

Landscape, Practice, and Tradition in a Sicilian Market

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Abstract

This research explores the dynamic relationship between place, history and landscape in an urban food market, Catania, Sicily. This market informs a mythological image of the island and my main concern is what significance lies underneath this representation. I examine the ways in which this image has been constructed through ideas of history, space, landscape, modernity and tradition. Unpacking these notions in the light of my in-depth ethnography, I address how vendors and buyers frame and define their relationship with space and time. After placing the market in relation to its historical and geo-political context, I argue that the representation of passivity and the lack of agency have contributed to the maintaining of elitist local and national powers.

The use of space within the market informs a distinctive cosmology, in which the landscape constitutes the main local organising principle. The landscape is looked at as a cultural process, constantly renegotiated and recontextualised. The principal categories of food classification ‘wild’, ‘local’, and ‘foreign’ are explanatory notions of a specific relationship between people, food and locality.

The interaction between vendors and buyers cannot be understood as a purely economic transaction . Their relationship is articulated through a unique set of practices, which are analysed throughout this thesis. Senses, social interactions, culinary knowledge, and conviviality contribute to the ability to operate within the market. I look at my own ethnographic experience as a practical “apprenticeship”. I also address the local ideas of tradition and modernity, mainly through the analysis of the shared fears of being left behind and of losing control over the process of change. The idea of modernisation as an ongoing process carries with it a sense of loss, of nostalgia for an idealised past.

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Chapter I

Introduction

During my first month in Catania, I tried to explore the city as much as I could. One day at dawn, in May 2009, I entered a nice bookshop in the pedestrian area of town, a silent oasis, apart from the noise of motorbikes and loud voices. I looked around, appreciating the choice of books, the fine selection of titles. Luca Greco, the bookshop proprietor, greeted me and spontaneously, as only lonely people in a new city can be, I came out with an unrequested explanation about what I was doing in Catania and what my research was about. He promptly suggested to me some books about Sicilian cuisine and the city, and also some amazing novels about the Mediterranean. Visiting this bookshop became one of my favourite pastimes in Catania. I felt safe and at home, surrounded by books where it wasn't so strange for a woman to be a researcher or to sit down at a table alone, drinking a cup of tea while reading and writing. People in Catania seemed generally not appreciate solitude.

During one of my regular visits, Luca the bookshop-keeper and I spoke about the city, the market and how it had changed in the past 50 years. He knew the city very well, but had an ambivalent relationship to his home-town. I remember him quoting the Mexican writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II, who commented that Catania was the most chaotic city he had ever visited. This was possibly the best testament to how haphazard the city was, coming from someone living in Mexico City.

Luca and I often spoke about *La Pescheria*, the market where I

conducted my fieldwork. Luca used the market as a metaphor for the city:

You can see the decadence of the city in the market. I don't like the market any more. It shows the ancient corruption. The market is as decadent as Catania. It is dirty, stinky, and corrupt.

It was the period in which the market - and the city - was invaded by garbage. Luca was not the only person complaining then about what was happening. Everywhere in town people were discussing this unbearable situation. Luca also complained about the lack of respect for the sea, shown by fishermen and fishmongers.

It is all about fashion now. For instance take sea urchins (*ricci di mare*). They used to be collected only by a few people and at a very specific time of year. Now it is fashionable, everybody is selling them. Pasta with sea urchins has become so popular that they are going to become extinct. Commerce, money, corruption. The disease of the city. You chose the symbol of a decadent city; it could only be decadent too [*Extract from my fieldnotes*].

Many of my friends in Catania would agree with Luca and his pessimistic description of the market; others in the city would have accused him of exaggerating the negative aspects of a tradition that needs to be preserved. One particular theme was consistent amongst the majority of Catania's citizens: the market at *La Pescheria* is a symbol of the city. All symbols are "intrinsically difficult to analyse" (Davis 1992:80), and the market also presented difficulties.

In my opinion, *La Pescheria* is one of many symbols representing Catania, a voice that often goes unheard and that provides us with a picture of a very specific 'cultural style' (Ferguson 1999:85). A city is a complex network of relationships and I cannot reduce it to one cultural performance. The voices within the city are the different melodic lines of a counterpoint, not always in harmony, but very often counter-balancing each other.

Catania has a strong bond with literature, music and cuisine and these artforms provide valid metaphors with which to approach the city, the market and local identity. Music plays a fundamental role in the city's cultural life.

Monuments acclaiming the genius of Vincenzo Bellini, born in Catania, are to be found in the city centre. The most famous dish in the Catanese gastronomy is named after Bellini's opera, *Norma*¹, even if its appellation is probably not directly connected to the composer's masterpiece. I often heard residents of Catania comparing the market itself to a musical symphony with its dramatic exposition of life and death, its pathos, and the hectic movements of people, voices, stories, and actions.

This parallel with music recalls the organisation of Lévi-Strauss's book *The Raw and the Cooked* (1970), in which the author took inspiration from music for its terminology in order to frame his analysis of South American myths. The use of the symphonic movements highlights the different rhythms of the social structures. The musical metaphor depicts its unpredictability, its harmony, counterpoints and variations. Although aware of the difference in topic and argument, I believe that this metaphor is still useful when dealing with social life, because it highlights complexity and avoids reductionism. The movements of a symphony entail variety, as much as any complex social organisation.

The counterpoint, that I have previously mentioned, is defined as the combination of two or more melodic lines in such a way that they establish a harmonic relationship while retaining their linear individuality (Oxford Dictionaries, 2010a). Said affirms that no identity exists by itself (1993:60), but that it is necessary to look “at the different experiences contrapuntally, as making up a set of [...] intertwined and overlapping histories” (*Ibid*: 19). This thesis analyses what constitutes the counterpoint at the market, taking into account the different melodic lines, which, in this case, take shape as ideas about history, landscape, locality, modernity, and tradition.

La Pescheria is officially defined as historical (*storico*) and traditional

¹ It is a pasta dish, seasoned with tomato and basil sauce, fried aubergines and grated *ricotta salata*, a salty Sicilian sheep-milk's hard cheese.

(*tradizionale*) by the municipality. Thus it can only be understood by investigating how notions of history and tradition are defined within the market. At the market, “historical” entails a notion of the past, intertwined with a very specific representation of tradition, characterised by nostalgia for bygone days. The social actors of the market, being vendors or buyers, perform their ideas of history and tradition, in constant dialogue with external, more institutional visions of what the market is. This dialogue values folklore and considers it important to tourists and visitors. These ideas of the past are continuously renegotiated in relation to the present. Actors at the market frequently use words such as 'crisis', 'difficulty', and 'loss' when describing the present, a present which is often compared to a romanticised vision of the past, in which everything tasted better.

Studying the historic market of Catania allows us to examine the daily practices, which reveal layers of an ancient history and a controversial present. Despite being the European city with the second highest concentration of hypermarkets after Norway (Camarda 2008), the historic market of Catania persists and people still gather in its noisy squares. It exhibits a certain exoticism, being described as primitive, exotic, smelly, and sometimes as a public affront to civic decency. In 1996, during my first visit to Catania, I stayed in the only backpackers' youth hostel in the city, which is located right above the market. I remember being annoyed by the voices of the sellers, waking me up every morning around 7am, when the market opened and the first customers arrived. In a strict Sicilian dialect, vendors loudly praised the quality of their fish. My Northern European friends were so surprised by the bustling noise and the vivid colours of the market, that they could not help taking loads of pictures. The vendors were pleased by the attention and often posed, showing their products and commenting on the beauty of my blondest friend.

Tourism is vital for the local economy in Catania and for Sicily in general. When I first visited *La Pescheria*, I was one of many young tourists,

buying an orange here, two peaches there. Backpackers, as much as cruise passengers, are fascinated by the noise, the mess, the chaos of the market. It was a bazaar-like experience, with the charm and the appeal of the exotic. When visitors arrive at Catania, especially those from the passing cruise liners that stop for just one day in the harbour, their tourist route² takes them through *La Pescheria*.

The interactions between cultural values and material and economic situations are evident within the market, and are often alluded to by the citizens of Catania. The following caption described a picture of the market taken by the Catanese graphic designers of the studio ETCETERA (2012)³, which appeared on an online network of international artists. The caption captures some of the most relevant features of the historical market of Catania: its theatrical nature characterised by the celebration of the life and death cycle, its ritual nature in the display of its bounty, and its liveliness given by the voice, the movements, the practices.

The *Pescheria* in Catania is the grand theatre of the city, the place in which life is celebrated through the representation of its opposite. It is the altar on which to sacrifice the most precious fruits, in a ritual ceremony consisting of recomposing the fish on the stalls in a marine crèche. Improvising every day, even following the same scenario: shouting, teasing, fighting, telling stories, cheating and following destiny, as it would be a fish. [...] This is the reason why this place is alive. On these sidewalks life rises up like a wave, screaming to everyone that a city without its historic markets is a city without a voice. (ETCETERA, 2012, *my translation*)

More than anything else the market is celebrated because of its nostalgic

2 This touristic path through the city was defined by one of my informants “pickpockets safe route”. Apparently the big cruising companies agreed a ‘safe’ route within the city along which they guide passengers, when they land in the harbour of Catania during the Mediterranean cruise.

3 This group of designers is directed by designer, Jacopo Leone, who has been carrying out research at the *Pescheria* for at least three years. He interviewed people and shot videos about the daily life of the market. He started an artistic project in which he painted the shadows of the fish using fish blood and squid ink. It is like a shroud, a lithography, in which the fish imprints its shape on a piece of fabric and then on to paper. The artist built a very close relationship to the fishmongers. All of them collaborate happily with him.

connotation, accompanied by the fear of losing the city's voice.

A similarly evocative passage comes from Antonino Buttitta (1984), a distinguished anthropologist from Palermo, who writes about the paradox of Sicilian identity, the mythic antithesis, the coexistence of the opposites, a complexity which is not rejected but embraced as part of a cultural heritage. It is the paradox innate in every Sicilian. It is the sweet and sour of its history, of its cuisine, of its daily life, in a region comprising contradictory identities. Buttitta writes:

[t]he mythological representation of Sicily results from the intermingling of these two opposite ideological attitudes. It is the wasted timeless feud and the pulsing rhythm of the gardens' life, it is the genuine home-made bread and the sumptuous desserts of the monasteries, it is the homicidal violence for the "goods" (*roba*⁴) and a generosity performed until dissipation, it is the *bracciante*⁵'s humble work but also the cart driver's indomitable pride, and finally the loyalty without hesitation to their own cultural universe alongside an openness to integrate models from other cultures (Buttitta 1984:17, *my translation*)

Otherness, chaos, exoticism, complexities, controversies, and paradoxes nourish ethnographic inquiry. The mythological view of Sicily, Catania, and its market poses a challenge to anthropological studies, to unveil what lies beneath this surface. Complexity is endemic in any society, what is relevant here is the friction and tension between apparent contradictions. The market is the symbol of Catanese sociality: it stands as a monument to tradition but simultaneously as evidence of its decay.

La Pescheria is located between the harbour and the city centre; it is close to the sea that provides fish for the market. It is also located at the end of

4 The term *roba* recalls Verga's short story "La Roba" (1979), in which a greedy peasant manages land belonging to a baron. This story represents wealth achieved through hard labour, but also the obsessive attachment to goods, symbolised mainly when the main character, Mazaró, does not want to leave his possessions behind when dying and tries to kill his turkeys and ducks.

5 "bracciante or laborer who depends on day wages whenever he can find work helping others" (Cancian 1961:2)

via Etnea, one of the main city arteries, connecting the city to the volcano, which is seen as the source of wild produce. *La Pescheria* is, in fact, located just off the main square, in which it is possible to see *u' liotru*, the fountain of the elephant, symbol of the city, and the Duomo, Catania's main cathedral. Like the renowned Tsukiji marketplace in Tokyo (Bestor 2004), *La Pescheria* is one of the most important of Catania's landmarks.

As a general term, *Pescheria* means 'the place where fish is sold', from the word *pesce* meaning fish. Thus, the name highlights the importance of fish within this market, which represents its primary value. Apparently *La Pescheria* started as a fish market before a landfill operation, which changed the urban plan of the city during Mussolini's Fascist regime. The market area was originally closer to the sea shore in the past. In Catanese dialect it is normally called *'a Piscaria*. Nowadays, *La Pescheria* and the *Fera 'u Luni* (Monday market) are the officially denominated historical markets of Catania.

My research project commenced by considering the market as an accessible gateway to understanding the daily life of a Sicilian city. I believe that food provides a meaningful entry point to wider social phenomena (Lévi-Strauss 1970). Furthermore, the market is the perfect place for examining the distinction between the inside meaning of food, the "daily life conditions of consumption" (Mintz 1996: 20), and the outside meaning, the social economic and environmental conditions of consumption (*Ibid*: 20). It is the place where inside and outside meet; where the external economy meets the household. Consequently, this research project developed from an interest in the marketplace as a forum for social relations, in which the everyday experience is linked to broader "cultural patterns, hegemonic structures, political and economical processes" (Holtzman, 2006:17).

My experience of fieldwork led me to follow three main threads: the landscape as representation of local identity; buying as social activity; and finally the ambivalence and complementarity of 'tradition' and modernisation.

I argue that the market provides a space in which it is possible to renegotiate the meanings attached to landscape (*paesaggio*). Landscape entails a romanticised idea of what surrounds human beings, a vision which does not allow the observer to interact too much with it, but to admire, to worship. This passivity seems to justify fatalism and this would be confirmed by a reading of Sicilian history as a never-ending series of invasions, in which there was very little space for contestation.

The notion of localism was not sufficient to capture the interactions between the market's actors and food. I suggest that at the market people are looking for an 'unmediated' relationship with food. The main categories they use to talk about food are 'wild', 'local/domestic', and 'foreign'. Wilderness enters the market through the mediation of fishermen and the men coming in from the villages around Etna. The 'wild' is separated and contained, and informs a social order, in which 'wild nature' simultaneously brings destruction and fertility. The power of 'nature's presence' within the market confirms the desire of a relationship with the landscape and, through it, with the island itself and with a certain kind of Sicilianess.

Shopping at the market is a social activity, carried out following criteria that only insiders can know. An articulated combination of sensory and social expertise keeps the boundaries of this 'community' intact. Vendors, however, choose to represent 'tradition', especially in the presence of foreigners. The peculiarities of folklore are placed on a stage for the tourists' experience, but this drives the stall-holders to renegotiate constantly their understanding of their history and their identity.

I believe that all these processes tell us something relevant about how meanings are re-territorialised (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b:50). My thesis considers the market as a space under construction, in which social relationships, exchanges and economic transactions contribute to creating a very specific context. I assume that space is "a product of relations-between,

relations which are necessarily embedded material practices” (Massey 2005:9). A ‘historical’ and ‘traditional’ market grants a window on these complex processes.

La Pescheria derives its identity from the notion of place; but on the other hand, it also challenges its own boundaries. Pardo (1996:3) writes that ethnography must be "set in a broader historical and sociological context". This is particularly important in the case of *La Pescheria*. I seek to connect the “here” to the “there” (Wittel 2000), by dealing with the flow of goods, people and information in a geographically located space, embedded in networks of regional, national, and transnational relationships. *La Pescheria* is a public social space in an urban South-European context, thus it provides a unique context of commodification and consumption, contributing to the contemporary debate about value, tradition and modernity (Argyrou, 1996; Huysseune 2006; Sutton, 2008).

