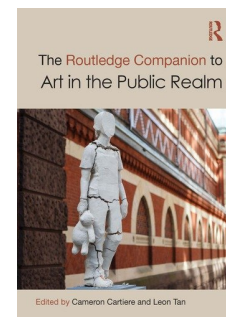


Public Art, Gentrification, and the Preservation of Black and Brown Urban Identity: The Case of Little Haiti, Miami – an Interview with Muralist Serge Toussaint

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Abstract

The arts have been a primary motor for reviving urban spaces throughout the Miami area and, on the flip side, the knock-on gentrification. Little Haiti has become the 'creative alternative' (Beth Dunlop, 'Grappling with Gentrification in Miami's Little Haiti', *Metropolis*, 5 Apr 2016), where property ownership is 'increasingly deemed the only way for art workers to break a vicious cycle of art-powered gentrification' (Brett Sokol, 'Miami's Art World Sets Sights on Little Haiti Neighborhood', *New York Times*, 23 Nov 2015). Resulting hyper-gentrification increases rents and thereby pressure on affordable housing, which has led to the forced relocation of the longer-time, low-income and overly Black and Brown residents. The trajectory of gentrification is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Little Haiti not only faces the consequences of arts gentrification but also of a so-called climate gentrification. Toussaint's muralism visualises the Little Haitian fabric of the last three decades. The interview has revealed some key tensions: Toussaint's artwork is respected; the popularity of his area-designated public art may have produced a clear visual identity marker. This artscape may have, nevertheless, canonised Little Haiti, potentially contributing to the stabilisation of Miami's imaginary as a 'creative city'.

Keywords

Public art, gentrification, preservation, Black, Brown, urban identity, Little Haiti, Miami, Serge Toussaint

Serge Toussaint's mural artwork has become an acclaimed, vital symbol for Little Haiti, Miami's historic ethnic, immigrant neighbourhood. Over the 1980s, Haiti's dictatorial regime of Jean-Claude Duvalier led to a significant influx of Haitians into South Florida, where – especially in Little Haiti – strong neighbourhood connections were formed through family ties, family-owned enterprises and (free) schooling programmes.² The area hosts a mix of a relatively strong, although declining, Haitian immigrant community and other African American immigrants across the Caribbean, with a rising population of Hispanic immigrants (notably from Venezuela, following its socio-economic and political crisis since 2010).³ Better known perhaps is Little Havana, Jan Nijman argued that

this has something to do with the Cuban community's much larger numbers and stronger voices compared to the Haitians ... Little Haiti's character, as a place, is not as well defined or iconic as Little Havana's. Neither its centre nor its boundaries are self-evident.⁴

Nevertheless, as a form of cultural protection, the City of Miami formally designated the area as 'Little Haiti' in 2016 – as will be critically revisited in this account.

On 9 December 2016, I had the privilege of meeting Toussaint for a street interview in Little Haiti.⁵ Born in Haiti's capital Port-au-Prince in 1963, Toussaint moved to New York at the age of 12, before finding his home in Little Haiti in 1994. He told me that his mother owned a restaurant, to which tourists brought interesting artworks and antiques. His schoolbooks were rich in depictions of art. All of which made him realise that perhaps he could make some money with it. His mother, however, told him that 'art cannot easily be sold and that artists [only] get famous once they are dead'. But 'art's me', he replied. Toussaint is an autodidact; he learned on the job, on the street: 'I look at the vibes – what does the neighbourhood like to see? You've got to feel the vibe to see what the neighbourhood wants.'

Toussaint's passion for art married with his love for Little Haiti. There, he found a warm and welcoming culture with the subtropical climate as a bonus – as it could let him work on the street all year round. Toussaint declared his artwork as a due reminder of a unique cultural heritage straddling the French-Creole and African American identities, as embodied by the locals. Ever since his arrival, Toussaint has been creating murals that cover a blend of storefront signs, advertising, and full-length murals. They combine more utilitarian purposes with visions inspired by Haitian cultural heritage.⁶ Portrayed figures feature notable Black and Brown freedom fighters, political leaders, and artists.

