

CITIES OF WOMEN

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In her influential essay “Democracy for a Small Two-Gender Planet”, Mexican anthropologist Lourdes Azirpe asserts that, regardless of class, race, or nationality, the opposition between a feminine private domain and the masculine outside world is fundamental to the social geography of the continent. But this gendered geography is not as universal as she claims. Throughout the Andean nations of Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, (and elsewhere in Latin America as well, including some regions of Azirpe’s own Mexico), every small town and big city is home to one kind of public space dominated by women – the produce market.

The Andean marketplace is unmistakably female. Men drive the trucks, buses and taxis that move sellers and products in and out of the market, and they control the wholesale end of the business, where most of the money is made. But by far the largest numbers of people who work in the market are vendors, and eighty-five to ninety-five percent of these are women. That such a large, old and well-established institution could remain invisible to analysts like Azirpe, allowing her to speak unconditionally of Latin America as a society without public spheres for women, illustrates just how anomalous the market is within dominant sexual geographies. The markets are flamboyantly female and unabashedly public, yet they exist within a larger world in which the public sphere is masculine, while feminine realms are enclosed and hidden away from the intrusive eyes of strangers.

The existence of this highly gendered institution highlights the masculinity of other public spaces, even as, for market women themselves, it reverses the gendering of both public and private space. And for every household that consumes its products, the market, and the variety of cooked and uncooked foods it provides, troubles the boundary between domestic and commercial work – between a labor of love and working for money.

1. the two plazas

Gender is deeply inscribed in the plan of the Latin city, which exalts the difference between public and private. Traditional homes are often walled, turned inwards to protect family life within a generous but totally enclosed space. Public life occurs within a city plan dominated by a central square, typically bearing a name like “Plaza de Armas”, “Plaza de la República”, or “Plaza de la Independencia”. As a physical representation of victories by and for European men, the Plaza de Armas defines itself against those it excludes: Indian leaders dethroned and banished to the peripheries of empire, Africans deracinated and forced into slavery, and women of all races disenfranchised and contained within houses and convents.

The central plaza is designed to present a visually overwhelming image of the power of the state, the glory of the wealthy, and the honor of men. It is clean and barren and masculine, an open space surrounded by the closed and forbidding architecture of state power. But the Plaza de Armas is not the only plaza to be found in Andean cities. Each of them also boasts another plaza: the messy and feminine space where the produce markets are held. In rural towns, these two different plazas occupy the same space: once a week the market takes over the civic plaza, temporarily re-defining its purpose. In larger cities, civil authorities try to keep the two spaces separate, designating specific squares, streets, and buildings around the periphery of the city as officially sanctioned markets, and sending the police to cleanse the main plaza of vendors and *ambulantes*. The public authorities in Andean cities and towns are perpetually at work to contain the constant, organic growth of this feminine, vernacular space within spatial and temporal limits, and so to protect the dignity of the city’s public persona.

In the global society occupied by the professional classes, it has become a commonplace to speak of women's success in entering the worlds of business and politics. But the inclusion of women as full-fledged members of such communities remains tentative and incomplete, giving rise to a popular discourse about glass ceilings and a legal wrangle over hostile environments. These architectural metaphors are apt: the buildings erected by governments, banks and corporations, like the central plazas around which these buildings are arrayed, are white male spaces, within which femininity continues to be a stigma that marks the interloper.

Inside the markets, it is elite men who are made to feel peripheral, like women and the poor in the "other" public spaces. They enter with hesitation and leave quickly, afraid that people are laughing at them behind their backs. The market is made up of individual stalls, row upon row piled with fresh food. Whether the display of food is simple or elaborate, at its center sits the marketwoman herself, a rounded vertical form rising from flat rectangles piled with goods. Repeated again and again across the open expanse of the plaza, or under the enormous metal roofs of the municipal market building, the female bodies of the vendors take on an almost architectonic function. Stationary in the midst of the tumult, these are the pivotal figures who give the market its shape and purpose. This public visibility of the female form, on display not for male delectation but for other purposes entirely, presents a symbolic inversion of the dominant sexual order that some men find profoundly unsettling.