1.2 Theoretical considerations and literature review

My anthropological approach to *La Pescheria* draws on Bestor's (2004) analysis of the Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo and Herzfeld's (1987, 1991, 2001, 2009) general anthropological concepts. Bestor's monograph aroused my interest in the marketplace as complex social phenomenon. His analysis posits an interplay between a specific ethnographic setting and national and international networks. It was an excellent starting point, even if my analysis moved in a different direction in comparison to his. Tsukiji is the world's largest wholesale fish market and Bestor focused mostly on the level of institutions. In Tokyo technology and global trades interact daily with Japanese economic behaviour. In the case of *La Pescheria*, I concentrated more on the way people manage daily social and economic interactions, in harmony with the local ideas of modernity.

Herzfeld's writings challenged my own prejudices and the limitations of mainstream thinking. The debt to his work is not so direct, but it contributed to creating the foundations of my own thinking. Before analysing the bodies of literature that influenced my work, I would like to illustrate the theoretical framework, on which my ethnographic account of *La Pescheria* is based. This explains how my work is placed in relation to the broader debates of contemporary anthropology and the social sciences.

First, the distinction between primitive and developed societies, which posits an essential difference between archaic and modern, is clearly based on Western prejudices and conceptions of superiority (Kuper 1999). Whilst there is maybe wide agreement about the rejection of this standpoint when dealing with non-Western countries, the dichotomy between archaic and modern is also counterproductive when looking at European countries, because it provokes a

refusal to acknowledge elements not fitting the schemata of a rationalized cultural system. The case of the Mediterranean is an exemplar in this matter, because its reification into a unitary object of study transformed it into the 'Other' within Europe. In my work I refute this hegemonic way of looking at Southern European contexts, following a wider trend initiated in different disciplines by scholars such as Herzfeld (1980, 1984, 1987,2009), Fiume (1987), Pina-Cabral (1989), Triolo (1993), Argyrou (1996), Huysseune (2006), Hart (2006), Montanari (2006), Pardo and Prato (2011).

What's more I do not see social processes in the light of Cartesian epistemology, but try to render their individual complexity. I explicitly rejected opposition between symbolic and material (Herzfeld 2001), and between body and mind (Csordas 1990). I sought to regard the market as a cultural and economic social fact, and evaluated the economy as intertwined with cultural values. This perspective followed the objection raised by Bird-David (1997:471), against “reproducing the master-division into wholly capitalist or wholly non-capitalist economy kinds”. Herzfeld (2001) also argues that the “notion of totally predictive market is a caricature” (Ibid.:92). Thus, the lens of rationality is insufficient to explain individual households' choices and also those of economic institutions such as markets.

I draw more directly on the following bodies of literature. The first is the literature which deals with markets as economic and social institutions, offering a gateway towards a deeper understanding of exchange and identity. The second body of literature deals with space, and the third with notions of modernity and tradition.

1.2.1 The marketplace: social relations, exchange and identity

In anthropology two classical contributions deal directly with markets: the ethnography about a Mexican market by Malinowski (Malinowski & de la Fuente 1982) and the analysis of a Moroccan *Suq* by Geertz (1979).

Malinowski's uncompleted work on Mexico, written in collaboration with De La Fuente, a local anthropologist, engaged with a rural area of Mexico during the 1940s. According to their informants, nobody goes to the market for reasons other than economic ones. The authors conclude that it is possible therefore to separate economic behaviour from other aspects of social life.

Our final conclusion is that the market is almost exclusively an economic mechanism in the conceptions and ideas of the natives themselves. We are unable to find a single person who did not come to a market place with something to sell or something to buy. (Malinowski & de la Fuente 1982:189)

On the other hand, Geertz's analysis of the *suq* in Sefour takes into account three aspects of the market: its physical form, comprising display, population, and divisions; its social relations, between different actors at the bazaar; and its activity form, in other words how people behave at the bazaar (Geertz, 1979:175). This shows how the market is structured according to general principles of social organisation. Consequently, it is easy to understand Geertz's (*Ibid*: 124) definition of the bazaar as “a distinctive system of social relationships centring on the production and consumption of goods and services (i.e., a particular kind of economy)”. He sees social relationships as being at the basis of the exchange, and thus of the economic system.

More recently, De La Pradelle (2006) has challenged the well-known distinction between traditional and modern economies, and she writes:

Karl Polanyi and the school of economic anthropology he inspired established a radical opposition between modern societies, where the self-regulating Market reigns, and traditional societies, where goods exchange is always ‘embedded’ in the social relations of persons and groups (kinship, status hierarchy, domination, and so on). [...] [A]nother effect was that our marketplaces, in contrast with those of Indians and Berbers, ceased being relevant objects of anthropological study"(*Ibid*:2)

De La Pradelle's (2006) monograph consists of ethnographic material about the Friday ritual of Carpentras, a village in the middle of the Provençal

countryside in France. Although her market is very different from *La Pescheria*, her analysis of exchange within the market is useful and inspiring. She believes that the market always involves social relations and that it constitutes a valid

[...] anthropological object – market exchange as social relation – that proved relatively novel and actually quite contemporary, in that under cover of Provençal exoticism and ancestral heritage, the logic of behaviour in this market, the perpetual play around anonymity that is its operative principle, was in fact thoroughly modern (*Ibid*:7)

It is beyond the scope of this literature review to provide an extensive discussion of anthropological theories of exchange. However it is necessary here to understand, as Davis (1992:63) points out, that “[e]xchanges involve categories, classifications of intended results, commodities and relationships.” He sees exchanges as deeply intertwined with social classifications, which are ambiguous. Davis affirms that these classifications are “complicated, imprecise and incomplete, and allow relatives, employers, companies, spouses, patrons, mafiosi and state's men scope for manoeuvre and manipulation (*Ibid*: 63)”. The ability by actors at the market to manoeuvre through social constraints constitutes one of my main interests. This operation of manipulation is deeply connected to the performance of identity within the market.

That is an important form of social creativity, an exercise in ingenuity which is enthralling and impressive even while it may offend our sense of justice and fair play. The power to manipulate categories is unevenly distributed in population. (Davis 1992:63-64)

Bestor (2004) analysed the ability of market intermediaries to manoeuvre between social categories. De La Pradelle (2006), on the other hand, compares the market to a game. She sees it as a micro-culture, in which actors follow a complex set of rules to perform the local identities. Black (2012:7) analyses “social and economic transactions” at Porta Palazzo, a market in the centre of Turin.

Despite the obvious differences between markets throughout the world, there is something universal about the way in which people

from different backgrounds and cultures are brought together for the purpose of exchange, trade, and socializing (*Ibid*:7)

I agree with Black (2012) when she sees economic and social life as interconnected. The market is, as she claims, the perfect context in which to observe resistance to more rationalised use of public space. However there is also a political and historical dimension to the commodification of food. Food is political and enmeshed in relations of power (Mintz 1996) and taste is shaped by belonging to social group (Bourdieu 1984). I believe Black's analysis overlooks this perspective, assuming a positive stand towards local food and farmers markets without challenging their meaning in the cultural context.

1.2.2 Space and landscape

The “representation of local identity” (De La Pradelle, 2006:156) implies a specific relationship to place. Place itself constitutes a problem in contemporary anthropology (Rodman 2003). Gupta and Ferguson (1997b) argue that place involves more than a physical location.

Physical location and physical territory, for so long the only grid on which cultural difference could be mapped, need to be replaced by multiple grids that enable us to see that connection and contiguity - more generally, the representation of territory - vary considerably by factors such as class, gender, race, and sexuality and are differentially available to those in different locations in the field of power. (*Ibid*:50)

Following Lefebvre (1991), it is possible to look at space as lived, experienced and constructed.

If space is produced, if there is a productive process, then we are dealing with *history*. [...] The history of space, of its production *qua* reality, and of its forms and representations, is not to be confused either with the casual chain of 'historical' (i.e. dated) events, or with a sequence, whether teleological or not, of customs and laws, ideals and ideology, and socio-economic structures or institutions (superstructures) (*Ibid*: 46)

This history of space recalls a conceptualisation of time and space as cumulative, formed by layers, by “imbricated strata” (De Certeau 1984:200).

Despite the complexity of such an approach, De Certeau argues that these “elements spread out on the same surface can be enumerated; they are available for analysis; they form a manageable surface” (*Ibid*: 200). He adds that “[t]he revolutions of history, economic mutations, demographic mixtures lie in layers within it, and remain there, hidden in customs, rites, and spatial practices. (*Ibid*: 201)”. From this perspective, places comprise stratifications of meanings.

The notion of landscape is dear to architects, designers, gardeners, agronomists, and other professionals directly engaged with physical space. However, social scientists have frequently ignored its significance (Tilley 1994). The Italian word for landscape, *paesaggio* comes from *paese*, indicating the village, but also the land, the region, the territory and the starting point of this cultural acquisition is a physical and geographical place (Turri, 1974:51). It bears a different connotation from its original use, addressed to painting. The landscape has been regarded from an aesthetic or artistic perspective mainly, as “overview, panorama, aspect of the territory” (Starnini 2008:9). According to Starnini (2008), this perspective underestimates the value of aesthetics: the beauty of the landscape “constitutes an essential requirement for the fulfilment of human beings' spiritual needs” (*Ibid*: 9, my translation).

In anthropological theory, landscape has broader connotations than aesthetical ones. From a critical, reflexive point of view landscape is a “sensory manifestation of the environment” (Turri 1974:52) and it is culturally constructed. According to Tilley (1994) the “[l]andscape is a signifying system through which the social is reproduced and transformed” (*Ibid*: 34). Bender (1993b) underlines the constructive nature of the landscape, as a continuous work of renegotiation. “It is part of the way in which identities are created and disputed, whether as individual, group, or nation-state” (*Ibid*:5).

Many authors look at landscape as cultural process (Hirsch 1995; Stewart & Strathern 2003). The power of this representation is clearly explained in the following passage.

[T]he tension between tradition and the modern - foreground and background, place and space - appears to be momentarily resolved in a representation that encapsulates the political fiction of a unified nation. There is no absolute landscape here, but a series of related, if contradictory, moments - perspectives - which cohere in what can be recognized as a singular form: landscape as a cultural process (Hirsch 1995:23)

Anthropologists have discussed the notion of “mythic geography” in relation to the landscape (Cosgrove 1993). Cosgrove (1993) connects the spatial and temporal dimension of Greek and Roman mythology. He remarks:

This temporal narrative moves from nature to culture via increasing human invention and social sophistication. Its spatial dimension is a series of symbolic landscapes from the wilderness of pristine nature, through the glades and meadows of the pastoral and the cultivated agrarian garden, to the walls and buildings of the city with its market for commerce and forum for political discourse (*Ibid*:293)

Cosgrove (1993) describes three mythic landscapes, which move progressively from a Dionysian landscape to an Apollonian one, a movement very often looked at as from nature to culture (*Ibid*:294). To clarify the use of the term *myth* in this thesis, I avail myself of Ferguson's (1999) point of view. He highlights the ambiguity of its definition.

First, there is the popular usage, which takes a myth to be a false or factually inaccurate version of things that has come to be widely believed. Second, there is the anthropological use of the term, which focuses on the story's social function: a myth in this sense is not just a mistaken account but a cosmological blueprint that lays down fundamental categories and meanings for the organization and interpretation of experience (*Ibid*: 13)

This duality allows us to play along the lines of the Sicilian paradoxes, and to acknowledge ambiguities and conflicts *a priori*. As Hirsch (1995:23) points out

[t]his is because there is no 'absolute' landscape: the salience and relationship between place and space, inside and outside and image and representation are dependent on the cultural and historical context.

Drawing on Hirsch (1995), Stewart and Strathern (2003b) also highlights the role of memory and place in the production of landscape.

Memory and place, via landscape (including seascape), can be seen as crucial transducers whereby the local, national and global are brought into mutual alignment: or as providing sites where conflicts between these influences are played out. (*Ibid*: 2)

Thus, the notion of landscape is vital to understanding the experiences of space (Stewart and Strathern 2003) and of time (Bender 1993). Fabian (2002) reminds us that:

[t]ime to accommodate the schemes of a one-way history: progress, development, modernity (and their negative mirror images: stagnation, underdevelopment, tradition). In short, *geopolitics* has its ideological foundations in *chronopolitics*. [...] Neither the political Space nor political Time are natural resources. They are ideologically construed instruments of power (*Ibid*:143).

Fabian also argues clearly that the “relationships between anthropology and its objects are inevitably political” (*Ibid*: 143). To represent something it is necessary to anchor it in time, to fix it.

1.2.3 Modernisation and Tradition, Nostalgia and Folklore

The idea of linear progress has been widely observed by different scholars. Roy (2004) takes a clear position with regard to the idea of progress and its relation to modernity.

The idea of the modern is also an idea of progress. This notion of progress operates in time and space. If some places are seen as backward, then moving ahead also implies being ahead of such places, of being essentially different from such places. Such geographical articulations of development and underdevelopment constitute a key dimension of the modern. They imply that progress can only exist in relation to what is seen as backwardness; that the modern must put not only itself but also tradition on display: the other continents must arrive as contributions. (Roy, 2004:67)

These geographies of power represent a relation between what is developed and underdeveloped; what is modern and what is traditional. In the

past anthropology reinforced these differences through distinguishing between 'pre-modern' or 'primitive' societies and modern societies, usually Western (Kuper 1999). This standpoint attributes positive value to a movement that goes from backward to modernised. I disagree with this evolutionary approach to tradition and modernity.

Sutton (2008) writes that 'tradition' and 'modernity' have the function to negotiate the future and the place in the contemporary world, "through every day practices and discourses on food, home life and consumption" (*Ibid.*: 85). Jacobs (2004) does not see modernity and tradition as opposed.

[T]radition is something that is brought into being by modernity's own imaginary. So formed, it is important to interrogate the specific logic of the relations that exist between the terms 'tradition' and 'modernity'. (*Ibid.*: 85)

The discourse about modernity and tradition emerged in Europe during the 19th century, at the time of the consolidation of nation-states (Otto 2007). Nostalgia and folklore also emerged at this time, and was crucial to the construction of otherness.

[Nostalgia] is coeval with modernity itself. Nostalgia and progress are like Jekyll and Hyde: alter egos. Nostalgia is not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space that made the division into "local" and "universal" possible (Boym 2001:XVI)

Pagano (1965), Cocchiara (1978), and Triolo (1993) discuss the emergence of folklore, *folclore* in Italian. Giuseppe Pitré, a Palermitan physician, compiled in 25 volumes the most extensive and systematic taxonomy of Sicilian popular culture. This work is "still regarded as an invaluable source of raw data about Sicilian culture" (Triolo 1993:306). Yet it is through a class-biased gaze that he pictured the lower-classes of Sicily at the beginning of the 20th century. His sympathy was directed at humble labourers, living modestly in urban areas, or enjoying an 'authentic' rural life. It is not an exaggeration to affirm that the study of folklore played a fundamental role in enhancing the

institutional focus on preserving tradition. This provided an impetus for the establishment of folklore institutes and museums of popular traditions. The idea of folklore became popular among the lay people, and is often used for their performance of tradition, when addressed to tourists and foreigners. Folklorists idealised rural life, and held a negative view of urbanisation. This is often evident in food culture (Montanari 2006).

Triolo (2003) shows how Pitré's work on folklore was based on a notion of progress, in which the rural peasant and the humble worker were characterised as primitive, and as “survivals of an exotic African” (*Ibid*: 307). This implied discrimination and the constitution of ‘sets of oppositions’ between the sophisticated and the simple, between the urban and the rural, between the European and the African, between the literate and the nonliterate (Triolo 1993:307).

