

Review Article

Gentrification in Latin America: Overview and Critical Analysis

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This paper offers a critical review and interpretation of gentrification in Latin American cities. Applying a flexible methodology, it examines enabling conditions associated with societal regime change and local contingencies to determine its presence, nature, extent, and possibilities. Questioning the uncritical transfer of constructs such as gentrification from the Global North to the Global South, the paper advocates analyses of mediating structures and local conditions to determine their applicability and possible variations. Overall, the review questions the feasibility of self-sustained, large scale gentrification in central areas of the region's cities today tying it to each city's level of incorporation into global circuits and the role of local governments. Rather than an orthodox hypothesis testing, this is an exercise in interpretation that calls for nuanced approaches to the study of urban restructuring in cities of the global South.

1. Gentrification in Latin America: Overview and Critical Analysis

When I started studying urban restructuring in Latin America I examined it from perspectives crafted in the North.¹ Although noticing similarities, the more I tried to fit Latin America's realities to these lenses, the more I wondered about their applicability. This was the case for gentrification; although, at first glance, initiatives to turn old downtowns into heritage destinations, transformation of fishing towns into tourist havens and projects including the clearance of former manufacturing plants or railway yards might be considered gentrification, application of the construct to every instance of rent extraction can stretch it so far as to make it meaningless. Then, I wondered if concepts such as gentrification applied equally to all places and circumstances. After much thought and many exchanges, by distinguishing between conditions of possibility or enabling conditions applicable across the board and contingent factors addressing specific contexts I found a way to keep constructs general enough to facilitate universality while providing the flexibility to accommodate changing conditions and local circumstances. This paper overviews gentrification in Latin America from this perspective; while the approach requires significant

work, when applied to evidence from different cities in different countries, it shows much potential, as illustrated here. To explore the presence and nature of gentrification in the region and the extent to which it duplicates trends and forms of the North, I gathered as much research and evidence as possible on centrally located areas of disinvestment (where gentrification started in the North), visited sites undergoing redevelopment, and discussed the issue with local academics and practitioners. Still, available evidence on actually existing gentrification in those sites appeared inconclusive further justifying flexible explanations addressing both the challenges involved in gentrification drives in Latin American cities and the potential for gentrification to become the self-sustained process it is in the North. Multiple iterations between existing theory, available evidence, and observations suggested the approach and analysis offered here; hopefully, this work will inspire other researchers to further explore the relationship between gentrification and local conditions. Overall, the paper questions the feasibility of self-sustained large scale gentrification throughout Latin American cities while suggesting that its presence, scale, and form are a function of the city's penetration by and role in the new accumulation regime. Furthermore, evidence suggests that, rather than emerging from the local dynamics of restructuring,

gentrification has been launched by governments with the assistance of international agencies pushing restructuring to create new markets and advance formulas of urban competitiveness in the South. Although Latin America is a vast and disparate region,² colonization and neocolonization shaped it into a single tributary polity and, as such, has been subjected to common policies and mandates last illustrated by the Washington consensus. Under the circumstances, analyses treating it as a unit are justified provided that they make room for actually existing differences and historical trajectories, as I try here.

2. Tracing Gentrification³

Although a major element of urban restructuring [1, 2], gentrification has been complex and controversial having emerged and being conceptualized first in the North; as both the process and the concept gained standing, researchers applied the experiences of the North to cities in the South without paying much attention to their applicability and contextuality. This paper departs from the work of authors such as Beauregard [3, page 40] and Smith [4] to differentiate between the structural core of gentrification or universal *conditions of possibility* (*enabling conditions*) and *contingent factors* to determine its actual presence, forms, and possibilities. The first refers to factors that make it possible and that, as many authors agree, resulted from societal regime shift and the associated restructuring of cities; here I consider factors that are critical in the production of space, namely, rent production, reproduction, and capture; production of gentrifiers and gentrifiable areas; and class displacement/replacement. I argue that regime shift neither has the same intensity nor occurs in the same way in different contexts as it has to contend with preexisting regimes and local constraints and, for the case of Latin America, different political economies or formations. Thus, gentrification may appear at different times and in different forms in different locales. *Contingent/conjunctural* factors refer to place-specific dimensions and regimes accounting for variations by geographies (and times).

For enabling conditions, I draw first on Lefebvre's [5] association of restructuring with regime shift and his claim that each mode of production (and societal regime of accumulation)⁴ generates its own space. This shift occurred principally in the North in the decade of the 1970s, consolidating in the 1980s, and migrating elsewhere through the actions and influences of the North on tributary economies.⁵ Lefebvre [5, pages 325 & 346] describes it in this way:

...capitalism, and more generally development, have demonstrated that their survival depends on their being able to extend their reach to space in its entirety: to the *land* (in the process absorbing the towns and agriculture...but also...creating new sectors altogether—noticeably that of leisure); to the *underground* resources lying deep in the earth and beneath the sea bed...and lastly to what might be called the *above ground*.

This development has indeed offered relief to a capitalism suffering from the fact that the high organic composition of capital in the most advanced countries tends to reduce necessary labor time...and therefore to threaten the minimal necessary level of available manpower; this situation further frees an enormous quantity of social time (...) as well as making for colossal surplus production, excess (floating) capital, and so on. Not that the production of space is solely responsible for the survival of capitalism...Rather, it is the overall situation—spatial practice in its entirety—that has saved capitalism from extinction.

“Spatial practice in its entirety” includes reorganization of the industry of space around finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE); as the financial industry became dominant amassing the largest exchange value ever, space became one of its main tools while securitization sped up circulation, deregulation made room for highly speculative financial instruments, and the state brought all forces together around a new developmentalist agenda and form (governance). In Lefebvre's words,

[T]he realization of surplus value...takes place through a worldwide banking network as part of the abstract relations...between financial agencies and institutions. [It] has, so to speak, been “deterritorialized” (347).

Today, the state and its bureaucratic and political apparatuses intervene continually in space, and make use of space in its instrumental aspect in order to intervene at all levels and through every agency of the economic realm. Consequently, (global) social practice and political practice tend to join forces in spatial practice, so achieving a certain cohesiveness if not a logical coherence (378).

With this shift, manufacturing production moved to the side and city building and rebuilding around high services took its place. Borrowing from Slater's [6, page 189] claim that housing is “the major vehicle of capital accumulation” and from authors tying gentrification to regime shift/urban restructuring (e.g., [3, 7]), I posit that gentrification is a major expression and instrument of accumulation under the current regime.

