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Subverting the “migrant division of labor” through the traditional retail market: the London Latin Village’s struggle against gentrification

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ABSTRACT

Retail gentrification describes the process by which the retail offer of a neighborhood is reconfigured to cater to a wealthier clientele than previously. This not only affects the ability of poorer urban residents to access essential goods and services but also has disruptive effects on existing communities. In this paper, we analyze the threat of gentrification and its impact on the experiences of migrant workers at the Latin Village, a Traditional Retail Market (TRM) in North London. We make two arguments based on a combination of qualitative research methods (interviews, participant observation, survey and document analysis). First, we find that the market offers a sense of belonging as well as economic opportunities to migrants, predominantly from Latin America, who face discrimination in many other parts of London’s stratified labor market. Second, we argue that regeneration of the Latin Village as originally envisaged would disproportionately affect this migrant community by threatening an important space of social and economic inclusion. The paper concludes by highlighting the importance of the workplace as a mediator of migrants’ experiences of the city, which calls for further attention to instances of workspace displacement engendered by processes of retail gentrification and their consequences for marginalized communities.

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Introduction

The Seven Sisters market in Tottenham, North London, was once referred to as a “mini United Nations in action” (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], 2008). Alongside traders from Iran, Uganda, Romania and Ghana, most market traders are of Latin American origin, earning the market its nickname – the “Latin Village”. For over a decade, market traders, their customers, friends, and family have contested Haringey Council’s plan to demolish and redevelop the market (Minority Rights Group International [MRG], 2019; Thain, 2012).¹ A report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Minorities in

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2017 recommended that planning permission for the redevelopment should be contingent on the recognition of migrants' rights to the space. This unprecedented decision emphasized how the project would have an impact beyond livelihoods, affecting migrants' social and cultural life and threatening their ability to remain in the city (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner [UN-OHCHR], 2017). Succumbing to the pressures of a "small but vocal minority", the developer eventually decided to withdraw from the project (Grainger plc, 2021). While demonstrating that nothing is inevitable about regeneration-led displacement, this emblematic case showcases the threat that urban renewal may pose to the livelihoods of marginalized communities.

The Latin Village provides employment for over 100 people from ethnic minority backgrounds (Taylor, 2017), which face severe discrimination in most other parts of London's labor market (Wills et al., 2010). More than just an economic space, the Latin Village is also a "community hub" for Latin Americans in and beyond Tottenham, a space where children can play freely and where people of all ages come to spend time and socialize (Save Latin Village [SLV], 2018). In this paper, we argue that the Latin Village is a space that challenges what has been termed London's "migrant division of labor" – a combination of neoliberal reforms, hostile immigration policy and outright racism that results in migrants' facing harsh and precarious working conditions (Wills et al., 2010). We show that by providing opportunities for meaningful work, the market enables migrants to better balance reproductive commitments and experience inclusion and a sense of belonging in the global city. We thus contribute to recent debates on retail gentrification by focusing on its threatening effects on migrant communities.

Although workspace displacement engendered by retail gentrification dynamics may disrupt livelihoods and generate feelings of community loss, the topic has just recently started to receive scholarly attention (González & Waley, 2013; Zukin et al., 2009). Traditional retail markets (TRMs) – defined as "indoor or outdoor, permanent or itinerant gatherings of sellers and buyers" (Bua et al., 2018, p. 2) that predominantly cater to people on lower incomes – have become a field for studying processes of retail gentrification. TRMs are particularly important to low-income migrants and play a key role in facilitating their social and economic inclusion (Chabrol, 2013; Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2013; Morales, 2009). This group is often over-represented in the lower end of increasingly polarized labor markets in Global North cities like London, where "migrant workers from the Global South [are] especially found doing the "dirty work" of neoliberalism such as care and cleaning" (Datta et al., 2009, p. 857; Wills et al., 2010).

This study analyzes the experiences of migrant traders of a London TRM threatened with displacement. We integrate the literature focusing on the experience of Latinx migrants in London (McIlwaine et al., 2010; Román-Velázquez & Retis, 2021) with debates on retail gentrification and its impacts on migrant communities (González & Waley, 2013; Nogueira, 2019; Taylor, 2020; Zukin et al., 2009) to make two key contributions. Firstly, we add to emergent debates on the importance of the workplace as an analytical frame for understanding the unequal experiences of migrants in London (Román-Velázquez & Retis, 2021; Wills et al., 2010). We demonstrate how the Latin Village, a TRM in North London, can help to subvert the "migrant division of labor" while supporting the ability of marginalized urban migrants to belong to the city by simultaneously providing meaningful employment and a place for community-building.

Secondly, this study adds to recent debates on retail gentrification by foregrounding the potential impacts of workspace displacement for migrant communities. We demonstrate how the regeneration project threatened to disrupt a unique place for migrant workers in London with a twofold impact on their lives – it may push them back into the “migrant division of labor” while disturbing their sense of belonging. By doing so, we respond to DeVerteuil’s (2018) call for further research on the intersections between gentrification and migration, two key processes shaping contemporary urban development. We argue that transformations at the urban scale affect access to economic opportunities and sociability, which are both mediated by the workplace, a key site for analyzing the London migrant experience.

