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

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Chapter V. Collecting food surplus. Asylum seekers and the construction of deservingness

While becoming more familiar with various marketplaces, I also started to get to know better many people aside of vendors who found an occupation at the market, such as people in charge of installing the stalls, cleaning the market square or engaging in the recuperation of food surplus and leftovers. This last activity, usually called food gleaning, is an old practice consisting of individuals or small collectives recuperating unsold food (e.g. damaged, semi-perished) that would otherwise be wasted for their own consumption (e.g. Varda 2000). During my fieldwork, while such gleaners (ranging from elderly women to grassroots initiatives such as *Food Not Bombs*) were still part of the markets' life, a new form of gleaning flourished prominently, namely institutionalised initiatives for the collection and redistribution of food surplus. These were promoted by non-profit organisations - thanks to the endorsement of the municipality and the financial contribution of the private sector - in several food markets around the city. Their activities mainly revolved around the collection of food surplus, such as overripe food which vendors could not sell anymore, as well as its free redistribution to people in vulnerable socio-economic conditions.

Such initiatives arose in parallel to the activities of food banks, aiming to tackle at once the issue of food waste, food insecurity and social exclusion. These were extensively analysed in literature on food poverty and welfare transformation in Italy (see for example Maino *et al.* 2016) as well as in Turin-centred scholarly works. Toldo (2017), Vietti (2018) and Pettenati *et al.* (2019) mapped these novel practices and pointed to their organisational features. During my fieldwork, I followed three of such initiatives which had different approaches to food surplus collection and redistribution in terms of whom they worked with and how. Some initiatives, such as *Fa Bene* (introduced in the previous chapter), involved people in vulnerable socio-economic conditions in the collection at markets and later food was delivered to specific beneficiaries. Other initiatives were organized with workers and volunteers who collected the food surplus and then redistributed it *in loco* to whoever passed by and wanted food, such as in the case of

the recollection organised by the association *Eco dalle Città* in several markets - including *Porta Palazzo*, the largest open-air food market in Europe. This association was born as part of the homonymous editorial board and news website on the urban environment and ecology, and organised awareness raising campaigns around these themes since 2009. In 2016, *Eco dalle Città* (from now on *EdC*) had also started several projects to collect and redistribute food surplus while supporting waste management at markets. *EdC* became famous for involving refugees and asylum seekers in their activities.

While these projects were publicly lauded by the local administration and media, little was said about the subjects (such as workers, volunteers and recipients) involved in the activities. Nor it was assessed how their participation shaped the way in which they understood themselves or in which they were framed. In this chapter, I focus on these subjects and more specifically on the asylum seekers and refugees (which I will also refer to as newcomers) at the forefront of the *EdC* projects. I expand on the ways in which they navigated the multicultural context of the markets, their role, precarious working conditions and their different relations with the *EdC* manager and Italian workers. I focus on the perspectives of the newcomers, but consequently also the ones of Italian workers, market goers and food recipients that they interacted with. By doing so, I discuss everyday intercultural interactions, labour conditions, power relations as well as the image-making of morally good and appropriate subjects and spaces. I argue that such initiatives around food surplus recollection are tightly interlinked with the transformation of the Italian welfare, the idea of deservingness, the reproduction of racial and social disparities and urban renewal in the context of gentrifying areas of the city. In continuity with the previous chapter, I use the perspectives of asylum seekers and refugees to contribute to new analyses of the marketplace, aiming to bring back spatial, social and labour dynamics into the equation.

To examine this case I bring together and dialogue with different anthropological sets of literature, including works on migrants, race and class at food markets (Black 2012; Semi 2009; Alkon 2012); asylum seekers and their reception in the Italian context and beyond (Boccagni and Riccio 2014; Pinelli and Ciabbarri 2017; van der Veer

2020); and migrants' (and marginal groups) inclusion in processes of moral production of deserving citizen-subjects (Ong et al. 1996; Ong 2003). In particular, the work of Aihwa Ong (2003) inspired my reflections around the notion of deservingness⁸². This author analysed the life of Cambodian refugees in America and the ways in which their access to welfare and citizenship was tightly interlinked with issues of race, class, labour and to the notion of deservingness. As explained by Ong (2003) – and later also by other scholars such as de Koning, Jaffe, and Koster (2015) in the context of the Netherlands - these processes of subject-making and related “citizenship agendas” are produced beyond the nation state, for example by actors such as cultural associations, private enterprises and non-profit organisations. I build on Ong's work to critically analyse how projects such as the EdC ones play a role in the “transformation of the newcomers” into “normalized” and deserving citizens (Ong 2003, 80).

My analysis of EdC adds to this literature from mainly three angles. Firstly, I show how the management and redistribution of food surplus can be an important mediator of processes of subject-making. Extending what written by Fredericks (2012) in relation to participatory trash management in Dakar, garbage and cleaning reveal specific configurations of moral projects. These are particularly powerful to analyse “because trash work is deeply implicated in the ordering of people as well as spaces” (Fredericks 2012, 136). My second point is that processes of subject-making and urban renewal are interlinked. In continuity with the other examples gathered in this dissertation, the analysis of EdC and their collaborations at the marketplace shows how urban renewal and gentrification are not only a matter of remaking the urban space and its economic activities but also of transforming its social practices. The progressive institutionalisation of gleaning which I discuss here is an example in this sense. Thirdly, an investigation of newcomers' perspectives sheds light onto more general trends that characterise the transformation of the Italian welfare system, and allows to extend the discussion around the idea of “deserving citizens” (Ong 2003) beyond their case. I show how their situation and the one of precarious Italian workers and food

⁸² Currently, several anthropologists are focusing again on the theme of deservingness, see for example Tošić and Streinzer (2022).

recipients share common features as they all must prove their deservingness in a multitude of ways, in a context of uncertainty. Extending what Beneduce and Taliani (2013) argued in relation to the bureaucratic systems regulating the reception of newcomers, such initiatives represent “a unique laboratory to study the transformations of the neoliberal state and its disciplining of alterity” (232, translation is my own).

Next, in the first section of the chapter, I look at the everyday dynamics that asylum seekers and refugees working for EdC are part of. Building on their experiences, I reflect on some of the socio-cultural interactions that characterise diverse and low-income neighbourhoods such as Aurora and Barriera di Milano at the intersection between unemployment, austerity and the promises and risks of urban renewal. In the second section, I delve into the organisation of EdC initiatives: I report on the workers and volunteers’ different perspectives on labour, and on the linkages and power relations between asylum seekers, the project manager and Italian workers. I explain why these relations reflect complex dynamics as part of which the idea of deservingness coexists with structural racial disparities and precarious working conditions. In this chapter, while I kept the real name of the association, initiatives and places, I have used pseudonyms for all EdC workers and volunteers.

Hello brother

Collecting food surplus at Via Porpora

When I arrived at the market of Via Porpora - another daily open-air food market situated in Barriera di Milano – Charles and Kevin, respectively an intern and a volunteer of the association EdC, both asylum seekers originally from sub-Saharan Africa, were waiting for me⁸³. On that day, they oversaw the EdC food surplus collection and redistribution for that market. As introduced above, EdC promoted initiatives aimed at reducing food waste and promoting a more

⁸³ This vignette incorporates insights gained during different days of participant observation at the market of Via Porpora in autumn 2019.

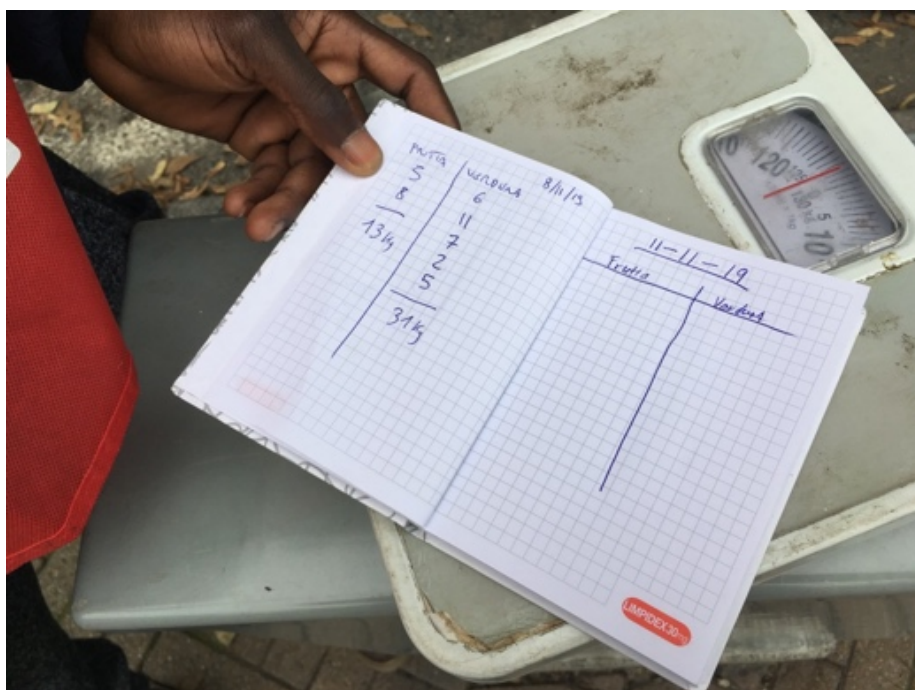
sustainable system of waste collection at markets. In 2019 the project saved and redistributed more than 73.000 kilos of food. It also helped to guarantee that 73% of the waste produced at markets where it operated was managed properly, namely separated into the organic, plastic and paper bins. To do this, the association receives the economic support of private foundations (above all *Compagnia di San Paolo*) and enterprises including, *Amiat Gruppo Iren* and *Novamont* (involved in urban waste management as contracting firms), and, to a minor extent, the sponsorship of the municipality.

