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Place Fontainas as a border area. Urban production with respect to sexuality, gender, ethnicity and social class

La place Fontainas comme espace frontière. La production de la ville au regard de la sexualité, du genre, de l'ethnicité et de la classe sociale

Het Fontainasplein als grensruimte. De productie van de stad tegen de achtergrond van geaardheid, gender, etniciteit en sociale klasse

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Introduction

- 1 Rue du Marché au Charbon – a small cobbled street with shops and cafés, where the ringing of bells mixes with the quiet sounds of a small alley – leads to Place Fontainas, a vast, noisy and unsightly square. It is located in the municipality of Brussels-City, in direct proximity to the city centre, and forms the junction of Boulevard Anspach and Boulevard Maurice Lemonnier, linking the neighbourhood of the Bourse and Grand'Place to the South Station.
- 2 A few steps further, everything changes: the noise, the smells, the decor and the people. Located at the edge of the so-called gay neighbourhood and the Anneessens neighbourhood, Place Fontainas has been the site of many presumed homophobic acts, thus contributing to its categorisation (notably in the media) as a dangerous area, particularly for homosexual populations.¹ In addition, these categorisations occur in an area which, in the collective imagination, is largely connected to Muslim populations, reinforcing an association between this area, a specific population and certain socially condemned characteristics (such as homophobia).

- 3 This association is further reinforced by political discourse. In order to prevent and combat discrimination and violence against LGBTI people (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex), one week before the 2018 Belgian Pride, former Federal Secretary of State for Equal Opportunities, Zuhal Demir (N-VA), developed a new “Inter-federal action plan to combat discrimination and violence against LGBTI people”². While such a plan seems necessary, the one proposed by the former federal government is in keeping with a logic of security and cultivates a monolithic and vulnerable image of homosexual populations, while essentialising certain groups which are considered as more or less homophobic. For example, we can read into this that “Muslims have a more negative attitude towards homosexuals than Christians do”³. Among other things, the plan establishes “Muslims” as a specifically homophobic population and cultivates the stigmatisation of a targeted group, without taking into account other religious or social groups, or the intersection of elements such as social class or gender. Along with the categorisation of Place Fontainas as a dangerous area, the new plan suggests an approach to the management of public space in terms of security, by associating a category of dangerous people with it. It was the subject of a *carte blanche* signed by 103 signatories from the associative and academic spheres, giving rise to numerous criticisms.⁴
- 4 This article proposes to examine this area from a different perspective. In contrast to the security aspect of the plan, it suggests viewing this area as a border, where there is a change of scenery as well as a social and urban change, fuelling an atmosphere of tension. It aims to go beyond the simplistic categorisations of “dangerous areas/safe areas or dangerous people/vulnerable people” and, based on the categorisation of border area, to understand the area’s challenges and conflicts. The conceptual change and the notion of border make it possible to understand the interweaving of the socio-spatial anchorings on and around Place Fontainas, trapped between areas with strong identities.
- 5 The article consists of three parts: the first deals with the notions of city and border from a theoretical point of view; the second presents the border area, Place Fontainas; and the last part discusses the area based on an intersectional analysis and examines it with regard to sexuality, social class, ethnicity and gender.

1. City and border

- 6 A city is fluid and in a state of agitation. It is a kinetic space permeated with movement, mobility, areas of socialisation and interactions [Rémy, 2001], with many sub-territories which generate certain inequalities in terms of access to areas. Recognising these inequalities is, to some extent, equivalent to recognising a heterogeneous public space, shared and divided into areas of the city which are subject to different rules, norms and social lives [Escalier, 2006]. In contradiction with the utopian vision of a city driven overall by a spirit of community and solidarity, there are therefore borders crossing the city.
- 7 But in the city, like the national border, borders are the result of a socio-historical construction [Moulin, 2001; Nordman, 1998; Arbaret-Schultz, 2002]. They are symbolic and above all are representations which convey a specific imagination: barriers, borders, markings, border guards, controls, identities, hybridisation, in-between, no man’s land. Borders are established by “all those whose daily actions take place around

and in accordance with them” [Amilhat-Szary, 2012], and have a performative function: they produce identities as much as they are produced by them [Staszak, 2017].

