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Concept of Localness in the Raval neighbourhood

Abstract

This essay is a segment – with additional parts – from a case study conducted in the El Raval neighbourhood in Barcelona. The research was conducted by me in 2019 from September to January. In this essay my inquiry focuses on the Raval neighbourhood in Barcelona. Firstly, there is an introduction to the field, which is followed by some of the results that I found during my fieldwork. During my stay I applied qualitative research techniques to create my research. The aim of the study is to analyse the usage of space along the claims of local activists and interpret their relation to the neighbourhood.

Introduction

In the year 2019, I conducted a fieldwork in Barcelona about activists' of Raval neighbourhood who were a part of the anti-touristification movement. In the followings, the information provided reflects to the state of the field between 2019 September to January, so right before the pandemic started. The study aims to explore the relationship and the connections between mass tourism and gentrification through a case study of a certain neighbourhood. In order to approach the movement first we need to understand what they are trying to protect from the effects of mass tourism. For this reason, this study analyses the activists' perspective from Raval neighbourhood through the narratives of the interview partners reached. The original thesis, which includes these texts is wider, this rate includes more topics such as gentrification and the movement against the touristification of the neighbourhood. The study provides insight into the problems of a neighbourhood with changing urban fabric and touristification. I hope in the future I will have the opportunity to observe the changes what was brought by the latest period and interpret these results in a scientific essay as well.

First, I present the methodological approach and the techniques applied on the field. Then I shortly introduce the informants who were reached on the field. In this study I included those who have a closer relation to Raval neighbourhood. Due to preserve

anonymity, I changed the names in the case of every interview partner. Thenceforward, after a brief historical context from the Raval neighbourhood I introduce the most important public spaces of the field which were mentioned frequently in the interview materials. This is necessary to understand the subsequent results from the concept of localness in the neighbourhood and the 'Spirit of the Raval'. These parts highlights elements of the community's' engagement for this particular area. At this point, I grasp the opportunity to underline that results of the study primarily include the perspectives of the activists reached and the interpretation connected to these in a certain period of time.

Methodology

This study is based on anthropological research in an urban setting. The focus is narrowed down to the activists in the Raval neighbourhood, which creates an opportunity to analyse micro-processes. However, when interpreting the data, it is necessary to analyse macro-processes as well. This is justifiable because of the topic of the inquiry and the data collected, the interviews and discussions are also referring to many of the nationwide or regional processes. I participated in demonstrations and assemblies, which were related to the life of the Raval neighbourhood, the housing situation and gentrification. Besides participant and non-participant observation, I conducted semi-structured interviews in which there were three major topics: the concept of localness in the Raval neighbourhood, the anti-touristification movement and gentrification. Not all the interviewees work or live in the Raval, but all of them are activists and conscious about the problems related to the tourism industry and the life of the neighbourhood. The main sampling technique was to find people who are related to the Raval or an activist group. At the end of our discussion or interview I always asked them if they could offer me someone else with whom I can talk to about these questions. This technique is appropriate to apply when the researcher does not have deep knowledge of a community and tries to explore the possible members of the field (Babbie, 2007:184-185). With this snowball technique activists were reached who are working in the Raval, or people who work connected to the anti-touristification movement but on a general level. The sample of informants are related to activism in every case. I applied the grounded theory, since I did not know much of the problems of local people, even though I read several articles and studies about the Raval, gentrification and over-tourism since I knew that this phenomenon causes

problems in the city. "Grounded theory is an inductive approach to the study of social life that attempts to generate theory from the constant comparing of unfolding observations" (Babbie, 2007:296-297). The topic of housing prices and gentrification came during my first interviews, such as the concept of localness, because I wanted to understand why activist love this neighbourhood so much. If someone moves to the Raval, they can feel the solidarity. As one of the interview partners explained, there is a *neighbour consciousness*:

"I think the unique of the Raval compared to other neighbourhoods is that here there is still a neighbour consciousness."(Pablo)

This means that people can stick together if they experience a problem related to their area where they live and they can fight together to get over the difficulties. This kind of neighbour consciousness is not common in metropolitan areas like Barcelona or in urban settings. In the following section I will introduce the informants who provided data for the research through interviews and conversations.

Informants

During my stay in Barcelona I engaged several people. Sometimes questions were asked about a place or an event or just had a regular conversation about topics related to the research, and from these I kept writing field notes. Besides that, the main material of this research will be the interviews, which were conducted. If someone gave at least one proper semi-structured interview it is considered as an informant. However, it is also true that some contacts who was reached continuously provided more information and some only gave one interview. Originally, I presented ten different informants in my thesis about this research. For this essay I cited eight of them who provided information about the Raval neighbourhood. There is a necessity to present some basic information about them for better understanding, who is speaking in the following. Before the start of an interview the person was always reassured that the data that was collected (in this case the audio files from the interview) will be handled securely, I will not give it to a third person and I only use it for the purpose of the research. In regard to preserving anonymity, I changed the names of every person (all the information hereunder refers to the conditions of 2019 autumn such as age and time intervals).

