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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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Conclusion

In this second part of the dissertation, I attempted to contribute to a broadening of the anthropological analysis of food markets. Building on my observations in three different open-air food markets in northern Turin, I highlighted how these can be sites of various forms of civic engagement. Going beyond literature on critical consumerism and alternative food procurement, I firstly discussed the case of conventional market vendors, their political engagement and practices of contestation in relation to urban and welfare transformations. I argued that their engagement can be regarded as ways of practicing their “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1968), voicing their needs and desires, beyond institutional consultation tools. In chapter five I discussed yet another form of engagement which is linked to the increasing role of the non-profit sector in the context of welfare state retrenchment. As part of non-profit organisations’ work at food markets, civic engagement builds on volunteering and precarious work which I analyse, in line with part one, as the result of the development of a specific morality around sustainability and the construction of deservingness.

In both cases, I contextualised these forms of engagement as part of the changing urban environment, looking at, on one hand, how long terms occupants of Piazza Foroni lived with and reacted to demographic, social and economic change in their neighbourhood. On the other, I looked at how the transformation of certain collective practices is entangled with urban renewal. I gave the example of how the transformation of gleaning can be analysed as part of gentrification processes. I argued that new gleaning practices (e.g. through the intermediation of non-profit organisations and collaborations with fashionable local food businesses) invite for studying gentrification as a process that creates a continuity between the transformation of space and the one of collective practices.

The central red thread across this second part of the dissertation was the analysis of labour and, more specifically, the different forms of precariousness that emerge in the analysis of the market as a space of labour. I highlighted how people lived and worked in different phases of recession and austerity, showing the meaning taken by these notions

in the everyday life of some market vendors, asylum seekers and refugees. I also attempted to untangle the ways in which the notion of “deserving citizenship” (Ong 2003) is key to understanding the neoliberalisation of the Italian welfare and related culture of voluntarism. Following Beneduce and Taliani (2013, 233), neoliberalism emerges here as:

the (imperfect) articulation between the market, the state and citizenship [as part of which] [...] the state occupies a decisive role in the making of subjects and social relations”.

As I argued in chapter five, it is not only the traditional components of the state, but also new articulations and subjects of the welfare realm, such as non-profit organisations, that become integral part of these processes of subject-making. The next part will focus precisely on the increasing centrality of non-profit organisations. Building on the case of food aid initiatives during the covid-19 pandemic, it will report on the blurring boundaries between the public and the third sector.