When travel writer Henry Shukman entered the municipal market building of a small town on the altiplano, he was stung by the silent stares of the sellers. They appeared indifferent to him; even their clothing – "absurd, wide, ballerina-like skirts and derby hats"—expressed an apparent unconcern with attracting masculine desire that he found frankly terrifying. Nonplussed, he

translated what he saw there into a total reversal of the patriarchal order. These women “hold a frightening dominion over the men” of the town, he asserts hyperbolically. Upset by their unreadable expressions, appalled by the absence of other men, he hastened to leave. “[T]hey didn’t want me here,” he writes, apparently astonished at the notion (1989:53).

Constrained by the bold gaze of a myriad of women, men in the markets temporarily lose what they have previously taken for granted: the freedom to move about in public with relative unself-consciousness. The sight of so many women so completely at ease in a public sphere of their own making, creates a corresponding unease in men momentarily bereft of a hitherto unquestioned privilege.

This unease has its origins not merely in the fact that this space is dominated by women, but in its dedication to “women’s work” – activities normally hidden from view. The visual impression created by the market mimics the intimate spaces and informal organization of domestic life; rather than the empty formality of the masculine plaza, here impromptu constructions criss-crossed with ephemeral passageways fill every available space. This is a haphazardly vernacular architecture, with hand-made, open-walled structures that invite the passerby to look, touch, and taste. The atmosphere is redolent with the smells of food and cooking, as well as of garbage and ordure.

Public life derives its masculine air of dignified display, from its contrast with the secluded existence of its necessary complement: the private world of the family. In erasing this opposition, the placeras’ daily activities undermine the plaza’s self-importance, making low comedy of high drama. The sight of bloody carcasses and dirty potatoes, the sound of voices calling out “Escobas!Escobas!”, “Chooooos! Chooooos!”, the loudspeakers extolling Jesus or toilet

paper, the bustle of women cooking dinner, washing dishes, emptying the slop bucket – all of these bring the mundane and even the unmentionable into open view.

The overall impression is not one of comic vulgarity, however: the women who gossip, eat, and take naps in public, shell beans and make soup, clean fish and fry pork, do so with a dignified self-confidence that makes it difficult to take them lightly. When travel writer Eric Lawlor was brought to the La Paz markets by a Bolivian women friend, he had a series of alarming encounters with the women working there, which culminated when he accidentally knocked over a pail of *refresco* belonging to a vendor who specialized in these flavored beverages. “The woman glared with such ferocity that, before I quite knew what I was doing, I had pressed all my money into her hand and fled,” he recalled. “To be frank, marketwomen unnerved me” (1989:32).

This surface appearance of the market as an independent city of women can mislead. Relationships with men and with masculine institutions set invisible boundaries everywhere. Socially, women live within neighborhoods and extended families dominated by men; in their businesses, marketwomen depend upon the male wholesalers, truckers and drivers who bring them their merchandise; politically, the relentless intervention of the state wears a masculine face and uniform -- that of the policeman. The many faceted and heavy-handed effort by all the Andean states to control the markets, which includes draconian measures to limit their growth economically and spatially, as well as abusive police tactics against individual vendors, is itself an indication that, however limited the freedoms it offers to women, the market nevertheless offers a profound threat to the social order. The market provides the women who work there not only

with a job, but with a vantage point from which to critique, to reject -- and even to transform -- the domestic unit that is the building block of civil society.

2. rejections

The working lives of professional women in offices are still largely defined by their relationships with men, whether as subordinates or colleagues. But *In The World of Sofia Velasquez: the autobiography of a Bolivian market vendor* (1996), published by anthropologists Hans and Judith-Maria Buechler Sofia, asked about what it means to be a woman, emphasizes the opportunities for homosociality that the produce market provides:

I see friendships between women sitting next to one another. They become friends or comadres. I frequently see them talk to one another or go and drink together. They lend one another money and they concerned about what is happening in each other's lives.

For women who work in such intimacy with other women, the home has a different meaning than it does for women who work in male-dominated contexts -- or who do not work outside the home at all. For market vendors, domesticity does not appear as the one definitively and unambiguously female domain, where women can feel at home and in control; far from it. In a radical inversion of this gender paradigm, domestic life with husbands, fathers and brothers appears in market women's testimonies as an ominously patriarchal territory controlled and dominated -- often violently -- by men.