This interview-based piece is mainly ethnographic: it presents vignettes that connect with topical debates across scholarship and news media regarding gentrification and the challenges of preserving neighbourhood identity. Particularly under-examined is the (under-)representation and (un-)remembering of Black and Brown urban life, which lies at the heart of

Toussaint's artwork. In this piece, I want to be upfront about my positionality as white researcher-visitor, learning about Black and Brown knowledges that are distinctive from hegemonic Anglo-Saxon knowledge production in which I am co-situated.⁷

Little Haiti's Gentrifying Context

How long until the displacer is displaced? Can you count it in years? Generations? Janus is the god of beginnings but also of endings. Gentrification, the artist's very own ouroboros.⁸ No matter which face, it just is.⁹

Toussaint's urge to make art has, in the more recent past, adopted the form of an 'artist' fight against unprecedented levels of gentrification. His case is exemplary but not isolated.¹⁰ The formal area designation 'Little Haiti' might be telling for fears over the disappearance of the Black and Brown identity of a rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood. According to a food seller at the Caribbean Marketplace, the area has become 'a dead zone; nothing is going on. Haitians have pretty much left the neighbourhood.'¹¹ The arts have been a primary motor for reviving urban spaces throughout the Miami area and, on the flip side, the knock-on gentrification. Artists compete for visibility and recognition in Little Haiti as well, where Toussaint found some of the newer murals entirely unrelated to the neighbourhood.¹²

Notable to mention in this context is the former warehouse and working-class Puerto Rican immigrant neighbourhood Wynwood, which residents have long referred to as Little San Juan or El Barrio. The dominant real estate developer Tony Goldman created the arts epicentre Wynwood Walls in 2009, giving the starting signal for a widespread sprawl of creative enterprises in the area ever since, with omnipresent murals and (commissioned) graffiti artwork that have become Wynwood's global visiting card. But the arts have, to some extent, become a victim of their own success. As also witnessed on Miami Beach, arts gentrification has priced out the first artists and galleries of Wynwood, forcing them to seek affordable workspaces elsewhere.¹³ Little Haiti has become the 'creative alternative',¹⁴ where property ownership is 'increasingly deemed the only way for art workers to break a vicious cycle of art-powered gentrification'.¹⁵

New development plans include the already highly controversial Magic City Innovation District®, a billion-dollar residential, commercial, and arts hub, co-directed by Cirque du Soleil founder Guy Laliberté. Reading the shirts of some of the anti-gentrification protestors, for some this project heralds a 'Tragic City'.¹⁶ Although such arts-led developments in Little Haiti may lay claims to assumed social benefits, their intentions often receive scrutiny from locals.¹⁷ Resulting hyper-gentrification increases rents and thereby pressure on affordable housing, which has led to the forced relocation of the longer-time, low-income and overly Black and

Brown residents.¹⁸ New developments have also been pushing out small ethnic enterprises, including eateries, clothes shops, kitsch bars, and thrift shops. This all has been occurring at such a fast pace that the local district commissioner speaks of a downright ‘whitewashing’ of the neighbourhood.¹⁹

Now, real estate developers are often reluctant to use Little Haiti as identity reference, due to the stigma around its socio-economically deprived profile. Perhaps more appealing to targeted residents and markets, they would rather use the area’s historically known names of Little River or Lemon City²⁰ – or invent new ones such as Wynwood Norte.²¹ Visit Florida™, the official state travel promotion agent, speaks of the next ‘Capital of Cool’.²² The trajectory of gentrification is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Little Haiti not only faces the consequences of arts gentrification but also of a so-called climate gentrification.²³ Rising sea levels have caused developers to look for safer capital investments in higher-elevated areas, including Little Haiti. This compound gentrification process is accelerating the obliteration of Little Haiti’s distinct identity – will the images of Toussaint’s murals become postcards of a forgotten past?