- 8 However, while borders are based on certain types of materiality (territorial, architectural or topographical) which give them sometimes a consistency and therefore make them obvious, they are fundamentally human constructions (Arrif and Hayot, 2001). As the fruit of coexistence, they are mainly made up of perceptions, practices and discourses – in particular political, such as Zuhail Demir’s new action plan – which contribute to materialising the distance between groups represented as being distinct yet close in spatial terms, and making them part of a discontinuous city where borders are all the more fluid as they are not established by the administrative authorities. Resulting from a certain relationship to opposition, negotiation and even conflict, borders impart breaks which limit contacts and exchanges [Piermay, 2002], create areas where conflicts intertwine [Reitel et al., 2002], and cause a social division of space, assigning certain identities to certain territories, affecting perceptions and spatial uses [Staszak et al., 2017].

2. Place Fontainas, a border area

- 9 Place Fontainas is a vast square divided into two parts by the junction of boulevards formerly open to road traffic. On either side of this division are two sections (intended for pedestrian use when the square was not pedestrian), where there are public benches and trees to provide shade. Integrated into the pedestrianisation plan of the city centre, the western part of the square is now surrounded by works and made invisible by the “Heras” fencing which reinforces the division.

The survey

The survey conducted between September 2017 and June 2018 made use of various data production methods. It was first conducted through an exploratory study of the Saint-Jacques neighbourhood (preliminary interviews with researchers and clients of gay businesses, preparatory observations of the extended neighbourhood, mapping of businesses and descriptive inventory), making it possible to establish a research system and set the boundaries of the site.

Secondly, the study was carried out through direct observation of Place Fontainas, from Rue du Marché au Charbon to the crossroads with Rue du Jardin des Olives, and from Boulevard Maurice Lemonnier to the crossroads with Rue de Soignies in the west and Rue Philippe de Champagne in the east (see map below). Observation data were collected from January to June 2018, two to three times a week, in three-hour periods. They covered a relatively exhaustive range of weather conditions, day and night, week and weekend, allowing an understanding of local lifestyles, practices, behaviour and interactions. This observation work was combined with fourteen semi-directive interviews with residents and clients of the neighbourhood’s gay businesses (or residents who are clients of these businesses), questioning the spatial representation systems inherent in the construction of identity, otherness and therefore of the border. All interviews were anonymised (the first names used are aliases). They lasted between 45 and 140 minutes and addressed pathways, identities and relationships to the spaces studied, as well as

to the city more generally. Mapping exercises (see below) were also carried out. By means of the “snowball” effect, recruitment took place essentially via advertisements in Facebook groups and from a network of contacts. Finally, two exploratory methods were tested: the mental geography of homosexual practices in the Brussels public space and transgressive pathways with commentaries, consisting in wandering through the public space in such a way as to transgress gender and sexual norms in order to collect information on the reactions of the public and the spatialised feelings of the transgressor.

Figure . Enlarged map of the observation area. Map created with Brussels UrbIS®© - Distribution & Copyright CIRB

- 10 The central and junctional geographical location of the square makes it an important and especially busy transitional space. In addition to connecting two central boulevards of the Brussels pentagon, it is also the junction point of five streets, a stopping point for several public transport lines and is next to busy consumer areas. However, despite both daytime and night-time crowds, “there is nothing to do”, according to a local resident, emphasising the more general view of a square whose uses are poorly identified. Other respondents described it as a “no man’s land” or as a “strange”, “bizarre” or “indistinguishable” square. Surrounded by highly connotative areas – with the gay neighbourhood of Rue du Marché au Charbon (with gay symbols, businesses and associations) and Boulevard Maurice Lemonnier, which gives rise to a pauperised commercial and residential area where there is a high concentration of people from North African and sub-Saharan immigrant backgrounds (also marked with symbols) – this square is often perceived as a hybrid area, with a mix of architecture, shops, people and symbols.

“On one side there is the boulevard [Maurice Lemonnier] and Place Anneessens, with the young local people who meet up, and it is sort of seen as a neighbourhood where people get bored because the blokes tend to whistle at you [...]. And then on the other side, there is an area with a lot of tourists as well as the gay neighbourhood. But the square is funny – it’s a true crossroads, a kind of no man’s land [with] Jour de fête on one side, with lots of trendy people, and on the other side, Tonton Chami selling halal burgers. That says a lot.” (Adèle, 2018)⁵

“[In Rue du Marché au Charbon] there are terraces with many [people] from the ‘gay’ community, and [in the boulevard] there are only men in tea rooms. There is a true split, with very strong identities, and for now there is a mix on the square” (Etienne, 2018).

