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Contested identities and ethnicities in the marketplace: Sofia's city centre between the East and the West of Europe¹

Stoyanka Andreeva Eneva

Introduction

Popularly known as the Women's Market, the central market of Sofia was built at the end of the nineteenth century. There are different versions about the origins of this name; According to Kostentzeva (2008) it was one of the few public spaces that could be freely and autonomously accessed by women during the early twentieth century. Given the long and intense bargaining processes when buying, and the use of this space as a meeting point, women spent most of the day doing the grocery shopping.

Though the location of this market has been slightly modified, it still can be found in the central area of the city. The appearance of the building has also changed through the years, but it has maintained a certain level of informality and ability to exist with little administrative regulation. However, local authorities have attempted to eliminate these features through a series of interventions implemented in 2006 and 2014. The first of these initiatives aimed at reorganizing most of the market stalls through the installation of PVC roofing panels. The measures implemented in 2014 adversely affected the layout of the space, since they eliminated all of the remaining open-air shops, which were replaced by the construction of five wooden buildings housing 90 kiosks intended for the provision of services and non-perishable food products.

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Figure 1: Part of the 'Women's Market' after it was reorganized in 2006 (Source: Stoyanka Andreeva Eneva

These two interventions attempted to modernize the market; however, the second measure – apart from revitalizing this area through the creation of new stores and restaurants – was marked by the 'Europeanization' of heritage, a change in the

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commercial offer and, even more starkly, the tenants. The racialization of poverty, illegal trading activities and crime were used to present this market and its neighbouring areas as a problematic and undesirable space.

Markets are often associated with cultural diversity, since they offer unique spaces for the convergence of diverse cultural groups (Watson, 2009). However, the emergence of exacerbated stereotypes, hostilities and ethnic and/or social boundaries (Thuen, 1999) can prevent this relationship from being fluid and equal. In this sense, this chapter – through the study of the central market of Sofia – aims to place ethnic identities as a key element of daily activities within the context of markets.

The opening of borders in Eastern Europe in the 1990s not only affected personal lives but also commercial routes such as the series of networks used by trade and people during the socialist era (Apostolova, 2014). Likewise, markets offered employment opportunities and national and social mobility for some ethnic minorities, thus becoming havens for socially- and spatially-excluded groups. In this sense, one of the main characteristics of the Women's Market during the 1990s was its association with concepts such as mobility and the possibility of finding affordable and rare goods that were difficult to find in regular stores. This was important in a period marked by shortage, inflation and low-paid employment. This situation led to the emergence of new stores located beyond the limits of the market: the opening of shops in the first floors of neighbouring buildings and the arrival of the first Arab businesses in adjacent streets.

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The increased number of stores and the ethnic composition of dwellers were not regarded as significant social issues until the late 2000s (Venkov, 2012). Then, the perception and definition of this market modified significantly in terms of the revaluation of the urban space and the adoption of capitalist-based trade, consumption and urban development models. At the same time, citizens, administrative decision-makers and the media insisted on the need to refurbish and modernize the market through a 'Europeanization' process; back then, Sofia's chief architect described the market as an 'unacceptable oriental landscape' (Stoyanova, 2008).

The general objective of this chapter, therefore, is to explore the connections that exist between the conflictive construction of identities and the gentrification processes promoted by the administrative sphere (which are supported by a group of local dwellers). This text focuses on the area used by the market and its surrounding areas to analyse the different opinions of relevant actors about ethnic identities and the multiculturalism of central Sofia. To this end, three different observation spaces were identified: the area that houses fruit and vegetable stores, which was refurbished in 2006, the new food kiosks built in 2014 and Tzar Simeon Street, where the vast majority of businesses are run by Arab or Central Asian nationals (most of them from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran and Lebanon).

The specific objectives of this chapter are associated with the analysis of the different points of view about the cultural diversity of the market and its transformation in recent years. Special attention is given to the different opinions of relevant actors, which range from the nostalgic search for authenticity and Balkan culture to the selective adoption of a 'European' approach through the implementation of gentrification projects and the

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removal of certain ethnic groups from the central area of the city. In this sense this text understands sociability within the market context as a complex and constantly changing process, which may lead to the emergence of identity-related conflicts.

