

Commoning through Caring

The case of Seven Sisters Market in London

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Infrastructures of Caring Citizenship
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Introduction

Approaching a neighbourhood market with scientist aspirations, seeking to unravel its functioning and unstable becoming in the midst of the daily dynamics of its urban context, might well start off by a critical dissection of its socioeconomic and employment structures in order to formulate a measuring of the economic value that the market delivers to the area. Yet, the threats posed by plans in place for urban redevelopment of the borough serve as appeal to push the investigation beyond the visible surface of its economic part, in search of other beneficial outcomes (or values) that could make the scales drop in favour of those struggling for their right to stay.

It is in this pathway of researching, where one quickly comes to realize two important constraints to face. On the one hand, the inherent limitations of the classical approaches to economic studies, focused for so long on an exclusive part of the socioeconomic structure that obviates and invisibilizes all that exists outside the market relations. From such well-anchored perspectives, those other forms do not engender value according to the logic of capital. On the other, the short-sightedness of the political authorities, who so often neglect deliberately both the virtues and the needs of the communities they claim to represent and serve.

This research has deemed necessary to pose a look at those spheres most concealed and hidden; an exploration of the submerged part of the iceberg representing the socioeconomic structure of a particular neighbourhood market in Tottenham¹ (London). The aim is to achieve a deeper understanding of that body that enables an alternative analytical reconstruction, recognizing and integrating its so-frequently-disregarded supporting base. Yet, having acknowledged the hurdles and posed the

intentions, it must be noted as well that at this point the researcher has also assumed the risk of the ambivalence of a discourse, which will intermittently fluctuate between a purely scientific commitment (if such a stance can be taken) and a primarily politic claim.

Akin to a small town centre of the South American continent, Seven Sisters Market (SSM onwards) deploys a scenario of successive superimpositions of Antioquia-style architectural elements concealed in the interior of a former Edwardian department store and its adjacent terraced houses. Still today, an amalgam of multi-coloured furniture, regional decorations, goods spilled over the halls and varied construction materials, continues to shape a never-finishing setting where several family generations keep crafting their shops in the midst of an active commercial activity. For twenty-eight years, SSM has provided a launching platform for small businesses. Together with food and goods, the market offers a range of services catering specifically to immigrant groups, primarily Latin-American, in need of legal advice, employment or accommodation.

Yet, a continued visit to the market starts to unveil a series of events, which also take place daily at this multi-cultural hub. In the early evenings, children of different ages appropriate the space with games and races, converting it at moments into their own self-made playground. Likewise, a group of mothers gather daily to watch TV and chat while they take care and breastfeed their babies. Twice a week, one could attend Gospel readings conducted by a priest, who provides religious and pastoral support. Recently, on Wednesdays, free soup has begun to be provided to those in need at *Pueblito Paisa Café*. Up on the mezzanines, English lessons are imparted to newcomers to the city. And so the list goes on. Over the years, the market has become a *home*, as

¹ Tottenham, in North London, is an area of the Borough of Haringey. It is inhabited by one

traders and regular customers refer to it, or at least, a piece of that diffuse home with which migrant people build up their domesticity.

Not in vain, this particularity of the market is the outcome and also reflection of a process of struggling, which has been headed by women. SSM has been earmarked for redevelopment for over seven years, holding shopkeepers and employees in uncertain circumstances and hindering their chances to invest and thrive. In response, the traders in coalition with several neighbourhood associations and residents have carried out a long-range campaign to block the development project for Wards Corner building posed by Grainger Plc, a real-estate developer, and backed by Haringey Council through its regeneration plan for Tottenham. Over almost eight years, this effort of endurance and future projecting in common has strengthened a series of networks of sharing and mutual support among the shopkeepers and the other people involved. These actions have influenced the management and way of governance of the market itself. Arguably, *caring* has become a distinctive feature of SSM through which traders have created a framework of collaboration and doing together, that is to say *commoning*, that extends beyond the walls of the market to the neighbourhood and further.

The claim to look at *caring* as an essential component for economic development and human well-being has been an identity sign of the feminist movement. Back in the 70's, feminist activists and scholars asserted the imperative need to reconsider the role of the housewife and domestic work, highlighting the negligence and constraints of the classical economics. Today, those challenges still in force have been enlarged by the new global dimension that the maintenance of life and its endangered sustainability have acquired (Pérez, 2014). The understanding of *care*, as argued by Schildberg (2014, p.2), is specific to a context, having different meanings in urban and rural areas and low-income or high-income countries. Nonetheless, what it is common for

every place is its persistent misrecognition and its general attribution to women. This invisibilisation of *caring* has been used by the capitalist market system in order to thrive and produce surplus, expelling reproductive activities out from capitalist relations of production and relegating them to the private sphere. In so doing, the market economy has grown upon the expropriation of people's *commons*, that is, the material and social conditions necessary for human life (Federici, 2012).

In the current widespread crisis of the last form of the market economy, namely *neoliberalism*, the claim and defence of *the commons* may play a relevant role not only as a material aspiration or mechanism of management, but also as a political imaginary for a possible reconfiguration of the socioeconomic structure (Chatterton, 2010, p.627). This paper adds that, in asserting *the commons* (and the act of *commoning*), such transformation would place *caring* and *reproduction* at the core of the economy. In cities, where nowadays financial capitals fiercely reproduce through real-estate bubbles, the fight for *the commons* is opening up an arena of resistance and contestation against this devastating phenomenon. Likewise, the practice of *commoning* has already started to generate new economic and governance forms that displace the purely productivist and pro-growth logic of the hegemonic socioeconomic system.