The research presented in this paper is based on both primary and secondary data sources. We combine semi-directive and unstructured interviews² with market traders, users and activists, with the analysis of local planning and policy documents and participant observation. Additionally, the study uses qualitative analysis of responses to a non-representative survey of 19 market traders.³

The article proceeds by reviewing the literature on retail gentrification and putting it in conversation with research on the “more than economic” function of TRMs, and research on migrants’ experiences in the urban labor market. We develop an analytical framework highlighting the function of TRMs to facilitate the social and economic integration of foreign migrants in a hostile and discriminatory urban labor market. The article then presents the specific case of the Latin Village as a TRM where social and economic activities overlap and which is a vital resource for Latin American migrants in London to access both social and economic opportunities. The paper concludes by highlighting the importance of the workplace as a mediator of migrants’ experiences of the city, which calls for further attention to instances of workspace displacement engendered by processes of retail gentrification and their consequences for marginalized communities.

The impact of retail gentrification on the working lives of migrants

Retail gentrification in the context of urban renaissance

Since the term was coined in the 1960s by Ruth Glass, a diverse and prolific scholarship has documented how gentrification is linked to displacement and dispossession of vulnerable populations globally (Atkinson, 2000; Freeman & Braconi, 2004; Lees et al., 2016; Slater, 2009). Today, gentrification remains a key process shaping cities according to the demands of privileged social groups, which constrains the ability of the urban poor to belong (DeVerteuil, 2018; Lees et al., 2016). One aspect of this process is the reconfiguration of the commercial landscape of neighborhoods, which affects shop-owners, workers and customers (Friesenecker & Lagendijk, 2021; Williams & Needham, 2016; Zukin, 2010). While much of the literature analyzing gentrification has focused on residential displacement, a recent area of studies has begun to explore the phenomenon of commercial or retail gentrification.

The term “commercial gentrification” was first coined by Zukin et al. (2009, p. 49) to describe the gradual displacement of traditional shops with new “boutiques” in the low-income neighborhoods of Harlem and Williamsburg in New York. These new shops were

often owned by residential newcomers to the neighborhood and visibly catered to a different, wealthier clientele. After an initial process of “pioneering” commercial gentrification, those who had opened their boutiques in Williamsburg were displaced by more experienced retailers and franchises or established chain stores. Importantly, Zukin et al. (2009) note the disruptive effects of retail gentrification on social bonds of the original neighborhood community.

Similarly, the phenomenon is defined by González and Dawson (2015, p. 19) as “the process whereby the commerce that serves (amongst others) a population of low income is transformed/replaced into/by a type of retail targeted at wealthier people”. They further suggest that retail gentrification can describe changes in the commercial landscape of a region triggered by rent increases that “push traders to increase the price of their products, change products or change location” (2015, p. 19). Where Zukin et al. (2009) explain gentrification through the actions of “bohemian” gentrifiers, González and Waley (2013, p. 966) argue that the process is the result of “coordinated state and market strategies” implemented in the context of “neoliberal urban restructuring”.

Particularly in the case of Western post-industrial cities, contractionary fiscal policy and inter-urban competition for funding (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 1989) have led local authorities to promote “creative city” and “urban renaissance” policies (Porter & Shaw, 2009; Rousseau, 2009). In Britain, such policy orientation has provided the rationale for popular yet controversial schemes for “mixed use” and “sustainable” urban regeneration (Imrie, 2009). These have been widely criticized for harming low-income residents by raising the cost of living in “revitalized areas” (Lees et al., 2007; Watt, 2013). Denounced as “state-led gentrification” by several scholars (Hochstenbach, 2017; Lees, 2003; Porter & Barber, 2006; Watt, 2009), these initiatives are “characterised by state encouragement of gentrification within previously hard-to-reach, deprived urban neighbourhoods” (Watt, 2009, p. 229). Often focused on public housing estates, this literature has yet to pay more attention to the situation of Traditional Retail Markets (TRMs), which are a centerpiece of what González and Waley (2013) call a retail-led regeneration policy.

Traditional retail markets at the frontier of gentrification

TRMs can be defined as “indoor or outdoor, permanent or itinerant gatherings of sellers and buyers”, predominantly catering to people on lower incomes (Bua et al., 2018, p. 2). This is to be seen in opposition to other types of “niche” markets that have recently gained in popularity, such as artisanal, gourmet or themed markets, usually catering to a wealthier public (González, 2019).

Recent literature on TRMs evidences local governments’ ambivalent attitude towards them (González & Waley, 2013; Guimarães, 2019). On the one hand, public markets are often subjected to extended periods of disinvestment. This favors a discourse presenting TRMs as “stuck in the past”, “needing to adapt”, “cheap, unruly, wild, dirty”, and “backwards” (González & Waley, 2013, p. 969). On the other hand, benefits to be reaped from the regeneration of TRMs are highlighted, which portray the existing market, its users and traders as an obstacle to urban modernization. This “dual narrative” thus locates TRMs as being in a state of decline while discovering them as an opportunity for

revival, in need of regeneration (Dines, 2009; Guimarães, 2019). It is in this context that González (2017) declares TRMs to be the next “gentrification frontier”.