In Sofia Velasquez's account, domesticity and the market are twin magnetic poles pulling women in opposite directions, towards men and away from them. Throughout her story, two family members stand for these opposite worlds. Her mother represents a happily feminine life of buying and selling, while her brother Pedro emerges as a repressive figure, forever attempting to

shape her behavior to conform to masculine ideals which Sofia does not attempt to refute, but which she nevertheless refuses to live by. When she first became an ambulante, conflict with Pedro erupted almost immediately.

[O]ne afternoon, my brother Pedro saw me selling on the street. ... [and] said, 'I will tell my sister that she is no longer my sister. It is shameful for her to be selling on the street.'... He said that it was unseemly for me to sit in the street and that his friends would criticize him.... But ... I liked to sell. Selling was pleasant. I could go and sell whenever I wanted and I was earning money. (20-21)

At this young age, Sofia's turn to marketing involved staking out her gender loyalties, rejecting male authority and looking to other women for support. "I won't stop, Mother," I told her. 'Let him go ahead and say that I am not his sister. It's fine with me. They (the other vendors) will help me.' And so I continued to sell... (21)"

To Pedro, as to other working-class men of La Paz, it is especially inappropriate for married women to sell. Sofia repeatedly tells of women leaving the market at the behest of husbands, especially newlyweds (often to reappear when family finances dictate). If family life sometimes pulls women from the marketplace, it has just as often pushed them into it. This feminine workplace not only provides women with an income when male wages are insufficient; it also acts as a refuge when a home falls apart, or becomes too dangerous. Sociologists Bunster and Chaney, in their 19xx study of working-class women in Lima, heard many tales of domestic tragedy when they interviewed recent immigrants from the highlands. Anthropologist Leslie Gill, who wrote an engaging study of domestic workers in La Paz, also met many young immigrants

escaping family violence: “Six-year-old Zenobia Flores fled to La Paz with her mother in 1972 to escape the drunken rages of her father, who regularly beat up his wife and children” (1994: 65).

Inasmuch as it provides them with a source of income, the market clearly gives women some independence. Perhaps as importantly, it places them within a collectivity of other women, one that, in the central markets, is highly organized. This position enables them to pass collective judgment about what goes on within the domestic sphere, and even to intervene. When married women work in the market, their co-workers claim the right to protest marital abuse, speaking on behalf of marketwomen in general. Sofia Velasquez recalled: “My secretary of organization, Rosa Espinosa, was beaten by her husband. One day, I called her husband and told him that I didn’t like the fact that he was beating his wife”.

Women make their way to the markets along well-established routes, one of the most common of which is an initial flight from one’s own rural family, followed by a second escape from the oppressive life of a domestic. “The sexual harassment and abuse of household workers is one of the enduring features of female domestic service in La Paz” (Gill 74). In another life history from the Andes, Gregorio Condori Mamami’s wife Asunta, a vendor of cooked food in the Cuzco market in the 1970s, recalled her earlier employment as a domestic with distaste. The husband of the woman who employed her, she said, was “un diablo” who tried to rape her whenever he found her alone in the house (1977).

The market can offer temporary respite from the violent excesses of male violence, or a permanent escape from patriarchal domination. While some vendors suffer execrable relationships with men, others terminate relationships that are abusive, seek transitory rather than permanent

alliances, or insist upon more egalitarian relationships with husbands and lovers. Some women reject heterosexual partnerships with men completely.

My interest in the domestic arrangements of women who work in the markets was first aroused by two women who had succeeded in opening establishments not in the market square itself, but in small buildings on its periphery: Heloisa Huanotuñu, a tavern owner, and her friend Elena, who had turned her kitchen into a lunch room.. The two were inseparable, Heloisa's tall black-clad figure a counterpoise to stout little Elena, who always wore a frilly shawl.

I was fascinated by this pair because they did not conform to the image of rural Andean women promulgated in social-science textbooks, in which heterosexual marriage is described as mandatory (see for example Bolton and Mayer 1977). Neither had ever been married, and I never heard either woman express the slightest desire for adult male companionship beyond that of their brothers -- indeed, quite the reverse. They spoke of the married women they knew in voices that mixed sympathy, pity, and a slight but unmistakable contempt.