Yet, the multidimensional debates on *caring* and *commoning* have not yet succeeded in finding a linkage capable of enhancing their scope in the urban field. This research endeavours to build a bridge between the two, taking *care practices* as a catalyst of *commoning* in the city. The aim is to reflect on the causes, outcomes and potentials of this combined perspective in ongoing processes of urban regeneration. The case of SSM may well cast some light in this regards. The market in question currently finds itself in a situation of administrative impasse, where the various forces seem to have reached a

technical draw. The tentative inspection of the base of the iceberg, which depicts this neighbourhood market, attempts also to bring into view what, it is argued, has been not only a successful tool of struggle and resistance, but also a constitutive principle of urban fabric generation from the grassroots and against the predation of the financial capitals.

Methodology

This research attempts to open up a line of reflection on urban regeneration processes through a situated construction of the notion of *commoning through caring* in SSM. Such concept is therefore the object of study. However, it also becomes a theoretical lens that enables an examination of this specific urban instance that is this market, cutting across its public and private spheres; the visible, the invisibilized and the interstices between them. That is to say, it provides the perspective to undertake a comprehensive analysis that does not divide the activities, relationships and spaces of the market between paid and unpaid, productive and reproductive, formal and informal, public and private.

Such approach in search of values beyond the economic is necessarily qualitative, although it could gain steadiness if complemented with quantitative data. The study that is presented draws on material from different sources. On the one hand, the ethnographic data produced from observations and interviews with traders, regular customers and people from the coalition, carried out over ten months of fieldwork at the site, as well as information taken from online blogs and forums related to SSM and the Wards Corner Coalition. On the other, the drawings elaborated as cartographies of the

spatiality and functioning of the market that attempt to add an additional layer of information by means of a graphic reading.

A double-entry table has been used as an analytical tool to break down this multi-source information gathered, following a classification scheme of realms and practices. The realms (or domains) included have been the following four: the family domain, the business, the market and the coalition, while the practices (taking discourses as practices as well) have been divided also into four categories: trading, management, communication /representation and design. This procedure has allowed a categorization of different modalities in which *commoning through caring* is performed and takes on meaning in the market and its external *spatialities*. The object of study, inherently relational, is therefore activated transversally, cutting across and acquiring different forms through these domains and the varied practices (activities, events, works, agencies, material productions and discourses) of the traders, their families, and the people who are part of the market in their particular way. This paper will seek to provide a detailed account of these distinctive ways of *commoning* and *caring*, which on reality overlap and also clash.

The space: a common place

Thresholds and juxtapositions

Exiting Seven Sisters Tube station by the corner between its homonymous street and Tottenham High Road, the visitor discovers a prominent Edwardian building apparently in disuse. Up on the windows, in colourful letters one reads: “SAVE OUR MARKET”. However, no particular sign manifests the existence of a market at the site. The adjacent buildings comprise a row of terraced houses with shops and cafes on the ground level, characteristic of the typical London’s high streets. Only if the visitor looks carefully, he/she will spot three doors seemingly open to the public. Upon crossing this first threshold, a singular market unfolds to the eye in a genuine fashion. From the inside, one realizes that entries to the market are multiple. All the shops at the front are open to the interior creating a sort of deep and dynamic fence. In fact, thresholds and passages are a defining feature of the market. There is not a clear frontier separating one space from its adjacent, but rather a sequence of overlapping architectural elements, colourful decorations, varied furniture, displayed goods, plants and domestic objects that create a moving setting of transitions and mingled realms.

A rectangular perimeter filled with shop units coupled with other three central blocks of stores define a layout perfectly regular and gridded on the architectural plan, and perfectly uneven and formless on reality. Diverse sets of tables and chairs indistinctly used to eat, watch TV or wait your turn at the hairdresser, blend with all sorts of groceries on jazzy stalls, clothing on movable racks and a repertoire of household items spilled out the building-style shops, breaking the rigidity of the pre-established architectural order. All the shops have been beautifully decorated by the traders themselves with personal objects, pictures, hanging pots of flowers, amulets, saints and flags

from their country of origin. In their effort to create a familiar place where to recognize themselves, the traders, for the most from Colombia, have transformed the market into a small reconstruction of a town centre of Antioquia. The halls act as busy streets, where the visitor can enjoy a lunch or a coffee by the several restaurants while watching the last soap opera, do some shopping at the butcher or at the clothing stores, bargain with sporadic ambulant vendors, look for a job through the numerous notices displayed on the glasses of the storefronts, attend Gospel readings twice a week or spend the time identifying the most recondite spots that children find and occupy playing hide-and-seek. Halls constitute the most accessible and busy side of the market.

Proceeding into the shops, it is easy to realize that some of them occupy several units, while others have resulted from multiple subdivisions of the initial ones. Yet, not all the shops are accessible to the public. Those used as restaurants are separated from the hall spaces by counters, where cakes, pastries and fruits are usually displayed, or bars where food is also served. Interaction with the shopkeepers and employees remains mediated by such devices, signallers of a new legality of access. Sitting by the bar, one can observe the quick movements of the waitresses and waiters, who constantly cross such thresholds carrying trays with drinks and dishes. At the rear is always the kitchen, always with women preparing the food. They seldom come out this space during their busy shifts and nobody comes in. Food is passed through the door or a window, so that their cooking space remains under their control:

“I’m the queen of that kingdom (the kitchen)” (Estefanía / Conversation 4/06/2015).

Above many of the shops, the traders have built mezzanines accessible by all sorts of ladders, deployable and winding stairs. In these spaces they have set up small versatile offices, cabins for body care treatments, pantries and storerooms. Yet, access to the mezzanines needs a previous appointment or consent from the shopkeepers and the activities inside them remain quite private.