Bender (1993) stresses a generalised fear of contemporary changes. Anthropologists, engaging with the urban gentrification of cities, often share this viewpoint. Zukin (2010), dealing with a neighbourhood in New York, believes that

[y]earning for authenticity reflects the separation between our experience of space and our sense of self that is so much a part of modern mentalities. Though we think authenticity refers to a neighbourhood's innate qualities, it really expresses our own anxieties about how places change (*Ibid*: 210)

Herzfeld (2009) explores the gentrification of Rome. His ethnography evokes passionately the complexity of Roman urban life and connects the micro-analysis of a local eviction to the intricate matters of facing change, corruption and moral judgements.

Social scientists generally agree that markets are privileged spaces in this search for authenticity (Bestor 1999b; Black 2012; De La Pradelle 2006; Favero 2007; Téhoueyres 2007). Téhoueyres (2007) analyses markets more

from the historical point of view. She connects the craving for authenticity in contemporary markets to a postmodern desire for the past. She writes:

the very anachronism of the market logic is in fact inherent to hypermodernity: consuming anachronism and elements of the past are typical of contemporary society. (*Ibid*: 248)

‘Consuming anachronisms’ seems to be related to modernity as much as the need to re-establish, construct and imagine traditions (AlSayyad 2004b). All these processes are characterised by a sense of loss, which is very often identified as nostalgia (Roy 2004). The South of Italy has been regarded as backward and Italy in general as a country characterised by incomplete modernisation (Huysseune 2006). Recent scholarly perspectives analyse the events of Italian history in a different frame (Pandolfi 1998, Graziano 2010).

All these bodies of literature are relevant to my ethnographic material. I shall address the importance of social relationships in contexts of commodification and consumption. I deal with the classifications people use to communicate about, and to relate to food. Investigating the meanings of space is vital because marketplaces are generally connected to location. The idea of the landscape, with its romantic connotations and its powerful aesthetic rhetoric, constitutes a fundamental departure point to understanding fatalism. Seeing landscape as a cultural process, allows for the insertion of ethnographic details into a more general cosmology, which speaks to us about nature and identity. Finally looking at modernity and tradition not as opposites, but as aspects of the same contemporary fear of change, is a useful way to provoke a discussion regarding notions of backwardness and progress.

1.3 Setting

Catania is an Italian city, located on the oriental coast of Sicily, on the

Mediterranean Sea⁶. Today Catania is the second largest city of Sicily. Sicily is the largest island of the Mediterranean and the largest Italian region, occupying 25,711 square kilometres (Regione Siciliana, 2011a). The island is separated from the Italian mainland by the “Stretto di Messina” (Straits of Messina) and from Tunisia by the “Canale di Sicilia” (Sicilian Channel). Sicily has been a major focus of attention over the centuries, mainly due to her centrality⁷ in the Mediterranean Sea and to her strategic location between Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia. Sicily has always been a privileged natural harbour, located between the Tyrrhenian and Ionian Seas, well-known for its typical mild climate of wet winters and dry summers. The island has very little flat land, with the exception of the Catania Plain, located between Syracuse and Mount Etna. The mountainous areas can reach much lower temperatures than the coastal ones.

The statistical data of the year 2010⁸ reports a population of 5.051.075, which counts as 8.3% of the national population, predominantly living in cities. 24,7% of the island's inhabitants live in Palermo (1.249.577) and 21,6% in Catania (1.090.101) (Regione Siciliana, 2011a). As in the rest of Italy, the average age of Sicilians has been steadily increasing. In 2010, 9.4% of all inhabitants were above the age of 74 years (Regione Siciliana, 2011a).

Today the province of Catania counts above one million inhabitants, and the municipality of Catania about 300,000 citizens (ISTAT 2011). It is located on the oriental coast of Sicily, close to Taormina and Syracuse, which were fundamental places in Greek times. Catania was founded by a Greek population

6 Maps illustrating the geographical position of Sicily from different perspectives are available at the end of this volume in Appendix I.

7 I refer to Sicily as female, since its name in Italian is *Sicilia* and it is always referred to as "she".

8 The quantitative data concerning the island's population, agriculture, industry and tourism are provided by the Regional Statistical Report, which is released every year by the Region of Sicily. This report is based on the data gathered by ISTAT, the National Institute of Statistics, responsible for the census in Italy. In this case I avail myself of the most recent set of data, available at the time of writing, covering the years 2009-2010 and published in 2011.

originating from the peninsula of Calchis in 729 B.C. (Scifo, 2009). The city is located at the foot of Mount Etna, a fearsome active volcano, on a small bay facing the Mediterranean sea and close to one of the few flat plains in Sicily, the *Piana di Catania* (Catania's plain). The wealth of Catania came from its location between sea and volcano, a landscape providing richness and development.

However misfortune has long plagued Catania. Its history is a history of destruction and death, but also of resistance and rebirth. It shows an eternal cycle of death and life, in which the hostility of fate is challenged by the inhabitants of the city. Still visible in the insignia at one of the city's gates, Porta Garibaldi, is written "*melior de cinere surgo*", meaning "I resuscitate from my ashes more flourishing" or "I am reborn from my ashes more beautiful". According to some historians (Clarenza, 1863; Correnti, 1964), Catania has been destroyed between seven and nine times. Among the most documented, according to Correnti (1987), the first destruction of the city goes back to 476 B.C. by Jerone I, Tyrant of Syracuse; this was followed by an eruption of Mount Etna in 121 B.C. In 1169 AD a violent earthquake ruined the city and in 1197 Enrich VI attacked the city as punishment for their loyalty to the Normans. In 1669 Etna's lava covered the city and less than twenty years later, in 1693, another earthquake razed Catania to the ground. This latter event is still remembered in Catania, because it completely changed the layout of the city. In the aftermath of this devastating earthquake, planners redesigned the whole urban structure (Rio 1987). After this reconstruction, the city was dominated by a Baroque architectural style, due to the work of architects such as Vaccarini. Catania was always rebuilt in the exact same spot, despite the threat from the volcano and the seismic danger (Chester et al 1985).

Catania was and still is an economically active centre in the Mediterranean, thanks to its location and also to "the most enduring and energetic tradition which, over time, have transformed the city into a first class

trade centre” (Cirelli et al 2004:3). It is in this context that Catania developed a strong reputation as a commercial centre, such that it earned the title of “Milano del Sud” (Milan of the South , *my translation*) (Barone 1987a). It was the industrial capital of the island, thanks to the less baronial attitude of its political class in comparison to the western part of the island (Barone, 1987a).

Unfortunately, between 2000 and 2010, Catania experienced a financial and social decline. One of the greatest crises occurred while I was conducting my fieldwork at the market. Catania's local government had been filling the pages of the Italian newspapers for the whole of 2009, as the council was facing a serious financial and social emergency . In the latter half of 2009 it was impossible to ignore the financial crisis. The city faced bankruptcy and according to some national newspapers, Catania was running a €700 million deficit (Camarda 2008). In 2012 the debt-ridden council still had multi-million Euro electricity and telephone bills (Perrotta 2012). On a few occasions, this led to the electricity company turning off the street lighting, leaving most of the city in the dark. Citizens felt really unsafe, and walking on the street was considered dangerous. The Italian government lent €140 million to the city council, but the situation was still grave. For one week, starting from September 15th the garbage collectors went on strike, they hadn't been paid since July 2009. During the protest a sign bearing the words “On sale” appeared on the elephant statue, symbol of the city.

1.4 The city centre and its markets

The first municipality hosts *La Pescheria*. This part of town is regarded as the city centre. It comprises the space rebuilt after the 1693 earthquake, and it is not dissimilar from the space delimited by the fortification built by Charles V at the beginning of the 16th century. Catania's official municipal web-page reports that the urban plan following the reconstruction after 1693 separated the

poor neighbourhoods from the up-market areas, creating a 'hegemonic city' and a 'subaltern' (Comune di Catania 2008). The western side of town was characterised by low housing prices, while the eastern side, due to very expensive land costs, was reserved for the local elite and the religious and secular institutions. According to the city council, the city kept expanding in all directions, but still maintaining this social distinction. Meridian areas such as *San Cristoforo* were also designed for the proletariat (Comune di Catania 2008). The market was located inbetween these areas, next to Piazza Duomo, which conflates the powers of the Senate Palace and the Cathedral. It is also in close proximity to previously overpopulated areas, like *Civitas* and the *Pescheria's* area itself.

The rapid urbanisation of the 20th century accentuated this process, creating ghetto areas, in which the living conditions were generally poor. Catania, like other European cities, experienced great expansion due to increased urbanisation between the 1970s and the 1980s. The borders of the city enlarged and the city centre became very congested and overrun with traffic. This was followed by several attempts to decentralise the city and create more urban centres. The city centre kept its centrality for administrative purposes, but lost its importance as far as economic and financial activities were concerned.

Shopping areas also underwent a similar transformation. Neighbourhood markets, supermarkets and lately hypermarkets have mushroomed in the suburbs. Nowadays a gentrification process has started in the city centre, which is now popular among university students and a young upwardly mobile class.

The idea of the market as a forum is an ancient one and in Sicily its roots go back to the time of the Greek settlements, the *Magna Graecia*, in which cities like Syracuse were as important as Athens. In modern times this idea was related to a concept of city in which the centre was not only the administrative heart of the province, but the hub of a very wide range of bureaucratic activities and a must for the daily social relations. It is this notion

of centre which has been modified by architectural interventions starting in the 1970s, driven by the concept of decentralisation.

As far as markets are concerned, today each neighbourhood has a local market, in some cases very informal ones, comprising ambulant vendors selling fish, fruit and vegetables from their *Ape Cars*. However the markets of the city centre still bear their significance. Upon entering the city, signposts indicate where the two historical markets are located: '*mercati storici*' (historical markets) the sign reads, clearly visible on the way to town from the airport. It is not difficult to grasp the symbolic importance of these markets. The *Pescheria* and the *Fera du' Luni* are both located in the city centre, about 500 meters apart. But despite their similarities, they encountered very different destinies. Whilst the *Pescheria* remained a 'traditional' market run by Sicilians, and connected to what is regarded as 'traditional' food, the *Fera du' Luni* integrated diverse elements. It kept the Sicilian vendors, but many informal traders belonging to other ethnic groups also started conducting their business here. *La Fera du' Luni* incorporates new social actors such as immigrants from different countries, who bring new elements also from a gastronomic point of view. Walking inside this market, it is possible, for example, to see Bengali and Pakistani vendors selling ingredients of their own cuisine. This market is more bazaar-like, messier and louder. It occupies more space and sells a larger variety of goods. It also sells clothing, and kitchenware. One area is reserved for the flea market, with second-hand clothing, and a wide variety of fabrics. *Fera du' Luni* is somehow more similar to other Italian markets, such as Piazza Vittorio in Rome or Porta Palazzo in Turin.

According to historical references, *Fera du' Luni* is probably older than *La Pescheria*. *Fera* was the word used for the weekly markets during the middle ages and *Luni* derives from *Lunedí*, Monday, which was the day on which the weekly fair was held⁹. There is some controversy surrounding the

9 Now the market is open every day, Monday to Saturday.

term *Luni*¹⁰. According to Clarenza (1833), during Greek times, Catania was already divided into four sections: one was dedicated to Cerere, *Dimeterea*, the goddess of agriculture; another one to the moon. This section probably coincides with an area where a temple dedicated to the Moon was erected, and where the *forum lunare* was held each Monday. The third section is the *civitas*, which still keeps this name and was where the majority of the population resided; and the fourth section was *etnapolis*¹¹ or Etna city, probably referring to Jeron I's expansion of the city's borders towards Mount Etna. Some of these elements are still recognisable today in the city's layout.

Lately Catania also hosts the organic market, the *Fera Bio*, a monthly market and a few *mercati dei contadini*, farmers' markets in which the farmers sell their produce directly to customers. Neither the *Pescheria* nor the *Fera du' Luni* sell organic produce, and they mainly resell goods bought from wholesalers.

1.5 Research Methods

When I planned my fieldwork, two different sources guided and informed my research design: Dewar and Watson (1990) and LaLone (2004). Dewar and Watson's book (1990) was addressed to planners and policy-makers of local markets in developing countries. Yet the way they conducted their research into sixty-six different markets represents a useful example of how researchers can observe markets and conduct interviews with market operators. On the other hand, the book about farmers markets edited by La Lone (2004) is the outcome of a university research project of the economic anthropology

10 It is not clear whether it is connected to Monday (*lunedì*) or the cult of the Moon (*luna*).

11 It is interesting to pinpoint that today *Etnapolis* is the name of a shopping centre.

department at Radford University, in the United States. The way LaLone organized the students' fieldwork constitutes a significant input for my own research.

My fieldwork comprised three different stages: observation and mapping; participant observation of the market and of other significant places in Catania and Sicily; and twenty in-depth open-ended interviews. These three phases were thought to form the best approach to a chaotic environment, such as *La Pescheria* and to provide for intellectual clarity. Although I will describe these methods separately, once my ethnographic work had started, it was not possible to separate one strategy from the other. They intermingled to contribute to the whole picture.

The first part of my fieldwork was dedicated to the observation and mapping of the market. This was necessary in order to become familiar with the space of the market and to acquire an in-depth knowledge of its display. Mapping meant observing the physical layout of the market, and drawing sketches of the market's appearance, providing

a sense of the market layout, including the layout of each vendor's display, the spatial relationship of each stall to one another, and the relationship of the farmers market to roads and town features (LaLone, 2004:4).

Since the utilisation of space, the construction of landscape, and the performance of Sicilianess at the market are the central topics of my thesis, this stage of research was fundamental to my preliminary investigation.

The participant observation in the market started from the very first moment I bought cherries at the market in May 2009. I engaged in "rapport-building" (LaLone, 2004:5) with the vendors, becoming a regular buyer and "establishing regular customer relations with vendors in the market place" (*Ibid*: 5). I also built relations with other buyers and regular customers. I extended the participant observation to many contexts outside the marketplace,

such as the wholesale markets, the city's eateries, food retail outlets, and other Catanese markets. A special mention is required for the fieldwork I conducted on a local fishing vessel. This experience enabled me to bond with the fishermen. The participation in the market and to other events in the city allowed me to relate the market's micro-level to broader networks of relations within municipal, regional, national and international contexts.

At the market, I usually did not take notes immediately, because it was impossible to stand still and write without being noticed. The market's pace is normally either fast or really slow, with the flow of pedestrians increasing and decreasing depending on the time of the day. As in the case of the *suq* described by Geertz (1979): "[n]o one in the bazaar can afford to remain immobile: it's a scambler's life." (*Ibid*: 185). Standing still and writing in this hectic environment was not recommended, so I stopped every day in a local café near the main square. It was popular with tourists and I did not attract much attention by sitting down and writing notes. When my relationships within the market became more intense, I split my daily visits into two parts. During the first half, I visited the southern part of the market, greeting my friends and buying small quantities of produce. Then I stopped in the café to hide my shopping in my cloth shopper and to record recollections of my interactions and observations. Then I was ready to set off for the next round. As much as the vendor is expected to "treat you well", the buyer is not supposed to "betray" his or her trusted stall. The same kind of dynamic was generated on the boat: once becoming close to the crew of a fishing vessel, it was not advisable to board a different one, as I might have disclosed important information about their practices. The affiliations between customers and vendors were often really strong.

The interviews belonged to the last stage of my fieldwork. During

participant observation, I discovered that there was a committee¹² representing the market. I interviewed all committee members and also other stallholders that I met during the first stages of my research. Everyone agreed to their interviews being recorded, but after getting to know me better, some interviewees asked me not to mention what they were saying or not to record specific passages of their interviews. Due to our established relationship of trust, they did not omit or censor themselves. They revealed untold aspects of their daily realities, but asked me for secrecy. These moments were normally related to some illegality or to the controversial relationship between the stallholders and local authorities.