- 1) Pablo, 29 years old, lived in the city for 9 years. During the last four years he lived in El Raval. He helps several associations in the neighbourhood, and lives in a flat

in a squat house. Originally, he is from a town in Catalonia, which is at the Cost Barva.

- 2) Anita, 41 years old, has lived in the city for 16 years, all of which she spent in the Raval. Originally, she is from Germany. She is well informed about the issues of the neighbourhood because she is connected to a community centre where activist groups discuss their actions.
- 3) Emilio, 52 years old, has lived in the city for 13 years now. He is more connected to the anti-touristification movement than the others but he does not live or work in the Raval. I got his contact from Pablo. He is well informed about the groups and associations that are trying to change the current situation related to touristification and gentrification. He also loves the Raval. Later on, I talked with him several times.
- 4) Ernesto, 43 years old, has lived in the Raval for 12 years now. He works for a public company. I got his contact from Anita. He was born in Barcelona and lived in different neighbourhoods in the city. He is participating in more than one activist community.
- 5) Carlos, 26 years old, worked for an organization that helps the people in Raval and other parts of the city with rent and flat problems. He does not claim, he is a pure activist but participates in the life of the neighbourhood, demonstrations and he is socially engaged.
- 6) Angela, 43 years old, was born in Barcelona, but grow up in Saragossa. She returned to Barcelona in her twenties. Lived in many places before she found the Raval. She has lived there for eight years and has a strong commitment to the neighbourhood. I got her contact from Emilio, but she also knows well the people from other organizations or activist groups. In her daily life she works as a sound and light technician at theatres.
- 7) Daniela, 29 years old, participating in many social projects and also a research gentrification. She worked in the same project as Carlos that is how I reached her. She really committed to activism and the Raval, but she did not live in the neighbourhood, however her work and her studies are connected to it.
- 8) Laura, 28 years old, lived in a squat outside of the Raval, she has practical knowledge about the flat situation in Barcelona. She is in connection with activists from the Raval.

El Raval

Firstly, it is necessary to gather the main points from the Raval neighbourhood to show the exact place where this research was conducted. The city of Barcelona are divided into three well defined section: 1. Ciutat Vella (the old city) is more or less the medieval territory of the city. 2. L'Eixample (Enlargement) residential and service area. 3. The former villages around the city which are now the outer regions; this is the biggest and the most heterogeneous territory. In this essay the focus is on the Raval neighbourhood, which is a part of Ciutat Vella. The Raval is one of the four neighbourhoods that make up the Ciutat Vella district (Casselas, 2009:816).



1. Picture source: Cocola-Gant A. (2018:55)



2. Picture Ciutat Vella source: Cocola-Gant, A. (2018:55)

These four neighbourhoods are la Barceloneta, Sant Pere Santa Caterina y la Ribera (which is too long so locals refer to it as "el Born"), el Gothic and el Raval (Picture 2.). At this point it is important to note that first I used the term "Raval district", which is not correct as one of the first informants made clear for me. The Raval is a neighbourhood, such as the other three, in the district of Ciutat Vella, however in some of the studies of the neighbourhood the incorrect term is used. In the last decades Ciutat Vella, like many other old neighbourhoods in European countries, went through urban renewal programs. These programs in the case of Barcelona are called PERI, (Special Plan for Interior Reform) which try to target regeneration, attract new investments and reducing socio-spatial inequalities (Arbaci & Tapada-Berteli, 2012:287-289; Pareja & Tapada, 2001:4). Later on it will be referred to how these processes could be considered gentrification or goes along with the phenomenon of gentrification, which is considered as a harmful process for the neighbourhood by local activists.

"The Raval has a strong identity among industrial workers, since it has been a working-class neighbourhood close to the port, having many factories, abandoned buildings and obsolete industrial complexes" (Tremblay & Battaglia, 2012:62). Urban renewal programs tried to gentrify the neighbourhood, which is considered as state-led

gentrification. The creation of the MACBA, or the Rambla del Raval, was the part of these PERI programs (Arbaci & Tapada-Berteli, 2012:287-289). The situation of these public spaces will be argued later on, although the informants introduced the gentrifying effect of tourism, which could be called spontaneous, or market type of gentrification. It is not organized, but the changes of the flat market and the increase in prices are pushing away the locals from the neighbourhood and replacing working-class people with a wealthier or middle-class population. In this introduction to the neighbourhood this phenomenon is worth just a short mention. Monica Degen (2017) who conducted several research in the Raval neighbourhood from anthropological and sociological perspectives since 1998 as an expert in the changes with the Raval claims some arresting findings in her study. There is a tendency in which gentrification, commercialization and beautification would "solve the problem" of the neighbourhood, which means that the physical transformation of the environment would affect marginality and poverty. This was the case with the Raval and the city council as well; they tried to change the aesthetics and the visual experience of the neighbourhood to bring changes in the social structure (Degen, 2017:143-144). These programs started from the late 1980's and several institutions were moved to the Raval, such as MACBA, some of the faculties of the Universitat de Barcelona and the Catalan Film Institute to make this district a Cultural Quarter and not a red-light district. Degen (ibid) argues that along this strategy of the city council many investments and changes were made, however the Raval "resists" change and urban regeneration programs have not played out as expected by the city council (ibid, p. 142). She bases these claims on more than 40 interviews made in 2012 with local residents, politicians, architects, NGOs and neighbourhood organizations.