- 11 The perception of Place Fontainas as a hybrid space seems to be closely linked to the perception of a distinction and contrast between the groups and areas around the square. The perceived contrast between the gay neighbourhood and the Anneessens neighbourhood is therefore expressed in the perceptions by the assumed contrast between the sexualities associated with the neighbourhoods and those associated with the different groups (which are linked to the areas). While the gay neighbourhood is largely associated with a type of sexuality (i.e. homosexuality), the same applies to the Anneessens neighbourhood, where the perception of the socio-economic characteristics of its population is based on the idea of a mutually exclusive relationship between these characteristics and homosexuality.

“[In] the Anneessens neighbourhood, there are many immigrants, especially Muslims, Moroccans, Turks and blacks. It is a poorer and very male population. But male, not gay – really... [true heterosexuals]” (Sophie, 2018).

- 12 Beyond the assumed contrasts, this rationale illustrates a frequent confusion of the categories of class, religion and ethnicity. It also reveals that associations between the categories of “homosexual” and “Arab” (or “homosexual” and “Muslim”) are not part of the scope of thinking, underlining the more global vision of an opposition between the “Muslim world” and LGBTI people and their rights. Thus, Place Fontainas, tucked between areas associated with “strong identities”, is perceived as a place of hybridisation, where “people do nothing”.

- 13 These categorisations must be understood in the broader context of the social characteristics of respondents (mostly middle-class white women and men) and their perception of the legitimate organisation and functioning of the public space [Bailly, 1977]. The majority of them perceive the public space as a place of consumption, production and transit, rarely in keeping with a space dedicated to “non-productive” activities.

“It is not a very lively neighbourhood – nothing happens there. There are some snack bars, “junky” and cheap stuff [...] and blokes who are bored all day long and have nothing to do but sit there and watch people, make comments and argue” (Amandine, 2018).

- 14 However, despite these perceptions, the observations reveal the existence of specific appropriations, practices and stable social uses of the square (beyond its transitional function). Public benches are thus occupied day and night (mainly by groups of men from the working classes or perceived as such). At nightfall, the square also becomes a place for “deals” and the use of “drugs” (often cannabis), mainly on the public benches located on the invisible side of the square, hidden by the work barriers. In this same part, homeless people come to settle on a regular basis (some of them were observed throughout the survey), as the invisible aspect provides them with some privacy. This contrast – between the perception of a busy square whose uses are not identified and the observations revealing stable practices and uses of the square – reveals how dominant perceptions of the functioning and organisation of public space have a propensity for making certain non-dominant practices invisible (such as loitering or drug use). As it contributes to social mix and cohabitation, hybridisation and transition,

Place Fontainas reveals certain contrasts, which are most often perceived, and reflects the social fragmentation of a composite city.

3. An intersectional boundary

- 15 Place Fontainas marks an urban social transition between areas associated with “strong identities”. It is perceived as an in-between area which feeds hybridisation, and despite its poorly targeted uses, shows stable practices and uses. Taking into account the relationship of distance it appears to establish between the gay neighbourhood and the Anneessens neighbourhood, the following section presents an intersectional analysis of the square, examining the notion of border with regard to sexuality, social class, ethnicity and gender.

3.1. A sexuality border

- 16 While the spatial distribution of homosexual meeting places extends beyond the central and visible gay neighbourhood [Deligne et al., 2006], Rue du Marché au Charbon is nevertheless widely identified in social and media rhetoric as an important area in Brussels homosexual life. And for good reason: bars, nightclubs, saunas, sex clubs as well as more “traditional” businesses, such as hairdressers or clothing shops, exist in an identified commercial setting (signs, advertisements, rainbow flags, etc.) targeting LGBTI populations, especially homosexuals. In the only street section in the direct vicinity of Place Fontainas, there are no less than five gay or gay-friendly businesses: Le Fontainas (café/restaurant), Macho Sauna (gay sauna), Stamm Bar (cruise club), Downtown Bxl (gay friendly bed & breakfast) and Bxl’hair (gay friendly hair salon). On the other side of the square, in Boulevard Maurice Lemonnier, the symbolic signs of a homosexual presence disappear suddenly.

Figure . Map of businesses in Rue du Marché au Charbon (scale 1: 800). OpenStreetMap contributors

- 17 During a methodological exercise, the respondents were asked to outline their perception of the gay neighbourhood on blank maps. While there are some subtle differences in the results, Place Fontainas is not part of the gay neighbourhood for almost all respondents, with a large majority of them perceiving its beginning at the start of Rue du Marché au Charbon, when arriving from the square. These mental maps make it possible to locate the setting [Goffman, 1973] in which the perception of the gay neighbourhood activities takes on meaning, materialises and establishes its boundaries. The interviews also reveal that this perception is associated with a sexualized projection of the street's activities, fuelled by businesses, symbols and practices (such as visible homosexual flirting). Place Fontainas therefore seems to mark the transition in this projection.