Along these lines, Harvey and Wachsmuth [8] note that, as returns on production declined below average with the crisis of Fordism, a mass of capital shifted from manufacturing to finances and to the secondary circuit of assets (the built environment) assisted by the financial industry's deregulation that set the ground for new speculative practices in the production of space; these changes generated a boom in built environments turning around disinvested into gentrification areas, a process Smith [4] tied to rent appropriation that reenacted built environments through the linked processes

of accumulation and annihilation (see [9, 10]); this appropriation fits Harvey's [11, 12] definition of the new regime as "accumulation by dispossession" historically and strategically mobilized to advance growth (as suburbanization did before).⁶

Closely associated with this is class displacement that Glass [13] made the defining feature of gentrification.⁷ Although authors such as Freeman [14], Hamnett [15], and Vigdor [16] built their careers by denying displacement,⁸ anybody examining the profile of residents before and after gentrification can verify the class substitution involved (e.g., [17]). Displacement is actually the main source of contention as residents struggle to keep the place-based support systems they rely on [18–21]. Some authors actually include displacement of manufacturing in the gentrification list due to the indirect displacement it causes via higher rents and property values [22–24].

The next enabling factor is the production of gentrifiable areas and gentrifiers. I draw here on Beauregard's [3, page 51] conditions for gentrification to occur: "production of the potential gentry," of "potentially gentrifiable neighborhoods," of the "potentially gentrified" and "facilitators or active agents" and their interventions; together, they explain "why only certain inner-city areas with inexpensive housing opportunities occupied by the "powerless" become gentrified" and others do not. For him, "All of these agents, inclinations and forces must come together in specific spatial locations." (53) (See also [4, page 68].) Along these lines, testing demographic, ecological, structural, and political-economic interpretations nationally, London et al. [25] associated gentrification with the size of the baby boom cohort, a strong corporate presence, and local actors with the capacity to make it happen.

Thus, to study gentrification in nontraditional contexts, I suggest starting with regime shift and corresponding enabling conditions to then identify contingencies mediating, bringing in, and shaping it in different localities. The next step is to examine interventions turning possibility into actually existing gentrification. Last are symbolic systems legitimizing/selling gentrification—e.g., through rationales of progress, heritage, culture, excitement, competitiveness, or inevitability (see [26, 27]).

I illustrate this approach⁹ by examining briefly the Latin American experience both generally (conditions and possibilities) and through cases that bring up contingent factors to then determine the applicability of the term to the region's cities and possible variations. This review is based on research by Latin American academics along with my own and verifications, reflections, or additional considerations resulting from my visits to sites and exchanges with public officials, researchers, residents, and actors. Although visits were often exploratory, they helped me collect materials and interview local actors. I also interacted with scholars and other informants knowledgeable of the cases examined for this paper. Additional sources included videos, media, web sites, forums, academic encounters, public meetings, and informal exchanges. This analysis does not include projects of mass clearance or development of empty land or of former

industrial sites and railroad yards; although they might be termed public gentrification [28], they fit better the mold of urban renewal involving large clearance and are known in the region as *large or mega projects*; I focus on the form of gentrification in which a disinvested area is improved causing class turnover with limited clearance. From the time I started this inquiry (Spring 2001) to today, I developed various iterations of this paper that gained from discussions in academic forums or with knowledgeable informants. I feel now comfortable enough to publish my findings hoping that other researchers correct, add to, or use these insights for their own research.

3. Enabling Conditions: Regime Shift in Latin America

As Garcia Canclini [29] explains, Latin American cities are cultural hybrids of pre-Columbian, colonial, mercantilist, industrial, and postindustrial societies coexisting in different combinations. Examining them from a political economy perspective, I view them as formations and argue that regimes have to sort through them to become dominant but are unable to erase them; accordingly, urban workers in the South are incorporated to the labor market in degrees and forms that include high levels of self-help and informality¹⁰ (see [30–34]). Countries and cities in the region are variations of such *hybrids*. Although restructuring packages such as the Washington Consensus push the same agenda on all of them, local conditions make their application differently feasible and their results often different qualitatively and quantitatively.

Designed in the North, neoliberalism was first tried in full in Chile under a 1973 US-backed military coup and in Mexico as part of the US-led "rescue" package of 1982 and, then, officially pushed in country after country as a condition for new loans or renegotiation of their (also induced) debt crises [35]. Tightly tied to core economies in the North and exposed to neoliberal shock therapy, Latin America's restructuring has been dictated or induced from outside maintaining the area's tributary condition (see [36–38]). It indeed has been mediated by, has had to adjust to, and coexists with preexisting forms generating ever new hybrids.¹¹ Depending on the economies they are part of and their strategic importance for global concerns, cities have undergone more or less intensive processes of restructuring as each of them came to play different roles vis-à-vis the capitalist core; the region's main cities (Sao Paulo, Mexico City and Buenos Aires) became value extraction/transfer and distribution nodes while other cities struggled to enter global circuits playing more secondary roles. As sites of national governments within highly centralized political economies linking the national to the world, city capitals played the main roles in the shift.

Under Fordism,¹² investment had privileged agriculture and raw material extraction throughout Latin America and import substitution industrialization (ISI) in the larger economies. Under flexible accumulation, local industry was exposed to international competition shifting often

into *maquila* production, undergoing deindustrialization or industrial reorganization (e.g., via commercialization of imported goods and subcontracting). Much of the region's capital also shifted from manufacturing to finances and commerce while adding global financial capitals and dynamics to the mix. Deregulation and privatization¹³ opened the doors to speculative transactions enhancing financialization and money markets. As in the North, the industry of space boomed. In the housing front, capital focused first and foremost in new projects for middle to upper classes (e.g., vertical and horizontal gated communities, urban sprawl, office campuses, tourism, shopping centers, culture, and entertainment venues), further commoditizing cities, again as per their form and level of incorporation to global circuits. Still, different from the North, regime shift was limited by the region's underdevelopment and the complexity of hybrid land and property markets with high levels of informality, a large, often majority population working in this sector, self-help [30, 39], and limited market capacity. As a result, restructuring has lagged behind the North.

Although entering the region's cities at different times and scales and achieving lower intensities and depth than in the North, by the 1990s, regime shift had set in and, with it, the enabling conditions for gentrification. By then well established in the North, gentrification was also introduced by global forces. Atkinson and Bridge [7, page 2] argue that it "appears to have migrated centrifugally from the metropolis of North America, Western Europe and Australasia. . . at the same time as market reform, greater market permeability and population migration have promoted internal changes."