Sofia Velasquez grew up knowing women like Heloisa and Elena. On the first page of her story she introduces a childhood friend who "doesn't have a father. [Her mother] lived with a friend called Agustina Quiñones. (1996:1). Later in the text, she describes them as Yola's "two mothers". Explaining her decision to work in the market, Sofia begins by stating that she had never had any desire to marry, or to live with men. In drawing the connection between working in the market and escaping domestic life with men so explicitly, she inadvertently makes her brother's relentless opposition to her marketing more understandable. Like Sofia, Pedro sees the market as the antithesis of patriarchal domesticity -- and thus as a direct threat to his own attempts to control the women in his life, both sisters and wives.

Pedro considered his sister's work to be "shameful" and "disgraceful". The source of this immorality lies in an apparent rejection of domesticity.

3. at home in the market

Market vendors, then, are public scandals: women without men, working the streets. Many of the women who work in the market are in fact married, or live in consensual unions with men; most of them are mothers; and all of them, except the truly destitute, have homes. But market women, even when earning money to support their husbands, fathers, and sons, evoke images of wicked women rather than of the good wife. The negativity that attaches to the woman of the plaza, is a measure of the positive valuation given to the woman at home.

The only problem with this picture, is that the street market is less an antithesis to the domestic kitchen, than its raucous twin. The public market exists in close economic symbiosis with the unseen interiors of the private homes that surround it, and which it daily provisions. The home and the home-maker are the market to which produce vendors sell their goods: the world of the plaza exists to provide services for the domestic sphere. 'Casera', 'casera', shout the marketwomen to potential customers: 'homemaker', 'homemaker'.

Visitors from other countries are often charmed and surprised by the incongruous domesticity of scenes in the market: a man sits at his sewing machine, ready to patch your trousers or catch up a fallen hem; a woman spreads a wooden table with a bright-colored plastic tablecloth, and offers to sell you anything from a Coca-cola to a four-course *almuerzo*, complete with dessert. Nor is this commercial domesticity a mirage: workmen and students cultivate special relations with particular marketwomen, eating at their stalls day after day, taking comfort in the familiarity of the woman's voice, her steady supply of gossip, and her knowledge of their

particular tastes and appetites. Real and fictitious family relationships abound. Some customers are distant relatives -- perhaps the son of a country cousin, sent to the city to attend high school with a strict enjoinder to eat all his meals “*donde su tía*” [where your aunt is]. No one who eats at a particular stall for any length of time remains a stranger; regular customers are inexorably drawn into the domestic dramas between the women who work there, and are ruthlessly -- albeit sympathetically -- interrogated about their own lives and kin.

Cooking is not the only housewifely work that marketwomen do. Like women who shop for their families, they bring the products of male producers and wholesalers into a feminine realm where these can be transformed into meals for individual families. Babb observes that market women’s labor is wrongly characterized as strictly distributive in nature. In fact, many kinds of food processing take place in the market that would readily be interpreted as productive if done in a factory. Vendors break down bulk quantities into smaller portions; shell beans and peas; peel fruit and vegetables; chop herbs and grate onions. They even make small ready-to-cook soup packages, filled with combinations of raw legumes, herbs and vegetables in exact proportions. Many stalls feature a single product offered in every stage of preparation, from unpeeled and dirty, to washed and sliced, to cooked and ready to eat.

Heloisa’s trago shop is a case in point. She buys contraband cane alcohol in large quantities from the men who bring it up from the western jungle by mule and llama train. The little caravans arrive at her home in the early hours of the morning, and she and the men pour the alcohol from saddlebags into big plastic containers that once held kerosene. Customers occasionally buy entire barrels of the stuff for weddings or funerals, or to bootleg over the mountains for resale in the white towns to the east. Most people bring smaller containers -- gallon

jars, empty liquor bottles -- that are filled by a hose and closed with a fragment from a plastic bag. As the morning wears on, other customers appear looking for a shot to be consumed on the spot. Heloisa or another family member is ready to oblige, siphoning the liquor directly from a fifty-gallon drum into a tiny glass.

Sometimes a group of people makes an impromptu celebration there; in that case, Heloisa can provide soft drinks for the children, and stale bread for everyone. She does not cook for her customers, but can always use her extensive social network to rustle up snacks or cooked food, as well as a variety of other services: a child to run an errand or deliver a message, a decoy to keep enemies away – and, not least in importance, her own physically and psychologically imposing presence to prevent the arguments that develop among drunks, from getting out of hand.