Degen (ibid) claims there is a clear distinction between the north and south Raval. I also observed this difference and my interviewees referred to it too.

"The Southern Raval is a bit more for locals and we always said, even ten years ago that Northern Raval is the Posh Raval yes" (Anita).

Northern Raval has shops for tourists, the university, MACBA and bohemian cool newcomers. South Raval, besides Rambla del Raval, which is used by tourists and locals too, is still a more marginal place, time seems to stand still there from this aspect (ibid, pp. 148-149). The places that I visited regularly are connected more to the southern part of the Raval as such the activists and the places of their groups or institutions.

Barrio Chino

The Raval is near the port, so it became the place where the latest arrivals from foreign countries settle. By the late 1970's with the influx of drugs to Spain it became an even more dangerous place than it was before, so-called Barrio Chino (Chinese district). At the same time, it was also known as the city's 'red light district', which refers to the high level of prostitution in the area (Degen, 2017:145-46). However, this name can be heard from locals referring to the neighbourhood as "Barrio Chino", there are several immigrant groups in the Raval who were born in another country and moved there, although Chinese are not among the six main minority populations (Arbaci & Tapada-Berteli, 2012:300-301). As one of the informants explained, Barrio Chino is used in other towns in Catalonia or even Spain for places where there is a lot of prostitution and crime, although it can also have a positive connotation because they use this term for underground and cool places as well.

"I know it has nothing to do with the Chinese because there was never a Chinese community there. Probably there were not even so many immigrants when this name and myth was created. I can tell you that even in my town whenever there is a conflicted area or a place where there is a lot of prostitution and so on people say that "oh this is a Barrio Chino." But also, there is a point that it used to be a lot of underground theatres under the dictatorship, so Barrio Chino was not only a place of danger but underground culture and freedom in a way." (Daniela)

Daniela also refers to the name *Barrio Chino* as a myth that has positive and negative connotations as well. Underground culture with theatres meant freedom during the dictatorship, however because of the crime and drug trafficking it was a dangerous place for a long time. Ealham (2005) in his article about the history of the Raval neighbourhood proves that the myth of Chinatown was born even earlier, in the 1930's. The bad reputation of the territory comes from this time, the Raval was associated with immorality, deviant behaviour, and crime. In the following section, I would like to introduce some of the most important public spaces of the neighbourhood that were transformed in the recent decades and analyse them shortly from the local perspective.

Public spaces in the neighbourhood

There are several public spaces in the Raval neighbourhood whose role and position was discussed during the interviews. In order to discuss the difficulties and problems faced

by the locals it is necessary to describe some of the details of these places. In general, a neighbourhood is a combination of private and public spaces.¹ The following section introduces two of the most important public spaces of the neighbourhood and the stories that are connected to them. Furthermore, it is also important to know how they were formed.

MACBA and Plaça dels Àngels

MACBA is an acronym of Museo d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (translation: Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art) which is one of the largest buildings in Northern Raval surrounded by Plaça dels Àngels, which is a huge square. The leadership of the city had a plan to make a cultural quarter (Degen 2017:146), so they hired Richard Meier, (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019) the world-famous American architect. Seemingly, the creation of the building was an element of gentrification, which was emphasized by the city council (Arbaci & Tapada-Berteli, 2012:307; Scarnato, 2014:5; Degen, 2017:146). This could be called a top-down policy, or state-led gentrification, when there is a will from the leadership to change the character of a place, by putting institutions and buildings there. My interviews also support the argument that the neighbourhood is different in the area of the MACBA. The visual appearance of the building is also alien from the neighbourhood with its white monumental modern style. Furthermore, the place was designed in a way that attracts international skateboarders. Locals have problems with the usage of the square because they claim that without green places and benches it is only good for skateboarders who are tourists in many cases. The big white walls and the modern style makes it an amazing place for shooting videos of skateboard tricks:

"First of all, it is necessary to remember how they built the building where MACBA is located. They demolished so many buildings where people lived. So, first of all they kicked many people out of the neighbourhood and demolished a lot of buildings. Now it is the building of MACBA, but they did not know this first they just wanted to build the building with a star architect." (Pablo)

As Pablo explained, the leadership did not know what to put inside the building, but they built it anyway. After all, they put a museum inside, however it is not the most suitable place for a museum because of the light. It enters through the huge windows that are a

¹ I discussed the situation of the private properties or spaces such as flats and the opinions of the locals about these questions in other chapters of the thesis.

part of the modern style of the building. The other thing is that the museum expands and owns several buildings around the square, which is also gentrification.

