

Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The silenced paradoxes of urban renewal: morality, welfare reconfiguration and precarious labour in Collective Food Procurement in Turin

Vasile, M.

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Chapter IV. “You cannot invent yourself as a market vendor”

One can cross the market square Piazza Foroni as a market goer. Go there to buy some fresh products or to enjoy its colourful and lively atmosphere. The market is a reference point for local inhabitants and well-known across the city as a traditional and iconic market, characterised by typical products from southern Italy. The space is simple but pleasantly organised: the market alleys develop in between approximately 150 market stands, surrounded by housing buildings from the beginning of the 20th century and long-standing shops and café. Market goers move from one stand to the other, based on their habits or simply following their feelings on the spot and vendors’ loud calls. Every stand reveals a specific set of products: fruits and vegetables, bread and pizza, cheese and dairy products, meat and fish.



[Image 16: Piazza Foroni in the 1930s. Photo archived by EUT 6. Retrieved on 07/03/2022 at: https://www.museotorino.it/view/s/0d0b0cde4372478db0de5c7e24f4ef72#]



[Image 17: Piazza Foroni. 2010. Photo by Mauro Raffini. Copyright Museo Torino. Retrieved on 07/03/2022 at: https://www.museotorino.it/view/s/0d0b0cde4372478db0de5c7e24f4ef72#]

One of the other ways to explore this market is to follow the perspective of market vendors. During my fieldwork, I decided to better understand Piazza Foroni and its context approaching it as a space of labour and related forms of collective engagement. During my very first visits at the market, I was struck by the comment of a vendor who said: "you cannot invent yourself as a market vendor!". This sounded as an invitation to a whole new world to be discerned, in relation to the history of a profession, vendors' skills, working habits and conditions, but also to the context of the market and its transformations.

I decided to conduct participant observation at the market, assisting one of the market vendors in his work. Spending time at the stand was a learning experience on different levels. It was an experience of apprenticeship: I learned elements of a profession, learned by watching, listening and imitating. But it was also a political experience: an occasion for spending time in the streets of *Barriera di Milano*, side by side with vendors, learning about their visions and

political stands. Before taking part in the market life, I knew very little about the challenges and claims of such category of self-employed workers and my experience revealed to me the heterogeneity of such category (especially in terms of their professional trajectories) but also their common struggles.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the market as a space in transformation. I built on literature on taste (Bourdieu 1984) to explain processes of identity formation, community building and distinction at the marketplace. I also contextualise the market as part of its neighbourhood, often discussed in terms of urban margins (e.g. Basile 2016) and which went through an important economic recession and demographic changes. In the second section, I discuss the trajectories of two vendors and their entanglements with the social and economic history of the neighbourhood. I discuss how they were affected by austerity and the economic crisis and their ways of making a living in such changing environment. I build on the approach of the volume *Grassroots Economies. Living with Austerity in Southern Europe* edited by Narotzky (2020) aiming at understanding austerity from the perspective of the lived experience of ordinary people, in specific times and contexts. In the third section, I discuss how vendors engage in actions of solidarity and contestation at the marketplace. Building on Muehlebach (2009) I discuss the different facets and ambiguities of market solidarity, including its potential exclusionary features. I also analyse their engagement as a form of contestation. I specifically report on vendors' mobilisation in the context of top-down market renewal plans and their more recent claims for a better recognition of their category and request for welfare support.

A real market

I arrived at the market of Piazza Foroni following the advice of a research participant named Riccardo. He had argued with emphasis:

> Do you know the market of Piazza Foroni? The market of Piazzetta Cerignola [the small square of Cerignola, a town situated in the southern Italian region Apulia], that's how they call it. It is in [the neighbourhood] Barriera di Milano. That one is a real market.[56] [57]

Based on the rest of our conversation, I understood that a "real market" was for Riccardo one with a long history and a working-class essence. He had distinguished Piazza Foroni from other open-air food markets of the city centre, which, over time, had become "upper-class" and were transformed into "picturesque markets". Based on his narrative, I got the sense that the continuation of such neighbourhood markets was under threat, as supermarkets, on the one hand, and quality food products (Riccardo had given the example of organic shops) on the other, were taking over most of their consumers.

As later confirmed during my participant observation at Piazza Foroni, in this context, the meaning of authenticity (alias the "real market") and quality food was tightly linked to the working-class and immigrant identity of the population of Barriera di Milano. As a matter of fact, the interpretation of quality food at Piazza Foroni was quite different from what is frequently presented as such in recent literature on food markets and sustainable consumption. For example, it had little to do with the idea of "quality turn in food production" developed by

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[56] Riccardo, member of the GAP Vanchiglia, interview, 14/03/2019.Original quote: "*Il mercato di Piazza Faroni, lo conosci? Il mercato di "piazza Cerignola", così la chiamano. È in Barriera di Milano. Quello si che è* un vero mercato.

[57] Riccardo was a leading member of the food collective GAP Vanchiglia, which is now extinct. The *Gruppi di Acquisto Popolare* (GAP) (Popular Purchasing Groups) are networks of citizens that gather and purchase collectively goods such as food. GAPs developed in the early 2000s all over Italy mainly as a reaction to the rise of the cost of living.

Goodman (2004) in relation to alternative food networks. Nor it could relate to the concept of critical food consumption, discussed among others by Orlando (2012) in relation to middle-class consumers' moral concerns. As I started to visit the market more regularly, I increasingly asked myself: how do market vendors at Piazza Foroni define authentic and quality food? In which ways these local meanings relate to the past and present transformations of the area? In the following paragraphs, to introduce this marketplace, I address these questions and present its social history.

Since 1925, Piazza Foroni was one of the main market squares of the neighbourhood Barriera di Milano (Beraudo *et al*. 2006). This area was always characterised by strong immigration. It developed as a city suburb during the second half of the 19th century, as rural inhabitants moved from the countryside to the city in search of work and better living conditions (Beraudo *et al*. 2006). With the development of the city's industrial plants, Barriera di Milano started to host immigrants from the whole peninsula (Beraudo *et al*. 2006). As part of the long immigration wave that brought to Turin many southern Italian (especially between the 1950s and the 1970s), Piazza Foroni became a reference point for immigrants from Apulia and more precisely from the town of Cerignola[58].

In the 1980s, the community of inhabitants originally from Cerignola (also called *Cerignolani*) living in the surroundings of the square was estimated to be around 35 thousand people (Donna 2018). The anthropologist Dario Basile (2003; 2009) examined, among other, the ways in which such population developed and experienced external marginalisation and internal community-building over the years. The scholar pointed to the strong identity juxtaposition between people from Piedmont and people from Southern Italy. Distinction mechanisms and discriminatory labels were common in those years

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[58] As noted by Basile (2003, 29-30), immigrants from Cerignola started to arrive to Turin even before the city's immigration boom. This was linked to the situation of poverty and unemployment that characterised the area of Cerignola, the possibility to work at FIAT in Turin, but also to local cultural components such as the idea of social mobility and a long migratory tradition.

and affected these immigrants as well as their sons and daughters – who correspond to both Basile's and my research participants' generation.

Apulia identity and the local meaning of "good taste"

At the time of my fieldwork, hints to the Apulian identity and traditions were still present at the market square. As mentioned by Riccardo, the square was often called Piazzetta Cerignola. The local inhabitants, among which several market vendors, had fought to obtain the official recognition of its additional name since 1983 and had requested it to be inscribed as such on a road sign at one of the corners of the square. The link to Apulian traditions also continued to be commemorated with the festivity of the Virgin of Ripalta (*Madonna di Ripalta*), the patron saint of Cerignola. Every June, it was celebrated with the traditional religious procession as well as activities organised on the square, including music and food stands.