Despite having gathered an enormous amount of data, I tried to collect more systematic information about the number of stalls, the number of people employed at the market and the type of goods on sale. Towards the end of my fieldwork, I thought that I needed a taxonomy of the market, in order to sustain my argument, so one day in June, about two weeks before leaving Catania, I presented myself at the market with a nice folder with spread sheet print-outs and I started wandering around the stalls asking apparently neutral questions. This was the moment I found most diffidence. This strategy was a very naïve mistake, as the majority of the employees were not registered and everyone thought that I was working for the municipality. At that stage, I knew already that the written word was regarded with diffidence at *La Pescheria*, but I thought that the trust the vendors had showed me would overcome this prejudice. However, the overt presence of pen and pieces of paper immediately and completely changed my positioning at the market.

The situation at *La Pescheria* was characterised by intense ongoing conflicts between the vendors and the municipality. This lack of trust in authority drove

12 To express their needs to the local government the vendors have organised a committee. They had drainage problems a few years ago and to solve this issue they established a group of representatives for each commercial category. The committee has an important role in the decision-making process of the market.

me to a choice: either to study the market from a more formal, institutional perspective, or to place myself on the side of the vendors and make an effort to comprehend their agendas, their daily difficulties and their views. As Van Meijl (2005) writes about fieldwork

[i]n the contemporary circumstances of globalisation, postmodernity and postcolonialism, it is increasingly cumbersome to conduct classical field research in the sense of becoming involved in the social practices of informants while simultaneously keeping a distance. Informants frequently request, if not command, anthropologists to attune their research directly to local interests and to support indigenous agenda (*Ibid: 235*)

Driven by the desire to grasp the *Weltanschauung* of the vendors, I chose to follow my informants' narratives, sometimes overlooking the institutional counterpart. Consequently my ethnography lacks insight into the policy of market administration. Heuristically speaking, this could be a stimulus for further research into this aspect of open-air markets.

During my fieldwork, I tried to give as much space as I could to sensory experience of the market. Therefore I recorded the sound of the market, strolling around with a recording device in my pocket, seeking to capture the vendors' hawks and cries and the noises in the different spaces of the market. Taste was one of the senses more directly involved in this fieldwork, especially once I had built a good relationship with the vendors. I also did not take pictures myself, but I asked friends to do so. It was useful to see the market with 'different eyes', from different perspectives, and this allowed me to check whether I had overlooked some aspects of the market organisation. Three professional photographers agreed to shoot in the market: Athanassis Zacharopolous from Greece, Giuseppe D'Alia and Andrea Nucifora from Catania. Other friends visiting the city were encouraged to photograph the Pescheria, while I was showing them around. Some of their pictures are

included at the end of this work, to provide a visual aid to the reader¹³. I also asked Architect Guido Robazza to create ad-hoc maps, in order to provide a better understanding of the physical location of Catania and of the market. The maps, available in Appendix I, are thought of as gradual zooming into the market area.

After returning to London, I transcribed the data compiled during my fieldwork and I translated some of the most relevant sections of my fieldnotes. I spent a considerable amount of time writing up my ethnographic material, without consulting the literature explicitly, in order to let the originality of my own data stand out. Only afterwards did I seek to interpret my material theoretically.

1.5.1 Positioning

Whilst conducting research at the market I constantly felt like an outsider. This was not only a consequence of the geographical location of my fieldsite, but also of the social and cultural contexts in which I carried out my fieldwork. Certainly Gupta and Ferguson's (1997b) conceptualisation of distance applies strongly to the situation of my fieldwork:

[w]e need to account sociologically for the fact that the "distance" between the rich in Bombay and those in London may be much shorter than that between different classes in "the same" city. (*Ibid*: 50)

I realised how true this is, every second Sunday of the month, when I attended Catania's farmers' market. Here a particular slice of the Catanese population gathers together in the beautiful courtyard of a professional horticultural school. Students of the school have their own stalls with plants pots and seasonal produce. Here food is turned into an event, into a happening for families and groups of friends. It is possible to grab a quick lunch, to have

¹³ Please see Appendix III. This appendix was thought as a photo-story of my ethnography. It follows the path of the thesis, exploring ideas of place, landscape, sense, interaction, and conviviality.

breakfast, to listen to some live music, to swap freebies, to buy organic produce and to interact directly with the producers and with the farmers. Here goodness goes together with ethics and sustainability. *The Fera Bio* (organic market) is the first and only organic farmers' market in Catania and every time I visited it, I questioned my choice of fieldsite. The organic farmers' market was my natural environment, perfect for a gourmand. Had I conducted research on this market, I would have dealt with people who share my own ideals about food and also my political opinions. However, my choice of studying the historical market challenged my comfort zone and my romantic idea of Sicily. In his monograph about senses in anthropology, Stoller (1989) highlights the importance of the anthropologists' gaze,

to borrow the apt term of Michel Foucault, of empiricism. 'Gaze' is the act of seeing; it is an act of selective perception. Much of what we see is shaped by our experiences, and our 'gaze' has a direct bearing on what we think. And what we see and think, to take the process one step further, has a bearing on what we say and what and how we write (*Ibid*:38)

One of my challenges was to transform my initial feeling of estrangement into a positive value, or even better into a methodological tool, to be able to overcome fears and prejudices in order to make a step towards a deeper understanding of what surrounded me. The uneasiness constituted a very physical experience, I did not know where to place myself; and I felt awkward and inadequate. It took me a long time to settle in, to get organised and to understand clearly what I was about to do for my research.

Whilst positioning my own body in the city and in the market, I became aware that I was entering a male-dominated space. In the market, whilst all the vendors are men, there are many female customers, so my gender was not an issue while I was shopping. I mingled freely among the customers. At the beginning I felt more of an observer, positioned between the stage and the audience. My observation was focusing on my experience of the market as a guest. During the early stages of my fieldwork, I thought that my outsider status

was due to the inability to speak Sicilian, but this was not the only reason. Although I am native speaker of Italian, I could not understand Sicilian, which is controversially regarded as a dialect. Within the market, Sicilian is the language of insiders and after I learnt a very basic gastronomic vocabulary, my access to the fieldsite became much easier. Italian was an imposed foreign language of intellectuals and of the bureaucracy.

Through attending the market on a daily basis, I built a closer relationship with the vendors and this allowed them to express their thoughts about me and my status. At this point, it was clear that the vendors had identified me as a student, or to be more precise as a left-wing student living in the area. This is partially due to the high register of polite Italian (*parlare pulito*) I spoke. The way I bought food also provided them with useful information about my status. Like most students, I was not married, I did not have children, I was not very wealthy, and I cooked only for myself. However, an interest in food, especially in Sicilian recipes, together with a constant presence at the market can transform even a student into a regular customer. In this market, one of the most important aspects of the daily interaction concerns discourses about food and cuisine. I underwent a proper apprenticeship guided by the vendors and by the women shopping at the market, during which I learnt how to behave appropriately at the market and how to communicate with people in that specific context. This meant not only dealing with the conventions and norms operating at *La Pescheria*, but also with learning a way of 'being-in-the-world' (Merleau-Ponty 2002), which in my case was related to being an unmarried woman in a fish market in Catania, Sicily. Women frequently engaged in providing me advice about how to get (and keep) a Sicilian husband.

People at the market often commented on my gender and status. What's more, at the market, and also in other parts of town, it is not common to see women alone. Men would sometimes stop by to ask whether I needed company.

Men of all ages questioned me about my loneliness, my sadness or my intellectual activity in cafés, while sitting on a bench taking notes or reading. Common comments included: “You are so pretty, why are you here alone?” or “It is good to study, but you will need a husband at a certain point”.

Through fieldwork we expose our identity, our beliefs, and our gender. My informants commented a great deal on my origins. They did not consider Tuscany in the north, and they appreciated my accent, and other Tuscan virtues, such as a good regional cuisine and the renowned sense of humour. This contributed to creating a joyful atmosphere and it eased our communication.

I grew up in a village in a remote part of the province of Lucca, where the land is harsh but which instills pride and shame at the same time. Self-sufficiency was, and somehow still is, the norm and almost everyone raises chickens, rabbits and has a vegetable garden. My grandparents worked in mines and marble quarries. These jobs emancipated them from being *contadini*, peasants, but they all died of silicosis, a lung disease related to the level of silicon inhaled while working. Their pensions paid for my education, because for them education meant a change in the social status.

Food has always been a principal topic of interest in my family. One day I called my father from Rome, where I was studying for an undergraduate degree, to ask him why my neighbourhood market was selling aubergines in November. My father was as horrified as I was. "They come from greenhouses – he said – don't buy them! They probably contain a lot of chemicals!" Although I grew up eating seasonal vegetables from my father's garden, I had also acquired more cosmopolitan tastes. Where I grew up, the supermarket and the neighbour's home-made bread were both elements of the daily life. Italy's supremacy, in matters of cuisine seemed to be linked to the gaze, pointing to the ‘otherness’ of Italians and of Mediterranean people. Italy is, indeed, a very special territory, but some of the ideas about Italian gastronomic culture are of recent construction and need to be addressed in a more critical framework. Some

studies also dispel this myth of a homogeneous Mediterranean food culture (Camporesi 1995, 2000; Montanari 2006).

My attitude towards Sicily and Sicilian culture was also characterised by a sense of guilt towards the south of Italy, due to the exploitation of this region by the north of Italy after the Unification of 1861. This political vision, close to that of left-wing radical intellectuals, coloured my perceptions during my fieldwork. Pretending to be dispassionate would have been inappropriate (Herzfeld 2009), also because the outcome of our research is deeply influenced by our vision (Stoller, 1989).

1.5.2 Ethical issues

Planning fieldwork constitutes a very important phase of research design. However, every ethnographer knows that once we enter the field nothing goes as we expected. This amount of surprise is related also to the choice of the fieldsite. The best possible metaphor to describe my fieldwork comes from Ferguson (1999). In his book about modernity, he quotes Mauss, who wrote: “Ethnology is like fishing; all you need is a net to swing, and you can be sure that you'll catch something.” (*Ibid*: 17). Ferguson acknowledges that the lack of control might be unpleasant, because the

researcher is not in charge and cannot choose what strange and terrible creature may turn up in the net. And when it comes time to inspect the haul, it is not always so clear: did you catch it, or did it catch you? (Ferguson, 1999:17).

On many occasions, I felt I was caught or trapped in the net of my own fieldwork. As I have already mentioned, my informants asked for secrecy and loyalty. From an ethical point of view, these requests bear complex implications. Writing up my fieldwork, I also faced the ‘dilemma’ of whether to change the names, of the market, of the city, or of my informants. Very soon I realised that *La Pescheria* is such a specific setting, that it would make no sense at all to give it a different name or to relocate the city somewhere else. There is

only one city in Sicily with a volcano, this city has two historical markets, and only one that specialises in fish. The main characters of the fish market are fixed. They are there every day and they have been there every day for the last fifty years. Anybody that frequents *La Pescheria* in Catania would be able to recognise who I am talking about, from the position of the stall, from the political views, and from the type of produce sold. My awareness of the specificity of the context of my research informed my decision not to disguise its location. However, I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of my informants, and I am not too precise about the position of their stalls at the market.

Another ethical question arises when it comes to illegal trades, unregistered employees, and boarding on boats without permits. By providing detailed descriptions of such events, I would have betrayed the trust of my informants. I had to confront the constant suspicion that I was 'spying' on them, and looking for all that was rotten within the market. As Herzfeld (1991:47) points out, "[t]he suspicion of espionage is a common hazard in fieldwork". Returning to my fieldsite, after the municipality had shut down the market, showed my informants that I cared about them, as they put it. My thesis is not a journalistic investigation into criminality, although it does confront the mechanisms of secrecy and communication within the market. My informants started telling me things they do not easily reveal, and do not want others to know.

One of the main questions for me was what to do with the 'rotten', once found. The Association of Social Anthropologists' ethical guidelines call on us to honour the trust of research participants in anticipating the possible consequences of anthropological work (Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth 2011). How do we represent a complex reality and in my case a very structured one without compromising the work of our informants? In my specific case, I learnt about illegal practices regarding

fishing and the selling of fish. At the moment, according to the law, engagement in these practices can lead to suspension of the fishing licence and the imposition of stiff fines. Details about such illegalities would make my thesis much spicier and more interesting. But my desire not to betray the trust of my informants is good enough reason to keep some details to myself. Someone could argue that this dynamic is at the basis of a well-known mechanism called *omertà*, a typical Mafia attitude, identified by many as a typical cultural trait of Sicily. Cottino (1999) argues that

[i]n a world where the historical memory of material and moral deprivation is still alive the connecting ruling principle is a Hobbesian one: *homo homini lupus*. [...] Violations of the rules protecting social identity (honour) and ensuring social relations (trust) are not tolerated and must be met with the death penalty. In such a world the phenomenon of *omertà*, i.e. the widespread refusal to cooperate with the judiciary finds a fertile ground. (*Ibid.*: 112)

Have I assimilated a common Sicilian cultural style of the place? Blok (2010:65) explains this process as "*scambio di favori*" (an exchange of favours/exchanging favours). I would argue provocatively that ethnography, if it does not exploit informants, is sometimes in the process of exchanging favours: we observe a specific context, we gain the trust of our informants and the least we can do is to respect them and their conventions. This creates some sort of reciprocity between the ethnographer and the informants.

There is another side effect of continuing to be in contact with my informants. The internet era constitutes a challenge for anthropologists, not least from an ethical point of view. Many of my informants have internet access, surf the net, send emails and use Facebook regularly. One of the questions they ask me when I go around the market is "Will you send me the link of your web-page? Is something going to be published on line?" It is probably the first time that we have to write with the knowledge that our informants can easily access our publications. How different would anthropology have been if the Trobrianders could read what Malinowski wrote?

A great deal of anthropological literature has been written knowing, or assuming, that informants would not read it.

This new context of writing poses unique challenges. When Van Meijl (2005) depicts the ethnographer as a trickster, he also delineates the “tension between involvement and detachment” (*Ibid:* 235), which could however enable the researcher to access complex social realities, if flexible enough to “operate contextually” (*Ibid:* 235).

I believe this possibility also challenges our comfortable position as observers, a position of power over our informants. The ability of our research participants to access our writing creates the possibility of greater ethical responsibility and of more equal relationships.

1.6 Outline of Thesis Chapters

Each chapter opens with a series of ethnographic episodes, introducing the main themes of my thesis. My thesis assumes that the historical market is constituted as its centre, as the focus of attention. This is articulated into two main movements: a centripetal one and a centrifugal one. Chapter two and Chapter three provide a broader picture from a historical and geographical point of view, starting gradually to zoom in on social interactions at the market itself. These two chapters place the market in its relationship with history, place, and power. The latter three chapters follow a centrifugal direction: they start from the market and its physicality, zooming out to encompass broader themes, such as the construction of landscape, the acquisition of knowledge and the debate regarding nostalgia, modernity and tradition. It is the micro-level of ethnography which guides us towards broader themes and the structure of this thesis is thought to demonstrate that.

In more specific detail, the second chapter offers an opportunity to

reflect upon the political geography and the history of the Sicilian landscape. History is seen as cumulative and as continuously renegotiated, and I challenge the vision of a static Sicily presented by mainstream historiography. I consider the history of invasions with specific reference to ‘food encounters’ that throughout history marked the transformation of Sicilian eating habits and contributed to the construction of what is regarded as the Sicilian gastronomic heritage. I shall also explore Italian unification and the controversial consequences of the creation of Italian nationhood and its impact on the local organisation of Sicily. Although this chapter captures a peculiarity of the Sicilian context, it is useful in embracing a critical perspective towards a representation of history which encloses an ideological positioning. This is the case as regards the south/north divide in Italy, and also the more general juxtaposition of modern and traditional societies.