Shifting to necessary conditions for gentrification, as the literature suggests, gentrifiability is a function of location of an area vis-à-vis refurbished CBDs, its rent potential,¹⁴ feasibility of taking it over, interest and capabilities of the real estate industry, and potential for reuse of existing properties and sites. To the extent these conditions have not held in Latin American cities in the same ways and intensity as in cities of the North, gentrifiability is still a question. Indeed, CBDs in Latin American cities have not been transformed into command and control centers of the global economy as in many cities of the north but have retained many of their older functions, uses, and users.¹⁵ Originally established for colonial and postcolonial elites, central areas had become hybrid formations serving the lower classes when the former left: individuals and businesses rented often illegally subdivided buildings or squatted others constituting dense environments of informal, formal, extralegal, or even prohibited income-producing enterprises.¹⁶ These formations were both a curse and an opportunity for the less affluent: the opportunity to make a living on the seams of the market and the curse of local conditions.¹⁷ They were "self-solutions" while offering cheap goods and services in accessible locations to the lower-income. Although raising hell about them, authorities oscillated between permissiveness and hostility, clientelism and corruption having no alternatives for such sites. These factors have rested attractiveness and potential for reuse to central areas and, thus, require huge capital infusions and public and private determination to turn them

around; next to or interspersed with them formed the CBDs of industrial substitution; meanwhile, rather than taking over and transforming historical centers and CBDs as in the North, globalization created its own spaces, sometimes nearby, sometimes scattered, often assuming the form of real estate islands resting to the centrality of traditional central areas. In the absence of sufficient, well-paid employment opportunities for a majority of the population, cities cannot afford to do without the employment and housing that central areas provide to the lower-income population. Under the circumstances, they cannot be removed without causing major traumas while posing formidable challenges to gentrification. In short, old downtowns and centrally located neighborhoods do not have the same rent potential and attractiveness of those in the North.

In turn, the emergence of gentrifiers is a function of the size and concentration of high service jobs in CBDs and of a city's role in and penetration by newly dominant accumulation regimes. Although growing in Latin American cities, mainly in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia, the share and compensation of such jobs are far lower than in the North and, again, clustered outside old downtowns. Meanwhile, cities continue to be majority lower income exhibiting the most skewed income distributions in the world (e.g., [40–42]). Middle classes are far smaller in Latin America than in the North: World Bank estimates (see [43]) put them at 30 percent in 2012—roughly the same size of those living below the poverty line.¹⁸ Nonagricultural informal jobs in Latin America average about 51 percent of all jobs compared to 16 percent in Western Europe and 14 percent in USA [44], and the informal economy averages 41 percent of GNP in Latin America compared to 17 percent in OECD countries [44–46]; informal employment figures for Brazil and Mexico are 60 and 55 percent, respectively. Thus, the pool of potential gentrifiers is much smaller in Latin America than in central economies. Added to this is the mediation of culture with the *new classes* reoccupying centrally located areas in the North and their Latin American counterparts being lured by exclusive new gated communities, high-rises, high-end clusters (e.g., Santa Fe in Mexico City), and other developments away from the CBD. Research (e.g., [47–49]) suggests that the populations attracted to central area living consist mainly of students, households qualifying for public incentives (case of Santiago), nontraditional, moderate-income households, retirees, and some intellectuals and artists.

Per se enabling conditions do not produce gentrification; active agents have to turn potential into actual gentrification. This explains why gentrification is often launched by governments;¹⁹ in older US cities, urban renewal, created by Congress in 1949, did it by transforming entire centrally located neighborhoods and enticing the private sector to follow.²⁰ Assisted or influenced by international institutions, Latin America has been also working to create such markets and transform cities into wealth production machines. Given the difficulties involved, the public sector has assumed much of the cost and risk while using its powers to address resistance. First tried in Barcelona and Bilbao and sponsored by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development

Bank, strategic urban planning (SUP)²¹ promoting redevelopment of central locations, especially heritage/historic centers, verticalization, and repopulation became the official Latin American urban agenda.

In short, I posit that Latin America's lag in research on gentrification reflects the corresponding lag and trajectory of regime change and of gentrification itself. The term was adopted only recently in the region (*gentrificação* in Portuguese and *gentrificación* in Spanish). Although cities have launched strategic urban renewal especially in the form of large flag projects (see Table 1 for a list), these projects have taken place usually in abandoned railroad or industrial sites and unimproved land and, hence, do not constitute gentrification proper as they did not take over built environments occupied by lower classes.²² Although upper and middle class relocation outside central areas has been a historic constant, it did not take over low-income neighborhoods; only recently has it taken place near peripheral low-income settlements forming gated "islands of privilege in seas of misery" [50].

4. Central Area Renovation

4.1. Background

Latin American Cities may be very different from one another but they share a common experience in "urban renaissance" based on new public transit networks, restoration of historic districts and upgrading programs involving local residents. At least 20 cities in this region have forged ahead with high profile urban improvement projects in recent years. Similar initiatives under way in 20 other cities will begin to change people's lives over the next few years. . . This wave of change started in large cities but won't stop there [51].

I argued earlier that restructuring in Latin American cities followed different trajectories than in cities of the North.²³ Thus, not only did gentrification lag behind but it also seems to have assumed different forms and paths. I further posited that disinvested central areas for the most part were not transformed into command and control centers as in the North and that smaller, lower-pay high service sectors, jobless growth [52], and informality limited their potential for gentrification. Still, booming real estate, availability of financial capital, restructuring of land markets, and international forces enticed Latin American governments to engage in heritage tourism and repopulation to redevelop these areas.

To launch their redevelopment, the Organization of American States sponsored a 1977 conference that issued the Quito Letter, an agenda to transform historic centers into heritage tourism. Furthermore, discourses and mandates of urban competitiveness promoted by entities such as the Inter-American Development Bank urged local governments to embrace urban renewal, renovation, and globally oriented economies; these forces worked in concert with FIRE putting together packages for sale to city after city. Aside from the large projects mentioned [53], initiatives focused mainly on

heritage tourism in disinvested (mainly historic) inner city locations in cities such as Mexico City [48, 54], Puebla [55], Salvador da Bahia [49], Sao Paulo [56], Buenos Aires [57–59], Santiago de Chile [47, 60, 61], Guayaquil, Lima, Bogota, Cartagena, and many others. The International Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the World Bank targeted UNESCO-designated sites offering packages that local (and national) regimes desperate for projects of urban renewal embraced²⁴ [62].