The connection to Apulia was also visible from the many regional products sold at the market and at the surrounding shops. Traditional products included: horse meat, *taralli* (salted biscuits), olives, *lampascioni* (leopoldia comosa bulbs) and *cime di rapa* (turnip greens). In the right seasons (autumn and winter), while walking across the market, one could hear some vendors shouting aloud the name of this green - "ah, ah, ah, there is plenty of turnip greens!"[59] -, to attract the attention of market goers. Turnip greens are exemplificatory of the sort of fresh products which arrived at the market directly from Apulia and were consumed in big quantities in the past.

[59] Fieldnotes, 27/09/2019. Original expression: "ah, ah, ah, c'è tutta cima!".


MARIASS DI RIPALTA
DAL FORNAIO


PIAZZETTA
CERIGNOLA
GIA' VIA CANDIA N° 2



[Images 18a, 18b, 18c: References to Apulia at the market, including the road sign “Piazzetta Cerignola”, the altar of the Virgin of Ripalta and the typical Apulia product lampascioni. 03/08/2019. Photo by the author]

In recent years, the popularity of such products decreased, but remained a distinctive feature that some of the well-established vendors used to attract and build a relation of trust with certain customers – mainly of Italian origins, regular clients, elderly people or young foodies. Having beautiful turnip greens on the stand allowed retailers to show their ability to select good products and exhibit their knowledge of regional (culinary) traditions. These products often represented an opportunity to engage in a conversation with costumers, during which vendors explained how to clean and prepare them, and shared recommendations and recipes. The heritage of such Apulia working-class traditions therefore echoed beyond festivities and products, and remained present in the local meaning of "good taste", which encompassed both the ideas of authenticity and quality.

Among the many social theorists concerned with (food) practices as "identity markers", Bourdieu's (1984) analysis is particularly relevant for framing "good taste" in the context of Piazza Foroni. Bourdieu (1984) explained how social classes are not only differentiated by their position in production relations but also by their class habitus and lifestyles. In the case of working-class population, defining the principles of its own identity is, according to the sociologist:

> perhaps one of the last refuges of the autonomy of the dominated classes, of their capacity to produce their own representations of the accomplished man [or woman] and the social world (Bourdieu 1984, 384).

The author also argued that such self-representations have over time transformed through "the imposition of the dominant lifestyle and the legitimate image of the body" (Bourdieu 1984, 384).

While the idea of class and class-based identity have become more complex, in the context of Piazza Foroni, some local vendors kept alive the memories of the periods when such identity markers were source of both community-building and external discrimination among working-class immigrant families. Food from Apulia also allowed to keep the continuity with the imaginary of their rural past. This was also pointed out by Basile (2003, 33), who highlighted how traditional recipes were still important for these immigrants in the early 2000s, to

feel *cerignolani* and cultivate a relation with their area of origins through the procurement of Apulian products. Moreover, based on my observations, such products and underlying ideas of taste helped vendors to maintain a sense of stability in a changing urban environment characterised by important demographic transformations. In this perspective, I argue that the local meaning of good taste allowed vendors of Apulia descendant to legitimise themselves as historical figures of the area, cultivate a sense of community as well as delineate its boundaries.

A market and neighbourhood in transformation

Over the last decades, the area of Barriera di Milano was characterised by significant socio-economic and demographic transformations. These are to be contextualised as part of the economic and occupational crisis that followed the deindustrialization of Turin and particularly affected the area. The crisis aggravated the situation of socio-economic hardship of many local inhabitants. Literature on the area (mostly in the field of urban geography) pointed to these issues in terms of marginalisation, deprivation and also of inadequate urban policy measures (e.g. Basile 2016; Governa 2016; Salone 2018). In a theoretical piece, Basile (2016) discussed contemporary social construction of urban margins (including Barriera di Milano) through the criminalisation of poverty and "a punitive approach against the most underprivileged" (Basile 2016, 310). By comparing so-called marginal areas in Turin and Marseille, the geographer Francesca Governa also called for scholars to move away from the "rhetorical opposition between deprived urban spaces and idealised conceptions of "good places" (Governa 2016, 3) to critically discuss mainstream categorisation of peripheral areas.

As I will further discuss, the creation of Barriera di Milano as an "urban margin" was strongly tangible at the time of my fieldwork, through stereotyped media accounts of the area (e.g. Massenzio 2022) as well as narrations of research participants, who often talked about residents' general feeling of abandonment and inadequacy of support from the public administration. As pointed out in the analysis of local urban renewal plans by Salone (2018), while the area was targeted by a series of urban renewal plans between 1997 and 2014 - often to be

implemented by local non-profit organisations - not always these were enough to ameliorate local inhabitants' living conditions and compensate the lack of public investments in the area.

As part of these plans, between 2011 and 2015, the market was one of the 34 target areas of the urban renewal program *Urban Barriera* (2011-2015) promoted and financed by the municipality of Turin, the Piedmont regional administration and the European Union (Comune di Torino n.d.). *Urban Barriera* was one of the renewal plans targeted to different peripheral areas of the city from the early 2000s, which included *Urban II Mirafiori*, discussed in chapter one. *Urban Barriera* included spatial, economic and socio-cultural interventions. At the market, the intervention aimed at "improving the security, accessibility, hygienic norms and, last but not least, the urban design, in order to increase the liveability and fruition of the area" (Comune di Torino n.d. a). The definition of the actual interventions was not a linear process. As I will later go into, vendors got engaged in the discussion refusing a top-down approach.

The area was also characterised by a series of demographic transformations. Since the 1990s, Turin started to attract an increasing number of foreign immigrants, and, in Barriera di Milano, particularly from Morocco, Romania, China, Albania, Peru and Nigeria (Beraudo *et al*. 2006. Data from 2005). This increased the diversity of the population in the area and also gave rise to new forms of discrimination, divisions and clashes, between people of different origins, ages (young versus elderly population) and occupations (employed versus unemployed) (Cingolani 2018). At the market, such transformations translated into vendors and customers' turnover and greater diversity. At the time of my fieldwork, several stands were owned or managed by Moroccans and the diversity of market goers generally reflected the one of the neighbourhood. Diversity among market vendors is also to be contextualised as part of the increasing presence of vendors of foreign origins city-wide (Ambrosini and Castagnone 2010).





[Images 19a, 19b: Views of the market. 03/08/2019. Photos by the author]

These transformations also entailed changes in the urban landscape (such as new shops, including halal butchers and Chinese houseware stores)[60] and in consumption habits. Some vendors got destabilised by these changes and voiced their fears and frustrations through exchanges, jokes and open conflicts at the market. As they explained, in economic terms, market life also transformed due to the reduced purchasing power of local inhabitants, shrinking of families' size - which had significant repercussions on the quantities purchased by each costumer -, and increase in the number of supermarkets in the

[60] While I do not discuss in-depth the neighbourhood landscape in the dissertation, the analysis of visual elements (such as the neighbourhood's architecture and shops signs) was key to gain a deeper understanding of the area. See also Krase (2012)'s general introduction to visual approaches to urban life and culture.

area[61]. According to the same vendors, the urban decay (*degrado*) and the bad reputation of the area had generated a widespread feeling of insecurity which had drawn away many long-term market goers. Based on my observations, such narratives were surely true for part of the local inhabitants but, at the same time, the market also attracted new costumers, mostly during the weekends, when it was particularly busy. For example, this was the case at the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic (which corresponds, in Italy, to March 2020), even though the number of people allowed into the market square was limited and queues prolonged.

One of my first conversations at the market was with a waitress around my age who was working in one of the cafés at the corners of the square. This first exchange allowed me to organise an interview together with her as well as the owner of the café a few days after. This was my first immersion into local inhabitants' perceptions of Barriera di Milano. These two women of different ages and employment positions shared a similar narrative - which I later discovered to be quite popular also across long-term market vendors. They depicted the neighbourhood as increasingly diverse - "there is a bit of everything. The Italian, the Chinese, the Moroccan, the Bangladesh [sic], blacks"[62] - and problematic. Local problems included poverty (often mentioned in relation to the elderly), lack of employment, petty criminality (drug dealing, prostitution, robbery) and lack of security, due to little police intervention and attention by local administrators (despite inhabitants' many complaints). They also shared their impression about the market, which they described as a "working-class market" (*mercato popolare*), which was fading away because of urban decay, changing consumers' habits and increasing costs faced by vendors.

