

# Migration, gentrification and housing crisis. The case of Peruvians living in Abasto (Buenos Aires)

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## Abstract

The neighbourhood of Abasto has been home to many Peruvian immigrants since the 1990s. Now, this population is suffering the effects of a notable increase in real estate value intensely. This work analyses the specific mechanisms that provoke a differentiated exposure of Peruvian neighbours to gentrification, as well as the differentiated responses of migrants to the housing crisis. This paper is an ethnographic account about the strategies developed by Peruvian families in the context of gentrification. For this purpose, an abundance of material collected through observation, in-depth interviews and a rigorous review of bibliographic and documentary material is provided. The results demonstrate how the condition of migrant as in-betweeners represents an overexposure to the effects of the housing crisis for this population. In this context, there is also an unequivocal tendency for migrants to develop autonomous strategies against gentrification.

## INTRODUCTION

The influx of migrants into host societies poses specific difficulties in terms of access to housing (Herzfeld, 1992; Torgerson, 1987). This problem governs the material life of migrants from the very moment of their arrival in the receiving country, and is highly sensitive to the evolution of multiple factors such as the physical availability of real estate, the legislation in force and the situation of the housing market. Immigrants' access to housing has been of interest to many authors and from different approaches. The sociologists of the Chicago School interpreted this

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problem through the prism of urban ecology, framing it in a context of general competition whereby some groups would infiltrate the territory of others, provoking dynamics of invasion and succession (Park & Burgess, 1925). Clyde-Mitchell, for his part, took into account the difficulties migrants faced in finding accommodation in his analysis of the incorporation of the African population into urban life in the Copperbelt (Clyde Mitchell, 1956). Furthermore, the relationship of migrants to housing has been the subject of a profuse scientific production around the problem of the ghetto as a scenario marked by socio-spatial segregation (Foote-Whyte, 1943; Hannerz, 1969; Suttles, 1968). And even authors such as Turner (1968) have proposed classificatory models to interpret the different temporal phases that immigrants go through during their residential experience in the city.

This paper analyses specifically the residential strategies of migrant populations in the face of the expulsion dynamics activated by gentrification. The hypothesis is that these populations experience gentrification in a differentiated way, and construct responses that are coherent with their migratory experience (Cachado & Frangella, 2019). This differentiated experience responds to the ambivalent position of immigrants as in-betweeners: people who are part of the neighbourhood community but not of the national community. To test such hypothesis, the case of Peruvian migrants living in the Abasto neighbourhood (Buenos Aires) is presented. In the analysis, the practices and discourses of immigrants are related to those produced by other actors, such as public institutions, real estate developers, the media and organizations representing civil society. This allows us, first of all, to discuss the notion of gentrification through the discourses and practices of the actors involved in its development. Secondly, it allows us to describe political discourses that frame immigrants in dichotomous roles as victims and villains which determine their high level of exposure to the crisis. Finally, the application of an ethnographic fieldwork in direct contact with migrants allows us to interpret their experience of the housing crisis within the framework of strategies built on transnationality.

The presentation of the data collected is organized into three main sections. In the first, we briefly reconstruct the history of the neighbourhood, paying special attention to the evolution of its urban fabric and the patterns of insertion of Peruvian migrants. Subsequently, we address the development of the neighbourhood's gentrification process, specifically discussing the way in which it has affected this group. The third section of the ethnography focuses on the strategies developed by these migrants to cope with the residential crisis that threatens them. The article ends with a brief section of conclusions in which we reconcile the main data of our study with the theoretical concepts that serve as a reference. In order to present these concepts, we then dedicate a section that frames them within the current theoretical debates on migration and gentrification.