Figure . Mental map (Antoine)

Figure . Mental map (Aurélien)

- 18 However, while Rue du Marché au Charbon is marked by the projection of (homo)sexuality, the “homosexual dimension” of the street should be questioned. Does Place Fontainas separate a homosexual enclave from a city which is generally heterosexual? In the section under study, businesses without specific sexualised targeting (such as Rachel or Asia Grill) exist alongside businesses which target homosexual populations (such as Stamm Bar, Macho Sauna and Le Fontainas). In addition, differences exist among businesses targeting homosexual populations. Thus, while the clientele at Le Fontainas are rather “young” and “trendy” (with a relative mix in terms of gender), the Stamm Bar and Macho Sauna – exclusively male – are frequented by a generally older population which, depending on the evening, adheres to certain codes of a more “virile” type of homosexuality. The interviews also reveal a heterosexual presence in places of socialisation such as Le Fontainas, as well as in places dedicated to sexual encounters, such as the sauna. By recontextualising some of the studies conducted on furtive and anonymous homosexual encounters between heterosexual men [Humphreys, 1970], Jane Ward [2015] shows that certain homosexual practices take place in a variety of places. She underlines the complexity of male sexuality, often perceived as rigid, and shows its fluidity, pointing out the subtleties in sexual orientations, identities and practices. Finally, it must also be mentioned that the “homosexual dimension” of the street includes a (very) small number of lesbians. Let us point out that in describing the neighbourhood we use the term “gay”, which, in French, refers directly to male homosexuality [Giraud, 2012]. And while lesbians gather in certain places in Brussels, such as the recent venue Mothers and Daughters, they are generally located outside the gay neighbourhood and are most often short lived [Martineau, 2018].

- 19 Rue du Marché au Charbon is more than just a place for homosexuals: it is a masculinised space for self-expression and a gay area, reinforced by the presence of monuments, institutions and associations.
- “It means being together in a place where you know there may be a way to meet someone or talk to people who have things in common, the same sexuality [...] in a familiar environment with the bars and people you know” (Mathias, 2018).
- 20 The street is perceived by respondents as a place to meet, flirt, socialise and share common interests – in particular sexual and emotional – among other things. It is also a spatial referent of the community, often part of the urban experience of gay people, playing a role in identity building and coming out [Valentine and Skelton, 2003].
- “The gay neighbourhood is fundamental. Beyond the bars and clubs, there are also places of refuge in the neighbourhood [...] It helps you to shed your inhibitions, as the process of acceptance and self-presentation is really progressive. It takes time all the same, just to know who you are in relation to others and the people you flirt with, and how you want to present yourself” (Noé, 2018).
- 21 As a result of this opportunity to be among themselves, the street constitutes a place where identity building and gay socialisation are optimised by an environment just outside the public space where certain practices (such as flirting or other forms of “homosexual display”) are perceived as inappropriate and are regulated by “heterosexual reactions” (Eribon, 1999), or are even severely punished.
- 22 The perceived possibilities of presenting a (homo)sexualised image of oneself are projected spatially and are established in relation to the perception of other spaces considered as dangerous.
- “I’m not going to dress like a poof when I go somewhere other than ‘marché au charbon’ or a gay party. [...] If you don’t want to get beaten up, you have to be careful about that sort of thing” (Bastien, 2018).
- 23 More than a border between sexualities, Place Fontainas is the border between a non-heteronormative space (or perceived as such) and heteronormative spaces (or perceived as such). That is to say that it marks the transition into an area where certain practices and presentations of oneself and one’s body take place and take on meaning in a spatial arrangement whereby a targeted commercial area creates a place for people to be among themselves and cultivate an identity and normative forms outside the dominant heteronormative code (in which norm transgression in terms of gender and sexuality is punished or perceived as risky) [Butler, 2006]. As of Place Fontainas, homosexual display is once again perceived as unsuitable and practices and behaviour adapt to this: less flirting and affectionate gestures are seen, there is an adjustment of physical appearance, accelerated pace. These elements allow us to draw an analogy with the urban experience of women, dictated by behavioural adjustment strategies (such as playing on appearance, taking certain routes or means of transportation rather than others, etc.) which are linked to the perception of dangerous and safe areas [Lieber, 2008 ; Nielsen et al., 2009 ; Van Brande, 2018].
- 24 The border, which is not subject to any political or administrative institutionalisation, is objectified on the basis of various elements. First, it is objectified on the basis of an arrangement of spatial objects which promote being together (businesses, signage, etc.), a system of localised interactions and certain types of behaviour and practices which emerge from an appropriation and perception of these places supported by the related identity referents. These spatial objects disappear as of Place Fontainas and promote the perception of a border. Secondly, this seems to be linked to the