Their outlooks displayed the many tensions and contradictions that developed in this area. They spoke about the city transformations, in demographic terms, as well as in relation to the local impact of

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[61] These themes were discussed in detail during interviews with the market vendors Enzo (13/08/2019) and Laura - a pseudonym (26/11/2019).

[62] Liliana Amatore, interview, 06/08/2019. Original quote: ""*C'è un po' di tutto. C'è l'italiano, c'è il cinese, c'è il marocchino, c'è il bangladesh, neri.*"

globalisation and the economic crisis (e.g. changing economic activities, labour precarity, unemployment). These themes resonated with broader challenges of Turin and rendered the case of this market relevant. Not only in terms of local inhabitants' everyday life and ways of navigating the area but also, following what Herzfeld argued in his volume *The Body Impolitic*, to explore the dynamics of power at the centre, defined in various ways: the state, the wealthy, the international economic community, the church, the educational system (Herzfeld 2004, 16). As I show throughout this chapter, the narratives and everyday lives of the people encountered at Piazza Foroni shed light on a multitude of facets of "the centre". Many of these were revealed by their fears, contestations, ways of remarking borders and internalising "representations and narratives surrounding stigmatised neighbourhoods" (Basile 2016, 309).

In the next section, I will expand on the perspectives and trajectories of market vendors at Piazza Foroni. I will focus on two of them, whom I got to know better, and will discuss their background, labour, feelings and visions about the area and the economy. I will follow Narotzky (2020)'s approach, on one hand unpacking the diversity and complexity of their everyday life and, on the other, shedding light onto the meanings of economic transformations and austerity from the perspective of "ordinary people". I aim at showing the diversity as well as the interconnections between these stories. It is important to underline that they represent only a partial representation of the perspectives of market vendors – other perspectives were not investigated in-depth such as the ones of the many vendors of Moroccan origins[63].

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[63] As part of my methodological choices, I decided to deepen my relations with few vendors, whom I got to know and work with on a continuous basis. The fact of investigating only some perspectives, but more in-depth, was mainly linked to my preferences in terms of how to organise my time in the field. To a minor extent, this was also a matter of access. In fact, once I started to work at Enzo's stand, I started to be directly associated to him. This changed the way I was perceived and my positionality within market's relations, sometimes facilitating others hindering my possibility to communicate with others.

Market vendors in crisis

Enzo: small-scale entrepreneurship and masculinity

Enzo (or Vicenzo, his full name, though rarely used), a big man of Apulia origins in his fifties, worked at the market since he was a child, helping his father at the stand. His family represented the quintessential story of migration from southern Italy, managing their own small enterprise (namely the food stand) since 1952. Enzo was 14 years old when his father passed away and he had to stop going to school and start working at the market every day, together with his mother. At the time of my fieldwork, 40 years later, Enzo was still working at the market, managing the stand he had inherited. He was also the president of the market commission and association, thus the reference point for many market vendors and consumers of this square. He was also known by many local inhabitants as he took active part in a series of social and political activities in the area, such as local charity projects, small cultural events and meetings with local institutions.

When asking more information about the market during one of my first visits at Piazza Foroni, the owner of the previously mentioned café had directly referred me to Enzo. He welcomed me at his stand, telling me that he was used to talk with journalists and researchers. I told him about my research and he agreed for me to ask some questions and to come back. He immediately introduced me to his helpers at the stand and shared with me his phone number. It was only after a few visits and Enzo's first recorded interview that I thought about asking him if I could work at the stand voluntarily, for the scope of my research. He answered positively, telling me that I could do as I wanted but that he was not able to pay me – an option which I would not have considered in any case. As I learned from him, his wife and helpers, we got to know each other better and develop a dialogue about our lives and working conditions, which alternated with moments of shared work and apprenticeship.

Enzo felt at home at the market: "I know everything about the market, I know all of its history"[64]. However, he was not particularly optimistic about the present and future of his work as market vendor. He often complained about the difficult working conditions such as the peculiar working hours, the physical efforts it required such as lifting weights, and the hardness of working outside every day, all year around. He also often explained how his income had decreased with the economic crisis since 2008 and due to high taxation and lack of welfare support for self-employed, small entrepreneurs. Enzo also felt threatened by transforming consumption patterns in the area – "there isn't the same people as before, the way of eating and way of buying changed"[65], which, according to him, made the market less popular than in the past.

While working at his stand, I got to see some of these challenges directly: the market life required him to wake up at 4 am almost every day of the week, go to the wholesale market, loading and unloading his truck, commuting between the market and his storage unit, opening and closing the stand, interacting with customers and solving bureaucratic issues that arose on a weekly basis. During the market hours, Enzo would occasionally receive the help of his wife, sister and retirees from the neighbourhood. However, he always remained in control, directly managing the stand's official responsibilities.

More than once, Enzo told me that he was tired of this work, but that he had to do this for his family. He wanted to do everything that was possible to support his daughters in their studies. While he had inherited the market licence from his father, he knew that after him nobody would take up the stand nor continue this family tradition. This work had become too difficult, too competitive and, with all the expenses it entailed, the margins for making a proper living out of it were shrinking every day.

Enzo talked about self-employment most often in relation to the lack of welfare state support for his category namely small-scale

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[64] Vincenzo Torraco (Enzo), market vendor, interview, 13/08/2019.

[65] Enzo, interview, 13/08/2019.

entrepreneurs and more specifically self-standing itinerant vendors (in Italian: *microcommercio, commercio autonomo, commercianti ambulanti*). He argued that, at the same time, they were increasingly controlled, having to obey an "exaggerated amount" of regulations. Bureaucracy such as multiple and differentiated systems of tax payments rendered small-scale businesses far too complicated to manage, while bigger companies were privileged: "big companies can do as they want"[66]. Such feeling of injustice and discussions around news of large firms' owners committing illicit actions (tax evasion and corruption) were widespread among vendors. Such issue is quite frequent in Italy, while some literature also suggests the opposite, for example, in relation to the fact that small firms "are more likely than larger ones to employ informal labour and participate in the shadow economy" (Schneider 2011 in Yanagisako 2020, 702). High taxation was a recurrent theme of discussion and an opportunity for Enzo to start talking about lack of institutional support for small-scale entrepreneurs:

> Today nobody helps you if you want to be entrepreneur… on the contrary! […] If [you are small scale and] you happen to have an idea [to start a business], forget about it. […] If, like me, you inherited something from your parents, it becomes a noose around the neck.[67]

The case of Enzo exemplifies the crisis of autonomous vendors and small entrepreneurs in contemporary Italy. Small enterprises always corresponded to an important sector of the Italian economy: as per 2017, small and medium enterprises (defined in these statistics as businesses having a turnover of less than 50 million euros) employed 82% of Italian workers and represented 92% of the total number of enterprises (Prometeia 2019). These included the activities of market vendors, who, as mentioned above, are legally categorised as itinerant vendors and in 2019 corresponded to 180 thousand persons and 22% of the Italian commercial enterprises (Unioncamere 2021). These categories were highly impacted by the economic recession that

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[66] Enzo, video recording, 17/12/2019.

[67] Enzo, video recording, 17/12/2019.

followed the 2008 crisis. As discussed in recent statistics and articles, the crisis of small retailers persists and has become a structural one, linked to various and cumulative factors such as the decrease in consumption, competition of large-scale retailing and e-commerce (e.g. Balduzzi, 2020). In these circumstances, many small retailers had to close their activities - around five thousand in 2019 (Redazione Today 2019).