## IMMIGRANTS IN THE FACE OF GENTRIFICATION

In Clark's (2005) well-known definition, gentrification refers to a twofold transformation of territory. The first concerns the built environment, which is the object of reinvestment in fixed capital. The second concerns people, reflecting the replacement of the original users of the space by others of higher socio-economic status. Regarding the push-out effect of gentrification, analyses have tended to explain it in terms of the social class variable, often subsuming others such as race or ethnicity (Fallon, 2020; López-Morales, 2019). However, accumulating evidence has increasingly shown that both migrant populations and racial and ethnic minorities suffer higher levels of exposure to gentrification (Betancur, 2011; Bolt et al., 2009; Goetz, 2011; Hyra, 2018). In the USA, several authors have recurrently pointed out that the intersection of class and race determines how the benefits and losses of gentrification are distributed (Hwang & Ding, 2020; Hyra, 2008), documenting how migrants and ethnic minorities are more likely to be among the victims of gentrification (Douget, 2020). In Europe, too, we find work that has long pointed to the overexposure of immigrant populations to the gentrification of urban centres in countries such as the UK (Shortell, 2020), Germany (Polat, 2020), Spain (Martínez Veiga, 1999; Sargatal, 2001) or Portugal (Salgueiro, 2006). In the Latin American context, however, the differentiated exposure of migrants to gentrification has not been systematically analysed (Janoschka et al., 2014).

This paper discusses the factors that could lead to a differentiated exposure of Peruvian migrants to gentrification in Abasto. A broad approach to gentrification is adopted, which goes beyond the purely monetary and incorporates into the analysis other forms of cultural, relational and symbolic capital that are mobilized for the transformation of urban space (Casgrain & Janoschka, 2013). The drivers of gentrification must legitimize their cause, presenting themselves as ethical actors and disavowing forms of inhabiting urban space that contravene their interests (Dalmáu i Torvà, 2016; Herzfeld, 2019). The transformation of an inhabited space requires gentrifying subjects to mobilize discourses on the desirability of urban regeneration (García Pérez & Sequera Fernández, 2013; Yúdice, 2002). These discourses often involve the hyper-visibility of certain sectors of the population, which are characterized as “problematic”, and thus as subjects in need of displacement (Kent-Stoll, 2020). The stigmatization of migrant populations is recurrent in this type of discourse (Lees, 2014; Slater, 2016), to fragment links of solidarity between neighbours as a whole and thus weakening possible organized forms of resistance (Sakizlioglu & Uitermark, 2014). In this way, the gentrification project does not rest exclusively on the investment of financial capital, but also involves a strong symbolic investment in the activation of discourses that stigmatize the immigrant population.

On the other hand, several studies have stated that resistance to gentrification takes many forms, from highly visible community protests (Smith, 1996) to smaller yet deliberate everyday acts of resistance (Newman & Wyly, 2006). Authors such as Rodríguez and Di Virgilio (2016) have identified several types of resistance strategies, including actions driven by relatively organized grassroots collectives; presence of social services targeting vulnerable groups; individual residents’ strategies; and public housing initiatives. In any case, most of studies on resistance to gentrification emphasizes that the class dimension constitutes the real core of the phenomenon (Bridge, 1995, 2001; Glass, 1964; Herzer, 2010; Wacquant, 2008). In Latin America we find the same tendency to analyse these strategies taking social class as the only reference criterion (González, 2016; Lopes de Souza, 2016; Rodríguez & Di Virgilio, 2016). However, ethnic identities by themselves may play an important role in the articulation of such strategies of resistance to gentrification.

In the face of gentrification, threatened communities need to resort to solidarity-based forms of “neighbourly behaviour” that have been seriously weakened by individualism and competition governing neoliberal logic penetrating social life (Harvey, 1988: 282). In the case of migrant populations, existing studies seem to point to two possible trends in their strategies. On the one hand, and towards the core of the group, there seems to be a frequent reinforcement of an ethnic identity to refer to that allows for the generation and maintenance over time of broad and dense support networks between nationals. Differentiated ethnicity can make it easier for migrant populations to deploy exceptional strategies in the face of the generalized decline that many authors have noted for forms of organized solidarity in the urban environment (Harvey, 2014: 189; Castells, 2003).

In parallel, migrants tend to converge with autochthonous neighbours in the development of joint strategies in the face of gentrification. This was already observed by Glazer and Moynihan (1963: 300), when they detected stable forms of cooperation between blacks and Puerto Ricans against gentrification pressure in New York City. The need to confront a common problem together favours the emergence of coordinated initiatives between groups that are able to collaborate without blurring their differential ethnic identities.