Different ethnography-based qualitative research techniques were used for the development of this chapter. This research was divided into different fieldwork stages – the last being carried out from May to June, 2016 – involving participant observation, interviews and collection of secondary data. Different interviews were conducted with customers, traders and workers of the market. The last of these stages was mainly focused on the workers and owners of the businesses located along Tzar Simeon Street, which is famous for its Arab stores. The inclusion of this street – which is not part of the market – is based on the negative opinions different interviewees have expressed about this space, particularly with a bias against certain ethnicities. Such a trend has increased over the last years in parallel with the increasing numbers of Arab immigrants and their visible presence in the area.

It is worth mentioning the sense of 'not-belonging' to the market felt by some individuals who declined to participate in these interviews. In contrast to the latter, and despite the indifference and hostile opinions about the market, participant observation enabled the identification of support and solidarity practices, or at least tolerance, towards these groups.

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Understanding the markets of the 'East of the West'²

Eastern Europe has a wide variety of markets, which are defined according to geographic, economic and cultural conditions. Despite this, it is still possible to identify some common characteristics among these spaces. Different authors (Sik and Wallace, 1999; Polese and Prigarin, 2013; Hüwelmeier, 2015; Verdery, 1993) agree on referring to markets as key elements within the economic, political and social changes undergone by the Eastern Bloc since 1989. However, these markets have played different roles since their proliferation in the 1990s and they are now facing a stage of vulnerability and decline that may be connected with the neglect and renovation cycle common to commercial gentrification processes (González and Waley, 2013). On the other hand, it is worth noting the role played by the ethnic and Oriental characteristics attributed to Eastern markets. Before exploring this case study, this section analyses some of the specific features of Eastern European markets and certain characteristics they share with their Western counterparts.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the production and redistribution of food in the Eastern Bloc were controlled by the state, with the only exception being the small-scale production and sale of agricultural products (Kaneff, 2002). Food stores and the businesses located in markets were owned by the State and administered through public agencies and represented the official provisioning system. There were also some specialized and exclusive stores (Tasheva, 2016). However, Verdery (1996) highlights the importance of the presence of a 'second economy', which is described as a series of informal/illegal strategies where private individuals produced and/or sold goods and services by using the official means of production and resources provided by the State. This author also stresses the ethnic aspect of these economic exchanges, since regular customers not only belonged to the same circle of friends, but also to the same ethnic group. As for markets, this second economy operated according to a series of

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assumptions, some of them being the private production of agricultural products that were secretly sold to the closest circle of customers. The fall of the Eastern Bloc did not mean the end of this type of economy; on the contrary, this secret practice gave rise to the proliferation of markets and street markets during the 1990s and 2000s. Such a phenomenon was fuelled by trade liberalization, a shortage of work and the combination of poor quality of life/ lack of opportunities and the progressive adoption of a consumerist lifestyle (Sik and Wallace, 1999). These circumstances allowed the expansion of regular markets and the spontaneous and informal emergence of new markets; in both cases, they used the public spaces built during the socialist era such as squares, green areas or monuments (Petrova, 2011). This period was also characterized by a certain *laissez faire* approach adopted by the state, which was gradually withdrawing from production and redistribution activities. There was a high demand for affordable products and interest in generating income through the leasing or subleasing of commercial spaces.

The development and expansion of markets and private trade activities in Eastern Europe are regarded as a post-socialist phenomena. However, our bibliographical research has shown that the study of markets in Easter Europe has tended to associate them with the concept of the 'bazaar economy', coined by Geertz (1978) much more often than the concept of 'market'. Geertz's work on the bazar economy during the 1970s refereed to a specific form of market organization in countries such as Morocco and Indonesia. Hüwelmeier (2013, p. 52) in her work on postsocialist markets in Berlin, Warsaw and Prague chose this term to reinforce the idea proposed by Geertz, who defined bazaars as a 'distinctive system of social relationships centring around the production and consumption of goods and services'. In his work, Geertz identifies three major characteristics of bazaars: lack of information, customer retention and bargaining. However, these features are not exclusive to the global South. For instance, the audiovisual work conducted by Robles and Monreal (2008) in different markets located

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in Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona allows us to observe some of the characteristics identified by Geertz. Despite the formal, regulated and institutionalized nature of these markets, the daily activities recorded by the researchers show frequent trader-customer interactions that begin with the latter asking for the price or quality of products due to the lack of information. This audiovisual document also shows the flexibility of traders on the price of goods – an action reminiscent of bargaining – and the offering of discounts or gifts to retain customers.