4.2. *Classing Central Areas in Latin American Cities.* Confirming Smith's revanchism [4] and Harvey's restoration of class power [11, 63, 64] explanations of urban restructuring, these projects exhibit a deep class slant. A typical example is Puebla's description of its historic center renovation as rescue/reconquest of patrimony from lower classes to reassert moral authority by returning it to its "rightful" owners and uses [55]. For Shanks [65, page 17], these restorations preserve, destroy, and transform historical centers simultaneously as the social relations of exploitation they represent are veiled by images of idealized elites and fantasy places. But so far, despite all-out efforts, they have not produced residential class replacement or the return of the gentry but commercial heritage tourism.

Dressed in nostalgic rhetoric, they portray the past as a soul buried in buildings, plazas, and streets longing to be rescued. Depicting the elites formerly inhabiting central areas as paradigms of civility, renovation is about class reinstatement through the "rescue" of the elite values and virtues that plazas, buildings and monuments represent [48, 54, 55, 62, 66]. Removal of current uses and users is presented as a civic, collective duty: Puebla's was branded as rediscovery of "a lost urban landscape" longing for its original dignity [55, page 1559]; Mexico City's program was hailed as "normalization" via the return of "decent people" [48, pages 6 & 82]; the media titled Quito's renovation as "Quito's rebirth" [67], "Everything old is again new in Quito" [68], "Historic Quito, Rescued;" [69]; and titled Lima's renovation in these terms, "Historic Lima gets a New Heart" [70] and "Colonial Lima Shines Again" [71].

Such symbolic constructions are a critical element of gentrification (see [26, 27, 72]): they add a sense of exclusivity to places (place making) describing redevelopment as a process of reoccupation by the rightful forces. But they also entice counterhegemonic responses on the part of threatened residents. Starting with naming, gentrification is fought about as much on the ground as in discourse. Whereas gentrifying forces naturalize it under images of recovery, occupants counter with claims of forceful displacement, colonization, class power, and revanchism [4]. A street seller carried a sign at a public rally in Mexico City that read, "El Centro no es Centro sin Ambulantes" (The Center is not Center without Street Vendors) [48, page 171]. In Lima, the motto of residents organized around the Comité Promotor para la Renovación Urbana was "Renovación urbana sin Desalojos" (Urban renewal without evictions) [73]; in their words, "nosotros somos parte del patrimonio histórico" (we are part of the historic patrimony) and, "mis raíces e identidad se

TABLE 1: Projects of Urban Renewal in Latin America.

Strategic urban plans (SUPs)	México City, Córdoba, Rio de Janeiro, Rosario, Buenos Aires, Bogotá, Santiago, La Paz, Trujillo, la Habana, Medellín, Ciudad Sur, Córdoba, Santiago de los Caballeros, Belo Horizonte.
Historical designation/renovation	México City, Cartagena, Antigua Guatemala, Panamá City, Cuzco, Quito, Santo Domingo, Arequipa, Camagüey, Cuzco, Salvador do Bahía, Cuenca, Sucre, Valparaíso, San Juan, Guanajuato, Guayaquil, Puebla, Lima, Buenos Aires, La Habana, Sao Paulo
Downtown repopulation	Santiago, México City, Quito
Ports, coastal areas, riverfronts	Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires (Puerto Madero and Base Naval Ushuaia), Habana, Guayaquil, Asunción
Industrial areas	Agua Branca (Sao Paulo), Medellín (Argos), Buenos Aires (La Boca)
Transportation terminals	Retiro, Buenos Aires, Montevideo (Fénix Plan), Sao Paulo (Julio Prestes and Luz stations)
New airports, expansions, renovations	México City, Córdoba (Telepuerto), Bogotá, San José, Buenos Aires, Lima, Guayaquil, Panamá City, Quito
Slum upgrading	Rio de Janeiro (Favela-Bairro), Rosario, Sao Paulo (Guarapiranga)
Large residential developments	Santiago, Panamá (Costa del Este) Bogotá (Metrovivienda)
Cultural centers	Panamá (Ciudad del Saber), Caracas (expansion of Universidad Central)
Commercial or mixed-use	México (Santa Fe) Airport Reuse Santiago
Transportation systems	Bogotá (Transmilenio), Concepción (Biotren), Transmetro (Guatemala)

encuentran aqui; aqui han nacido nuestros padres y nuestros abuelos” (my roots and identity are here, our parents and grandparents were born here) [74]. In Colombia, opponents of gentrification renamed the Office of Urban Development “Office of Urban Displacement.”

Two in-depth studies of Mexico City’s Historic Center renovation [48, 54] detailed the resilience and resistance of street vendors who created formidable organizations allied with political parties to oppose displacing redevelopment, protested and rallied on an ongoing basis, reoccupied “rescued” spaces, partnered with small retail businesses also threatened by renovation, and managed to accommodate those displaced. Despite the drastic tone and actions of cities, resistance has slowed renovation to a snail pace while questioning public claims of patrimony that might not exist in the first place were it not for its lower-income occupants. A sign at a mass protest in Mexico’s Centro Historico read, “What is historic about the Historic Center? Street vending! Street vending existed before the arrival of the Spanish. We are part of the history of this area. Removing us is like removing a chunk of history.” [54, page 47] As elsewhere, Lima has emphasized the historical and architectural values of colonial buildings while also marketing to tourists the *happy innocence of the exotic mestizo other*. (See [75–77]²⁵).

But resistance also comes from the structures in place; rather than a tabula rasa to build on, the hybrid socioeconomic formations that historical centers became after elites left are often dense and well established; the rhetoric of renovation stands in contrast with actual results: while claiming to create jobs and development, renovations destroy the opportunities, jobs, and housing such sites offer to lower classes; street vendor relocation into indoor *mercados* contradicts the actual advantages of street vending (e.g., visibility, central

location, nonpayment of taxes, flexible and extended hours, unpaid family members, bargaining, avoidance of regulation and even traffic and congestion), making it unfeasible for the low-income.²⁶ These factors explain why relocation has required heavy policing both to carry out and to maintain. The limited successes of renovation, meanwhile, accrue to higher classes and users and the jobs it offers to others are far fewer and pay less than street vending. Whereas the inclusion of vendors and low-income users might make renovation more feasible, it has been out of the question. Although Quito added generous subsidies to entice property owners to renovate their buildings and rent to residents [66] and for the program to acquire and rehab buildings for sale to residents, participation in these programs has been meager: owners cannot find tenants for the pricier rehabbed units while residents lack the credit and income necessary to qualify for homeownership; similarly, although Lima created “Mejorando mi Quinta” to rehabilitate residences for rent to current tenants, the city did not fund the program and actually issued Ordinance No. 1157 of 2008 to evict dwellers of deteriorated properties.