## MATERIALS & METHODS

This paper is based on data produced in the framework of a research project funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology.<sup>1</sup> Its objective was to analyse the forms of exposure of migrant populations to different forms of urban conflict, as well as their response strategies. Such project included anthropological fieldwork in Lisbon (Portugal) and Buenos Aires (Argentina). In Buenos Aires we implemented qualitative fieldwork, based on participant observation exercises and in-depth interviews with both Peruvian living in Abasto and other relevant actors. Participant observation was designed on the basis of a script aimed at documenting the most widespread forms of neighbourhood sociability among Peruvians in Abasto, both in the contexts of formal associations and in

informal meetings, public and private events. At the same time, the interviews made it possible to record the experience of these neighbours through their own discourses. The interviews were conducted by the author himself as the person responsible for the research. These interviews were conducted with 16 Peruvians and four Argentines, all of them adults, including men and women between the ages of 26 and 62. The script for the interviews to Peruvian people was organized into three large blocks of questions: the first block was devoted to outlining the profile of the interviewee and their migratory trajectory; the second block was aimed at capturing their experience in the neighbourhood, as well as their strategies in relation to family organization and access to housing and employment; the third block was devoted to collecting the informants' discourses on the housing crisis, paying special attention both to the problems identified and to their opinions and guidelines for intervention on these problems. Finally, the information collected in the field was complemented by systematic consultation of bibliographical documentation and audiovisual material.

The implementation of the fieldwork lasted for a total of 4 months, divided into two phases. The first phase was carried out between October and December 2014, and was aimed at a socio-spatial characterization of the neighbourhood, focusing both on the observable demographic profiles and their distribution in the neighbourhood, as well as documenting the main problems identified by residents and their opinions about the environment they live in. The second phase was carried out between July and September 2016, and concentrated on in-depth interviews. From a first round of semi-structured interviews with around 20 residents of the neighbourhood, a total of 10 key informants were identified. They were selected on the basis of three criteria: the diversity of their socio-demographic profiles, their representativeness of the different actors involved in the social life of the neighbourhood—neighbours, associations, political groups—and their particular skills in summarizing and conveying the opinions and strategies of these actors. The inclusion of these informants made it possible to complete, contrast and organize the information gathered, through systematic exercises of participant observation and new interviews on partial aspects of the study.

The data analysis strategy was aimed at exploring the connections between the daily practices of Peruvians, their discourses on gentrification and their migratory experiences. Based on the identification of specific items—for example: experiences of eviction; savings strategies; forms of access to employment; organization of care among family members—the informants were questioned about their relationship with practices, values and social relations linked to the national status of Peruvians. This system made it possible to identify in the interviews practices that were then systematically observed, and addressing in new interviews partial questions that made it possible to complete the understanding of the practices observed.

## PERUVIAN IMMIGRATION AND GENTRIFICATION IN ABASTO

Throughout the 1990s, there was a strong growth in the Latin American immigrant population in Buenos Aires. This population grew by almost one hundred thousand people in 10 years (Cerrutti, 2005), with an outstanding representation of Peruvians, Paraguayans and Bolivians. The Peruvian community of Abasto was therefore generated in a context already marked by a widespread feeling of rejection towards immigrants from Latin American countries in Argentina. Nevertheless, Peruvian migration presents some significant differences with those of Paraguayans and Bolivians. In the predominant demographic profiles, Peruvians are more feminized and have a higher level of formal education on average. And in urban insertion patterns, Peruvian migration shows a tendency to settle in central areas of the city, as opposed to the predilection for the periphery found in the other groups (Cerrutti, 2005). Many Peruvians emphasize the idea that Bolivians suffer a higher level of discrimination in Argentina.

Bolivians are more marginalized. Peruvians have a bit of a bad reputation for being thieves, you know. Lazy not much, but of being thieves yes, because there are bad people who come from Peru to do bad things, and we are all lumped together. Bolivians are workers, but they are marginalized because of

their race, because of the color of their skin, because they are short, they are fat, they don't bathe... There is a lot of racism, specially towards bolivians.

(Ángela, 37 years old, Peruvian)

Abasto occupies an area of approximately one square kilometre in the central area of Buenos Aires. It is organized in an orthogonal layout covering a total of 60 blocks, bounded by the streets Ecuador, Córdoba, Mario Bravo and Presidente Perón. In the centre of the checkerboard is the Abasto Shopping Mall, a colossal art deco building, whose inauguration as a central fruit and vegetable market at the end of the 19th century historically marks the origin of the neighbourhood itself. A diverse neighbourhood originally grew up around the commercial activity of this centre, largely nurtured by European immigrants—Italian, French and Spanish (Carman, 2006)—who were incorporated through the “conventillo” housing model, consisting of houses with several rooms where families of limited means lived together, sharing common rooms such as the dining room and toilet.