Charles and Kevin stood at the EdC meeting point not far from the first stands of the market, on the left sidewalk, next to a waste collection point. At that time, they were already quite used to my presence. They welcomed me in a friendly manner and handed me one of the project's red vests, which they also tuck above their jackets. We were ready to start the market tour: we stopped in front of every stand, said hi to the vendors and asked if they had some products that they were willing to give away. Charles and Kevin were smiling and mild, alternating a general “*ciao!*” to the expression “hello brother!” (*ciao fratello!*). The vendors were used to the presence and requests of these “youngsters of colour” (*ragazzi di colore*), as one of the vendors called them, while turning to his colleague and asking him to search for food leftovers in their van. The interactions were brief as vendors in most cases were also busy serving their clients. Several of them reacted in an open manner and gave us a box – which they had already prepared or made on the spot - of very ripe fruits and vegetables, which they were unable to sell. Some told us to pass by again later, others just said “no nothing, sorry!” and few did not even look at or answered to us. As Charles and Kevin were busy taking some boxes from the rear of a stand, a market goer, an Italian elderly lady, asked me about the project. I explained that we were gathering unsold food to redistribute it to people for free and she complimented us, emphasizing that so many people needed such support in the area. She underlined with emphasis that many of them were Italians and elderlies.

As we walked back, loaded with boxes in our arms, around ten people were already waiting for us, standing at the meeting point. We said hi, while putting the boxes on the floor. Charles took the weighing scale out of his bike's basket: we weighted the food and, as instructed by the

project managers, he wrote down on a small notebook the number of fruits and vegetables collected on that day. At the same time, Kevin selected the food, removing the most spoiled products by throwing them into the brown container for organic waste just next to us. Then, Charles asked me to stay there, surveying the food and the weighing scale, while they went back to the market for another round.

As I stood there, some people had started to form a circle around the boxes, starting to glimpse at what was there. I knew some of them, while others I saw for the first time. Carla, a caretaker (*badante*) originally from Romania, came there every day of the food collection. She usually liked to teach me Romanian words. She picked up an apple, cleaned it with her knife, cut it and offered pieces to her friends – who worked in the area as caretakers and housekeepers – Mario and me. Mario was also present regularly to the food distribution. He liked to make jokes, that he said helped him not to think about his economic situation. As he saw Charles and Kevin come back with more food, he joked aloud: “the bogeyman is coming!” (“*sta arrivando l’uomo nero!*”). In Italian, “*l’uomo nero*” also means the black man. Like the bogeyman, it can be mentioned to children as a demon that comes at night and take them away if they do not behave appropriately by closing their eyes and falling asleep. Charles laughed with him, amused or maybe just reacting politely. At 13h sharp, Charles announced “you can help yourself!” and people immediately started selecting and filling their bags as we stood there, on the side.





[Images 24a, 24b, 24c. Photos taken at Via Porpora on November 11 and 27 2019. Charles taking notes. Carla cleaning an apple. The recollected food. Photos by the author.]

In the following paragraphs, I build on these observations to analyse markets as arenas of intercultural relations navigated by the newcomers that were part of EdC - mainly asylum seekers and refugees originally from Sub-Saharan Africa. Transactions around food represented, also in this context, privileged moments to explore the fine lines between social inclusion and exclusion as well as new understandings of citizenship which developed in post-industrial, working-class and diverse neighbourhoods such as Aurora and Barriera di Milano.

Markets and multiculturalism in Turin

As introduced in the previous chapter, Turin was characterised by several waves of immigration and hosts a diverse population, especially in Aurora, Barriera di Milano and other northern neighbourhoods of the city (Comune di Torino 2020). These areas host a population composed of several generations of immigrants with multiple regional and ethnic origins. This gives a context-specific meaning to the notion of multiculturalism, which needs to be understood here as a multi-layered set of relations, frictions and disparities, including inter-generational and intra-group dynamics⁸⁴. Among the anthropologists writing about Turin, Cingolani (2016) examined the coexistence between populations of different origins in these areas and explained why this is not always easy. For example, he shows how this is intertwined with generational conflicts and inhabitants' socio-economic challenges. The specificities of the case of Turin were also explored by Sacchi and Viazzo (2003) who gathered a series of ethnographic studies on migration in Turin conducted between 1996 and 2002 pointing to the relations to past immigration waves from Southern Italy and the complex experiences and representations within more recent immigration phenomena. Immigration in Turin, related bureaucracy, reception practices and popular responses should also be contextualised as part of the relatively recent history of immigration in Italy. While I do not have the space to expand on such historical account, Jacqueline Andall provided a good overview of the distinct stages of the Italian migratory model. This was characterised by a late institutional response to the migratory phenomenon and the significant role of the voluntary sector as “principal regulator of immigration” until the 1980s (Andall 2000, 49).

As part of the ethnographic studies exploring immigration from a “space and people focused” perspective (Cingolani 2016, 123), several anthropology researchers have discussed open-air food markets in Turin as central (and complex) economic, social and cultural arenas, where many intercultural relations take place (see for example Basile

⁸⁴ In relation to intra-group dynamics, see also Capello (2008) on Moroccan immigrants in Turin.

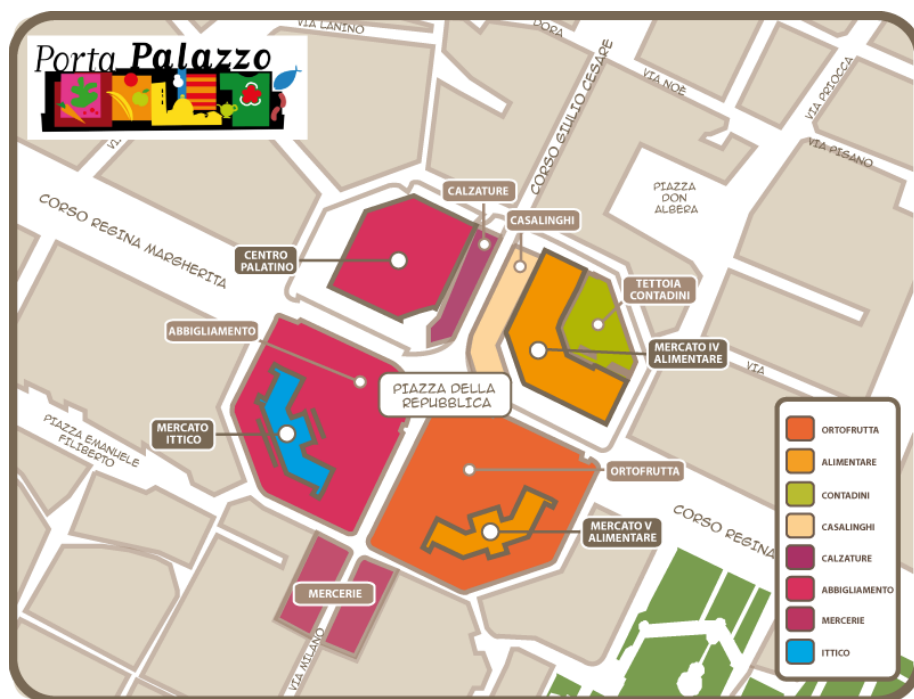
2003; Semi 2009; Black 2012; Vietti 2018). As pointed out by these scholars, markets play a key role in the path of many migrants as they often represent spaces where it is possible to:

meet compatriots, cultivating in this way linkages with the country of origins, but also to establish interactions with the context of settlement, with its products, with the people who live in the same neighbourhood, with the vendors, with the local language and its everyday practices. (Vietti 2018, 117, translation is my own)

This is surely true for the markets of Porta Palazzo and Via Porpora, both important centres of the food collection and redistribution promoted by EdC. The market of Via Porpora exists since the 1970s. It is a daily (07h-14h) open air market for food but also clothes and accessories situated in the northern part of the neighbourhood Barriera di Milano. At the time of the fieldwork, it was considered as a relatively small market, of about 60 stands, popular among local residents – usually low-income elderly people and immigrant families. It gathered food retailers and few farmers' stands, which offered fresh fruits and vegetables as well as meat, fish, eggs, bread and sweets.