If work done in the market strikes economists as somehow too informal, too feminine, too unimportant to be recognized as productive, it is at the same time too commercial in nature to be properly domestic. The same activities, done inside the home, do not count as labor at all; in economic terms, they become invisible. But for housewives, the existence of inexpensive market labor radically re-shapes the work load within the home. Women come to buy big quantities of corn already cooked into *mote* for a family dinner, or a little bag of it with hot sauce on top for immediate snacking. They may purchase a whole cooked pig or a single slice of roast pork. Some vendors sell enormous wheels of *panela* [turbinado sugar]¹, dark and strong-smelling, wrapped in banana leaves; but they will also cut you off a little chunk to eat like candy.

Histories of the American consumer describe the advent of ready-to-eat foods as a recent innovation made possible by enormous technological advances. The willingness of working women and their families to eat prepackaged food, or to dine in restaurants, is described as a

fundamental change in twentieth century social life. Azirpe describes this as a pernicious penetration of the capitalist market into women's traditional sphere of authority, one that has usurped their most valuable "function" and left them "empty handed" (xv). These visions of history are too narrow in both class and geographical perspectives. In Latin America, the presence of the markets, with their abundance of pre-cooked foods, is old rather than new. Some industrial technologies have filtered into the plaza: many factory-made foods are sold there; beverage stall counters are lined with electric blenders; the small stores that ring the market occasionally invest in a refrigerator for milk and cheese. But for the most part, this enormous system of provisioning works through the simplest of technologies: knives to slice and peel, ropes to carry bundles, cooking pots and wooden spoons to boil and stir. The fact that it is human labor, not capital investment or technological innovation, that adds value to the products there, is transparently obvious. The fact that this labor is predominantly feminine, has limited the ability of scholars and policy-makers to understand, or even perceive it.

Working-class women depend upon the ready availability of meals and ingredients from the markets; in small cities and towns this attitude extends to professional women as well. Travelling the back roads of Cotopaxi Province with a car full of Ecuadorian anthropologists, I was surprised when one passenger insisted that we drop in for lunch on an old school friend he had not seen in some time. Her feelings would be hurt, he insisted, when she found out he had been in the town and had not let her give his friends a midday meal. How, I wondered, could this unknown woman cope with a half dozen unexpected lunch guests? The market provided the answer: our hostess disappeared within minutes of our arrival, then returned to usher us in with fanfare to a dining room laden with local specialties: potato pancakes, roast pork, tomato salad,

fresh corn. Beaming, she boasted of knowing all the best market stalls in town: without her, she insisted, we would never have been able to eat well in a strange place.

The willingness of market women to perform any sort of food preparation, and the eagerness of housewives and domestic servants to avail themselves of these services, mediates the boundary between the loving work of caring for a family, and the paid labor of strangers. Men and children eating a meal within the house, consume the work not only of their own wife and mother, but of other women as well. In order to be the ideal housewife who knows how to provision her family, women must create and keep good relations with the women of the market and of the small shops that surround it. Thus even for women who do not work there, the markets demand a degree of female homosociality which customers find alternately maddening and rewarding. Market women foster affective relations with their customers, capturing their loyalty, blurring the line between business and friendship. An expatriate American scholar who lives in Cuenca spoke to me fondly about “her egg ladies”, whose stall was a regular stop on her Saturday morning excursions around town. But personal relationships are always risky. When Sofia Velasquez, an “egg lady” herself, got on the wrong side of one of a restaurant owner who bought large quantities of eggs from her on a weekly basis, she found herself scrambling for new customers -- and missing the tasty sandwiches the woman’s husband used to sell her, as well.

The relationship between a marketwoman and her customers, has its own arcana. Many a gringa who has lived in the Andes for an extended period of time, recalls with pride her first ‘yapa’ -- the first time that, as a repeat customer, she earned a little ‘extra’ scoop of flour or beans, poured into her bag after it has been weighed and the price figured. Marketwomen who sell to Indians often keep a bag of cheap, brightly colored candies with which they ‘yapa’ their

customers, preferring to offer these treats rather than any of the more expensive dry goods or produce they sell. The result is a subtle insult, masked as a kindness: are these candies for the purchaser's children, or is the Indian woman herself being treated as a child? Why is it that the seller, pretending friendship, nevertheless insists that Indians -- unlike their white customers -- pay full price for every ounce of merchandise?