‘Welcome to Little Haiti’: Public Art as Pedagogy

Toussaint is a prolific mural artist with a record of – according to his self-report at the time of the interview in 2016 – roughly 500 murals in Little Haiti alone and 500 murals in the larger Miami area. To heighten his fight against the yoke of gentrification, Toussaint has been applying the word tag ‘Welcome to Little Haiti’ to most of his recent murals (Figure 1), imparting, as said in an interview elsewhere, ‘a long-term effort to help affirm the neighbourhood’s existence and protect its identity’.²⁴

I recorded the conversation with Toussaint while I was sitting on a garden chair on the sidewalk, next to his mural-in-progress entitled *The Bread Sellers* (Figure 2). Toussaint’s reputation as a local figurehead was shown by the way locals warmly greeted him when walking by. His words flowed together with his strokes of paint, as he explained to me how with his new mural, and with his art more generally, he wants to bridge history, identity, and place:

This is a Haitian farmer selling some bread in the 1980s. We now see people going to buy bread at little bakeries. But in this, we see how the bread is sold on the street in the morning when people go farming. We could see the ladies that have a little basket of bread in front of them on the side of the street [...] There are bakeries but we don’t really go to bakeries to buy bread. You know what I mean? So, once I paint that, it brings people, Haitians, way back [...] This brings back the memory of street life. Because it’s Little Haiti, it’s Little Haiti. You have to put up something that our history,

our people remember [...] I paint to make you remember what you can't find. 'Cause if I come here and paint a skyscraper, like the World Trade Center, it wouldn't be appropriate, even though it's a nice building, but it wouldn't match with what we're trying to do in here.²⁵

While I was talking to Toussaint, he painted the contours of a mountain. This was not a coincidence. The country 'Haiti' infers its name from the indigenous Taíno name *Ayiti*, which means the 'land of high mountains', obviously a stark contrast with Miami's flat surface area. Imagery that combines street scenes with natural environments seems to play an important role in Toussaint's murals. He rendered his art as a teaching tool for intercultural encounters – as if he creates a schoolbook of his university of life: 'When people come to Little Haiti, I want them to take a piece of Haiti with them, because there are people that don't even understand what I'm doing.'²⁶



Figure 1 *Anpil Min Chay pa Lou* (2016), Serge Toussaint. Little Haiti, Miami, FL, USA

Source: Martin Zebracki. Photo reproduced with Toussaint's consent.

Note: 'Anpil Min Chay pa Lou' is Creole wordplay for 'many hands make the load lighter'



Figure 2 *The Bread Sellers* (2016), Serge Toussaint. Little Haiti, Miami, FL, USA
Source: Martin Zebracki. Photo reproduced with Toussaint's consent.

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Toussaint conveyed how some people noticed little aspects of significant cultural difference. Toussaint recalled the following conversation he had with a passer-by, a visitor, indicating how his art elicited surprise that facilitated transcultural understanding:

There was a lady that walked in here and asked: 'What is she holding?' I sat down with her and explained to her what it was. She's holding her bread. 'She's holding her bread? What is that she's holding?' A [loaf of] bread. People hold breads like that with no gloves. We do that in Haiti. 'They hold breads with no gloves? Why doesn't she have gloves on her hands?' [Toussaint laughs] 'But why would she sell bread in the street? Dust. All that thing coming on it. People will buy that stuff? Why is the bread not covered?' [Laughing] You know, yes this is something that you need to teach people [...] Haitian people know exactly what this really represents. But foreigners, also people born here, they don't always know what this is [...] That's how I paint, so that I can explain to you what this is.²⁷

Name Play: The Power of (Visual) Language

The conversation segued into a discussion about the strategic role of language in identifying the area, where different interests have translated into different namings. Toussaint signalled processes of systemic racism and social exclusion, which are interlocked with the real estate 'game'. He argued that 'the big problem' only started just recently with the new investors and developers coming in. Toussaint argued how these newcomers have reclaimed 'their' space and even want to create, or reinvent, a whole different, new identity for the neighbourhood. As Toussaint asserted:

I've been in Miami since 1994 [...] When I came here, the only thing I knew was that this is Little Haiti. But the developers tried to change the name [...] They want to buy a piece of land out ... Once you mention the word Haiti, the land is not worth a lot [...] Before, it was called Lemon City. At the time there were a lot of lemon trees everywhere. But if you go around, I don't even think you'd see one single lemon tree. It's gone [...] So, now the developers tried to turn this into Lemon City – it's too vague because there are no more lemons. [Laughing] It'd be worth more money if you say, I'm going to buy a piece of Miami. 'Where?' [referring to fictional interlocutor] In Little River.²⁸