The market of Porta Palazzo is situated in the square *Piazza della Repubblica*, at the edge between the city centre and the working-class (but also gentrifying) neighbourhood Aurora. It is the largest and most iconic market of the city, with a long history which started in 1835 (Balocco 2014). In the last decades, various sections of the markets developed on different parts of the square. As represented on the map below, one section is dedicated to fruits and vegetables retailers, while another one to clothes, textiles and accessories stands. Its covered sectors host fish, meat, dairy and bread stalls as well as a separate farmers' market. Porta Palazzo is a multicultural space, a crossroad between various cultural traditions and commercial activities (including the adjacent historical flea market *Balôn*). Since 1996, the area has been subject to various urban renewal interventions for the physical improvement and socio-economic development of the area

promoted by the municipality and non-profit organisations⁸⁵. As I will further discuss, at the time of the fieldwork, the area was at the centre of a series of transformations and increasingly targeted by gentrifying actors such as quality food retailers and the international hospitality industry.



[Image 25. Map of Porta Palazzo market. Retrieved on 09/12/2021 at *Scopri Porta Palazzo* website: <https://scopriportapalazzoaurora.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/mappa-mercato-pp.png>]

Giovanni Semi explored the connection between multicultural relations, spatial and commercial transformations at the market of Porta Palazzo building on ethnographic research conducted in the early 2000s (Semi 2009). He depicted a series of complex intercultural interactions between Italian vendors and those of foreign origins as

⁸⁵ See for example the urban renewal project Progetto Porta Palazzo (Comune di Torino n.d. b).

well as between informal and official vendors of foreign origins. Such relations took the form, for example, of open conflicts and jokes, which the author found particularly telling of the social relations produced in these spaces (Semi 2009, 645). Rachel Black also described the market of Porta Palazzo as a place of encounter for immigrants and “not always happy multicultural moments” (Black 2012, 10). While food is discussed as a “steppingstone in cohabitation” (Black 2012, 43), the visibility of immigrants at Porta Palazzo were (and still are) integral part of a narration of public insecurity in the area depicting it as potentially dangerous and a site of petty criminality (137). The work of asylum seekers and refugees as part of the EdC initiative is therefore to be contextualised as part of such complex arena. As I will further discuss, their presence gave continuity to intercultural conflicts at the marketplace. At the same time, their work and its representation were used to talk about the progressive renewal of the area and to put forward, also in this context, the figure of the “good immigrant”.

Deserving and undeserving alterity

The figure of Mario (one of the above-mentioned food beneficiaries) is useful to start introducing how similar dynamics to the ones depicted by Semi (2009) occurred in the everyday interactions surrounding EdC food surplus redistribution. At Via Porpora, Mario’s main way of interacting with others was by making jokes, often related to an imaginary past as well as a present full of difficulties. Through his jokes, he revealed how he “ended up here, doing this [gleaning], with poor people” and attributed most of the fault to “*la politica*”⁸⁶. With a smile on his face, pointing out to Charles he once explained: “then they arrive and they [politicians] give them 600 euros like nothing, as soon as they arrive!”. The idea that the local administration tends to give more economic support to immigrants than to Italians was quite widespread in multicultural low-income areas of the city. This was also pointed out by Bertuzzi, Caciagli, and Caruso (2019, 113) based on interviews with inhabitants of the suburbs of four Italian cities (Milan, Florence, Rome and Cosenza). As written by Pietro

⁸⁶ Fieldnotes, 27/11/2020. See the previous chapter for a description of local understandings of “*la politica*”.

Cingolani (2018) in relation to the neighbourhood of *Barriera di Milano*, labels and reciprocal definitions are used to differentiate between Italians and foreigners, as well as between different migrants, and reflect the competition over resources and the marginality experienced by the population in the area. As analysed by the scholar:

The foreigner is also the illegitimate user of welfare: an “us” - impoverished and isolated Italians - is juxtaposed to “them” - immigrants who are very solidarious, united and well organized, sharing information to misuse public assistance but also the help provided by charity and voluntary associations.” (Cingolani 2018, 97, translation is my own)

As exemplified by the interactions at *Via Porpora*, such preconceptions could result in everyday episodes of distrust, more or less aggressive racial discrimination and layered marginalisation, as part of which different generations of migrants and socio-economic factors were at play. The approach of Mario was also telling of the limited extent to which the role of newcomers as free food distributors helped dismantling negative preconceptions about the presence of migrants among Italian working class and underclass population. Paradoxically, this theme was presented to me as one of the central goals of EdC, namely the idea that their activities could help increasing tolerance in these areas and deconstruct racist preconceptions. As explained by one of the Italian workers of the association:

The project was born in a period in which the language of politicians and media was starting to change, and Salvini was in his run for power. So, it was good for us to show this aspect: “mind that there are starving people in Italy and they are Italians and the person who is collecting food for them, who is helping them to make it to the end of the week, of the month, is

the migrant that you have transformed into the new Austrian, the new enemy...”⁸⁷

In the view of this worker, through the engagement of migrants as food collector and redistributors, EdC developed a new narrative, which represented an alternative to a growing political discourse that tended to depict them as enemies and exclude them. This interviewee hinted to a cultural shift that could happen via interactions around food, and through newcomers’ role and moral stand as food givers.

Building on Ong (2003)’s terminology, I argue that the organisation aimed to construct the “ethical figure” of the refugee, intertwining the idea of race, performance and deservingness of social recognition. In fact, the visibility of EdC asylum seekers as different, working and deserving subjects was also emphasised through the use of red vests, which they were asked to wear at all times. The red vests also increased the visibility of the project itself, which, as I will further explain, built on the use of the image of asylum seekers and their black bodies. It is interesting to note that the theme of migration, race and discrimination is also discussed in some literature on Alternative Food Networks but often from a different perspective, namely examining the (lack) of involvement of people of colour and migrants in these initiatives (e.g. Guthman 2008; Mares 2014). The practice and narrative of EdC raises yet another set of questions as it requires to explore what happens when these novel food (and waste management) practices do engage migrants in their activities and build their communication around such participation. What does it entail in terms of everyday practices and interactions? What does it reveal about representations of a deserving alterity? How does it connect to the transformations of the area? And what does it translate into in terms of the association’s internal dynamics and organisation of labour?

⁸⁷ EdC worker, interview, 10/12/2019. Original quote: “*il progetto nasce in un momento in cui iniziava a cambiare il linguaggio politico e all'interno dei mezzi di comunicazione c'era la cavalcata di Salvini verso il potere. Quindi a noi faceva gioco far notare questo aspetto qua: attenzione, ci sono morti di fame in Italia che sono italiani e qua chi gli sta recuperando il cibo, chi lo sta portando alla fine della settimana, a fine mese, è il migrante stronzo che tu hai fatto diventare il nuovo austriaco, il nuovo nemico...*”.

Gentrification and the redefinition of food gleaning

Asylum seekers and refugees at EdC experienced subjective, complex and changing relations with food recipients. These included a variety of people ranging from elderly women of various backgrounds to young students. While I refer to them as food recipients or beneficiaries, EdC workers called them “*recuperatori*”, a term which could be translated as gleaners. I decided not to use this word in the text as it could lead to some confusions in relation to who did what. However, such terminology shows how EdC reframed the figure of the gleaner as a rather passive subject, namely a person queuing, waiting for and taking home the food surplus collected by workers and volunteers. Such vision of gleaning contrasts with the image of gleaners reported in recent literature on this matter, which depicts them as active agents, often young and motivated by anti-capitalist values - see for example De Musso (2010) on the gleaning practices of university students in Bologna.

In Turin, in addition to the type of interactions depicted earlier - as well as more frequent anonymous exchanges -, some of the long-term food beneficiaries and EdC asylum seekers knew each other well. They called each other by their name and seemed to care about each other. In some cases, the beneficiaries brought something to give to the EdC workers such as clothes and shoes⁸⁸. Over time, EdC also reached out to new people, aiming at normalising the collection and redistribution of food surplus. It did so by enhancing the visibility of food surplus, for example, through the organisation of theatre performances on the issue of food waste at the Porta Palazzo market square⁸⁹. The number of food recipients also significantly increased

⁸⁸ I did not witness such exchanges myself but was told about it by a research participant (EdC worker, interview, 03/12/2019).