However, within the context of Western Europe, this type of informality is not associated with the concept of bazaar, which is generally used in case studies about the reality of markets in post-socialist scenarios in cities such as Odessa (Polese and Prigarin, 2013) or Warsaw (Hüwelmeier, 2015). This practice defines the approach of social sciences to markets through the establishment of a division between East and West; such a method is based on the clear distinction described by Geertz: 'Bazaar, that Persian word of uncertain origin which has come to stand in English for the oriental market' (Geertz, 1978, p. 29).

The use of the concept of bazaar to refer to Eastern European markets might be interpreted as a form of orientalism which according to Said's definition refers to the process of 'dealing with the Orient by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it' (Said, 1979, p. 23). The association of Eastern European markets with the concept of bazaar and notions such as informality, uncertainty, clientelism and contrasting them with the more regulated markets in the West – supposedly governed by supply and demand and free competition models – can be seen itself as a form of orientalism. This is where the concept of

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Balkanism emerges, as a particular form of exoticism applied to the Balkans and its history, collective image and proximity to the Orient. According to Todorova (2009, p. 15): 'It is, thus, not an innate characteristic of the Balkans that bestows on it the air of mystery but the reflected light of the Orient. One is tempted to coin a new Latin phrase: 'Lux Balcanica est umbra Orientis'' [The light of the Balkans is the shadow of the Orient].

Despite the differences in terms of the organization, operation and understanding of Eastern markets, it is still possible to observe some similarities with their Western European counterparts. On the one hand, and in the same vein as previous cases in this book, it is possible to identify a certain 'devaluation' of markets as spaces for daily shopping and socialising. Within the context of a broader trend, which is associated with the transformation of consumption models and social networks, shopping centres are emerging as new spaces for leisure and social interaction (Sazonova, 2014). At the same time, new life has been breathed into markets through the organization of events such as organic and eco-fairs and farmers' markets, which are intended to revitalize these spaces by disguising consumption as a unique leisure experience. Part of this trend is also associated with neo-traditionalism and the appeal to customer's emotions through self-identification with certain traditional products associated with the national identity.

The decline of markets may be related to the general arrival of supermarket chains and their marketing campaigns, which have been adapted and transformed over recent years. Initially, supermarkets promoted the consumption of western products as desirable; today, however, major retail chains have adopted a more sensitive approach, and offer

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products tailored to each country or region (see for example an interview with Lidl Bulgaria's CEO, Capital.bg, 2016). The current strategy aims to generate nostalgia for traditional products or encourage experimentation and fusion between culinary cosmopolitanism and exotic ingredients.

As in the case of the other cities analysed in this book, this allows us to identify a double trend. On the one hand there is the re-emergence of events, fairs and 'conventional' or 'strip' commercial centres, which are targeted at the middle class and are built with the aim to recover the central area of cities for leisure activities; and, on the other hand, there are traditional markets, which are increasingly framed as obsolete, not only in terms of place, but also in terms of consumption, association and economic activity.

The redevelopment of the Women's Market in Sofia

This section offers a brief timeline of the transformations undergone by the central market of Sofia since the 1990s. These changes are not only related to infrastructure but also to the modification of symbolic spaces, especially in terms of space perception. In this case it is important to identify when and how the market began to emerge as a social issue, which went from being a needed and useful space to becoming the 'ghetto' or the 'ulcer' of central Sofia (this how it is commonly referred to by the media, political officials and users of Internet forums).

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During the 1990s, the Women's Market was defined by the characteristics associated with the boom and expansion of markets in post-socialist cities, which emerged as the consequence of the shortage of formal employment, the adoption of consumption as a lifestyle and the destigmatization of trade as a private profit-making activity (Sik and Wallace, 1999; Kaneff, 2002). This space also served as a haven for excluded ethnic minorities, which were offered employment opportunities and inclusion. It is important not to idealize or attempt to identify harmonious and fluid social interactions; however, attention should be given to the fact that vendors, customers and poor individuals from different ethnic origins had also the right to remain and belong to a space in central Sofia through activities such as work, residence or education (in the case of the children of vendors).