The traders have designed and built them up very quickly in order not to be prevented by the authorities, following the precedent set by Remedios, the owner of *Pueblito Paisa Café*, who was the first to raise a mezzanine:

“We rented a small space outside of the market to cook, but the landlord wasn’t very nice to us. He would set a time limit for cooking hours because it smelled. We couldn’t stand that situation. So I decided to build a mezzanine in my own shop to have the kitchen upstairs. I hired an engineer to do the design that I had worked for my mezzanine. In order to build it, we had to do it in one night because I didn’t had the permits in order and Jill had no idea” (Remedios / Conversation 24/10/2014).

An updated map of the market should include all these spaces, the complete units, their upgrading and their subdivisions, the most evident to the eye and the ones concealed. Since its reopening twenty-eight years ago, SSM has undergone permanent transformations. SSM has evolved through consecutive juxtapositions over the initial setting. Still today, a series of scaffoldings and piled construction materials keep shaping a never-finishing setting where traders continue crafting their shops in the midst of an active commercial activity.

The drawings on pages 8-11 seek to represent that spatiality of the market; not only as a mere built form but rather as a lively environment informed by the daily and occasional activities that take place in its interior².

Ownership and management

Wards Corner building stands over public land, having Transport for London as the actual administrator of the property. For its part, the indoor market has been run over the last decade by two internal administrative structures of very different nature. On the one hand, a profit-making management by Mrs Oakley, who holds the lease of the building’s ground floor, and is responsible for collecting rents from the shopkeepers and provide and maintain common services. On the other, a parallel non-profit company, *Pueblito Paisa Ltd*, that brings together traders to secure a good management of the market in their own interest. Actually, they have taken action on their own at many times in order to repair particular disarrangements neglected by Jill:

“Jill is absent. She collects a weekly rent on Fridays and hires two guys as caretakers. It’s tough to struggle with her to get things done in the market, like painting the walls or taking care of the carpets. Once she refused to refurbish the bathrooms that were looking horrible. Then I told all the shopkeepers to stop giving her rent until she did the job. We didn’t pay for two weeks and she finally agreed. She understood the power we had” (Candela / Conversation 24/10/2014).

² Jaque (2013) contends that architecture itself is not capable of prompting social processes. Only in relation with other agents is how it participates in the social constructions.

Likewise, they look after shared furniture, common plants, cleaning of halls and toilets, security issues and even children on a collective basis. In practice, the traders take care of the market as a whole, sharing a common custody over it based on a common responsibility. It is also regular to find shopkeepers watching over others shops when their neighbours need to leave for a while, or helping out each other with particular individual arrangements and upgrading, or sharing resources like photocopy machines and computers.

Regarding the individual units, officially, Jill has jurisdiction over the space by contractual agreement, but on the ground shopkeepers have full autonomy over their shops. Overtime, the traders and Jill have negotiated an agreement that allows the first to sublet their units. The traders have taken advantage of such permission and they charge newcomers a fee for the handover on top of the sublet fee that they have to pay to Jill. No written rules specify what a shopkeeper can do with his/her shop. Interestingly, the traders themselves are who establish those limits, sometimes almost implicit or unspoken (Gutiérrez; Hofert; Orbea; Riseck, 2015).

Arguably, the networks of material care and cooperation, although primarily as mechanisms for survival, have also allowed the traders to dissolve the official hierarchy in a daily process of self-empowerment. The traders have succeeded in making the market their own. Furthermore, the forms of flexible ownership and self-management, resulting from a continuous interplay between the common and individualities, have provided them with the collective agency needed to handle both internal and external pressures and conflicts.

A home within a market

The overview of the spatiality of the market initially presented allows capturing a glimpse of some of the particularities of this intercultural hub. However, the later understanding of its mode of management suggests a mode of inhabiting a space much more related to the way in which an extended family or a group of peers live together in a common house, rather than sharing a mere workplace. It can be affirmed that on the basis of collective caring and common building of the space, SSM has become a home for those transnational workers and migrants who have settled in Tottenham over the last years.

“We are like the neighbourhood’s lung. We have created a place where we feel safe and welcomed. Like a big family in a big house” (Remedios / Conversation 24/10/2014).

Deeper observations come to show the market as an actual house with its characteristic rooms and associated functions. It is a common practice among traders and acquaintances to use the halls as if they were an open kitchen or a dining room. Traders tend to go for coffee to their neighbouring shops. In their way back, they will frequently stop by a friend and share the drink with him or her. Since queues at the lawyer’s office are usually long, many customers will ask Pablo or Blanca, owners of two of the most popular restaurants, to have their lunch served there, sitting by the door. They will then return the dishes to their corresponding places. Similarly, it is also habitual to see kids eating alone at the restaurants. Once finished, they will bring their dishes to the actual kitchen, being the only ones allowed to cross that threshold without hesitation. Sometimes, they will also get invited to help out with the washing up, offer that they will accept reluctantly.

As it has been mentioned before, children have their own conception of what the market is and how it can be used. Their routes and places to stay vary from those of their elders. Alfonso's grocery, where two candy dispensers are placed at the door, is one of their meeting points. Then, they will usually race around this last block of shops, which happens to be the less frequented and supervised, and hide behind the several trolleys with construction materials, the series of tables apparently abandoned, or the flags and varied textiles that hang suspended on wires strung from shop to shop. For their part, babies are also very welcome in the market. On weekdays around five o'clock, several women, some of whom are relatives of the shopkeepers or employees, usually gather on one of the central halls, filling it with baby-buggies. They like to watch TV and chat while breastfeeding their babies.

Caring of personal image, as it has been pinpointed yet, constitutes one of the most demanded services in the market. Yet, what is distinctive in our place of study is that many of these usually intimate practices are made in public. People at the hairdressers prefer to wait outside on the corridors with curlers and dyes acting on their heads, but chatting animatedly or just looking at the people passing by. The same applies when it comes to wait for their recently-done nails to dry. Many customers spend this often extended time in conversation with others as if the market were an open public restroom.