But not all is bleak, and the reality seems ambiguous. Toussaint acknowledged that Little Haiti is a somewhat natural choice for developers and artists to move in. Its development potential not only has to do with its elevated 'hardware' but also with its social 'software', as the community cohesion is a competitive pull factor, too:

The problem is South Beach is getting so crowded [...] The closest space for the people to come when they want to hang out is Little Haiti. There's Overtown but they're scared of going to Overtown, because in Overtown there is [sic] a lot of yankies and a lot of Black people [...] They're going to rob you. They're going to kill you [...] Haitian people are different. We are sort of French. We respect one another. So, now they, the developers, are taking the kindness for weakness [...] If you go to 36th street right now, there's no more Haitians. They [i.e. the developers] took over [...] When I first came here the only bar was Churchill's, the one right there on Second Avenue [...] Nowadays they have art galleries everywhere. They're coming up.²⁹

Just as developers use specific language to protect their interests, so does Toussaint. In his art, visual semiotics – i.e. inclusive visual language – plays a major role in safeguarding local heritage. As such, Toussaint has been renegotiating (or subverting, depending on your point of view) the hegemonic Anglophonic landscape:

Back in 1994, when I first came to Miami, all I saw was just signs. There was [sic] no artworks, you know, and I realised, I am in Little Haiti and everything is written in English ... Tiny Cup, barber shop, beauty salon ... People here don't understand what the word beauty salon is. They don't understand what barber shop is. They don't understand what grocery means, because that's not how we say that in Creole. But why not painting a soda, a hotdog, a cigarette, a beer. So, people who don't know how to read English, automatically, by seeing behind, they know what's going on in there. That's how I started. So, when I started doing that, people have come to embrace that [...] Now all of a sudden, I was called for a botanica [i.e. Haitian Vodou shop], the botanica is right there [points at location].³⁰

When asking about the foregrounding of language, Toussaint stressed his larger effort to reminisce about urban life:

The language? I'm bringing back the culture. Back then, all you saw was just the word botanica, but they have a particular saint that they worship. I was like, okay, what if I paint your saint for you? What you worship? They like cows. What if I paint a cow for you? [...] Once you walk up in here, you already know what's going on in there by not even knowing how to read. It's like when you see Coca Cola. You don't know how to read but once you see red and white, that's coke [...] They remember the label and it's the same thing I've tried to do in Little Haiti.³¹

Empowerment versus Erasure: The Politics of Recognition

Toussaint reflected on his muralism as tool of empowerment for the local community, including himself. This has provided force to his warning message that the local culture that his artwork embodies should not be erased. Locals were already forced from homeownership into foreclosure since the recession in the late 2000s. The argument of Toussaint became particularly defensive when I dropped the name Magic City. For him, this most recent development is the epitome of the sophisticated practices of developers to push out the impoverished community in order to replace them by newcomers who have little or no ties with the local community, culture, and life.³² When I asked Toussaint whether he is afraid of Little Haiti's identity being taken away by large-scale commercial development of this kind, his response was testament to community resilience:

I'm really afraid of that, because that's the reason why I'm fighting so much as an artist, because there are not too many artists at my level [...] Wherever you go to Little Haiti, you see my work. It's related to Haiti. It has something to do with Haiti [...] Maybe by me doing all that, I'm just going to put some type of power on Haitian people, knowing that whatever they own, you cannot let it go like that. People cannot go to Little Havana, take Little Havana from the Cubans [...] As soon as you walk in Calle Ocho you have a sense of being in a Cuban community. You understand what I'm saying? But why would they [referring to developers] want to take our little place? [...] But by me being around, and putting up all this Haitian artwork, when people are going back and forth, the sense of Haiti is still going to be around.³³

Toussaint, in this sense, construed himself as an influencer who instigates recognition:

Every time I make a little piece on the wall, I pass the message. So, in other words, I'm not a writer, but with my artwork, I can inspire you [...] In a sense, I'm not a politician but I'm like ... almost like ... I don't even know how to explain that. But I stand for truth. You understand what I'm saying?³⁴

Indeed, I have observed how his muralism is present, as much as on the public streets as in public tweets (i.e. social media), lending visibility and a life span beyond the original location and ephemeral materiality of his art. Also, I, as researcher-visitor, have become part of Toussaint's outreach. In so doing, relating back to the previous point about public art as pedagogy, Toussaint aims to teach about – and put a face to – community history through mural art, which he contemplated as particularly effective in reaching and empowering a wider audience beyond school textbooks. Toussaint turned to me and said:

People like you are going to be involved because I give you something to write about. I give you something to influence you. I do some work so that people would act. If

you go down there on 54th street, I don't know if you've seen that work before. I put up all the ancestors, Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines [both Haitian revolutionary leaders, 1789–1804], Charlemagne Masséna Péralte [Haitian nationalist leader resisting the 1915 US occupation of Haiti], the ancestors that gave Haiti freedom. It's right there. I think I'm going to show it to you before you leave [...] People who, in 1804, gave Haiti freedom.³⁵ So I paint those ancestors, to let the Haitian people know that, hey man, you have a background [...] You are the first [Black-led] nation in the world that got your freedom [from colonial rule and slavery] [...] Those are the people that fought for you, for you to keep your head up [...] We did help Americans get their freedom, so why would you bring yourself less.³⁶

Toussaint's artistic route of empowering others is anchored in his personal life course. He passionately reflected on the future generation:

I don't paint just to paint, I paint just to put out a message, to remind you of who you are. So, I want to make it when my son grows up, even if I'm not alive anymore, he will be like, man, my father was one of the guys who was fighting for this [...] my dad was one of the pioneers that fought for Little Haiti.³⁷

At the same time, Toussaint realised that neither his murals nor his 'wake-up call' through the image of his murals may last forever. His muralism has become a site-specific strategy; an aesthetic act of empowerment that calls for recognition, protection, and ready action to avoid consigning the local identity to oblivion in the minds of the community in transition:

The Haitian, we, need to wake up, to realise that if you stand for Little Haiti, five years from now, eight years from now, you're going to come right here looking for Serge's artwork, and they're all going to be washed off, they're going to be off [...] [But] it's still going to be Little Haiti because I put a fight for this. And my voice is being heard man, my voice is being heard everywhere. My voice is being heard.³⁸

I queried Toussaint about whether there are any efforts in place to preserve his murals. Not much can be officially done when developers or new owners wish to take down his murals – as anything else – on their properties, as a result of which many murals by his hand are left unrecorded.³⁹ Toussaint's 'wake-up call', however, could make a moral appeal to discourage them from doing so. Toussaint argued that he has developed great, promising support among the local community and fellow artists, cloaking his murals with a certain level of informal protection:

All my works are protected. I can say they're protected because I've been around here since 1994. The people that could destroy your work, is [sic] your artists, the graffiti people. They call me the godfather, because, in other words, they know that I started.

Wherever I put my work, I don't get tagged [...] If they come here with graffiti, they go: 'That's Serge, I don't like touching Serge's stuff'. Because they have some respect for me [...] As you can see, I left all my stuff here. Nobody's going to touch it. I can leave that till the morning until I come.⁴⁰

Toussaint's labours and struggles, as artist and community builder, did not go unnoticed by the authorities. His work has been endorsed and sustained by invited commissions, including from local authorities:

City of Miami, they love my work. As matter of fact they give me some work sometimes [...] If they're going to do something, the one they're going to ask is me to give the first shot at it [...] They're like, you know, Serge is the one that changed the face of Miami.⁴¹

Recognition from the Florida Department of State came in 2016, when he was the recipient of the Florida Folk Heritage Award:

You know how many artists there is [sic] in the state of Florida? For someone to recognise you as being a winner? This thing really means a lot to me [...] and it was on the news. This is one of the greatest things that I have accomplished in my life.

But this was followed by a sad postscript: 'I was telling you about my mom who never wanted me to be an artist [...] What hurts me the most is that I became famous when my mom died.'⁴²

Controversy: Black Memorialisation or 'Whitewashing'?

