticeable features of gentrification in East Harlem (Calmes, 2016) (Photo 4). Because of this neighborhood being a melting pot of cultures, housing a large Latino community enclave and because of the relatively low median income, the residents fear about the potential consequences that gentrification could bring (Calmes, 2016). There is even a documentary displaying the different ways the residents are fighting against gentrification: "El Barrio Tours: Gentrification in East Harlem", produced in 2012 by the Porto Rican local activist Andrew Padilla, which focuses on the displacement of the population and the disappearance of the Porto Rican community due to gentrification (García, 2013). This multi award-winning documentary has played in major cities across the United States (García, 2013). The screenwriter regularly updates the documentary's Facebook page with the latest developments in the area related to gentrification.



Photo 4: members of the Latino community fighting against gentrification

East Harlem Preservation is a volunteer advocacy organization whose main goal is the promotion and conservation of the neighborhood's history and culture (East Harlem Preservation, 2016). It keeps regular updates about topics concerning displacement and other issues related to gentrification and has publicly spoken up against de Blasio's rezoning project.

Frequent public town meetings take place as well to discuss the main issues of the population, especially the imminent rezoning project (Savitch-Lew, 2015).

2.5 A Marxist approach to gentrification

The term "gentrification" was first coined in 1964 by the British Marxist sociologist Ruth Glass, to describe the processes of urban change that were taking place in central London, in which a new urban "gentry[6]" was moving in working-class quarters (Ley, 1986). Glass observed that

> *One by one, many of the working class quarters have been invaded by the middle class - upper and lower* […] *Once this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the working class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed.*
>
> (Glass, 1964:18-19)

As Slater (2001) writes, Glass underlined that capitalist urban land markets and policies can lead to the formation of class inequalities and social injustices:

> *The rising house expense burden for low-income and working-class households, and the personal catastrophes of displacement, eviction, and homelessness, are symptoms of a set of institutional arrangements (private property rights and a free market) that favor the creation of urban environments to serve the needs of capital accumulation at the expense of the social needs of home, community, family.*
>
> (2001:571-572)

However, it should not be forgotten that this process had already been taking place long before it received its own definition (Clark, 2005). In the case of North America, Gale (1984) argued that, by the late 1930s, parts of New York City, New Orleans, Charleston and Georgetown (a neighborhood of Washington, DC) were experiencing gentrification. In the post-war era, urban renewal processes spread to more cities of the United States, which often meant the bulldozing of run-down neighborhoods and their replacement with modern housing and roads (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008). Coupled with this phenomenon was the growing number of protests that took place, mostly against the destruction of old buildings: in New York City, this led to the birth of the phenomenon of "brownstoning[7]", which consisted in young and middle class families buying old houses and restructuring them (Williams, 1986).

In the United States, gentrification started being a research topic around the 1980s (Beauregard, 1985). During this period, the focus of Urban Geography shifted to the so-called "back to the

[6] The term « **gentrification** » derives from the word « **gentry** », a social class which occupied one of the highest positions in England in the 18th and 19th century (Redfern, 2003).
[7] The term « **brownstoning** » derives from "brownstone ", which is a type of sandstone which was once a popular material used to construct buildings which are known as "brownstones". Brownstones are a very common sight in New York City, especially in Brooklyn. (Cooper, 2010).

city" movement, which was directly opposed to the process of suburbanization of the 1950s (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008). In the literature, there is no specific definition of the concept of "back-to-the-city movement" (Hyra, 2014), but in general it refers to the increase of the population and of capital investment in inner city areas observed between the 1960s and the 1990s in major US cities (Birch, 2005, 2009). Gentrification played a key role in shaping this movement and it was used as an urban renewal strategy, which was often initiated through State-led programs (Smith, 1979), like the one adopted by the NYCHA in East Harlem in the 1980s.

In its book "Capital", Karl Marx already mentions the negative consequences of displacement:

> *"Improvements" of towns, accompanying the increase of wealth, by the demolition of badly built quarters, the erection of palaces for banks, warehouses, etc., the widening of streets for business traffic, for the carriages of luxury, and for the introduction of tramways, etc., drive away the poor into even worse and more crowded hiding places.*
>
> (Marx, 1947:674)

Marxists views of gentrification are tightly related to the concept of "revanchist city", introduced by Smith, while observing New York City's gentrification processes in the late 1980s (Smith, 1986). According to him, gentrification is a spatial manifestation of *"a race/class/gender terror felt by middle- and ruling-class whites"* (Smith, 1996:211). The predominantly white ruling class believed that the city had been "stolen" by the working class and other immigrant groups and gentrification was a crucial part of this strategy of revenge and of retaking the city (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008) and it created a climate of revenge against minority groups, feminists, the working class, homosexuals and immigrants (Slater, 1989). An event that led Smith to introduce the concept of revanchist city is the Battle for Tompkins Square, in Manhattan's Lower East Side, in August 1988 (Smith, 1996). What was a demonstration against a park's curfew evolved into a greater confrontation between the population and the authorities touching multiple issues afflicting the neighborhood, among them gentrification (defined here as a "class war") and the consequent fear of displacement (Moynihan, 2008). This event led Smith to see gentrification as a spatial expression of revanchist anti-urbanism, in which the arrival of the middle class in the Lower East Side was part of a broader agenda of collective owners of capital to gain back the neighborhood from those they believe had stolen it (Smith, 1996).

Class is a key concept in the Marxist literature on gentrification. As central city areas undergo de-industrialization to accommodate typical middle-class institutions, there is the emergence of

a phenomenon coined by Harvey as "spatial mix" of the previously established working class with the newly arrived middle class (Harvey, 1990). As specified previously, gentrification favors the establishment of the middle or high class in central urban areas, which were once populated by the working class. This creates a new environment in the city, where the original population struggles to adapt and this complicates relationships with the new population, what can fuel conflicts and displacement (Redfern, 2003).

In the literature, there is a long-running discussion about what are the main reasons behind the birth of gentrification (Smith and Williams, 1986). On one side, there are explanations relying on socio-cultural factors, and on the other side, economic arguments are advanced and others believe that it is due to a combination of both (Slater, 2011). The arguments advanced by Marxists are the "production explanations" of the birth of gentrification. Production-side explanations define the economic forces and the roles of capital and the State that are behind the development of gentrification (Schaffer and Smith, 1986). Smith gives the greatest contribution to this theory by introducing the concept of the *rent-gap* (Slater, 2011), which he described as *"The necessary centerpiece to any theory of gentrification"* (Smith, 1987:165). He based his observations on the decades following World War II, when inner-city areas went through a stage of decline, in which the price of the ground rents fell sharply because of disinvestments in the city centers, suburbanization, decline of production and the withdrawal of big amounts of capital (Smith, 1986). The combination of these phenomena caused the land of inner city areas to lose much of its former value, which should be understood as the fall in the price of inner city land relative to the price of land in the suburbs (Smith, 1986). This gives the basis to explain the previously cited rent-gap theory. The rent gap refers to the existing difference between the actual economic value attributed to a land parcel (capitalized ground rent) and the potential economic value of this land parcel if it were used at its optimal, highest and best use and if adequate to its real attractiveness (mainly based on accessibility and location) (Smith, 1996). A land is prone to gentrification from the moment when the "gap" between the actual and potential value of a land becomes fairly large, because whoever is in the housing market would take advantage of this low rent area situated in a desirable location (Smith, 1996). While capitalized ground rent experiences smaller fluctuations, potential ground rent mostly increases over time: as long as an urban area experiences population growth, more job opportunities and technological innovation, any location within a city will become more desired and thus more valuable over time (Loretta, Slater and Wyly, 2008). Production-side theories allow explaining gentrification as the result of uneven investment of capital, of the cycles of evaluation and devaluation of land parcels and of the opportunities of profitable investments due to these capital flows (Slater, 2011).

On the opposite side of the spectrum there are neoclassical explanations of the causes of gentrification, commonly known as consumption-side explanations, portrayed in particular by David Ley, a Canadian urban geographer, who explained gentrification as the consequence of the evolution of society's needs, rather than because of changes in the housing market (Mathema, 2013). In summary, here it is argued how demographic and lifestyle changes due to alterations in the labor market and in the industrial structure of advanced capitalist cities favor the emergence of a specific population (the "gentrifiers") who prefer living in inner-city areas rather than in the suburbs (Slater, 2011).

2.6 Contemporary gentrification

Contemporary gentrification is the consequence of the renewal of inner city areas through post-industrial growth, as central urban areas formerly dominated by factories were de-industrialized to make room for office and apartment complexes, what gives the incentive to renew buildings and to attract a middle class, which brings consumerism and tourism (Benson, 2006). Contrary to early times, when Bourne (1993) predicted that gentrification was not going to become an important topic of research in the future, since the beginning of the 21st century there has been a revival in the interest of this topic, especially from researchers and policymakers (Vigdor, 2002; Slater, 2006). In particular, the contemporary gentrification literature focalizes more on the study of the impact of gentrification in economic terms and on different races (Williams, 2013). David J. Maurrasse (2006), a Columbia University Adjunct Associate Professor of International and Public Affairs, described the economic and demographic impact of contemporary gentrification in Harlem in the following extract, taken from his book "*Listening to Harlem: Gentrification, Community and Business"*:

> *At 122nd Street, near Morningside Avenue, two white men peer into the window of a brownstone, maybe speculating about the unit's and the neighborhood's livability. Although some boarded-up buildings remain in this section, like one red brick structure on 122nd Street and St. Nicholas Avenue, one is far more likely to see various construction projects underway, ones that involved renovation of old homes or sites starting from scratch on empty lots. At 120th Street and Lenox Avenue, a new café/bakery called Settepani looks like something you'd find on 23rd Street. The storefront looks brand spanking new, the windows sparkling clean. The mostly White but still relatively multiracial crowd inside conjures up images of almost anywhere but what many would associate with Harlem. This is quite a nice café, by the way. And it is only one among a few others that have*

> *recently opened in the neighborhood.* […] *Harlem's significance as a center of African American life and culture may very well be in jeopardy in the long run. But as these resources enter the neighborhood, the challenge of ensuring that longtime residents benefit rather than lose is of outmost concern. It could be that the residents are expected to sink or swim in an increasingly competitive environment. If development is going to result in widespread empowerment, residents, community organizations, corporations, government, and real estate developers all must take some action, beyond market forces, to ensure some degree of balance in Harlem's current and future economic development*.
>
> (Maurrasse, 2006:6-7; 39-40)

In Maurasse's quote, elements attributed to Marxist views of gentrification can be traced. Once an industrial area, Harlem starts experiencing a new wave of investments, for example the renewal of brownstones and the opening of new cafés and restaurants. Even though these changes render Harlem a more attractive place, the original population, prevalently African-American, must cope with the influx of mostly white middle class people, which is something that presumably will alter the socio-cultural character of this stronghold of African-American culture. In addition, Maurrasse fears that this wave of changes will eventually lead to a clash between former and new population, which is one of the consequences of gentrification noted by Redfern (2003).

Jones Hackworth and Neil Smith, two well-known researchers on gentrification, give an insightful account of the evolution of this process while basing their observations on New York City and identified three waves of gentrification (2001).

First-Wave Gentrification: beginning in the 1950s and lasting until the global recession of 1973, was what Ruth Glass observed as a state-led, sporadic and superficial process of urban renewal. It mostly concerned small neighborhoods in the Northeastern USA, Western Europe and Australia (2001).

Second-Wave gentrification: also known as the "anchoring phase", it took place in the post-recession years of the 1970s and 1980s and it is characterized by the "*integration of gentrification into a wider range of economic and cultural processes at the global and national scales*" (2001:468). New York City became an increasingly important financial hub and neighborhoods such as SoHo and Tribeca experienced capital flows that transformed them into art meccas (2001). These waves of development, however, were met with growing protests from the local residents, for example in Tompkins Square Park in the Lower East Side, who feared that their displacement to other neighborhoods would be an inevitable consequence (2001).

Third-Wave gentrification: it began in the mid-1990s, following the economic downturn of the early 1990s, when there were fears that there was going to be a "degentrification" of neighborhoods, which is the reverse process of gentrification (2001). Some neighborhoods did see a reduction of capital flows, but the majority of the gentrification processes kept taking place and many new areas were experiencing it for the first time (2001). Hackworth and Smith argued that third-wave gentrification became a *"generalized strategy of accumulation"* and that it is a *"purer expression of the economic conditions and processes that made reinvestment in disinvested inner areas so alluring for investors"* (2001:468). One of its main features were the growing involvement of the State in gentrification processes, the presence of gentrification in neighborhoods far from the city center, it was a phenomenon flued by globalization and there was decreasing resistance thanks to the diminishing presence of the working class in the city (2001).

Loretta Lees, Tom Slater and Elvin Wyly, in their textbook "*Gentrification*" (2008), argued that today's society has entered a *fourth wave of gentrification*, in which capital flows into neighborhoods are more tightly related with the global state of the economy, and more and more state policies are encouraging gentrification. With the increasing gentrification of inner-city neighborhoods, homebuyers move in the last remaining neighborhoods with still affordable rents, which mostly consist of racially marginalized communities, like Harlem and the South Bronx (2008). A recent example of fourth-wave gentrification is the redevelopment of New Orleans, after it was hit by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, whose wide spread destruction of large chunks of the city created the perfect conditions to renew them from zero (2008).

Predicting the future of gentrification is as hard as determining the causes of it. Something, however, is for sure: that this word is taking an increasingly negative connotation, because it is employed more and more in debates about social justice and to document struggles over neighborhood life, in which this word includes concepts of class, culture, inequality and social justice (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008). As Harvey (2000) asserted, gentrification is an issue that mobilizes people and gives birth to social movements, just like what is currently happening in East Harlem (see Chapter 2.4). At the same time, resistance movements in face of gentrification are experiencing a decline. Taking the example of New York City, Hackworth and Smith (2001) noticed a *"palpable decline of community opposition"* in contrast with the *"intense political struggles"* that characterized the 1970s and 1980s (2001: 470). They both go on arguing that resistance has diminished because of fewer number of activist living in the city as they have been displaced and because of the goverment of cities making it even difficult to protest against gentrification (2001). At the same time, however, the way people resist gentrification is evolving, in particular for what concerns the ownership of housing. James DeFilippis (2004) observed that, over time, low income subjects attempt to gain more control over their housing,

and aim to own it. This form of protest constitutes a "soft" way to oppose gentrification. DeFilippis (2004) explores this phenomenon in his work on equity housing cooperatives (LEHCs[8]), community land trusts (CLTs[9]) and mutual housing associations (MAHs[10]). He found from his study that these forms of ownership have improved people's lives because it gives them a certain degree of control over their propriety, but also remarked that the owners do not have the level of ownership they would be eligible to have (2004).

Tom Slater (2006), on the contrary, believed that the gentrification research of the 21st century is leaning away from the classical topics of rent increase and displacement, and mostly focuses on the benefits it could bring. He associated gentrification with a *"healthy economic present and future for cities across the globe"* (2006:738) and claimed that there is an increase in the research on gentrification due to the *"demise of displacement as a defining feature of the process and as a research question"* (2006:737).

Another important topic that has emerged in the gentrification's 21st century literature are concerns about an exact definition of "gentrification", even though this word first appeared over 50 years ago (Goworowska, 2008). An attempt to describe the evolution of the significance of this term through the years has been made with Hackworth and Smith's (2001) previously explained three-stage model. Lees (2000) introduced a new subcategory of gentrification: "supergentrification", which she defined as the stage that comes after gentrification, in which formerly gentrified neighborhoods are being re-gentrified and former gentrifiers are displaced by even wealthier people. Butler and Lees (2006) provided empirical evidence of this phenomenon in Brooklyn Heights, NY. Supergentrification is a debated concept as it contradicts every stage model that has been made about gentrification, Hackworth and Smith's three-stage model included, because these models take for granted that the phenomenon of gentrification will eventually reach an endpoint, known as "mature gentrification" (Lees, 2003b).

2.7 Debates on gentrification: positive and negative consequences

Besides the discussions on the causes that favor the emergence of gentrification (Chapter 2.5), another heated topic of debate in the literature is about its consequences. The potential outcomes

[8]**LEHCs**: a corporation owns the housing and the residents are shareholders of that corporation, but the owner's share price is not determined by the state of the real estate market, but by a formula determined by the corporation. This means that the owner does not have complete freedom to decide the resell price, thus ensuring permanent affordability of the housing. In New York City, LECHs are mostly found in the Lower East Side (Lees, Slater and Wyly, 2008)

[9]**CLTs**: a sustainable way to develop a community that guarantees long-term low rents. Rent increases are restricted and must be agreed by the whole community (Lees, Slyter and Wyly, 2008).

[10]**MAHs**: are quite similar to LEHCs, but residents do not own any shares in their cooperative (Less, Slater and Wyly, 2008).

of gentrification have been as well broadly argued in the literature and the bottom line is that it is hard predicting the effects it could have, because it depends on the characteristics of the gentrification process and of the neighborhood. In order to simplify matters, I decided to present these consequences by organizing them in positive and negative arguments. When trying to make sense of the arguments emphasized in the literature, it is recommended keeping in mind Atkinson and Bridge's table (2005), in which they represent some of the positive and negative effects of gentrification.

POSITIVE AGRUMENTS	NEGATIVE ARGUMENTS
	Displacement through rent/price increases
	Secondary psychological costs of displacement
Stabilization of declining areas	Community resentment and conflict
Increased property values	Loss of affordable housing
	Unsustainable speculative property price increases
Reduced vacancy rates	Homelessness
Increased local fiscal revenues	Greater take of local spending through lobbying/articulacy
Encouragement and increased viability of further development	Commercial/industrial displacement
	Increased cost and changes to local services
Reduction of suburban sprawl	Displacement and housing demand pressures on surrounding poor areas
Increased social mix	Loss of social diversity (from socially disparate to rich ghettos)
Rehabilitation of property both with and without state sponsorship	Under occupancy and population loss to gentrified areas

Source: Atkinson, Bridge, 2005:5

The following chapters are going to explain more in detail the main points of debate that concern East Harlem in particular.