dichotomous perceptions of an enclave of identity in which heterosexual codes are renegotiated, in a more global context of the symbolic inferiority of homosexuality in the public space. Due to the disappearance of the area for being among themselves and of identity referents, which is perceived to exist as of Place Fontainas, the square constitutes a gradual border between one space and another, between a non-heteronormative identity space and heteronormative spaces. Finally, the border is objectivised by the perception of a generally violent public space and by heterosexual reactions, which contribute to a feeling of insecurity which is partly reduced by the neighbourhood, being together, the businesses and the gay associations. Place Fontainas is therefore a transition area, not so much between a heterosexual space and a homosexual enclave, but rather between different normative codes in which the body as a medium through which expression allows the individual to incorporate space [Fournier, 2015], its display, and the relationship to others, are governed by different rules.

3.2. Class border and ethnic border

- 25 The hairdresser Bxl'Hair, located in Rue du Marché au Charbon, offers cuts ranging from € 22 to € 52 in a "vintage" and "trendy" decor. It also displays a rainbow sticker and a rotating barbershop pole (blue, white and red), which is a commercial symbol indicating the presence of a men's hair salon, typical of Anglo-Saxon countries and whose use, through the idealised representation of the small neighbourhood shop, is seen more and more often in some "trendy" businesses in Brussels. Its clients, almost all of whom are male, are predominantly white. Their appearance is characterised by neatness, fashionable clothes and accessories, a clean and refined look and thin and muscular bodies. On the other side of the border, in Boulevard Maurice Lemonnier, Modern Coiff offers men's cuts at much lower prices (between € 8 and € 20), displayed clearly on most of the shop front. Its interior is more "traditional" and its customers are less "trendy", and contrast with those in Rue du Marché au Charbon. They seem quite young and mainly from a North African background. About fifty metres away, businesses providing similar services reveal certain contrasts, in particular with respect to class.
- 26 In their comparative study on gentrification and commercial dynamics in Brussels and Paris, Mathieu Van Criekingen and Antoine Fleury describe as "the new urban middle class" or "the qualified fringes of the tertiary wage system" [2006: 2], the clientele of the "trendy" central areas such as the Saint-Jacques neighbourhood, where Rue du Marché au Charbon is located. Contrary to the widespread myth that businesses in these areas promote social mix through an alternative commercial offer, they seem to attract a relatively homogeneous clientele (Zamora and Van Criekingen, 2015). They are white and well-to-do, and are in keeping with the dominant consumption practices and lifestyles. They frequent consumer spaces which are also in keeping with this, where prices are high (but not as excessive as in luxury shops), where interiors and exteriors are cared for and make use of "vintage" elements, popular music, maximisation of outdoor spaces, etc. [Van Criekingen and Fleury, 2006]. Bxl'Hair, Le Fontainas, Rachel and a wide range of businesses which extend into Rue du Marché au Charbon illustrate these characteristics.

- 27 In Boulevard Maurice Lemonnier, after crossing Place Fontainas, an urban social change takes place, and one enters a neighbourhood with more degraded buildings, close to the centre and the South Station. The boulevard is wide and is part of a historically working class neighbourhood [Van Crielingen, 2006] (where the average per capita income is among the lowest in the Brussels Region⁶), and has a large number shops selling cheap items. Like Rue du Marché au Charbon, the boulevard is also an ethnicised area, inhabited by a large number of people from North African and sub-Saharan immigrant backgrounds, a significant proportion of whom are Muslims or perceived as such. Some respondents evoke in this respect the perception of a contrast – albeit with an element of mix – between the projected sexuality of the gay neighbourhood and the perception of a working-class North African identity associated with the Anneessens neighbourhood:

“That area [Place Fontainas] is much poorer, more working-class, and it is quite ambivalent after all, because it is both a gay area and potentially very Arab. For me, it is really the border between the two and I think there is a lot of violence there. With Muslims on one side and gays on the other, I think there must be some tension” (Emily, 2018).