Only few articles in news and scholarly literature exist on the crisis of open-air food markets in Turin. Some news highlight, for example, vendors' accounts of desertification of small markets and the increasing competition and tensions between vendors (e.g. Coccorese 2013; Ambrosini and Castagnone 2011). COVID-19 related economic crisis also impacted open-air food markets such as the ones of Piazza Foroni, in a complex way, based on the various stages of the crisis. While I do not have the space to delve deeper into it – and the economic consequences will have to be evaluated in a few years from now -, in 2020 I could observe some immediate impacts. Among others: changing market opening regulations (passing from totally closed, to open with restrictions in numbers, to fully open), the reorganisation of market areas and the general increase of prices of agricultural products.

More generally, the long-term crisis of this professionals impacted them beyond the economic realm. As pointed out by Yanagisako (2020) (who examined family firms in Italy), the meaning of the past, present and imagined future of these firms is to be analysed in relation to ideas of the self, kinship, gender relations, and social mobility. Analysing the case of Enzo necessitates in fact dialoguing with anthropological literature which discussed the ways in which small entrepreneurs are impacted by the economic recession in various aspects of their life and personhood. Particularly relevant to this case is the study of Loperfido (2020) who explained the ways in which recession and austerity can impact entrepreneurs' sense of self. His contribution, as part of the volume *Grassroots Economies, Living with Austerity in Southern Europe* (edited by Susana Narotzky 2020), discussed the case of "small entrepreneurial identity" (173) in the context of the collapse of Small and Medium Enterprises since the economic crisis in 2008 in the Veneto region, in Italy. The author

delved into the case of suicides of entrepreneurs which followed the crisis as "the product of the collapse of entrepreneurialism as *both* an economic project and a symbolic space of identification" (Loperfido 2020, 174). The author examined - through the example of Anna, a 45-year-old entrepreneur – how the crisis of enterprises often entails a crisis of personal identity, a sense of failure of the subject as a whole, due to the complex intertwinement between productive, reproductive and affect relations.

Similarly, in the case of Enzo, continuing his work and attempting to resist the crisis meant safeguarding his sense of self as the son of a market tradition, Italian hard-working man, paterfamilias and local inhabitant. Enzo's way of living with the crisis at the market was deeply interrelated with his idea of being a man and his performance of masculinity. Discussing such interrelation seems particularly important to contextualise the different forms of his (and other vendors') forms of solidarity and engagement at the market, which I will examine in the following section. The theme of masculinity emerged at Enzo's stand recurrently, in several manners: in the way he and other male vendors spoke about themselves, in the gendered division of labour at the stand, and through discussions on food and on politics.

Again Bourdieu (1984)'s concept of class identity markers is relevant here to approach masculinity (referred by Bourdieu as virility) as a way of emphasising one's own belonging to specific class cultural models and habitus. Specific ideas of virility are, according to the author, entrenched in class visions of work, of being an accomplished man and working-class identification mechanisms (Bourdieu 1984). In this perspective, Enzo's approach is to be contextualised as part of his education in the context of a hard-working immigrant family, in which both men and women worked, but men maintained a central role and, most often, the overall family's responsibility. As mentioned by Yanagisako (2020), some Italian small entrepreneurs' ways of managing their business and family might also be influenced by the heritage of agrarian paternalism. This seems relevant in the case of the history of this family, originally from rural Apulia.

Enzo would always oversee the general management of the stand and the heaviest physical tasks such as the transportation of food boxes and the setting up of the stand. Moreover, while Enzo would be at the stand until market closure time, his wife and sister would usually go home before that stage of the day, usually to prepare lunch for the whole family. If women were there to help, their work was limited to serving customers. When needed, Enzo would also do all the tasks by himself such as cleaning vegetables, serving customers - especially the most regular ones or whom he considered as the most important such as lawyers, police officers, Apulian elderlies. He also talked with them about food recipes, without that this threatened in any ways his masculinity. As also underlined by Black (2012) in relation to Paolo, a market vendor at Porta Palazzo, while, in the Italian context, food is often associated to women roles, at the market, it can represent a medium to perform masculinity and a social bond between men. Similarly to Paolo, Enzo often gathered with a group of male vendors to eat lunch all together every Saturday, sitting on an improvised table in the middle of the stands. This moment of rest and sociality revolved around the meal prepared especially for them by the local chef Rocco, selling his dishes a few stands away.



[Image 20: Enzo preparing meat at the local event and craft market *Barrierafiera*. 29/09/2019. Photo by the author]

In his study of manhood in a Cretan village, Michael Herzfeld examines the ways in which local inhabitants distinguish between "being a good man" and "being good at being a man", highlighting the importance of understanding local performative aspects of masculinity (Herzfeld 1985 in Gutmann 1997, 386). In the case of Enzo, the performance of "being good at being a man" linked to other important facets of his personhood, namely his entrepreneurial self and his social and political engagement around the marketplace. Enzo presented himself as a resilient and self-sacrificing man who, despite the deteriorating working conditions, continued to fight for keeping its activity in function and to defend his profession from multiple attacks. Such attitude is similar to the one of Greek artisans pushed at the

margins of the economy, as presented in Herzfeld (2004)[68], for whom similar expressions of resistant masculinity become essential to their struggle, when "struggle is the only thing capable of redeeming their social worth" (80).

Before connecting these elements to a discussion on social and political engagement at the market, I want to highlight the diversity of vendors' trajectories by presenting the case of another market vendor called Laura (a pseudonym). Her story is particularly telling about yet another aspect of the transformation of vendors' profession, and the local effects of and reactions to increasing market competition. In particular, the story of Laura shows how some vendors navigate economic transformations by changing professions, going in and out of the market, continuously searching for new ways to make a proper living.

Laura: self-employment and global competition

When I met her, Laura was a woman in her sixties. She sold coffee capsules, a few meters away from Enzo's stand, on the other side of the market pathway. I would often observe her while working with Enzo. Short, red-coloured hair, colourful nails, most times she sat quietly behind her stand. She would sit alone, resting on the counter, supporting her head with one hand, with an expression of tiredness on her face. Other times, someone was standing close to her, probably friends or markets' regular goers, chatting. Few clients approached her stand. From time to time, her strong personality would come out when engaging in brief exchanges with other neighbouring vendors. As it was generally done, she would shout things from her stand as a response to others' jokes or calls for opinion: "Have you seen the news on TV last night?", "what are you talking about?", "Enzo did you take the documents to the post office?".

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[68] In his book *The Body Impolitic, Artisans and Artifice in the Global Hierarchy of Value* (2004), Herzfeld examines the everyday work of Greek artisans and their apprentices in a context of changing value of craft production. The author reflects on the cultural and moral aspects of globalisation , artisans' marginality and relation to the state, and the practice of apprenticeship, among other things.

Only several weeks after the start of my participant observation, I discovered more about Laura, as she came to the stand and asked me to change her 10 euros banknote in smaller pieces - an exchange which was quite common among neighbouring vendors. While I was taking the change from the cash desk, she asked me about my accent and showed some curiosity when learning about my Roman origins. Several conversations followed this first exchange as I also started to stop by her stand. I liked to ask her opinion on little facts happening at the market, as she was the only woman who was willing to take part in the research and agreed to be interviewed. She also asked me questions about Rome, a city which she had visited only very briefly to partake in national demonstrations. She dreamt of going back for holidays and liked to ask me for recommendations.

Like Enzo, Laura had grown up at the market, but she had never liked it that much[69]. From her childhood at the market, she remembered the cold that would freeze her fingers in winter, her hard-working father, the river of people that would fill the market's pathways. Attempting to stay away from the market life, Laura had tried a variety of jobs. She had worked as a factory worker at FIAT, being fired after ten years, as part of the company's mass dismissals of the late 1980s. She had opened a paint shop together with her husband, but they were forced to close it down due to the development of large-scale competitors. Family and friends had then pushed her to reconsider coming back at the market and she decided to invest in a fresh pasta activity, buying the license and all the material needed. However, her new activity got highly affected by the mad cow disease and, for a long time, consumers refrained from buying any product filled with meat. While her stand survived that specific phase, it proved not to be economically viable in the long term, mainly because of the fast perishability of fresh pasta products as well as her limited sales, often coming down to families' weekend purchases.