Commissioned public art may come with challenges to artistic autonomy, in this case within the context of a complex racial, post-segregation society. Toussaint highlighted one salient controversy around the time of the 2007–2008 US election:

The city of Miami hired me to paint at 62nd Street. That's before Mr Obama became president [...] I thought I'd paint a picture of Doctor Martin Luther King but it's like I made a mistake. It's not a mistake but the wall was so big. I painted Doctor Martin Luther King but there was a big empty space on the side. And I'm trying to figure out, what if I put a flag, American flag [...] Then again, I'm like ... but what else should I put to fill the gap? [...] But that's at the time that Mr Obama came up and I'm like, you know what? Why I don't just paint Mr Obama and Doctor Martin Luther King together because Doctor Martin Luther King's dream was to have a Black president before he died, which he didn't get the chance to see [...] But Mr Obama was a son of a white woman and a Black man [...] Doctor Martin Luther King fought [for the recognition]

11

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that all people are the same. So, Mr Obama, to me, is the dream of Martin Luther King. So why don't I just put Mr Obama next to Martin Luther King and call the wall 'The Dream of the Century'?⁴³

Toussaint continued:

So, I painted Doctor Martin Luther King and then, all of a sudden, I put a nice picture of Mr. Obama next to him. Man, before I knew it ... the TV started calling me [...] This is beautiful, 'We want to have an interview with you. Why would you paint this?' I'm like, 'because he's going to become president.' The next day the City of Miami calls me. And I'm like, 'Hello?' They say, 'Serge, we have a problem.' I go, 'what's the problem?' 'The problem we have is this: we had heard you would paint Doctor Martin Luther King, not Mr Obama, so now we want you to paint over Mr Obama's picture.' [Toussaint:] 'You know, I get so many compliments. People are loving it and now you want me to paint it over?' But what I did is, I didn't paint it over. They gave me 72 hours to take it down and then what I did, I painted the silhouette, I painted around it [...] You know, Mr Obama got some big floppy ears, I just left the outline of Mr Obama on the wall.⁴⁴

Then, I asked Toussaint whether it became a neighbourhood icon and he agreed. It became widely discussed across the news media. The rhetoric revealed a dissonant conversation piece, targeted against whitewashing:

Yes, boom now the news called me again. 'Serge ... we really want to do an interview [...] But why did you paint that with white paint? [...] Why didn't you use a different colour? [...] Did the white man make you take it down?' – because Mr Obama is Black [...] Oh my god, next thing I know is, it's a big controversy. They called the wall 'the white out'. The white out? ... I'm like 'no, man, because whenever you paint something on a background you always use your white paint to cover it' [...] They [i.e. the media] are calling the wall the white out ... oh my god, that was really hard for me.⁴⁵

Epilogue

Toussaint's muralism visualises the Little Haitian fabric of the last three decades. His oeuvre can be rendered as a twofold, ongoing act of activism: an act of bestowing a sense of ownership on the local population (in a larger attempt to take pride in Black and Brown culture, identity, and neighbourhood community), as well as an ongoing grassroots activism that, in a more recent context, has adopted a fight against the exclusionary forces of (hyper-)gentrification.

The critical narrative that has come to me through the interview with Toussaint has shed light on a fascinating yet troubling mosaic of the identity of an ethnic, Black and Brown, neighbourhood in transition. This transition occurs under joint art and climate gentrification mechanisms. They are mediated through neoliberal regimes of power and post-colonial hierarchies, which feed Miami's urban imaginary.⁴⁶ At the same time, Toussaint's muralism manifests itself as apprehension: that is an uneasy, or fearful, anticipation of existing and future real estate developments that threaten the continued existence of Little Haiti's distinct cultural life and migratory background identity. New arts-driven development may well appropriate the creative spirit of the area while compromising the right to place of longer-term residents who are, in fact, increasingly forced to move out of the neighbourhood. This reality of social disenfranchisement is a vicious circle, as it obviously makes resident-led counteraction harder, or even impossible.

The interview has revealed some key tensions: Toussaint's artwork is respected; the popularity of his area-designated public art may have produced a clear visual identity marker. This artscape may have, nevertheless, canonised Little Haiti, potentially contributing to the stabilisation of Miami's imaginary as a 'creative city'. This may not be problematic per se. But what does it mean when new developments are possibly compensating for lost neighbourhood life by capitalising on its cultural and artistic legacy? They may well become ersatz developments that detract from Black and Brown community development.⁴⁷ In other words, what does the authentic 'publicness' of Toussaint's image culture entail if, or when, his visual artwork gets commodified for the gaze of audiences that cannot relate to the Black and Brown identity and street culture from which his work originates?