The commercial vitality of the market favoured the proliferation of theatres, canteens and brothels in its surroundings from the beginning of the 20th century. Strongly linked to tango and bohemian life in Buenos Aires, the image of the neighbourhood deteriorated as it became increasingly associated with vice, violence and insecurity. This situation worsened considerably after 1984, when the local government closed the market and move it to the periphery (Carman, 2006). This decision immediately led to a sharp increase in unemployment in the area and, in general, to a degradation of the urban environment. Meanwhile, the country's economic crisis and the easing of repression after the end of the dictatorship favoured an increase in squatting (Carman, 2005). All of this coincided with the consolidation of a strong migratory flow of Peruvians to Argentina, made up mainly of people from middle and lower-middle class backgrounds, who entered precarious employment sectors, especially in construction, domestic service and industrial activities (Canevaro, 2008). This migratory flow occurred in response to the political and economic crisis resulting from Fujimori's rise to power in Peru, but also to Argentina's need for cheap labour in sectors such as commerce, industry and domestic service; to Argentina's new convertibility regime that allowed for payment in equivalent to dollars (Cerrutti, 2005); and, from 2003 onwards, the opening up of migration policy by Néstor Kirchner's government. The availability of abandoned or under-demanded housing in Abasto, as well as its central location, its infrastructure and the accessibility it offers to strategic employment niches, meant that many Peruvians concentrated in this neighbourhood, where they number around a 1000 people out of an estimated total of 3500 residents.

But at the end of the 1990s, a series of urban transformations began that definitively changed the reality of the neighbourhood. In 1998 the old market building was reopened to the public, refurbished as a shopping centre full of fashion shops, cafés, restaurants and cinemas. The operation was paid for by Inversiones y Representaciones S.A. (IRSA), a large real estate company whose total investment exceeded 200 million dollars, and included not only the opening of the Abasto Shopping Mall, but also the construction of three skyscrapers of luxury housing, the international Holiday Inn hotel and a large hypermarket. At the same time, IRSA itself executed the joint purchase of two complete blocks of housing, as well as five strategic corners in the very vicinity of the shopping centre (Carman, 2005), in order to control these spaces and lease them for social sectors and activities consistent with its objectives in the neighbourhood. Soon the area was filled with themed restaurants, theatres, antique shops and souvenir shops (Carman, 2006), and the central public spaces were redesigned with good tiled floor, decorative lampposts, elegant shops and, in general terms, a careful aesthetic strongly associated with tango and its historical relationship with the neighbourhood.

The process of gentrification of Abasto caused a rise in sales and rental prices. The poorer sectors of the population often responded by means of savings strategies based on maximizing the use of space. This led to the generalization of overcrowding among many Peruvian residents of the neighbourhood:

My family had two different rooms. We had one upstairs and a kitchenette. And upstairs, on the roofs we built a kind of hut to be able to live there. Because you come from a country, and you get something, you bring your sister, you want your sister to become independent. You give her a home.

And another brother comes and there is nowhere to live. So you make a little house, like a little room, where he can live. Each one brought a cousin, a sister, or a mother brought a child.

(Violeta, 43 years old, Peruvian)

The urban transformation of Abasto called for a material exploitation of its financial value, but also a moral restructuring of the environment. From the mid-1990s onwards, there was a proliferation of media reports warning of the dangers of Abasto (Heuse, 2004), identifying squatters and illegal immigrants as an identical sector of the population, with particular emphasis on the stigmatization of Peruvians as “dirty, thieves and drug addicts” (Carman, 2006: 227). According to Carman (2006: 160), patrimonialist discourses have characterized the Peruvian residents in Abasto as usurpers in three ways: as squatters who usurp the real estate value of the buildings; as usurpers of a heritage neighbourhood of high value for the Argentine nation; and, as foreigners, as illegitimate occupants of the national territory. In this context, the reopening of the old market was presented in the discourse of its promoters as a patriotic enterprise against the double threat embodied by the immigrant-squating subject. A few months before the inauguration of the new Abasto shopping centre, one of IRSA's directors stated that “as soon as the lights go on in the shopping centre (...) there will be no more *conventillos*” (Carman, 2005: 84). The opening ceremony was attended by both Mayor Fernando de la Rúa and the President of the National Government Carlos Menem. And beyond this symbolic support, authors such as Heuse (2004) interpret that the directives approved by the national government at this stage were directly related to episodes of persecution of the Peruvian population in the neighbourhood. The role of the public authorities did not remain in the discourse, and was projected in new measures such as the mounted police surveillance in the neighbourhood (Heuse, 2004), as well as in the periodic execution of what Carman calls “pedagogical evictions”: spectacular evictions of occupied houses picked up by the media—often broadcast on television—and which played a determining role in the functional illumination of the Peruvians as invading foreigners (Carman, 2006: 64). The Peruvians of the neighbourhood were thus becoming visible as illegitimate users of the neighbourhood in which they live.