Finally, rest activities have also a place in the market. Many of the offices on the mezzanines have couches and even spare mattresses. The intimacy of these rooms is used by the shopkeepers and their families to take small naps or relax for a while.

From this view, the different spaces of the market take the form of small pieces, which connected configure that diffuse domestic environment of the

migrant people, who carry out many of their daily domestic activities in collectivity (Jaque, 2013, p.45).

"We have created a sense of place, somewhere to go if you are feeling depressed. If you get homesick, you can come here and find everything you would find at home. They cannot move us because this is like home" (Candela / Conversation 24/10/2014).

In looking at SSM as a home (or a fragment of it), it is easy to understand how space can become an effective resource in the generation of bonds and affections. What drives people to come to the market is not only work nor the amount of services that are provided for very specific needs. People do not come to the market only to buy, but also because conversations, memories and care are exchanged daily in a familiar environment to which they feel to belong. On the other hand, this conceptualization also allows us to break the traditional long-established dichotomy between public spaces where productive activities are carried out, and private ones where the social reproduction takes place. In SSM such divisions are always blurred as a result of the relationships that the people from the market have constructed through *caring* and *commoning*.

The economy: a displacement of production

For more than three decades, feminism has advocated and claimed a reconceptualization of the economy that includes not just the series of monetary flows, but all the processes that sustain life, particularly *care work* (Pérez, 2014). Back in the 70's, the role of the housewife and domestic work triggered intense discussions about Marx's theory on capital, class struggle and work distribution. The worker subject failed to represent the reality of women, whose work and struggle were taking place at home rather than at the factory. Today, the processes of globalization have added new challenges to those ones while the notion of *caring* itself has acquired multiple dimensions and different definitions. The following ones are some gathered by Ricks in her text *A Feminist's View of Caring*:

"Caring is human service work – "people work" – but it has not been recognized as work" (Pascall, 1986, cited by Ricks).

"Caregiving is an activity encompassing both instrumental and affective relations" (Abel & Nelson, 1990, cited by Ricks).

"Caring is a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible... Caring can be seen as a process of four intertwining phases: caring about, taking care of, caregiving and care-receiving" (Fisher & Tronto, 1990, cited by Ricks).

In line with the last one, Schildberg quotes (2014, p.5): *"Caring is not just an activity (caring for) but also a practice that encompasses an ethical, emotional and relational dimension (caring about) and an activity (caring for)"* (Tronto 1993). And she adds (2014): *"Therefore care is both, asset of values and a series of concrete practices"*. For her part, Pérez highlights the marginalization of *caring* by the capitalist market stating (2014, p.11): *"Caring would be those residual activities for the market: those*

activities essential to repair the messes produced by the logic of accumulation and/or cover those spaces left empty for not being profitable".

In line with these claims, this section will try to outline the socioeconomic functioning of SSM, stressing that part of the structure that tends to be left outside the relations of production and generation of value. As a counterpoint to classical economics rationality, the aim of this situated account will be to bring to light that side of the economy less visible or deliberately invisibilized and, therefore, less measurable in arithmetic terms. Following Pérez, I will use the metaphor of *the iceberg*, which enables a visualization of the distinct socioeconomic spheres in different levels of analysis and relevance (Pérez, 2014). Thus, I will start with the most visible side, *the tip of the iceberg*, and will finish with *its base*, the side underneath the visible surface. Having said this, it should be noted that such a division is useful for analytical purposes, but is never clear or static on reality.

The tip of the iceberg

SSM is one of two sites in London (the other is Elephant & Castle) catering specifically for Latin-American groups, providing distinct goods, clothing, hardware and foods as well as access to specific support services like legal advice, assistance in job and affordable accommodation searching, or language lessons and translation services. A quite large clientele, predominantly Latino, wanders around the market at almost any time of the day, but it is in the evenings and weekends when people come the most. SSM has a core of unconditional customers who have been shopping and gathering at the market for more than ten years:

"My wife - who is from Peru - was elated when we discovered the market. Many products she discovered there were products she was familiar with back in Peru. And she was very happy to have conversations in Spanish with shopkeepers who identified with her cultural values." (Stewart George / CCP, Sticky World).

Very likely, the visitor will be quickly attracted by the lush gastronomy that permeates the market's atmosphere at every corner. Among the wide repertoire of food, one can find Argentinian meat like "sirloin" and "punta de anca", Mexican enchiladas, "sopa de choclo" or "solteritas" (a Colombian sweet made of wheat flour and caramel). At Alfonso's grocery, opened ten years ago, chili, spicy flours for tortillas, different kinds of wheat and medicinal herbs are also provided:

"My shop is the one in North London with so much choice of Latin American products. Sixty percent of what the Latinos from Seven Sisters consume is bought here. They do their shopping during the week and gather here on weekends". (Alfonso / Nieto Maestre, 2015).

"The business is going well for us, it is the main income for me and my father, we work hard and it works well for us. There are lots of great things in here - people don't even know! For example, the clothing is really good, lots of people come for clothing. Really good barbers too. The kind of meat we sell at the butchers is mainly Argentinian, Uruguayan and Brazilian - they are the main exporters from South America. People really do notice the difference - they can really taste the difference! Lots of people come especially to us - lots of English customers come, and ask where we get the meat from e.g. a rump steak from Uruguay, and people can really tell the difference between say a steak from Sainsbury's. Once they try it, a lot of people will come back. One of the best sellers is chorizo, the seasoning is great, we sell 1500 a week!" (Carnicería Martínez / CCP, Sticky World).