2.7.1 Displacement

The issue of displacement of low-income people, especially of ethnic minorities and working-class people to make room for richer ones, and of small businesses like mom and pop shops, is almost certainly the most widely discussed topic and it is the biggest concern people have when thinking of gentrification (Pacione, 2001). *"Displacement, most frequently, refers to the forced involuntary dislocation of needy households (i.e. the poor, black, ethnic minorities, and the*

aged)" (London and Palen, 1984:12) and it is mostly done through landlord eviction and harassment (Aktinson, 2002). As a neighborhood becomes economically more attractive, people are more willing to pay a certain price to move there and the landlords take advantage of this by increasing the rent prices, those of the native population included (Smith, 1986). Because of this, the original residents, who are generally not as wealthy as the new ones, can do nothing but accept the higher price of the rent or leave their neighborhood to seek somewhere else a more affordable place to live. This is a dominant topic of the 1970s and 1980s gentrification literature and it is by far the biggest concern expressed by whoever writes about gentrification, but validity of this issue is often disputed, especially because it is very difficult to quantify exactly the importance of this phenomenon (Slater, 2006). Freeman and Braconi (2002) conducted a study which aimed to find if there is actually a correlation between gentrification and displacement in New York City, by analyzing the triennial New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey. First, while looking at surveys done in 1990s of people who had recently moved in a new location, they found out that, among them, only 5,47% could be considered as displaced due to gentrification (2002). Second, when comparing the movements of low-income people between gentrified and non-gentrified neighborhoods, they demonstrate that these subjects are 19% less likely to move out of gentrifying neighborhoods than those from non-gentrifying ones, because they appreciate the new amenities that come along with gentrification, such as improved services and increased safety, so they are willing to do a greater effort not to leave their houses (2002). They conclude that, contrary to common belief, higher rents cannot be associated with a higher probability of people moving out. However, they warn in their paper that *"only indirectly, by gradually shrinking the pool of low-rent housing, does the reurbanization of the middle class appear to harm the interests of the poor"* (2002:4). Displacement not only concerns people, but also small businesses, which are priced out of their location due to high rent prices, especially small businesses (Goodyear, 2016). In ethnic neighborhoods, for example, gentrification favors the establishment of food shops geared to the middle class but also puts at risk the survival of traditional shops selling products for the different ethnic groups, so this phenomenon further deepens the loss of ethnic diversity (Anguelovsy, 2014), which is described in depth in Chapter 2.7.2.

2.7.2 Loss of ethnic diversity

Because of the original population being displaced, the demographic composition of the neighborhood changes and thus its "soul" (Hughes, 2012). Jacobs (1993) states that ethnic diversity is a key factor for a neighborhood to thrive. This issue is particularly problematic for immigrant groups, because their lifestyle is greatly influenced by the presence of their ethnic enclave, which provides a comfortable place to live and it is able to provide goods coming from their birth country (Murdie and Teixeira, 2009). *"Not only are local residents and businesses*

displaced but the symbolic representations of people and their activities are as well" (Krase, 2005:207). For immigrant groups, but not only, gentrification brings about changes that *"move longtime residents outside their comfort zone"* (Zukin, 2010:3-4), because of the loss of amenities they are used to have around. Nyden (2006) carries out a study, whose aim is to find out the real impact of gentrification on the loss of ethnic diversity and sense of community, by analyzing four different ethnic neighborhoods in Chicago. Byrne (2003), by contrast, by citing Freeman and Braconi's study on displacement (see Chapter 2.7.1), does not recognize a real correlation between gentrification and the loss of ethnic diversity. He argues that *"gentrification creates urban political flora in which affluent and poor citizens must deal with each other priorities in a demographic process"* (Byrne, 2003:421). In East Harlem, given its very diverse ethnic composition, one of the residents' biggest fears is that gentrification will eventually take its toll on the cultural character of the neighborhood and on the sense of the community, especially the one of Porto Ricans (Calmes, 2016).

2.7.3 Increased tax revenues

The increased number of households, the influx of middle class and high-income people translates into "*increased revenues for municipalities*" (Lang, 2008:37), especially in the United States, where property taxes are a big source of revenue for municipalities (Lang, 2008). Empirical evidence of this fact, however, is lacking, probably due to the fact that most of the gentrifiers who move into a new part of the city were already residents of that same city (Gale, 1984) and because those who are displaced leave the city and there is thus a reduced pool of taxpayers (Aktinson, 2002).

2.7.4 Overall improvement of the quality of life

It is believed that the gentrification, through the revitalization is brings about, improves the quality of life of the residents, in part due to higher tax revenues, which allow the financing of services and investments that could further ameliorate living standards in the neighborhood (Pacione, 2001). Old buildings are brought down to make place for more modern and better looking ones and entire neighborhoods are renewed. It is also argued that gentrification improves safety and lessens the crime rate, because security forces are more willing to operate where richer people live and where there are many valuable assets such as high-end stores and luxury apartments (McDonald, 1986). Gentrification can help alleviate the isolation of a neighborhood, because, as it becomes wealthier, it will attract more attention of the local government and will thus be more aware of its problems and will try its best to improve it, such as renewing sidewalks and making space for public parks (Evers, 2013). However, Levy and Cybriwsky (1980) warn that longtime residents who are facing the threat of displacement could benefit of these improvements only for a limited period, because later in time they are going to

be forced to leave their homes. Another point in favor of gentrification is that it could create a tolerant living place for those who have a bigger chance to be marginalized from society, for example homosexuals (Lauria and Knopp, 1985). Jon Caulfield (1994), when studying gentrification in Toronto, notices that

> *Suburbs are sexually policed; that's what they're for – institutionalized heterosexuality* […] *But in inner city, lesbian women can connect up with organizations that represent their kind of life-style, and they can live as lesbians without feeling surveilled or threatened* […] *there's a wider range of acceptable behaviors here.*
>
> (Caulfield, 1994:188)

2.7.5 Loss of political representation

When voting for political representation in a multicultural country like the United States, a study conducted in collaboration of the Center for American Progress, the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution demonstrates that the ethnicity of a person greatly influences voting patterns, as racial minorities have a high probability to vote people belonging to their same racial group (Frey, Texeira and Griffin, 2016). Regarding the political consequences of gentrification, Hyra (2014) argues that gentrification in culturally diverse neighborhoods (like East Harlem) can lead to "political displacement". As more people (mostly whites) move into a neighborhood, those belonging to another ethnicity are gradually displaced: as such, minority groups who cover political functions in a neighborhood will see their power weakening over time, because there are less and less people of the same ethnicity in the neighborhood who would support them (Tighe *et al*, 2015). Following this loss of political representation, minorities will have a harder time raising their voices and participating actively in the political life (Hyra, 2014).

2.8 Social work, community practice and gentrification

According to the International Federation of Social Workers, social work is a

> *Practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work,*

> *social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.*
>
> (IFSW, 2014)

As social workers are employed in a wide range of contexts and conduct multiple functions, the subjects of my study are going to be community social workers. Community social workers

> *Administer and implement a variety of social assistance programs and community services, and assist clients to deal with personal and social problems. They are employed by social service and government agencies, mental health agencies, group homes, shelters, substance abuse centres, school boards, correctional facilities and other establishments*.
>
> (HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector, 2013:2)

Communities, the one of East Harlem in the case of this thesis, are the context of the profession of social work and community practice is a key component of this type of work. Warren defines communities as a *"combination of social units and systems that perform the major social functions relevant to the meeting of people's needs"* (1978:9). Weil (1996) believes that individuals establish unconsciously a relationship with their surroundings, which gives birth to a desire of sense of belonging and thus incentivizes the individuals to find their own position and identity within the community. The way a social worker exercises his profession with individuals while considering the context the individual lives in and utilizing as much as possible the resources offered by the community is through an action known as Community practice (Hardcaste, Powers and Wenocur, 2011). Community practice is a branch of social work, which is

> *Primarily aimed at helping people within a local community to identify social needs, to consider the most effective ways of meeting these and to set about doing so, in so far as their available resources permit.*
>
> (Younghusband, 1959:10)

And

> *It applies practice skills to alter the behavioral patterns of community groups, organizations and institutions or people's relationships and interactions with the community structures.*
>
> (Hardcastle, Powers and Wenocur, 2011:1)

When considering this definition, it emerges that it is of primary importance for a social worker to understand the individual's community and its position in it during the execution of the profession and in the helping process, given that a community strongly influences how a person develops and acts (Hardcaste, Powers and Wenocur, 2011). According to Well and Gamble (1995:577), the main purposes of community practice is to:

- *"develop the organizing skills and abilities of individuals and groups;*
- *make social planning more accessible and inclusive in a community;*
- *connect social and economic involvement to grassroots community groups;*
- *advocate for broad coalitions in solving community problems;*
- *infuse the social planning process with a concern for social justice."*

2.8.1 Effects of gentrification on the social work profession

Researches about the relation between social work and gentrification are quasi non-existent.

One of the few researches of this kind is Huyser's and Judi Meerman's study entitled *"Resident Perceptions of Redevelopment and Gentrification in the Heartside Neighborhood: Lessons for the Social Worker Profession"* (2014), carried out on behalf of the Departments of Social Work at Trinity Christian College, IL and Kuyper College, MI. In this paper, the authors seek to understand what are the effects of gentrification in the Heartside neighborhood in the city of Grand Rapids, MI, the perceptions of the residents and ultimately the implications for social workers and how they should address this issue. When interviewing the residents, the authors identify three main issues in relation to gentrification and for each of them they propose some suggestions for the social work profession (2014):

1. *Sense of belonging*: a key contributor to the integration of individuals in a neighborhood, social workers must be aware of the residents' sense of belonging and of how they identify with the neighborhood when executing community practice (2014).
2. *Recognition of neighborhood changes*: social workers should be aware of the sense of pride noted by the residents, by advocating for the resident's rights, preserving those elements which contribute to their sense of belonging and, most importantly, by assuring that the residents have their voices heard from the authorities (2014).
3. *Restrictions in the neighborhood*: as more people from the outside move in gentrifying neighborhoods, the residents feel isolated and see their decision power on neighborhood-related issues weakening. In this respect, social workers have the task of giving back to the residents a sense of hope, by stressing the fact that they have a dignity and have the right to be listened by governing bodies. After this first step, social

workers should find ways to bring together former and new residents and make sure they cooperate for the common good of everyone (2014).

Another relevant research dealing with gentrification and social work is *"Evidence of Gentrification-induced Displacement among Social Services in London and Los Angeles"*, written by deVerteuil (2010). He investigates to which point gentrification can be an explanation behind the displacement of social services taking place in gentrifying neighborhoods of the two cities between 1998 and 2008 (2010). He concludes that gentrification is not a valid enough reason to justify the displacement of those social services that changed location during those years (2010). In fact, he argues that over half of the examined social services are actually staying in gentrified neighborhoods because they end up in a condition known as "involuntary immobility", where long-times residents or businesses are "trapped" in a gentrified neighborhood situated in a heavily gentrified city (2010), a phenomenon observed by Newman and Wyly (2006). In the case of social workers in deVerteuil's study, they are unable to expand their services within a neighborhood or move somewhere else, as the city lacks of geographically convenient or affordable places areas where to move (2010). From this fact, another problem arises: as more residents are displaced and contemporarily the social services stay and thus see their client base diminishing, what is their purpose for them to remain in that location (2010)? Furthermore, deVerteuil (2010) worries about the strong resistance exercised by residents of gentrifying neighborhoods against social services moving into their area. He concludes that, because of these two issues, social services must make a critical choice: either be "trapped" in gentrified neighborhoods and deal with a decreasing clientele, or close down completely since they would not have the means to move somewhere else (2010).

2.8.2 Social work and social services in East Harlem

As stated previously, East Harlem is afflicted by a large number of social issues. The neighborhood, though, disposes of several social services, from public owned to private owned, which address a variety of people's needs. The majority of the working force employed in the social sector is fluent in Spanish, because of the large Latino population they serve. Health-related problems are numerous: in 2013, 24% of the population did not have health insurance (9th out of New York City's 59 community districts), it ranked 13th in the number of HIV infections (46,1 infections/100'000 people), 33% of the population was overweight (ranked 5th) (DOHMH, 2015). The cause of obesity can be traced to the lack of shops offering healthy food options, since approximately two thirds of them are bodegas, which tend to offer less healthy food compared to supermarkets (Gordon *et al*, 2007). A few of the organizations addressing family and health-related issues, such as the Union Settlement Association, partially government and privately funded, include healthy nutrition education programs (Union Settlement, 2016). There are two public hospitals serving the neighborhood: Mount Sinai Medical Center and Metropolitan Hospital Center, where there is a team of social workers providing counseling to patients and their families (DOHMH, 2012). One of the biggest providers of physical and mental health services in the area is the East Harlem Council of Human Services, not-for-profit, which is the parent company of different associations (Boriken, 2007). A big evolution for the social work profession in East Harlem is the relocation of the Hunter College Department of Social Work to East Harlem from their original location on the Upper East Side in 2011: as the original building was no longer meeting the needs of the school, it was decided to relocate the headquarters to East Harlem, because this way it could integrate better in the community and could better address the neighborhood's problems (Zimmer, 2011). As Jacqueline Mondros, the dean of the School of Social Work, explains: *"Social work is all about enhancing communities and the people in them. To have a community in which to work, that needs us and wants us, and which we need and want – it's a synergistic moment"*[11]. Originally, the school planned not to move and to expand its facilities, but this was met with discontent from the neighbors and they brought up the topic about why a school of social work was situated in one of the most affluent neighborhoods of New York City and not in more needy areas like the Bronx (Dunlap, 1987). Despite the East Harlem community's initial fears about the possible consequences of this relocation on the rent prices, in the end it was met with consent, as they appreciated the increase of social services that would arise from this move (Macaulay Honors College, 2010). The board of the school, however, wishes that the students will bring positive changes to the community and not just carry out academic research (Macahulay Honors College, 2010).

[11]DNAinfo. https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20110519/upper-east-side/hunter-college-school-of-social-work-moves-east-harlem [Consulted on February 15, 2016].

Substance abuse is a severe issue, as East Harlem is the neighborhood with the third highest rate of hospitalizations due to alcohol abuse and with the second highest rate of drug-related hospitalizations (DOHMH, 2015). As of 2012 hospitalization rates due to drug and alcohol abuse were more than twice as high as of the rest of New York City (2'333 per 100'000 adults compared to 1'019 per 100'000 adults in New York City for alcohol abuse, and 2'822 per 100'000 adults compared to 907 per 100'000 adults in New York City for drug abuse) (DOHMH, 2015). East Harlem is the neighborhood where there is among the highest consumption of the drug K2 (also known as synthetic marijuana) in New York City, especially among the homeless, which is very easy to obtain and it is affordable relative to other type of drugs (Casey, 2015). According to the Harlem Neighborhood Block Association, there are 22 drug-treatment centers in the area and this association is concerned about the rising number of these kinds of centers, because it believes they are attracting drug addicts and homeless from different parts of the city (Solis, 2015). Homeless are a very common sight and they mostly congregate on 125th St (Casey, 2015). There are various associations providing shelter for the homeless and among them there are a few based in East Harlem, like the Center for Urban Community Services, a not-for-profit corporation financed with public donations. The Government of the City of New York regularly updates the list of social services provided in the neighborhood in the East Harlem Community Resource Guide (DOHMH, 2012). The main programs enacted by the Government of New York City to address social issues are, among many, the New York City Department of Education (DOE), Department of the Aging's (DFTA), Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Department of Homeless Services (Light, Chambers and Garofalo, 2011).

3. METHODOLOGY

The nature of this research is qualitative. I believe it is the methodology that is better adapted to the type of topic of this thesis, as my goal is to investigate the way the subjects of my research discuss a specific subject. Qualitative methodologies are as such the most suitable means to help me carry out this sort of research and to achieve my objectives.

3.1 Planning of the research

What I first had in mind when conducting this research was to understand what the views of gentrification among the population of East Harlem are and to understand what arguments they express in favor of and against it. The next step was finding an archetypal segment of the population which could help represent in the best way possible the most common views of gentrification, somebody who would potentially know the points of view of different types of people. As such, my choice fell on social workers and there are a variety of reasons why they are an ideal subject of my research: it is a profession that allows having very close relationships with the population and gain a great knowledge of the most common issues afflicting a certain type of population or a neighborhood (NASW, 2016; CASW, 2016). This is why my thesis centers on the perceptions of social workers and on the impact of gentrification on their profession.

The second part was to become familiar with the notion of gentrification and I soon discovered what a multi-faced concept it is. This is the reason why I felt it necessary to base the research on a specific definition of gentrification, which is found in Chapter 1. I collected as much information as possible about gentrification in East Harlem, mostly by reading news articles online and watching news reports. I also had the chance to get in touch over Skype with Andrew Padilla and was able to obtain his documentary. Given how the concept of gentrification is tightly related to real estate, a considerable part of my time was spent looking up definitions specific to this sector and I felt like it was necessary for me to understand how the housing market functions and how it is regulated in New York City.

The final step was looking for a representative number of social workers who would be willing to dedicate their time for an interview. This had proven to be the most arduous task when planning this research. Initially, my intention was to find social workers residing in East Harlem and who would possibly be of difference ethnicity, but after realizing how difficult it was getting in touch with someone, I decided that residence and race would not constitute a

criterion, so this facilitated the task of searching people; at least the interviewees I found work in completely different contexts. Having learned from past experiences that conducting interviews is time-consuming and since I knew that I would be taking only one trip to New York City, I had to limit the interviews to a small number (three). Furthermore, because I was able to leave for New York City only during the Christmas holidays, which is a very busy time of the year, I feared I would not be able to schedule an appointment with the social workers who replied to my requests, or that the interviews would be canceled at the last second. In the end, two interviewees had to cancel our appointment for work-related reasons. However, I was very lucky to find another social worker who had time for me by showing up directly in their office. In the end, the third interview was carried out on Skype a few weeks after returning to Switzerland.