With the third chapter, I walk the reader through the market. Here through an ethnographic tour of the market, we enter the very specific space of *La Pescheria*. This description draws on information about the setting of the market and its surroundings and by a proper sensory promenade through the market. This chapter is about the physical space of the market, but in relation to the sensory experience and to the stalls' display. I take into account the display as performance, as representative of the local ideas about nature. In this chapter I argue that space is constructed and layered and it needs to be addressed in the complexity of its significance. The stalls layout and the goods classification initiate a discussion about space, hygiene, and locality.

After becoming familiar with the market, in Chapter 4, I analyse the social construction of the landscape within the market. Through the deconstruction of the concept of local food, I argue that within this market there are more categories, necessary to understanding the relationship to food and to landscape. Wild, foreign and domestic are here explanatory concepts of a very specific relation to the environment, be it the volcano, the sea or the land. This

opens up a discussion concerning what is perceived as inside and what as outside and I demonstrate that the idea of landscape functions as a filter to what enters into the market and how it is displayed.

Chapter five deals with the way the actors enact market competence through the sensory perception of food quality. Senses, social interactions, culinary knowledge, and conviviality are all aspects which contribute to the ability of operating within the market. This section analyses the organisation of vendor/buyer transaction, exploring what makes transactions appropriate within this context. Finally, I reflect on how cooking and eating are involved in enacting consumer competence.

The central themes of chapter six are the local ideas related to tradition and modernity. After placing these two concepts in a critical perspective, I then move on to consider how people at the market engage with them, confirming or challenging power relations. The fears of being left behind and of losing control over change are reported by my informants as consequences of modernisation. The idea of a movement from backwardness to modernity carries a sense of loss, which instigates the search for authenticity and the feeling of nostalgia. The representation of the past is performed within the market, giving relevance to folklore and irrationality.

The last chapter summarises the different stages of this ethnographic account, highlighting my main conclusions. I stress the political implications of my material, especially related to the representation of the landscape. I also consider the limits of my work and suggest possible directions for future research.

The Appendices are organised as follows: Appendix I contains the maps of the setting, which might help the reader especially at the beginning of the thesis in locating Catania and its market; Appendix II reproduces some illustrations related to the symbols of Sicily and of Catania; Appendix III

contains the photo-story of this ethnographic analysis: and finally Appendix IV reports the list of the fish sold at the market, with the names in Sicilian and in Italian.

Chapter II

A Local History of Global Invasions

“Be dry, be distant. We have always enjoyed the fact that others assume responsibility over us, for our island. Don't relieve us of the responsibility of our history”. That is how a Sicilian friend responded to my difficulties in writing this chapter. He went on to explain how easy it was to become too involved in debates about Sicilian history. He asked me to try to maintain some distance from the events and from the consequent controversies. The idea of responsibility plays a central role in this account, and probably in every historiography.

Writing a chapter which attempted to locate *La Pescheria* historically was very challenging, because I had to rely totally on secondary sources. In any case, this chapter tries to analyse how history has been used and interpreted to sustain the differences, and to support ideas of otherness and alterity in Sicily. The term ‘history’ can be viewed as problematic within the field of anthropology, but I believe historiography helps us in situating *La Pescheria* ethnographically, which by local definition is 'historical'.

In this construction of local identity, it is important to become familiar with the history of the island, or at least with the various historical representations of Sicily, as they illustrate the ways in which the past enters the market and how it is perceived by people today. In this context, a considerable component of this historical grounding is found within Greek mythology and other literary accounts of the region.

In Michael Herzfeld's (2009) account of Rome's gentrification process, he remarks that the past can be condensed in a place like the Italian capital city. He describes the past as “inescapable” (*Ibid.*:68) and goes on to specify that he:

hesitate[s] to call it "history". It is too palpably present, immediate, an inhabited reality; and, at the same time, it has an aura of the fabulous because local residents can rarely resist dramatizing its intensity and duration. (*Ibid.*:69)

This very notion could equally be said to apply to Catania. Wandering around Catania's centre the ‘past’ is everywhere, and reminders of the bygone stand out, as one approaches the city either as a foreigner, or as a tourist. The ‘modern’ is evident in the form of huge retail outlets located outside the historical centre; while the centre itself, the heart of the city, is dominated by a quotidian viewing of the past's remnants. It is a representation of the official past, and of ‘monumental time’, as Herzfeld (1991:6) defines it. Herzfeld (1991) distinguishes monumental time from social time. He defines social time as “the grist of everyday experience” (*Ibid.*: 10), while monumental time “belongs to the vicarious authoritarian control” (*Ibid.*: 10). In this chapter I try to analyse the way in which the ‘official past’ enters daily life.

I view history in terms of exchange and continuous renegotiation. The Italian historian Montanari (2002) writes that the reference to history is very often a mystification, because it separates the notion of identity from exchange. He observes that cultural identities are constantly being readjusted, through contact with other cultures (*Ibid.*: VIII). He concludes by stating that “[i]dentities do not exist outside of exchange networks.” (*Ibid.*: VIII, *my translation*).

Sicily certainly provides an intriguing case of exchanges throughout its history. This vision of history is a helpful tool to contextualise the debates which surround Italian nationhood, regionalism and identity. Writing within this framework, Huysseune (2006) warns

a reading of culture as being strongly geographically and historically determined overstates regional differences and underestimates cultural diversity and changes, especially in the allegedly backward South. Cultural interpretations downplay the historical, institutional and macro-economic processes that shape societies, constrain their development, and (re)produce inequalities (*Ibid*: 115)

My approach also follows Buttitta (1984), who clearly affirms that Sicilian history is cumulative. According to this Sicilian anthropologist, “new cultures, customs, techniques, and languages never completely substitute the previous ones, but they overlap”(*Ibid*.:17), composing a unit of different intermingling layers, with different degrees of permeability. As Correnti (1987) remarks, the very name of Catania reveals the numerous layers of its history: drawing from the Greek, *Katane*, to the Arab, *Qataniah*, finally to the Italian, Catania. This cumulative sense of history places the city in a relational dialogue to centuries of domination.

The cumulative notion of history of Sicily and Catania can be seen within the context of the region’s gastronomy. The most acclaimed example of Sicilian cuisine is the famous *pasticcio* in Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* (Il Gattopardo), written in 1958. The writer describes the layers of the Baroque dish, the “*torreggiante timballo di maccheroni*” (a towering pasta timbale), as embodying the influences of the different cultures which had contributed to Sicilian gastronomic knowledge (Simeti 2008). It was a celebration of Bourbon Baroque taste with memories of cosmopolitanism, due to the opulence of cinnamon and sugar in the pastry, the ancient Sicilian tradition of pasta making, the presence of ham and truffles to please the French facon, and the *demiglace*, testifying to the expertise of the trained French chefs (Simeti, 2008). In essence this one dish invokes multiple layers of history. One dish literally combines the elements of wealth, exoticism, expertise and competence.

Just as in ,cooking the way these layers are combined is very important. Renda (2000), a Palermitan historian, strongly asserts that the way of reading

history is not only important from a historical point of view, but also has distinct political implications, especially for our understanding of reality and daily life (*Ibid*:59). Although this argument holds true for every region of the world, it is particularly relevant to Sicily. Furthermore, this aspect is fundamental to placing the market of *La Pescheria* in the appropriate context.

This chapter addresses the relationship of the market to its past, and what type of history underpins the market. I deal with the perspective of oriental Sicily, and I will emphasise the events and the features characterising the area around Catania, certainly keeping in mind the holistic vision of the island, but prioritising the immediate reality of the city as it exists today. I argue that the representation of history in Sicily and Catania revolve around one main axis: the succession of foreign invasions. These ‘invasions’ either provoked resistance, passive acquiescence or compliance with powerful outsiders. This created a deep connection to the past intertwined with a conflict between those on the inside and those on the outside. General accounts of the history of Sicily posit external factors as change provoking and are contrasted with the resistant or passive internal forces. Fatalism, resistance and survival are central themes in the history of the island. External forces, being ‘foreign invasions’, volcanic eruptions or earthquakes, bring destruction but simultaneously bring wealth. They carry a destructive power, but they also enrich the local culture. These events are accepted as belonging to the cycle of life and death, destruction and reconstruction. This duality permeates the Sicilians' own representations of history, which on the one hand are find positive elements in almost every period of domination¹⁴ and, on the other hand, feel powerless to intervene and or change course.

The chapter opens with a brief overview of the different foreign dominations of the island in ancient times. These include a discussion of how

¹⁴ I am aware that the words ‘domination’ and ‘invasion’ are politically loaded terms, but they reflect the prevailing approach of historiography and the use of these terms also communicates the way, in which ‘the presence of other peoples on the island was perceived by my informants.

the Arabs, the Normans and the Spanish transformed the agrarian landscape. Special attention is given to the institution and management of the *latifundia*¹⁵. I also consider the contributions of these cultures to the local gastronomy. This paragraph leads naturally to the Unification of Italy (1861) and the related historiographical issues.

I discuss the various controversies regarding Italian nationhood, and their position in relation to Sicilian social and economic issues. These include the issues of banditry, the ‘Southern Question’¹⁶, and the violent repression of peasant protests. Then I move on to explore the consequences of the Fascist era on Sicily, as for example when Mussolini declared war on the Mafia. The liberation of Italy, which started in Sicily with the landing of the Allies in 1946, reopened the power struggle between the local Sicilian elite, the Mafia, and the different political parties. I also consider how firstly the Christian Democrats and secondly the establishment of the European Union have shaped the history of the island. A brief excursus through the institutional crisis of the nineties leads us to the rise of Berlusconi.

2.1 Ancient times and symbols

Sicily is embodied within its famous symbol¹⁷, the Triskelion, already in use in the 7th century as reported by Correnti (1994), which is composed of three legs emanating from the head of Gorgon, a mythological monster, probably Medusa, who was able to transform her enemies into stone. The three legs are intended to represent the rays of the sun, and reflect an early name for the island, the “*isola del sole*” (the island of the sun). They also represent the three corners of the island, i.e. Capo Passero, Capo Peloro and Capo Lilibeo. Its ancient name

15 The Latin term *latifundia* indicates large landed estates.

16 “The Southern Question” (*Questione meridionale*) indicates the issues deriving from the ‘backwardness’ of the southern part of Italy. As I will show, the question arose immediately after Italian Unification as economic, political and social emergency of the new born state.

17 Available at the end of the thesis in Appendix II.

Trinacria, also refers to its triangular shape and this was the name used by Homer in the *Odyssey* to refer to Sicily (Correnti, 1994). The current flag of Sicily still contains these ancient symbols. According to Correnti (1994:12), the contemporary name *Sicilia* has Indo-Germanic origins, for its recollection of *sik*, referring to growth, as in “fecundity” or “fertility” island. Sicily has always been considered a very fertile land, and is host to an ancient tradition of cereal production, especially wheat. Indeed it was known as the 'granary of the Mediterranean' in ancient times (Aymard 1987:12). It was also called the “island of Ceres”, the goddess of agriculture and of the harvest (Tuzet,1955:307).

Renda (2000) positions Sicily geopolitically within the Mediterranean area, and he notes that the island has encountered all of the most important political systems in the Mediterranean area, with each of these civilisations leaving something behind in Sicily (*Ibid*: 85). What is generally thought of as ‘given’ or ‘taken’ from the different invaders is intimately connected to food production. There is agreement among historians and scholars of food that the influences of different cultures throughout the centuries have enriched Sicilian cuisine (Dickie, 2007; Simeati, 1989; Sapio, 2003). The history of Sicily is profoundly interwoven with its agriculture, as it has been the main economic sector for a very long time. It is not possible to imagine a history of Sicily, which does not address issues related to the *latifundia*, land-ownership, the shifts in crops, the battles for wheat, bread and water.

The first historical record of Sicily was registered by the Greek, Thucydides, who detailed the populations that inhabited Sicily before the Greeks (Finley 1968). He first mentions the Sicans, a population from the Iberian peninsula, from whom the island took its ancient name of *Sicania*. After them, the Elymians reached the island after escaping Troy and following them, an Italic population called Sicules occupied the island (Correnti, 1994). The Greeks, coming from Chalcis, had easy access to the oriental coast of Sicily,

where they founded Naxos in 734 BC, and thereafter Leontinoi, Katane, and Zancle. For a long time Siracusa was regarded as the most important city on the eastern coast. It was indeed known as the second Athens by the Greeks, and it was the centre of political and economic power until the arrival of the Romans, who took the city in 212 BC. The Greeks initiated significant large scale cultivation of food crops, such as olives, honey and wine, and they introduced the use of *ricotta salata* (salted ricotta cheese) and the cooking of eels and other fish species (Sapio, 2003:8).

The oriental coast of Sicily still boasts its Greek origins. The Greeks established their *polis* in Sicily. The *agorá* (meeting place) was the centre of public life and of daily activities.

The word *agorá* is connected to *aghéiro*, to meet, to gather and it refers not to places but to men who gather and meet in assembly as a community. The main Athenian assembly (synonymous of the political ordering in the city, democracy) used to meet in the square of the market, (*agorá*) north of the Acropolis (Zumbo 2005:35, *my translation*).

The market at *La Pescheria* was definitely not established during Greek times, however the ideas of *polis* and *agorá*, which entered Sicily via the Greek invaders, bring a notion of political sociality (Zumbo 2005). Catania had somewhat more frequent contact with the East than most other Greek cities in Sicily. Its trading links to Phoenician and Greek cities, and to Egyptian ones, were many, and this influenced local mythology.

When the Romans arrived during the first century BC, the oriental coast of Sicily was Greek and the north-western, Carthaginian. During Roman domination, Sicily became known as the granary of Rome (Aymard 1987) and Catania was regarded as one of the twenty most important cities in the Mediterranean world (Correnti 1987). Roman rule on the island lasted five centuries, until the fourth century AD. As I have already mentioned, the Romans attributed great importance to Sicily as a region of wheat provision for

the empire.

The Barbarians, as the populations from the north of Europe were called, arrived in Sicily in 439. Theodoric, who built the walls around Catania, was believed to have been swallowed by Mount Etna, and the volcano was thought of as the gateway to the after-world. The Barbarians, as their name suggests, are not remembered for any improvements to the island.

In 535 the Byzantine empire conquered Syracuse. In 663 the city became capital of the empire. During this historical period, Sicily's destiny was different from the rest of Italy, which fell under Lombardi domination. Traces of the Byzantines can still be seen in the use of spices and desserts which incorporate cinnamon and vanilla (Sapio, 2003:8).

2.2 Arabs, Normans and Spaniards: the transformation of agriculture

In 827 Arabs, coming from Tunisia, reached Sicily in an attempt to halt the expansion of Byzantium in the Mediterranean. Sicily held a strategic position between West and East and was considered vital to the commercial activities in the Mediterranean. The Arabs first occupied Mazara del Vallo, then Palermo, and then took about eighty years to conquer the whole island. During this time Catania was called “Balad-el-fil” or “Medina-el-fil”, the city of the elephant¹⁸ (Correnti, 1987). Sicilians record the Arab era, which lasted until 1060, for the agricultural innovations, especially those concerning irrigation¹⁹. They also introduced citrus fruits²⁰, aubergines, rice, and pasta (Montanari, 2006:136). According to Dickie (2007:20) dates, pistachios, carob and almonds comprised

18 The elephant is still the symbol of the city and a statue of an elephant is located in *Piazza Duomo*, the city's main square. “The elephant [...] seems to be influenced by the art of northern Africa or the eastern Mediterranean (Gallo, 2003).”