Prices at the restaurants are slightly lower than those found in chain stores, providing access to affordable and familiar food, particularly to low-income groups in the area. A daily menu including two dishes and dessert costs 7£, a coffee is 1.40£ and a pint of freshly made juice 2.50£. For their part, clothing shops always offer 3x2-type deals, while beauty salons provide discounts on services in combo. Exchange rates at the money transfer shops are also below those at the post office or chain businesses.

The sixty units in the market house businesses run by people from Colombia, Peru, Sub-Saharan Africa, Iran and the Caribbean. A significant characteristic of this multi-cultural business hub is that nearly 80% of the shops are run by women. The cases of Candela, Clara and Remedios, who have been running a business in the market for more than eight years, are good examples of the entrepreneur spirit of these women.

Candela set up her first business in 2007 as a Colombian clothing shop at the rear of the market. Today, she runs RIA, a money transfer business in one of the front units facing the street. The shop houses a small counter on the ground floor and an office on the mezzanine, which she managed to build up with the help of Remedios. She has employed her husband, who is actually the one present at the shop on a daily basis, since she needs to travel frequently to France to attend meetings related to her second job as a commercial intermediary.

"In 2007 I was a working nurse in London but still needed another source of income. A friend of mine asked me to open a Colombian clothing shop with her in SSM. I didn't have the money for the investment so I asked for a bank loan and got it. At first we didn't have any customers. We sort of asked people from our own Latino community to visit us, and they did. With time we started attracting many customers" (Candela / Conversation 24/10/2014).

Over time, thanks to her active engagement and well-developed skills of intermediation, she has gained the legitimacy to become the main representative of the shopkeepers. Such role makes her responsible for negotiating with Mrs Oackley regarding management issues, as well as acting as the spokesperson in the WCC campaign, which will be expounded in the next section.

Akin to Candela, Clara started her first business in the UK in SSM. It was a hairdresser where she self-learned such activity. She has done quite well and today she just manages it. She leaves chairs to let for those who want to start the profession, but cannot afford the purchase of a complete unit. At the market, she met a British man who helped her doing some translations and eventually became her husband and the father of her two sons.

“I arrived in the UK in 2002 as a political refugee without knowing English and what to expect. I invested the money I got in purchasing a shop in the market. At the beginning, there weren’t many Colombians, maybe just Oscar Mauricio and Vicky. I bought the shop to the previous owner... they don’t really own the shop, you pay a weekly rent to the leaseholder but you gotta give a prima to the previous occupant to start your business. I turned my shop into a beauty salon and hired a couple of hair dressers to start my business. My shop has now been divided into different pieces. I sold half of it to Regina, who is a hard worker and has been working for me since the beginning. I still own my shop, but I don’t work in it any more. I have my office upstairs and I come from time to time” (Clara / Conversation 24/10/2014).

For her part, Remedios came to SSM in 2002 and opened a bakery with her husband, from whom she divorced later and managed to dismiss. The bakery is today *Pueblito Paisa Café*, one of the most popular spots of the market. She manages it in conjunction with several other businesses including trading of

second-hand cars between Europe and Africa, an informal mechanical workshop and three other shops in the Holloway area.

“I am Peruvian but my ex-husband is Colombian, that’s why I have a Colombian restaurant. I opened my shop officially in 2004, but I had already been working here before. We used to be bakers, the only Colombian bakery in all London. But we didn’t sell the bread in our shop, we just baked it and distributed all over the city. On one delivery we had on SSM, we realized that a front street shop was on sale and we decided to buy it. We had to pay 11000 pounds for the three units I purchased” (Remedios / Conversation 9/11/2014).

For twenty-eight years, SSM has served small and independent businesses as a launching pad. Some shops have been run by up to three family generations, as Amara’s clothing store, the last at the frontage. Today, the market provides jobs for almost one hundred and fifty people and there is a long waiting list of people willing to lease a unit in it. The strong demand for available units is a sign of the affordable conditions offered by the market to set up a business. Rents are paid to Jill (the leaseholder) on a weekly basis and they depend on the location of the units. The ones at the front pay 160£ per week, while the weekly rents of the units at the rear are 125£. If a shop has several units, it will pay the corresponding amount for the total of them. The lease of a unit includes also the right to common services and facilities in the market.

SSM has remained over the years as a thriving market, generating significant income for the traders and delivering economic benefits to the local economy. The first visible causes of its success lie on the premises of affordability and flexibility of tenure and ease of networking. However, underneath this part of its productive system, there exists a world of not so discernible exchanges and relationships without which, I argue, the market would not have prospered and become what it is today.

The base of the iceberg

There is in the market a series of practices, works, agencies, relationships and events, which take place outside the sphere of trading itself. They largely match with the notion of *caring*, which was first brought to the academia by the feminist movement, as it has been noted earlier. Despite the varied approaches to the concept, *caring* provides a theoretical framework very enlightening to addressing the economy of our case of study, integrating the part that does not move money (or at least directly) into the socioeconomic structure.

Delving into the interactions among the workers of SSM, a series of networks of mutual support exchanges can started to be traced. They can be recognized, in a first instance, in the way in which settled shopkeepers at the market manage to facilitate the entry to relatives or acquaintances. It is a common practice for some shopkeepers to rent empty units to secure them for their own people:

“The first trader, Carlos Mauricio, has already a communitarian vision. He started to rent units as they became available, to sublet them to other Latino” (Angel / Conversation 7/07/2015).