Brief description of the interviewees:

- **SW1**: program coordinator at a family resources center, has worked in East Harlem for a year and a half, doesn't live in East Harlem
- **SW2**: director of the department of social work at a community health center, has worked in East Harlem for two years, doesn't live in East Harlem
- **SW3**: program director at an organization providing social services to the homeless, has worked in East Harlem since 2008, does not live in East Harlem.

Out of confidentiality reasons, the real names of the interviewees and the name of the company they work for have been omitted.

3.2 Data collection

The data collection method chosen for this research was semi-structured interviews. In this method, the interviewer disposes of an interview guide, in which there are questions about topics the interviewer wishes to cover, but he also has the freedom to ask other questions that might come to mind during the discussion, which lean towards specific arguments raised by the interviewee (Bryman, 2008). The drawback with this method, however, is that the interviewer runs the risk of omitting topics relevant to the research and the order in which the questions are posed can lead to very different answers from diverse perspectives, which then complicates the comparison of the data (Patton, 1990). I found myself in the situation described by Patton. My initial intention was posing questions in a pre-defined order, but during the interviews it turned out being a very hard task to follow, as, for example, some answers included elements that could be the answer to other questions. Another difficulty was trying to direct the conversation

in a way that the interviewees would bring up topics related to gentrification, which was frequently not the case. When noticing that the interviewee was going off the topic with the discussion, my strategy was to pose questions which would help leading to something more pertinent to my research. As my questions would cover a wide range of themes, I believe that semi-structured interviews are the ideal method for this research. My curiosity regarding the topics raised by the interviewees also led me to pose questions that were out of context. The questions are divided in three categories: introductory questions about the interviewee and its job, those about gentrification and those about the relation between gentrification and social work. The type of questions were chosen in a way that they would cover different aspects of gentrification in East Harlem as those seen in Chapter 2 and tried to balance the best way possible positive and negative aspects.

3.3 Analysis method

The method of choice for the analysis of the interviews is qualitative content analysis. Content analysis *"classifies textual material, reducing it to more relevant, manageable bits of data"* (Weber, 1990:5) and can be used for either qualitative or quantitative data. The main outcome of this method is the derivation of categories depicting the phenomenon (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). For this thesis in particular, I am going to follow the approach Hsieh and Shannon (2005) called Conventional Content Analysis, in which the coding categories are not pre-defined by a theoretical framework, but emerge during the analysis process. This approach is ideally suited for research either where the previous literature on the same theme is limited, or when the researcher is not able to pre-determine which topics could arise during the analysis process because of lack of knowledge (2005). I fall in the category in which I am dealing with a theme for which exists a voluminous amount of research, but virtually non-existent from the point of view of the subject of my research, social workers. The steps of this research method are as follows:

1. Attentive reading of the data and starting to make sense of it (2005);
2. Definition of what sort of element of the text to analyze, whether it is an individual theme, a word, sentence or a paragraph; in content analysis, the piece of analysis is usually the individual theme, no matter if it is presented with a single word or an entire paragraph (Zhang and Wildemouth, 2009);
3. Coding process: association of the unit of analysis to a specific theme or concept, which constitutes a sub-category (2005). Especially when there is considerable material to analyze, using computer programs like NVivo can be extremely helpful;

4. Sorting of the sub categories into smaller bits of the main theme, which are going to be the main focus of the analysis (Morse and Field, 1995);
5. Findings, discussion of the results and conclusion (2005).

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) stress that the main point in favor of this method is that the outcome of the research is uniquely determined by those subjected to the analysis. The researcher is ready to obtain any possible result, which allows him not to make use of pre-defined categories during the coding process and there is no literature review on the topic that could influence his expectations about what results would come out (2005). However, the fact that this method is mostly used in cases where there is a general lack of literature limits the chances to gain a broad understanding of the context, so the researcher incurs the risk of not identifying relevant categories subsequent to the coding process (2005).

There are two approaches to determine which categories are relevant to the purpose of the research and which are not (Zhang and Wildermuth, 2009):

- *Inductive category development*: the process in which the raw data is coded, grouped into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation (2009). This task is carried out with inductive reasoning, as the researcher individualizes the categories during the coding process (2009). This is the approach used in this thesis.
- *Deductive category development*: the categories the researcher wishes to discuss are already determined before starting the analysis process, so only data corresponding to the pre-defined topics is coded (2009).

To simplify the analysis task, I used the software NVivo 11 (examples of the application of this program in the Annexes) to code the content of the interviews and to ultimately find out what topics are relevant and most frequently discussed. In the first part of the analysis, I present the main topics the social workers raise when discussing gentrification. In the second part of the analysis, I discuss what could be the implications of gentrification on the profession of social work. Before presenting these results, a chapter is going to be dedicated to presenting and analyzing their own definition of gentrification.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The way the results and analysis are going to be organized is as shown in the following mind map (Photo 5). When going through the interviews, I realized that the main points of discussion can divided into three categories: own definition of social work, most discussed issues and impact of gentrification on social work. This classification of the results is suitable to answer the research questions defined in Chapter 1.

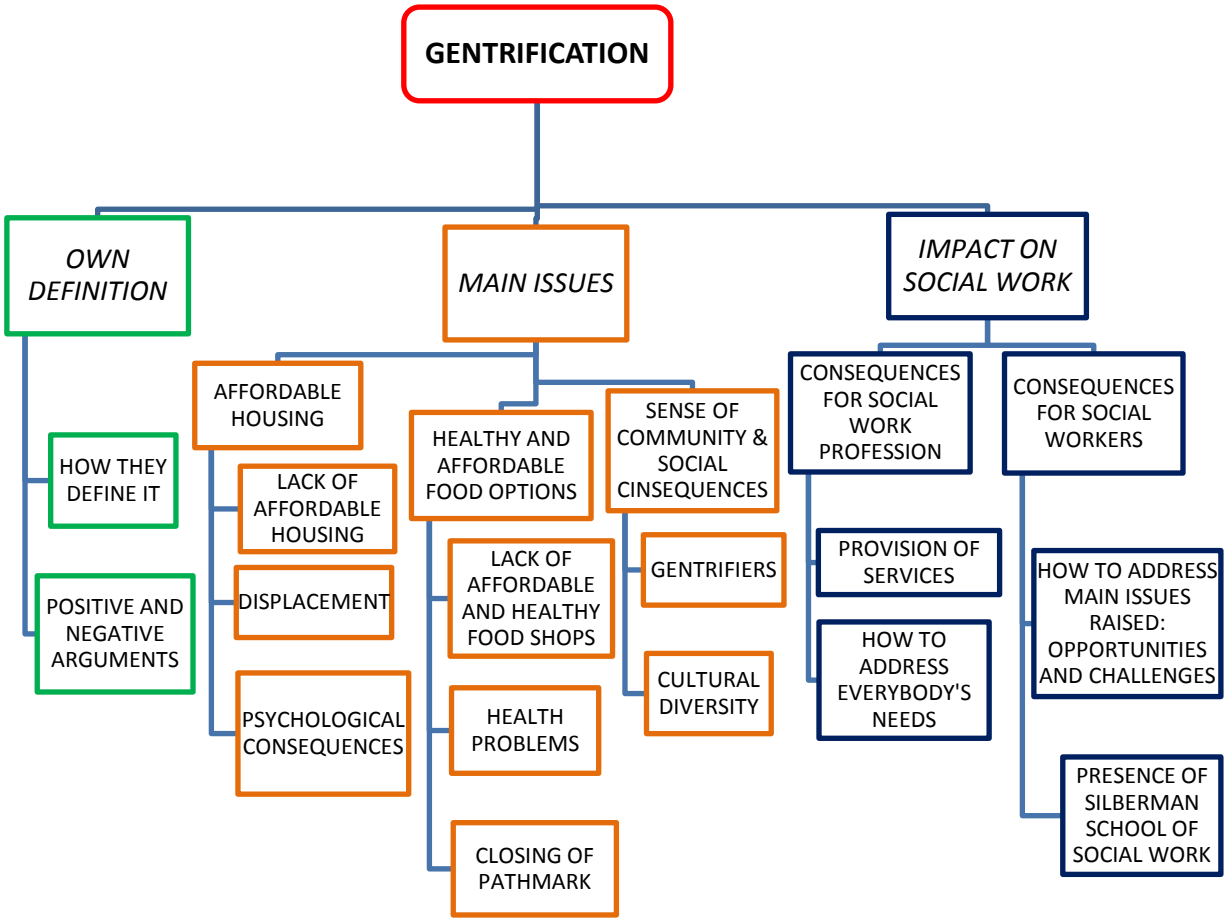


Photo 5: Mind map showing the organization of the results

4.1 Results

In this chapter, the most common topics of discussion in the interviews are going to be presented.

First of all, it is interesting noting how they define and view gentrification. The social workers generally welcome the revitalization East Harlem is experiencing, but fear that this will lead to the displacement of the current population due to rent spikes and to the loss of services for their client systems.

They all bring up the issue of displacement. They express concern about the potential consequences gentrification could have on their clients, as they come mostly from low-income backgrounds, so rent increases would seriously condition their lives and fuel discontent.

All of them mention the consequences of gentrification on the physical health of the population, in the sense that there is an influx of grocery stores which sell goods at prices that are too high for low-income residents. At the same time, grocery stores selling affordable healthy food are closing down due to rent spikes, with Pathmark being a overwhelmingly cited example. As a result, several residents are forced to find cheap groceries in other stores, which mostly sell unhealthy foods and this is causing concerns among the social workers for the health of the population.

Despite the fact that gentrification improves the look and the reputation of a neighborhood, the social workers fear that their clients will not be able to fit in this new and middle-class dominated environment. In particular, social workers are concerned with loss of those elements representing the culturally diverse population of East Harlem, such as shops selling foreign products and political representations. If current residents fail to integrate well with the new residents, social workers project that they will experience marginalization and lack of representation.

Finally, the social workers discuss how gentrification could impact their jobs and the social work profession in the neighborhood and share what they personally could do to address it. In addition to the lack of funding, they worry about the displacement of social services for the population in need, due do continuous local opposition on behalf of the new residents, who fear that the presence of social services would attract a somewhat problematic category of population, like homeless and drug addicts. They express the desire to address gentrification, in a way that this phenomenon would be benefitting their clients as well. They are all well aware of the presence of the Silberman School of Social Work, but besides working with interns enrolled there, they do not really perceive the involvement of the School in the community.

4.2 Analysis and discussion

4.2.1 Own definition of gentrification

The first and important step of the analysis is understanding what knowledge the social workers have of gentrification, how they define and which topics they bring up in relation to it.

SW1 believes gentrification is

> *Pretty much people coming in from the outside of the community and changing the whole dynamic of what it looks like, by pushing out the people who live here.* (SW1: 221-222)

When asked which kind of people are they, they mean "definitely wealthier and white".

SW2, when thinking of gentrification, argues that

> *For me, it is the loss of mom and pop shops* […] *East Harlem is slowly being gentrified and there is an influx of these no longer mom and pop stores.* (SW2: 205; 99-100)

Their definitions are somewhat different, but they both mention the fact that there is something that is coming into the neighborhood that in return is pushing out something else. SW1 stresses the effects gentrification has on the community, whereas SW2 relates the emergence of gentrification to the decreasing numbers of mom and pop stores. These stores, besides being small family-run businesses, also serve as an informal socializing place where people can easily interact with each other and are a non-negligible component of urban culture (Goodyear, 2016). SW2 establishes a relationship between gentrification and the amount of social interactions, in particular with the loss of them, so a resemblance can be established with SW1's definitions in terms of impact of gentrification on the community. SW2 associates the decreasing numbers of mom and pop shop with an *"influx of chain shops or restaurants"* (SW: 206-207). To clarify this statement, they make an analogy with Starbucks: *"my biggest concern is affordability. I like Starbucks just as much as the other guy, but a typical person from here can't really afford a cup from Starbucks"* (SW2: 218-220). Starbucks, which has a shop in East Harlem, it is often seen as a clear indicator of ongoing gentrification in the place where it is located (a socio-economical phenomenon known as "Starbucks effect[12]"). They fear that gentrification is bringing in the

[12]**"Starbucks effect"**: by many economists and real-estate developers, the presence of a Starbucks is often seen as sign that a neighborhood is prospering, what in turn increases home values and fuels gentrification (Rascoff and Humphries, 2015). According to a study carried out by these two authors, between 1997 and 2003 the values of the homes situated in proximity of a Starbucks increased by 96%, compared to the average increase of 65% of all the other homes in the USA.

neighborhood services that would be appreciated by both the present and future residents, but the drawback would be that only the new residents would have the chance to benefit from them, because these services would target at a population having a certain income level. They generalize this explanation when they affirm that *"if the needs* [of the community] *are housing, food choices and social services and if gentrification won't provide any of these needs, then it is going to be a challenge"* (SW2: 255-256). SW2 designates Starbucks as a symbol of all those services and innovations brought by gentrification that could be somewhat beneficial to everybody, but of which the current residents will not be able to take advantage because of financial reasons. As SW1 specifically mentions the impact of gentrification on the community, he alludes quite precisely to Kennedy and Leonard's (2001) Marxist-styled definition of gentrification, the one I am going to refer to for this thesis, as they indicate how it changes the aspect of a neighborhood. SW2 has similar views to those of Maurasse (2006), who is concerned about the usefulness for the native population of a broad range of new services coming into Harlem due to gentrification.

However, despite bringing up some negative arguments, SW1 phrases the changes ongoing in the neighborhood, when they explain the transformations that took place in the past 5/10 years, even though they neither explain why such changes are there, nor do they mention gentrification: *"I know they are doing a lot of things in in East Harlem to… not to revitalize, but give a less negative connotation to it… So there's been a lot of things that have been done to kind of clean up the area, to make it safer"* (SW1: 37-39). He refers to the past times where, as seen in Chapter 2.2.1, the neighborhood was afflicted by high crime rates and widespread poverty. In particular, they mention how these changes are having a positive impact on the people served by their agency (whom they always refer as "families"), who must cope with many social problems and are often victims of crime and drug abuse, when they claim that *"it's becoming a place that's being reclaimed, and we love that for the families that are here"* (SW1: 56-57). They believe that gentrification can potentially benefit their clients, in the sense that they would live in a safer neighborhood. They also take the point of view of their workplace when saying *"we at *workplace* are all for these projects"* (SW1: 39). Expressing the opinion of their workplace could be a mean to legitimize, to reinforce their affirmation. In spite of this optimism, they further offer a more specific explanation of their thoughts by adding a negative element: *"I wouldn't necessarily say that things are getting better… it is slowly improving but I think it is good that now there is more attention* [from the authorities]*… the mayor is paying more attention to it and it is not just being forgotten or brushed aside"* (SW1: 90-92). Either this could mean that it is still too early to predict if gentrification is improving his clients' lives, or that their clients are yet from fully benefitting from the changes brought by it.

SW3 brings up gentrification in a different way and, contrary to the previous social workers, they express mixed reviews about it. When they first define it, they show a more favorable position:

> *Gentrification is when a neighborhood that has a sort of very low-income status, it's poor and there are multiple issues going on, money is brought in by outsiders to start making changes and once those changes start happening, more and more people from the outside feel comfortable coming there and living there as it continues to change*. (SW3: 331-334)

Initially SW3 appears to have a positive view of gentrification, because, similarly to SW1, they argue that it brings positive changes and sees it as a way to get rid of the social problems of a neighborhood. However, attention must be paid on the subject of the sentence: *"people from the outside"* (SW3: 333), and they do not mention how the residents of the neighborhood (the people from the "inside") live through it. Once this observation is taken into consideration, then it emerges that SW3 actually does not have such a positive opinion of it. This hypothesis is confirmed in another abstract of the definition they give, when they finally mention the point of view of the residents: *"it's like they* [the residents] *don't get to keep the benefits, they get pushed out and they miss out when things start to be nice and they are no longer able to stay here"* (SW3: 338-340) . Like SW1, they raise the issue of displacement and, similarly to SW2, they fear the residents will not be able to fully benefit from the changes. Their thoughts reflect quite precisely those of Levy's and Cybriwsky's (1980), where they argue that the native residents are able to enjoy only for a short period of time the benefits brought by gentrification. What they think of this situation is *"that doesn't feel right to me, it doesn't feel right to me"* (SW3: 340). In addition, SW3 mentions that they learned about gentrification in high school, where at the time they were taught a negative definition of it. Their confusion about how to see gentrification can be explained with Hammett's (1991) and London's and Palen's (1984) argument, in which they affirm that it is an arduous task attributing an exact definition to gentrification and evaluating the consequences. Later in life, as they learned more about it, he found out about the positive aspects of it and because of this they are currently uncertain about whether gentrification is overall something positive or not. They talk about the struggle they have with how to view gentrification:

> *That's the thing, what's hard for me with gentrification is that…the folks who have always lived there they want to feel safe and they want their kids to be able to play outside and they deserve those things. And it's almost like when they work hard to get those things and make the neighborhood a safer place, then the people come in to take advantage of that and they get pushed out because of that* […] *The woman*

> *who has been living on the corner for 30 years might get frustrated with the changes that are happening, but I'm sure she feels good and safer in the neighborhood than she has before"*. (SW3: 98-104)

They stress that the residents are longing for changes in their neighborhood, which could be brought from gentrification, but adds that ultimately they will not be able to take advantage of them, because they will get priced out. To conclude this statement, they say that gentrification *"is like a double-edged sword"* (SW3: 104). Similar to SW2's opinion, SW3 shows a generally favorable attitude towards the changes brought by gentrification, but they only wished that everybody could benefit from them in the same way and not only the new residents.

4.2.2 Issues raised by the social workers

From the content of the interviews, it appears quite clearly that the main issue discussed by the social workers is housing, in particular the severe lack of affordable housing units and the threat of displacement that part of their clients are facing. In addition to this expected problem, others have come under the attention of the social workers: lack of affordable and healthy food options and the impact of gentrification on the sense of community.