Thus, different from cities in the North, in Latin America, gentrification has run into and has to sort through the stubborn resistance of environments of self-help/self-employment that the lower classes carved for their livelihoods. Historic center renovation has proven far more complex and contentious than assumed and has not produced the results expected. Although gentrification has run into much resistance also in the North, it pales in comparison with the tangled environments and resistance of historical and central locations in the South. These are the types of contingencies standing on the way of or mediating gentrification on the ground in Latin America while posing challenges that so far

cities have been unable to sort through—even when applying the full extent of state powers.

4.3. Selected Experiences. For this analysis, I focused on the experiences of historical centers in Mexico City, Panama City, Bogota, Cartagena, Quito, Lima, Sao Paulo, Santiago, and Buenos Aires. However, I limit this section to the cases of Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, and Chile that not only are representative but also hold the most potential for gentrification due to their levels of globalization. Mexico City, Sao Paulo, and Buenos Aires are the three largest Latin American cities in that order and Santiago the seven largest; all of them are the main economic and financial engines of their countries' economies and all but one (Sao Paulo) are national capitals. These cases illustrate the ways in which possibility has combined with actually existing structures and contingencies to frustrate or redirect gentrification drives. Mexico City housed one of the main pre-Columbian civilizations in the continent and, as major colonial and postcolonial cores, all of these cities developed impressive downtowns for their elites, governments, and mainstream institutions. Eventually abandoned by their wealthy residents, businesses, and many of their institutions, these areas did not perish thanks to lower classes and businesses who gave them a second lease on life turning them into metropolitan cores of the informal economy employing large segments of the population in informal employment (nonagricultural informal jobs employ the majority of the population of these cities with estimates as high as 57 percent for Mexico City,²⁷ 56 for Brazil, 53 for Argentina, and 40 for Chile).

Like many other cities in the region and certainly those examined for this research, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, and Buenos Aires pursued the redevelopment of their historical centers for heritage tourism including extreme efforts at class replacement. City after city condemned and acquired architectural buildings, monuments, and plazas considered historical gems renovating them for museums, cultural and educational institutions, hotels, and other tourist concerns. As per lenders' requirements, IDB in particular, governments agreed to expel lower-class residents and uses; also each city had to establish an independent agency to implement plans; manage loans, donations, and programs; and coordinate the removal of residents and vendors with public authorities.²⁸ Cities assumed the bulk of the cost, risk, and responsibility for infrastructure, acquisition, renovation of national monuments, evictions, and policing; the expectation was that these actions and financial incentives would entice the private sector to follow making the process self-sustaining.

Starting with Mexico City, historical center renovation stands out for its size targeting nearly 9000 buildings (of which 1500 were prioritized for their historical and architectural value) and the support of multibillionaire Carlos Slim who grew up in the center. According to Walker [48, page 195], "Six years and over one billion dollars since its inception in August 2001, the Program has made great strides in transforming the Centro from an outdoor bazaar landscape to a more august, neocolonial space. However, the Programa has yet to meet all of its goals." Despite being perhaps the

most successful historical center renovation in the region, the program has "rescued" only a portion of its 668 blocks. Nearly 10,000 out of a total of 30,000 vendors have been evicted, but many have come back, others have joined in, and a majority remains [78]. The support of political parties, labor unions and NGOs, rallies, takeovers, media exposés, new street vending strategies,²⁹ and even open battles with the police have made eviction very complex and conflictive while negatively affecting private sector participation.

Renovated buildings have been occupied by religious, educational, and cultural institutions or turned into museums, hotels, educational institutions, cafes, and restaurants. Slim has acquired and rehabbed nearly 100 buildings renting them to artists, out of town politicians, and students or using them as call centers for his company TELMEX. Still, the resident composition of the area remains unchanged. Most structures remain empty or overcrowded with small businesses and dilapidated rental units. Educational and cultural venues have produced some studentification, but the program has failed to attract gentrifiers-proper. Notice that, as the traditional site of national government, churches, museums, and institutions, the area was already an obligated stop for tourists, citizens, and politicians.

The Centro has not turned the corner retaining much of its traditional customer base, economy, and residents now coexisting with rescued buildings, hotels, and tourism and the scene is one of heavily policed tourism [23] in "rescued" streets alongside small businesses, street vending, and low-income occupants and buyers. It may be actually unfeasible to wipe out Mexico City's informal sector as it employs 60 percent of the city's active workforce and has been a local feature for millennia (e.g., [48, 79]) as reflected in the words of the program director, "Congestion is a real problem, but the vendors can't all be chased out. They're a big part of the history, character, and culture of the Centro." While the forces of renovation have realized that the task is far more complex than envisioned, analysts ([80]; [54, page 190]; [48]) agree that low-income users of the Historic Center have been only "shifted around."

Brazil launched its own programs of heritage renovation in the 1980s [81, 82] enticing cities in the Northeast (Salvador da Bahia, Recife, and São Luis) to apply generous Federal programs in the restoration of historical sites to attract tourists producing what researchers have called their commercial gentrification [49, 83].

The pioneer case of heritage renovation I discussed here is the Luz District immediately north of Sao Paulo's old downtown and, most specifically, the historical structures and park that had housed Sao Paulo's elite in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Hub of the city's and region's railroad industry, the area attracted heavy industries during that time, in turn attracting immigrants and setting off the departure of the elite around the 1920s. Then, the decline of the railroads and the relocation of large manufacturing in the 1960s opened the area to lower uses and users; many buildings became tenements (*cortiços*) and others were abandoned and squatted; street vendors, lower-income shoppers, beggars, prostitutes, and others occupied the main avenues while drug

dealers and users turned a subsection into a drug destination-Cracolândia (land of crack cocaine).