## LEGITIMACY AND VIOLENCE IN ACCESS TO URBAN SPACE

The main attraction offered by Abasto to Peruvian immigrants is its proximity to the main sources of employment—hotels, domestic service, construction. The central location of this neighbourhood allows direct access to the metro network and several city bus lines. In addition, the socio-economic level of the surrounding neighbourhoods, mostly middle class, explains a wide offer of employment in the domestic sector, while the commercial character of the area significantly increases the options of working in the hotel and catering sector. Finally, it should be noted that over the last 30 years Peruvians have consolidated a large presence in Abasto, which can be seen in the abundance of shops in the area that are run by Peruvians and/or aimed at this population. These businesses are also an important source of employment for the Peruvian community in the area.

For us Peruvians it is very important to be here. Because the kids all go to the schools here. One is a few blocks away and the other one is behind here. And those primary schools, the secondary school is on the other side but it's still close by. So they are always moving around here. And most of us adults work around here anyway. So if we go to the periphery, where do we work?

(Marco, 39 years old, Peruvian)

Faced with the centrality that Abasto represents, the housing alternative for Peruvian immigrants are the peripheral neighbourhoods of the metropolitan area, which are generally affected by serious problems of poverty, precariousness and unemployment. In contrast to these neighbourhoods, popularly known as “*villas miseria*”, Abasto is perceived by Peruvians as a safe, orderly place, and therefore conducive to healthy neighbourhood coexistence. The discourse of this population contrasts sharply with that of the media and government institutions, which tend

to overestimate the dangers in Abasto, generally presenting it as an impoverished and unsafe neighbourhood for passers-by. Peruvians, on the other hand, take the suburban villas as a reference point and highly value the peaceful urban environment in Abasto.

What I like most about the neighbourhood is that it is quiet. (...) And I wouldn't like to go to the slums, because it's no life for a kid. It's not because I marginalise them, but I wouldn't be happy to go out and look for a job and leave the kids there. Because you know that in a slum, or in any other settlement, there are always fights or bullets. Or to know if you are going to come back from work at dawn and find your children safe. Here the children can go out, play, we watch them, we take them to the park.

(Violeta, 43 years old, Peruvian)

Peruvians find advantages in Abasto that directly contradict the media discourse about the neighbourhood, which mainly reflects police operations against drugs and warnings about fights in nightlife venues. In both political and media discourse, these events tend to be treated in an isolated and discontinuous manner, reinforcing the perception that they constitute periodic outbreaks of violence within a framework of general normality. However, in the discourse of Peruvian residents the daily life of the neighbourhood appears to be constantly violated by speculative pressure, which has been expelling many neighbours by dispossessing them of the homes they used to live in. In contrast to the discourses that present the renovation of the neighbourhood as an act of pacification, the Peruvians clearly perceive a specific act of violence in the real estate market, which prevents them from taking advantage of the neighbourhood and threatens to drive them to the periphery.

The problem here is housing: always housing. Because there is work everywhere. We have sold on the street, we have done anything, me and my husband. But what we have always suffered is housing. And if you go to the periphery there is no work, so what do you eat? In the periphery there are houses, there is a shack, but there is no work. And here the housing is very expensive.