In 2005, a group of neighbours founded a citizens' committee for the purpose of establishing a dialogue with the local administration on the reduction of the market's size. According to a letter sent to different institutions, this group expressed its concern about the expansion of the market and the negative consequences of such an action on the use of public space, the quality of life and the image of the neighbourhood. During its first years of existence, this 'Vuzrajidane' committee, as it was known, had no significant impact. Different measures were taken such as the collection of signatures and the reorganization of the structure of the group; however, all requests made by the committee were unsuccessful. It was not until 2010 that a strategic alliance with mayoral candidates³ enabled this group to achieve visibility and popularity. The committee held a series of meetings that were attended by local politicians and intellectuals; as a result, the opinions of this group about the condition of the market were heard and further disseminated.⁴ Venkov (2012) analyses this conflict from the point of view of the success of a citizen participation campaign. However, the stigmatization of the market would not have been possible unless the vendors were categorized as non-citizens.

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This can be observed in the change of attitude of the media and users of Internet forums. Until 2004, the information available on the Internet was related to tips on how and where to find specific products and stores. However, since 2006, and especially since 2010, an increasing number of articles published by mainstream newspapers began to associate the market with crime, pollution and the inability of ethnic minorities to adapt themselves to what was regarded as acceptable and/or desirable for a European capital such as Sofia. During the last six years, the words 'ghetto' and 'orientality'⁵ have been frequently used by the media to refer to the market. Some relevant examples are an interview given by the mayoress of Sofia to BTV, one of the main television channels of Bulgaria, entitled 'Women's Market, a ghetto in the center of Sofia' (Btv, 2011) or the article 'Life in the Women's Market, between a ghetto and a mall' (webcafe.bg, 2014), which discussed the effects of the renovation process in 2014, published on Webcafe, an emerging portal on current issues and leisure. On the other hand, the headlines pointed at the contradiction between the goal of Sofia to become a model of European city and its current reality: 'The markets: so much Orient within a supposedly European Sofia' (Sega.bg, 2010). Likewise, the Roma population has been frequently associated with concepts such as illegality, fraud and deception like in this article, entitled 'The Roma people control the 'duty-free' tobacco business within the context of the street selling of non-tax-stamped cigarettes'.⁶ This is a process similar to that described by Semi (2008) in the case of Turin, where bad economic practices are intrinsically related to migrants because of their foreign status. The chief architect of the city also supports this type of discourse by referring to the 'oriental aspect of Sofia's centre as 'unacceptable'.

These circumstances led to the approval of the renovation project in 2012, within a context marked by a combination of negative discourses on space (promoted by *respectable* neighbours), politicians with electoral aspirations and the intervention of the

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city council's chief architect, who has decision-making power on urban transformation. The incorporation into the EU and the discourses on the 'return to Europe' had also a great impact on the perception of the identity of the city. Both the local administration and private investors aim to turn Sofia into a city model and a European centre through the implementation of an elitist and exclusionary project. The exchange value of land and real estate interests in the area surrounding the market are prevailing over the value of land use through the stigmatization of poverty and its association with ethnic-related issues. An example of this is the list of requests submitted by the citizens' committee to the City Council, which demands the rights of proprietors and a duty for the administration to increase the value of real estate around the market area. Equally essential was the agreement on heritage demands, which aimed at recovering the old spirit of Sofia through the rehabilitation of dwellings located around the market. 'Rescuing Old Sofia' has been a recurrent topic on the press and a concern for different campaigns and pieces of research (Fading Sofia, n.d.).

The popularity gained by the discourses on the marginalization of the Women's Market is also associated with the emergence of xenophobic parties (Ghodsee, 2008). This phenomenon is characterized by the convergence of concepts such as nationalism and 'Europeanism' which, according to Latcheva (2010), gave rise to a new sense of belonging and national pride through the exclusion of certain groups. In this way, wide sectors of the population – most of them well-represented in the market – are symbolically deprived of their national citizenship and European status. Therefore, the voices, lives and images of vendors and customers who want to preserve the market are practically ignored by the media and city decision-making processes. Similar to the discussion around the redevelopment of Queen's Market in London (Dines, 2007 and González and Dawson, this book), the renovation of the Women's Market does not include the human dimension.