- 28 This type of rationale (sometimes cultivated by the media and politicians) tends to create the idea of a border by ethnicising the relationship to otherness, by labelling “others” according to an “ethnic group” or a “race”. The socio-economic and ethnic dimensions thus fuel the existence of a boundary and an area of tension in an in-between space with a co-presence, whose representation is governed, not by an exclusive class differential, but by the perceived dichotomy between an ethno-religious categorisation and the spatialisation of a sexual identity. Thus, the ethno-religious and socio-economic dimensions – the latter sometimes tends to be obscured in favour of the former – are often perceived as being factors of tension, violence and insecurity.

“It is a more working-class area which is in a way much more closed and violent. [...] I don’t go there in the evening or at night” (Adèle, 2018).

“There are many attacks on gay people. For gay people, it is very dangerous” (Mathias, 2018).

- 29 Often perceived as potentially responsible for homophobic acts, racialised populations⁷ are partially excluded from the gay neighbourhood, which is the prerogative of white, middle-class gay men. Since then, Place Fontainas has been a symbolic border of class and ethnicity between an area occupied by the white “new urban middle class” population of Rue du Marché au Charbon and the racialised population of Boulevard Maurice Lemonnier, merging with the boundary between a non-heteronormative area and heteronormative areas. However, despite the perceptions, the boundaries are not impermeable, as the spaces are not homogeneous. In this regard, Huysentruyt et al. [2015] point out that, despite the dominance of white men in the gay neighbourhood, racialised people are not totally absent, but are often confined to the role of objects of desire or curiosity. In addition, some respondents seem to fight against this domination – at least in words.

“The invisibility of gay Arab people or gay underprivileged people is a concern, and it saddens me in a way. I have an idealistic hope that this will change, but for the moment I don’t see a solution” (Etienne, 2018).

3.3. A gender border

- 30 While Place Fontainas constitutes a border of class and ethnicity, which both play a role in the transition between heteronormative and non-heteronormative areas, there is no gender border linked to the spatial transition area. On the contrary, there is a continuity of male domination which limits women's access to public space, contributing to making them invisible in each of the areas studied.
- 31 However, male continuity differs according to the space. First, it exists through mechanisms to preserve a male togetherness in the gay social space of Rue du Marché au Charbon, which contributes to regulating, limiting or even prohibiting women's access to it (this is the case in Macho Sauna and Stamm bar, where signs and bouncers ensure that the gender border is not crossed). Furthermore, a feeling that women are not allowed in addition to the projection of a space for socialisation among male homosexuals solidifies their invisibility.
- “I prefer not to go there [Rue du Marché au Charbon]. I'm not gay and I prefer to leave them among themselves. They need it more than me” (Solène, 2018).
- 32 However, while certain spaces (the sauna or the Stamm bar) or certain temporalities (nights or weekend evenings) are particularly revealing in terms of the invisibility of women in the street, male hegemony does not follow a completely linear spatio-temporal course. The integration of the street into the tourist centre and the presence of “mixed” businesses (in particular) lead to the presence of women in the street, especially during the day.
- 33 Secondly, in Boulevard Maurice Lemonnier, while women are present and visible, their presence and visibility is different from that of men due to different spatial practices and occupations. Men are mainly found on public benches and in cafés and restaurants, while women are more transient and stop rarely. This observation is all the more obvious when evening falls and women become less and less visible, in spaces or infrastructures where people tend to be immobile, as well as in passages. This masculine continuity can be understood in relation to the invisible boundary between domestic and public spaces, contributing to social partitioning, whereby women are assigned to the domestic space, in accordance with ideas of what is feminine and what is masculine. On Place Fontainas and in Boulevard Maurice Lemonnier, the presence of women sometimes gives rise to male reactions or remarks which ensure a solid gender-based exclusion: whistles, flirting, insults, attacks, etc. A local resident mentioned her recurring experience of this behaviour:
- “Almost every day I get a remark or a whistle. I've already been spat at because I had the misfortune of walking through the neighbourhood in high heels” (Emily, 2018).
- 34 The experience of these reactions promotes the idea of a dangerous space and can lead women to use spatial avoidance strategies, to favour certain roads, means of transportation or times for travel, to play on appearance or to be accompanied by someone else [Lieber, 2002; Hanson, 2010; Gilow, 2015].
- “When I leave a party at night, I either try to stay over at a friend's place in the neighbourhood or take a taxi right to my door, and there is no way I would ever walk through the neighbourhood alone at night” (Laura, 2018).
- 35 In addition, gender is linked to a class dimension in the understanding of the relationship to danger. In Camille Dejardin's study [2018] of the feeling of insecurity