"Yes, around the Plaça dels Àngels they have almost all the buildings at the square. I think it forms an "L", so they have almost all the square, and if they finally build their expansion, they will have another building and it will be a 100% gentrified square. No neighbours go to the square or almost no neighbours and do... maybe if you are young and feel like... but it is hostile and it has no green." (Pablo)

All of the interviewees who mentioned MACBA mentioned the skateboarders and they had a poor opinion of them:

"So now what you have seen at Plaça dels Àngels in front of the MACBA the idea was to recover the square for the locals because now it is only occupied by skaters. Which is fine but they made it their square, so it is not open for other people anymore. Elderly people are scared, they do not want to walk there anymore because of the skate-borders. " (Anita)

"The other day I was surprised because I did an interview with a channel who was filming at the MACBA and they also interviewed some of the skaters and they were Catalan, but of course there are a lot of tourist skaters and they come here for the video. On an international level the square is very famous." (Laura)

As Laura claimed in this quote the skaters of MACBA are mostly tourists. She was surprised that the ones who gave an interview were Catalan. This means that the phenomenon of skaters is also linked to touristification of the neighbourhood. When I was there, I had to cross Plaça dels Àngels almost every day from where I lived to the university and I observed that there were a lot of tourists and languages there. Sometimes I also spent some time in the square with a coffee or waiting for one of my classmates, but there were not many elderly people or locals spending time or hanging around. The last thought on this topic is that Degen (2017) claims very similar phenomena from the square based on the interviews she did in 2012. It proves that the presence of the skateboarders is not a temporary phenomenon but a constant state since the creation of the square.

"Yes, the square of the MACBA is in all the architectural guides around the world but what is it used for? For skaters, OK, but for anyone else? It is absurd, yes, the city needs to be for everyone. (Planner C, Foment de Ciutat Vella, personal communication, April 2012) " (Degen, 2017:146).

Skaters have been around MACBA since the creation of the square. Most of them are not locals in the Raval or not even from the city. This seems problematic for local activists who would prefer public spaces that are for the benefits of the local population. As I discussed in the anti-touristification chapter, one of the problems with the high number of tourists is the degradation of public space. At the same time, it would be a necessity to deal with the needs of the local population who live there.

Rambla del Raval

"The creation of the whole new Rambla del Raval (1996-2001) throughout the demolition of almost 3000 houses in the historic tissue, has been the most consistent operation." (Scarnato 2014:1). I believe that the author of the text means that at the end of the demolition there were 3000 less flats, in the neighbourhood, because Rambla del Raval is not as big as that much house would possibly fit there. However, still 3000 flats is a huge number, so it shows that this urban renewal program affected the life of many people. The creation of this place was an open act to make changes in the neighbourhood, although the locals mostly like the results. Of course, there are different opinions and reasons why somebody likes Rambla del Raval between the interviewees too, but it is sure that locals are using this space. In the case of MACBA there was nothing like this. Almost every people whom I spoke with claimed that the MACBA and the square surrounding it is not a good place and locals do not use it like it was mentioned before. On the other hand, Rambla del Raval is under mixed judgment at least between the part of the local community whom I reached. It is a commercial street with restaurant and bars for tourists such as the bigger Rambla, but there are also smaller bars and cafes, which are visited by the locals. I crossed the Rambla del Raval several times a day because the place I lived was one street away from there so I could observe the life of the street. Based on my observations and the conversations with locals it is possible to claim that the street is commercialized and created for tourists, however it is also an integral part of the neighbourhood and frequently used by locals to meet, walk, and rest. In that sense it is different from Plaça dels Àngels, which is not considered as a place that they can use. There are several reasons behind it but Rambla del Raval is designed for people of the city too, for example there are benches everywhere and green areas (Scarnato, 2014:7). It is a fine thing that this public space became a part of the neighbourhood and offers opportunities to spend time, however it does not change the fact that it was an aggressive gentrification to create it and

many people had to move to other places because of the construction. Not only those who lived in the buildings that was demolished but those who were not in a good economic situation and became the victim of real-estate speculation, which moved along with the construction of Rambla del Raval. Flat prices went up radically around the new street such as rent prices, which was a negative effect for many of the locals (Scarnato, 2014:11-12).

Locality in Raval

Originally, the topic of my thesis was the anti-touristification movement in the Raval neighbourhood. When the interviews started and the structure of the research became clear, an equally important and relevant topic came up, which was the concept of locality in the Raval. To make a distinction between your group and another, it is a necessity to state something from yours along the way (Turner & Reynolds, 2012: 7-8).