With the booming of the coffee capsules market, Laura, following again the advice of her family and friends, decided to convert her activity and start a business in this rapidly expanding sector. Based on their analysis, many people around them had a coffee machine at

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[69] Laura – a pseudonym, market vendor, interview, 26/11/2019.

home, which confirmed that there was a local demand for these items. However, when I asked Laura about her current situation, she explained that the problems were on the side of the offer:

> Amazon. Gaia [a pseudonym] is working at Amazon and without any hesitation she tells me "You can't imagine how many boxes of B. [coffee brand] we sell". So [I have] a fearsome competitor because if you go and buy on their website of course you save a bit of money. The new coffee pods and capsules chains have a higher purchasing power than you have […]. And then if you go online, on Facebook, now everybody has improvised themselves as coffee pods seller, have you noticed? […] It became a very competitive world. […] Before I started, I just used my old Moka, so I had no idea… there is an entire world that I would have never imagined, a world of blends, compositions, origins…[70]

Laura, like several other vendors encountered at Piazza Foroni, suffered from the direct consequences of increasing global market competition. In particular, she spoke of the uneven competition with large food chains and e-commerce controlled by multinationals. Contemporary anthropological literature often focuses on the consequences of the globalised food systems by looking at the local alternatives put in place through new agri-food structures such as Solidarity Purchase Groups, Community Supported Agriculture and farmers markets (e.g. Dubuisson-Quellier *et al*. 2011; Grasseni 2013). These structures develop alternatives to the global food market by re-embedding producer – consumer relations in the local context. For example, Dubuisson-Quellier *et al*. (2011) discussed three French organisations advocating for alternative food procurement through protests and educational campaigns, as part of which consumers play a significant role. Grasseni (2013) provided an ethnographic account of Italy's Solidarity Purchase Groups. While presenting these systems of

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[70] Laura, interview, 26/11/2019.

local food procurement, her book also sheds light onto the organisation of civil society in contemporary Italy, more generally[71].

However, such analyses do not consider the workers of the food sector or food retailers, such as Laura, who are not necessarily in the position or do not have the economic or cultural means to operate such reconversion and to opt out of conventional food circuits. These vendors are hit by recession and austerity but do not envision alternatives and continue their activities in a situation of dependency but also of direct and uneven competition with large-scale food retailers. Laura attempted to work in several contexts, with different products, but she surrendered to the idea that she would manage to improve her living conditions.

As written by Narotzky (2020, 1) this is a general trend in contemporary Southern Europe, where "prospects for well-being and upward social mobility, or even stable employment, have grown increasingly elusive since 2008". This was also the case of other vendors such as one of Laura's neighbours, who, in 2019, alternated his work as market retailer with occasional employment at the Amazon local distribution centre. He often complained about the stressful working rhythms and repetitive movements at the centre, but decided to continue working there as long as he would have the opportunity to do so. This "opportunity" ended very quickly: after three months his contract was not renewed and he came back to work at the market on a regular basis.

Such volatile working conditions of market vendors can be analysed in relation to notions of labour and dispossession as analysed by Sharryn Kasmir and August Carbonella in their edited volume *Blood and Fire. Toward a Global Anthropology of Labor* (2014). In their introductory piece, the two anthropologists explain how global precarity can be understood by exploring the variety and complexity of histories, struggles and social relations around labour in different contexts. The

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[71] These contributions are just two examples of the wide set of literature on alternative food networks (AFNs). For critical approaches to AFNs beyond the field of anthropology refer to, for example, Harris (2009), DeLind (2011) and Ashe (2018).

authors build on David Harvey's conceptualisation of "accumulation by dispossession" to point to the global dynamics of capitalist accumulation that, while transforming the ways of working and "making, remaking and unmaking" working classes also connect different contexts and local struggles (Carbonella and Kasmir 2014, 6). The authors also call for a holistic understanding of dispossession as:

> the varied acts of disorganisation, defeat, and enclosure that are at once economic, martial, social and cultural and that create the conditions for a new set of social relations. (Carbonella and Kasmir 2014, 7)

The case of Laura shows how the labour of small entrepreneurs is also part of these transformations: their work becomes volatile and just a partial solution that is often not sufficient to guarantee a stable income. Moreover, the public sector does not necessarily work on the improvement of their conditions – which can be analysed as part of what Carbonella and Kasmir (2014, 15) discuss as "the politics of dispossession". Global competition also affected vendors such as Laura by creating a feeling of disorientation and inability to make sense of markets' fast transformations. Such processes can be regarded in terms of increasing abstraction, interdependency and mediation, which render more complex for subjects to discern the causes and effects of the many fluxes that characterise society (e.g. Ciavolella 2013; Narotzky and Smith 2006). In their historical and ethnographic study of the Vega Baja region in Spain, Narotzky and Smith (2006) similarly point out to the growing feeling of alienation which workers experience as globalisation transforms their local production systems, class relations and culture. At Piazza Foroni, feelings of alienation and vulnerability in the face of global dynamics also informed and modulated local understanding of civic engagement and political participation, which I will discuss next.

I presented two cases of vendors of Apulian origins (as long-term local inhabitants and workers of the area) and stressed how the food market and their profession allowed them to maintain a feeling of continuity with the past, while their labour underwent several transformations and was highly impacted by economic recession and austerity. I argued that these also affected their sense of self as small entrepreneurs by

showing how this related to other aspects of their personhood – in line with scholars analysing the complexity of "small entrepreneurial identity" (Loperfido 2020, 173). Reporting on their everyday life also allowed me to discuss how issues such as global economic competition and labour precarity were experienced by workers at Piazza Foroni. While these vendors often felt discouraged, isolated and marginalised both by the global market and the state, they did not remain silent and found ways to raise their voice in local and national political debate. In the next section, I analyse some of these practices, which I discuss in terms of solidarity, engagement and contestation. I do not define these terms upfront, but rather describe how they unfold in practice and how context-specific ways of doing can enrich different denotations of these concepts. Going back to the initial questions of this chapter, I argue that conventional markets represent a space of engagement and organisation despite contemporary anti-politics turn (e.g. Ciavolella 2013) and workers' disorganisation through differentiation (Carbonella and Kasmir 2014).

Solidarity, engagement and contestation

It was a quiet day at the market and I was working together with Enzo[72]. I was at the back of the stand, waiting for costumers next to the weight-scale and cashier. Enzo was at the front, cleaning leafy vegetables - cutting off damaged or perished leaves - and rearranging them. The market was less busy than usual and I decided to ask Enzo some questions. He was used to me asking things and he seemed to appreciate our conversations, as he often took the time to explain his views in detail. I took my notebook out of my bag, which he made me keep under the stand, "far from the robbers' hands" as he said.

While starting to write, resting the notebook on a box of onions, I said aloud: "Enzo, are trade unions popular among market vendors?". He seemed to find that question worth discussing and got closer. He firstly explained to me about the two main unions, the "big ones, the ones that are related to *la politica*". The expression *la politica*, literally "politics", was used in this context with a pejorative connotation to refer to formal or informal interactions and agreements between (local)

[72] The following vignette is based on fieldnotes taken on the 18/09/2019.

politicians. “These large unions have become the ruin of workers” he stressed. In the last decade, he had witnessed the development of new unions, smaller and managed completely by workers. However, these did not gather many vendors as “foreigners [market vendors of foreign origins] are not interested”. He added: “they get state support and face lower expenses!”.

Later that day, Enzo introduced me to an old friend of his, who was shopping at the market with his wife. He used to work as market vendor but had to stop because his activity was not economically viable anymore. “Together, we fought a lot of fights!” Enzo said to me proudly, patting on his friend’s shoulder.