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The images that the planners developed regarding the renovated market show how architects have come to ignore the habitability conditions of the spaces they design and also represent the targeting of new users for the future market. There was little information available for traders and customers on the reconstruction of this space and there were no debates on this problem other than those held by the citizen committee; The local administration remained silent on this issue.

An exception was the debate organized by the architects of *Grupa Grad* (City Group), which took place in the market. With no rules other than respect, each participant expressed their opinions and doubts about the future of the market as may be seen in the video they recorded (Grupa Grad, 2015). Despite failing to stop the reconstruction project and the lack of a genuine dialogue with members of the local administration – who did not participate in the debate –, this event successfully managed to spread the personal and social situations of affected people and the different interests involved in the future of the market.

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TITLE: Part of the 'Women's Market' showing the new kiosks which replaced the former market stalls removed in 2013 (Photograph: Stoyanka Andreeva Eneva)

Finally, the reconstruction process was carried out during the 2013-2014 period and, unlike the former open-air stores, the new kiosks were used for different purposes. The sale of fruit and vegetables was banned in the new segment of the market; this measure forced former traders to move to other areas of the market or sell new types of goods. On the other hand, the increase in rents also caused the displacement of traders. Since

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the price per square metre of the new kiosks was higher than that of former shops, some traders were no longer able to stay in the market. These pieces of evidence reveal the presence of a gentrification process: an increase in the price of leasing fees, displacement of traders, physical renovation and the transformation of most commercial spaces into recreational areas. There was also a symbolic transformation which took place through the creation of a discourse on the 'new and European aspect' of the market. However, it is difficult to find positive opinions about the renovation of this space from traders, customers and the media – who firstly created a sense of urgency about the reconstruction of the market . The media criticized the delays, cost and aesthetic result of the project; however, criticism was also levelled at the inability of the project to 'civilize' the area; There are still articles warning of the insecurity of the neighbourhood and revealing that undesirable people have merely moved to the Arab shopping area, which is referred to as 'Little Beirut' or 'Little Baghdad' in order to highlight ethnic identities that do not fall within what is 'normally' regarded as Bulgarian. Finally, the media have expressed a growing concern about the destruction of the market in terms of socialization and daily shopping activities and the subsequent loss of employment for highly vulnerable people (Dnevik.bg, 2014). Soon after the reconstruction, recurrent headlines appeared, such as 'Neither for women, nor a market' (Capital.bg, 2014) and 'Could the modification of functions lead to the end of the Market?' (Bnr.bg, 2014).

The Women's Market and the role of ethnic diversity in its daily operation

Sociability is one of the characteristics that most attention has drawn within the context of the study of markets. However, when it comes to ethnic and social diversity, there are different opinions about the potential of markets to encourage social and cultural exchange. According to Hann (1992), the open and informal nature of these spaces

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enables the convergence of individuals from different backgrounds; However, such a mixture is not enough to evolve into cohabitation. Smith (1965) points out that the multiculturalism of markets may be referred to as 'mutual avoidance'; on the other hand, Watson (2009) suggests that these circumstances promote situations of 'rubbing along'.

In relation to these presumptions, the following points analyse the role of ethnic diversity not only in the functional operation of the Women's Market, but also in its capacity to create a multicultural space within the context of a gentrification process. This diversity however is expressed in very different and sometimes contradictory ways::

1. The market is a relatively peaceful and tolerant space in terms of the availability of a wide array of affordable products; in other words, vendors are not discriminated against, as they offer economic benefits. An example of this is Adam, who purchases products for his restaurant from Arab, Roma, Turkish and *ethnically neutral* Bulgarian traders. He buys from the market, serves to Arab traders and acts as neutral actor because of his religious observance, language proficiency and likeability. Due to his ability to get along with others and his interesting life story, this person is frequently interviewed about the issues and the future of the market and its surrounding area, thus becoming an informal spokesperson.
2. The self-exoticisation of Balkan culture expressed by the interaction with others which is manifested in the pre-redevelopment calls for preservation and defence of the market as well as in current feelings of nostalgia that the market conveys. This type of sense of belonging towards the market is not necessarily linked to the possibility of finding different and affordable products, but also with its lively atmosphere, which is described by Venkov (2012, p.10) as a form of 'autochthonous, typical and Balkan exoticism'. This perception of the market is common among the post-1989 generation.