4.2.2.1 Lack of affordable housing and displacement

When the social workers describe what the main problems afflicting East Harlem are, all of them treat the lack of affordable housing and displacement of the local population as one of the biggest issues, which concerns in particular their client systems. As seen previously in how they describe gentrification, most of them include in their definitions elements related to housing and displacement. Until more or less a decade ago East Harlem used to be one of the last safe havens of affordable housing in New York City, but since not too long ago the average rent prices have gone up dramatically and gentrification has played a major role in fueling this process (see Chapter 2.3). SW3 describes the evolution of the neighborhood in recent times:

> *I've seen the neighborhood change, I am concerned for more change, it's going to force out people who can't afford to live there now, where are they going to go* […]*? I do feel like this was the neighborhood in Manhattan that was reasonably priced for people. Now it's changing so much. Affordable housing is an issue everywhere but I think that East Harlem was a place that provided affordable housing and feel like it's not the case anymore, it's changing*. (SW3: 55-56; 57-60)

This summarizes very well the overall situation in East Harlem. SW3 has been practicing their job in East Harlem since 2008, so in the timespan of 8 years they have noticed considerable changes in the neighborhood. Being situated in Manhattan, East Harlem has become a very desirable place to live in, so more space is needed to make place for new buildings which would

house apartments at current market prices. At the same time, the rents of the already existing apartments have to adapt to these new market price levels and, as a consequence, the residents are having a harder time paying the rents. In the literature, this phenomenon is throughout fully described in Neil Smith's *rent-gap theory* (1986), in which he explains that gentrification originates from the rents of neighborhoods ideally located in proximity of the city center being proportionally lower to what the land is potentially worth. The real estate business in East Harlem has experienced exceptional growth in the last decade, but at the same time the average rent prices are lower than average in Manhattan. Consequently, it is easy to conclude that, as SW2 says, that those who have bought a property in East Harlem *"have been granted a wonderful financial opportunity to come here"* (SW2: 216-217).

All the interviewees work with a category of clientele whose lives are severely affected by the increase of the rents and who face the prospect of displacement. SW2 goes into depth by explaining the physiological effects of this issue on the people:

> *As the rents increase, the stress of the local population increases. In some cases desperateness comes to place"* and in relation to this, he argues that *"housing is vital, it's very very important to your health in general. If you don't have a roof, you are going to have many problems, whether it is physical or mental so it is impacting the physical and mental health of the East Harlem community"* and *"your rent is still a certain number that somehow is making you feel a little bit uncomfortable*. (SW2: 74-80; 92-93)

In the extract they describe what is grouped under the category "secondary psychological costs of displacement", listed in Aktinson and Bridge's (2005) table as a negative outcome of gentrification. I noticed how the literature has dedicated very little attention to the psychological consequences of gentrification. Perhaps it is easier for a social worker to bring up this issue, as, because of the nature of his profession, he has the means to understand what are the underlying psychological effects that emerge as consequence of a specific action. Social workers, when they take charge of a situation of a person being forced to leave his home, monitor closely its mental state and the emotions that come into play, exactly as described by SW2.

4.2.2.2 Lack of healthy and affordable food options

When I enquired about what the three social workers believe are the main social problems afflicting East Harlem or what is really missing for them there, they all overwhelmingly answered that it is lack of healthy and affordable food options. In particular, they explain how the low-income population cannot afford buying healthy food and that there are many health problems due to malnutrition originating from this limited access to healthy food. Gentrification has the tendency to bring to neighborhoods new shops selling products at a generally higher

price than those sold by the shops that have had their presence there for longer, so the average price of food products has increased and people are going to have a harder time finding affordable food that matches their budget (Anguelovsky, 2015).

SW1 appears particularly worried about the physical health his clients. When asked what they wished there would be in the neighborhood that is currently missing, they answer

> *Definitely more food options. There is really no any healthier affordable options for families* […] *That is a big issue for our families and we see a lot of obese, diabetes which is directly related to food* […] *when you are happening to make decisions between a cheaper unhealthy food option and a healthier but more expensive one, if you're poor you obviously go for the cheap one*. (SW1: 132-139)

The lack of affordable and healthy food could be a valid explanation of the emergence of physical problems among the population. This is currently an issue that mostly concerns low-income people, but gentrification could have a broader effect as it advances in the neighborhood and thus afflicts a greater number of people. In this respect, in October 2015 SW1's association has started a healthy nutrition group, which consists of classes and workshops about learning how to cook healthy food.

In addition to the diminishing number of cheap and healthy food options, there are growing concerns that gentrification might bring in grocery stores that do not cater the real needs of the community. SW2 shares their worries for this topic:

> […] *what kind of market would that be? Will it be a new Chelsea Market? Again, you have to cater to your costumers* […] *but is a Fairway or Chelsea Market something the East Harlem community would like? Absolutely not! Absolutely not!* (SW2: 118-129; 121-123)

Chelsea Market is an indoor market situated in the district of Chelsea (Manhattan), where there are multiple fine food shops and restaurants and is believed that the presence of this market is contributing to the gentrification of the surrounding areas (Navarro, 2015). He uses the example of Chelsea Market to symbolize all of those businesses and food-selling places that settle in East Harlem and aim to serve only a limited part of the population, similar to how he sees Starbucks.

All of the interviewees mention Pathmark in their discussions, the healthy and affordable food retailer that closed down in November 2015. SW2 argues that the closure of Pathmark is one of the biggest changes he has seen in recent times.

> […] *the biggest change I've seen in the last 2 years is the closing of the supermarket Pathmark that has been in East Harlem for many many many years*.

> […] *They* [the population] *have been accustomed for decades to affordable food choices like the Pathmark, so this closure is going to have a big impact on our community.* (SW2: 101-103; 123-124)

The Pathmark, besides being a symbolic institution of East Harlem, played as well a very important role in providing healthy and affordable food options, and SW2 fears that the community is going to suffer without it, as it will face the problem of having less healthy food choices and it is thus going to be more prone to health problems. SW1 denotes how the closure of Pathmark is *"a big thing for our families"* (SW1: 134-135), symbolizing how this event hasn taken a serious toll on the community.

4.2.2.3 Sense of community, culture and impact on population

As gentrification advances in a neighborhood, new buildings spring up and new shops open, which all primarily aim to serve the new residents, the *gentrifiers*. SW3 describes the gentrifiers as:

> […] *mostly young white folks, couples, families… And these new people like living here. I think that years ago they wouldn't have chosen to live up here, they wouldn't have felt comfortable, safe. And now people are feeling safe.* (SW3: 95-97)

SW3 believes that new people are populating the neighborhood because of increased safety levels.

SW1, besides defining who gentrifiers are, mentions how they settle spatially in the neighborhood:

> *Definitely wealthier and whites* […] *most of them settle in the lower parts of East Harlem, by the Upper East Side, but we don't see much of that up here in 125th St, but we know that down below 116th St, around 109th St there is a little bit more of that, especially when you get closer to Central Park. So the more south you go, the more rich it becomes.* (SW1: 214-218)

They agree that they mostly consist of white people, and add the fact that they are wealthy, young and couples. In addition, SW1 specifies where they mostly reside, which is in the area below 116th St and explains how the people are wealthier the close they live to Midtown. In the quote he mentions a specific location, 125th St. Besides being the location of his workplace, 125th St is often mentioned in the other interviews as a desolated and dangerous place, probably still untouched by the wave of gentrification affecting the surrounding areas, despite going through a cleanup process in recent times. The presence of gentrification is an indication that an

area is being revitalized, so the authorities are somehow paying more attention to it. In the case of East Harlem,

> […] *East Harlem is not the area that gets looked at the most, like the Upper West Side, Tribeca, all these places where there are rich people, these issues get fixed right away but then these areas where the people don't have as much money, who have more at stake of speaking up and sharing their voice it's a lot more difficult.* (SW1: 83-86)

The more the median income of an area is higher, the more attention it gets from the local governments (Evers, 2013), like lower East Harlem, the Upper West Side and Tribeca. As people pay higher taxes, they expect in return more services, and where the tax base is low there are not sufficient financial resources to provide the population with certain services. SW1's assumption reflects the findings of McDonald (1986), where they associate gentrification with a lower crime rate and increased attention from the authorities. It is obvious from this example that gentrification is spreading from the south, the area closest to Midtown, to the northern part of the neighborhood, towards the Bronx. However, in the northern areas, including 125th St, gentrification is still at an early stage. SW3 claims that

> *The biggest changes* [he has seen in the past 5/10 years] *is from 125th and Lexington Ave, seeing it going from this kind of crazy corner where you never knew what to expect to a desolate empty space* […] *there was always a lot of talk about that corner at work, like why nobody should walk there but take the subway instead… Then all of a sudden, when it was like sort of removed, it felt surprising to me, I think also specifically because it felt like it was very unwelcoming to our clients, like you can't spend time there.* (SW3: 131-132; 354-357)

They explain how the 125th St area went from being a dangerous area to being cleaned up, but it has yet to be revitalized. In addition, they bring up another issue: how are their clients dealing with the changes going on in their neighborhood?

> […] *I have the impression that there are changes going on that are making it less comfortable for homeless to be homeless in that area.* (SW3: 44-46)

East Harlem has been going through a wave of transformation in recent times for different reasons, but it does not necessarily mean that it is having a positive outcome on everybody. SW3 is worried for their client system, the homeless, as these changes could lead to less social services for them and they might feel even more out of place with these changes going on (a topic that is going to be discussed in depth in Chapter 5.3.1).

East Harlem, with the high percentage of its residents being foreign and as a stronghold of Latin American culture, could see its demographic composition change considerably as more new residents flock in and thus, as stated in Kenney and Leonard's definition of gentrification (2001), change the essential character of the neighborhood.

> *The majority of our staff is bilingual and we put a lot of emphasis on that. No matter which culture a family belongs to, we always try to incorporate that. All the material we provide, the classes are bilingual.* (SW1: 191-193)

> […] **workplace* take full knowledge and sensitivities and values that acknowledges that we're here, so attempt to hire 100% bilingual staff. Most of the employees speak Spanish* […] **workplace* is still very enriched in the cultures of East Harlem. When we do events, you will see the music, the food, it will have that catering and appreciations and believes of those here in El Barrio.* (SW2: 233-235; 236-238)

As the social workers serve a very diverse clientele, it is recommended for them to be fully aware of their background and culture. The majority of the social workers speak Spanish to provide a better service to the important Latin community and play a key role in this community by organizing events especially catered to them. As Murdie and Texeira (2009) argue, it is important for the foreign community to live in a place where they feel accepted and where they feel at ease with conducting a lifestyle according to their traditions. As the changes brought by gentrification could make these people feel out of their comfort zone (Zukin, 2010), it is part of the social workers' job to assure that they maintain their sense of belonging and do not out of place where they live (Huyser and Meerman, 2014).

4.2.3 Impact of gentrification on the social work profession

This section is going to discuss how gentrification has impacted the social work profession in East Harlem and how the social workers are dealing with gentrification in their everyday's occupations.

4.2.3.1 Consequences of gentrification on sector of social work

As a starting point, it is important to first understand what the main needs of a social worker in East Harlem are and what their working conditions are like. Among the social workers there is overwhelming agreement that East Harlem disposes of a sufficient number of social services, despite the presence of a few issues like the lack of financial resources, insufficient cooperation among the different institutions and the scarcity of resources available to the homeless (the drop-in centers), who are SW3's main clients. However, in some areas, additional services are needed to serve a specific category of people.

We don't need more social services, we need more money. (SW1: 273)

We can always use more [social services]. *But we do have a lot of social services. I do feel that with the institutions that we have here we have a lot of social service programs that serve the needs of the community. I think that we could work better together.* (SW2: 157-159)

I think there is a fair amount of social programs. They may not be like the drop-in centers where the people can go and stay. (SW3: 232-233)

In spite of the satisfactory number of social programs, some social workers argue that, in reality, they lack of resources which would be fundamental to addressing completely the needs of the population:

Then we need more housing, that's the other problem. We can encounter, engage and meet as much money as we want but if we have no place to house folks then we're going to be stuck […] *You feel like you don't have enough resources to offer* […] *but there isn't so much that I can offer, and that feels frustrating. I f I had unlimited supply it would feel much nicer* […]. (SW3: 197-199; 284; 285-286)

And certainly more areas of social work or places where we can work together to better address the work needs or the mental health needs of the people, but in a way where they can get the help that they need […] *So maybe affordable housing may not be in East Harlem, but if it's not there, how do you address those needs?* (SW2: 134-137; 137-138)

They argue that a sufficient number of social services is not helpful enough to deal with the people's needs and that the availability of resources (affordable housing in the previous quotes) is condition that deeply influences the efficacy of their work. Just as Younghusband (1959) indicates in its definition of community practice, the quality of community practice is dependent on the number of means social workers have at disposal. In spite of the social worker's willingness to find a solution to the problem of lack of resources, they must cope with certain part of the population who opposes the increase of social services in their neighborhood:

I sense that there is this other group of people in the community who want us to stop offering more programs, more services… These people feel that, if we build more social services, we're going to attract more people with problems to East Harlem […] *there is another group here in East Harlem who may not want affordable housing, they might not want another social worker agency or a rehab, because these folks fear that these institutions may attract a certain type of*

population […] *This small contingency of people in an advocacy group think that we're going to attract more people.* (SW2: 183-185; 51-53; 188-189)

In the quote, SW2 discusses about the presence of people coming from an advocacy group that is speaking up against the settlement of new social services in their neighborhood, however it is not clear what type of people they are exactly. At the same time, as stated before, social services are needed in this neighborhood to address people's issues and they wonder how are they going to be able to carry out their jobs flawlessly if they cannot provide certain services. This is a concerned raised by SW2 and SW3:

A patient who wants services generally wants to stay in East Harlem. A lot of it it's due to its financial situation. So if you have something that I can walk to get a service, a program for any kind of problem (pregnant mom, housing problems), I wouldn't want to go all the way Downtown because I would have to pay to go all the way there. (SW2: 327-331)

I'd like to have one of those [safe heavens for the homeless] *in East Harlem, but they are always located nearby so the clients aren't as willing to go because it feels unknown to them.* (SW3: 174-176)

If certain needs of the population cannot be satisfied with the social services currently located in the neighborhood, but at the same time new social services cannot be built because of other people's opposition, the residents are going to be forced to seek for help elsewhere, outside of East Harlem. The social workers are expressing concern for this, because those in need both don't have the financial means to go looking for help elsewhere, and they feel much more comfortable making use of the resources already located in their neighborhood; in other words, people wish to get help in a place familiar to them. With these assumptions in mind, it could be argued that part of the sector of social work in East Harlem has ended up in the situation of "involuntary immobility", theorized by Newman and Wyly (2006). There is a push to expand social services across the neighborhood because there is the urge to address certain necessities that social workers are currently not able to take care of with what they have at disposal. A the same time, they are facing difficulties with the expansion of their services because there is increasing opposition coming from those who fear that this could lead to attracting undesired people and, if they relocated somewhere else, they would face the same wave of opposition from the residents living there. SW2 gives a hint about the possible consequences of this inability to expand the social services in the neighborhood:

> *There is going to be a clash at some point, so someone's going to have to lose out, because the developers are not going to want to showcase a very inexpensive apartment to a clientele with this kind of safety issues.* (SW2: 151-153)

4.2.3.2 Consequences of gentrification on the social workers' profession

As seen in the previous part of the analysis, gentrification is having a visible impact on the sector of social work in East Harlem, with the inability to expand social services and a clientele that is in some ways suffering from the continuous effects of gentrification on their lives. The next step of this analysis is investigating how the social workers are addressing issues related to gentrification and how their job has changed. The results are mixed and they are all reacting to it in different ways, even though they all recognize that gentrification poses a considerable threat to their clients and affirm the need to look more attentively into it.

> *Given the type of job I do, I don't think that gentrification is that pressing of an issue, because there are so many other things that many families face, like losing custody of their child, being evicted from their apartments. Not that gentrification is not important, I do believe it is a very important issue, but I don't have time to advocate and fight against that. We have other issues at *workplace**. (SW1: 243-247)

SW1 does recognize that gentrification could in some ways impact negatively his clients, but does not believe that it is their job to address it, because their clients have other more important problems to cope with.

> *Something I never do and that I wonder if I should do more on the policy end of things and government end of things, like getting more involved with how decisions are made about affordable housing or like when you were talking about this rezoning plan, I feel very removed from that. My work is very specific with the person, assisting him and getting him what he needs and that's the part I like, but sometimes I feel like I need to get more involved in this sort of policy, larger picture thing, because that's how you change things, you got to be able to change things there... It is one thing being able to assist one person, but it's another thing to be able to make a larger change that would assist a lot of people. It just never interested me as much as talking to that person.* (SW3: 361-369)

SW3 has been wondering how they could contribute to addressing gentrification, by expressing the desire to get more involved in decision-making processes.

> [Gentrification] *has made me look into addressing the needs of housing for my patients and working closely with other agencies, strengthening partnerships,*

*working directly with my staff, with caseworkers that would help patients with housing. I think that if *workplace* does not address the housing situation head on, we will be continuing to face patients who have problems with their physical and mental health.* […] *So it has definitely made me think more about gentrification, the impact and it has changed my way of looking at how we can help our patients.* (SW2: 313-318; 319-321)

SW2 is the only one among the interviewees who shows they have taken action to help people deal with gentrification it, which is paying more attention to housing-related issues and building partnerships with other professionals and agencies to solve together these problems. With these three different answers, it is hard finding common features among them and explaining why exactly they are reacting to gentrification in that particular way. What I assume is that the answer could be traced to the type of position they cover in the agency they work for. As a program coordinator, SW1 is probably less involved in policy-making processes, unlike SW2 and SW3, who cover a higher position. Thus, it could be that SW2 and SW3 have the feeling that they are in the position to deal more effectively these issues, so bear the responsibility to do something about it, whereas SW1's function is more suitable to dealing with problems at a lower scale.