These exchanges illustrate how political reflections were part of the everyday conversations between Enzo, me, nearby vendors, as well as his most regular customers. These reflections revolved around the institutions, which they most often mistrusted, such as large unions and *la politica*. They also referred to past demonstrations, solidarity among vendors and collective achievements as organised workers. At the same time, they emphasised differences between one group, so called “us” and composed of Italian vendors, and the others, “them”, namely vendors of foreign origins.

The multiple facets of market solidarity

In the next paragraphs, based on the case of Enzo, I will further discuss how solidarity relations unfold at the market. I will focus on two main facets of market solidarity. Firstly, I will illustrate the characteristics and boundaries of a form of solidarity among vendors, namely their collective organisation. Secondly, I will discuss food donations as a form of vendors’ solidarity towards the local population. In both cases, solidarity reveals itself as an ambiguous dimension, as similarly underlined in anthropological literature calling for context-specific analysis of solidarity such as Rakopoulos (2014), who investigates the meaning of solidarity in a grassroots movement in the context of austerity in Greece. As highlighted by the author, ambiguity emerges not only in terms of the meaning of the concept of solidarity but also in terms of its implications on the relations between people, their visions of the state and the market (Rakopoulos 2014). At

Piazza Foroni, practices of solidarity included tensions and ambiguities that I put at the centre of my analysis.

As introduced above, one of the ways in which solidarity among market vendors became particularly apparent was through their organisation as part of small unions and collectives. Enzo and some of the other Italian vendors of the market were organised as part of a small union of vendors called *G.O.I.A. Gruppo Organizzato Imprese Autonome* (literally, organised group of self-standing enterprises) as well as the market vendors association *Associazione Commercianti Piazza Foroni*. Together with the market commission, the association served as a space for decision-making on logistics, activities and events at the market. It organised social and cultural events such as artisanal fairs, concerts, temporary art projects that would animate the market square, often in collaboration with other local organisations. It promoted these events through its Facebook page[73], which was also used to advertise products and share news articles and videos of the market. It was through these posts, often written by Enzo himself, that vendors also shared information about their collective efforts. For example, they explained about local and national demonstrations[74]. They also communicated the days of market closure, organised in solidarity with vendors participating to national strikes.

On the other hand, the vendors union G.O.I.A was born in Turin in 2010, following the protests against the Bolkestein directive, namely an EU law approved in 2006, which aimed at creating a single services market within the European Union (Goia n.d.; EUR-Lex 2006). G.O.I.A emerged from the mobilisation of vendors and other self-standing entrepreneurs wanting to act together to protect their work in such context. More precisely they protested against the fact that their concessions for the use of public ground would no longer be automatically renewed but regularly re-assigned through tenders open

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[73] See https://www.facebook.com/mercatopiazzaforoni/ (accessed 19/01/22).

[74] For example, a demonstration organised on the 18/05/2020 to protest against the strict government measures in terms of the reorganisation of open-air food markets due to COVID-19. Communication shared on 17/05/2020 on the *Mercato Piazza Foroni* Facebook page.

to stakeholders in the whole European region (Percossi 2017). The protests lasted several years and in 2018 self-standing market vendors obtained the temporary exclusion of their category from the national implementation of the Bolkestein regulation (HuffPost 2017). More recently, vendors continued to organise themselves collectively as part of G.O.I.A to request a single taxation system to simplify complex bureaucracy-related tasks, among other things.



[Image 21: The protest in Spinaceto in 2017. Photo by Massimo Percossi/ Ansa. Retrieved on 10/03/2022 at: https://www.ilpost.it/2017/03/16/ambulanti-bolkestein/]

Both G.O.I.A. and the association *Associazione Commercianti Piazza Foroni* brought together Enzo and Laura, as well as few other of their neighbouring long-term colleagues. However, these organisations did not represent all vendors working on the square. According to Enzo, most vendors of foreign origins did not participate to these groups and related activities. While I did not investigate this matter directly – and lack the material to discuss in depth why other vendors did not participate and whether they were part of other collectives or solidarity networks[75]-, such difference represents an interesting entry point to

[75] I could not find any literature on the theme of vendors' collective organisation in Turin, despite the existence of some studies on market vendors. See, for example, Blanchard (2011).

discuss the boundaries of such forms of vendors' solidarity and unpack their idea of marginality. While they considered themselves as marginalised individuals and category of workers (e.g. marginalised by economic competition, decline of small-scale retailing, lack of welfare state support, pushed away by urban transformations, to reiterate a few), they also seemed more inserted in local networks when compared to vendors that had been on the square for a shorter amount of time. Especially Enzo held a position of power due to his legitimacy as long-term market vendors, and his many contacts with the local administration, associations and police officers. To provide an example, police officers would usually interact directly with him when issues of (perceived) insecurity or petty criminality would emerge within the market area.

As hinted in the vignette above, Enzo would often also differentiate between vendors of Italian and foreign origins, arguing that the latter were privileged from the point of view of taxation and welfare state support. When discussing these differences, Enzo repeated that he was not racist and exemplified the good relations he held with his neighbouring vendors of Moroccan origins. He underlined that it was "the system" (to be understood as the public sector, its bureaucracy and regulations) that brought people to become racist, because of the disparities it generated. As previously discussed, these mechanisms of differentiation between "us" and "them" were common in this multicultural, fast changing neighbourhood and reflected fears of isolation and economic insecurity among certain groups of the Italian working-class population (see also Cingolani 2018; Campolongo and Tarditi 2019). I add that such preconceptions created circles of solidarity that were not easily permeable and which inclusiveness towards other vendors is to be questioned and remains to be investigated.

Such mechanisms of differentiations also coexisted with the other form of solidarity which I want to discuss, namely vendors participation in local charity projects such as small fundraising campaigns and food donations. Enzo liked to sponsor and participate in some social activities in the area: his stand would often be decorated with leaflets of local initiatives such as charity campaigns, positioned amidst his scarfs and posters celebrating the Torino football team.

Moreover, Enzo donated weekly some of his products to local inhabitants in need, through the food aid initiative *Fa Bene* (literally doing good). As we discussed in Mari and Vasile (2020), *Fa Bene* was a project born in Barriera di Milano in 2014, and later extended to several other neighbourhoods in Turin, with the objective of collecting unsold food surplus or food donations at the marketplace. These products were then redistributed to families in need, which, in exchange, made themselves available to volunteer within the local community. Enzo and the market association *Associazione Commercianti Piazza Foroni* had been supporting the initiative *Fa Bene* from its very beginning. For example, they had actively participated in discussions about how to develop the project as part of the social activities of the market (Corriere di Barriera 2014).

While this and other food aid projects will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, here I want to highlight how vendors' participation in such projects coexisted with possible preconceptions and discriminations towards vulnerable categories of the local population. This can be exemplified by the opinions of Enzo's sister, who helped at the stand from time to time. While she supported the fact that Enzo donated part of his products to local population in need, she also blamed vulnerable groups and immigrants, arguing that they were responsible of the decline of the area. Enzo and his sister would often end up in a discussion. He was particularly critical about some of her arguments which she borrowed from far-right politics. To me he argued that her views were related to the situation of economic hardship that she was facing despite an entire life of demanding work.

This final example shows how the notion of solidarity can incorporate quite different positions and has stopped pertaining to specific political postures. As argued by Muehlebach (2009, 497):

> "solidarity" has long ceased to pertain exclusively to the Left's narrative repertoire. […] A trope that circulates across various social and political domains, solidarity draws together disparate projects and agents while seemingly eradicating historical and ideological difference.

While Muehlebach (2009) mainly refers to master narratives (which are present at all levels of political debates including policy makers), the example of these vendors shows how the solidarity trope incorporates paradoxes and divergent political views also at a very local, neighbourhood level. I showed how local understandings of solidarity are related to collective representation of vendors and their donations to vulnerable groups. At the same time, I highlighted how such forms of solidarity can coexist with mechanisms of differentiation between long-term and short-term vendors and with narratives that blame vulnerable local inhabitants. In the next section, I focus on two themes that proved to be strongly interlinked with notions of solidarity at the market, namely engagement and contestation.