Profiting from a federal program of heritage renovation, the City steered millions of dollars to the area in the 1980s and 1990s for renovation of valuable architectures that it transformed into cultural institutions,³⁰ for the refurbishing of Jardim da Luz (a park originally developed for the aristocracy that had been swallowed by the new uses), façade renovation, infrastructural upgrading, new sidewalks and lighting, and extensive demolition of cortices, and squatted buildings (especially in and around Cracolândia) seeking to turn Luz into a culture, leisure, and tourism pole. Generous incentives attracted a couple of department stores and a few other developments early on. As in the other cases, heavy policing, surveillance cameras, strict enforcement, close supervision of lower-class establishments and activities, and eviction sought a complete class turnover of the area [84].

But following the initial renovation of the main sites, advance stalled due to a combination of factors. The violence of eviction raids called the attention of human rights agencies and other NGOs that, invoking constitutional rights and the rhetoric of plurality and social inclusion the city used to sell the project to the public, demanded the suspension of evictions until proper central accommodations were in place and the rights of residents were assured. Renovation of major historical sites and buildings and support infrastructures did not produce the chain effect and private sector reaction expected due in part to the difficulty of replacing structures built for the working classes and removing the dense and large economy and population occupying the area and in part by the inability to entice the scale response of the private sector required. Cleared land remains vacant; the few businesses initially recruited left; the resident composition has not changed much and users and uses stubbornly hang to the area they made their home. In response, the City reduced the program to maintenance and policing of buildings and areas “rescued” and to further demolitions of cortiços and squatted buildings. Tourists restrict their visits to the restored institutions and cultural outlets. Frúgoli and Sklair [56, page 11] summarize the process and results in these terms, “Luz presents an ambiguous scenario, in which a numerous, heterogeneous and firmly established local population—almost entirely made up of very low income, working class families—seems to make a rapid transformation of the urban landscape along the lines proposed by local government practically impossible.” Echoing Leite [85], current uses and residents are hard to displace and probably impossible to remove permanently.³¹

Moving to the third case, Buenos Aires actually adopted culture as its core strategy of global competitiveness and identity promoting “Buenos Aires, the cultural capital of Latin America.”³² In 1989, the City designated historical neighborhoods south of downtown for heritage restoration, marketing them as the essence of Buenos Aires, especially San Telmo, where the City was founded and home to local and international elites until the early 1900s, Barracas, a former industrial area formerly housing many industrialists, and La Boca, a former port of entry for Italian immigrants. As in the previous cases, renovation started with valuable buildings

and the enactment of lines of credit for private acquisition and rehab of properties. In San Telmo, extensive façade and street restoration produced a nostalgic (imagined) version of Old Buenos Aires. In Barracas and La Boca, a raised wall along the Riachuelo River to control recurring floods and the development of a river walk enticed the reuse of former factories and warehouses for lofts and commercial spaces. San Telmo was marketed as the capital of antiques and Caminito, a tourist strip of street art, tango bars, music museums, souvenirs, and restaurants in La Boca, as the face of immigrant Buenos Aires.³³ On weekends and holidays, tourists and bohemia flood streets and plazas visiting museums, theaters, art and antiquity fairs, watching or dancing tango in plazas and bars, sorting through memorabilia, drinking, eating or buying souvenirs.

Although renovation has displaced low-income tenants and principally vendors, the main focus has been commercial and institutional or has taken place in vacant land or buildings [57–59, 86]. The resident population continues declining as before and there is no evidence of gentrifier replacement; renovation has produced some bohemia pockets that have not been followed by gentrification proper as in the North;³⁴ still, it has generated some real estate speculation causing rents to increase. Rather than considering titling abandoned properties occupied by squatters as many have advocated, the City has opted for eviction³⁵ turning properties over to developers; as in all the other cases, eviction has enticed significant resistance slowing the process and generating major social tensions. While removing street vendors and recyclers on grounds that they cause congestion and obstruct traffic, the City closes the same streets to traffic and opens them for street fairs, sidewalk restaurants, orchestras, and tango shows: clearly the issue is not the occupation of public spaces per se but by the low-income. Meanwhile, as in the other cities, potential gentrifiers continue veering towards middle and upper middle class areas in the North of the city or closer to downtown, to gated communities in the periphery or to waterfront developments (especially in the former major port of the city, Puerto Madero to the south) [87]. Not only has the public sector taken the lead but it has also absorbed most of the cost and risk. Already a major destination especially for European tourists, Buenos Aires used the opportunity to add to it the nostalgia and tango consumption that these areas represent.

Santiago de Chile constitutes an exception to the renovation approaches of the previous cities by focusing on repopulation via high-rise development/verticalization rather than on historic heritage per se. A combined national/municipal program works simultaneously in two fronts: (1) recruitment of and assistance to developers and (2) attraction of first-time home buyers through handsome subsidies [88]. Despite low-property values, dilapidation, and population decline, as in Mexico City, the area has historically included universities and institutions displaying a unique blend of uses and users; subsidies apply only to new apartments discouraging low-rise rehab or construction; hence, their owners (often residents themselves) have little to gain from selling. López-Morales [60, 61] argues that large developers are the ones benefitting from the ground rent the process generated.

The lead agency, CORDESAN, recruits and matches developers and apartment buyers. Although the area has been ancestrally zoned low-rise, special permits have been issued to allow for high-rise development. Altogether, the program created a risk-free market for private developers while assuring them high returns; new high-rises went from 37 in 1997 to 65 in 2008 (for a total of 17,000 units) [47, page 99]. Along with them, new educational institutions have moved and others expanded into historical buildings in the most valuable sections or corridors. Condominiums are small and basic, attracting transient households or speculators—rather than gentrifier proper.

Between 1992 and 2002 the central Commune of Santiago lost 109,826 residents and gained 79,641 slightly changing the characteristics of residents as testified by the loss of 6.7 percent of laborers and 3.9 percent of unskilled workers and the gain of administrative (6 percent), support (4.3 percent), and retail and service workers (6.1 percent) [47, pages 101 & 103]. Over two-fifths of newcomers are CBD employees and students but still moderate income. Segmentation continues with the higher income groups and institutions clustered in the most valuable historical properties and the rest in unimproved or in subsidized new buildings. A majority of the in-movers are small households, both young and older empty nesters taking advantage of the subsidies whose ties to the center are weak. They are not displacing lower income residents but occupying the new high-rises built on empty land or on torn-down deteriorated buildings (usually low-rises). According to Contreras Gatica [89], small pockets of gentrification have formed quietly in the best sections attracting some cafes, art galleries, and bookstores that cater to them and to university students; overall, however, class replacement is scanty failing to produce a chain effect [89, 90].