⁸⁹ Performances by Vicente Cabrera, entitled “The Route of Food”. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bjCsbtUS6g> (accessed 29/10/2021). This performance later evolved into a play called “Raymi” directed by Vicente Cabrera, which narrates the experience of an asylum seeker involved in the recollection of food surplus. More information available on the website of the Rescue! theater project (Progetto Rescue 2023).

after the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic and related socio-economic crisis, namely up to 60 and 25 people per day, respectively at the market of Porta Palazzo and Via Porpora⁹⁰. During the pandemic, EdC adapted to the new context by increasing its food surplus redistribution, for example by collecting also at the wholesale market, refurbishing non-profit organisations which, in turn, distributed food aid packages, and expanding its activities to new markets. EdC also enhanced its collaboration with new food actors in the area of Porta Palazzo such as the food hall *Mercato Centrale* (literally central market). This collaboration translated into new interactions, increasing visibility and number of beneficiaries but also symbolised broader changes in the area.

In particular, in September 2020, EdC extended its distribution points to a space within the Mercato Centrale hall (which they called Circular Stand - *Banco Circolare*). They also started to collaborate with its internationally renowned chef Scabin, who prepared a soup with the ingredients recollected at Porta Palazzo. They created an event of out this collaboration which consisted in a free meal distribution outside of the hall, which I had already witnessed in February 2020, on the national day against food waste (see also Rasero 2020). The *Mercato Centrale*, a quality food hall established in several Italian cities, opened in Turin in April 2019 and can be regarded as an emblem of urban transformations as well as new approaches to food in the area. Selling quality and expensive food products, organising events such as food related debates and *aperitivi* around local products were among the elements which made it contrast with the popular and accessible open-air food market across the street⁹¹.

Few local vendors thought that the new food hall could attract more well-off consumers to the area and indirectly benefit their activities⁹². At the same time, several research participants considered it as a symbol of the gentrification processes occurring in the area. These

⁹⁰ Fieldnotes, 01/06/2020.

⁹¹ To see more of their activities, visit: <https://www.mercatocentrale.com/turin/info/> (accessed 29/10/2021)

⁹² Clothing retailer at Porta Palazzo, interview, 03/02/2020.

processes involved changing economic activities and new safety and hygienic standards aimed at pushing away the poorest inhabitants. Research participants' diverse and sometimes opposed outlooks on this issue reflected various expectations and disillusion around urban renewal in the area. Local activists recurrently referred to it in terms of gentrification and they spoke aloud its exclusionary features on several occasions. For example, they organised a protest on the day of the official opening of the *Mercato Centrale* during which they used slogans such as “menu of the day: rich binges and kicks to the poor” (“*menu del giorno: ricche abbuffate, ai poveri scarpate*”) (see also Rocci 2019).

As critically analysed by Bourlessas, Cenere, and Vanolo (2021) and Vanolo (2021), the hall is to be regarded as part of a broader process of what the authors called food-oriented “retail gentrification” and which should be contextualised as part of Turin’s recent attempts to modernise its international image. The authors argue that such processes of “foodification” produce a displacement atmosphere in the area, through specific “discourse, materialities and practices” (Bourlessas, Cenere and Vanolo 2021, 10). These include quality food discourses, its homogenised aestheticization (see also Parasecoli and Halawa 2021) and related experiences for connoisseurs, which should also be understood as mechanisms of class and cultural distinction. Such distinction and displacement processes fit into broader spatial dynamics which revolve around the fact that the gentrifying areas of the city centre are expanding northwards (Bourlessas, Cenere and Vanolo 2021).

I find important to stress that such gentrification processes also included episodes of resistance, among which loud-spoken ones such as in the event mentioned above. Resistance should also be understood as the continuation of local inhabitants’ everyday life and habits. For example, it was not rare to see the terrace of the *Mercato Centrale* busy with market goers and vendors, who used the space without necessarily consuming more than a coffee. Moreover, building on the example of the collaboration between the *Mercato Centrale* and EdC, I want to underline how gentrification in the area also happened in dialogue with existing food practices such as gleaning. In turn, gleaning became increasingly institutionalised, normalised and

incorporated into the discourses of a variety of local actors ranging from the municipality to private food businesses. As also discussed by Semi (2015), gentrification processes can allow for an initial coexistence of what is regarded as the new and the old, the fashionable and the outdated. Food is particularly interesting to study in this perspective as it allows for the materiality to stay the same, while its surrounding agents and meanings are changing.

In the literature such properties of food are discussed in numerous ways. Grasseni et al. (2014), among others, studied processes of “reinvention” of certain food practices and associated meanings, relations and ethics. Within the *Food Citizens?* research project, this was also discussed by PhD candidates Vincent Walstra and Ola Gracjasz around the development of the quality food hall Fenix Food Factory in gentrifying Rotterdam South (The Netherlands) and the recent renewal of the *Polanki* (now called *Rynek w Oliwie*) market in the working-class neighbourhood Oliwa in Gdansk (Poland), respectively. Adding to the examples of these scholars, I argue that, through the collaboration between Mercato Centrale and EdC, the practice of gleaning at Porta Palazzo was reinvented. While its reach and visibility were extended, it also became incorporated into new fashionable and gentrifying spaces.

This case is interesting to point to the tension between the presence of what becomes generally framed as ethically “good food” (whether it is referred to quality products or food surplus) and its impact in terms of urban transformations. At Porta Palazzo, the advancement of “good food” also involved the normalisation of certain marginal practices. This created a fertile ground for the food hall (and potentially also other gentrifying agents) to play a role and establish itself in the local urban dynamics. By partaking to projects such as the free soup, it created its image of inclusivity and became functional to the visibility (thus economic survival) of EdC initiatives – as exemplified by the newspaper article below. The article firstly describes the latest offers available at the food hall and comments positively on the new partnership with EdC and their stand Banco Circolare. It also reports on the tons of food surplus recuperated by EdC over the years (e.g. 74 thousand kilos in 2019) and sponsors their future initiatives around food reuse (such as the use of fashionable coffee mushrooms).

L'iniziativa

di **Piera Genta**

La pappa al pomodoro di Scabin al Banco circolare

Al Mercato centrale pasti pronti anti spreco per chi è in difficoltà

LA DIFFERENZIATA **SOLIDARIETÀ**



La scheda

- Il mercato centrale ha deciso di accogliere il Banco Circolare, spazio destinato a RePoPP, progetto di economia circolare urbana.
- Ogni giorno, dal lunedì al venerdì, i prodotti recuperati saranno offerti a chi ne ha bisogno.
- Lo chef Davide Scabin si è messo ai fornelli per riunire i volontari in modo da offrire anche piatti già pronti.

Un'offerta dinamica quella dell'autunno al Mercato Centrale di Torino. Tante novità rappresentate dall'inserimento di nuove botteghe del gusto: la cucina vegetale creativa GivMeVeg a firma Antonio Chiodi Latini, la sfogliatella napoletana di Sabato Sessa, il Girarostito di Denys G. Rodriguez e il riso della famiglia Perinotti.

Fortemente voluta da Umberto Montano, presidente del Mercato Centrale, la vera novità: il Banco Circolare. Si tratta di uno spazio all'interno del Mercato stesso destinato a RePoPP, un progetto di economia circolare urbana, unico in Europa, nato nel 2016 su iniziativa della Città di Torino e sostenuto da Amiat, Gruppo Iren, Novamont ed Eco dalle Città, con la collaborazione scientifica dell'Università di Scienze Gastronomiche.

Un luogo che non ha finalità commerciali, dove ogni giorno (dal lunedì al venerdì, dalle 15 alle 17), vengono messe a disposizione, gratuitamente e fino ad esaurimento, per chiunque ne avrà bisogno, cassette di prodotti ortofrutticoli recuperati dagli fornitori (volontari richiedenti asilo) e dalle Sentinelle dei Rifiuti presso i banchi degli ambulanti del mercato.

Per Davide Scabin, testimonial dell'iniziativa «L'avanzo è sempre una risorsa» e con l'occasione ha lanciato l'idea di strutturare anche una formazione per i volontari di RePoPP, offrendo loro una svolta lavorativa e con la trasformazione delle eccedenze in gustose pietanze avanzo diventa sostenibile.

Il successo del progetto RePoPP nel corso degli anni è stato sempre crescente, da poco più di 53 mila chilogrammi di eccedenze del 2017 si è arrivati a circa 74 mila nel 2019, con una media settimanale di 210 persone beneficiarie del recupero: la raccolta differenziata nel mercato ha raggiunto ormai quota 73 per cento nel primo semestre 2019. Dall'inizio del progetto sono stati recuperati quasi 195 mila chilogrammi di cibo.