A number of scholars have examined the impact of TRMs’ gentrification (González & Waley, 2013; Guimarães, 2019; Morales, 2009). Morales (2009) shows that the relocation of Chicago’s Maxwell Street Market resulted in a significant reduction in trading spaces and higher barriers of entry, which disadvantaged independent ventures relative to more established businesses. Analyzing the effects of rehabilitation of a traditional neighborhood market in Lisbon, Guimarães (2019) evidenced how changes in the types of products offered and price increases negatively impacted long-term residents of the neighborhood. Examining the case of Leeds Kirkgate Market, González and Waley (2013) demonstrate that more than a place for trade, the market functions primarily as a community space. Following the process of gentrification, economic losses were observed, but the main consequence felt by this community was a loss “of a sense of identity with a place” (2013, p. 978). Such feelings are akin to what Atkinson (2015, p. 978) defined as “symbolic displacement” to describe “the sense of subordination, discomfort and unease with trying to stay-put while the visible and sensed changes of the physical and social fabric of the neighborhood” are transformed as a result of rapid gentrification. While Atkinson’s study is focused on the home, the negative consequences he describes also apply to cases of workspace displacement.

As noted by Nogueira (2019, p. 530), “[a]ccessing urban space for labor can be vital to those struggling for a place in the city but, unlike the right to housing, discussions about the right to work have been largely disassociated from space”. Her work analyzes the displacement of an informal market in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, due to renovation works associated with the city’s hosting of the 2014 FIFA World Cup. The market provided employment for marginalized workers who were not relocated or compensated for their losses. Nogueira demonstrates how workspace displacement engendered by state-led regeneration has impacts beyond the loss of livelihoods, affecting workers’ ability to remain in the city. Although focused on the Global South, she offers relevant insights for thinking about the importance of workspace for marginalized communities in the Global North.

This paper contributes to debates about the importance of place – and particularly the workplace – for understanding migrants’ experiences in and of the city by investigating how low-paid migrant workers in London are particularly affected by retail gentrification. In the next section, we highlight the non-economic functions of TRMs and their role in creating a sense of belonging for workers whose prospects in the labor market are often precarious and socially isolating.

Traditional retail markets as spaces that support solidarity and belonging

An important function of TRMs is that they can accommodate urban population growth. Indeed, their creation has been encouraged by municipal authorities in the United States specifically to address issues of unemployment and economic inclusion of migrants (Morales, 2009). Lower barriers of entry mean that foreign immigrants or ethnic minorities, who often face discrimination in the labor market, may find it easier to access employment or start a business at a TRM than elsewhere in the urban labor market (Morales, 2009). Compared to food superstores, East London’s Queen’s Market provided

double the number of jobs per square meter and jobs were found to be significantly “more varied (...) involving a richer skill set and greater opportunities to start a business and to acquire business knowledge” (New Economics Foundation [NEF], 2005, p. 2). In Halle, a German city plagued by unemployment, Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2013) reveal how small- and micro-businesses provide stable employment for natives and migrants alike.

In addition to their economic and commercial functions, TRMs are also spaces of social connection and inclusion, where “direct face-to-face interaction creates both social and economic benefits” (Bua et al., 2018, p. 6). Watson and Studdert (2006) found that TRMs provide important spaces of social interaction for traders and shoppers, but most crucially for vulnerable groups, including elderly, ill and disabled people or single parents. This social interaction can take various forms, from casual everyday sociability (Stillerman, 2006) to deep forms of social inclusion. Watson’s (2009) work on public markets in the UK points to a transposition of social care from the private to the public sphere of the market. For example, she found that it was common for traders to enquire about their regular customers’ health. In another example, people living on lower incomes recounted that by spending time at the market during the cold winter months, they could save money that would otherwise be spent on heating their homes (Taylor, 2019).

It is for migrants and ethnic minorities that this social function of the market is particularly important. Senegalese traders and shoppers in the Parisian street market of “Goutte d’Or” went there to find employment and products from their home countries, but also an African community that made them feel at home in a new city (Chabrol, 2013). Similarly, Latin American businesses in Elephant and Castle “are supported by a strong community that come to socialize, work or live at ‘the Elephant’” (Román-Velázquez & Hill, 2016, p. 16). This literature highlights the importance of markets as spaces of belonging and social inclusion for migrant communities.

An important contribution to this debate is developed by Hall’s (2011, 2015a, 2015b) work on the diverse landscape of the “multiethnic high street in London’s urban margins” (2011, p. 2571). Similar to TRMs, the high streets analyzed by Hall provide employment and opportunities for everyday exchanges “within and across affiliations of ethnicity and origin” (Hall, 2015a, p. 22). Her approach reveals how migrants’ abilities to belong to the global city are affected simultaneously by intersecting regulatory regimes implemented at different scales – through border controls, everyday racism as well as urban regeneration (Hall, 2011, 2015a, 2015b). Our paper builds on Hall’s (2011) contribution by demonstrating how urban regeneration may negatively impact the relationship between migrants and the workplace, a key site of sociability for marginalized Latinx migrants in London (McIlwaine et al., 2010; Román-Velázquez & Retis, 2021).