Concept of localness

During the interviews, every informant was asked "who do they consider a local person?" Most of them were from the Raval so in these cases the question related to the Raval, although in some cases the informants were related to activism but not especially in the Raval. In these situations the question is related to locals in Barcelona or a local person in their neighbourhood. Before presenting these results, it is necessary to discuss the use of the term "*neighbourhood*", which the informants used often. They articulated differences and problems in the city in connection with tourism and every other topic through this concept, so the author also uses this term. A district is a bigger unit. For example, Ciutat Vella is an aggregation of four neighbourhoods, including the Raval. Neighbourhoods could be divided into different sections, such as South and North Raval, as it was explained by one of the informants earlier. As we can see, Northern Raval is different from Southern. This is partly a result of the will of the city council to gentrify the Northern part of the Raval. They moved cultural institutions there, such as MACBA, and they hoped that middle class residents would follow these institutions and move into the neighbourhood. (Arbaci & Tapada-Bertelli 2012:302-304)

An even smaller unit would be a street that has a problem with drug trafficking or has some other specialty. Obviously, a house where there are problems is a smaller unit than a street, and an even smaller one is a flat. It may seem unnecessary to explain this, but these are the units of space that were used in the explanations of the informants, so in

this research these are used to present the findings. As an example the "narco piso" phenomenon came up several times, which means the drug mafia occupies flats. This causes problems and affects the community in the building. The research mainly discusses the situation in the Raval neighbourhood but it is necessary to know the smaller and the bigger units as well, as the different levels of the neighbourhood are interconnected.

The most common term, which reflected on locality in the interviews and expressed the solidarity between locals was 'neighbours' and several forms of it. That is why this expression is used here as well. Neighbour communities are very strong in El Raval as Anita and many of the other informants explained.

"This neighbourhood is extraordinary because there are lots of groups and platforms and associations. I have never seen something like this in my life. The intensity of people acting and wanting to change the neighbourhood and it really works." (Anita)

As the interview material showed, places with more problems attract more social activity. This could also correlate with the large number of activist groups in the neighbourhood. Behind this phenomenon there are several reasons but two of them appear in various forms in every discussion and thus can be considered essential. The first is the historical background, which shows that there is a tradition of strong solidarity (Mansilla, 2019:7). The second important reason is explained by Pablo and it relates to the high number of newcomers in the district.

"So, people who come to Barcelona could afford the rent only here, so normally it created a different way to relate to each other, because they needed to help each other to survive." (Pablo)

As Pablo said, many of the newcomers are in a vulnerable economic situation, which makes social connection more important. The Raval is a central place for newcomers either from other parts of Spain, people from other European countries or people from other continents. In 2009 in Ciutat Vella district, 56% of the total population was Spanish born and 44% foreign. From the latter, 11% came from "first world" countries 33% came from 'Majority World' (Arbaci & Tapada-Berteli, 2012:300). These numbers clearly show that this is a multicultural, cosmopolitan area. The five biggest immigrant communities in the Raval regarding the number of inhabitants in order are from Pakistan, Philippines, Bangladesh, Italy and Morocco (Galindo et al. 2018:11). These details show that most of the newcomers in the neighbourhood are not from Latin-American countries that are

Spanish-speaking areas. This fact also affects how locals define locality. Before presenting these results, it is necessary to underline that this is the activist concept of localness. If the informants would be retired people, primary school teachers or homeless people I assume that the results would be different. However, it is essential to see how they connect locality to activism and social responsibility. When the interviewees describe who are included in their concept of localness this also means they are describing who is excluded. I present above some of the answers about who they consider a local:

"So, I could consider myself as a local as I am living here for four years, but the real point of being part of the neighbourhood is to have an open mind and participate in the social movement. I think the only reason anyone in the Raval counted to be local is to be welcoming. It is not like people say no, you are not local because you have not been here enough time." (Pablo)

"I would consider myself as a local although I only live here for 16 years and yeah. But if you try, if you take social responsibility for the place where you live and try to make a better life for everyone then I would consider a person to be local even if he only lives here for two years." (Anita)

From these claims we can see that they consider themselves local, however they were not born in the neighbourhood. The second relevant interpretation is that they connect abstract values to locality related to active participation in the life of the area.

"So, for example I was not born in Barcelona, I have been here for 13 years, I consider myself a Barcelonian. Maybe I do not consider Barcelonian other people from Barcelona who have been here for a longer time. I mean to me, the thing is the link that you want to develop with the territory and the people." (Emilio)

"All the people who would like to make life there. I mean tourists are not locals in the Raval because they cannot be by definition, they are only visitors but not contributing visitors because they are spectators. But all the rest of the newcomers are different even if they are here for two months because they build community. They produce place, community and social life as well as the historically established community." (Daniela)

The statements of Emilio and Daniela also support the presumption that locality is not related to ethnicity or nationality. There is another significant observation that time does not play an important role in the definition of locality. As Emilio explains he would not

consider someone a local who is there for a longer time but does not participate in the life of the territory. The explanation of Carlos about locality also contains the time perspective in a similar way:

"For me a local not only in the Raval but in Barcelona and in Catalonia is a person that is living in the neighbourhood, does not matter how long has been living in it. The only thing that matters is that he or she has actually an intention to make a life in it. This means this is going to be a person who worries about what is going to happen around him or her." (Carlos)