(Ángela, 37 years old, Peruvian)

In the media discourse, Peruvian immigrants are the maximum embodiment of the usurper of urban space, and the cause of a conflict that would make their expulsion necessary (Heuse, 2004). Peruvian immigration and the problem of squatting are often treated together in the news and other television content, facilitating an interpretation of both phenomena in terms of cause and effect (Carman, 2006: 68). Likewise, the image of the Peruvian is frequently associated with other problematic uses of urban space, such as illegal street commerce and the *boliches*, discotheques frequented by Latin American immigrants that abound in the Abasto area. This makes an important difference in the exposure of these immigrants to gentrification: in addition to the expulsion pressure that affects the entire neighbourhood, there is a specific questioning of the legitimacy of Peruvians to live in the area. The Peruvians, however, proudly claim their long presence in the neighbourhood as a factor that legitimizes them as *de facto* caretakers of this heritage space over three decades. From their point of view, the threat that really affects the neighbourhood is that of financial speculation, and it is the real estate companies that illegitimately usurp the houses in Abasto and the rest of the city.

The real estate companies are taking over all the old houses. It's growing the... how do you say? The real estate speculation. And the old houses are disappearing and everything is being filled with buildings. And they are kicking out the people who have lived in that house for so many years. (...) The rich people are taking over everything in the city. And they destroy the people with less resources. They say: "Let them go to the province. If they can't pay rent, then let them go to the province. The country is big!"

(Ángela, 37 years old, Peruvian)



Peruvians perceive that gentrification harms them in a special way because they are foreign immigrants. Here we observe two recurrent elements: on the one hand, we find a class-based reading, which underlines the pervasive damage that gentrification does to all humble people, regardless of the nationality of each individual; at the same time, however, they also clearly perceive that being immigrants exponentially increases their level of exposure to gentrification. The legal difficulties encountered by undocumented migrants here are added to the pressure exerted by xenophobic discourse against Peruvians and the reluctance of part of the local population to provide them access to housing.

The situation in Argentina, as you will have seen, it is not only peruvians. Every immigrant has the same problem: that they cannot afford to live like the locals. They can't afford to go and rent something, so that you can pay. You can't, because without a guarantor, with a flat or a house, you are nobody.

(Violeta, 43 years old, Peruvian)

Gentrification affects Peruvians as a threat that can take explicit forms of violence. In their accounts of their lives in the neighbourhood, traumatic episodes appear recurrently, generally related to experiences of eviction.

When we were evicted my daughter was 10 years old. I had worked in offices, but I became unemployed and went into depression, and we could no longer pay. And the eviction was very traumatic for my daughter, because she saw the violence, because I resisted and the police were there grabbing me. And then her friends insulted her because she had been left without a home, or even the adults, who are sometimes worse: the parents of her friends. And it's only now, after psychologists, that she's getting over the trauma. And she is 25 years old, and then she was 10.

(Alicia, 46 years old, Peruvian)

The daily life of many Peruvians in Abasto unfolds in a context of speculative pressure, which translates into periodic evictions, demolition of old buildings and announcements of price rises in rents and service provision. For these immigrants, this represents a serious threat to their family strategies, which are based on rapid access to central urban enclaves in search of employment and the support of dense networks of Peruvians in the neighbourhood. Vulnerability to gentrification induces them to join the more precarious local population, which also suffers from its consequences. However, as we shall see, the specific way in which they are made visible and stigmatized sometimes makes coexistence difficult, and results in the simultaneous need to reinforce solidarity networks within the group.

## RESISTANCE STRATEGIES OF PERUVIAN IMMIGRANTS AGAINST GENTRIFICATION

The media stigmatization of Peruvians in Abasto is based on the hyper-visibility of this population in the press and on television, their recurrent association with squatting and the dissemination of negative images, such as the designation of Abasto as the "Porteño Bronx" (Heuse, 2004). All of this has led some Argentine neighbours to internalize prejudices against the presence of Peruvian immigrants in the neighbourhood. The Peruvians interviewed stated that they had at some point suffered xenophobic attitudes on the part of some Argentine neighbours.

Sometimes they point the finger at us immigrants. Like across the street, there was a neighbour who, years ago, used to put grease on the seats so that our children wouldn't sit there. And she shouted at them: "Fucking peruvians, go back to your country!" (...) She hates us. She passes by with a look of indifference, we say hello and she doesn't say hello back, she looks at the children from head to toe with such a disgust....

(Margarita, 46 years old, Peruvian)



However, this type of xenophobic behaviour is always interpreted by Peruvians as anecdotal and minority. In their statements, immigrants describe the neighbourhood as a place of coexistence in which they feel integrated as neighbours, and where confrontations with Argentine residents are always occasional and can be explained by the 'bad neighbour' status of very specific individuals.