19 For a better understanding of the Muslim contribution to Mediterranean agriculture, see Riera-Melis (2002).

20 Originally from China, India and Malaysia (Riera-Melis, 2002)

the Arab heritage; whilst Sapio (2003:8) mentions sugar cane²¹, cotton, jasmine flowers and couscous as emblems of the Arab domination. It would seem that another interesting innovation of the Arab period was what is now commonly known as ‘ice-cream’: “The Italian *sorbetto* and the English *sherbet* come from the Arabic *sharbat*, sweet fruit syrups that the Arab drank diluted with ice water (Simeti; 1989:283)”. The ice water was probably taken from Mount Etna, and then mixed with fruit essences, flowers and sugar, also improved by the Arabs. The Arabs also most likely improved the *tonnara*, the typical Sicilian tuna fisheries (Longo & Brett 2012). Today the head fisherman of the *tonnara* is still called *Rais*, which means chief in Arabic.

By the time the Normans started conquering the island in 1061, Sicily was Arab and very cosmopolitan. During the reign of Roger I of Hauteville feuds were common. Roger II was proclaimed king of the sovereign ‘Kingdom of Sicily’ in 1130 (Finley 1986). When Roger II married Constance of Hauteville in 1186, the Svevian domination of Sicily started. Their son Frederick II²² became Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 1198, unifying the kingdom of Germany with the kingdom of Sicily.

During the reign of King Roger II, the Muslim geographer Al-Idrisi conducted a survey about the Norman customs in Sicily and he mentions *itriyya*²³ for the first time, which is similar to modern-day vermicelli and which has “survived as *tria* in Sicilian dialect until the present” (Simeti, 1989:144). From the culinary point of view the Normans are remembered for their complaint about the predominance of vegetables in the Sicilian cuisine (Simeti, 1989). It was probably compulsory to indulge in larger quantities of meat.

21 Sugar cane was originally from India, Indonesia and South-East Asia. Its long voyage to Europe took it through China and Mesopotamia, then Syria, Palestine, Egypt and finally al-Andalus and Sicily in 878 (Riera-Melis 2002).

22 Frederick II was known as a patron of the arts and the sciences and in Sicily his School of Poetry became really famous. The Sicilian School of Poetry is recognised as being responsible for the origins of the modern Italian language (Finley 1968).

23 *Itriyya* has an uncertain etymology. According to Simeti (1989) it is an Arabic word; while Dickie (2007: 24) believes it to be a transliteration from Greek.

The Angevins ruled the island from 1266 to 1282, but on 30th March 1282 a remarkably successful uprising against the French domination broke out in Palermo and then spread throughout the island. The revolt was called *Vespri Siciliani* (Sicilian Vespers), because it took place on Easter day (Finley et al 1986). The rebels failed to achieve independence, but they called upon the Aragonese to rule over the island. A very turbulent time commenced, as the Kingdoms of Aragon (Sicily) and Angevins (Naples) began a war that lasted ninety years.

In 1413 Sicily yielded to the Spanish. The Aragonese founded the University of Catania in 1434, and the city soon became the intellectual centre of the island becoming known as the “Sicilian Athens”²⁴(Alfieri 2007). In 1647 another significant revolt against Spanish rule occurred. Historians often correlate the Spanish way of ruling their territories with the origins of the Mafia (Finley, et al. 1986; Gambetta 1988, Schneider & Schneider 1976). In the words of Schneider and Schneider (1976),

populations which became colonial outposts for metropolitan centres in the Spanish Empire - in Sicily and southern Italy, Latin America (including Brazil under Portugal), and to some extent in the Philippines - reveal historical careers strongly influenced by its presence. [...] The reason for these similarities lies in the structure of the world-system forged by Spain in the sixteenth century and altered in subsequent centuries by the emerging hegemony of the North Atlantic core (*Ibid*: 12).

Finley et al (1986) argue that under Spanish administration, nobles preserved the *latifondi*, but never engaged directly in the management of the land. Instead they handed it over to “a new class of *gabelloti*.” (*Ibid*.: 87) In the seventeenth century, the *gabella* was referred to as a form of tenancy

whereby an entire estate was leased out, usually for three years, sometimes six, to an individual renter known as a *gabelloto*. [...] By the 1770s these *gabelloti* were referred to as the new tyrants of the countryside (*Ibid*.:126)

24 As we can notice the Greek and Arab legacies are among the most persistent.

Thus a fundamental question relating to the organisation of the agrarian system in Sicily is:

[t]he agrarian structure of the South, the classes and strata associated with it, have created the principal components of the region's social structure. The fundamental social distinction has been between those people who work with their hands, the *contadini* and the *braccianti*, and those who do not, the landowners -the *baroni* and the *borghesi*, their managers and intendants (Franklin 1969:127).

According to Franklin (*Ibid.*), the *braccianti* were low-skilled day labourers. The word '*braccianti*' invokes the word '*braccia*', meaning arms, arms working the land being the most important part of the peasants' bodies. Many issues relating to the island's economy, history, and sociology are explained by virtue of the difference between the two main institutions: *latifundia*, in Southern Italy, and *mezzadria*, the northern Italian organisation of share-cropping. Harper and Faccioli (2009) provide a detailed account of these systems. They juxtapose the *mezzadria* with the *latifundia*. In the former, farming estates were divided into peasant farms and peasants were given "land, the housing, oxen for plowing, a plow, and other equipment. The peasants produced the crop and distributed half to the landowner" (*Ibid.*: 35). In the latter system individual landowners or the church owned large estates. Describing the conditions of the southern peasants, Harper and Faccioli(2009) write:

They had no stake in the land they worked, no plots for small gardens, no common land to graze a few animals, and no security. When they rented the land, they borrowed at high rates of interest from the landlord, and when land was sharecropped, peasants received only a quarter of the produce rather than the half share that was customary in the north. (*Ibid.*:36)

This type of institution was typical of the Spanish domination and it was a residual feudal system, which allowed no improvements in the living conditions of the peasants.

Despite the hatred towards Spanish rule, the South of Italy was probably

the first country after Spain to receive the new vegetables coming from America after 1492 (Kiple & Ornelas 2000). Tomatoes were probably the most important of these.

Italy proved to be the ideal country for the adaptation of the American plants. The climate and soil were similar to that of central Mexico, and the new plants adjusted easily to the area” (Kiple & Ornelas 2000:356).

In 1713 the Utrecht Treaty ceded Sicily to Vittorio Amedeo II, the Duke of Savoy, thus beginning the Savoyard and Austrian domination which lasted until 1720 when Carl the Bourbon was proclaimed king. Bourbon rule started in 1735 and in 1848, the citizens of Catania and the rest of Sicily fought a resistance movement against the Bourbons, but their independence was short lived and only lasted a year. Soon after, both the Sicilian movement for independence and the struggle of the poor *Fasci* (organised peasants and workers), were suppressed vigorously in 1866 and 1894 respectively.

It was during first the Spanish and subsequently the Bourbon rule that the gap between the peasant cuisine (*cucina popolare*) and the baronial cuisine (*cucina baronale*) is thought to have widened. During this historical period, the Baroque entered Sicily, transforming its architecture and its gastronomy. This is also the period when French chefs were introduced into the Southern courts. They were called *monzu*, the local transliteration of *monsieur*. As Mintz (1985) writes “[g]rand cuisine and haute cuisine arise out of political and social change” (*Ibid*: 96) and this period was, for Sicily, a very unstable time in its own history.

This brief historical account shows that, prior to the Unification of Italy in 1861, Sicily was not an isolated island, but rather an international centre of exchange and a major producer of wheat, wine, sulphur, silk, citrus fruit and salt (Aymard, 1987).

2.3 A Disunited Unification

*La Sicilia avi una patria
chi la strinci 'nta li vrazza,
ma nzammai dumanna pani
fini dallu e tannu ammazza.*

Sicily has a fatherland
that holds her tight in her arms,
but if she asks for bread
pretends to give it and then kills her (*my translation*)

In June, 1860 the first Garibaldi's troupes arrived in Catania. Palermo, however, remained under the Bourbons until Italian unification, which as I will show does not form a linear process. Wandering around Palermo, I heard the voice of Rosa Balestrieri (1974) for the first time, singing a beautiful ballad in Sicilian. I later discovered that it was a popular song, explaining far better than many historical contributions, the feelings of exploitation and helplessness, which characterise Sicily. “*La Sicilia avi un patruni*”, (Sicily has an owner), she sings of the empty villages, left to the old people and the kids, thanks to the emigration of the able-bodied generation. In this account, the ones with strong enough arms to work had all departed. It laments the sense of impotence towards oppression by foreign powers, not sparing the Italian government, which is depicted as another oppressor.

The song expresses a wish that the people of Sicily wake up, shake away the immobility and fight for a better future. This ballad encapsulates the feelings of exploitation expressed by the Sicilians after their hopes of being liberated from the Bourbons, their continued longing for political autonomy, helplessness, and also hope for political mobilisation that characterised political culture after unification. It also refers to migration as a strategy for coping with poverty.

Unfortunately, many of the books about Sicilian history terminate their account of the invasions with the Unification of Italy (Correnti 1987; Libertini & Paladino 1933; Natoli 1935). They thus imply that the arrival of Garibaldi brought Sicily back in to the fold of the Italian state. But these accounts conceal the fact that the island's destiny had been separate from the peninsula for a long time. This type of historiography approaches history from a nationalistic perspective. Natoli (1935) and Libertini and Paladino (1933), who were writing during the period of Fascism, contributed a great deal to the nationalist propaganda. Such literature does not adopt a critical stance towards the situation in Sicily, and avoids topics such as the Mafia (Correnti, 1987).

Aymard (1987) identifies the tendency of historians to stage a “petrified Sicily in the immobility of its own structures' burden, [...] but also in the distance and inefficiency of a political power regarded as 'foreign'” (*Ibid.*:5, *my translation*). Only historians such as Salvemini Don Strurzo and Gramsci have focused on the complexities of the historical conditions and have adopted a more critical perspective on unification (Huyseune 2006).

The historical particularities of the Italian state [...] as resulting from the connivance of the central state and peripheral oligarchies, which several of them connected with the unachieved democratisation of the state (*Ibid.*: 111).

The Italian *Risorgimento* (i.e. Resurgence or Uprising) indicates the period of time after the Congress of Vienna in 1815, and culminates with the capture of Rome by the Italian army in 1870 (Riall 1994). It is clear from its name that it was meant to carry new positive values. Hitherto the Sabaud monarchy state had imposed new duties on the Italian territory, including compulsory military service, compulsory education, and increased taxation. At the same time the price of goods decreased due to more direct competition with the north of Italy. The construction of an Italian nation involved the spread of Italian as the common language. Massimo d'Azeglio, the Piedmontese politician who played a central role in the Unification process, described this process as

‘making Italians’ (Clark 1984). De Certeau (1984) describes the passage from an oral culture to written culture, as follows.

It is thus not without reason that for the past three centuries learning to write has been the very definition of entering into a capitalist and conquering society (*Ibid.*:137)

During this period, Sicily began to favour monocropping, shifting cultivation from cereals to the vine, and then to citrus fruit, losing biodiversity in the process (Renda 1999b). The economic burden of the new social organisation and the crisis of traditional agriculture transformed Sicily into a 'labourers' factory' (*fabbrica di uomini*) (Aymard 1987:24, *my translation*). This resulted in an increase in emigration to America, Northern Europe and Northern Italy. During the first fifty years following Unification, about twenty-six million Italians migrated and a second wave of migration occurred after the Second World War (Aymard 1987). Barone (1987b) argues that migration peaked when Italian economic development was also at its highest. After the global crisis at the end of the 19th century, international economies recovered from the Great Depression and attracted not only goods, but also workers. Hence, migration is often seen as a consequence of capitalism and industrialisation. But Italian migration also opened up a network of exports, especially of food, as Italian communities established themselves abroad (Renda 1999b).

The failure of the unification process lies also in the failure of Sicilian hopes for a more equal and fair distribution of resources. Aymard (1987) shows how Unification opened up a time of missed revolutions and of ruptures. This vision is positioned in a meridionalist perspective of Salvemini and Gramsci. Gramsci considered the Risorgimento a “passive revolution”, as the ‘masses’ were not involved (Gramsci 1971), a unification based on central power, and not on federalist forces (Huyseune 2006:113).

After Unification, local elites began to act as mediators between centre and periphery (Huyseune 2006). Local elites are very often the missing link,

as, in the past, the historiography of Sicily emphasised the agency of outsiders. In fact, Renda (1999b) claims, following an approach similar to Gramsci's, that the image of a passive island helped the local elites to maintain their power. Urbinati (1998) comments as follows:

In 1926, Gramsci defined the South as a "great social disintegration" (*disgregazione*): disintegration among the classes, which did not communicate with each other, and within the classes themselves, which were composed of individuals sharing the same material interests but spiritually estranged from one another. The cultural environment of social disintegration was a schism between the intellectuals as encyclopaedic rhetoricians and the poor as 'empty containers to be filled'. (*Ibid.*:146)

The changes introduced by the newly-fashioned state overlooked the inability of the social structures to cope with them²⁵. At the end of the 19th century, Sicily was still largely an agrarian society. But the intricate series of events after Unification led to an important turning point:

Sicily stops being a separate reality, a world on its own, in order to become a region that cannot be assimilated, but somehow can be compared to all the others (Aymard 1987:37, *my translation*).

2.4 Banditry and the Southern Question

Besides the massive emigration, the new laws introduced by the Italian state also provoked a wave of banditry. The repression of the peasant insurrections in the south of Italy has always been violent and sanguineous. But after Unification the repression of political mobilisation became more systematic. Repression hindered any participatory movement involving the peasantry and confirmed local oligarchies (Gramsci 1966). The Italian army was seen as an army of occupation, which tried to control any kind of resistance to the unitary state (Graziano 2007). According to Gramsci this resistance was a basic form of

²⁵ This is however not meant to be an exhaustive historical excursus of these years. For an in-depth understanding of Sicilian history between 1870 and 1970, please consult Francesco Renda's volumes (1999a, 1999b, 1999c).

terrorism in which class revolution and banditry were mixed (Gramsci 1966).

Banditry was the southern answer to yet another foreign state, which was supposed to have liberated the island from iniquities. It was the only form of protest left to the peasantry (Graziano 2007). The repressive reaction by this newly formed Italian State to banditry was cruel and it is difficult to establish how many were its victims.

In 1873 the Italian government extended the Pica Law (*Legge Pica*) against banditry from Naples to Sicily, even though the Sicilian banditry was very different from other forms of southern banditry (Graziano 2010; Lupo 2011; Pandolfi 1998). Sicilian banditry was less organised and lacked strong political connotations, and was therefore mainly a peasant reaction to the new institutional order (Barbagallo 2002). The battle with southern banditry turned the 'Southern Question' (*Questione Meridionale*) into a national issue.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Italian state encountered major social and economic divisions between north and south, but which tended to reinforce the alterity and otherness of the south. Pandolfi (1998) writes about the failure of Italian nationhood:

[...] the consciousness of a group can be integrated through a rhetoric of alterity; insiders reinforce their own identity by constructing an external, deterritorialized "other". [...] On the one hand, southerners continue to invoke the figure of a land invaded, of centuries of foreign oppression, of the abandonment of an artistic heritage - a position which places the South in the realm of alterity to Italian nationhood. On the other hand, a reciprocal figure emerges in which this alterity must be internalized in order to imagine a territorially integral Italy (*Ibid:285*)

The feelings of hopelessness regarding the new state, which demanded a sacrifice from peasants already reduced to a state of misery following the reign of the Bourbons, constituted fertile ground for the consolidation of mistrust toward institutions, both local, regional and national. Southerners perceived all authority as unjust. As Blok (2010) clearly explains

[w]ith the unification of Italy in 1861, the new state imposed taxation and conscription, which alienated the working population and entrenched rural banditry in the south. Moreover, successive governments chose to administer the new periphery through indirect rule - a well-known colonial practice whereby local elites retained power (*Ibid:57*).

