



Sara González (ed), *Contested Markets, Contested Cities: Gentrification and Urban Justice in Retail Spaces*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2018. ISBN: 9781138217485 (cloth); ISBN: 9781315440361 (ebook)

I start reading *Contested Markets, Contested Cities* the day after visiting the newly reopened and refurbished Sant Antoni market in Barcelona. The €80m project was one of dozens of market renovation projects in the city designed to turn what were characterized as dilapidated and “gloomy” markets into spaces that would foster vibrant trade, a sense of community, and even more ecological economic exchange (The Guardian 2018). Yet the neighborhood surrounding the market, like much of Barcelona, is full of anti-tourist graffiti and many residents fear that the refurbished market will lead to more gentrification as it attracts tourists and wealthy customers with its new gourmet food offerings. This story, of course, is not limited to Barcelona: cities from London to Santiago de Chile are undertaking similar projects, and as *Contested Markets, Contested Cities* makes clear, they often aim to directly emulate Barcelona’s model (p.87) and, in the process, end up contributing to gentrification. Yet, more than just tourist attractions, markets have traditionally served as a form of public space, as spaces of encounter and exchange between different individuals and communities. Markets, both regulated and unregulated, formal and informal, still play an essential role for poor communities, both in allowing them to access goods and in creating new social relations of solidarity and support in the midst of the increasing privatization and individualism of neoliberalism. What is lost when markets no longer play this role? And, despite gentrification, what alternative markets are possible? *Contested Markets, Contested Cities*, edited by Sara González, takes up these questions, examining the different roles played by markets, and their contradictions, from the perspectives of gentrification and the right to the city.

The volume encourages us to expand our studies of gentrification beyond the residential to investigate the relationship between transformations in retail spaces and access to public and

urban life. The different cases presented in the book draw on three overlapping analytical frameworks to present and analyze markets in different cities. The first of these looks at markets as “frontier spaces for processes of gentrification”, how markets themselves are gentrified and how transformations to markets often play a role in broader neighborhood gentrification processes. The authors define “retail gentrification” as a process in which retail itself is transformed so as to target wealthier consumers over low income consumers, or as an increase in commercial rents that either drives vendors out of markets or forces them to change their products (p.8). The cases demonstrate how this process has played out differently in markets across Europe and Latin America to develop an analysis of the relationship between markets and gentrification that transcends national boundaries while recognizing geographic difference, drawing on the extended work of the “Contested Cities” research project (<http://contested-cities.net>) and showing the potential of multi-sited, collaborative research. The cases also draw comparisons between retail gentrification and residential gentrification: they both often start with a period of systematic disinvestment by the state, which is then used to justify state intervention. For example, campaigns to save public markets in London are struggling directly against the disinvestment and abandonment of the markets in generally poorer and more ethnically diverse areas of the city, which they understand as a concerted effort on the part of public authorities and private developers to exploit the rent gap on the well-situated land on which the market stands (p.62-63).

Often the creation of upscale gourmet markets functions within an urban competitiveness model to attract investors and tourists to cities, showing how retail gentrification is not only the outcome of local government decisions or economic processes, but also global economic forces (Chapter 6). Cities as diverse as London, Madrid, Barcelona, Mexico City, and Santiago de Chile have attempted to create similar gourmet markets as part of their urban regeneration strategies. La Vega Central in Santiago finds its status as a de facto public space, catering mostly to low income and migrant shoppers as well as a space for building community, under threat as the

market turns towards selling more gourmet goods to attract tourists and wealthier clientele (Chapter 3). This retail gentrification is closely linked to residential gentrification and government policies aimed at promoting tourism. Yet these processes are far from monolithic, as Chapter 7 shows by analyzing transformations in three markets in Madrid. Even within the same city, the proposed redevelopment and gentrification of each of these markets has followed a different path and led to different results in what the authors call a “variegated process” of “*selective transformation*” (p.99). The redevelopment of public markets in different neighborhoods of the city has led to very different results, pointing to what the authors refer to as the “exhaustion” of the gourmet market model. This attention to detail and local specificity make it clear that while cities are facing many of the same economic and political pressures, the local circumstances within which these gentrification processes play out will always be different and lead to different results.

One element that many of these attempts at gentrification share are discourses of *modernization* and *securitization* used to justify state intervention. As Victor Delgadillo details in his chapter on the gentrification of the market area of La Merced in the historic center of Mexico City, a major part of the regeneration projects proposed by the local government is aimed to drive street vendors out of the space, associating the street vendors with unordered, “insecure” and “pre-modern” uses of space (Chapter 2). A similar discourse of security is deployed by the local public authorities to stigmatize Mercado de San Roque in Quito (Chapter 11), which is largely inhabited by Indigenous people. Systematic disinvestment by the state has led to physical obsolescence of much of the market infrastructure as well as the surrounding neighborhood, to which the state responds to with a racialized discourse of security to justify interventions to clean and sanitize the market area. Despite this discourse from the government, the chapter shows how the market serves as a relational and hospitable space for many people from otherwise marginalized communities (p.173). Yet there is a long history of similar arguments being used to justify state or private sector interventions into market spaces (p.5).