Nel corso degli anni RePoPP ha ricevuto importanti riconoscimenti sia in Italia sia

all'estero, inoltre risulta conforme ad alcuni dei 17 obiettivi fissati dall'Onu nell'ambito dell'agenda 2030 per lo sviluppo sostenibile, quali sconfiggere la fame, maggiore pulizia delle aree di mercato e miglioramento della raccolta dei rifiuti, riduzione degli impatti ambientali associati alla produzione, distribuzione e smaltimento del cibo. Potrebbe essere un valore aggiunto alla candidatura di Torino European Green Capital 2022.

Presso il Banco Circolare RePoPP si terranno attività di sensibilizzazione contro lo spreco e di promozione di esperienze innovative di recupero e cultura, con dibattiti culturali incentrati sui temi della sostenibilità dei sistemi alimentari urbani.

Uno degli obiettivi è quello di promuovere esperienze innovative come far nascere funghi commestibili dai fondi del caffè. Attraverso il «Good Metrics» si racconteranno gli indicatori del sistema alimentare torinese, strumento utile per tutti gli attori del sistema che vogliono creare nuove relazioni e migliorare le future politiche del cibo del territorio.

Con una gustosa e colorata pappa al pomodoro, un grande piatto di recupero della cucina toscana, Davide Scabin ha inaugurato il primo appuntamento di un calendario mensile, «bontà contro lo spreco», in cui si alterneranno artigiani e chef per preparare nuove ricette con le eccedenze alimentari.

Al fornelli
Qui accanto: lo chef Scabin con Umberto Montano; sopra, un gruppo di ragazzi del RePoPP

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[Image 26. Article about the collaboration between EdC and Mercato Centrale. Corriere della Sera, Cronaca di Torino, p.9, 17/09/2021]

New roles, old forms of discrimination

The everyday work of EdC asylum seekers and refugees also implied different interactions with market vendors. Aside of the food recollection operations, EdC workers and volunteers also played an educational role by informing vendors about how to better manage their waste. This was particularly the case at Porta Palazzo, where EdC organised an initiative called RePoPP (project for the valorisation of organic waste at Porta Palazzo) together with the Municipality of Turin, the waste management companies Novamont and Amiat-Iren Group and the University of Gastronomic Sciences⁹³. As part of this project, EdC oversaw the operational and awareness-raising work around the themes of food waste and urban waste management. Supporting waste management meant that EdC workers and volunteers actively participated in cleaning up the market square and

⁹³ For more detailed information on the RePoPP initiative see Fassio and Minotti (2019) and (Eco dalle Città n.d.).

complemented the work of the official employees of the cleaning company (Amiat-Iren Group) in charge of urban cleaning services.

Facilitating an increase in sustainable waste collection also involved supporting the market vendors developing new habits in terms of differentiating their waste. For example, EdC distributed biodegradable bags for free to make their work at the stand easier and incentivise a more sustainable recollection of perished food. Such interactions were also an opportunity to engage in a conversation with the vendors at Porta Palazzo and gain their trust, as the interactions were not always easy⁹⁴. Many of them feared that the project would negatively influence their sales and that people would prefer to get food for free rather than to buy it. As once explained by Charles, market vendors of Via Porpora were not always friendly but better than the ones of Porta Palazzo: “nobody is looking bad at you... nobody is telling you to fuck off... even the food they give here is in better conditions”⁹⁵.

Porta Palazzo was defined by Charles as “the real chaos” because of the size of the market but also due to the complex relations with vendors, some of which often looked down on him and made racist comments. The words of Charles should be contextualised as part of some of his broader comments on his personal experiences in the Italian context. For example, his regular encounters with police authority were particularly telling of the forms of structural racism and power abuse that characterised his everyday life in Turin. He once told me and other volunteers that in that period he got stopped by police officers up to two times per week. “I do not react, I stay calm, even when they touch me or check my backpack for no reasons”⁹⁶. During the first *Black Lives Matter* ‘s demonstration in Turin (June 27 2020), people denounced many similar abuses and forms of discriminations at the open microphone set up in the main square of the city centre *Piazza Castello*. During an interview, Alessia, one of the EdC Italian

⁹⁴ EdC worker, interview, 28/02/2020.

⁹⁵ Fieldnotes, 28/10/2019.

⁹⁶ Fieldnotes, 04/11/2019.

workers and coordinator of the activities at the market of Porta Palazzo also pointed to the discriminatory language of some market vendors:

Some [of the project's members] do not have any type of relation with the market vendors, if not the fact of being the youngsters who go to pick up stuff and carry it away. Why? This is also linked to the fact that ours are all black Africans, [while] most of the vendors at Porta Palazzo are Moroccans and Moroccans hate black Africans so they call them "Africa" or "negros" across the whole market. To call them they shout "negro" and they [project's members] rightly get pissed and so they do not develop any relation. Others instead go beyond this way of being called, they really do not care, they start to joke with them, and slowly the Moroccan vendors stop calling them "Africa" but learn their name and then the relation is established.⁹⁷

To conclude, EdC food collection and redistribution activities involved much more than material aspects linked to the management of food surplus. In fact, the work of EdC is to be analysed to understand part of the interactions occurring in public space in transforming post-industrial, working class and multicultural neighbourhoods in Turin. By involving asylum seekers and refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa in their activities, EdC tried to develop a new role, image and narrative for recent newcomers present in the area. It provided them with some occupation and volunteering opportunities, which they also framed as a new productive and ethical function. EdC discussed this as means to increase newcomers' deservingness and social recognition. The ethical dimension of their new role was linked to the nature of their activity, namely the fact of supporting the poorest strata of the population with free food and engaging in more sustainable waste management. By being responsible for food surplus recollection, the association ensured a more equal division of food surplus, extended the reach of the practice of gleaning but also transformed its meaning and incorporated it into the work of new food businesses. The relations between EdC workers and the market environment also hinted to urban transformations which occurred in different areas of Turin, beyond

⁹⁷ Alessia – a pseudonym, EdC worker, interview, 03/12/2021.

Porta Palazzo. In particular, EdC expanding collaborations spoke of the development of new food spaces and the consolidation of their image. As underlined by Semi (2015), the flourishing of new (food) commercial activities was central to gentrification processes in Turin, for example in the case of San Salvario and Quadrilatero Romano areas. Looking at these interactions is important to analyse EdC initiatives in relation to its effects on the area, but also the new meanings of food surplus redistribution, which became institutionalised and in harmonious accordance with the work of gentrifying businesses.

In the next section, I focus on the dynamics internal to EdC: I present the ways in which asylum seekers and refugees work as part of the organisation and their relation to its Italian manager and workers. I firstly discuss how some of the asylum seekers whom I met during my fieldwork joined the initiative, their understanding of the working (or volunteering) conditions and what motivated them to stay or leave. I argue that their inclusion into the initiative, most often publicly lauded, should also be problematised and speak of challenges linked to precarious labour conditions, voluntarism and racial prejudices present in contemporary Italian society more broadly. Secondly, I report on the perspective of the Italian manager and workers of the organisation, depicting their visions around this diverse working group and its rationale. I particularly expand on the use of the image of the asylum seekers to advertise the project as well as on elements of the internalised moral conflicts of the Italian workers. I show how the idea of the “deserving citizen” is useful to analyse the case of EdC workers, beyond asylum seekers. In fact, to a certain extent all workers also shared a similar condition linked to the fact that precarious labour became normalised, if not encouraged, through the interrelation between the idea of “doing good” and deservingness.

Precarious sustainability stewards

The reception of asylum seekers in Italy

Several of the asylum seekers I met at EdC arrived there through friends and acquaintances, often met in the centres and accommodations that compose the Italian reception system for asylum seekers. While expanding on the functioning and complexities of this system goes beyond the scope of this section, it is important to underline three main elements to stress the variety of situations in which the asylum seekers whom I encountered in the field found themselves. Firstly, this complex reception system was often subject to reforms, among which the Law 173/2020, which changed the rules to access different reception facilities and the services provided in these centres⁹⁸. Such reforms created procedural and practical differentiated experiences among asylum seekers, who arrived before or after a certain year. In particular, in 2018, the right-wing parties and at-the-time Minister of Internal Affairs Matteo Salvini (*Lega* party) promoted the Security and Immigration Decree (*Decreto Sicurezza e Immigrazione*). This decree changed several regulations and included the abolition of the humanitarian protection residency permit, which was used frequently because it allowed to comprise a larger category of asylum seekers (e.g. people fleeing general conflicts and natural disasters)⁹⁹.

Secondly, the accommodation centres and inclusion procedures for immigrants differed based on their status and stage of their request.