among female students in Brussels, she shows that youth gangs and the supposed characteristics of class and race are essential elements which influence the perception of a dangerous masculine public space, even though several authors highlight the socially scattered distribution of violence against women (Jaspard, 2005). The interviews conducted with local women confirm these remarks, the danger being associated with the same types of people: “young people who loiter”, “young Arabs” and “beggars”.⁸ More than the perception of isolated categories, it is the combination of “young, poor, foreigner” which contributes to the image of a dangerous and threatening space. It is therefore the relationship to otherness combined with the possibility of being subjected to remarks or aggression which explains these forms of spatial avoidance and these “no woman’s lands” [Di Méo, 2011], which Place Fontainas and Boulevard Maurice Lemonnier are part of.

- 36 In short, while Rue du Marché au Charbon, Place Fontainas and Boulevard Maurice Lemonnier present different spatial occupations and populations, the three spaces are essentially male, making women invisible in each of the areas. This masculine continuity reveals asymmetrical gender relations which seem to be established both outside and by the spaces, drawing self-generating relationships in which public spaces are both the reflections of a social order which transcends them, and the sites for the production and reproduction of this order.

Conclusion

- 37 Beyond the simplistic views sometimes presented in social, media and political rhetoric, marking the opposition between categories and spaces at times considered as violent and exclusive (in particular between the Muslim “world” and homosexual people, or between the Anneessens neighbourhood and the gay neighbourhood), an intersectional reading and the notion of border allow a change of perspective. They show that the city is crossed by social boundaries – multiple and intersecting – built in close relation to spaces.
- 38 By considering the border in terms of sexuality, social class, ethnicity and gender⁹, we are able to show that it works in a performative way, materialising above all in practices, rhetoric and perceptions. This article therefore shows that these elements make Place Fontainas the border of a non-heteronormative space starting at Rue du Marché au Charbon, which is essential for gay socialisation and identity building. Some practices (such as visible homosexual flirting or transgressive self-presentation) are anchored there and take place in relation to the representation of other (heteronormative) spaces in which the possibility of transgressing gender and sexual norms is associated with danger.
- 39 The study then shows that this border is confused with a border of ethnicity and class, separating a space occupied essentially by the white and well-off population in Rue du Marché au Charbon and a more impoverished space, inhabited by racialised populations, in Boulevard Maurice Lemonnier. Often thought of outside its social environment, the gay neighbourhood limits its access to the racialised populations which border it (often perceived as dangerous), but also to other populations – including homosexual populations (such as lesbians). The gay neighbourhood remains the prerogative of middle-class white gay men and conveys a normative and monolithic image of homosexuality, i.e. one of the most visible and favoured types.

- 40 Moreover, without being perfectly homogeneous, Rue du Marché au Charbon, Place Fontainas and Boulevard Maurice Lemonnier present a continuity in masculine presence which restricts women's access to public space and contributes to making them invisible in each of these spaces. On the one hand, this female absence is understood in relation to the perception of a dangerous space in which the risk is linked to the perception of a space associated with a difference in gender, class and ethnicity. On the other hand, it is understood through the homosexualised projection of a space associated with gay male socialisation, limiting its access by women. This article shows the importance of distinguishing between gender and sexuality, often considered together when they are analysed, as the two dimensions generating different urban experiences.
- 41 In the end, the groups are crossed by internal borders and more or less impermeable hierarchies within the city. However, in contrast to normative rhetoric, gendered or racialised homosexual populations exist, are seen in the city (and in the gay neighbourhood) and are the subject of intersectional oppression, among others in and by the public space. Although we can be glad that LGBTI issues are being integrated into public policies, they generally contribute to reproducing this normative image, which is also widely disseminated by the media at times or by tourism promotion policies. They also fail to make other "urban issues" visible, such as those related to the lack of free movement of women in the public space. To fill these gaps, social responses must be proposed – particularly urban planning – aimed at the sharing of public space and the fight against discrimination, taking into account the intersectional experiences of oppression. Recently, certain public services (such as Unia or Actiris) have begun to include intersectionality in their objectives.