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These are people who have travelled, studied or worked in different parts of Europe or the US and associate this market with regional and national authenticity and self-representation. Despite not being part of their lives or daily activities, the market reflects their Balkan, Slavic and non-western identity and represents an opportunity for them to identify themselves with these ethnicities.

3. The emergence of neo-traditionalism: In this case the market is regarded as a picturesque place where it is possible to find traditional Bulgarian goods and artisans associated with activities such as pottery, crafts and food and cosmetic products. As of May 2016, the 'normatively Bulgarian' nature of this space can be easily identified in the reconstructed area. Some examples are the dairy store *Bulgaricus Bg* and the stores named after the surnames of their owners – Gavrilovi, Simeonovi –, which is a measure intended to reinforce the local identity and presence in the area. The objective of these initiatives is to represent authenticity, which is also reinforced through the concentration and visibility of different craft and folklore stores in the central segment of the new market. This new approach – targeted at tourists through the display of graphic images of Bulgarian and traditional culture – is a key element of the renovation project. The creation of a pedestrian street and the opening of cafes and craft shops was the pinnacle of this project, prompting the media to make enthusiastic comparisons between this city and other European capitals. As for the recovery of old Sofia, there is *KvARTal*, an urban art festival that evokes the old spirit of the neighbourhood; however, despite being held in adjacent streets, this event's map ignores the presence of the market.

4. The emerging proliferation of minority ethnic businesses. In this context, importance is given to cake shops, bakeries and Arab food shops, which are growing in popularity among local dwellers, regarded as 'pioneers' (Smith, 2012) as they dare to explore this part of the city. There is also the *Multi Culti Map* project, which aims at creating positive opinions about the ethnic and culinary diversity of the area. This initiative is based on the identification of restaurants run by foreigners, especially in the city in Sofia, and is not intended to create a culinary map of the area but to choose different establishments according to the project's team impressions and preferences. In general

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terms, this map is targeted at Internet-savvy and tolerant young users who enjoy cosmopolitan cuisine. Likewise, attention should be given to the comments of some of the media – mostly targeted at upper-middle-income users with cosmopolitan tastes – concerning the market and its surrounding areas. The latter is related to the search for exoticism and the use of headlines such as ‘A scent of saffron and nostalgia’ (Capital.bg, 2015) or descriptions that compare the market area with the streets of Havana ‘with its old cars and cobblestones and a little reminiscence of Istanbul’ (Webcafe.bg, 2015) in an article which portrays some of the men working on the Women's Market

The above classification shows the different opinions expressed by the media, neighbours and clients; however, the situation of the market according to traders and workers can be referred to in terms of coexistence rather than cohabitation among different ethnic groups (Giménez and Malgesini, 1997). This is mostly due to the lack of communication among these communities. There is practically no relationship between the market and its adjacent streets dominated by Arab stores. All Arab interviewees – either workers or traders – live in other neighbourhoods. If we consider the capital city as a whole, it is normal for some individuals to live away from their workplaces; however, it is important to pay attention to the stigmatization of the zone as a residential space.

Stores are mostly perceived as workplaces and, to a lesser extent, as social spaces. On the other hand, streets are used for socialising purposes, as these are places where people meet to interact during breaks, when looking for employment or just to hang out. This type of sociability and street-based leisure (‘urban bustle’ as discussed in Chapter 11 in this book on markets in Quito) tends to be stigmatized within the context of the modern, European and efficient city model, where the non-commercial use of streets is

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constantly frowned upon (Hernández and Tutor, 2015). However, these relationships are limited and locally-based. Apart from Adam, who purchases products for his restaurant in fruit and vegetable stores and neighbouring butchers' shops, the rest of Arab men who took part in interviews have no relationship with the market. Their routines do not include activities such as doing the grocery shopping or cooking, as they go to Turkish or Arab restaurants, like Adam's restaurant. This situation and the distrust generated by people speaking in other languages hinders the building of relationships between this group and local dwellers. Therefore, they meet among their own countrymen and do not feel welcomed or encouraged to speak with local people and thus aspire to delegitimize the area and fight against gentrification.