It is interesting to note how the resettlement of the Silberman School of Social Work in East Harlem changed the social work profession in the neighborhood and if and how it is influencing the ways gentrification is being addressed. In 2011, the social work department of Hunter College relocated to East Harlem from its original location in the Upper East Side, claiming that they wanted to be more immersed in the East Harlem community in order better deal with the issues of the neighborhood. All three of them gave roughly the same answer, which are as follows:

I believe they wanted to be immersed in a community they can really work in. But I'm not sure though. (SW1: 262-263)

I can try to guess it. The school has always been committed to addressing the needs of the underserved […] *I think that the leaders of the Hunter School wanted to pick a location purposely fort the process of making it even easier for them to help the community* […] *They could have moved anywhere, but they purposely chose East Harlem because they wanted their presence to be even closer to meeting the needs of the community* […]. (SW2: 274-275; 276-277; 278-280)

I don't know. Maybe because the rent was cheaper which is why many businesses move here. […] *But I also wonder if there wasn't a part of them that… you know,*

> *the history of social working is working with the urban poor and if they wanted to be in a neighborhood where they felt they could bring something positive to the neighborhood.* (SW3: 297; 300-302)

The transfer of the School to East Harlem was a significant event for the sector of social work in East Harlem, however it emerges that none of the three social workers know exactly the reasons why this school moved there. In spite of not being aware of the reasons, they all guessed that the school wants to engage more with the community, what corresponds exactly with official explanation given by the school board (see Chapter 2.8.1 for more details). However, there could be other explanations to this, as SW3 points out by mentioning rent-related reasons. This explanation is reasonable, as the Upper East Side is one of the most affluent neighborhoods in New York City, so Silberman probably relocated to East Harlem because of cheaper expenses. As the school relocated there only recently, it is not suitable to draw conclusions about the impact of the presence of this school in the neighborhood. Furthermore, all the agencies the social workers work for employ interns from that school, but that is the only connection they believe they have with Silberman. However, SW2 adds that

> […] *we set high expectations of each other* [the social worker agencies], *so we set high expectations for *workplace* to provide the best quality services and I am also sure that the Silberman School thinks it that way* […] *There are also high expectations of them, taking their opportunity to East Harlem to the next level. It's great that they're here, we welcome them, we work with them* […] (SW2: 292-294; 296-297)

SW2 is satisfied with their presence in East Harlem, but they expect them to carry out an outstanding job. At the same time, they are aware that, in order to cooperate with them, they must provide services that live up to the level demanded from Silberman. In specific, what they expect from them is greater involvement in the community, as promised from Silberman when they moved there:

> […] *are they taking in students internationally, from other parts of the City or of the Tri-State area, or are they looking for candidates from East Harlem? Again, I think that being even related to somebody that is similar in terms of your culture, especially somebody who is very similar with your language, I think that makes a difference. In encourage the Silberman School and other schools to hire potential good candidates who are directly from here* […] (SW2: 299-305)

In terms of community engagement, they wishe that Silberman would incentivize the enrollment of students from East Harlem, as he believes that there are many of them who would be

qualified and because they would understand better their clients than someone coming from outside who does not know the neighborhood as good. As Younghusband (1959) believes, the best way possible to serve a community is having deep knowledge of it and SW2 adds that the highest quality service can probably be provided from those who have lived in there. In gentrifying areas, Huyser and Meerman (2014) stress the importance the social workers' awareness of the population's sense of belonging has when carrying out a job aimed at serving the community in an optimal way. As workers from East Harlem most probably already a sense of belonging to the neighborhood incorporated in themselves, there is no doubt that hiring staff directly residing in the area is highly advisable.

4.3 Discussion

As seen in the previous chapter, the social workers I interviewed bring up several topics related to gentrification in the interviews, but their explanations differ according to their specific job and position they cover within the agency they work for. The objective of this chapter is now putting all the results together and making sense of them.

The three social workers discuss gentrification in different ways. However, all of them associate it with the typical Marxist topic of displacement, by mentioning how this is one of the biggest worries of the population and that it is an issue they must often address at work. Somebody goes in depth with their explanations by highlighting the psychological effects of it. This is a surprising result when put in comparison with Slater's beliefs (2006), who affirms that the topic of displacement no longer gains much interest anymore in contemporary gentrification literature. Furthermore, the social workers' fears about displacement could be considered unfunded when taking into account Freeman and Braconi's quantitative study (2002) about the research of a correlation between gentrification and displacement in New York City, in which, contrary to common belief, discover that there is no significant correlation between the two variables. There is a clear discrepancy between Slater's ideas and how the social workers and the population in general perceive the risk of displacement. This justifies the need to carry out again a quantitative study, similar to that of Freeman and Braconi, about the relation between gentrification and displacement in East Harlem in recent times, to give credibility to the social worker's concerns. This is a matter that seriously needs to be addressed not only for East Harlem, but also for all of those areas which are being affected by gentrification, in order to evaluate if gentrification is really forcing people out of their home and to assure the implementation by the authorities of an ideal policy adapted to the specific situation of the area.

Despite the social workers' awareness of the problems afflicting the neighborhood, it emerges that they have yet to do something tangible about gentrification. All of them recognize the seriousness of this issue and how the neighborhood has changed in recent times because of it, but not everybody expresses the urgency to specifically do something about it. What turns out is that, in reality, the social workers are addressing this issue, but on a small scale and at a more individual level. Some of them, for example when dealing with housing-related problems for low-income families, are indirectly dealing with a problem that has become deeper due to gentrification; or when worrying about the disappearance of healthy and affordable food shops, they put under the spotlight how new services and facilities are gearing more and more towards the tastes of the new inhabitants, the gentrifiers. They are not occupied with specifically addressing gentrification, but by trying to provide the everyday needs of their client systems, indirectly give their contribution to the issue of gentrification.

Given the very culturally diverse population of East Harlem, it would be recommended for social workers to have a deep understanding of the individual's culture and to find the ideal strategy to help people in a way they would feel at ease with. The social workers bring up this fact very clearly, by affirming the engagement of almost exclusively bilingual staff and by organizing events targeting a certain type of population or culture. This is the same recommendations Huyers and Meerman (2014) share for social workers practicing their jobs in gentrifying neighborhoods, in terms of sense of belonging and cultural awareness. As Krase (2005) argues, gentrification not only displaces people, but also elements that represent the culture of a certain population will eventually move out or disappear, so social workers must consider this potential scenario when practicing their jobs. This is to avoid the emergence of class struggles, between the original and new population, who have different needs.

The social workers mention the lack of resources they have at their disposal to flawlessly carry out their duties and feel disturbed by not being able to provide an optimal service to their clients. While they do not clearly relate this issue to gentrification, I understood with Levy and Newman's (2006) theory of "involuntary immobility" that it could have played a role in creating these conditions for social services and it has the potential to worsen over time if not solved promptly. As such, social workers seriously need to advocate for the right to physically expand their services, which is going to be a challenge in a gentrifying neighborhood like East Harlem, where more and more people are longing to possess a property and at the same time the price of the rents, as seen in Chapter 2.3, is skyrocketing. There is a probability that, in the future, social workers are going to face a stronger political opposition to their requests to expand services, in case there is going to be a decreasing number of people covering a political function who advocate for the interests of a specific segment of the population, mostly Latinos. This is a scenario Hyra (2014) describes as "political displacement", in this case of the political

representations of minority groups. If the politics of East Harlem are going to develop in this direction, it is probable that social workers will have to bring their engagement in the community at a higher level, where they could have a voice in policy making, just as SW3 wishes to do.

As a last point of discussion, it is worth noting how positively and how negatively overall the social workers perceive gentrification. Through gentrification, the neighborhood has experienced some much-needed changes, for example the restructuring of run-down buildings, higher security levels and, like neighboring Harlem, it has become an increasingly appreciated place by tourists and investors. At the same time, on a negative note, it is subtracting an array of resources and elements much needed by the neighborhood's foreign, low-income population and in general from a category of people easily exposed to social problems and hardship, which constitute the majority of the social worker's client system. The general sense I get when analyzing the content of the interviews and when associating it with the arguments brought forward by the Marxist literature, while considering the current effects of gentrification in East Harlem, is that they fear that the main consequence of gentrification is going to be the deprivation of some much needed services for the local population. Gentrification, just like in East Harlem, primarily facilitates the appearance of elements that are mostly targeted to the middle and upper classes, of which lower class people do not have easy access to or do not need at all, an accentuated issue in this thesis with the example of Starbucks. The main goal of a social worker is assuring the well-being of whoever is in need in the most effective way possible. They welcome some of the changes in the neighborhood, however, as they fear that their clients will not be able to benefit from most of them and that ultimately some are going to harm them, I can conclude with certainty that their versions of gentrification tend to highlight negative aspects. The Marxist literature on gentrification portrays this phenomenon mostly from the point of view of the underprivileged of society and, at the same time, social workers mostly cope with issues which concern individuals that are somewhat unprivileged and neglected by society. This explains that the results I found from the interviews are due to the fact that social workers mostly have a Marxist view of gentrification. Even though they recognize the positive changes in the neighborhood due to gentrification, their vision is greatly influenced by how they see it is affecting their clients' lives, which is predominantly in a negative way.

5. CONCLUSION

The main goal of this research was to understand how social workers view gentrification and how it is affecting the sector of social work in the specific socio-cultural context of the neighborhood of East Harlem, NY. Given the penury of studies which investigate the relationship between gentrification and social work, it is worth questioning at first if such a research topic makes sense. While talking to the social workers and through the analysis of the results, I can easily affirm that, at least in East Harlem, the profession of social work greatly perceives the influence of the effects of gentrification. The three social workers I interviewed share more or less the same concerns; those being displacement, deprivation of healthy and affordable food stores and the lack of resources they have at disposal to help their clients. The greatest part of gentrification literature focuses on the classical topic of displacement and aims to describe this phenomenon mostly in economic terms, but a specific literature about this phenomenon from the point of view of a professional subject is severely lacking, and I find it surprising that there is such a gap in the literature. The figure of the social worker, undoubtedly, can bring a very valuable contribution to the greater gentrification debate. Because of their broad knowledge of the social issues afflicting the area they work for, the recognition of recent neighborhood changes, their sensitivity and given their expertise when dealing with these problems, they could share with us a vision of gentrification from a unique point of view, which could help shed light on some previously unknown aspects about this topic. For example, besides the topic of displacement, in this thesis the social workers have contributed greatly to the debate about the potential effects that gentrification could have on the physical and mental health of the population, by discussing in detail the problem of the lack of healthy and affordable food options for low-income people and how people experience displacement.

An additional point which validates the significance of such research are my findings about how gentrification is taking a visible toll on the profession of social work and how the social workers are adapting to it. In this respect, it is clear from their perceptions that, more than a possibility to bring positive changes to East Harlem, gentrification is affecting in a negative manner the lives of their client systems, which in turn is making the social workers' job increasingly challenging. Their requests for expanded services are being met with growing opposition and they have the feeling that the political board of the neighborhood is becoming less and less concerned about the needs of the low-income population, as seen with the increasingly difficult access to affordable housing and the support of services mostly aimed at satisfying a wealthier segment of the population. Social workers constitute an important voice in addressing this issue, as they work in close cooperation with governing bodies and, according to their function, could have a

broad knowledge of the legal aspects concerning the neighborhood. Furthermore, the settlement of the Silberman School of Social Work could constitute a promising future for the social work sector, as it is bringing to East Harlem a higher number of professionals and could strengthen the network among the different social services, thus enforcing the social workers' position and influence on different levels.

Despite the interesting results that have emerged, it is worth mentioning that this paper would have gained more credibility if a larger number of social workers had been interviewed, which was not possible due to time constraints when conducting interviews and because of other circumstances described in Chapter 3.1. The analysis of only three interviews is not valid enough to generalize my findings on the overall problematic, but it could certainly contribute with some valid suggestions for reflection. The content of this thesis could have been further enriched with the interview of a least one social worker residing in East Harlem and at least one social worker belonging to a different racial group, Latino or African-American. In addition, just for personal needs, it would have been ideal interviewing at least a long-time East Harlem resident to gain a detailed perspective of the changes the neighborhood is undergoing and of its own opinion on gentrification. Furthermore, regarding displacement in particular, it would have been helpful collecting information from someone involved in the real-estate business to have a deeper understanding of how housing and rents are regulated in the area.

One must keep in mind that I am treating the outcomes of gentrification for the social work profession as exclusively valid for East Harlem or at least for an area with a similar socio-cultural context. It is true that gentrifying neighborhoods have a few features in common, but there is such a great number of variables that distinguish a neighborhood from another that make it improper to generalize my findings on a larger scale. However, with the support of the theoretical framework, my conclusions could help individualizing different implications for other neighborhoods.

Gentrification is an exciting topic of debate for the literature of many disciplines, and taking into account an unusual point of view like that of social workers further enriches this discussion. Listening to social workers could without a doubt put under the spotlight different issues would otherwise go unnoticed by authorities, and social workers do have the possibility to exercise a considerable influence on the decisions taken from the governing board and thus advocate for the needs of their clients. With this in mind, a close cooperation between social workers and governing bodies could potentially transform gentrification into a positive phenomenon, not only for wealthy individuals, but also for those who tend to be left behind, ultimately granting the whole community of East Harlem a bright and promising future.

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7. ANNEXES

7.1 List of Photos

Photo 1: Riccardo Cerutti, December 22, 2015.

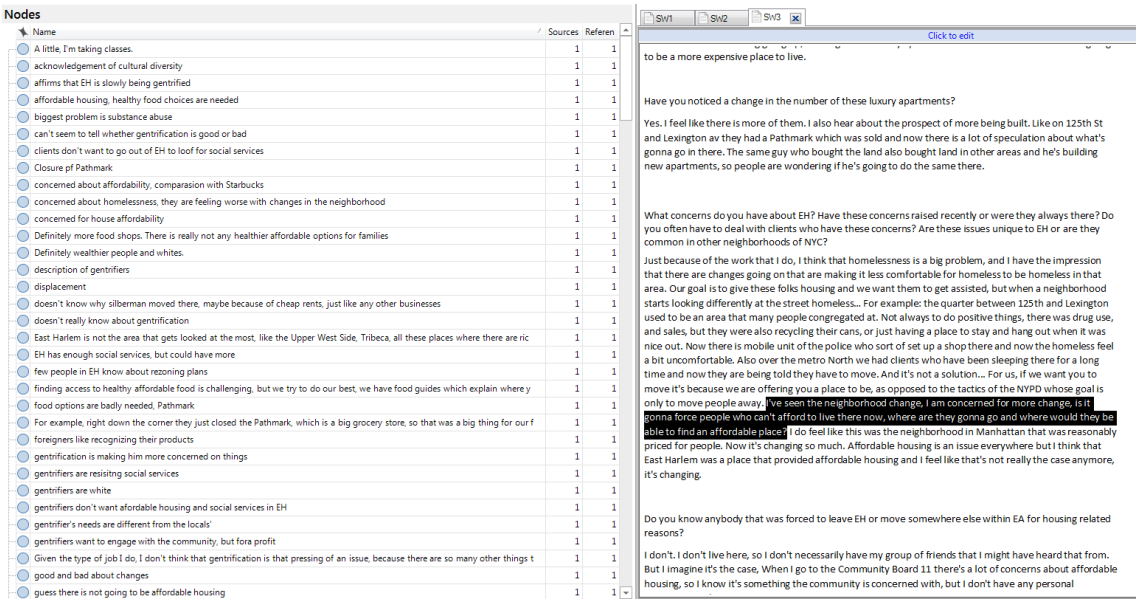
Photo 2: Claire Wilson, September 10, 2006. http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/10/realestate/10livi.html [Consulted on July 19, 2016].

Photo 3: Roxana Baicenau, October 14, 2015. http://www.propertyshark.com/Real-Estate-Reports/2015/10/14/a-decade-of-home-price-changes-in-nyc-reveals-a-very-divided-city/ [Consulted on July 23, 2016].

Photo 4: David Howard King, November 6, 2015. http://www.gothamgazette.com/index.php/government/5972-east-harlem-tenants-group-rejects-de-blasio-housing-plan-offer-its-own [Consulted on April 2, 2016].

Photo 5: Riccardo Cerutti, March 29, 2016.

7.2 Coding from NVivo 11



Nodes

Name	Sources	Referen
A little, I'm taking classes.	1	1
acknowledgement of cultural diversity	1	1
affirms that EH is slowly being gentrified	1	1
affordable housing, healthy food choices are needed	1	1
biggest problem is substance abuse	1	1
can't seem to tell whether gentrification is good or bad	1	1
clients don't want to go out of EH to loof for social services	1	1
Closure pf Pathmark	1	1
concerned about affordability, comparasion with Starbucks	1	1
concerned about homelessness, they are feeling worse with changes in the neighborhood	1	1
concerned for house affordability	1	1
Definitely more food shops. There is really not any healthier affordable options for families	1	1
Definitely wealthier people and whites.	1	1
description of gentrifiers	1	1
displacement	1	1
doesn't know why silberman moved there, maybe because of cheap rents, just like any other businesses	1	1
doesn't really know about gentrification	1	1
East Harlem is not the area that gets looked at the most, like the Upper West Side, Tribeca, all these places where there are ric	1	1
EH has enough social services, but could have more	1	1
few people in EH know about rezoning plans	1	1
finding access to healthy affordable food is challenging, but we try to do our best, we have food guides which explain where y	1	1
food options are badly needed, Pathmark	1	1
For example, right down the corner they just closed the Pathmark, which is a big grocery store, so that was a big thing for our f	1	1
foreigners like recognizing their products	1	1
gentrification is making him more concerned on things	1	1
gentrifiers are resisitng social services	1	1
gentrifiers are white	1	1
gentrifiers don't want afordable housing and social services in EH	1	1
gentrifier's needs are different from the locals'	1	1
gentrifiers want to engage with the community, but fora profit	1	1
Given the type of job I do, I don't think that gentrification is that pressing of an issue, because there are so many other things t	1	1
good and bad about changes	1	1
guess there is not going to be affordable housing	1	1

SW1 SW2 SW3

Click to edit

to be a more expensive place to live.