In this paper, we further explore this topic by analyzing the case of the Latin Village. While resembling Hall’s (2011) “multiethnic high street” or other TRMs, like Queen’s Market in Newham, the Latin Village is run by and caters to primarily migrant communities, mainly from Latin America. Similar to the now-defunct Elephant and Castle market, we argue that the Latin Village provides meaningful work opportunities for migrant workers as well as creating a workplace that stimulates solidarity and sociability. This function of the TRM is of particular importance for migrants who face discrimination in what has been termed the “migrant division of labor” (Wills et al., 2010).

The experience of Latin Americans in London's "migrant division of labor"

While migration studies have traditionally focused on transnational and global processes, the dynamics and effects of migration on a subnational level have recently gained interest (Hess & Lebhun, 2014). Scholars have highlighted how economic and cultural opportunities available in cities and pre-existing social networks or established national communities guide migrants' choices of where to settle (Glick Schiller, 2012). Other studies have explored how urban environments shape migrants' everyday experiences, but also how migrants, in turn, respond to and shape the cities they settle in (Parzer & Huber, 2016; Williamson, 2016).

Policymakers' reaction to urban migration has been ambiguous (Rodatz, 2012). On the one hand, urban governments have embraced (the right kind of) diversity and cosmopolitanism as an asset for competitive city branding (Belabas et al., 2020; Raco & Kersten, 2018). On the other hand, foreign migrants are faced with hostile urban environments, shaped by discriminatory practices and increasingly restrictive policies on both national and local levels (Da Silva Rebelo et al., 2020; Hall, 2021; Herbert et al., 2008; Raco, 2018).

In London, diversity and multiculturalism have been used as discursive narratives to justify policies aimed at city branding, which often result in less desirable/marketable migrants being pushed to the margins (Raco & Kersten, 2018). Migrant experiences in London have been analyzed from a variety of perspectives including studies on the importance of interactions in public spaces to forge a sense of belonging and community among migrants (Malyutina, 2018; Wessendorf, 2019). The literature that focuses on migrants' working trajectories and conditions is particularly fruitful for this discussion. This body of work has looked at the experiences of elite and middle-class migrants (Batinizky et al., 2007; Hall, 2019) but also at the economic precarity and social marginalization of migrant groups in the labor market. Herbert et al. (2008) show how racism is an everyday experience in the working lives of low-paid Ghanaian workers in London and prevents them from moving into better-paid employment. Focusing on illegal immigrants from Pakistan, Ahmad (2008) highlights the insecurity and instability that makes it nearly impossible for them to achieve upward mobility in London's labor market.

Wills et al. (2010) have coined the concept of the "migrant division of labor" to analyze the experiences of migrant workers and their role in London's economy. In London's migrant division of labor, low-paid jobs such as cleaning, construction and care work have become synonymous with migrant work over recent decades. Furthermore, they argue that London has become almost completely dependent on migrant workers to perform these tasks. While low-paid migrants are necessary for the city to function, their working conditions are physically demanding and economically precarious. The low social standing and alienating nature of the work, the feeling of being easily replaceable and the experience of being treated with disrespect and sometimes overt hostility and racism by their superiors places a further strain on the physical and mental health of migrant workers in London, such as the low paid Ghanaians in Herbert et al. (2008). Their study showed that racism in the workplace leads migrants to isolate and seek comfort in the company of their communities and of other migrants.

The migrant division of labor is embedded in a national policy environment that is increasingly hostile to migrants pejoratively classified as “low-skilled” (Jordan, 2017), and the precarity of migrant workers is compounded by austere welfare policies that often explicitly exclude the most vulnerable among them (DeVerteuil, 2017). Rather than preventing undesired migration to the United Kingdom, this has pushed already marginalized groups into further precarity (Román-Velázquez & Retis, 2021; Wills et al., 2010).

Focusing on Latin Americans in London, McIlwaine et al. (2010, p. 8) found that, like most migrants from lower income countries, a majority works in low-paid employment and often under “poor and exploitative conditions”. Many of the jobs held by Latin Americans, such as cleaning and work in security and hospitality, only offer shifts of a couple of hours at a time. This meant that many Latin American Londoners found themselves needing to combine several jobs, often working “fragmented and unsociable hours” to make ends meet (2010, p. 62). Faced with these hostile working conditions, Latin Americans rely on social networks to help them cope with the stress of everyday life in London as well as to access important information, including on employment, schooling, health, and social services. This informal way of accessing information is particularly important for those who identify as working or lower middle class, who make up more than half of all Latin Americans in London (2010).

Recent literature on urban migration has shone light on the ways in which migrants shape urban environments and create spaces of belonging (Malyutina, 2018; Williamson, 2016). A few notable contributions have extended this analysis to the workplace. Román-Velázquez and Retis (2021, p. 83) note that relationships forged in the workplace are “embedded amongst wider structural inequalities”, arguing that “the workplace is as much a site of solidarity and integration as it is a site of power and conflict”. This literature shows the relevance of (work)place, which can either facilitate or constrain belonging for urban migrants.