On the other hand, high staff turnover (described by Adam and Carlos⁷) hinders the creation of a sense of identity and permanence or the collective association of traders. Having said that, the case of Barcelona demonstrates that illegal trade can generate collective organisation and politicisation in protest at the imposition of barriers, the Foreign Nationals Act, racism and labour injustice⁸. However, in this case study, and according to Venkov (2012), traders were not able to agree on common goals in order to fight against the reconstruction project. This has been due largely to the multiple tensions between discriminated and oppressed groups such as the Roma, Turkish and Arab people and old migrants or between economic and political actors.

Despite these particularities, it is possible to draw some parallels with the other markets described in this book in terms of the expulsion of diversity in cases where it is considered that there are no profitable or beneficial results. Gentrification processes do not usually start with the direct intention to attack and destroy markets, but to create

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new tastes, consumption habits and desire within the context of a city that has turned these spaces into undesirable objects. In Sofia, concepts such as disorder, noise and informality are now regarded as atypical, shameful and unworthy of an EU member country. In this way, the topophobic discourses justified and demanded the displacement of traders, poor people and individuals from other ethnicities. However, the reconstruction of the market represented an architectural quick-fix measure that failed to solve or even address the social problems of the area.

Conclusions

Eastern European markets have undergone a series of transformations over the last 25 years, from an initial proliferation and intense activity associated with informality to decay and neglect on the part of the local administration, including the current impetus for transformation and building European capitals and global, competitive cities that have no space for the informality and precariousness of surviving markets. This last phase has been defined by the re-emergence of nationalism and the development of a discourse and a sense of belonging to Europe that excludes those who do not fit with the national prototype.

This chapter has reviewed some trends related to the perception of ethnic diversity in markets by using the city of Sofia as a case study. The market is a space where different emotions such as rejection, fear, fascination and culinary exoticism converge. In this sense, the main contribution of this chapter is the analysis of the role of ethnic diversity within a context marked by the vulnerability of the market. Special attention is given to

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how the identity of people has been used to elaborate the image of a market that went from being useful, essential and characteristic of Sofia to an undesirable, avoidable and dispensable place. European aspirations, an increasing nationalism and the impetus of a group of neighbours to recreate 'the old Sofia' constructed a discourse centred on the urgency of transforming a central area of the city that has not been properly countered by market traders and customers.

However, even after the destruction of the market and the construction of modern buildings that could not be used by former traders as the result of their expensive leasing fees, diversity is still there, hidden among the borders of the new market area.

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¹ Original in Spanish translated by Juan Pablo Henríquez Prieto

² This title was taken from the book *East of the West: A country in stories*, written by Bulgarian author Miroslav Penkov. In this work, the author thinks through and rethinks Bulgaria according to his migratory experience in the United States.

³ Meeting between local neighbors and municipal candidate Proshko Proshkov, who supported the destruction of the market. As for local vendors, the candidate said 'these people will leave after the completion of the reconstruction process. They will not feel comfortable within a clean environment'.

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grvN_67CqPM

⁴ Collection of signatures for the reconstruction of the market. Text put out by the citizen committee and published on the website of one of the political parties that supported such an initiative. Mayoral candidate Proshko Proshkov is a member of this party. Source: <https://mysb.wordpress.com/2010/04/29/dsb2010042901/>

⁵ Interview with the chief architect, who referred to the old market as an 'ulcer' and promotes the renovation of such a space by stating that there is no need to discuss the implementation of this initiative since 'we have all seen the same market over the years.' Source: <http://focus-news.net/opinion/2014/06/08/28712/arh-petar-dikov-rekonstruktsiyata-na-zhenski-pazar-shte-doprinese-za-po-dobriya-oblik-na-sofiya.html>
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⁶ Roma people control the 'duty-free' tobacco business within the context of the street selling of non-tax-stamped cigarettes. Source:

<http://www.segabg.com/article.php?sid=2009081700040001401>

⁷ A Peruvian trader who has been worked in the market for more than 20 years.

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⁸ An excellent example of this is the Popular Union of Street Vendors of Barcelona.