Participation in the affairs of the neighbourhood and the intention to make a life there was underlined by Carlos among the most important criteria of localness. From these answers it could be concluded that they connect locality to abstract values. There is something else, that is also relevant to reflect on, that is what is missing from these answers. None of the informants connected locality to nationality, ethnic or religious background. This means there are other factors, which are considered by them. An observation was made while comparing these answers: they did not need time to think about this issue, the responses were clear and quick all the time. Analysing this phenomenon, it could be stated that this is an easy question to answer for them, the response is obvious. If it would be unclear for them to answer emotionally or any other way, it is imaginable that they would hesitate at least. From this it could be concluded that they consider everyone a local who wants to make a living there and tries to be a part of the community. Once again, a critical view is necessary to interpret these answers. All the respondents are the members of the activist community and this explains a lot from the phenomenon that they connect locality to social responsibility and be an active member of the community. This phenomenon also relates us to the question of identity and how it could be transformed in contemporary ages. Zygmunt Bauman (2004:30-32) claims in his book that in the liquid modern setting of life identities are like a light cloak, ready to be taken off anytime. Many people in the Raval changed their identity partly or at least get a new identity element as local in the Raval neighbourhood. If this is not an experience of their own, they must know many people who did it because of the high number of newcomers in the Raval. This could explain why it is an easily imaginable thing for them to become local, because it happened with them and many others. I would not claim that for most of the people this identity element to be a local is on the same level. However, as it was

aforementioned *neighbour consciousness* and the enthusiasm about this particular place in the city is present between locals. This leads us to the next section, which is the "*otherness*" that is present in the neighbourhood in several forms.

Otherness

This section presents the diversity of the Raval neighbourhood and how the locals relate to this. As it was mentioned before, one of the characteristics of this place is the high number of newcomers who were not born in the neighbourhood, or the city and in many cases not even the country.

The statistical data of the population of Barcelona shows that the proportion of immigrant population in the city is 16,55% (Galindo et al. 2018:6). In the Raval, this rate was almost 50% based on statistical data from 2016. From the 47.264 inhabitant 22.929 could be considered to have immigrant background. In my observation activists consider immigrants parts of the neighbourhood. One of the informants, who works as a lawyer in Raval with people who have problems with their living conditions, related the regulation of immigration to the regulation of the tourism industry. Carlos underlines the double standard related to the confiscation of a person who want to visit the city as a tourist and people who want to live there, but they arrive as a refugee in the following way:

"I mean why does a person coming from Africa need to climb a wall and then wait for months and years to have a permit to work and even be expelled? And a tourist who is coming from China, French or from the USA can come here for a week or stay here for months and live. I am not saying these are the same situation but maybe we should find solution to control tourists such as economic immigrants."(Carlos)

From this quote it can be deduced that in his consideration not the immigrants are the problematic actors in the neighbourhood. The reason behind it turned out from other parts of the conversation. People who move to the city and want to live there are perceived as a positive phenomenon in the view of the activists. Furthermore, I never met an opinion, which would show immigrants as an inferior group. If immigrants appeared in a story usually, they were in a positive shade, such as in the following:

"Now I am going to tell you a story. I used to volunteer with immigrant women, most of them coming from Muslim countries like Morocco, India or Bangladesh. We volunteered to teach them Spanish and also the culture. One day I was

walking on the street and I lost my wallet. I did not realise it and somebody found it opened and saw, "oh this is the teacher of my wife, she is Angela, she is from the neighbourhood" and they took the wallet and put it to the school and stole nothing. I do not think it would happen in any other place in Barcelona, so for me it is important." (Angela)

Among other things it appears from this story that Angela considers the Raval as a special place in the city. She claims the result of the story would be different if it would happen in another neighbourhood. The fact that the people who found the wallet and realized it belongs to someone who is also part of the community bring home the importance of *solidarity*. This was mentioned several times by many of the informants. In my interpretation, the values of the activists do not lead them to be in opposition with immigrants because in several cases they work with them or take part in the same neighbourhood community. Naturally, it would not be a trustworthy observation if I would try to claim there are no problems with living together. Some of the informants mentioned cultural differences as a barrier that could cause problems. However, it is important to see that for the question "what are the biggest problems of the neighbourhood?" no one mentioned immigrants, or anything related to them. Unconventionally, it would be a racist argument, although it did not appear in the data, which was collected. In some cases, the information is the lack of something, I believe it is one of those cases. The comparison of tourists and refugees in the discourse of anti-touristification movements is not a new phenomenon. In 2017 there was marches in the city organized by a leftist group *Arran Paisos Catalan*. One of the main slogans was "*Tourists go home refugees welcome*". The protesters demanded from the government to welcome more refugees and they described tourists as invaders who are endangering social and cultural reproduction of places. (Giaccaria, 2018) My observations are also supporting this phenomenon, refugees are not seen as invaders or a threat for local culture but tourists do. There is a clear distinction between the mobility of privileged tourists and the mobility of vulnerable *others*.