Similarly, people are primarily hired on a basis of solidarity among relatives, friends or compatriots. Many shopkeepers usually offer flexible shifts and even informal contracts to those who remain in an irregular legal situation or conditions of economic instability:

“I have hired people from everywhere who have come to me pleading for help. When I arrived in London, I was sleeping on the street next to a lady who I befriended. Now it is my turn to help. (...) I take care of my employees and I have even hosted two of them in my house for a while. (...) I think it twice before I tell them off. I don’t want to be harsh and

they need to learn. I am currently considering if I should fire one of the chefs. I don’t like the way he treats the new ones, although I have warned him several times.” (Remedios / Conversation 16/07/2015).

As it has been mentioned before, many families or relatives have been working together at the market for several years. Many of their children have been raised in it, under the eye of what some of them call “our big family”. Parents feel safe when they have to leave their children in the market in order to attend other commitments outside. They view in the market a privileged space for their kids, in contrast to the isolated environments in which the majority of children grow up nowadays. Furthermore, they also praise it as an excellent hangout for teenagers and they take great pride of the engagement of young people in the issues that the market has been facing over the last years.

“The market is a bank of happiness. For me, it is like a town that takes care of you. Look at the children. They love it. It remains me of Cuba in my childhood, when I used to spend the day on the street playing with my friends. There is a saying in Britain that says: “It takes a village to raise a child”. That is the market” (Nelly / Conversation 25/07/2015).

This willingness of trust, cooperation, togetherness and amity led the first Latin-American shopkeepers to form a non-profit organization, which was called *Pueblito Paisa*. Today, 70% of the workers form part of it, although its structure and functioning remain quite unclear.

“(...) You can called it nostalgia, but the true intention was to create an own space beyond economic benefit. It emerged spontaneously. Yet, it lacks visibility. The time has come to clarify its purpose and strengthen its presence” (Angel / Conversation 7/07/2015).

"In the beginning, it used to be more familiar. We used to gather and make special meals after the market shut. Everyone brought something and we stayed up at night chatting and even dancing. Marta loves to dance and she always cheered up the meetings. We have invested in this (market) much more than money" (Candela / Conversation 2/07/2015).

On the basis of this commitment of unity and solidarity, there have been three occasions in which shopkeepers have collaborated in raising funds to pay the rent of one individual shop that was facing financial problems at the time. Likewise, most of them offer themselves to watch the shop of their neighbours when those need to leave at some point, in an act of reciprocity that has become a daily habit.

"Only if we take care of each other, we will remain united and will thrive" (Angel / Conversation 7/07/2015).

This series of reciprocities can be fairly seen as a survival mechanism in a context of instability and relative scarcity. Yet, solidarity does not exist only among established traders. By consensus, they have permitted street vendors to sell small products in the market as well. It is common to see these vendors in the mornings wondering around, offering from cookware to body creams and nail polishes sets. Beside Clara's hairdresser's door, Francisco has installed a tiny stall that he uses to sell daily lottery. He is not required to pay rent for it. On the other hand, newly on Wednesdays, free soup has begun to be provided to those in need at *Pueblito Paisa Café*. It is an initiative of Remedios, who also distributes the leftovers of the café and the bakery among charities in the area. In line with this procedure, Clara collects clothing at her office for disadvantaged families:

"We came here to set up a business because of the sense of community. I grew up in Tottenham, but left, and then came back for the sense of community. This is so important

*to me, I had left for the United States in order to try to find this sense of community, and now I have come back and found it in Tottenham (...). I have found David Lammy's book, *Out of the Ashes*, really useful on this. He identified the problem of lack of community. This community spirit is what brought us here to Seven Sisters Market, It is a basic human need to feel a sense of belonging. This is especially important for young adults, who can get into a lot of trouble if they don't feel this sense of belonging"* (Nelly / Conversation 25/07/2015).

It has been already pinpointed that, the metaphor of *the iceberg* as a whole entity with its visible tip and its submerged base is useful and clarifying in analytic terms. However, paid and unpaid work in the market, production and reproduction, labour and *caring*, do not occur at times or spaces clearly separated, showing that the logics of *capital* and *care* are not opposing at all. Moreover, in continuing divorcing both, one falls on the risk of reproducing the marginalization of *caring* as that part of the socioeconomic structure for so long privatized, feminized and invisibilized (Pérez, 2014). In this vein, the following statement of the economist: "*caring is at the border between work, consumption and leisure, between egoism and altruism, between the market and the non-market, between autonomy and dependence, between public and private, between the collective and the individual (...)*" (Pérez, 2014), much more represents the notion that this paper seeks to construct through the case of SSM. *Caring* in the market evidences the interdependence that inherently exists among its people. It creates a social capital that protects the individual from his/her isolated economic vulnerability, while triggering at the same time a process of enrichment of the group as a whole. This results in a strengthening of their agency that drives their awareness of *the common* and the power of *commoning*.

The struggle: an *urban common* for a shared horizon

In the spring of 2007, the traders of SSM received an eviction notice as part of the redevelopment proposal for Wards Corner by the private real-estate developer Grainger Plc, and backed by Haringey Council under its regeneration plan: “Plan for Tottenham”. This large-scale profit-led development plan evidences with shameless indolence its speculative purposes, which will lead to increased rents and unaffordable housing and hence, to an inexorable displacement of the less well-off local communities. The rhetoric itself used by the Council to market the regeneration plan, packed with apolitical renderings and decontextualized visualizations, excludes, marginalizes and subsequently stigmatizes this significantly large sector of Tottenham population.

In response, *Pueblito Paisa* mobilized and organized an event with the purpose of raising awareness about the recently-known threat posed on the market on the one hand, and promoting the market itself as a multi-cultural hub on the other. That first action of *Pueblito Paisa* succeeded and ushered in the formation of The Wards Corner Community Coalition (WCC) at the end of the year, which reunited existing local associations of residents and traders as well as independent individuals under the objective of saving the building and the market from demolition.