We build on and integrate the contributions reviewed above to analyze the case of the Latin Village. Research on TRMs demonstrates how they provide affordable workspace and spaces of belonging (Bua et al., 2018; Morales, 2009; Watson & Studdert, 2006). They are of particular importance to migrants (Chabrol, 2013; Román-Velázquez & Hill, 2016) who face discrimination in many other parts of London’s labor market (Herbert et al., 2008; McIlwaine et al., 2010; Román-Velázquez & Retis, 2021; Wills et al., 2010). As TRMs have become a “frontier of gentrification” (González, 2017; González & Waley, 2013), we contend that this disproportionately affects migrants because it contributes to the multi-scalar hostile environment (Hall, 2015b) they are faced with. In the remainder of this paper, we analyze how the Latin Village mediates the experiences of the city of predominantly Latin American migrants. We argue that the redevelopment of the market as initially envisaged by a partnership between the council and a private developer would have disadvantaged migrant traders, for whom the Latin Village is an important space of social and economic inclusion and belonging.

The case of the Latin Village: a place of work and belonging for Latin Americans in London

The Latin Village is a covered market, located in the Seven Sisters ward in the North London borough of Haringey. Almost half of the residents (49.1%) in this ward were

born outside the UK (Greater London Authority [GLA], 2015), which is located in one of the 20% most deprived areas nationally.⁴ What is known as “Wards building” is located at the heart of this area, next to the Seven Sisters underground station. Until 1972, it hosted the Wards Furnishing Store (Craig, 2017). From the 1990s onwards, after the store closed down, the building was gradually taken over by Latin American migrants, who used the space to set up small-scale businesses. The marketplace has since become known as the Latin Village – or “El Pueblito Paisa” (Burgos, 2017). Over time, the market has become home to about 48 businesses offering a diverse range of goods and services, such as Colombian snacks, household supplies and video cassette rental, while providing direct employment for over 100 people (Taylor, 2017). While most stalls are owned and run by Colombian first- or second-generation immigrants, traders have roots in a variety of places, including Peru, Venezuela, Iran, Ghana and Romania (Save Latin Village, n.d.). The market is considered a “community hub”, a place for social interaction (Seven Sisters Market Tenants Association [SSMTA], 2019). It is also a place whose future has been uncertain for the past decade and half, when the market has been at the center of plans for the area’s regeneration, contested by market traders, users and civil society organizations (Taylor, 2020).

In this section, we examine the dual narrative of decline and revival around the Latin Village and shed light on how the market combines work opportunities with sociability. We argue that more than just an affordable workspace, the market is a place where economic and social dimensions of life become blurred (Bua et al., 2018) to the benefit of a more inclusive and fulfilling lifestyle than what is commonly found among poorer Latin American migrants in London.

Decline and revival: the Latin Village at the frontier of gentrification

Over the years, Wards Corner and Tottenham more generally, have been portrayed as “run down”, “chaotic” and even “worthless” (Taylor, 2017). Plans for the regeneration of Wards Corner had been in the making since 2007 when Haringey Council signed a Development Agreement with Grainger plc. But the Tottenham riots in 2011⁵ helped cement the need for regeneration into the negative narrative surrounding the area (Tottenham Community Panel, 2012). Soon after the riots, a report commissioned by the then Mayor of London made several recommendations for the area’s improvement, such as attracting businesses and encouraging the creation of “fun” facilities (BBC, 2012). The development plan for Tottenham, published in 2012, followed these recommendations (London Borough of Haringey [LBH], 2012). The document has since come under sharp criticism, having been interpreted as a “marketing exercise” to attract investment (Clossick, 2017, p. 91). In the document, Seven Sisters is described as a “compelling investment opportunity [...] the ideal place in London for people to live, work and have fun” (LBH, 2012, pp. 21–22). Whilst neither Wards Corner nor the Seven Sisters Market are specifically mentioned in the plan, the wider area was described as “in desperate need of improvement” (Thain, 2012, n.p.). Regeneration would enable its transformation into the more prestigious “gateway to Tottenham” (LBH, n.d.).

The initial plans set out in the Development Agreement between the Council and Grainger plc omitted the re-provision of a market space to replace the Latin Village.

However, pressure from campaigning groups forced Haringey Council to require the developer to amend the original plans and include a new market hall with 50 units to accommodate current market traders (Claridge & Xanthaki, 2017; Taylor, 2017). This vision gained planning permission in 2012. However, at least six of the 14 units in the main (and much bigger) part of the re-provided market were earmarked for well-established chain stores, curiously disguised as “Pasta Express” and “Coste Cafe” in a mock-up plan for the site (see LBH, 2012). The proposed project would also include the development of 196 – mostly market-price – residential units in a neighboring building. This fueled traders’ fears that there would no longer be a place for them and their less shiny businesses and selves in the new market, and that they would be displaced once the new development was completed (Clossick, 2017).