In conclusion, could there be a stereotypical reproduction of a Haitian urban imaginary if there were no locals left for interpretation? It is also nothing new that the further marginalisation – and stigma – of Black and Brown communities points to systemic discrimination and related processes of exclusion and segregation in urban redevelopment, i.e. gentrification.⁴⁸ Who, or which neighbourhood, is next? And how can public artists fight back to reclaim power, place, and identity beyond what might be (come) remnant beacons of an abandoned and underserved population?

Notes

- 1 I owe a debt of gratitude to Serge Toussaint for this unique opportunity to conduct the interview while he was at work on a new mural. Toussaint consented to be named in this dialogical piece (as anonymising would be impracticable in this case).
- 2 See David Brown, *The Story of Little Haiti: Featuring Its Pioneers* (Pompano Beach, FL: Educa Vision, 2001), cited in Sandra Lemaire, 'Fighting Gentrification by Making Little

- Haiti Great Again', VOA, 9 April 2018, www.voanews.com/usa/fighting-gentrification-making-little-haiti-great-again.
- 3 For an interesting historical background reading about Little Haiti in the light of gentrification, see Andres Viglucci, 'Little Haiti Is Up for Grabs: Will Gentrification Trample Its People and Culture?', *Miami Herald*, 29 September 2019, www.miamiherald.com/news/business/real-estate-news/article232134932.html.
 - 4 Jan Nijman, *Miami: Mistress of the Americas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 158. See also Edward LiPuma and Thomas Koelbe, 'Cultures of Circulation and the Urban Imaginary: Miami as Example and Exemplar', *Public Culture* 17, no. 1 (2005): 153–180, who argued that 'there is no city of Miami' (161, original emphasis) in an effort to deconstruct Miami 'as a stable, bounded, space' (161).
 - 5 For compelling reference interviews with Toussaint, see Maria Murriel, 'Little Haiti's Street Art, Before the Wynwood Era', *WLRN*, 30 November 2015, www.wlrn.org/post/little-haitis-street-art-wynwood-era; and Monica Uszerowicz, 'In Miami's Little Haiti, a Muralist Fights Gentrification One Wall at a Time', *Hyperallergic*, 7 September 2016, <https://hyperallergic.com/321133/in-miamis-little-haiti-a-muralist-fights-gentrification-one-wall-at-a-time>.
 - 6 See Uszerowicz, 'In Miami's Little Haiti'.
 - 7 The discursive use of the capitalised 'Black' and lower-case 'white' is an attempt to 'centre anti-racism', Alex Kapitan, 'Ask a Radical Copyeditor: Black with a Capital "B"', <https://radicalcopyeditor.com/2016/09/21/black-with-a-capital-b>.
 - 8 An ouroboros is as an 'emblematic serpent of ancient Egypt and Greece represented with its tail in its mouth, continually devouring itself and being reborn from itself', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/topic/Ouroboros.
 - 9 Dana Bassett, 'How Many Sides Are There? A Meditation on the Many Headed Janus of Gentrification', *Miami Rail*, 10 October 2016, <https://miamirail.org/web-exclusives/how-many-sides-are-there-a-meditation-on-the-many-headed-janus-of-gentrification>.
 - 10 Toussaint is not alone in his fight against the gentrification of Little Haiti. In 2013, the Miami artists Loriel Beltran, Domingo Castillo, and Aramis Gutierrez opened GUCCIVUITTON, an ironic play on the high-end fashion brands Gucci and Louis Vuitton. See Jarrett Earnest, 'Toward South Florida Aesthetics: An Oral History of GUCCIVUITTON', *Miami Rail*, 13 September 2014, <https://miamirail.org/visual-arts/toward-south-florida-aesthetics-an-oral-history-of-guccivuitton>. In 2019, local 'artists' Najja Moon and Michelle Lisa Polissaint critically responded to the widely circulating Miami Design District designer umbrellas, taken by them as a 'marketing propaganda for the gentrification machine' and the 'whitewashing' of Little Haiti. For their collaborative site-specific public art project *Who's the Fool? How to Patch a Leaky Roof*, they designed their very own umbrellas, which were placed open on doorsteps across Little Haiti, see Alexandra Martinez, 'Two Little Haiti Artists Are Resisting Gentrification With an Army of Umbrellas', *Miami New Times*, 23 April