Contesting at the market: vendors engagement to shape urban renewal and the future of their category

To discuss market vendors' forms of engagement and contestation, I will discuss two examples: vendors engagement in market renewal and in demonstration for better welfare support. I discuss vendors engagement at the market following Georges Balandier (1984) theorisation of contestation as "protest within", as also discussed in the work of Tommaso India (2013) who used this framework to examine the case of FIAT factory workers at Termini Irmese (Sicily). In particular, he analysed their use of traditional food practices in the factory as a form of contestation of power. As India (2013) explained (building on Balandier), contestation is a form of protest that does not aim to fully subvert the system but to increase the possibilities for subaltern groups to negotiate their necessities to alleviate their condition of subalternity.

In this perspective, I firstly examine vendors' participation to the process of market renewal between 2011 and 2015. While I did not witness this period directly, Enzo frequently referred to it as a period of great achievements for local vendors, who had managed to protect the market from the inappropriate renewal plans initially proposed by the administration. I found this case particularly significant as clearly interlinking the topic of urban transformations to the one of civic and political participation. In fact, vendors had decided to collectively raise

their voice to have a say in the market renewal process. Moreover, while reviewing material about the renewal of the area, I realised that such active engagement of vendors was not narrated in the official documentation, such as the project's website and magazine. When mentioned, vendors' engagement was reduced to the account of the participatory tools developed by the project such as questionnaires and official working tables meant to establish a dialogue between the administration, planners and local inhabitants[76]. However, vendors were partially critical of these tools and their engagement went beyond these spaces, as reported in vendors testimonies, visual material, articles and blogposts, which I use (together with the accounts I gathered) to acknowledge and discuss their complex engagement.

The market renewal plans were part of *Urban Barriera,* a broader set of interventions for the physical, social and economic renewal of the neighbourhood Barriera di Milano. The intervention at Piazza Foroni aimed at improving the organisation of the market from the point of view of its access, security and hygienic standards. In practical terms, this involved construction works that lasted 18 months and included new pavement, improvements to the electric and water provisioning for market stands, new parking lots and renew of facilities such as benches and bike racks. Such physical interventions were complemented with an innovative marketing project aimed at increasing market's visibility through the development of shared image, colours and logo (Comune di Torino 2016). The process was facilitated through a participatory organism called the Urban Committee (*Comitato Urban*), which was created by the city administration. This committee aimed at "coordinating, informing, promoting and mediating" and followed the renewal works (Comune di Torino 2016, 4). It informed local inhabitants about ongoing transformations, collected the ideas and requests of the local population and mediated these with the needs of the administration. As part of its various activities on the ground, in 2013, this committee organised at the market the information campaign INFOroni (playing with the words info and Foroni). This consisted of a small information stand present at the market two days a week to notify market goers

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[76] See for example the accounts of participatory processes in the final report of the Urban Barriera project (Comune di Torino 2016).

about the distinct phases of the construction works as well as to collect their impressions and suggestions in relation to the future of the neighbourhood, more generally.

Despite these tools for co-planning and information, market vendors did not feel appropriately included in the decision-making process around the market renewal. Before the start of the construction works at the market, vendors were invited to discuss the plans via the market commission. According to Enzo, it was while partaking to such discussions that vendors realised that the plans being presented were already finalised in the mind of the administration. Enzo and his colleagues felt tricked by such "fake" participatory processes*:* they were being called to the table, but this felt like a pure formality, they had no power as the main decisions had already been taken. Enzo and other vendors felt that these plans were not adapted to the context of the market. As he explained, they were designed by bureaucrats who had no idea about what was going on daily at the market[77]. For example, they wanted to improve security at the market but, according to vendors, planners' initial program risked worsening it by decreasing the width of some alleys. Most importantly, vendors did not agree with the reorganisation of the stands and the new arrangement proposal. They did not want to leave their original spots nor to excessively distance the stands.

Vendors expressed their disagreement throughout the renewal process with demonstrations, active participation in local meetings on the matter, which transformed the plan into a subject of debate felt and participated by the local population. Vendors' discontent was so important to the point that it was also perceived as dangerous, as proved by the presence of anti-riot police on the square on the day of the start of the works in 2013[78]. To be heard, vendors decided to organise simulations of how the new market would look like if the original plans would go through. Only following these simulations, the local administration started taking vendors' opinion more seriously and ultimately decided to revise its plans.

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[77] Enzo, informal conversation, 04/01/22.

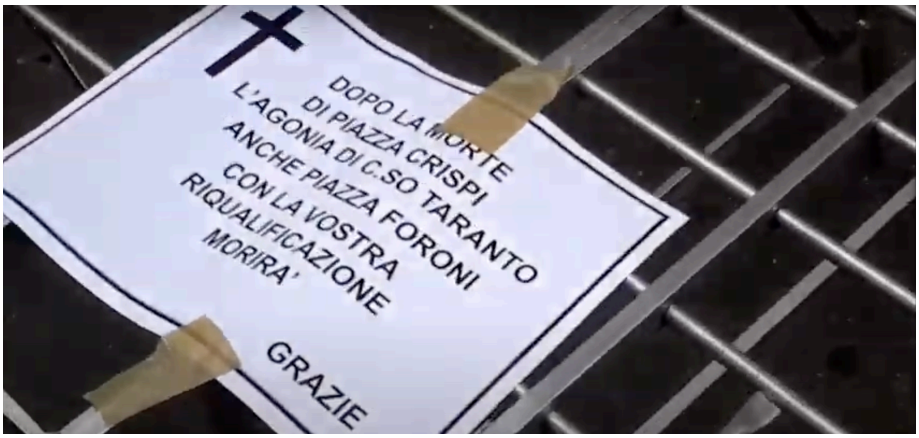
[78] Enzo, informal conversation, 04/01/22.

As shown in the video recording of the simulations[79], these days at the market also included heated discussions with local politicians as well as symbolic actions. For example, the possible future death of the market (following the renewal) was symbolised by the transportation of a coffin made of cardboard. The vendors carried it on their shoulders enacting the funeral of the market.





[79] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-47myZedBY&t=576s (accessed 10/02/22)



[Images 22a, 22b, 22c: Screenshots from the video of the protest and simulation (02/07/13) illustrating the references to the death of the market. Retrieved on 10/03/2022 at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-47myZedBY&t=576s]

As resumed in the images above, the vendors argued that the renewal plan of Piazza Foroni was going to lead to its decay, as in the case of other markets in the area - which had been transformed in the previous years. Vendors resumed their ideas in banners and messages such as the ones above. The big banner stated "Piazza Foroni must not die. Why not listening to the advice of the vendors?" and referred specifically to the lack of appropriate consultations on the reorganisation and physical transformations of the market area. Similarly, the message posted on shop shutters (last image) stated: "after the dead of Piazza Crispi [market], the agony of Corso Taranto [market], with your renewal [plans] also Piazza Foroni will die". These markets had indeed lost many of their vendors and customers, were reduced in size and frequency, as confirmed for example in a 2013 news article about the market of Corso Taranto (Coccorese 2013). Based on my observations several years later, the market of Piazza Crispi had basically ceased to exist: its impressive iron structure and roof only hosted a few stands, on occasional weekends. The daily

market of Corso Taranto attracted few vendors and customers, as also confirmed through interviews I conducted with two local vendors[80].

Vendors at Piazza Foroni were particularly afraid that the renewal would make the market lose its identity. A market without a strong identity was, according to them, destined to disappear. Therefore, they also wanted some elements to remain unchanged and evocative of its long-term history. The pressure of market vendors brought to the development of a second renewal plan which did not include any rearrangement of the stands and most vendors were able to keep their same workstation on the square. It also allowed vendors to continue their activities during the renovation and construction works by dividing these in different steps. Such outcomes encouraged the vendors: during our most recent conversations in winter 2022, they still remembered these days as a victory.