Unification conjoined two discrete realities which were different in their social-economical status (Mangiameli 1987). The south of Italy becomes a 'question', a problem. It is in its relationship to the ever-increasing capitalism of the north that the south becomes backward. Renda (2000) writes that the birth of the Italian state meant the defeat of the Southern state. It could almost be seen as the loss of southern independence.

Military repression was the answer also to another form of protest: the '*Fasci Siciliani*' (Sicilian Fasci) in 1898. According to Clark (1984) this revolt was able to marry the rural peasantry with the urban intellectuals. It was in fact the first southern movement to have an organised structure, with an ideology, a programme and a leadership (Hobsbawm 1959:96). According to Hobsbawm²⁶ (1959),

the habitual effects of the introduction of capitalist relationships were intensified by the world agrarian depression of the 1880s, and not yet even partially alleviated by the massive emigration which was to become so characteristic of the island (*Ibid: 96*).

Crispi's government decided on a military resolution, one which recalled the Bourbon's style of dealing with protesters in Sicily and in the South of Italy.

2.5 Fascists, the Allies and Separatism

Prior to World War I, the trend of migration was still strong with more than a million Sicilians leaving the island (Renda 1999b). There were other major

²⁶ Hobsbawm (1959) analyses the movement of Fasci in their relationship with socialism and communism, but also with the church.

shifts too, as the Sicilian population underwent a process of urbanisation, and inland inhabitants moved towards the coast (Barone 1987).

The beginning of the 20th century saw the emergence of Italian colonialist aspirations and of a concerted African colonial campaign. Because of its proximity to Africa, Sicily occupied a strategic position in relation to Libya and East Africa. It is in these years that the politics of otherness materialised in order to consolidate an unreliable nation state. It is indeed in these years that the work of Giuseppe Pitré was published, which documented Sicilian folklore in response to the perceived threat of modernisation²⁷.

Despite the concerted efforts in the building of nationhood, Clark (1984) writes that Italy “was still run by much the same people: a small elite, with little title to rule except its belligerent patriotism and its historical myths (*Ibid*:177)”

Simultaneously, the rise of Fascism brought a declaration of war upon the ‘traditional’ institutions of the old Sicilian society (Renda 1999b). This process started with a literal assault on ‘the Mafia’. The ‘super-prefect’ Mori was in charge of the operation and he set up a permanent police regime. In 1941 Mussolini “ordered all Sicilian-born government employees working in Sicily to leave the island (Clark, 1984:290).” The reason for this draconian decision was apparently to be sought in the fear of the Sicilian separatist tendencies.

Furthermore, fascist food policies affected Sicily, as much as if not more than other regions of significant agricultural production. Politics rooted in self-sufficiency and autarky (Helstolsky 2004) demanded that local producers donate agricultural produce to state warehouses. Sicilians responded by resorting to a rapidly growing market trading (Schneider & Schneider 1996). Food production however fell, as many men were called to the war effort and had to abandon their fields (Clark, 1984). The situation in Sicily was so dramatic, that, in 1941, even Ciano, the fascist Minister of Foreign Affairs,

²⁷ For more information about Pitré and the interpretation of his work see Chapter 1. For an ethnographic account of folklore see Chapter 6.

wrote in a letter “Is being Sicilian worse than being Jewish?” (*quoted in Renda, 1999b:404*).

In 1943, when the Allies landed in Sicily, they found an impoverished region. The war had worsened the already harsh living conditions of the population (Ginsborg 1990). According to historical accounts (Finkelstein 1998; Renda 1999c), the links between the Allied secret services and the Mafia favoured the landing of the Allies in Sicily. The Sicilian Mafia had not been defeated by the fascist repression. It remained latent and ready to resume power again, once the Fascist government fell. Herzfeld (2009) explains that Italy:

[a]mong European states, [...] is arguably unique in the extent to which it is tormented by powerful separatist movements and torn by conflicting local autonomies in culture and politics. (*ibid* 2009:28)

Probably one of the most significant separatist movements arose in Sicily between the Fascist era and 1946, when Sicily became an autonomous region of the Italian Republic²⁸. The Allies sustained the Sicilian autonomists (Behan, 2009). Early Sicilian separatism did not call for the abolition of *latifundia*. On the contrary, the elite of the feudal institutions were the main supporters of the Sicilian agrarian right-wing movement (Mangiameli 1987). The land-owners highlighted Sicily's ‘backwardness’ and the impossibility of its modernising according to a northern model. This political picture shifted, when Andrea Finocchiaro Aprile (1878-1964) became one of the main representatives of the separatist movement. It was not without disappointment that separatism failed and became contained within the decision of the Italian state to grant special autonomy to the island, which hitherto is endowed of political, legislative, administrative and financial autonomy²⁹.

In 1946, during the first ever democratic elections, the majority of Italians voted for the Republic. Sicily and the south, however, expressed their

28 Italy has five autonomous regions: Sicily, Sardinia, Trentino Alto Adige, Valle d'Aosta and Friuli Venezia Giulia.

29 For more historical details about Sicilian separatism, see Marino (1979) and Nicolosi (1981) in Italian and in English Reece (1973) and Finkelstein (1998).

preference for the monarchy of the House of Savoy.

The referendum revealed a dramatic split between North and South. Whereas the North and Centre voted solidly, and in some areas overwhelmingly, for the republic, the South was equally strongly in favour of the monarchy (Ginsborg 1990:98).

2.6 Economic Miracle and Christian Democrats

From 1950 onwards, Italy underwent a consolidation of the Christian Democrats' power (*Democrazia Cristiana -DC*). The ideology of the party was based on the powerful combination of Americanism, Catholicism and anti-Communism (Ginsborg 1990). The Mafia actively supported the DC during the elections so as to exclude the communists from power. The communists were the “principal backers of the peasant struggle”(Schneider & Schneider 2005:506). Union representatives and communist activists featured prominently on the the Mafia’s hit-list of well-known assassinations, such as the political activist Peppino Impastato or the unionist Paolo Bongiorno.

This era, known as the 'economic miracle' (*miracolo economico*) or 'economic boom' (*boom economico*) is characterised by an increase in the industrialisation of the country (Ginsborg 1990). It is also a time of agrarian reform, which occurred far too late, when the country was moving towards industrialisation as its main source of income (Lupo 1996b). According to Schneider and Schneider (1996), this reform was a failure, since “[s]ome former owners, generally those with good land, divided their properties among family members in advance of expropriation (*Ibid:251*)”. The agrarian reform of 1950 expropriated and distributed 700,000 hectares of land, however much of this process went through Mafia intermediaries (Lupo 1996). “The DC-Mafia alliance formed around the management of public affairs (*Ibid:254*).”

According to Sorcinelli (1999: 219) 20% of the Italian population

changed their place of residence during the 1950s. This phenomenon was also due to the shift the whole country experienced towards industrial and tertiary sectors as main fields of occupation. Between 1950 and 1960, urbanisation reached its highest levels, in Sicily too, thereby fuelling the building industry. Disappointment over land reform combined with the industrial drive of the country both contributed to provoking this wave of migration.

Between 1958 and 1963, net emigration of Italians to northern Europe totalled 545,000 persons; of these 73.5 per cent came from the South. [...] However, the greatest flow of all was towards the northern region of Italy. In the five years of the miracle (1958-1963), more than 900,000 southerners changed their place of residence from the South to the other regions of Italy (Ginsborg 1990:220).

In 1950 the Italian government set up the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* (the State Fund for the South) to “mobilize[...] capital for infrastructural projects: roads, rural houses, electricity, and water control” (Schneider & Schneider 1996:251). The state contribution to the development of the south inflamed, and still inflames, the discussion about the burden of the ‘backward’ part of the country, being sustained by the more advanced one³⁰. Aymard (1987) responds to this argument, claiming that Sicily's contribution to immigrant labour amounts to three times the Cassa del Mezzogiorno's investments (*Ibid.*:35).

The alliance of Mafia and Christian Democrats, state intervention in the provision of infrastructures, and the massive internal migration were essential elements of the political climate of the time. In Sicily, conflict was projected “outwards, toward the state, and by making demands for external intervention which became the central prop of the debate on the South”(Lupo 1996:255).

30 The effects of this rhetoric of progress will be analysed in the following chapters through the original contribution of my own fieldwork.

2.7 European Union, Institutional Crisis and Berlusconi

As I have shown, Italy was still busy discussing and trying to sort out its own internal differences, when the European Community was established. In 1957 Italy, together with the other five founding members, created the European Economic Community (EEC), which eventually became the European Union in 1992 (El-Agraa 2007). Graziano (2007) ironically writes that countries, such as France and the United Kingdom, faced greater difficulties than Italy in the cession of sovereignty to the Union, since they had something to hand over. Due to its internal issues, Italy still had not reached full control over its territory.

Membership of the European Union opened up extensive debates which centred on Sicily's geographical position. The island became a border for Europe, and thus a gateway for peoples from the African countries trying to gain entry into Europe³¹. At this juncture, Italy has become a focal point, a part of the 'wealthy' Europe, a country of immigration.

Between the 1960s and the 1980s, Italy endured a particularly dark page of its own history. These years have earned the name of *Anni di Piombo* (Lead Years) due to both right-wing and left-wing terrorism. During this time a war between different factions within the Mafia affected Palermo more than any other place on the island (Lupo 2004). The institutional response was strong, but the lives of several people engaged in fighting illegality were claimed. General Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, who was a symbol of this counter-attack,

31 The percentage of immigrants registered as residents in Sicily is 2.8% of the total, which has been increasing in the last five years. Despite being below the European average, which according to Eurostat is 6.5% (Vasilea 2011), this phenomenon is creating a lot of interest, since Sicily and Italy in general are experiencing immigration for the first time. Sicily, with its central location in the Mediterranean, faced, and still ,faces an ongoing emergency due to the massive number of people landing on the island's coast every week. The last available data about the number landing on the Sicilian island is provided by Fortress Europe: in 2008 more than 34.000 people arrived in Sicily via the Mediterranean Sea, the majority of whom will be repatriated or will see their right to enter Europe denied (Del Grande 2009).

was murdered in Palermo in 1982. This was only the beginning of a long list of people assassinated for their anti-mafia activities. The deaths of the two magistrates, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, both born and raised in Palermo, drew much attention. They were part of the Anti-Mafia Pool, a group of magistrates who investigated the Mafia, and shared information with each other to counter Mafia activities. The group had been created by another Sicilian-born magistrate, Rocco Chinnici, assassinated in 1983 (Schneider & Schneider 2003). Falcone and Borsellino were responsible for the Maxi-Trial, during which 474 people were tried for Mafia crimes since 1986 (Dickie 2004). On 23rd May 1992, a blast of a half tonne explosive killed Giovanni Falcone, his wife Francesca Morvillo and their police escorts Rocco Dicillo, Antonio Montinaro and Vito Schifani. The images of the scene on the motorway between Palermo and its international airport and the voice of Schifani's wife during the state funerals still stand like a Polaroid in the memory of many Italians, and many more Sicilians. Less than two months later, Paolo Borsellino was killed by a car bomb, placed close to his mother's house. Despite the helplessness and the rage that these two events provoked, they also initiated and fuelled many anti-Mafia social movements (Schneider & Schneider 2003).

In Italy, however, the nineties are remembered for the institutional crisis (Hine 1996).

Italians lost confidence in the capacity of the Italian state and Italian parties to cope with a set of policy problems that face all European governments. [...] Probably the major reason why public opinion remained in such a raw state was that just as the institutional reform debate was intensifying, political life was swamped by the exposure of political corruption on an unprecedented scale (*Ibid:314*)

Hine refers to the operation “*Mani Pulite*” (Clean Hands) led by the judge Antonio Di Pietro, who exposed the corruption endemic in the Italian political system.

The rise of Silvio Berlusconi and his party *Forza Italia* (Go Italy)

occurred amidst this political climate³². Berlusconi's leadership was confirmed twice at elections in 2001 and 2008. He remained Italian Prime Minister until 2011, when he resigned, to be followed by a technocratic government lead by Mario Monti.

Sicily was an important part of Berlusconi's constituency, being a *Forza Italia* political stronghold. If the history of Sicily after the Unification can be characterised by alliances or wars against the Mafia, it is not very difficult to establish which side Silvio Berlusconi took. Apart from Berlusconi's personal allegations, his party politics focussed on aspects which were dear to the interests of the Mafia, particularly legal garantism (Lupo 1996).

From 2000 until 2008 Catania's electorate chose Umberto Scapagnini as Mayor of the city. He is known nationally rather more for his job as Berlusconi's personal physician, than for his political skills. As some of my informants used to say, Scapagnini was probably more concerned with Berlusconi's sexual health than with the municipality's financial situation.

2.8 The Social and Cultural Burden of the Mafia

The Mafia has to be understood as a historical phenomenon³³. Writing about the Mafia in Sicily requires a strenuous search for balance, since the topic has been characterised by extremist attitudes ranging from "*the Mafia does not exist*" to "*In Sicily everything is Mafia.*" Denying its existence does not help in understanding Sicilian society. However, the emphasis given to the Sicilian Mafia has too often created and reinforced stereotypical representations of Sicilian identity (Schneider & Schneider 2005). When Sicilians travel the world and they say where they are from, the first thing they hear is "Sicily? Mafia!". It is an endless refrain, since the enormous amount of movies and books,

32 For an in-depth historical account of this events see Ginsborg (2004) and Andrews (2005).

33 Further reading about the history of Mafia: in English Dickie (2004); in Italian Lupo (2004).

reiterating the same image of Sicily, have contributed to spreading a univocal image of the island. Even the history of the Sicilian Mafia has been a history of bosses, violence, and vendettas, with less space given to its victims and their resistance.

Lupo (2004) highlights the ambiguity surrounding what the Mafia actually refers to. This historical phenomenon has been changing throughout time and place and the tendency to picture the Mafia as a homogeneous organisation, as Scorsese (1972) does in “The Godfather”, is more fictional than real. There is no such organisation as a unitary, unchanging Mafia. The same is true as regards the idea that the Mafia initially defended the poor, and then degenerated into a criminal organisation (Lupo 2004). This idea also derives from Pitré's work, where he affirms that *mafiusu* once had a positive connotation, related to beauty and pride (Schneider & Schneider 2005). The Mafia has also been depicted as a system of protection replacing or integrating an absent state (Gambetta 1988).

In my own view, the most dangerous perspective on the Mafia consists of seeing it as a cultural system and as a typical mode of organisation. The Mafia has often been depicted as part of Sicilianess (Schneider & Schneider 2005, Huysseune 2006). Schneider and Schneider (2005) observe:

[s]ince Italian Unification, outside observers have represented Sicily as a timeless island whose inhabitants, although buffeted by foreign tides, cling to homegrown passions, homegrown habits of crime and corruption, and homegrown pessimism about change. Many Sicilians themselves subscribe to the same stereotype, giving it even greater weight (*Ibid:250*).

Pezzino (1987) connects the origin of this stereotype to the post-unitary conflict between Sicilian elites and Italian state. The latter became the scapegoat for the island's social and economic crisis. Pezzino argues (*Ibid*) that the images of the *mafioso* as men of honour, helped “to support an alleged Sicilianess from external threats” (*Ibid:234, my translation*).