Here an interesting dialogue could be had with Verónica Gago's (2017) analysis of a different market, La Salada, an enormous informal market outside of Buenos Aires, which has faced both threats of eviction from the government but also increasing competition for space between vendors themselves. In her analysis of this market and its related production networks, Gago shows that the division between the modern and the premodern is not so stark or clear; elements of the "premodern" are, in many cases, at the heart of "modern" production in what Gago calls "baroque economies". This perspective could open up interesting angles for continuing to study markets and gentrification, calling into question the idea of a linear progression from informal to regulated, formal markets, and complicate our understanding of the relationship between markets in the global North and South, for example, in looking at the informal elements that persist in European market and street spaces. Or, as Gago does in her book, looking more deeply at how informal markets and production processes are often linked to more regulated markets, or how informal markets operate according to their own complex logics which can simultaneously challenge and reproduce the dominant capitalist logic.

This brings us to the other major emphasis of the book: What other markets are possible in the face of gentrifying forces? The second framework used throughout the book analyzes markets as terrains of struggle, focusing on disputes over the use of space and the future of the city. In other words, these processes of retail gentrification do not occur without contestation: often market vendors or customers or even neighborhood residents organize to fight against threats to their markets. These campaigns take different shapes in different locations, but in many cases the struggles go beyond the specific space of the market itself – they often involve other neighborhood organizations and are part of broader struggles over the use of urban public space and neighborhood transformations. For example, Chapter 4¹ explores how three campaigns to

1 The authors of which, Sara González and Gloria Dawson, received a Scholar-Activist Project Award from the Antipode Foundation: see <https://antipodefoundation.org/scholar-activist-project-awards/201314-recipients/sapa-1314-gonzalez/> and <http://tradmarketresearch.weebly.com>

save traditional public markets were organized, demonstrating how market users – both vendors and customers – are able to collectively organize to prevent the gentrification of their markets. This provides an important perspective to work on gentrification that tends to focus on the workings of capital while assuming that resistance will always be minuscule in comparison. In another example, in Mexico City the vendors in *tianguis* – movable, semi-fixed street markets – are involved in complex conflicts and negotiations over the use of public space involving multiple state and non-state actors, showing the diverse conflicts that can arise with different types of retail use of public space (Chapter 5). As González and Dawson argue, “[m]arkets and retail spaces therefore are increasingly becoming not only frontiers for gentrification but also for new struggles against it” (p.57). Importantly, these struggles are not only over living space, but also about how public space is used, bringing together fights for the right to the city, the right to consume, work, and interact in urban spaces.

The third line of analysis, which is the least developed of the three, is markets as spaces for the construction of alternatives. The most explicit case of a market *as* an alternative discussed in the book is the Bonpland market in Buenos Aires (Chapter 8). Bonpland, an extension of the 2001-era neighborhood assemblies, seeks to directly link producers and consumers through a type of solidarity market based on the principles of a social and solidarity economy. While small, this market, and the proliferation of similar markets across Argentina both during and following the economic crisis, show that alternatives to market gentrification are possible. In many cases, vendors in Bonpland are able to sell agricultural products at a significantly lower cost than supermarkets, but, even more importantly, the space allows different social movements and alternative projects to come together: stands sell goods from *campesino* and Indigenous movements, from the radical publisher, Tinta Limón, and the collective, Yo No Fui, working with imprisoned women. Another example can be found in the San Fernando market of Lavapiés, in Madrid, discussed in Chapter 7, which was remodeled in line with neighborhood organizations and activists to create a space for local producers and youth to sell goods.

Traditional markets, such as the Kirkgate Market in Leeds discussed in Chapter 9, can also serve as spaces for the creation of alternative social relations as traders and consumers care about each other and construct relations that go beyond the mere exchange of goods and services. Of course, this cannot be taken for granted; markets are just as likely to reproduce the dominant relations of capitalism and exclusionary political systems. The case of Sofia's Women's Market (Chapter 10) makes clear that markets can also reproduce racist and xenophobic discourses.

Together the different frameworks for analyzing market transformations and the geographic diversity of the cases show how markets themselves can be driving factors in the gentrification of particular neighborhoods, but also how markets can be sites of resistance to gentrification. Thus, what ultimately emerges is a vision of markets as terrains of struggle. The chapters in this volume take on this question in a number of different useful ways, which allow us to think about markets as places bringing together not only producers and consumers (and their associated networks), but also municipal policy and global economic forces, a variety of different types of workers and labor relations, desires, and multiple types of social relations. Studying these different elements of markets together, as the chapters in this volume do, can also allow us to create and strengthen different types of markets: markets based on relationships of solidarity and care, as seen in some of the markets studied here. This will require battling on multiple fronts, in connection with other struggles for rights to live, work, and play in the city. It might also require rethinking the relationship between markets and progress, modernization, and security.

References

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