The traders’ concerns were only strengthened by the approach to community engagement practiced by the project partners, which was perceived as insufficient as well as discriminatory. Maria⁶, who is an activist involved in the Save the Latin Village movement and daughter of a trader at the market, voiced concerns regarding what she perceived as a cherry picking of community representatives. Other complaints concerned the exclusion of dissenting voices from consultation meetings (Burgos, 2017), and the intimidation and harassment of traders.⁷

Such invisibilization of the economic and cultural relevance of the market and its local voices is a common trend followed by state-led regeneration plans. As noted by Hall’s (2015, p. 23) work on Peckham, council experts generally draw on “planning and economic conventions” that privilege chain retailers and emphasize “the need for more cafes and restaurants”. The incompatibility between the type of “large-scale development” favored by the council and the need to support existing local economies are articulated with remarkable honesty and clarity by one of the officers she interviewed for her study. Her work reveals how local authorities are often aware of the risks that regeneration may pose to existing shops but might accept gentrification as a by-product of neighborhood revitalization.

In London, this risk is magnified by the scarcity of affordable workspace (Ferm, 2016). Activists and researchers have emphasized the importance of affordable workspace to enable the creation of independent businesses and decent, local jobs particularly for lower income groups, migrants, and those with caring responsibilities (Just Space Economy and Planning Group [JSEP], 2015). The disappearance of affordable workspace, as currently observed in London, may thus place an additional burden on already vulnerable groups (Taylor, 2020). Crucially, rents at the Latin Village are well below levels in the borough and wider city (Gutiérrez, 2015). Despite the developer’s commitment to guarantee rent prices in the new market for five years (Grainger plc, 2018), the traders feared the long-term effect of the redevelopment would have been to price them out of the market. This concern was voiced by Maria:

The plans to protect the traders have a 5-year shelf life. [After that] it will go up significantly, to the extent that my father will not be able to afford the rent even for the temporary market. (...) it will be the market forces that will determine the rent (...) the regeneration is something that will appeal more to gentrification. Only the more established stores will be able to pay the new rents. (Interview with Maria, 2019)

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, acknowledged that there was no “cast iron guarantee that the new permanent market will be provided,

or retained in perpetuity, nor that all existing traders will be able to, or wish to continue trading” (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [MHCGL], 2019, p. 4). However, it was deemed that the “direct economic, social and environmental benefits would be substantial [enough]” (2019, p. 3) to support the project and confirm the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) that had since been placed on the site. The CPO would allow the Council to purchase the targeted land and sell it to the developer, enabling the start of demolition and construction works. Given that the market predominantly caters to low-income people and that traders are, without exception, members of minority ethnic groups (SSMTA, 2019), King et al. (2018, p. 11) consider the expected loss of affordable workspace to be “a form of discrimination”. The redevelopment plans would be “likely to economically marginalize the Latin American Traders” as no adequate provisions for their protection are taken (Claridge & Xanthaki, 2017, p. 7).

Importantly, traders at the Latin Village are not opposed to regeneration and refurbishment. Whilst they strongly opposed Grainger’s plans for redevelopment, many of them agree with the urgent need to improve the market.⁸ As we will discuss, opposition to regeneration plans was thus predicated on fears of displacement, which would impact both traders’ incomes and sense of belonging.

A ladder of economic mobility and out of the migrant division of labor

Francisco came to London as an illegal immigrant in his early twenties. To get by, he started out washing dishes in a restaurant before working as a cleaner for a big company. He remembers it as “hard, strenuous work. I came home tired every day with my entire body aching”. At that time, he already lived in Tottenham, which is how he discovered the market. Today, he owns two market units from which he runs a small retail business, selling food and other products imported from Latin America, mainly from his native Colombia. Apart from himself, his shop provides employment for three people, among them his sister Luisa who followed him to London a few years after he migrated. Similar to Luisa, Angela, who also works for Francisco, moved from Venezuela to London, seeking a better life. She started working as a shop assistant in the market immediately after she arrived, having secured this employment through her brother, a regular customer at the Latin Village.

Jacob, who had worked in various jobs in and around Tottenham since moving to London, learned about the opportunity to open a shop at the Latin Village through friends.

I’ve been working here for two and a half years now. I came here because the Iranians over there [points at the shop next door], who own this unit, they are my friends. When the money transfer business that used to be in this unit moved next door, the Iranians took over the unit. When I came here to visit them at that time, I thought what was missing here was a fruit store. So, I suggested my idea to open one ... and here I am. (Interview with Jacob, 2019)

This form of accessing employment at the market through connections to the “market community” was something that practically all the traders interviewed had experienced in some form. In line with Morales’ (2009) account of Maxwell Street Market, the Latin

Village is a place where people can access information about employment and build up and use the existing networks to find a job. Beyond employment, the market also represents a space where other vital information can be accessed.

There is a thing called the Citizens Rights Bureau in England. But the problem is that many of its services are only in English. The Latin Village is a Citizens Rights Bureau – only that it is in Spanish. People go there to find out how everything works in the UK. This can be about things as simple as how to get an Oyster Card⁹, but it can also be about seeking advice on how to find a home or a job. (Interview with Maria, 2019)

In London, discrimination in the labor market means that many migrants find it difficult to access employment outside of occupations such as cleaning or the security and hospitality sectors, which is often characterized by low pay and exploitative working conditions (Wills et al., 2010). As highlighted by McIlwaine et al. (2010), informal networks and community hubs are crucially important, in particular for migrants with limited English language proficiency, to access all kinds of vital information as well as employment opportunities. The Latin Village is no exception. Maria explained that