The coalition started an active campaign comprising numerous public meetings, protests, workshops, street stalls and collection of signatures of support. They also managed to get a promise of support by council candidates, including Boris Johnson, whose words have been well kept as an instrument of legitimization:

“I want Haringey Council to urgently review this proposal and put the livelihood of the traders and the thousands of locals who rely on this market at the core of their decision” (Boris Johnson).

Yet, the most important achievements so far have been the elaboration of a Community Plan, as a counterproposal to Grainger’s project, and the setup of the West Green Road and Seven Sisters Development Trust as the vehicle for its delivery. The Community Plan³ is the result of almost four years of consultation with the traders and residents, coordinated by the coalition in collaboration with the architect Abigail Stevenson. It was granted planning permission by Haringey Council in 2014. Nevertheless, the possible implementation of this project and the fate of the market itself remain in suspension to date. The struggle to halt Grainger’s proposal seems to have reached a legal and administrative impasse of uncertain future.

Regardless how this conjuncture evolves, what is important to recall is that the activism undertaken in common over these years has yet impacted the market; its functioning, its economy and its space itself. It is also necessary to highlight that all these actions, carried out in different but parallel fronts, have prompted a leadership and organizational structure that has been taking shape over time. There has never been a predetermined action plan nor have been leaders specifically assigned to coordinate the group as a uniform entity.

“The key is to let doing, to make room and prepare the path in order to boost self-confidence and growth. Not to lead, but support” (Angel / Conversation 16/06/2015).

On the one hand, some of the shopkeepers of the market, those ones who already had well-established communication channels and bonds with their

³ The Community Plan for Wards Corner is a community-led counterplan for the refurbishment of WC building, including the upgrading of the indoor market and the restoration of the first and second floors to house a community centre.

peers, have been who have taken the role of representatives in the process. Apart from one man, Angel, the chair of a non-profit organization in support of the Latin American community in the UK, the rest of these spokespersons have been and still are women⁴. Their names are Candela, Clara, Remedios, Eugenia and Nelly and they are all from Latin-America. When asking Angel about this fact, he responded:

"The woman is the action. The Latin woman is not submissive. In Latin-America women run the economy. (...) For instance, women who have two children say they have three - the husband is considered as another one to take care for -. Mothers are guilty of that, they reproduce it" (Angel / Conversation 2/06/2015).

These women have eventually involved members of their families not only in their business, but also in the campaign and struggle. Candela's husband, for instance, accompanies her in all the meetings and helps out offering drinks and snacks to the attendees. Their daughter has started a campaign on the internet to spread the claims in defence of SSM and obtain further support, while Eugenia's daughter, a close friend of her who was also raised in the market, has recently organized workshops with children to make drawings and banners. For his part, Clara's husband is in charge of all the translations to English of the letters that his wife submits to the authorities and the different stakeholders as the lawyer of SSM's case. The chain of support from family and friends does not end here, but it rather extends across the market and beyond its physical demarcation:

"My family has to understand my struggle. My husband, who's Spanish but raised in the UK, at the beginning didn't get I was doing all this. Now, he's supportive, and whenever

⁴ It is the intention of this paper to highlight the importance of women's presence regarding SSM and its history. However, it must be noted that women do not equate to caring per se, as if these activities were inherently part of their identity or a natural outcome.

there is a meeting and I can't show up, he would go" (Candela / Conversation 2/07/2015).

On the other hand, the actions by the WCC have also been headed by a group of women who in that case, are all nearby neighbours of British nationality. They hold regular open meetings every Monday in a local café outside the market where they take decisions by consensus and distribute tasks.

The lack of an organizational structure clearly defined or markedly vertical has not been exempt from internal misunderstandings and disputes among the traders, where the solution eventually taken has not always been the most egalitarian. Moreover, the communication between the traders and the coalition has lacked transparency at some points. However, over the time it has enabled a dynamic of progress that in general softens the differences and boosts the work in common. The premises of unity, togetherness and trust have prevailed over individual aspirations:

"We need to keep stepping forward collectively, to stick together and invest in building the relationship. (...) I'm here as a resource. We're all in a learning journey together" (Emma / words at DT public meeting on 16/06/2015).

"We need to share with everybody as much as possible." (Fran / words at DT public meeting on 16/06/2015).

"Grainger wants to divide us. They want to create a market where everyone is confused and afraid." (Candela / words at DT public meeting on 16/06/2015).

The expounded process of struggle emerges as a reaction to a threat imposed over the lives of the most vulnerable local groups and their citizenship rights.

It is the condition of being affected what yields a common action in defence of these rights. However, in working in common and resisting together, affections and bonds are created that over time can gain the potential to overcome the act of resistance itself and become a force capable of constituting an alternative on its own. *Commoning*, and more specifically, *commoning through caring*, has provided these people with a mechanism of self-constitution and legitimation. By means of mutual support, they have laid the groundwork of their own mode of coexistence and way of “co-working”, and in doing so they have constructed their own vocabulary for political claim and assertion of rights:

"The discourse needs to go beyond data itself and appeal to the feelings and values. We always need to remind that. That is our power" (Angel / Conversation 2/06/2015).

In their exertion of endurance, the traders in particular have created a counter-power that has transformed them themselves, influencing their own way of governance and self-management, their economy and even the space they share, which today looks beautiful with the drawings by the children posted all around. The experience gained in this journey has given them the capacity to constitute themselves as an independent group with self-autonomy. This fact is reflected on the Development Trust, which is currently taking its real first steps in that direction.