Have you noticed a change in the number of these luxury apartments?

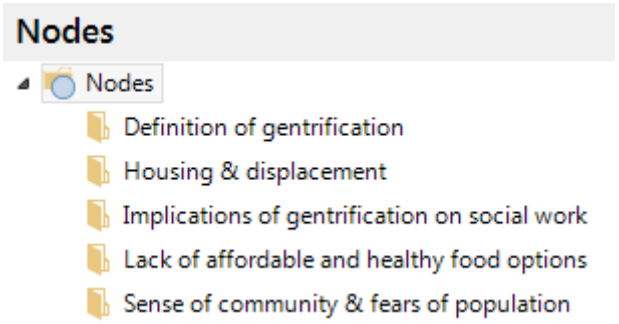
Yes. I feel like there is more of them. I also hear about the prospect of more being built. Like on 125th St and Lexington av they had a Pathmark which was sold and now there is a lot of speculation about what's gonna go in there. The same guy who bought the land also bought land in other areas and he's building new apartments, so people are wondering if he's going to do the same there.

What concerns do you have about EH? Have these concerns raised recently or were they always there? Do you often have to deal with clients who have these concerns? Are these issues unique to EH or are they common in other neighborhoods of NYC?

Just because of the work that I do, I think that homelessness is a big problem, and I have the impression that there are changes going on that are making it less comfortable for homeless to be homeless in that area. Our goal is to give these folks housing and we want them to get assisted, but when a neighborhood starts looking differently at the street homeless... For example: the quarter between 125th and Lexington used to be an area that many people congregated at. Not always to do positive things, there was drug use, and sales, but they were also recycling their cans, or just having a place to stay and hang out when it was nice out. Now there is mobile unit of the police who sort of set up a shop there and now the homeless feel a bit uncomfortable. Also over the metro North we had clients who have been sleeping there for a long time and now they are being told they have to move. And it's not a solution... For us, if we want you to move it's because we are offering you a place to be, as opposed to the tactics of the NYPD whose goal is only to move people away. I've seen the neighborhood change, I am concerned for more change, is it gonna force people who can't afford to live there now, where are they gonna go and where would they be able to find an affordable place? I do feel like this was the neighborhood in Manhattan that was reasonably priced for people. Now it's changing so much. Affordable housing is an issue everywhere but I think that East Harlem was a place that provided affordable housing and I feel like that's not really the case anymore, it's changing.

Do you know anybody that was forced to leave EH or move somewhere else within EA for housing related reasons?

I don't. I don't live here, so I don't necessarily have my group of friends that I might have heard that from. But I imagine it's the case, When I go to the Community Board 11 there's a lot of concerns about affordable housing, so I know it's something the community is concerned with, but I don't have any personal



Lack of affordable and healthy food options

Name	Sources	Referen	Created On	Created	Modified On	Modified
affordable housing, healthy food choices are needed	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
Closure of Pathmark	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
Definitely more food shops. There is really not any healthier affordable options for families	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
finding access to healthy affordable food is challenging, but we try to do our best, we have food guides which explain where you can buy this healthy food.	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
food options are badly needed, Pathmark	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
For example, right down the corner they just closed the Pathmark, which is a big grocery store, so that was a big thing for our families. It is a big issue for our families, and I would love to s	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
Hard for her getting lunch	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
More grocery stores.	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
No healthy food options	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
no Pathmark, lack of affordable grocery stores	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
No Pathmark, people don't want Chelsea Market	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
Pathmark closed	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
Pathmark is closed	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
That I'm not sure of. But I do know for a fact that there are more grocery stores in affluent neighborhoods across the city.	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
That is a big issue for our families and we see a lot of obese, diabetes which is directly related to access to food.	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC
The reality is that a lot of our families don't.	1	1	21.03.2016 1	RC	21.03.2016 1	RC

7.3 Transcription of interview with SW1

What exactly do you do as a social worker? What is your role in this institution? What does this institution do?

I'm a social worker here and I run our family resource centers and I'm the program coordinator. What our family resource center does is… anybody can really come here to the open door, so we don't have any restrictions on whether you don't have any sort of income level, you don't have to live in a certain area, it's really open to anyone in the community. So somebody can come here if they need help, if they have immigration issues, if they are getting evicted from their apartments, or anything else… so they can come here and we will connect them to resources in the community. And then we also run parenting skills classes, so for parents who are having like difficulties with different behaviors with their child and they might want to come to parenting class. And we work very closely with ACS which is the Administration for Children Services, so that's our child welfare agency here in the City, so for parents who have lost custody of their children and who are trying to get their kids back, then the court says so take a parenting class, so we work very closely with a lot of those agencies. And then we also run on Saturdays a Saturday program, where we have classes for the kids, from birth to 18, and we have computer classes for the parents… so they are able to come in, everybody gets lunch… and again that's open to the whole community, and the line builds up around the building.

It does? Is there a big need for these services?

So that's just what that program does. And in *workplace* we have like the children's mental health clinic and afterschool program, early childhood program and preventive services, early intervention, lots of stuff for the families.

What is your relationship to East Harlem? Do you live here? How long have you worked here? Is there a particular reason why you decided to live or work here?

I do not live in East Harlem, and I've been here at *workplace* for about a year and a half. I didn't necessarily want to come and work in EH, I just love the mission of *workplace* and what we do… So it is not necessarily a EH thing, but *workplace*'s mission is to really serve any family that is in need. For example, my executive director says that as long as there is a child that is hungry, that needs somewhere to live, we will never stop fighting.

Are you aware of the De Blasio's plan to rezone EH whose goal is to reserve affordable housing to low-income people? Rezoning is when land is reclassified from one use of the land to another (from parks to commercial, from residential to mixed use ,…). Does it directly concern you? Does it concern anybody you know?

I know they are doing a lot of things in EH to… not to revitalize it, but give a less negative connotation to it… So there's been a lot of things that have been done to kind of clean up the

area, to make it safer…. Like we at *workplace* are all for these projects because there is a lot of violence, drugs, gangs… Just yesterday on 116th St there was a shooting, one of the staff here witnessed and called 911, one our parents saw it happening… This summer we had… our families were lining up outside to pick the kids from afterschool and they were banging on the door and on the street there was a big fight, so we had to let the families inside… So here there is a lot of stuff going on that don't really make it a safe neighborhood for our families… So it is great that they have been doing more to make it a safer community and trying to crack down on the drug issues… Because for our families there a lot of risk to speak up, like denouncing these issues when it is happening right next to you and you could be uncomfortable for someone, so it is a good thing that the City is stepping up against these issues, so that the families will not have the need to speak up.

So the city has been paying attention to the social problems in East Harlem since the past few years? Before it was just a rundown neighborhood, you couldn't step foot in here, and the mayor and the authorities are more concerned about what's going on here?

On 125th and Park Av was always a place where everybody was just high, on drugs and you literally had to run by. Now that place is a plaza area where they have farm fresh food stands, Zumba classes, set up tables where you can eat lunch, other resources… so it's becoming a place that's being reclaimed, and we love that for the families that are here.

What concerns do you have about East Harlem? Have these concerns raised recently or were they always there? Do you often have to deal with clients who have these concerns? Are these issues unique to East Harlem or are they common in other neighborhoods of NYC?

The drugs and violence are the biggest issue. And they go hand in hand with each other. A lot of the violence is drug related.

Among the young people as well? People get involved through these things at an early stage, maybe because they don't have an education lack of attention from their parents? So they find comfort and a sense of community in joining these communities? Do you work with children which were involved in this kind of stuff?

No, it's just that they are affected, it's happening literally next door to these kids

Do they have parents who are involved in these things and take drugs?

Yeah, somebody. I think that is also like a stereotype that all families in poverty are drug related, whereas a lot of our families are... like their parents are involved, but it's so hard because right next door, right down the hall in their buildings people are selling drugs. So that's definitely difficult and these kids get so much exposed to all of this. They might see this at their friends' house as well

Are these issues confined to East Harlem or you can find them in other surrounding neighborhoods such as the Lower East Side, Harlem, The Bronx?

Yes. It's definitely as issue not just in EH. I think a lot of the violence and the gangs are definitely more prominent in poverty-stricken areas. The crime when you look at the crime rate, you see that the most dangerous part of New York City is the South Bronx and East Harlem. But so much of that is due to the fact that poor people are easy preys. And East Harlem is not the area that gets looked at the most, like the Upper West Side, Tribeca, all these places where there are rich people, these issues get fixed right away but then these areas where people don't have as much money, who have more at stake of speaking up and sharing their voice it's a lot more difficult.

Are things getting better or worse?

I think that... I wouldn't necessarily say that things are getting better... it is slowly improving but I think it is good that now there is more attention... the mayor is paying more attention to it and it is not just being forgotten or brushed aside.

Do you know anybody who lives here?

Yes. A lot of our families do live here, lots of them live also in the Bronx, as well because it's very close.

Do East Harlem and the Bronx share the same issues?

Yes. A lot of my families are undocumented, or they either work illegally, a lot of single mothers, and... Just families who... A lot of them are not sure when they are going to get their next meal, they're unable to work. So a lot of our families are undocumented, there is a lot of exploitation with that.

Do you know anybody that was forced to leave East Harlem or move somewhere else within East Harlem for housing related reasons?

Some of our families got evicted and go into shelters. A lot of that is because they are not able to pay the rent anymore, they get back payments on the rent... A lot of families I work with live in the shelters.

Why are the rents changing?

I depends. Some of my families are in rent-stabilized apartments. But sometimes affordable housing is not as affordable as it is, so families just don't have enough money and get behind on rent, so end up in the shelter. Maybe they were working then they lost their job, so get behind on rent and get evicted. So it's always necessarily due to rents that are increasing. But some of

our families that are in the housing projects maybe live with other families in the same apartment, so they get evicted from the landlord. Immigrant families have a lot more issues.

Over the past 5 / 10 years, which changes have you noticed the most? Is it the first time that these changes are occurring or are they something that have already taken place in the past?

I didn't live in NYC before then, so I was not really familiar with this place beforehand. But we have a lot of staff that lives here, who have been working here for years and they have seen things change. Like the culture changed and you can see it.

Do they talk to you about how it is different before now and in the past?

A lot of people don't talk about that, maybe because a lot of our families have to deal with so many issues right now that it is sometimes hard to look for this kind of information, because you have to deal with so many things right now.

What is the most important thing for you to have in East Harlem, in general? What is missing here? What is badly needed here that is missing according to you?

Definitely more food shops. There is really not any healthier affordable options for families. There is McDonald's at every corner, bodegas... That is a big issue for our families and we see a lot of obese, diabetes which is directly related to access to food. For example, right down the corner they just closed the Pathmark, which is a big grocery store, so that was a big thing for our families. It is a big issue for our families, and I would love to see more of that available here, so that our families can have more affordable food options, because when you are happening to make decisions between a cheaper unhealthy food option and a healthier but more expensive one, if you're poor you obviously go for the cheap one.

So where do these people buy healthy food?

The reality is that a lot of our families don't. In October we started a healthy nutrition group. In the plaza area they have farm fresh food in bags that you can get. So families are able to go to produce stands. The city gives out these things called health bucks worth $2 each, so that's helpful. It's just that it is a little bit more expensive and it takes more to search it out, but also a lot of our families don't know for example what is a certain type of food. So in our education groups we talk about food and vegetables and how to cook them, and our families enjoyed that a lot. So finding access to healthy affordable food is challenging, but we try to do our best, we have food guides which explain where you can buy this healthy food.

So this association works for The Bronx and East Harlem?

It depends. Our family resource center is open to anybody and we have a lot of families who come from the Bronx because it's very close from here, but primarily we serve East Harlem, it depends on the program though.

What type of business growth do you want to see in East Harlem? Which type of business has grown in particular in the past 5 / 10 years?

More grocery stores.

Are there more grocery stores compare to the past 5/10 years?

That I'm not sure of. But I do know for a fact that there are more grocery stores in affluent neighborhoods across the city.

What type of job growth do you want to see in East Harlem?

I'm not sure about that. But there are people who are having a hard time looking for a job.

Is there high unemployment here?

Yes. I think that is a big issue, and our systemic issue which is not only confined to East Harlem is that you can receive public assistance and then as soon as you get a job it's very black and white, like if you are just over the borderline, there is no like gray line, so for a lot of families... This leads to making quite a lot of survival choices. If I need to do a certain thing to provide for my family, but working is going to you know, decrease that, like not that the parents are lazy, they want to work but that's not going to feed their kids...

Is the jobless rate high here?

I don't actually know what the rate is, but a lot of our families are not employed or working out of the table.

Is it because there are illegal here, they don't have a college education?

Yeah.

How about the college education, do people have a degree here, do most of them finish school?

It depends. For our families most of the education they have is a high school diploma, we don't have a lot of families that have advanced degrees but we really try to help families go back to school. Some of them don't even have a GED.

Why don't a lot of people go to college?

It's expensive. Child care is an issue, time... it costs a lot here!

Latin Americans are the biggest demographic group here. Do you have any special relationship with them? How do you profit from their presence?

The majority of our staff is bilingual and we put a lot of emphasis on that. No matter which culture a family belongs to, we always try to incorporate that. All the material we provide, the classes are bilingual.

What do you think when you hear speaking Spanish and seeing elements of the Latin American culture around you? Do you speak Spanish?

A little, I'm taking classes.

So you are interested, you want to have contacts with these people? Like, if you had to go in a shop and the owner speaks Spanish, which language would you speak?

Spanish.

The demographics of East Harlem are changing rapidly for several reasons, where people who previously lived in other parts of NYC or in the suburbs are moving here in big numbers. Do you know if these people are well integrated with the locals? Is there something that is characteristic of all these new arriving people? Are they bringing any particular changes?

Especially the lower parts of East Harlem, not really as much as here because no one wants to live by 125st St, but in the lower parts of the neighborhood there is definitely more of that.

What kind of people are coming here?

That I don't know.

Which social class do they belong to?

Definitely wealthier people and whites. Most of the wealthy people in the City are white, and most of them settle in the lower parts of East Harlem, by the Upper East Side, but we don't see much of that up here in 125th St, but we know that down below 116th St, around 109 St there is a little bit more of that, especially when you get closer to Central Park. So the more south you go, the more rich it becomes.

Gentrification is a term which as countless definitions. What is it for you?

Pretty much people coming in from the outside of the community and changing the whole dynamic of what it looks like, by pushing out the people who live here.

Do you often hear people talking about it? Do they specifically mention the term "gentrification" or only talk about this phenomenon without mentioning it?

No not too much, at least not from our families. I think that there are so many other issues that, even if gentrification is happening, is not even noticed. There is so much else going on. But I think that it is going to be one of those things that before you know it is going happen, like Williamsburg.

Do you think this is going to become a neighborhood like Williamsburg?

I don't know.

In a few words (1-2 sentences), what does East Harlem mean to you? How do you see its future?

In all honesty: when people ask me where I work I say "in the hood", because we are in the hood! It's Spanish Harlem, it's poverty, it's not safe. I think it's a great community, there is so much culture which love, but keep in mind that there is also a lot of drugs and violence.

Is gentrification making you more concern about a specific topic rather than another? Thanks to it, are you now more aware about certain issues? Are these issues related to gentrification pushing you to do more research on a certain topic?

Given the type of job I do, I don't think that gentrification is that pressing of an issue, because there are so many other things that many families face, like losing custody of their child, being evicted from their apartments. Not that gentrification is not important, I do believe it is a very important issue, but I don't have time to advocate and fight against that. We have other issues here at *workplace*.

Are you in contact with social workers from other neighborhoods? Do you guys talk about your jobs? How is your work different from a social worker in other neighborhoods in terms of type of clients, issues raised, community involvement...?

I work with a lot of different places across the city, but I don't really partner with them. But we have like an East Harlem community partnership, like tasks groups which work a lot on child welfare.

So you don't have the chance to compare with other colleagues the problem from other neighborhoods with the problems here?

Not me. But *workplace* has connections all across the city.

Do you know the Silberman School of Social Work? Do you know why has this school decided to relocate here and not somewhere else?

I believe they wanted to be immersed in a community they can really work in. But I'm not sure though.

Do you have any contacts with them?

We do. *workplace* does work with them.

For example what do you do?

I don't know exactly but here we have students from that school who intern here, volunteer. They support the East Harlem community partnership, so they are in the community.

Do you believe there are enough social services here? Or the community needs more of them?

We don't need more social services, we need more money.

Thank you… Do you have any other questions for me?

No.

7.4 Transcription of interview with SW2

What do you do exactly as a social worker? What is your role in this institution? What does this institution do?

I'm the director of social work here at *workplace*. We're a community health center. We primarily provide medical treatment to the patients of all ages in East Harlem. And I'm in charge of the social work department social team which helps patients and doctors in regards to their mental health and their case management needs. So we treat everything that is not medical. And I supervise social workers and case managers. I also have my own patients for counseling purposes. *workplace* is the biggest company of our parent company called East Harlem Council for Human Services. We also have other programs, like a school health program, singing, nutrition program, women - children program. But we are best known for this mental health facility.

What is the typical person who comes here like?

Most of the people are minorities: African-American and Latino. Then we have many people from very different backgrounds, nationalities and cultures. We have different departments which serve any age. The main problem the people have is that they're sick. They don't feel well physically. People also come here for a medical exam. A lot of the people have other issues other than medical: they need help with their food stamps application. Many of them are mentally sick: anxious, depressed, nervous, have problems with their housing, drinking problems, domestic violence... One of the biggest things is not having money, unemployment is high here.

Do these people seek for help voluntarily?

For our patients it is much easier to come here when they are not feeling well physically.

How long have you worked here?

2 years.

Is there a particular reason why you decided to work here?