None of the sites examined for this analysis has turned the corner; all of them have successfully restored the most historically significant buildings, cleared pathways, and attracted some bohemia, but changes of uses have been principally commercial and educational; in all of them informal businesses and poor residents coexist in uneasy and heavily policed tension. Actually, in 2008 UNESCO placed Lima's historical center on its watch list due to high levels of deterioration; similarly, many structures in these areas remain in disrepair.

4.4. Summary of Cases. These cases illustrate the contingencies challenging gentrification drives in old central areas in Latin American cities. Although the necessary conditions for gentrification are present in different degrees, they lack the scale and intensity of the economies and cities of the North; as the production of gentrifiers is far more limited and middle and upper classes opt for exclusive developments elsewhere, gentrification has failed to lure enough of them; the industries of globalization have formed their separate 'islands of development' often outside of downtown or next to traditional higher income areas; as a result, traditional downtowns have not received the stimulus or developed the rent potential and attractiveness of CBDs in the North; entrenched hybrid formations occupying old central areas

and providing jobs and services to a huge segment of the population [91] have posed a formidable obstacle and risks to would-be developers and buyers of traditional central areas; although the historical and architectural value of some of the real estate of targeted areas has attracted the interest of educational, cultural, tourist, and religious institutions, it has not enticed gentrifiers of the type and scale needed to make gentrification large scale and self-sustainable. Meanwhile, in the absence of meaningful alternatives or opportunities, residents and occupiers of old center have held stubbornly to the jobs and economies that provide for their livelihood. Under the circumstances, although local governments have engaged wholeheartedly in the transformation of old central areas, they have not been as successful as expected; so far, successes have been limited to tourism-dependent commercial and cultural industries, students, and nontraditional households and populations while the populations and users that are necessary for self-sustained gentrification remain elusive.

Along with these efforts, public-private partnerships have engaged in the development of large flag projects involving global capital and occupying sites such as abandoned railroad yards, former industrial parks, waterfronts, or undeveloped land usually outside traditional downtowns for high-rise residential clusters, commercial and hotel towers, mixed use gated communities, or real estate islands inside or outside the city. Although they might be classified as gentrification for the rent they capture and the indirect effects on the lower-classes, they do not displace lower-class users and uses directly and constitute principally commercial rather than residential gentrification.

5. Concluding Considerations

Combining critical elements from the gentrification literature, this paper offers a flexible approach for the study of gentrification especially outside the cities where it emerged. Foremost, the paper suggests that gentrification is highly contextual depending on the right mix of circumstances, political economic formations, and local contingencies. By differentiating between enabling, necessary conditions applying across the board, and contingent factors differing between locales it is suggested that both elements have to concur at a critical scale and be brought together by social actors turning potential into actually existing gentrification. In particular, this analysis suggests that restructuring follows different trajectories and assumes different forms in different geographies and political economies.

Specifically for Latin America, gentrification has to sort through hybrid socioeconomic formations assuming different forms in different locales as their specific political economies filter changes in accumulation spurred by the core economies of the North. Thus, we argue that the ways and means of gentrification are rather fluid deferring between and within cities of the North and the South; accordingly, rather than mechanically using the term for all cases of upward redevelopment and rent appropriation, they have to be established and differentiated carefully for each case. Even

in the North, areas are often deemed gentrified before they actually are [92].

Three main elements stand out in the Latin American experiences examined here. First, gentrification has been largely imported from/enticed by the North through international agencies acting in consortium with local governments via public-private, national-international partnerships in which local authorities assume the leading role and often absorb the bulk of the cost, risk, and responsibility (e.g., heritage renovation). Second, the high levels of hybridity of Latin American economies cause markets to operate and respond differently to policies/interventions and, in this case, to the forces advancing gentrification; the possibilities of gentrification are largely a function of factors such as level of development, penetration of global forces, and the extent of incorporation of local real estates and economies to global circuits of investment. Third, although the most immediate factors standing on the way of gentrification are spatialized informal economies, factors such as potential rent, location vis-à-vis globalized industries, and effective demand appear critical in the gentrification drives of ancestral central locations; as potential gentrifiers veer toward new construction in exclusive locations and high-rises elsewhere and as the potential for rent capture of traditional central areas is far more limited than in the North, gentrification has to rely principally on intellectuals, artists, architects, students, small households, and alike others that I have referred to as marginal gentrifiers. Thus, gentrification in the classical sense of class displacement/replacement in areas of valuable historical architectures and sites has not produced the appeal it did in cities of the North for the reasons explained.

Although researchers have showed caution in their research of gentrification in Latin American cities, they have not incorporated the factors introduced here. Still, the evidence they have produced fits the framework offered here. Lastly, this analysis suggests the need to study urban restructuring, for our case, gentrification through their historical trajectories linking regime shift to factors on the ground while paying much attention to the mediating forces and contingencies between the global and the local. In this way, it is possible to access general questions such as the potential for gentrification á la North in the South and the paths and ways of gentrification in different latitudes.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

Endnotes

1. This term refers to developed countries at the core of global capitalism; I also refer to them as central economies.
2. Commenting on earlier versions of this paper, reviewers questioned the effort to examine an entire region together; still, as mentioned, not only did colonial and semi-colonial relations made the region a single

polity for many matters but theory formation requires generalization as much as detailed studies.

3. For literature reviews, see Smith [4], Atkinson and Bridge [7], and Lees et al. [93].
4. Authors call the current accumulation regime post-Fordism, flexible accumulation, informational economy, service economy, accumulation by dispossession, free trade, Neoliberalism, globalization, and others.
5. For literature reviews, see Smith [4], Atkinson and Bridge [7], and Lees et al. [93].
6. Suburbanization produces high extra rents from rezoning of agricultural land. Meanwhile, public and private sectors gain from gentrification (tax base and returns of development plus rents, resp.).
7. No universal agreement exists on these elements; this formulation implies a choice.
8. Slater [6] showed that they applied the wrong data to make their cases and that displacement cannot be readily measured unless new data sets are created to measure it—as is the case for the rent gap.
9. Smith's [4] three arguments, local, global, and social, also follow the line of my argument and approach.
10. Data on informality is estimated and is highly sensitive to its definition. Despite the International Labor Organization efforts to establish a common definition, definitions differ by country.
11. When I started researching urban restructuring in Latin America in 2001, I found a scanty literature and could not engage much in conversations about it with locals. This changed as literatures made their way into the region and as regime shift and entities such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, CIDEU, and the Lincoln Land Institute pushed it.
12. Due to their hybridity, underdeveloped economies cannot be examined with the same lenses used in the North but as appendices or tributary hybrid formations.
13. Latin America carried out the earliest and most massive privatization of public assets in the world [94].
14. Initially, elites and their associates lived in central areas limiting the rest to the periphery. With ISI, immigrants flooded cities, CBDs assumed new functions, and the elite relocated into exclusive enclaves. This is consequent with gentrification: as central areas declined but were kept alive by lower income residents and uses, they held potential for rent capture via redevelopment.
15. After all, location is a function of the added value accruing to a place vis-à-vis others—in this case, the presence, size, and clustering of new industries and occupations most directly tied to the global circuits of capital.
16. These formations may be the best examples of deregulation, space maximization, and self-help but also extra-legality and even illegality while functioning as communities for many.

