



## Journal of International Women's Studies

Volume 6  
Issue 2 *Volumes*

Article 22

Jun-2005

### The View from the Street: *La Goutte d'Or*

Mary Ellen Wolf

Follow this and additional works at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>

 Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

#### Recommended Citation

Wolf, Mary Ellen (2005). The View from the Street: *La Goutte d'Or*. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 6(2), 202-207.  
Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol6/iss2/22>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

## The View from the Street: *La Goutte d'Or*

By Mary Ellen Wolf<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract:

This photo essay is about a multiethnic urban immigrant neighborhood in central Paris called the Goutte d'Or. The text and the selection of photographs foreground the author's exploration of women's spaces in the neighborhood and the difficulties which women face in everyday life: housing, illiteracy, cultural differences, and poverty.

*Keywords:* immigrant, neighborhood, Goutte d'Or, women

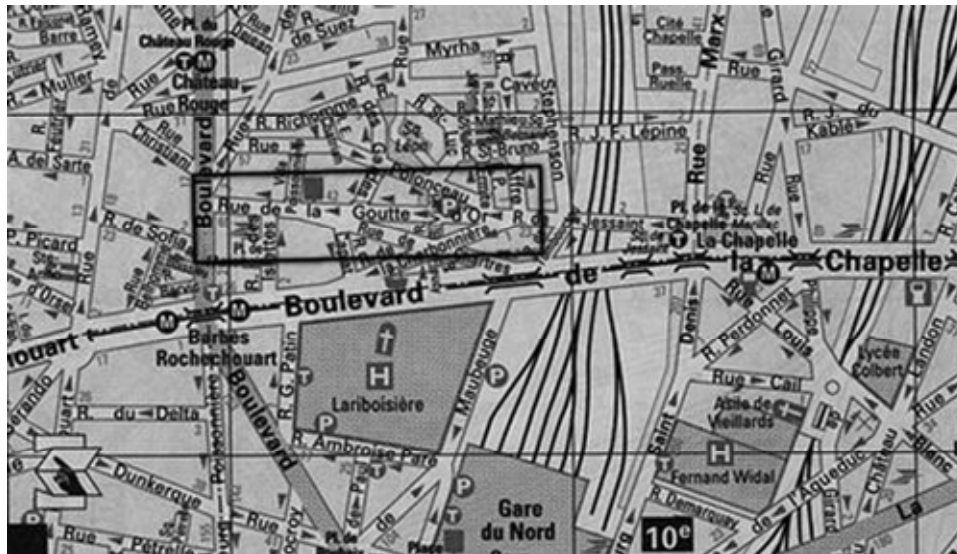


Figure 1. Map, La Goutte d'Or.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary Ellen Wolf is an Associate professor of French and Women Studies at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Her photo essays have appeared in *Critical Inquiry*, *Puerto del Sol* and *Proteus: A Journal of Ideas*. She is currently working on a book about the Goutte d'Or.



**Image 1. Rooftop, Sacre Coeur.**

**Image 1**

Tourists in Paris usually spend some time on the terraces of Sacré Coeur, a Byzantine-styled church which crowns the top of the Butte Montmartre. From its terraces, they get an amazing east-west panoramic view of the French capital, its various historical monuments and the overall layout of the city. Yet if they were to descend the southeastern side of the hill, they would encounter another Paris, the tiny immigrant neighborhood at the base of the hill called "*La Goutte d'Or*"--"the drop of gold."



**Image 2. Rue Poloceau.**

**Image 2**

I first began exploring the streets of this labyrinthine urban space in the early 1990s. I discovered it quite by accident early one August evening. I like to wander and let myself get lost. On that particular evening, I felt that I had left the Paris that I knew and entered a world that was exotic, mixed, and diasporic. It was as if I had turned a corner and walked into an urban village populated by a collage of nationalities and ethnicities. I saw men laying out their prayer rugs on the street, veiled women with their children in hand, hawkers and beggars, mullahs and prostitutes. I met a group of children and photographed them. I learned their names and the various countries from which they and their families had come: Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Senegal, and the Ivory Coast.



**Image 3. Mullah.**

**Image 3**

I began to see how ethnicity, gender, and immigration had shaped the physical spaces of *La Goutte d'Or*. The *quartier* was split, with North Africans dominating the southern sector and Western Africans and Antillians, the north. In the middle, there were thirty-to-forty other nationalities, including native French.



**Image 4. Rue de la Goutte d'Or.**

**Image 4**

In *La Goutte d'Or*, men and women seem to walk different paths. While the men go to work (or go looking for work), their wives go to the markets and take their children to and from school. I interviewed Aïcha, a social worker *who* runs a literacy center in the neighborhood. She talks about teaching these women who, for the most part, come from rural communities in North and West Africa. Not only is it important for them to learn how to read and to write French, but they have to become familiar with the French system, its culture, and above all, its bureaucracy. They need to understand their rights, or even more, their “lack of rights.” For example, many immigrant women arrive as the “spouse” of an immigrant. They are part of a nuclear family unit but are dependent on their husband’s immigration status. They typically do not have their own residence cards. So a woman who separates from or divorces an abusive husband becomes illegal overnight. If she were to understand the workings of the French immigration system, she would have a chance to fight and to stay. The neighborhood center educates her, helps her to adapt, alleviates her sense of isolation, and empowers her (to the extent possible).



**Image 5. Footsteps.**

**Image 5**

In *La Goutte d'Or*, I have noticed that women of African descent appear to enjoy the mobility and freedom a city provides. They usually walk together in small groups and it is not uncommon for them to take the metro to shop in other districts. Paris has a cold, damp climate for many months of the year. Even though the women walking in front of me are wearing heavy coats, they still prefer their sandals to Western shoes. This is an image which captures the complexity of a globalized urban environment: it is an image which suggests that urban space does not merely absorb those who are different but rather is itself marked by that difference.