⁹⁸ For an overview of the legal framework, asylum procedure and reception system in Italy in 2020 consult (Bove and Romano 2021).

⁹⁹ For an overview of the changes brought by the Security and Immigration Decree see Camilli (2018). For more detailed information see the collection of articles and juridical guides collected by the *Progetto Melting Pot Europa*: <https://www.meltingpot.org/+Decreto-legge-Salvini-su-immigrazione-e-sicurezza-.html> (accessed 09/10/2021). In the last year, new decrees have brought several changes among which the partial restoration of a residency permit for humanitarian reasons called “special protection”. For an overview of these more recent changes see Camilli (2020).

The asylum seekers and refugees whom I met in Turin were usually part of the so-called second level of reception (*seconda accoglienza*) (and only few were living on their own) meaning that they were recognised as asylum seekers entitled to international protection. These second-level reception centres were generally run by non-profit organisations, social cooperatives or catholic institutions. These groups were also responsible for designing an inclusion path for their hosts, which entailed to ensure that they had access to courses, internships or working opportunities. Such inclusion paths however often resulted in differentiated experiences and opportunities, also based on the various resources available, types of management, everyday interactions and relations at these centres (see also Tarabusi 2010). Thirdly, receiving the final residency permit was often taking much longer than expected, around 18 months, due to the high number of requests and slow bureaucratic system (e.g. Pinelli 2015). Consequently, asylum seekers faced difficulties to get a more stable and autonomous life and to secure long-term employment, but rather experienced a prolonged situation of uncertainty.

Different motivations and experiences

When arriving at EdC, most asylum seekers did not have a job and knew few people outside of the circuits of the reception centres. This was the case of Edu, an asylum seeker in his twenties, originally from West Africa. I met Edu several months after his experience at EdC had ended. I encountered him in a different context, but via volunteers I had met at EdC and with whom he had remained friend. After seeing him a few times, I asked him if he agreed to be interviewed about his experience in Italy¹⁰⁰. Edu had joined EdC following the advice of a friend, who had been volunteering with the association before. His friend had presented it as an opportunity to get out of the centre and get to know more people. When they had gone together to the market of Porta Palazzo for the first time, Edu had got to know some of the coordinators of the initiative, felt welcomed and decided to stay. This was his first work-like experience in Italy. It was not the work that Edu dreamt of, but he liked to help other people:

I was a volunteer, I was really helping the poor. We were going every day to the market to collect fruits and vegetables, we were gathering them on a table and poor people, people that do not have anything, that do not have money and do not know

¹⁰⁰ While Edu agreed to be interviewed, he also stressed that he found more relevant to talk about his past and document what he had experienced in his home country and had pushed him to flee. However, I did not feel that I was the right person to listen to these very personal facts and proposed to him to talk about that in a different context - and focus our interview on his Italian experiences only. At that time, I felt unable to provide him with the right tools and platform to publicly narrate his story. I remained available to try to support him to find a way to voice his story and once participated to a meeting with him and a film director, who seemed interested to do a short movie about it. However, this meeting did not have any follow-ups and the project remained unaccomplished. I point out to these elements to highlight that Edu's personal story did not have the public dissemination he desired as well as to include in this dissertation some examples of what I consider were my limitations as an anthropologist and active listener during the fieldwork.

how they will prepare food and eat, well, these were the people whom we were helping.¹⁰¹

Edu explained that he did not care about money and that he was doing this because helping people was important to him, referring to both his religion and background, explaining that he used to do the same for his family and had worked laboriously since a very young age. Edu volunteered with EdC for more than a year, until he found a job - an informal occupation which he accepted to try to learn a profession. He remained in contact with some of the members of the association, especially with its manager, whom, he said, was like a father to him.

Perspectives such as the one of Edu call for exploring volunteering as a complex phenomenon. As mentioned in the literature, volunteering should not be regarded as a “black box” but analysed in terms of its specific processes and actors (Shachar, von Essen, and Hustinx 2019; van der Veer 2020). As emphasised by Lieke van der Veer (2020) in her analysis of volunteer initiatives to support refugees in the Netherlands, volunteering can assume different meanings for the people involved, including for the refugees, some of which are also volunteers themselves. In such cases, volunteering is framed and perceived as an opportunity for “shifting positions in the gift exchange” and “giving back” (van der Veer 2020, 3). Such narratives around refugees’ volunteerism also became an integral part of broader social arrangements for the promotion of a moral, active and responsible citizenship (van der Veer 2020). Muehlebach (2013; 2012) highlighted how different moralities and value systems, for example linked to Catholicism or the Left, can be at the basis of voluntary labour and in a creative tension with neoliberalism. For example, in the case of Edu, his (religious) values were an important drive for his participation to EdC initiatives. At the same time, these kept him in a position of dependency and unemployment.

Others, like John, had arrived to EdC in search for an employment. After two weeks of try-out as a volunteer, John decided to ask to the association to be remunerated and, after some time, he obtained the possibility to do a six-month internship (*tirocinio*). He considered that

¹⁰¹ Edu – a pseudonym, former EdC worker, interview, 01/05/2020.

he was paid very little - first 300 euros, then, when he asked for more, 600 euros per month - especially for the amount and quality of his work. He fully understood what to do, he had developed good relations with market vendors and beneficiaries, he spoke Italian and English better than most of his peers and often helped introducing the project to new participants. When I met John, he was towards the end of his internship and seemed indeed fully autonomous in his work and to be holding quite some responsibilities. I met him as I was directly referred to John by my initial contact at EdC, one of its Italian workers. John was responsible for guiding EdC activities at some of the smaller markets. As soon as we got the chance to talk to each other more calmly, one day, after the end of the food redistribution, John explained to me that he wanted to ask to the association to be employed with a stable contract. He was critical about the fact that some of EdC members had a contract while others did not. Moreover, he was often asked to do more tasks than what he had been told initially - such as attending public events in the name of EdC. This had been justified to him in terms of the important nature of the project:

When the six months ended, they told me to continue to do an internship for a year and I said that I would not do an internship anymore. [...] He [manager of EdC] always said: “the things that you are doing are very important” but then there were many youngsters there and I understood that he wanted to make them work without a long-term contract. And then other people had a contract: like [X] and [Y]. These people were employed in accordance with the law. I understood that this was not fair to me. I must work but not like this. [...] The money was little and I did not have paid leave.¹⁰²

John was aware of his rights that he had learned in the course “Italian language for work” offered as part of the asylum seekers reception system, he explained. However, not all the asylum seekers he met at the market were able to attend or understand this course. Therefore, he often found himself in the position of explaining to other EdC asylum seekers and refugees what a stable contract was, why it was important and the long-term benefits that it could secure.

¹⁰² John – a pseudonym, former EdC worker, interview, 18/05/2020.

By engaging in EdC activities, I also got the confirmation that the group was very varied, in terms of the asylum seekers' level of Italian, engagement in the project and working conditions. I heard about all types of working arrangements: volunteering, reimbursements of five euros per day, internship organised in collaboration with other organisations, casual work contracts (*contratto di prestazione occasionale*) and more. As discussed by John, only few had a permanent contract. One of them was Samuel, who had joined EdC since the early stage of their initiatives at open air food markets in 2016. He had received the invitation to participate at the reception system centre - to whom EdC director had communicated that they were looking for asylum seekers and refugees interested in partaking in the collection of food surplus. Samuel was in Italy since 2014 and had been a fast learner: he held his Italian school diploma, had followed a cooking school and done an internship. He started to collaborate with EdC as a volunteer but always wanted to continue as he felt that he was doing "something useful"¹⁰³. Quickly, Samuel gained enough experience and responsibility to coordinate the operations at the market of Porta Palazzo (where I first met him and saw him regularly) as well as to present the project in public events. During an interview, he explained to me the distinct phases of the project, such as how they had started to collect food and got progressively better organised and how the project had started to gain the recognition of local authorities. He also gave particular emphasis to the relations they established with market vendors and the ways in which asylum seekers were raising awareness about waste management. Samuel sounded fully part of EdC work, but his account also reflected a privileged position, when compared to the situation of many of his colleagues.