What appeared in the discussions from the neighbourhood is the value of helping each other, solidarity, community, and the character of the inhabitants. The last one needs a more complex analysis from these at this point. The title of this section is *Otherness* because of this character. At this point it is clear that in the interpretation of activists the

neighbourhood has values, which are connecting the people. The best way to introduce this character is through the voice of locals.

"The atmosphere or the context of the neighbourhood historically is a place where people help each other. They have a consciousness that we need to survive, and because of the party places so many gay people came also to the neighbourhood because of the freedom. So, it is in a very different way of the neighbourhood where people can stay different and do not get bad looks and be discriminated against because of it. It is part of the genetics of the neighbourhood." (Pablo)

Solidarity and the topic of *otherness* are connected in the argument of Pablo. He claims that people can stay different more freely than in other parts of the city. This is a reason for the higher level of *solidarity*. *Otherness* is a concept which originally comes from Simone de Beauvoir's work: *The second sex* (Beauvoir 1989:23-27). However, this concept was initially related to the position of women in the society, later on it became used as a framework in other fields of social sciences to analyse oppressed, colonized and exploited people. The base of this concept is that there is an absolute and related to this there are others who are inessentials. The claim that I make here is that the Raval is a place for groups considered 'Others'. The notion of *otherness* relates us back to the "*Barrio Chino*" (China town) myth. As we see it does not reflect the Chinese population but for a place, which is exotic and different (Donovan, 2016:10). In regard to seeing the different stigmatized and discriminated groups who find shelter in the neighbourhood I would like to collect this information quickly. As we have already seen, there are immigrants in high numbers who try to make a living here. Traditionally the population of the Raval is mainly working-class as it was mentioned before. Economically vulnerable people who suffer from poverty and unemployment also live here in high numbers such as homeless people. As it was explained to me because of the freedom and underground places many members of the gay community moved here. There is a strong activist scene, which composes the main focus of this study. There are also criminals, drug addicts and prostitutes and so on and so forth. I would not try to put an equality sign between all these groups, because obviously they have different problems, goals, motivations, background and so on. What I would like to claim is that in the eyes of the majority society they are more or less the *others*. There must be so many narratives as individuals, maybe someone is empathizing with homeless people, but feel hatred for gays, or helps the immigrants but is against

activism. Nonetheless these are labels, which are stigmatizing these individuals. One of the main points of labelling theory, that individuals lose the right to self-identify themselves, because of certain behaviours or characteristics and they will be determined with labels that are used to classify them. Usually, it happens with minorities or those who are seen as deviant from the majority's standard. A social stigma is something that is a kind of stereotype, which affects the behaviour of those who are stigmatized (Goffman 1963). In the case of the Raval, this *otherness* and being the home for the people who are different is a part of the identity of the place according to local activists. This leads us to the next section where the "*Spirit of the Raval*" is analysed by showing the information, which was said about this by the informants.

"Spirit of the Raval"

In this section I would like to show the essence of the neighbourhood. How local activists formulate values of it and distinct from other places in the city. Angela responded to that question, "*What makes the Raval special for her?*" like this,

"Well, I think it is about solidarity, being in a big city like Barcelona where nobody knows each other. Creating a community in your neighbourhood is important. I never did it in other neighbourhoods in Barcelona and I lived in a lot of them, really in a lot of places. But here there is a community." (Angela)

One of the most interesting claims from this quote is that she lived in several other parts of the city but did not experience that kind of community, which is present in the Raval. There are several things to interpret and understand from this claim. One thing is a deep love and enthusiasm for the Raval, which can be observed in the words of Angela and many other locals whom I talked with. Solidarity is one of the most frequently used notions in the transcript of the interviews. As it was mentioned before in the introduction of the neighbourhood: the Raval is different, in the following there is a collection of the responses to how activists see the Raval neighbourhood, how it is different from other parts of the city and what they like in these specialities.

"It is also a kind of freedom that people who are racially discriminated outside can move freely here and no one looks at them badly because people who lives in this neighbourhood are also racially discriminated or understands this is not any kind of problem or trouble that people come here and try to live as good as they can." (Pablo)

"In some way we are all here because we want to be different and want to help each other because of that even if we have to fight against MACBA or the major-ship." (Ernesto)

The enthusiasm about the Raval can be detected from these quotes above. Ernesto's explanation refers back to *otherness* such as Pablo's opinion. From these parts it is clear that activists connect freedom to this place where they can be different. This freedom, which is mentioned by people who are inside the neighbourhood is interesting compared to the bad reputation of the place. It is mentioned in several studies that the Raval is a dangerous place, or a troubled quarter (Galindo et al. 2018:8; Scarnato, 2014; Arbaci & Tapada-Berteli, 2012:294; Elham, 2005:374-375). Although the Raval also has an artistic and cosmopolitan identity in recent years because of the changes and gentrification, I argue that the bad reputation is protecting the neighbourhood communities. While the outside seems dangerous and wild compared to other parts of the city, on the other hand from the inside is based on solidarity and strong community. Activism and occupations can scare away big companies. Criminals and bad reputation are creating several problems, but it is also true that they set back investments. This seems problematic from a macro level, or from the aspect of capital, could create a liveable space for the *others*.