The high levels of residential precariousness demand a high degree of internal cohesion from the Peruvian population. The maintenance of dense networks of fellow Peruvians enables the continuous exchange of resources, both material—food, money, accommodation—and immaterial—information, advice, emotional support. Most Peruvians in the neighbourhood constantly participate in organized events that challenge them in a communal way and induce them to take part in spaces, networks and activities explicitly oriented towards support among fellow Peruvians.

When it was Peruvian Mother's Day, we all shared a meal together. In other words, we would cook together and eat. We celebrated Mother's Day, Children's Day, Christmas, among neighbours: it was like a family. (...) Peruvian festivals are also celebrated. For example, on July 28th we go somewhere to celebrate the *Fiestas Patrias* (Peruvian National Holidays), or we would have a Peruvian meal, we would eat with the kids... There were, even though there were discussions, there were also joyful.

(Violeta, 43 years old, Peruvian)

This type of event allows reproducing in Argentina solidarity practices incorporated from their experience in Peruvian society. In order to effectively bring together the Peruvian community in the neighbourhood, these practices activate symbolic references that act as markers of Peruvian cultural identity. The commemoration of dates specifically associated with the country of origin, such as the *Fiestas Patrias* or Peruvian Mother's Day, allow Peruvians to become involved in an autonomous social life, which is made visible and positively affirmed as an expression of a common culture. However, beyond the ethnic connotation of these activities, their organization in Abasto has a practical application and pursues specific objectives. This is especially evident in the *pollada*, a traditional Peruvian system of solidarity fundraising, which consists of the preparation and distribution of a collective meal—usually chicken, hence the name (*pollo* means chicken in Spanish)—in exchange for an economic contribution to defray a larger expense. The recurrent organization of *polladas* in Abasto seems to be an effective mechanism for motivating Peruvians to cooperate in solidarity. However, in this neighbourhood *polladas* are generally used to cover the maintenance costs of the houses, which are abandoned by landlords whose interest in speculating on the value of the land discourages them from investing resources in buildings subject to low rents or squatting.

To organise ourselves we hold a *pollada* among the neighbours, and we raise money with that. Because we only do that meal to do an activity, and to raise money. Pro-health, pro-housing, pro-this or pro-anything but it's to support, it's a special meal. (...) If we had to fix the house, all together. That grille, for example, we all put it up together, the grille on the door. We collected money from each neighbour, how much per head, and we all put it up together.

(Ángela, 37 years old, Peruvian)

The configuration of dense and very active solidarity networks within the group does not mean that Peruvians live on the margins of neighbours of other nationalities. As the advance of gentrification has led to an increase in evictions in the neighbourhood, many Peruvian residents have established relations of active cooperation with Argentine left-wing political parties, trade unions and NGOs involved in the life of the neighbourhood. A clear case in point is the eviction of a *conventillo* inhabited by some 30 families in calle Zelaya, 27 of whom are Peruvian, who decided to organize themselves to resist eviction. These Peruvian families responded positively to the Argentine organizations' offer of help, and some specific individuals even became actively involved in the militancy of these organizations, fully assuming their discourse and objectives. It can be seen in the words of Ana, one of the evicted Peruvian neighbours who is also an active member of the network of left-wing organizations with which they cooperate:

La Brecha is a branch of us, but in La Brecha they are young people, professionals. And in La Ciega they are lawyers, and in Cauce they are university students; and we are mothers, cooperativists and soup kitchen volunteers. It's like a little onion. We the mothers, in the middle, protected by the lawyers, by everyone, and so it's like a little onion. More than anything they are concerned about the needs of poor people, because being professionals they could live very well at home and not waste their time with us. That's what I admire most about them, it strikes me. Because there are people who have money, but they give their time and money to help poor people.

(Ángela, 37 years old, Peruvian)

In Ana's statements it is interesting to note how she combines a commitment to values and objectives common to Argentine militants with a clear awareness of the structural inequality she suffers as a foreigner. Nonetheless, there is an active willingness to coordinate the struggle of Peruvian neighbours with Argentine political and trade union organizations. The fact that many of the Argentines involved in them have a comparatively high socio-educational profile does not translate into a rejection of cooperation, and is even valued as an objective demonstration of the altruistic nature of their militancy. This opinion is common among Peruvians in the neighbourhood, who value positively the support they receive from these organized sectors of local society.