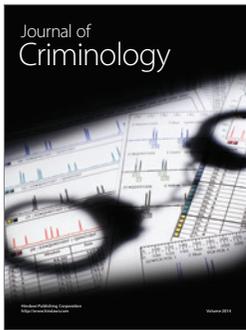
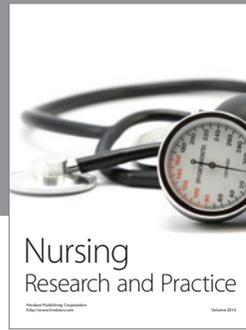
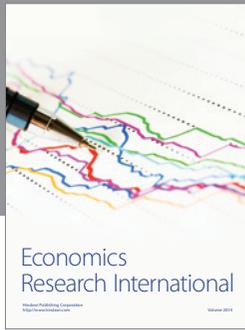
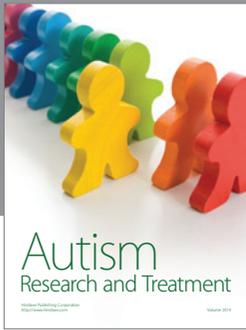
17. These formations weave together what Braudel [95] calls *infraeconomy* and “free” market exchange [96].
18. Forty percent of the change comes from Brazil’s 64 percent increase in minimum wages under President Lula. Cardenas et al. [97] found that in 2005 only four countries had majority middle classes (Mexico, Uruguay, Argentina, and Costa Rica) while the region’s average was 36; also they are not necessarily global and most of them live well below developed country standards.
19. Galster [28] distinguishes between public- and private-led gentrification.
20. Authors have not discussed much whether or not urban renewal is gentrification. It can be considered such to the extent that it tears down areas occupied by low-income people and replaces them with new construction for higher classes or uses. But gentrification proper refers to the actual reuse of low-income areas by higher classes (Glass’ definition of 1964).
21. Authors such as Borja and Castells [98] and the world city paradigm (e.g., [99]) have influenced the choice of strategies in Latin American cities as they enter the competition for global standing.
22. If we defined gentrification only as rent capture, any development involving rent could be classified as such (see [1, 100]). I am applying the term here to the reuse of low-income neighborhoods by higher income populations.
23. Fishman [101] argues that what is happening in the cities of the periphery is critical to understand today’s capitalism.
24. For a summary and examples of these public-private partnerships and instruments, see [53].
25. Heritage tourism fetishizes histories of forced labor, repression, conflict, and resistance of which encounters between residents/vendors and authorities are a pale reminder.
26. Residents and street vendor organizations demand recognition of their rights of occupation (to housing and to work). Renovations actually operate in violation of Mexico’s, Brazil’s, and Argentina’s constitutions consecrating the social function of property and enacting the right to work and shelter for everybody. Alleging that informal economies are illegal and invade public space and that tenancy does not entitle them to stay, yet fearing the potential fallouts of eviction, authorities use the stick and the carrot to buy time and break resistance; but residents’ and businesses’ resilience continues frustrating or derailing eviction.
27. OEDC/ILO [102] put informal employment in Mexico at 57 percent, the informal economy at “146 billion dollars a year, 12.3 percent more than exports,” and daily income of informal workers at \$10 dollars a day on average.
28. Mexico City hired former mayor, Rudy Giuliani, best known for his zero tolerance policing in New York to draft a similar plan for the city and specifically for the Centro Histórico.
29. A vendor explained that, to blend in, she hid merchandise in her body, walked in the middle of the crowd offering wares to transients, and stored the rest nearby coordinating with others to keep a watch on police and run away or hide as needed.
30. For example, the Museu da Lingua Portuguesa, Sala Cidade de Sao Paulo Concert Hall, home of the symphonic orchestra, the Pinacoteca do Estado, the Museu de Arte Sacra, the Art Institute, the Center for Music Studies Tom Jabin, The Technical College, the Federal Technical School, and religious buildings.
31. Interventions assume that such central area formations are abnormalities that can be removed just by government edict and police action. They omit the fact that these populations and activities are constitutive features of downtown that actually provide “solutions” for the lower classes and the destitute, are products of the city, and, no matter how much they are squeezed out, will pop out again and again, unless meaningful alternatives for the lower-income are offered.
32. Ironically, the most European of Latin American cities portrays itself as the cultural capital of the region reinforcing the idea that what is most valuable is the European print.
33. Although considered the music of old people, tango became a fad in the 1990s after it flourished outside Argentina. In 1996, National Law 24.684 made it part of the country’s cultural patrimony. Born and played in *arrabals* (areas of prostitution and bars of the low classes), tango symbolized cultural revival to the dismissal of popular rhythms with local roots such as *murgas* and *candombe* [103].
34. In San Telmo, artists, architects, and intellectuals have joined others like them already clustered in selected subsections; many of the buildings newcomers have occupied were vacant; most newcomers are students and staff of local educational institutions; middle and upper class residents, meanwhile, live in stable sections out of the way of tourism; still the area has a higher share of the very poor than the city [104, page 317].
35. In 2008, Buenos Aires created Unidad de Control del Espacio Público for the removal of vendors and homeless. Major clashes have taken place in Abasto District (2000), the Giol warehouses (ordered by the presidency bypassing the judicial system), the Marco de Portó building converted into a shopping mall, villas miseria by the river and PADELAI in San Telmo while actions against *cartoneros* (street recyclers) are frequent [105, 106]. In 2007 alone nearly 2300 families received final eviction orders [107]. Forces have organized around Red Habitat to challenge the constitutionality of evictions and the removal of street vendors and *cartoneros*. [106, 108, 109].

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