The Trust was set up in 2008, but it is not until today that it has really started to specify its role, its aims and its functioning structure. Its first objective is to deliver the Community Plan, although its horizon is much wider, going beyond the market itself. The Trust seeks to promote West Green Road and Seven Sisters Town Centre working together with the communities to support the local economy and further development in the best interests of this sector of Tottenham for so long neglected and marginalized by the local

authorities. It is a project with a long-term view and scope. At the present moment, given the possibility of an imminent eviction of the market, they are trying to raise funds to create a committee of psychological aid to traders, comprising two social workers and a psychologist, who could assist those most affected:

"They (the Council) never take into account the real social impact, because they cannot measure it. Even they (the traders) seem to be carrying on, you just have to talk to them and see how worried they are. Many of them have children. Others are too old to start something new. Moreover, if they evict them, all what they have together will be destroyed. That is why I'm seeking social support for them. They don't even know to what extent the eviction could affect them. (...) My dream will be to also have a small clinic upstairs (in the implementation of the Community Plan) that could provide this type of support continuously" (Angel / Conversation 3/08/2015).

The Trust attempts to be a progressive and enduring initiative to bring together the communities of the Tottenham, prompting a common framework of exchange, solidarity, mutual support, caring, learning and development of community assets to deliver regeneration for community benefit. The years of struggle have served them as constituent process in which through a daily practice of caring, sharing and negotiating they have collectively constructed an own image to be identified, legitimized and to move forward; an image in continuous motion and redefinition. As Chatterton (2010) contends in regards to *the commons*: *"The common, then, is not a static entity; it is as much a verb as a noun. It is something that is perpetually made and remade, created, eroded and defended"* (Chatterton, 2010, p.626).

Conclusion

The use of *caring* as analytical lens through which to study the multiple layers that inform the convoluted reality of a specific urban instance, has oriented the look of this paper towards those domains less visible to the eyes of both the local governments, lately aligned in favour of large real-estate urban developments, and those economic analysts trapped by the hegemonic productivist logic of our time. In the endeavour to bring to light those hidden spheres and the social interactions that shape them, this research has tried to show that in fact they constitute indispensable parts in the functioning of that urban entity as a whole.

In the pursuit to understand that which has allowed our case study; the SSM to function and remain running under strong pressures of eviction, *caring* has also become an object of study in itself. *Caring* has proved an essential component of the structures of the market and the production of the space. As argued by Schildberg (2014, p.2), “*the understanding of care as well as concrete care work is context-specific*”, and this is the way in which this study has constructed such notion, that is, rooted in its setting. *Caring* in SSM comprises a series of practices, works, discourses, agencies and relationships that cut across the different spheres of the market; the visible and those invisibilized, connecting them in specific spatiotemporal scenarios. What the case of SSM has shown is that *caring*, as a “*practice that encompasses an ethical, emotional and relational dimension*” (Tronto, 1933, cited by Schildberg, 2014, p.5), evidences the interdependence that inherently exists among people. It has been argued that such acknowledgment, seemingly obvious but actually not at all, facilitates and advances common action and work, that is to say, *commoning*.

A deep dive into the market has unveiled it as a home, highlighting the extraordinary capacity that a space can have in generating affections and

bonds. This transnational and transgenerational home is the result of such practices of mutual support, collective agency and common action, which create a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. Far from being spatial or diachronically separated, these practices form part of the daily grid of activities overlapping each other and connecting the public and the private, what is paid and the non-monetized, the productive and the reproductive. Certainly, SSM has succeeded in displacing the exclusivity of trading activities as the only means to generate value, integrating functions of social reproduction as essential components of its socioeconomic system, and most important, acknowledging them as such. However, it must be noted that this study has lacked a sufficiently robust economic data to actually prove the specific economic benefits resulting from this system. Furthermore, a deeper examination of the actual tensions and contradictions that the reproductive activities and relationships create with trading, should have also been undertaken to prevent the risk of taking *caring* and care work as positive *per se*⁵.

At the urban level, the threat of eviction has united the people of SSM in a fight, which has become *a common* in itself for them. This struggle has

⁵ Cautionary Note: as contended by Pérez (2014), the common tendency that takes *caring* as positive eluding its questioning, is responsible for continuing relegating such works and practices to a marginalized position both political and theoretically.

It has been remarked in this paper that addressing *caring* requires extreme caution. Thus, the *iceberg*'s metaphor must be taken as an analytical tool that helps to discern the characteristics of *caring* in a determined context through a process of analytical abstraction. On reality, *caring* does not exist detached from the market relations, neither from the public domain. The aforementioned analytical separation can easily turn against the claims of those seeking to take out *caring* from its subordinate position, and reinforce disgracefully such condition.

strengthened an already pre-existing willingness of togetherness and mutual care, creating a constituent force that today may have achieved the capacity to overcome the mere act of resistance to revert a process of expropriating development, seemingly irreversible at the global level. *Commoning through caring* in SSM has constituted both its socioeconomic sustaining base and its political engine. Although born fundamentally from endurance and subversion, they have created an articulating principle, which may well serve as a political counterproposal for the urban regeneration of Tottenham.

On a theoretical plane, the bridge between *caring* and *commoning* that this paper has sought to draft, could provide a new optics that integrate those spheres conceived as solely domestic and completely private, as important components in the studies of the contemporary urban phenomena. In so doing, such analytical framework could even become an instrument for the field of urban planning that would allow designing the city in terms of home, interdependence, care, collective production and shared responsibility. A city that could place people and the sustainability of life at its own core; where productive and reproductive activities could coexist in common spaces, breaking those pernicious dichotomies in play for so long.

Should time come to prove such proposition too naïve, and SSM and its Community Plan were eventually dismantled for aye, still two things will undeniably remain; one is a precedent of urban claim and production from the grassroots to which refer to. The other is a new urban collective subjectivity, that of *care* and *the common*, and a horizon to keep us moving.

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