From the marketwoman's perspective, maintaining the proper degrees of intimacy with customers is among the most complicated and delicate of tasks -- and the one that separates an inept from a successful entrepreneur. My landlady in Zumbagua, Rosa Quispe, operated a cooked-food stall in the Saturday market there for a while, but gave it up in disgust. "It costs me more than I earn," she explained to me. "The entire family comes to the market and expects me to feed them for free, but I have to buy all my ingredients in Latacunga the day before, and there I pay cash."

Successful marketwomen, too, find the boundary between market and domestic relations impossible to maintain. What distinguishes professional women like the stall-owners in the Cuenca municipal markets from amateurs like Rosa, is their ability to make profit out of their personal relationships, while using their commercial ties to benefit themselves and those they care about. For the true professional, the line between public and private, commercial and familial disappear almost completely. The Buechlers comment about Sofia Velasquez, that she and her co-workers, unlike the Bolivian middle class, eat out all the time. The domestic expertise upon which mothers and wives pride themselves, is among marketwomen translated into knowledge of especially tasty or reasonably-priced meals cooked by others. They collect coveted relationships with restauraunt

owners who give free meals, wholesalers who add on a generous yapa “just for the family”, and growers who reserve choice produce for friends and intimates.

Sofia Velaquez, for example, reminisces about sharing meals with her daughter, but not because she had stayed home and cooked for her. Rather, returning home after a long overnight journey to make purchases at a rural fair, she recalls that “We would always arrive hungry and would go to eat salchipapas together” at a favorite stall that stayed open late into the night (204).

Conclusions: cooking for love and money

In the late afternoons, when the market is quiet, the market in Cuenca is a drowsy place. There are almost no customers. The big metal doors of the market are pulled down part-way, making the interior dim and cool. Young assistants and relatives have been sent home; only the older women, owners of the stalls, lounge in them half-asleep, reading newspapers or taking naps as though in their own living rooms. They take out their reading glasses, their crocheting, and their slippers, wrap themselves in their shawls and prop their feet up on a sack of potatoes or noodles.

If the market is literally a domestic space for these women, whose work brings them there seven days a week from the middle of the night till mid-afternoon, their homes, in turn, become staging sites for commercial and productive operations. Sra. Loja, the rocoto seller, didn't mind that her daughters had not followed exactly in the footsteps of their mother and grandmother. They sell clothing rather than food, and recently began to manufacture some items at home. “They have turned the house into a factory”, she remarked with satisfaction.

In La Paz, Pedro complains that Sofia uses the family home, inherited from their mother, as a source of income. He doesn't mind that she has filled the bedrooms with boarders, as her

mother had done before her. What upsets him is that Sofia rents out the courtyard to her fellow vendors as storage space. It is stacked with folding tables, portable stoves, piles of raw produce, and even -- much to Pedro's disgust, and eliciting complaints from the long-suffering tenants -- loads of freshly slaughtered meat.

Heloisa Huanotuñu lives in her trago shop. The counter and shelves, table and chairs serve both as her kitchen and the bar's furniture. Her bed, partly curtained with a sheet of plastic, and the small storage areas above and below it, are the only semi-private spaces within the one-room building. Much of her emotional life is centered elsewhere, in the family farmstead up above town, where her brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews live. She spends many hours there, cooking and eating, listening to complaints and giving advice, loaning money and demanding help. But she does not sleep there. She, too, then, has arranged working, sleeping, eating, and loving in ways that cannot readily be reduced to a single dichotomy of public and private.

Henry Shukman and Pedro Velasquez are separated by race, class, and nationality, but united in their embrace of the idea that family life, the home and domesticity should be a single unit, defined by its contrast to the public spheres of work, business and politics. In rejecting this pattern, market women do not challenge universal or essential sexual patterns, or even Hispanic or Mediterranean cultural patterns. Rather, they are rejecting a pattern specific to modern capitalism, which fetishizes the home as the realm of affective relations (Moore 1988:23). Market women, although they live completely within the commercial and urban spheres of capitalism, are as resistant to this, its central tenet, as are the Indian peasants who live on its fringes. Women vendors do not merely leave the realm of the domestic in order to enter commercial life; they drag domesticity into public in order to make money, and embrace a commodification of private life

that is more unnerving still to a bourgeois sensibility.