[t]he market is very important for people who perhaps don't have that many options (...) for example because of their language, their low education. This means that jobs on the high street may not be open to them, whereas markets are. (...) My father, for example, can't speak English very well. For him, the possibility of trading at the market is an opportunity to escape other, very strenuous professions, such as cleaning (...) trading is a step up, a step of social mobility. (Interview with Maria, 2019)

The stories of Francisco, Luisa, Angela, Jacob, and Maria have shown us some ways in which the Latin Village helps migrants to overcome working conditions they are faced with through the “migrant division of labor”. Incomes of market traders are still low, and hours worked long – the 2019 survey found an average monthly income of just £1,040 and an average of 42 h worked per week. However, working hours are more sociable than what people may be confronted with otherwise and employment is very stable over time, which starkly contrasts with high turnover rates in the cleaning or catering sector (Wills et al., 2010). Market traders' accounts reflect Morales' (2009) and Glick Schiller and Çağlar's (2013) findings about traditional markets in Chicago and Halle, which provide stable employment to marginalized people in a hostile urban labor market and accommodate population growth in the city. In its function as a business incubator, the market also supports entrepreneurship – facilitated by social networks and low costs of entry and initial investment (Taylor, 2017), as was the case for Jacob. However, the traders' stories already hinted at some other functions of the market, which cannot be defined as strictly economic.

A home at the market: the “more than economic” value of the Latin Village

“I spend a lot of time at the market. I'm here every day, except Sunday”, Francisco, a market trader, explains. He goes on to enthuse about the karaoke and salsa dancing sessions they organize there “almost every Friday and Saturday, after the market officially closes”. On another occasion, a Friday evening a few days later, he cheerily commented the football match he was displaying on a big TV in his supermarket stall, selling beer to a

handful of equally enthusiastic supporters who watched the game from plastic chairs inside the shop.

Francisco embodies the blurring of economic and social life and functions at the TRM, described by Bua et al. (2018). He is not an exception, however. As Maria observed, “people go to the market not just to buy goods but also to socialize”. Similarly, survey respondents unanimously highlighted the contact and social interaction with customers and other traders alike as one of the aspects they appreciated most about the market. One trader praised the community life at the Latin Village as a way to “distract from the stress that this city generates”.¹⁰

The isolating nature of the work many migrants find themselves restricted to upon arrival in London makes spaces that allow people to socialize and interact, such as the Latin Village, even more important. McIlwaine et al. (2010) identified the lack of time to make social connections due to unsociable working hours and overworking as a major issue for Latin Americans in London. At the Latin Village, on the other hand, the separation between “home” and “work”, the public and the private spheres, seems much less distinct. This is noted by Luisa (Interview, 2019), an employee at the market:

“We get along well here (...) [the market] feels like home”.

The social interaction happening at the market is not limited to casual forms of everyday interactions (Stillerman, 2006). What takes place at the Seven Sisters Market indeed resembles Watson’s (2009) account of the transposition of social care from the private to the public sphere. “[I]t is not just a market but much more than that (...) Many young people spend a lot of time there, including me when I was a kid. When you go there, you can see children running around, playing hide and seek ...”, Maria reminisces, “everyone looks after you, not just your own parents”. Responding to the 2019 survey, one trader claimed that “whatever happens, you are not alone. We are an individual part of a whole, we are part of an island”. Another response highlighted the fact of “everyone helping and knowing each other”.

The Latin Village feels like a home away from home for many of the traders we encountered. Although not all the traders are from Colombia – not even all of them are from Latin America – the Latin atmosphere remains a defining feature of the market, highly valued by traders and users alike.¹¹ For instance, Marco, a trader at the Latin Village explained during an interview:

I am a baker, just like my mother and grandmother before me. Look, what I am preparing here is actually a recipe of my grandmother. A Colombian sweet, with guava paste. I was a baker all my life and I am going to continue baking. I am happy (...) and people here are happy too, about the products.

Marco’s experience is strikingly at odds with the accounts presented in work on London’s migrant division of labor, which often had workers feeling easily replaceable and undervalued, doing their jobs out of necessity more than anything else (McIlwaine et al., 2010). Work at the Latin Village greatly differs from working opportunities migrants have in other parts of London’s labor market. Besides feeling a connection to their labor, market traders at the Latin Village reported appreciating to work for a community they feel part of.

In their study of Latin American migrants in London, Román-Velázquez and Retis (2021, p. 83) found that “the workplace is as much a site of solidarity and integration as it is a site of power and conflict, and that gender, class, nationality, legal status and ethnicity are intertwined in everyday work interactions”. Their research thus calls attention to how relationships developed within the workplace are mediated by wider structural inequalities. Our findings reveal how such disparate work experiences can be mediated by place. For the interviewees quoted in this paper, the Latin Village is more than just a market, being rather perceived as a “meaningful site” (Barnes, 2018), akin to home, where they feel a sense of belonging. The threat of displacement thus goes beyond a potential loss of employment or income. It poses a risk to a community that integrates Latin American migrants into a global city that often works to marginalize and exclude them.