- 2019, www.miaminewtimes.com/arts/o-miami-poetry-festivals-whos-the-fool-how-to-patch-a-leaky-roof-fights-little-haiti-gentrification-11149028.
- 11 Cited in Lemaire, 'Fighting Gentrification'.
 - 12 See Uszerowicz, 'In Miami's Little Haiti'.
 - 13 See Alfredo García, 'The Walls of Wynwood: Art and Change in the Global Neighborhood' (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2017).
 - 14 See Beth Dunlop, 'Grappling with Gentrification in Miami's Little Haiti', *Metropolis*, 5 April 2016, <http://www.metropolismag.com/design/grappling-with-gentrification-in-miamis-little-haiti>.
 - 15 See Brett Sokol, 'Miami's Art World Sets Sights on Little Haiti Neighborhood', *New York Times*, 23 November 2015.
 - 16 Allison Waller and Joey Flechas, 'Little Haiti Residents Rally for a More "Inclusive" Development Ahead of Magic City Vote', *Miami Herald*, 21 June 2019, www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article231762063.html.
 - 17 See Viglucci, 'Little Haiti Is Up for Grabs'.
 - 18 See Sokol and Jerry Iannelli, 'New Report Warns Magic City Development Could Displace Thousands of Low-Income Residents', *Miami New Times*, 21 June 2019, www.miaminewtimes.com/news/little-haiti-miami-activists-warn-magic-city-innovation-district-could-displace-thousands-11201465.
 - 19 See Uszerowicz, 'In Miami's Little Haiti'.
 - 20 See Sokol, 'Miami's Art World'.
 - 21 Andres Viglucci, 'This Working-Class Miami Barrio Is Geared Up for Gentrification: Welcome to Wynwood Norte', *Miami Herald*, 19 September 2019, www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/midtown/article234485632.html.
 - 22 Jodi Mailander Farrell, 'Now's the Time to Visit Little Haiti, on the Brink of Change', Visit Florida™, www.visitflorida.com/en-us/cities/miami/visit-little-haiti-in-miami.html.
 - 23 See Jesse Keenan, Thomas Hill, and Anurag Gumber, 'Climate Gentrification: From Theory to Empiricism in Miami-Dade County, Florida', *Environmental Research Letters* 13, no. 5 (2018): 1–11; see also Carolyn Beer, 'Miami Residents Fear "Climate Gentrification" as Investors Seek Higher Ground', *PRI*, 19 December, 2017.
 - 24 Cited in Uszerowicz, 'In Miami's Little Haiti'; see also *Miami New Times*, 'Arts & Entertainment 2019: Best Street Artist Serge Toussaint', n.d., www.miaminewtimes.com/best-of/2019/arts-and-entertainment/best-street-artist-11190836.
 - 25 Interview, Miami, 9 December 2016.
 - 26 Ibid.
 - 27 Ibid.
 - 28 Ibid.
 - 29 Ibid.

- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 See Viglucci, 'Little Haiti Is Up for Grabs'.
- 33 Interview, Miami, 9 December 2016.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Haiti declared independence in 1804, after having been the French colony of Saint-Domingue from 1659 to 1804.
- 36 Interview, Miami, 9 December 2016.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 See also Murriel, 'Little Haiti's Street Art'.
- 40 Interview, Miami, 9 December 2016.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 LiPuma and Koelbe, 'Cultures of Circulation and the Urban Imaginary'.
- 47 For an account on the exclusion of Haitian migratory culture and identity in Miami's cultural production, see Fredo Rivera, 'Precarity + Excess in the *Latinopolis*: Miami as Erzulie', *Cultural Dynamics* 31, no. 1–2 (2019): 62–80.
- 48 See Louis Marcelin, 'Identity, Power, and Socioracial Hierarchies Among Haitian Immigrants in Florida', in *Neither Enemies nor Friends: Latinos, Blacks, Afro-Latinos*, ed. Anani Dzidzienyo and Suzanne Oboler (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 209–227; and Tatiana McInnis, 'Missing Miami: Anti-Blackness and the Making of the South Florida Myth' (Phd diss., Vanderbilt University, 2017).