The cases of Edu, John and Samuel reveal the various situations of asylum seekers working at EdC. They also speak about the different feelings and levels of trust that they developed towards the organisation: while John left the organisation with the sense that his rights had not been fully respected, Samuel was in a more advantaged position, feeling recognised by and belonging to the project. Authors such as Tomlinson (2010) have studied the pathways from voluntary

¹⁰³ Samuel – a pseudonym, EdC worker, interview, 28/02/2020.

work to employment for refugees in London and discussed these in terms of processes where belonging and inclusion are negotiated. Similarly to the Italian context, in the UK, refugees are encouraged to participate to courses and voluntary activities to gain experiences and because securing an employment might be particularly difficult. However, voluntary activities might also trap newcomers in specific situation of partial inclusion: they might continue feeling treated as foreigners and have limited possibilities to express their agency. They might also experience “multiple marginalities” because volunteer work is often perceived as less significant than paid work, and offers no chance for self-sufficiency (Tomlinson 2010, 292). In the context of EdC, this was also the impression of John. For him, the idea of continuing to work as an intern represented a lack of recognition of his efforts. Moreover, the internship incarnated a step back from the stabilisation and normalisation of his situation in Italy, namely from his objective of getting a formal employment and full recognition of his labour rights.

Testifying deservingness

The different feelings of EdC asylum seekers surely reflected their various positions, expectations but also past experiences, including those with other non-profit workers, whom are part of the Italian reception system. As argued by Pinelli (2015) in relation to Italy’s asylum seeker camps (first level of reception), the staff of humanitarian agencies and social workers often hold an ambiguous role. As she explained, these camps are characterised by “the ambiguity of control and the role played by humanitarian agency personnel as ‘delegates of surveillance’” (Pinelli 2015, 14-15). In these contexts, NGOs’ social workers play both a role of care and control, limiting the agency of asylum seekers but also exchanging information with the commissions and producing the idea that “‘respecting the rules’ will guarantee the positive outcome of their asylum claim” (Pinelli 2015, 15).

This was also the case at EdC, where some asylum seekers were motivated by the idea that working or volunteering there would increase their chance to obtain a residency permit. Edu referred to a letter that the association could send to the authorities as part of the

documentation considered as part of their demand for the residency permit. Many of his peers had been told about this letter – and its possibility to favourably influence authorities’ decisions. The existence of such document was confirmed to me during an interview with one of the Italian workers of the association, who explained:

They [EdC workers and volunteers] saw that being part of our project is a way to obtain the residency permit, well it is not written anywhere that if you work with *Eco* [EdC] you obtain your permit. But when you present (to the commission that evaluates you) a sheet of paper [stating] that you are doing this work and that probably we are also paying you (we have activated an internship or through a collaboration or something else) ... well, it looks cool.¹⁰⁴

The point of the interviewee was that such letter could represent a proof of the good integration of the asylum seekers: as he further explained, it could demonstrate that the candidate knew Italian and took part in “nice projects”. I argue that this document also symbolises the way in which organisations such as EdC can, not only influence the everyday life of asylum seekers, but also play a role in the definition of their long-term rights. In this perspective, the letter testifies the moral stands of the newcomers and links their deservingness (to have a residency permit) to their engagement in projects deemed appropriate for their position. In this case, it entailed helping others and improving environmental sustainability, independently from their working conditions and uncertain situation.

Linking asylum seekers’ rights to their moral attitude and ability to conform with certain context-specific expectations of the “good immigrant” is even more problematic as the commissions, on the other

¹⁰⁴ EdC worker, interview, 10/12/2019. Original quote: “*Hanno visto che stare nel nostro progetto è un modo per ottenere il permesso anche se non sta scritto da nessuna parte che se lavori con Eco ottieni il permesso, però quando presenti alle commissioni che ti valutano il foglio di carta che stai facendo questo lavoro con noi e probabilmente ti stiamo anche pagando (ti abbiamo attivato un tirocinio o tramite una collaborazione o qualcosa altro) ... fa figo.*”

hand, often fail to acknowledge as valid and legitimate their personal accounts (Beneduce and Taliani 2013). Moreover, as in the US case analysed by Ong (2003), the idea of a “model minority” often implies a stereotyped and racialised differentiation between the docile and productive immigrants versus the unemployed and criminal ones.

To sum up, while the diverse perspectives I gathered above are not representative of all the opinions of the asylum seekers and refugees encountered at EdC, they provide insights for reflecting on what this organisation represented for them. For Edu, John and Samuel, it had allowed them to become more active and reduced their isolation. The three of them spoke proudly about their engagement in the organisation and perceived their work as a useful one. At the same time, working conditions at EdC generated very differentiated experiences and little long-term employment possibilities. As also discussed by Tomlison (2010), non-profit organisations only rarely represent a long-term working opportunity for refugees.

The analysis of their perspectives also reveals how EdC played a role in the definition of their deservingness. As argued by Ong et al. (1996), citizenship in Western democracies became a process of subject-making beyond the state. Especially in the context of discontinuous state presence, “the work of instilling proper normative behaviour and identity in newcomers must also be taken up by institutions in civil society” (Ong et al. 1996, 738). Building on such analysis, I argue that the case of EdC is an example of the ways in which non-profit organisations define the deservingness of refugees in relation to their inclination to “doing good” (namely a sustainable and charitable food surplus distribution) and normalise labour precarity.

To further develop my argument around the construction of deservingness (and its entanglement with labour precarity), I now turn to the analysis of the approach and opinions of EdC Italian manager and workers. Firstly, I discuss the ways in which the image of asylum seekers is constructed and used by the organisation. I also highlight some of the recurrent arguments that the manager and workers made about the role of their organisation in terms of the support and education it provided to asylum seekers. Secondly, I report on challenges common to all EdC workers around issues of labour

precarity, working conditions and opportunities. While I have presented the views of asylum seekers and Italian workers separately (as I believe that their various positions must be accounted for), I also want to go beyond a dichotomic understanding of their conditions and underline some of the commonalities that characterise their work. Such common conditions call in fact for a larger problematisation of the social and economic sustainability of initiatives such as EdC, beyond the condition of asylum seekers.

Branding through inclusion

Most of EdC Italian workers saw the involvement of asylum seekers and refugees as the distinctive characteristics of the project. While EdC focused on the theme of (food) waste management and its reduction, their engagement had increased the visibility of their initiatives. The work of the organisation was often advertised through their image (e.g. Ricca 2017). Exemplificatory in this sense is the name *ecomori*, which was developed to advertise specifically the work of food collection and redistribution done by asylum seekers and refugees. *Eco* (as in ecological) refers to their work around sustainability, the reduction of waste and positive impact of their action on the environment. *Mori* can be understood as a reference to the Moors, black people or, in Piedmont dialect, to foreigners more generally. As defined by EdC director in one of his articles on the initiative: “[...] *ecomori* is a self-mocking definition that puts together the “colour of the skin” and the ecological nature of the actions [...]” (Hutter 2018). While this expression was normalised by the local administration and media, it was considered controversial and criticised as discriminatory and opportunistic by some local inhabitants such as the educated youth. EdC director counter-argued that shocking the population was also a way to attract its attention¹⁰⁵. He had invented this expression himself, without concerting with the asylum seekers - who never discussed their feelings about it with me.

Moreover, the work of the organisation was often advertised through the image of the asylum seekers and refugees, who were put at the forefront of everyday work at the markets and public events. As also

¹⁰⁵ Paolo Hutter, EdC manager, informal conversation, 05/12/2019.

explained by one of the Italian workers of the association in charge of fundraising and communication, EdC manager gave a considerable importance to communicating about their work and achievements. It was not rare that EdC initiatives appeared in local newspapers and regional TV channels and, in such contexts, asylum seekers were often asked to present the projects themselves¹⁰⁶. To discuss how the branding of the organisation occurred through the use of the figure of the asylum seeker, I discuss the example of images from February 2020.

In the framework of the national day against food waste, EdC organised an event with the Mercato Centrale for the preparation of a free soup with the food surplus collected at the market of Porta Palazzo¹⁰⁷. The soup, prepared by the famous Michelin star chef Davide Scabin, was served to people passing by as well as to several journalists and politicians who had joined the event (such as the at-the-time mayor Chiara Appendino and the Environment city councillor Alberto Unia). The images below, retrieved from the website of a local newspaper, show the participation of the asylum seekers and refugees during the event, on the side of EdC director, the Environment city councillor and chef Scabin.

¹⁰⁶ See for example the local TV news of 11/08/2020 (TgR Piemonte): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qr3nLlpNpVs> and the videos reported on EdC Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkMnC1Ij8-000LAJBb7uimA> (accessed 12/12/21).

¹⁰⁷ See the previous section for more detailed information about Mercato Centrale food hall and its collaboration with EdC.