The domesticity of the market stall and the industrialization of the home erase the line between work and family. If some market vendors have unconventional domestic partnerships, all of them create intergenerational relationships that violate bourgeois notions about love. It is in their relations with children – the individuals with whom vendors typically form their most enduring and intimate relationships – that marketwomen violate the norms of bourgeois capitalism most egregiously.

Their intergenerational relationships are manifestly as commercial and industrial as they are emotional and social. In Cuenca, young women helped older ones in relationships that were either actually or fictively the kinship relations of mother and daughter, or aunt and niece – but were also those of employer and employee, banker and debtor, investor and fledgling entrepreneur. Sofia Velasquez provides a detailed, decades-long account of how such relationships develop. She began life as her mother's dependent, but quickly became her employee, then her partner. In her eyes, there is no contradiction between financial and emotional investment – and no shame in the expectation of both immediate and long-term return. Remembering the loans her mother made to get her started as in her own independent business, and the careful accounting of interest payments each night, she says fondly and with pride, “She made a really good profit from me in those years.”

Today, she explains her love for her own daughter – and her daughter's love for her – by detailing the girl's labors as her employee.

Rocio is helping me at home for two years now. ... She gets up at 4:30, dresses warmly

and goes out to light the kerosene stoves and prepares the food. ... I get up at 5:00 just to see what she has done. At 6:30 she packs up the food and has it transported with the stevedore to my sales site on the street... at 7:30 she leaves for school. (210-11).

Here, the bourgeois convention of cooking as an expression of female affection for loved ones, is translated into a commercial proposition. In Sofia's experience, mothers and daughters cook for one another, not in intimate, lovingly-produced meals removed from the uncaring relations of the commercial world, but in bulk, as cheaply and efficiently as possible, because they are business partners hoping to turn a profit.

The market, then, challenges the sexual geography of the Americas on several fronts at once. It brings women and women's work into the public sphere; and it allows some women to reject the patriarchal domination exerted over the private sphere as well. The most profound challenge it offers, however, is to the very separation of private and public spaces, and of commercial and familial relations. It threatens to create a domesticity without walls, drawing household members outside into the plaza for the satisfaction of their social, emotional and bodily needs, while invading the domestic kitchen with commoditized relationships between the marketwomen who work for money, and the housewives who buy their labor when they might have done the work themselves.

As Sofia Velasquez' brother Pedro seems all too aware, the market undermines the foundations of Andean patriarchy, including the authority and privilege extended to men within the home -- an authority backed up, when necessary, with violence. More unsettling still is the erosion of a distinction between highly valued male wage labor, and the unpaid domestic labor performed by women. And worst of all is the market woman's insistence on defining her

emotional work in raising children, as well as her remunerative work in the commercial sphere, not as selfless giving for the good of her family, but as activities from which she herself enjoys multiple returns – in love and friendship, money and security, and in the immediate physical pleasures of eating and drinking, talking and laughing in the company of other women.

Today, large American-style supermarket chains are beginning to undermine the importance of the open-air produce market in the Andes, a process that will no doubt accelerate in years to come. Many of the daughters of Cuenca's market women are abandoning not only the plazas where their mothers sell, but the city, the nation, and the region as a whole, emigrating to the United States in droves. These girls grew up in households in which the lines between profit and pleasure, domesticity and public life, friendship and commerce were configured in defiance of the dominant sexual geographies of the Americas; what they will do with this intimate and embodied knowledge as they move into spheres far removed from the produce markets of the Andes, we can only wait to discover.

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The reputation of Federico Fellini's "City of Women" (1980) belies how attuned it is to cinema's role in shaping gender relations and fantasies. The movie is now playing at Film Forum. Photograph by Everett. *What if the New York City subway map paid homage to some of the city's great women? (Hover over the map to magnify.) *Cartography by Molly Roy, from "Nonstop Metropolis," by Rebecca Solnit and Joshua Jelly-Schapiro. City of Women (Italian: La città delle donne) is a 1980 Italian fantasy comedy-drama film written and directed by Federico Fellini. Amid Fellini's characteristic combination of dreamlike, outrageous, and artistic imagery, Marcello Mastroianni plays SnÃ poraz, a man who voyages through male and female spaces toward a confrontation with his own attitudes toward women and his wife.