Conclusion

While gentrification literature has long focused on residential displacement, the reconfiguration of commercial spaces has recently attracted academic interest. Amidst the emerging scholarship on retail gentrification, scholars and activists have highlighted the importance of Traditional Retail Markets (TRMs) in providing opportunities for the economic and social integration of urban migrants (Glick Schiller & Çağlar, 2013; Morales, 2009), whilst also being subject to gentrification pressure (González, 2017; González & Waley, 2013). Another body of work has been concerned with the working experiences of urban migrants and has highlighted how neoliberal reforms and discrimination have resulted in a “migrant division of labor” in global cities, including London (McIlwaine et al., 2010; Wills et al., 2010). Recent contributions have focused particularly on the workplace, emphasizing the ambiguous role of these spaces for fostering a sense of belonging among migrants (Román-Velázquez & Retis, 2021).

We contribute to these debates by bridging the gap between migration and gentrification studies (DeVerteuil, 2018) in demonstrating how migrants may be disproportionately affected by commercial gentrification spurred by urban regeneration. By analyzing the case of the Latin Village, a TRM in North London, our paper makes two interrelated points. Firstly, we argue that TRMs can subvert the migrant division of labor (Wills et al., 2010) by offering opportunities for more meaningful work for marginalized communities who are otherwise relegated to precarious jobs with low pay and constrained opportunities for socialization (McIlwaine et al., 2010). In doing so we demonstrate the importance of the workplace to understand the kinds of relationships that migrants are able to establish while at work. Whilst Román-Velázquez and Retis (2021) found an ambiguous relation between migrants and the workplace, we demonstrate that TRMs foster solidarity and create opportunities for social belonging. Besides acting as a space of economic integration, the Latin Village provides an important social resource and is a meaningful place where the spheres of work and home, public and private, overlap. It allows workers to sell products and generate income while socializing with friends, and for parents to pursue their business while other traders and market users watch over their children. Secondly, we foregrounded the risk that urban regeneration policies impose on migrant communities by threatening

TRMs. We follow Hall's (2021) work by emphasizing how transformations at the urban scale may affect migrant lives by disrupting access to work and social belonging. We argue that more than just the loss of a workplace, the gentrification of the Latin Village would have had the additional effect of disrupting an established community, which migrants turn to for support to navigate London's hostile environment and to foster a sense of belonging and solidarity.

Much of the policy and academic debate on displacement has focused on housing, whilst "discussions about the right to work have been largely dissociated from space" (Nogueira, 2019, p. 530). However, as noted by others, commercial property, and traditional markets in particular, have increasingly moved to the frontier of gentrification (González & Waley, 2013; Zukin et al., 2009). While pressure by a host of community organizations has overturned the gentrification threat faced by traders and the wider community of the Latin Village, this threat remains for countless other retail spaces across the Global North and South (see contributions in González, 2017). Given the disappearance of affordable workspace in global cities like London, this development threatens the livelihoods of low-income urban residents. In particular, this puts the most vulnerable migrant communities at risk, who depend on independent commerce – like TRMs – not only for work but also for social belonging.

The importance of spaces that offer both work and belonging is slowly being recognized by the growing body of scholarship cited as well as in the report issued by the UN Special Rapporteurs on Minorities discussed at the outset of this paper. What is unprecedented about their statement is the acknowledgement that the expulsion of migrant traders from the Latin Village would violate the rights of this community, affecting not only their livelihoods, but also their social and cultural life and their very ability of making a life in the city (UN-OHCHR, 2017). The report thus reveals the relationships between workplace and social and cultural belonging. The case of the Latin Village demonstrates that community organizing can successfully assert this right to the city by claiming the right to workspace, opposing it to the current model of regeneration-led gentrification.

Policymakers, activists and the academic community would benefit from further attention to the importance of workplace as an active aspect of migrants' experiences in the city, and how current urban revitalization plans may disrupt existing spaces of belonging beyond the home. The successful "Save the Latin Village" campaign revealed the power of organized communities not only to challenge the prevalent system of market-led regeneration but also to propose alternative pathways for inclusive regeneration. Further attention to how this community-led process will evolve will provide researchers and activists with an expanded repertoire of resistance strategies for challenging exclusionary models of city-making.

Notes

1. While these mobilizations are not the focus of this article, interested readers may refer to Taylor (2020, 2017) and González and Dawson (2017).
2. 21 interviews – 9 semi-directive and 12 unstructured – were conducted by the first author in June and July 2019. This research was conducted as part of the first author's MSc Urbanisation and Development in the Department of Geography and Environment at the LSE and

has received ethical approval from the school. According to the regulations in place, participants have provided their consent for their data to be included in the dissertation and any subsequent academic publications derived from the research.

3. This survey was conducted in July 2019 by Nuria Benitez, Alice Devenyns and Felix Lacoïn as part of an unpublished project that assessed the more-than-economic value of the Latin Village to its community. We would like to thank the authors for their authorization to use the data they have collected for this paper.
4. English Indices of Deprivation 2019.
5. A wave of riots spreading from Tottenham all over England, following the shooting of Mark Duggan by the police in August 2011.
6. All names of interviewees changed.
7. 2019 survey.
8. 2019 survey, as mentioned above.
9. A travel card for London's transport system.
10. 2019 survey.
11. 2019 survey.

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