I was always interested in working in areas where there is need. I'm a big advocate for people who need services. It is easy for people to get medical care here, but I feel that when it comes to mental health services, like counseling, evaluation, therapy... It's been harder, in general patients don't volunteer to those services. Only when a doctor or nurse asks them if they are depressed or not, then they express how they feel, so the doctor tells them that he can seek one of our social workers for counseling. The main reason why I came here was to help these people who could

benefit from these kind of services. The second reason why I came here is that I was told that there were going to move into a new building, so it was a nice little attraction knowing that I might be in a nice office!

Are you aware of the De Blasio's plan to rezone EH whose goal is to reserve affordable housing to low-income people? Rezoning is when land is reclassified from one use of the land to another (from parks to commercial, from residential to mixed use,…). Does it directly concern you? Does it concern anybody you know?

I'm not. I think that only a few people in East Harlem are aware of these kind of projects. But I do know there a lot of businesses and agencies that are familiar with this rezoning, but I'm not sure of what the consequences of this rezoning would be. It is a big issue defining who is low income and who is not, because real estate here is very very valuable, and I think that developers want to come in here and build housing, whether it's affordable or not. The mayor, along with a small advocacy groups here in East Harlem, would like there to be affordable housing. But there is another group here in East Harlem who may not want affordable housing, they might not want another social work agency or a rehab, because these folks fear that these institutions may attract a certain type of population.

Why has real estate become so valuable here? What is it that makes East Harlem so special / attractive?

My guess is that you're still in NYC, every place in Manhattan is valuable, this is the greatest city in the world. So I think that every real estate developer of every business want to look at every place, and if they're thinking of having businesses here in East Harlem, then they're going do it because there is always going to be an interest for housing, because people want to live here.

What is the trend of the rent prices in the neighborhood?

From my perspective it is hard to give you complete information, but from what I hear from colleagues and patients is that the rents keep on going up and up and up, and it's harder and harder for whether it is big institutions, small businesses or tenants or people in housing, to afford living here. I think there is, whether it's directly or indirectly, this push, for people who can't afford to live here to go and live somewhere else. I can take advantage of that apartment and put it at a fair market which would generate much more revenue compared to what folks are paying now, because some of that rent is subsidized.

How are these rent increases affecting the local population and those who have lived here for many years?

As the rents increase, the stress of the local population increases. In some cases desperateness comes to place, so we see patients here who don't want to lose their apartments, and there are doing anything that's within their power, whether it is going to court, getting more assistance

from local agencies to help them... I think that housing is vital, it's very very important to your health in general. If you don't have a roof, you are going to have many problems, whether it is physical or mental, so it is impacting the physical and mental health of the East Harlem community. Rents are higher, they can't afford to live here, and everyone is on a fixed income, meaning that, if you're not employed and you have a disability, you receive benefits from the government on a monthly basis, but that is not enough, it is always better to work than to be on disability. So there is a reason to be worried. This benefit may be enough to cover your rent, then you have to cover your groceries... So at the end of the month you have a week where you are very stressed out about the rent or food or something else...

Are most people here receiving money for disabilities?

If you're not employed or don't have an income, I don't see how you can survive in Manhattan. Maybe you can survive outside of NYC, but without income I think that housing is very very hard, nothing is free in Manhattan or in NYC. So if you're having an apartment here you have to be somehow be able to afford it, even if you've been in that apartment for 40 or 50 years, or you're 80 years, you're on a fix income whether it is social security, your rent is still a certain number that somehow is making you feel a little bit uncomfortable. And this is what is going on in East Harlem: if you take the subway just a few blocks down to the Upper East Side, this all goes away for the most part.

Over the past 5 / 10 years, which changes have you noticed the most? Is it the first time that these changes are occurring or are they something that have already taken place in the past?

From my perspective and I definitely affirm that East Harlem is slowly being gentrified. There is an influx of these no longer mom and pop stores, the stores and the businesses that attract a different population. Developers are wanting to build and offer at market price housing. And the biggest change I've seen in the last 2 years is the closing of the supermarket Pathmark that has been in East Harlem for many many many years. It was one of the biggest and busiest supermarkets in East Harlem, and I'm not exactly sure what the plans are, but I have a guess that developers are going to come and not put up so affordable housing. I think that, once that takes place, we are going to see even more changes to East Harlem that are similar to other neighborhoods in the city like the Lower East Side, where the middle class is being squeezed out and what you are left with are high end folks who can really afford high rent apartments. And then this problem, when you do put up a big high rise and then you don't have these kind of services for those who are more disenfranchised, only bad things can happen. If there is no more Pathmark, the folks who need groceries are not going come here, so if you build a big high rise and it is not affordable housing, then you don't have an affordable supermarket, there where are people going to go? That are not going to hang out here anymore.

Are there any other affordable supermarkets here?

I don't know. The trend is that, this developer who will build this kind of housing may be contracted to have like a… the council men here in East Harlem are advocating so that they provide some sort of supermarket. Bu the question again is: what kind of supermarket would

that be? Will it be a new Chelsea Market? Again, you have to cater to your costumers… I think that for any business developer it doesn't make any sense not to cater to your costumer. If your costumer want a Trader Joe's of a Fairway, that is what they might have to decide, but is a Fairway or Chelsea Market something the East Harlem community would like? Absolutely not! Absolutely not! They have been accustomed for decades to affordable food choices like Pathmark, so this closure is going to have a big impact on our community.

According to you, what is the most important thing to have in East Harlem? What is badly need, what is really missing here?

Certainly affordable housing, healthy food choices, more choices and easier access to exercising, like more gym choices, more parks or more space for you to walk around. Obviously more security, in East Harlem we need to improve the relationship between our police and the community, especially the relationship between the police and the African American community and the Latino community. So I think that relation has to work better and I think that we have to work together to protect our community and our police officers who are getting killed on the line of duty in East Harlem. These are the first things that come to mind. And certainly more areas of social work or places where we can work together to better address the work needs or the mental health needs of the people, but in a way where they can get the help that they need, even if it's not in East Harlem. So maybe affordable housing may not be in East Harlem, but if it's not there, how do you address those needs? We also have a big homeless population that lives on Wards Island in a shelter, so there are hundreds of people are living there. They're assigned to Wards Island mostly because they've had a history of incarceration, so they lost their housing, at least they have a shelter there. But can't stay there the whole day, so they have to get kicked out, so they're put on a bus and get dropped off at 125th St and Lexington Av, so they get to hang our whole day in East Harlem then at the end of the day take the bus back to island. So they do nothing else rather than hanging out, going in the bodegas where you can buy K2 and other illegal drug that are very dangerous. So this is why this area is so unsafe and you have to be careful when you walk around. These people are not getting the help they need, they're not getting their housing, their food, their mental health treatment, they're not getting seen by a doctor, and they don't come here for medical treatment, so they just hang out. There are shelters here, but they are there just give a roof over their heads for the night. So it is a big big problem. And those folks are still going to be here if you put in more of these developing real estate. There is going be a clash at some point, so someone's going to have to lose out, because the developers are not going to want to showcase a very inexpensive apartment to a clientele with this kind of safety issues.

So given all these social problems, do you believe East Harlem has enough social services to serve all these people?

We can always use more. But we do have a lot of social services. I do feel that with the institutions that we have here we have a lot of social service programs that serve the needs of the community. I think that we could work better together.

Some examples of the social programs?

We have a one of the highest areas... Within East Harlem: drug treatment programs, so if you have a drug or drinking problem there are programs here that can help you. If you are HIV positive and you can't afford your treatment and housing, in East Harlem there are agencies that can help you find housing, employment, treatment... If you're depressed and you have a serious mental issues that a lot of people here suffer from, we have many mental health clinics in the area, there are five within a few blocks from here. We have services for pregnant, moms and new moms. We have big hospitals, so if there is anyone who needs an emergency for whatever reason or they need any sort of medical treatment, we have Mount Sinai, Harlem Hospital, Metropolitan Hospital. We also have community health clinics: if you are feeling well physically and you don't want to go to a big hospital, there are big places like *workplace* that can help you.

And for children?

We have many bilingual head start program in many schools, with social services within the school. *workplace* for instance is in 3 different schools offering within the school medical care and mental health care. There are many other agencies and hospitals like Mount Sinai, Union Settlement, agencies that also provide these social services within the schools. So yeah, there is help.

Has the number of social services changed in the past 5/10 years?

They certainly have increased. But I think that recently the cap has been reached, that's the sense I get in the last 2 years. I sense that there is this other group of people in the community who want us to stop offering more programs, more services... These people feel that, If we build more social services, we're going to attract more people with problems to East Harlem. I disagree completely with that, I think that East Harlem residents have many needs to begin with: they need help. We're here to help the community, there's no need for people from Brooklyn to come to East Harlem for services. This small contingency of people in an advocacy group think that we're going to attract more people.

So if this increase of the social service in the past years is coupled with the increase of social problems, do you believe that things are getting worse for the population, that more help is needed?

I think that there is more need for help, but I think that the stakeholders or the people in powerful positions like the mayors, the council people and advocacy groups in East Harlem have always advocated for services, therefore the City and the State and the Federal Government have listened and so it's not that there are more social problem, but there has always been a need. There is always going to be a need for these programs, but I think that what has happened is that we've gotten stronger because of the financial backing of the city, state and federal government. We are founded directly from the Federal government and the President's

initiative for affordable care. Through the Affordable Care Act he made a lot of money available to this community center, we wouldn't have been able to build without that money.

Gentrification is a term which as countless definitions. What is it for you?

For me, it is the loss of mom and pop shops. For some reason, a lot of it has to do with rent, real estate... Here there are many valuable proprieties, so to me, when there's an influx of chain shops or restaurants, or high end real estate developers that come in that are able to build quite easily because they have some backing financially to take those risk through the rent. That's what comes to mind. Every other shop is similar to like a shopping mall sort of approach things. But the closing of the mom and pops shops is what come to mind for me.

The demographics of EA are changing rapidly for several reasons, where people who previously lived in other parts of NYC or in the suburbs are moving here in big numbers. Do you know if these people are well integrated with the locals? Is there something that is characteristic of all these new arriving people? Are they bringing any particular changes?

I don't know many of them, but I guess there just people like me and you, that have been granted a wonderful financial opportunity to come here, take chances, make leaps and bounds and sort of provide services that normally as many in East Harlem may not have able to. My biggest concern is affordability. I like Starbucks just as much as the other guy, but a typical person from here can't really afford a cup from Starbucks.

How do they integrate with the local population?

Absolutely. I may be wrong here. but I think these gentrifiers do want to engage and meet and get to know the community and serve the community, because it will mean more business for them and have participated in local meetings or local events and I'm sure they are more than willing to cater needs of the communities of... and again. Hiring from a population of East Harlem. I hope this translates into more opportunities for those who want to work in these kind of places. I always have some concerns about it, but that's my perception of gentrifiers, but again: I don't frequent these stores.

Latin Americans are the biggest demographic group here. Do you have any special relationship with them? How do you profit from their presence?

East Harlem Council for Human Services and *workplace* take full knowledge and sensitivities and values that acknowledges that we're here, so attempt to hire 100% bilingual staff. Most of the employees speak Spanish, whether they learned it or it is their second language. *workplace* is still very enriched in the cultures of East Harlem. When we do events, you will see the music, the food, it will have that catering and appreciations and believes of those here in El Barrio. So I think that is one of the really strong points of the neighborhood, which are the sense of community and the closeness, togetherness. Whatever event you want to put in, people

will support you and they are more than willing to help, and there is this family approach to helping neighbors in need. So it is still a very strong community.

Do these Hispanic people believe it is important to have this sense of community, to have services that cater to this specific population? From what you see, do you think this sense of community is changing?

I think we are at the threshold. I think a lot will depend on the next 3 to 5 years for me to really understand. I am very concerned about the safety of the community in East Harlem. But I think that only time will tell in terms of how gentrification will impact East Harlem. It could be a good or bad thing. But I don't think that East Harlem will be completely broken up, there is such a rich community here of Latinos, African-American, influx of other minorities who established themselves and there is a young crowd who want to make this place their own. I think that we still have some serious needs to address.

What is the impact of gentrification on this community?

I think that it is not such a good thing, because if the needs are housing, food choices and social services and if gentrification won't provide any of these needs, then it is going to be a challenge.

How would you describe East Harlem?

It would say it's El Barrio. I would describe the richness and culture of the Latin and African-American community and I would mention that it is one of many interesting pockets that make up Manhattan, so it's one of many different neighborhoods, just like East Side, Times Square...which is defined by the culture of the people who live there. I would also say that for one reason or another, that there is uncertainty, nervousness and anxiety in this community of folks who have deprivation. While there is a rich culture and music, there is also a part of East Harlem that is not safe.

What makes East Harlem unique compare to other neighborhoods?

It's definitely the majority and minority. In this case therefore you will be able to partake pretty much anywhere you go... It's just the language, food, culture, music that stands out from other neighborhoods.

Why has the Silberman School of Social Work decided to relocate here and not somewhere else?

I can try to guess it. The school has always been committed to addressing the needs of the underserved, so I think that historically each and every school of social work is concerned about underserved populations. But I think that the leaders of the Hunter School wanted to pick a

location purposely for the process of making it even easier for them to help the community, so they're very much a big advocate to meeting the needs of the community. They could have moved anywhere, but they purposely chose East Harlem because they wanted their presence to be even closer to meeting the needs of the community and being part of not only the community, but also to be part of the solution, and providing and addressing the needs of those folks who need these kind of services.

*Do you or *workplace* have any relation with the school?*

We have a close association with them. We get together for these monthly community meetings, but from day 1 the school approached *workplace* to send students for internships to become social workers, so I supervised students from that school.

How is the presence of this school changing the landscape of social working in East Harlem?

We've become connected with other agencies, we work together, we have more meetings together… It is still a work in progress. It is exactly like that, so social work school, social workers, agencies and communities get to meet and get to interact on both sides. Bu we set very high expectations of each other, so we set high expectations for *workplace* to provide the best quality services and I am also sure that the Silberman school thinks that way, it doesn't matter what race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or need, we're going to try to do the best job that we can. There are also high expectations of them, taking their opportunity here to East Harlem to the next level. It's great that they're here, we welcome them, we work with them, but would like to see any new member here in East Harlem to welcome the pool of candidates from East Harlem. So even if you're a business person here, you open up a shop, the question is: are you going to hire folks from East Harlem, who want jobs? The same with the student body of the school of social work: are they taking in students internationally, from other parts of the city or of the Tri-State area, or are they looking for candidates from East Harlem? Again, I think that being even related to somebody that is similar in terms of your culture, especially somebody who is very similar with your language, I think that makes a difference. I encourage the Silberman School and other schools to hire potential good candidates who are directly here, I would like to see more minority professionals represented in East Harlem, more than what we already have. We do a good job, but that doesn't mean that it's required, but I would like Silberman and other agencies to do it more of that way.

Is gentrification making you more concern about a specific topic rather than another? Thanks to it, are you now more aware about certain issues? Are these issues related to gentrification pushing you to do more research on a certain topic?

Absolutely. Even though I don't know exactly what gentrification is, it has made me look into addressing the needs of housing for my patients and working closely with other agencies, strengthening partnerships, working directly with my staff, with caseworkers that would help patients with housing. I think that if *workplace* does not address the housing situation head on, we will be continuing to face patients who have problems with their physical and mental health. If you don't have a roof over your head, you are going to be in a whole lot of trouble. So

the fact that it's real, it's coming, it's here, Pathmark's closing... So it has definitely made me think more about gentrification, the impact and it has changed my way of looking at how we can help our patients.

Are you in contact with social workers from other neighborhoods? Do you guys talk about your jobs? How is your work different from a social worker in other neighborhoods in terms of type of clients, issues raised, community involvement...?

Yes. It is a little tough for me in East Harlem to work directly with other social workers and other neighborhoods to connect. It's a great idea, but in practice it hasn't really worked for me. A patient who wants services generally wants to stay in East Harlem. A lot of it it's due to its financial situation. So if you have something that I can walk to get a service, a program for any kind of problem (pregnant mom, housing problems), I wouldn't want to go all the way Downtown because I would have to pay to go all the way there. So what we have are some associations and partnerships. I have colleagues I keep in touch with in other neighborhoods. But it is really challenging to really make it work. Lots of patients going there, lots of patients coming over here... It doesn't work, according to my experience people here want convenience.

And when you talk to these colleagues do you realize if there are issues unique to East Harlem?

Yes. K2. It's synthetic marijuana, it's an illegal drug. It's bad, it messes you up, it was meant to manipulate the system so that you can buy these ingredients legally and smoke it and get the same effect as marijuana. Unfortunately it is much worse than that and now the chemicals in this kind of marijuana... it is no longer just synthetic marijuana, it's a lot of other things. It's deadly and it really makes you do really unsafe things. When I speak to other colleagues I seem to be only one who is dealing with a K2 epidemic. It is easy to get here, especially in the bodegas, it's affordable... This is one of the few neighborhoods which has this kind of problem.

Thank you… Do you have any other questions for me?

No.

7.5 Transcription of interview with SW3

What do you do exactly as a social worker? What is your role in this institution? What does this institution do?

I work for *workplace* and I am a program director. *workplace* has 30 different programs that they run and I run one of them. *workplace* works with homeless and assist with housing, mental treatment, medical health care... We also have programs that are more focused towards people in the neighborhood specifically. We assist people with and affordable walk-in kind of thing, like we help with benefits and legal assistance and we help people in the neighborhood who are troubling for various reasons.

**workplace* works only for East Harlem or for other neighborhoods?*

We're in Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx. It's very big. Initially we were part of Columbia University, there was a group of social workers from there that started a program, then we separated from the university.

Is there a particular reason why you decided to work here?

No. it was a coincidence. I initially applied for the *workplace* office in West Harlem because I am interested in working with people who are mentally hill. When I changed position in the agency and started doing the street outreach, we were still in West Harlem for a while, and then new spaces opened up in East Harlem so we just moved there.

Are you aware of the De Blasio's plan to rezone East Harlem whose goal is to reserve affordable housing to low-income people? Rezoning is when land is reclassified from one use of the land to another (from parks to commercial, from residential to mixed use,…). Does it directly concern you? Does it concern anybody you know?