[Images 27a, 27b. Screenshots from a video reportage of the day. Retrieved on December 12, 2021 at *TorinoOggi* website: <https://www.torinoggi.it/2020/02/05/leggi-notizia/argomenti/attualita-8/articolo/progetto-repopp-lo-chef-scabin-offre-la-zuppa-prodotta-con-gli-avanti-alimentari-del-mercato.html>]

These images were shot by journalists in front of the entrance of Mercato Centrale, shortly after the distribution of the soup. Like during the activities at the markets, EdC members are recognisable through the systematic use of the red vests of the project, which recall their tasks and role as sustainability stewards. The vests contrast with the more formal outfits of the politicians and chef, whose presence also appears like an official recognition of EdC activities. These images are particularly telling of the ways in which the branding of the project is built upon the presence of black bodies. Moreover, these images mediate a certain idea of newcomers' deservingness, especially when compared with mainstream representations of immigrants and asylum seekers in the Italian media. As explained through a media analysis by Cava (2011, 4), the representation of immigrants in Italy is often stigmatising, distorted and criminalising. While EdC (like many others non-profit organisations in the area), subverted the ways in which the figure of the newcomer was generally framed in the news, its self-narration and representation also reproduced racial and social disparities. Among other things, these images reveal how a clear division of labour and paternalism (mediated in this example by the bodily position of white men) can accompany such reframing of newcomers into deserving citizen.

Precarious labour

Going beyond the representation of asylum seekers and refugees as sustainability stewards, working with them on a daily basis acquired different meanings for the Italian workers of the organisation. For workers such as Luca, EdC provided asylum seekers with a "small employment opportunity and a remuneration", building an innovative model of sustainability and inclusion which he opposed to that of private companies:

Outside of non-profit organisations, migrants are almost always used for specific tasks that can be downgrading. [...]. Probably [in the case of] a migrant who works on an assembly line during a night shift, they employed him with the lowest level and he is the fifth wheel, on which they can put pressure, to increase productivity, withdraw his rights, because he does not stand up [...] He thinks he found a good salary, because it is

surely so when compared to his country of origins, and so if the boss shouts, orders something, the migrant does it because he thinks its normal. But it is not normal.¹⁰⁸

According to Luca, non-profit organisations are better places for migrants to work within, when compared to the other possibilities and conditions in the private sector. EdC Italian workers also framed the project as an educational and relational platform for the asylum seekers, in a context in which the official reception system was not always doing its work. This was exemplified by Alessia, a social worker coordinating EdC daily activities at the market of Porta Palazzo. As she explained, her work went beyond the coordination of the food surplus collection and redistribution:

A typical working day could be accompanying the youngsters [asylum seekers] to open a bank account, explain to them how the city services are working and whom to address if you have this or that problem. So, helping them. We do it in a non-professional manner because we are not teachers of Italian, but we also try to help them with the language. [...] When they stay [after work] we talk in Italian about separate waste collection and we do a bit of environmental education.¹⁰⁹

Alessia would also help them with “the more bureaucratic part”, namely sorting out their paperwork and organising all the documents they needed to present to the commissions. Over time, she had developed knowledge and skills around these processes and helped

¹⁰⁸Luca – a pseudonym, EdC worker, interview, 10/12/2019. Original quote: *“I migranti, se non è il Terzo Settore, vengono quasi esclusivamente utilizzati per determinate mansioni che potrebbero essere dequalificanti. [...] Probabilmente il turno di notte che fa uno in catena di montaggio ed è migrante lo assumono con l'ultimo livello più basso ed è l'ultima ruota del carro, sulla quale puoi fare pressioni, per aumentare la produttività, per togliergli diritti, perché non si ribella [...] Lui crede di aver trovato un ottimo stipendio, perché sicuramente rispetto al suo paese è un ottimo stipendio, e quindi se il padrone urla, gli ordina una cosa, lui la fa perché lo ritiene normale. Però normale non è.”*

¹⁰⁹ Alessia, interview, 03/12/2019.

them also in her free time. However, this was not always easy: according to her, the reception system had passed on wrong habits and expectations to the newcomers. In her view, it did not prepare them to be independent nor to face the world “as it really is”. Alessia felt that sometimes they did not trust her because she was the first person to tell them how things worked in Italy - she made the example of housing costs and bills. She tried to maintain the relations less hierarchical as possible and to work with them daily at the market and avoid staying in the office. Based on her experience, working at the office complicated the relations between Italian workers and asylum seekers as it involved counting their working hours and arranging their contracts. This made the relation more distant and decreased, she argued, possibilities for developing trust relations and a shared sociality.

It is also around these issues of working arrangements and remuneration that EdC Italian workers and asylum seekers faced, to a certain extent, shared challenges. These included precarious working arrangements, payment delays and limited possibilities for professional growth. Nino, an Italian student in his twenties, was one of the people in a situation of more evident precarity. He had joined EdC for an internship during which he supported the administration and accounting of the organisation. As he explained:

Economically I asked a minimum. To live and to... I am not saying to save money, but to pay for my vices such as cigarettes and going out from time to time. A decent minimum wage which, in the beginning, we set to seven euros per hour... Now I cannot really tell you what my wage is as there were several... not retractions but attempts to redefine my type of contract.¹¹⁰

As further explained by Nino, in the beginning, EdC had funding possibilities and arrangements for his internship. He had tried to organise that himself while starting to work at EdC but had encountered complications because, following the Italian law, the number of interns per organisation is limited. If he would have made

¹¹⁰ Nino – a pseudonym, EdC worker, interview, 18/03/2020.

himself a contract as an intern, this would have limited the possibility to set up an internship for an asylum seeker. Therefore, together with the EdC manager, they had decided not to do it, which meant to try to find another arrangement for Nino. For example, by making another organisation collaborating with EdC take him as an intern. In the end, Nino got paid with a casual work contract (which, by law, entails max 5.000 euros per year and no social security) for a few months before he moved abroad.

Because of the slow arrival of funding, it was also not rare that Italian workers would get paid with one or more months of delay. EdC manager had decided that the asylum seekers would get paid with priority, while Italians might have to wait. This led to internal complaints as some Italian workers felt that such differentiation was unfair and that their personal situation (such as having children to take care of) was not considered. However, in general, EdC Italian workers accepted precarious working conditions, low remuneration, extra working hours in the name of their passion and the “good” outcomes of EdC projects.

The sociologists Busso and Lanunziata (2016) discussed this phenomenon in their analysis of social labour in the context of Italian non-profit organisations. As explained by these scholars, the limited costs and flexibility of this sector makes it particularly competitive in the delivery of public social services. This is the reason these services are increasingly contracted-out. However, such limited costs are linked to the extraction of value from non-profit workers. In fact, the immaterial components (e.g. sense of solidarity, care, friendship, attention to the common good) and passion related to this type of social work generates forms of self-exploitation and unconditional dedication to these organisations, which the continuation and competitiveness of this sector builds upon (Ross 2008, Chicchi and Leonardi 2011 in Busso and Lanunziata 2016). Such reflections can be particularly applicable to social workers who engage with migrants. As explained by Pilotto (2018), these social workers are in a potentially vulnerable and (self)exploitative situation because of the relation they develop with migrants. They are requested flexibility, daily contact and emotional labour and often have no boundaries between their private and working life (Pilotto 2018). This is like the efforts made by Italian

EdC workers such as Alessia, committed to supporting the asylum seekers in relation to their life matters daily, during and beyond her working hours.

While dealing, mostly silently, with their precarious working conditions, EdC workers also developed general critiques about the functioning of EdC and the non-profit sector more generally. They would all recognise that their working conditions were not good but normalised these as part of the country's general lack of employment opportunities and precarious working environments. As also discussed by Molé (2010) in her account of precarious workers in northern Italy, precarity has become normalised in the way in which people speak about labour and affects them materially and psychically. Moreover, several EdC workers did not think that this experience could open-up new working opportunities neither for asylum seekers nor for them. According to an Italian former worker at EdC, the organisation also reproduced forms of occupational segregation. It offered little space for professional growth of workers nor for the diversification of their tasks, because of the continuous efforts needed to sustain the initiatives.

To conclude, the case of EdC and its workers speaks of a changing multicultural environment for the understanding of which the study of open-air food markets can play a role. It also speaks about processes of urban transformations and gentrification by showing the evolutions of food practices such as gleaning. This case also reveals the fine lines between the creation of a sustainable and inclusive practice and new forms of extraction of value - as also exemplified in other analyses around waste management such as Fredericks (2012). This case invites to question what inclusion of asylum seekers is and on what it is premised. As argued by Millar (2012) marginality is not only about being left out but the outcome of specific forms of inclusion in the city. I argued that asylum seekers and refugees' engagement in food waste collection and redistribution is used as a proof of their deservingness and interrelates with their social recognition as well as with precarious working conditions and racialised power relations. I concluded by remarking how the effects of moral entanglements between sustainability, food charity and deservingness expand beyond the situation of asylum seekers. Precarity in the name of "sustainable

work” is also a shared condition among all non-profit workers and a central theme, too often neglected, when discussing the overall sustainability of food procurement related initiatives.