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NOTES

1. For example, on 24 March 2015, the RTBF website reported: "Agression place Fontainas : le parquet reconnaît le caractère homophobe" (Agression at Place Fontainas: the public prosecutor's office recognises the homophobic nature). More recently, on 21 May 2018, the BX1 website featured the following headline: " Un groupe de jeunes victimes dimanche soir d'une agression homophobe près de la place Fontainas" (A group of young victims of a homophobic attack near Place Fontainas on Sunday evening).
2. Author's note: translation of "Plan d'action interfédéral contre la discrimination et la violence à l'égard des personnes LGBTI". The plan is available at: https://fedweb.belgium.be/sites/default/files/Plan_d_action_LGBTI_2018-2019_FR.pdf

3. Excerpt from the "Plan d'action Interfédéral contre la discrimination et la violence à l'égard des personnes *LGBTI*", p. 10.
 4. 2018. Un plan d'action interfédéral *LGBTI*: pour qui et pour quoi? In: *Le Soir*. 19/05/2018. Available at: https://www.rtb.be/info/opinions/detail_un-plan-d-action-interfederal-lgbti-pour-qui-et-pour-quoi?id=9921631
 5. Author's note: The interviews have been translated into English in order to facilitate reading.
 6. Source: BISA, Le Monitoring des Quartiers de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale. In : *Monitoring des quartiers* [online]. Available at: <http://monitoringdesquartiers.brussels/>
 7. Racialised populations are those populations which are subject to processes of racialisation, i.e. categorisation, essentialisation and differentiation based on assumed racial characteristics, the latter being conceived here as a social fact which has meaning in social relationships and not, of course, as a biological reality.
 8. Comments from the interviews
 9. Other areas of dominance with an implication in social relations, such as age or health, have not been addressed. They could be the subject of future studies.
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ABSTRACTS

Located between the “gay” neighbourhood and the “working-class” Anneessens neighbourhood, Place Fontainas has been the site of several presumed homophobic acts of violence, thus contributing to its categorisation as a dangerous area, particularly for homosexual populations. In response to this type of violence, there have been several measures adopted by the public authorities, yet they are in keeping with an often binary and essentialising logic of security. Based on direct observation work and interviews at and around Place Fontainas, the present article intends to adopt a new approach. It examines this area based on the notion of border and, through an intersectional analysis, discusses the social and urban mechanisms which contribute to the establishment of abrupt changes in terms of sexuality, social class and ethnicity. However, in each of the areas studied, there is a continuity of male domination, which makes women invisible and limits their access to public space.

Située entre le quartier « gay » et le quartier « populaire » Anneessens, la place Fontainas a été le lieu de plusieurs actes de violence prétendument homophobes, contribuant à la catégoriser comme un espace d'insécurité, particulièrement pour les populations homosexuelles. En réponse à ce type de violences, les mesures adoptées par les instances publiques se multiplient mais peinent néanmoins à sortir d'une logique sécuritaire, souvent binaire et essentialisante. À partir d'un travail d'observation directe et d'entretiens sur et autour de la place Fontainas, le présent article entend adopter une nouvelle approche. Il appréhende cet espace à partir de la notion de frontière et, à travers une analyse intersectionnelle, rend compte des mécanismes socio-urbains qui participent à établir des ruptures en termes de sexualité, de classe sociale et d'ethnicité. Par contre, dans chacune des zones étudiées, la continuité de la domination masculine invisibilise et contraint l'accès des femmes à l'espace public.

Het Fontainasplein, gelegen tussen de “volkswijk” Anneessens en de “homowijk”, was het toneel van verschillende vermeende homofobe incidenten, die ertoe bijdragen dat het plein wordt gecategoriseerd als een onveilige ruimte, vooral voor homoseksuelen. Als reactie op dit soort

geweld heeft de overheid al heel wat maatregelen getroffen, maar zij slaagt er vooralsnog niet in een vaak binaire en essentialiserende veiligheidslogica te doorbreken. Op basis van directe waarnemingen en interviews op en rond het Fontainasplein wil dit artikel uitgaan van een nieuwe benadering. Het bevat deze ruimte op basis van het begrip “grens” en brengt op basis van een intersectionele analyse verslag uit over de sociaal-stedelijke mechanismen die bijdragen aan het ontstaan van breuken met betrekking tot geaardheid, sociale klasse en etniciteit. De continue mannelijke overheersing in elk van de bestudeerde zones beperkt de toegang van vrouwen tot de openbare ruimte en maakt hen onzichtbaar.

INDEX

Keywords: gender, public space, gentrification, social inequalities, feeling of insecurity

Trefwoorden gender, openbare ruimte, gentrificatie, sociale ongelijkheden, onveiligheidsgevoel

Mots-clés: genre, espace public, gentrification, inégalités sociales, sentiment d’insécurité

Subjects: 7. aménagement du territoire – logement – mobilité

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