No. Because of the work I do there, I go to the community boards and I hear things in those meetings about changes, but specifically about rezoning I don't know.

What is the trend of the rent prices in the neighborhood?

I would imagine that they're going up. From what I've noticed, they're building more expensive housing. When I see a new building going up, I see signs like "luxury apartments" which make me think this is going to be a more expensive place to live.

Have you noticed a change in the number of these luxury apartments?

Yes. I feel like there is more of them. I also hear about the prospect of more being built. Like on 125th St and Lexington Ave they had a Pathmark which was sold and now there is a lot of speculation about what's going to go in there. The same guy who bought the land also bought land in other areas and he's building new apartments, so people are wondering if he's going to do the same there.

What concerns do you have about East Harlem? Have these concerns raised recently or were they always there? Do you often have to deal with clients who have these concerns? Are these issues unique to East Harlem or are they common in other neighborhoods of NYC?

Just because of the work that I do, I think that homelessness is a big problem, and I have the impression that there are changes going on that are making it less comfortable for homeless to be homeless in that area. Our goal is to give these folks housing and we want them to get assisted, but when a neighborhood starts looking differently at the street homeless… For example: the quarter between 125th and Lexington used to be an area that many people congregated at. Not always to do positive things, there was drug use, and sales, but they were also recycling their cans, or just having a place to stay and hang out when it was nice out. Now there is mobile unit of the police who sort of set up a shop there and now the homeless feel a bit uncomfortable. Also over the metro North we had clients who have been sleeping there for a long time and now they are being told they have to move. And it's not a solution... For us, if we want you to move it's because we are offering you a place to be, as opposed to the tactics of the NYPD whose goal is only to move people away. I've seen the neighborhood change, I am concerned for more change, is it going to force people who can't afford to live there now, where are they going to go and where would they be able to find an affordable place? I do feel like this was the neighborhood in Manhattan that was reasonably priced for people. Now it's changing so much. Affordable housing is an issue everywhere but I think that East Harlem was a place that provided affordable housing and I feel like that's not really the case anymore, it's changing.

Do you know anybody that was forced to leave East Harlem or move somewhere else within East Harlem for housing related reasons?

I don't. I don't live here, so I don't necessarily have my group of friends that I might have heard that from. But I imagine it's the case, When I go to the Community Board 11 there's a lot of concerns about affordable housing, so I know it's something the community is concerned with, but I don't have any personal experience with it.

According to you, what makes East Harlem special? What is there that makes it unique compared to other neighborhoods in NYC?

I think it's the culture, it's a very big Latino culture that's very strong and I think there are ways in which people in that neighborhood feel comfortable. The Latinos have been there for a long time and not just Latino but also African Americans, they are a population that have lived there for a long time and that have grown up there. Not all neighborhoods are like that, others are trendier, people are coming in from the outside, and people are moving alone, whereas here there are a lot of people who were born and raised here.

The demographics of East Harlem are changing rapidly for several reasons, where people who previously lived in other parts of NYC or in the suburbs are moving here in big numbers. Do you know if these people are well integrated with the locals? Is there something that is characteristic of all these new arriving people? Are they bringing any particular changes?

My feeling would be that there wouldn't be a lot of integration that I think, people who have been there for a long time feel frustrated. New people moving in who are at the higher economic class and perhaps want to bring changes to the neighborhood they're not interested in. And that's on a larger level, in a smaller level person to person, people are able to go along and find connections. But I think that in a larger way... I feel the folks who have been there for a while would feel frustrated with the changes and frustrated with people that are coming in new and blaming those people for the changes that are happening.

What is it the typical person like who comes living here?

There's more white people moving in because others are getting priced out of their neighborhoods and are looking for cheaper living. And also with these new buildings there are some nice places to live up there, that may be more affordable in comparison to some other parts of Manhattan, whereas in East Harlem they seem to be more expensive but if you compare to the Upper West Side than it may be less expensive. And it's mostly young white folks, couple, families... And these new people like living here. I think years ago they wouldn't have chosen to live up there, they wouldn't have felt comfortable or safe. And now people are feeling safe. And that's the thing, what's hard for me with gentrification is that... the folks who have always lived there they want to feel safe and they want their kids to be able to play outside and they deserve those things. And it's almost like when they work hard to get those things and make the neighborhood a safer place, then people come in to take advantage of that and they get pushed out because of that. The woman who has been living on the corner for 30 years might get frustrated with the changes that are happening, but I'm sure she feels good and safer in the neighborhood than she has before. It's like a double-edged sword I think.

Has safety increased in the past few years?

Yes it has. But it also depends on how comfortable the person feels, some might still not feel comfortable. My comfort level comes from having worked there for many years. But sometimes I still feel unsafe.

Latin Americans are the biggest demographic group here. Do you have any special relationship with them? How do you profit from their presence?

I think that working in East Harlem you sort of figure out that there's a lot of Latin food available. I know some Spanish and I took some Spanish specifically for my job. We work with a lot of folks that are Spanish speaking, so we have to hire staff who are Spanish speaking. A lot of times when folks walk in for services we have to sort of navigate the Spanglish. I don't feel

like I have immersed myself completely in the culture, just because of out of necessity. Because of the nature of my work, I feel the need to understand people.

Do you think that for these Latin Americans the sense of community and the closeness of their community is important?

I don't really know. My assumption is yes, that folks like having their community and be around people like them, going into shops and recognize the goods, I'm sure they wouldn't want to lose that. The main reason why they decided to live in that community or stay there was because of those things.

Over the past 5 / 10 years, which changes have you noticed the most? Is it the first time that these changes are occurring or are they something that have already taken place in the past?

More police presence, the constant changing of the restaurants, stores, new things coming in. But there are also a lot of things that stayed the same, I still feel there is this sense of people hanging out on the street. The biggest change is from 125th and Lexington, seeing it going from this kind of crazy corner where you never knew what to expect to a desolate, empty space.

Talking about these new restaurants and shops: which type are these? And which types have closed?

I remember there is a new Applebee's on 125th Av. There was a place called Well Beings, a Caribbean style restaurant where we used to go for lunch and now it's closed down. The Banana Republic outlet came in, the Old Navy... Those are the new things. And there are some new stores that are not part of a big chain, like neighborhood stores. So yeah, it though finding places where I would get my lunch. So yeah, I saw smaller places open and smaller places closing down who weren't able to maintain their business. On 125th St there is the Apollo, that's not going anywhere because it's been there for years.

Are there healthy fresh food facilities?

I would say no. There is a long-standing institution, the Uptown Veg, which is a vegetarian place that's been around forever, there's a place called K&M which sells salads... But there's a lot of Popeye's, fast food, McDonalds... There was a 24h grocery store on Lexington that's now closed down, the Pathmark.

What do you think of the changes that have taken place in the past 5/10 years?

I think they're good. I like the fact that I can have lunch at a nice place and go to a Banana Republic. But there's always this feeling of bringing in so many chains that's sort of pushing out the more local businesses I that I think it's not a good thing. Probably the locals are not too

happy with it, but they might be happy that there is an Old Navy which is an inexpensive place to get clothes, at least you can get it in your neighborhood without traveling somewhere else.

What is missing for you in East Harlem? What is badly needed according to you?

I think more grocery stores are missing. The Pathmark was a really good one. I would like more food options, I feel like I'm very limited with my food options, I often have to bring my lunch from home. When I go to a meeting to another part of Manhattan it's exciting for me because there is a new place to get food, whereas here you mostly have fast foods which is where I don't wanna eat at.

Are there a lot of health problems here?

Yes. I used to see on the corner of 124th and Lexington you see people missing limbs, overweight, bent over, physically not well... You see more people from the outside who have health problems in that area. You also see a lot of drug addicts.

Talking about homeless people: do you think you would need more facilities for them?

We obviously need more affordable housing. The city has gotten rid of drop-in centers, these 24h places where homeless can go and have a meal and a shower and a place to be inside. Even when those excited they were mostly downtown. It would be nice to have a place Uptown where I could refer somebody. There are also safe heavens which are a smaller type of shelter and sort of making more comfortable for people to stay there and you have your own room. I'd like having one of those in East Harlem, but they are always located nearby so the clients aren't as willing to go because it feels unknown to them.

It's a little contradicting that these places are not in East Harlem even though there are a lot of homeless people there! Why is that?

It is odd! Many people mention that to me. I don't know the answer. *Workplace* used to run one on the Westside for many years that was shut down. There's really nothing in East Harlem other than shelters. They're not 24h drop in center where you go and do your laundry on a 109th St but there is not a lot of that and when they do open I find that they're in the Bronx, or the one that have existed for any years are Downtown or Midtown.

Why did these places close down?

These city felt that drop in centers were only there to hand out sandwiches and blankets and not necessarily providing services with people. In my mind, rather than trying to change that and provide better services and housing, the idea was just to shut them down and focus the energy more on programs like the street outreach program or shelters.

Is this trend common to the whole city?

Yes. And they're now reconsidering, but there's been a lot of attention on the homeless population in NYC, there is a lot of pressure on Bill de Blasio to do something about it and there's been the idea that you have to reopen again drop in centers and I think it would be a good Idea because you seem to get the right staff who what they're doing in terms of housing and they would have a good access to some clients we wouldn't have access to. Then we need more housing, that's the other problem. We can encounter, engage and meet as much money as we want but if we have no place to house folks than we're going to be stuck. So yeah, more affordable housing for the homeless is needed.

What type of business growth do you want to see in East Harlem? Which type of business has grown in particular in the past 5 / 10 years?

Some places on 125th are boarded up and not in use, I'd like to see more places opening up, and that's changing now because less places are boarded up, but I'd to see more of that happening, especially local businesses opening up. The community is getting involved in whatever is happening there as supposed to having some guy like the one who closed down Pathmark and build something not relevant to the community. I'd like to see that growth from within the community as supposed to coming from outside.

Have you seen more international brands coming in?

Yes, I've seen that happen. And you do see a lot more tourists walking around compared to a few years, which is a good thing if people feel safe to walk round and explore, and they did not feel that way before, and that brings in business and that's good, but then also those folks are being catered in a way that the local population isn't.

What type of job growth would you want to see in East Harlem?

More jobs for the homeless. But the beautification of the street like picking up the trash are things that could be done by the homeless, it would help the community look nicer and would benefit the folks who are struggling in the neighborhood. I wonder about all the people who were working in that Pathmark what happened to them.

Why aren't there many organizations which help homeless integrate into the job market?

There's an agency called the Dou Fund that tries to do some of that work but there isn't as much as there needs to be. Our program is very focused on housing. If a clients wants a job I'm going to refer him somewhere else. Sometimes I don't even know where to refer him. So what's lacking is a way to be able to put folks to work in a positive way that helps them. When you are

not busy and have nothing to do, that's when you have problems. If you have that you feel like it keeps you active and a routine and a routine that keeps you busy, that's a healthy thing.

Do you believe there are enough social services here? Or the community needs more of them?

I think there is a fair amount of social programs. They may not be like the drop in centers where the people can go and stay. There's a fair amount of clinics like medical and harm reduction places for folks who are using methadone and similar things. There are places that are outpatient drug treatment programs, places where people can receive psychiatric care... I think there are a fair amount of services in East Harlem.

What is the biggest social problem there?

Substance abuse. It's very visible and there's a lot of sale with drugs in liquor stores. The homeless issue is a big one here. Our area of work is from 110th St to the very top of Manhattan and I think East Harlem is one of the most concentrated areas with homeless.

Do you think the homeless population has grown in East Harlem?

A lot of people talk about that and it gets a lot of media attention saying that it has. The shelter numbers are insane, there 60000-70000 people living in shelters and those numbers are going up, but the street number... I feel like it's hard to tell because I'm so in the middle of it that I can't see the bigger picture. But when I'm in the middle of it and think about my staff... if I didn't hear from somebody else that the population was going up, then I would think that it is not going up.

So you don't know why it is going up?

No, I don't know if I believe that they are.

What about whole New York City?

There is a difference between street homeless and homeless in general. The homeless shelter population has gone up dramatically and that continues to rise and that's been going on since mayor Bloomberg and before. When I started working here there were 30000 homeless in the shelter system and now there is double of that.

Why?

Because of the economy collapsing, because people can't afford living in the city and because of the population which is growing rapidly so there is not enough space for the people to be here. There are too many people and not enough housing and jobs.

So East Harlem was quite hit by this economic crisis?

Yes. I think there's always been an issue with homeless in East Harlem and I don't know if that's ever going to go away. Not even in the rest of the city.

You've been a social worker since when?

2006, in East Harlem since 2008.

What do you like the most about your job?

I like working with people, I've always liked understanding people's stories and where they come from. Sometimes it feels unrealistic, but being allowed to be into somebody's world who happen to share it with you, their life experience, both the good and the bad, it's always been very interesting to me. I came in initially with the intention to work with mentally ill people and I still have that specific interest, like how to help these people, define if medications are helping or not, who to provide the best sort of counseling or psychiatric care, folks who had negative experiences in the past, I like working with people who have had frustration, challenges with the system and I hope that my team is trying to provide these services in a different way. And I feel gratified when I feel from our clients that they appreciate the way we help them.

What are the main challenges of a social worker in East Harlem?

You feel like you don't have enough resources to offer. There's plenty of people out there, I feel good about our ability to engage and work with them, but there isn't so much that I can offer, and that feels frustrating. If I had unlimited supply it would feel much nicer, there are ways in which you have to sort of pick and choose who you're going to give this opportunity to. We have systems that are set up to help us figure that out when it's sort of taken out of our hands, but still... Sometimes you have people walking in asking for help and you have to tell them that you're sorry but you haven't been homeless for long enough so we can't help you and that sucks. We have a criterion that has to be met. Even when they meet the criteria we're still limited in the offering of housing we have for them. That's hard.

Why has the Silberman School of Social Work decided to relocate here and not somewhere else?

I don't know. Maybe because the rent was cheaper, which is why many businesses move here. They have grown out of the space that they were using which was on the Upper East Side and they needed a larger space. I think what East Harlem has is an area of larger space to be able to have institutions and agencies. But I also wonder if there wasn't a part of them who felt that... you know, the history of social working is working with the urban poor and if they wanted to be in a neighborhood where they felt they could bring something positive to the neighborhood.

Do you cooperate with people who work there, do you organize things together?

No. We have some students interns that come from there, just that.

Are you in contact with social workers working on other neighborhoods of the city?

Yes. The program that I work for, the Street Outreach Program, we're part of a consortium of agencies, so I work very closely with two other agencies, who do outreach in other parts of Manhattan. It is a very important part of our work working closely with people from other parts of the city and that we're in touch with the community and that we're not overlapping services.

When you guys talk about your neighborhoods, do you think that there are issues that are only particular to East Harlem?

There are some issues that are more of a problem in East Harlem, but they're pretty much shared all around, especially because, from my perspective that I work with the homeless, that's going to be something continuous, it's going to be the same throughout the city. I do feel like that the substance abuse is a big issue but I think is it a big issue for all parts of Manhattan, but sometimes to me it feels stronger in East Harlem. I think I noticed about the homeless population in East Harlem is that a lot of the folks we serve are born and raised in East Harlem, very few come from outside, whereas I think that in areas downtown you get more people coming from other states to New York City and are homeless there.

They've been homeless for many years?

Yes. Like 20 years. In my opinion they haven't been offered the right type of service to get the way out. They've been told to go to the shelter system and they have had that experience and they're not going to stay there. Nobody has been able to offer them the right solution. And we're used to it here, not like in Switzerland, and we shouldn't be used to it.

Gentrification is a term which as countless definitions. What is it for you?

Gentrification is when a neighborhood that has a sort of very low economic status, it's poor and there are multiple issues going on, money is brought in by outsiders to start making changes and once those changes start happening, more and more people from the outside feel comfortable

coming there and living there as it continues to change. I remember learning about in high school and it was always to me viewed as a negative thing and I've noticed that in my adult life that not everybody sees it that way. Some people see it as positive, so I sort of tried to understand that a little bit and I think it was challenging for me is that there are things that can happen with gentrification that are positive for the local community as well, but it's like they don't get to keep the benefits, they get pushed out and they miss out when things start to be nice and they are no longer able to stay there. And that doesn't feel right, it doesn't feel right to me. I wished there were ways to make things better for folks living there in the way they want and I shouldn't decide what's better for them but in the way that they express what they want without making it so that it's not a place where they no longer can afford to live.

Is gentrification making you more concern about a specific topic rather than another? Thanks to it, are you now more aware about certain issues? Are these issues related to gentrification pushing you to do more research on a certain topic?

I wasn't like I tried to learn more because of the work that I do, it just sort of happened, because of the neighborhood that I'm in and because of the fact I'm witnessing these changes that I was able to see it. I inevitably learned more from my experience of working here.

Does this issue come out often at your workplace?

Yes, especially lately, because of the increased police presence and this sort of clearing out of the block of 125th and Lexington, there was always a lot of talk about that corner at work, like why nobody should walk there but take the subway instead... Then all of a sudden, when it was like sort of removed it felt surprising to me, I think also specifically because of it felt like it was very unwelcoming to our clients, like you can't spend time here.

As a social worker, what do you think you can do to help people who are being affected by gentrification?

Something I never do and that I wonder if I should do more on the policy end of things and government end of things, like getting more involved with how decisions are made about affordable housing or like when you were talking about this rezoning plan, I feel very removed from that. My work is very specific with the person, assisting him and getting him what he needs and that's the part I like, but sometimes I feel like I need to get more involved in this sort of policy, larger picture thing, because that's how you change things, you got to be able to change things there... It is one thing being able to assist one person, but it's another thing to be able to make a larger change that would assist a lot of people. It just never interested me as much as talking to that person.

With the presence of the Silberman School of Social Work, do you think that it could strengthen your position as a social worker, that your role becomes more important?

I don't know. I think if I were more involved in the school and I think the school has a policy department, they have students who are very interested in policy work...I feel very removed from that school, other than... I forgot they were there until you mentioned they were there. So I don't feel that way.

Thank you… Do you have any other questions for me?

No.