The second point in this section to argue is the history of the district. The reason to include these aspects are based on anthropological methods, because many of the informants mentioned history as a source for the high intensity of activism in the neighbourhood. In the following there is a collection of these claims:

"I think solidarity is the most important, and we are very working-class people in the Raval. We have this tradition for leftist history, and fight for the rights. But we are poor really, I do not think people with real money live in this neighbourhood, and that makes you see if you do not fight for your rights with your brothers and sisters no one is going to do it. For me that is the thing." (Angela)

As it was mentioned before *solidarity* is between the most commonly used terms among the expressions of activists describing the neighbourhood. Working class identity and leftist history is a reference point, which is commonly used in the self-definition of locals. This implicates the fight for the rights, which was explained by Angela and mentioned by other informants too:

"I think because historically the Raval has been a fighting community ever since, with a lot of anarchism, with working class, but organised working class. With people who were very attached to the fight of each of the historical moments and with a lot of solidarity. I think that is why the Raval resists because if you think of it is the place of the city which resists gentrification attacks." (Laura)

These claims of Laura are not only relevant regarding the history of the area. Working class identity, Marxist values and the fight for rights are clearly present in this explanation. In addition, what I want to underline is the importance of resistance in this definition of ravalian identity. Daniela's exposition from this topic also stresses the historical perspective:

"I think history plays a very important role in structural things, such as the historically working-class concentration in a way. The Raval was the neighbourhood where there were more factories in the city for many years. All those factories had also political organisations and syndicates" (Daniela).

Regarding these claims it is clear that activists are conscious about the history of the neighbourhood, however in many cases they are from other parts of the city or from even further places. Daniela said that everything comes from somewhere and has a root in the past. The high intensity of activism in the neighbourhood has historical reasons. Ealham (2005) in his study about the history of the Raval neighbourhood proves that while the Raval became a centre of industrial revolution in the middle of the 1800's, along this it also became a place where labour movement and syndicates were concentrated. During the Franco area Barcelona including the Raval and the whole territory was punished because of their part in the Spanish Civil War (ibid, pp. 396-397). This opposition with the dictatorship was also strengthen the culture of resistance, which connected to anti-fascist, leftist values. As one of the informants explained who works in the Raval there were other neighbourhoods with strong industrial background where syndicates and organised working-class were very active, but these places lost this character in the latest decades. She explained the following argument when we were discussing the gentrification related to the Raval, however it would belong to the gentrification part it gives the title of the section so I would like to present this result here:

"It has been very very modified and there was a lot of investment to change its ways, but there is still the spirit of the Raval many organizations, which recall

that spirit. There is one, which is called Raval Rebel and it is true. The Raval is a rebel place ever since and still is" (Daniela).

Daniela claims that in spite of gentrification endeavours the *spirit of the Raval* is not broken yet. Somehow the Raval was able to preserve this character and it is a place of resistance and social struggle in contemporary times too. As it was mentioned before state-led gentrification tried to modify the character of the area, but because of the lack of social programmes it was unsuccessful in many ways. One of the findings of Degen's study from the Raval is that regeneration of the stone was done, and the city council made spectacular squares and public spaces, but at the same time social intervention was not followed by these gentrification programs (Degen 2017:150). At the conclusion she claims it is a more complex phenomenon why el Raval (especially the southern part) resist to commercialization and globalization than a single issue, but somehow it resists, my findings also prove this. One of the informants, who answered every question in a complex way, tried to show as many aspects as possible including opposition arguments to his own beliefs, had a change of tone in his voice when the situation of the Raval came up. We discussed several topics from touristification, the movement against it, gentrification, then a question came up about what he thinks will happen to the Raval. His voice changed to an emotional tune, which he did not use before and he said:

"It is been hard for el Raval and I think they will never make it to kill it somehow because it is really too strong. I mean it is still surprising to me, it is a really particular place. Let's see what it becomes, I do not know. At the moment there is still resistance there. Will to keep on living together in a lot of sense and I hope, and I will try to help within my possibilities." (Emilio)

From the claims of Emilio, it is necessary to underline the strong commitment for the case of the Raval and resistance. He is committed to help the neighbourhood preserve its character for the benefits of locals. This supports the finding of Degen, which could be summarized as "El Raval se resiste"² (ibid, p. 153). It was fascinating to observe how a rational and intelligent person became emotional when the topic of the Raval came up. This is one of the reasons why I chose this topic to research to understand a bit more from this passion and love of the activists to this neighbourhood.

² The Raval is resisiting.

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The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2019). *Richard Meier* opened: 2020.03.30,

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