Vendors' willingness to have a say in urban transformations and their direct intervention in the market renewal are interesting to be analysed in relation to the notion of "right to the city", as theorised by Lefebvre (1968) (also introduced in part I) and Harvey (2008). Both authors stress how collective voice and power are key to reshape the processes of urbanisation, while related rights to direct participation and action are most often neglected. From this perspective, these processes at Piazza Foroni reveal the details and tensions of such mechanisms – and maybe that is why they also tend to be forgotten. They speak of different meanings associated to participation, the mainstream one often being just a formal narration or, as explained by Enzo, a word to be used to create a space for discussion and information, while the actual decisions have already been taken. With their contestation, these vendors challenged such "participatory mechanisms", finding their own ways (such as the simulations) to reshape urban renewal plans.

During my fieldwork, I could observe also more recent example of collective engagement and contestation at the market. Most of them related to concerns and demands for the future of vendors' profession. More specifically, vendors contested the way in which their profession

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[80] Rachid, market vendor in Corso Taranto, interview, 16/12/2019. Monica – a pseudonym, market vendor in Corso Taranto, interview, 16/12/2019.

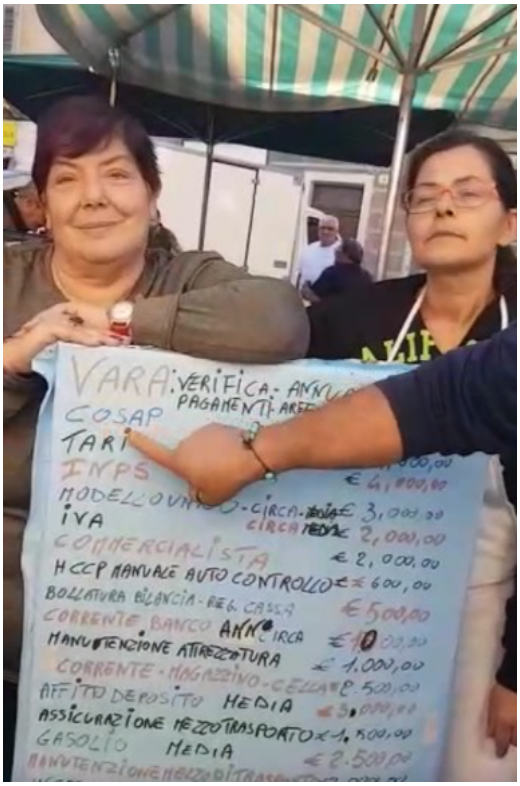
was negatively depicted in public discourse, often associated to fraud and tax evasion. They also complained about the lack of state support, high taxation and increasing bureaucratisation of their labour. They participated to local and national demonstrations - for which they also travelled to Rome. Such engagement is to be contextualised as part of a tradition, as mentioned by Enzo in the quotes reported at the start of this section, for example when he said: "we fought a lot of fights". Enzo often referred to protest movements such as the mobilisation of the *Forconi* (pitchforks) in 2012 (Zunino 2013). This series of protest consisted in road and rail blockades and urban demonstrations and uprisings which aim was summarised in the slogan "let's block Italy" (*fermiamo l'Italia*). These protests were initially organised by farmers and truck drivers, but soon extended to small-scale entrepreneurs, unemployed and students. The main critiques put forward by the *Forconi* related to the consequences of global competition and austerity, which had pushed these workers into difficult economic conditions (Sperandio 2013). They also requested the possibility for ordinary people to be involved more directly in political decision-making processes. While the *Forconi* has generally been regarded as a right-wing and populist movement, according to Enzo, it was quite heterogeneous.

At the time of the fieldwork, interestingly, this same group of vendors also used the market as a space of contestation. They developed video messages by filming themselves during working hours and posting these images on social media – usually on Facebook. In October 2019, one of their videos, ironically entitled "greetings from the tax evaders" (*un saluto dagli evasori*) reached more than 3100 likes 650000 views[81]. The video showed the group of vendors standing in front of a stand, sheltering from the rain. The vendors called themselves sarcastically tax evaders to respond to recent public statements of a politician who had made blunt generalizations about vendors' tendency to evade taxation. Sarcastically, they thank the government for worsening their reputation and made applauses. Enzo talked loudly and heatedly, explaining that vendors worked hard, every day, despite

[81] https://www.facebook.com/vincenzo.torraco.5/videos/195624471457614/ (accessed 10/03/2022).

the terrible weather conditions, and arguing that it would not be the case if they were rich.

Based on the success of their message, a few days later, the same group developed a follow-up video aimed at creating awareness about the amount of bureaucracy they dealt with. They presented a board with a lengthy list with the names and amounts of their disparate expenses, including various taxes and markets costs. They aimed at explaining about their profession and its challenges, while inviting people to think beyond prejudices.



[Image 23: Enzo pointing to the different fixed costs faced by market vendors. 26/10/2019. Screenshot retrieved on 23/02/2022 at: https://www.facebook.com/vincenzo.torraco.5/videos/196453018041426/]

I take these examples to highlight how markets can represent a space of civic and political engagement, and should be analysed as part of contemporary multiplication of the "lieux du politique" (places of politics) and the reconfiguration of political participation and repertoires of action (Abélès 1992). Abelès (1992) described how political anthropology increasingly shifted its focus to political processes and power relations in Western societies, where the political landscape is transforming due to the crisis of legitimacy of institutional politics. The author calls for anthropologists to develop a new outlook on every day political action and "its associated symbolic and rituals", linked to both the affirmation of power and its contestation (Abelès 1992, 17). As explained by Melucci (1991), among others, in the last decades, different forms of non-institutional places of politics emerged and the action field of grassroots organisations diversified - despite the neoliberal drive towards the individualisation of society.

Popular movements, together with less structured types of action (such as occasional participation in campaigns, public events or demonstrations), can be regarded as ways in which politics emerge in contemporary subjects' everyday life, offering possibilities for the practice of political and civic participation, while bringing new questions with regards to their contemporary definition and emancipatory potential (e.g. Ciavolella and Wittersheim, 2016; Van Deth, 2014). The organisation and forms of contestation of the vendors of Piazza Foroni forces us to enlarge conceptualisation of market space, beyond its function as site of economic and cultural exchange (e.g. Black 2012) and multicultural relations (e.g. Semi 2009). Despite their limitations, such as the possible exclusionary features in the definition of the group of vendors, contestation and political participation is forwarded at the market to denounce undemocratic urban transformations and precarious working conditions.

From this perspective, the case of Piazza Foroni illustrates how conventional food markets can be site of political engagement as much as alternative food networks. The engagement of these vendors however revolves around different themes: while they do not engage in critical consumerism or short food supply chains, they discuss about labour precarity, welfare and urban transformations. While one might

disagree with vendors' political opinions or find some of these issues to be prioritised over others, this case reveals how these themes are embedded in class dimensions. The concerns of vendors at Piazza Foroni are an expression of what is happening to the people most impacted by austerity, economic recession and unequal urban transformations, representing attempts of ordinary people to have a say.

To conclude: in this chapter, I have discussed the case of Piazza Foroni market building on my experience side by side with some of its vendors. I examined the market from the perspective of its rooted and dynamic cultural identity - also important to gain a deeper understanding of the whole area of Barriera di Milano (which I will return to in the next chapters as well). I have discussed the context-specific meanings and consequences of austerity and economic recession through the analysis of the personal trajectories of two vendors. Their paths, in and outside the market, depict the possible intersections between changing labour, sense of alienation and loss of sense of self (for example, in relation to dominant models of masculinity). Finally, I discussed the market as a site of ambiguous solidarity, political engagement and contestation. In the next chapter, I continue to discuss the case of food markets but from the perspective of a different set of market goers. I enlarge my discussion on markets, urban transformations and labour, by looking at how a morality of deservingness is constructed through the gifting of unsold food and precarious labour at the marketplace.