They gave us a hand. They told us: guys, we are here, you are not alone. They were there, the CIBA [Buenos Aires Tenants Association] kids were there. They managed to get toilets, they saw that we were living well, that we were looking for a tent. The guys from Nuevo Encuentro lent us the premises so that we could sleep there on the day of the eviction.

(Violeta, 43 years old, Peruvian)

However, migrants' cooperation with these organizations is not without limits and contradictions. During the fieldwork, several lines of tension were documented that appear recurrently in the relations between Peruvian immigrants and Argentine militants. In general terms, it can be said that Peruvians are reluctant to adhere to codes and organizational structures with which they are unfamiliar, and which are often excessively rigid. For their part, activists in Argentine organizations interpret the Peruvians' reluctance as a symptom of a lack of commitment and militant diligence. These differences can lead to serious disagreements when the gravity of the circumstances exacerbates the sensitivities of the parties. This was the case in one of the cases covered in this research, when in the midst of resistance to an eviction, the Argentine political organizations withdrew, tired of Peruvians abandoning assemblies to hold festive events or interrupting them to cook and eat *polladas*. In these episodes we find traces of the difficult articulation between Peruvians and their native neighbours in the deployment of organized forms of resistance to gentrification.

## CONCLUSION

The Abasto urban renewal project is having a decisive effect both on the appearance of the neighbourhood and on the daily life of all its inhabitants. Gentrification is causing a generalized rise in the cost of living in the neighbourhood and an intensification of legal-administrative control over the ways to inhabit it. The investment of a large amount of financial capital by private agents is accompanied by a parallel investment of cultural, relational and symbolic capital that attempts to generate a stigma on certain uses and certain users of the space, which legitimizes the gentrification action as an exercise in restoring order and rescuing a heritage environment. The initiative of the agents promoting gentrification is largely supported by a political and media discourse that contrives Peruvian migrants as a threat. The Peruvian is characterized as a usurper who jeopardizes the coexistence of neighbours, the value of the properties and the heritage value of the neighbourhood. Beyond the strictly economic logic, gentrification implies a transforma-

tion of urban space that must be legitimized in the discourse. The stigmatization of migrants comes to play a central role in the strategic action of the beneficiaries of urban transformation. In this context, Peruvian migrants living in Abasto occupy a delicate position as in-betweeners, whose bond with their neighbours oscillates between precarious membership of the neighbourhood community and radical exclusion from the national community.

This ambivalent position is projected onto the strategies that Peruvians deploy to cope with the effects of gentrification. On the one hand, there is a reinforcement of intra-group networks, through the visibility of shared cultural references and the reproduction of mutual aid systems that challenge Peruvians as members of a national community. In a context of stigmatization of Peruvians as an external threat to the Argentine community, each Peruvian relies on his or her compatriots to resist the effects of exclusion. But at the same time, this allows the Peruvian community as a whole to dignify their collective image, and symbolically legitimize their presence in Abasto as worthy members of a neighbourhood community committed to the preservation of the neighbourhood.

On the other hand, the shared belonging to the neighbourhood community makes it possible for Peruvians to cooperate with the local population in the deployment of joint strategies of resistance to gentrification. This rapprochement focuses on politicized and organized sectors of Argentine society, and more specifically on political, trade union and non-governmental organizations. Inter-ethnic cooperation is articulated in concrete initiatives and makes it possible for Peruvians and Argentines to converge in common spaces of self-organization. However, this confluence is not without its limits and contradictions. In particular, it is difficult to harmonize the political culture of the Argentine organizations with the organizational forms of the Peruvians, which ultimately reflects a certain difficulty for the immigrants to reconcile two different dynamics: the tendency to organize themselves autonomously among their fellow countrymen and the need to converge and coordinate with other sectors of the neighbourhood community. In any case, the use of the ethnographic method allows us to rescue at first hand the way in which this population experiences the housing crisis, and also the strategies they deploy to confront it. This information should undoubtedly be taken into account in the design of policies that seek to confront the effects of gentrification by involving the populations that suffer from it and making them protagonists in the search for solutions.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest has been declared by the author.

## PEER REVIEW

The peer review history for this article is available at <https://publons.com/publon/10.1111/imig.13068>.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Imigração e conflito urbano: o direito à cidade diversa em Latino-América e na Península Ibérica [Immigration and urban conflict: the right to cities of diversity in Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula] (Ref. SFRH / BPD / 85,438 / 2012).

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