Addressing the Southern Question, Huysseune (2006) looks at the way Mafia borrowed certain cultural values, such as the code of honour. The association between Mafia and honour “undoubtedly made a cultural impact” (*Ibid:146*). Harts (2007) writes that “the appeal of the Mafioso lies in their strength compared to the weakness of the *state*” (*Ibid:221*).

2.9 Conclusions

The centuries of invasions settled themselves one on top of the other, blending, mixing and intermingling new and old elements. The endeavours of the different foreign powers are still visible in the ‘inescapable’ history (Herzfeld, 2009:68), and are to be found in the different layers of cultural expression, from architecture to gastronomy.

I would like to underline some of the points that have emerged in this chapter. First I demonstrated that the myths of the island (fertility, agriculture, sun) have certain ancient roots. According to Buttitta (1984:17), the symbol of Sicily (see Appendix II) expresses the paradox of a mythic Sicilian image of the island. Sicilians, like the great Greek adventurer Ulysses, have been travelling with the illusion of clinging to the people they once were, nature summarised in a symbol in which “the head, the thought, is ‘to be’ and the legs, ‘the movement’, are ‘to become’” (*Ibid.:17*). I looked at the invasions of Sicily as contributing to the present, to what is now regarded as local ‘tradition’.

Dealing with the Unification of Italy means dealing with controversies: migration, banditry, lack of faith in the authorities, and with a generalised feeling of helplessness and fatalism. Historiography has been changing perspectives towards this complexity very often, however there has been a mainstream tendency to depict Sicily, and the South of Italy more generally, as passive, immobile, static, backward. The strong repression of any movement

aiming at the island's self-determination has bequeathed a society, in which the peasants were caught in the mesh of a social net that did not allow them any other option. Thus turning to banditry or migration represented valid alternatives to starvation.

The divergence between the societal organisations of the south and the north was, and is, real, and it has constantly been emphasised. Pandolfi (1998:157) has no doubt that

for Italian nationhood to succeed in its project of agency and historical coherence, it must overcome the otherness of the South.

This chapter argues that seeing history as an exchange and as cumulative allows for a perspective which counterbalances the vision of a static island lost in the middle of the Mediterranean and at the mercy of different foreign powers. Sicilian history is thus placed in a complex set of local, regional, national and international relations. Herzfeld (1991) seems to have Gramsci in mind when he writes about fatalism:

[t]he conversion of chance into destiny displaces intimacy in favor of form. If the play of chance is what enables everyday experience to grow out of imperfection and spontaneity, destiny must ultimately render human action socially meaningless and reduce it to the status of a cipher in some immovable grand design (*Ibid:11*).

Gramsci (2011) argues in one of his beautiful letters dated 11th February 1917 that indifference is a dead weight of history and that

it is fate that which one cannot count on; [...]. Whatever happens, does not happen because certain people want it to happen, but happens when the majority of people abdicates its will (*Ibid:4-5, my translation*).

Mistrust in politics and in social institutions has fuelled this idea of fate, in which agency does not seem to play a very important role. In this frame the beauty of the island and its mythological representation become a refuge, a romantic escape from a controversial civic life.

Chapter III

The Market in Context: Space between Chaos and Structure

The third time I went to the market to meet the committee³⁴ president, Mr Daniele Finocchiaro, he was supposed to introduce me to the fishermen, whom he kept calling “sailors” (*marinai*) even in front of them, provoking a pretty nasty reaction. Each time there was an impediment and the meeting we arranged was postponed. I had become irritated by all the delays, but finally on a sunny April morning, I was introduced to one of the fishermen of the market. I crossed the market following Mr Finocchiaro's quick pace and we reached the fishermen's area, *Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto* (Alonzo di Benedetto's square). On our way to the square, Mr Finocchiaro stopped, smiled, and shook hands with many of the vendors, or he simply lifted his head to greet people. That quick tour of the market differed from my previous visits to the market. For the first time I felt visible within the market, especially in the central square. All the fishermen stared at me, this young lady walking behind the committee president.

Being guided through the market makes for a different experience from finding one's own way. From the beginning of my fieldwork until February 2012, when I last visited Catania, friends or family members who visited me on the island regularly requested: “Can we come with you to your market?” I started wondering at what stage of the fieldwork I became a suitable guide for the market and what kind of acquired knowledge had allowed me to assume this role. This request can also be seen from a different perspective: why do people need a guide at the market? To answer this, I reflected on the uneasiness I had experienced at the beginning of the fieldwork. The market appeared chaotic and impenetrable, an

³⁴ After a few months of participant observation, I found out that there was a committee at the market, which represented the vendors' needs in institutional occasions.

indistinct knot of colours, voices, smells; an overcrowded assemblage of stalls, foods, and people. Somehow every ethnographer dealing with markets has reported a similar initial sensation. De La Pradelle (2006) describes her first impression of the market as

[...] inextricable chaos: a labyrinth of densely crowded, narrow streets and squares, the pleasant jumble characterizing some stalls, products spread about in apparent disorder, the profusion of foodstuffs and combination of odors, a general hubbub in which the only distinct sound is the sales pitch of a street hawker (*Ibid:17*).

Similarly Bestor (2004) borrows Geertz's expression of "grooved channels" (*Ibid:51*) to indicate the intricate and complex systems of relationships within the marketplace and Black (2012:34) depicts markets as "contained chaos".

It is necessary for the reader to get an idea of how the market looks, however I also admit to the challenges of this exercise. Bestor (2004) describes Tsukiji's market in Tokyo, all the while warning the reader that the market is not fixed in time and space, but rather it changes constantly. He notes that this kind of description may seem to "freeze the place in time", but despite this inconvenience, he acknowledges the necessity of providing a sense of the market' spatial layout, in order to understand how "[t]ime and space [...] significantly construct the social structure of the marketplace (*Ibid:55*).” Thus, the cosmology of the market and its meaning for the vendors and the customers would not be comprehensible without a deeper insight into the spatial arrangement of the market and its display of goods, but this picture needs to be intertwined with narratives, customs, and practices.

In this chapter I aim to delineate this "well-ordered chaos" (De La Pradelle 2006:17) and this can only be achieved through a detailed analysis of how space is used, occupied and structured within the market. As history can be seen as cumulative, I argue that place is layered too, or to use De Certeau's wording "stratified" (1984:200). De Certeau sustains that, despite the changes introduced in urban realities,

[...] opaque and stubborn places remain. The revolutions of history, economic mutations, demographic mixtures lie in layers within it, and remain there, hidden in customs, rites, and spatial practice (*Ibid:201*)

Assuming that place is socially constructed implies that it is not just a location where things happen, but it is recognised in its own complexity. This view of place as constructed is shared by many scholars (Boym 2001; Castells 2004; De Certeau 1984; Fabian 2002; Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Harvey 1985; Low & Lawrence-Zuniga 2003; Rodman 2003; Zukin 1995 and 2010).

Rodman (2003) affirms that places are “local and multiple” (*Ibid:208*), referring to them as ‘polysemic’. These places “bespeak people's practices, their history, their conflicts, their accomplishments”(*Ibid:214*). This connection between practice and place is particularly relevant within a marketplace, challenging a static and simplistic idea of place in favour of an analysis which takes into account multiple aspects, such as the subjective, yet cultural sensory perception of people.

To pursue this intent of rendering the complexity of how space is used, my description fluctuates through some of the dynamics of organising space: inside and outside, meaning the boundaries between market and city, but also the lines between local and foreign, insiders and outsiders; centre and periphery, indicating the power relations between places in the city and within the market and highlighting the reciprocity between them; and finally formal and informal. “Informal” and “formal” are key concepts which underline the transition from a market in which everything was improvised and left to the discretion of the stallholders, to a more formalised practice, within which vendors deal with bureaucracy, taxes, rules, the council and the local authority. This shift has been characterised by a change from relationships based on trust to a standardisation of services, governed by current legislation. The criteria coming from organisations such as the European Union provide guidelines which are not based on local concepts such as tradition or proximity, but on extra-territorial

authority (Seremetakis 1994). Within the market this is perceived as a new ordering imposed by foreign bodies.

Following the musical metaphor from the introduction, the description of the market will function as an overture, leading into the intricate movements which compose the remainder of the score. In this chapter I progress gradually from the surface of the city and of the market, through the different layers of meaning embedded in the various places. I advance from an overview of the city and its history, to placing *La Pescheria* in relation to the city centre's surroundings to help conceptualise the unique characteristics of its location. I will move forward defining the market's boundaries and its physical structure³⁵. Next, I will introduce the landscape through a segment about the particular language that is used to describe the flow of people and goods between the market and its surroundings. Subsequently I describe the spatial organisation of the market, walking through its squares and alleys to provide a sense of how the space is used. I aim to take the reader on a short guided tour within the market, imagined as a simple stroll through the stalls, whilst providing some information about spatial landmarks, such as the ones recalling the cult of Saint Agatha in Catania, the most important religious celebration of the city. This is necessary to get a sense of how space is organised and it is helpful before analysing the layout of the stalls in detail.

Then, I consider the criterion for classifying goods, within the market, to seeking to connect each commercial category to its own use of space. The way stalls occupy space initiates a discussion about the meanings attached to it and the significance of each typology at *La Pescheria*, notably fish, meat, vegetables and fruit, and also grocery stores and bakeries. Within each category I discuss the location of stalls, what they sell and how the merchandise is displayed. I then provide information about the sourcing and highlight some of the main features of the commercial category, explaining the role played within

³⁵ Please see Appendix I for the maps of the city centre and of the market.

the market and its significance.

The spaces dedicated to fish within the market help us in understanding that places carry different meanings, or to reconnect to my initial metaphor, different layers. These meanings are however implicit and they can only be analysed by “studying the classifications by which people decide if an action has been done well or badly, whether it is right or wrong. (Douglas 1999).” In the particular case of the market, this translates into an analysis of food classification (Bestor 2004).

3.1 The market in the heart of the city

The majority of the city's landmarks lie on an imaginary line which connects the volcano to the sea: Piazza Università (University Square), Piazza Duomo (Cathedral Square), *La Pescheria* (the Fish Market), the Archi della Marina (Arches of the Marine) and so on³⁶. The city hints at the natural entities which made this the chosen location in which to build and rebuild a prosperous metropolis. An English travel book dating from the end of 19th century describes Catania as “unquestionably the handsomest city in Sicily, and, for its size, has few rivals in Europe (Dennis and Murray 1864:388)”.

Walking around the pedestrian area of the city centre, one admires Piazza Università and the grandness of its white marble buildings shining in the sunlight. The regional library, the administrative offices of the city's university are to be found on this square. This square leads naturally south towards Piazza Duomo, where the Cathedral, the Town Hall, and the main municipal offices are located. All the symbols of the city's main powers are represented in this square: the Catholic Church, the municipality, the police authority, and the banks. Piazza Duomo is built with the unique volcanic stone, used both for the

³⁶ A map of the city centre is provided in Appendix n.1, map n.4.

pavements and the buildings, and noticeably darker than Piazza Università. The stark contrast of white marble and black volcanic stone characterises eastern Sicily's Baroque style. On the eastern side of the square, the cathedral's Baroque façade is particularly prominent. It was designed by Gian Battista Vaccarini, the Italian architect, who is responsible for much of the town, and experienced extensive restorations after the 1693 earthquake (Rio 1987). The Cathedral is Catania's most important church and it is devoted to *Sant'Agata* (Saint Agatha), the city's patron saint³⁷. Icons of this devotion are found within the statue of the saint both on the façade and inside the church with the *Tesoro di Sant'Agata* (Saint Agatha's treasure), a precious silver reliquary, containing the skull of the martyr and other valuable treasures.

Going back to the square, the *Municipio*, the city's Town Hall, is situated within a baroque palace known as *Palazzo degli Elefanti* (Elephant's Palace), which is central to the three day celebration in honour of Saint Agatha. It is in fact from this building that the major and other institutional personages start their tour of the city centre on the *Carrozza del Senato* (Senate's Chariot).

The elephant statue stands in the middle of Piazza Duomo as the symbol of the city. Again it was Gian Battista Vaccarini who assembled this monument in 1736, combining the volcanic stone elephant, probably sculptured during the Roman era, with an Egyptian obelisk. Many legends are told about the elephant. A few people at the market explained to me that the elephant faces east to scare

³⁷ The martyrdom of Saint Agatha (231-251) is reported as follows by Liana De Girolami Cheney (1996:3): "Saint Agatha, a patron of the royal city of Catania, Sicily, died in prison during the persecution of the Christians [...]. Quintianus King of Sicily [...] fell in love with Agatha, a great beauty of noble birth who had dedicated her virginity to Christ. [...] When Agatha refused his sexual advances and objected to handing over to him her family wealth, he subjected her to all kind of indignities [...]. She remained stalwart and Quintianus ordered her beaten, then had her breasts shorn. However, she was miraculously healed by Saint Peter. The vengeful Quintianus subsequently had her further tortured with burning coals and fire. She was sent to prison, where she died. Pope Gregory the Great (590-604) elevated her to sainthood in the sixth century and established February 5th as her feast day. She was one of the church's first female martyrs." Hitherto Saint Agatha's celebration constitutes the most lively and heartfelt cult of Catania's religious life. She is believed to defend the city from the volcanic eruptions.

off the Turks; and others that it symbolises protection from the threat of the volcano³⁸.

On the southern corner there is a fountain facing the square, sculptured by Tito Angelini in 1867, called “*Funtana dill'acqua a linzolu*” (the fountain of the sheet water) (Alfieri 2007). The fountain's name derives from an optical illusion whereby the water seems to flow onto the marble like a soft white sheet. The official name of the fountain is “*Fontana dell'Amenano*”, *Amenano* being the name of an underground river flowing underneath the city centre. The river becomes visible under the fountain and draws the eye to the bowels of the city, in which water flows underground³⁹. All these elements illustrate Catania's relationship with water, connecting the volcano and the sea, as does the market. The river runs from the volcano towards the sea under the market area. Water is seen to bless the city. Due to Etna's presence and proximity to water sources, the local economy has fared well in comparison to other areas in the South of Italy (Aymard 1987). To sum up, Piazza Duomo provides a good representation of the elements upon which the city is built. The Piazza invokes Mt Etna, the river with water flowing out to the sea, and the sea itself.

Piazza Duomo functions as centre of the the city, both on a physical and a symbolic level. It is clearly one of Catania's favourite meeting places where small groups of people, mainly men, surround the monuments of the square: the fountain, the steps under the elephant statue and the steps leading to the cathedral. They meet mainly on Friday and Saturday mornings, with many men sitting and chatting there. If it is hot, one can find them wherever there is some shade. These men, generally over the age of fifty, usually read the local newspapers, comment on current affairs, talk about food, football, politics and

38 The Catanese name for the elephant, “*liotru*”, might be a reference to a heretical wizard from eight century, Elidoros. For more information about the elephant's history see Alfieri (2007) or Gallo (2003).

39 An urban tale tells of men fishing eels through the manholes during the night. I personally saw a man during the night with a fishing rod sat next to a manhole. Whether he actually fished there is still a mystery to me, but it seemed to be his intention.

local government. Throughout the day this population shifts considerably, as the elderly populace of the early morning gives way to younger people in the late afternoon and night time .

3.2 The market boundaries and its structure

Before describing the market, it is essential to delineate the market area and its boundaries. When I asked vendors and customers to do so, there seemed to be a general agreement on where the boundaries of the market were. The market runs from via Alonzo di Benedetto to the end of Via Giraud and it spreads outwards from its south-eastern side: Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto, Piazza Pardo, Piazza dell'Indirizzo, Via Pardo, via Autieri, Via Gisira, via Dottore, via Riccioli, via dell'Indirizzo⁴⁰.

The more one walks towards the Via Gisira end, the more evident it becomes that one is entering the peripheral edge of the market. It is the last part of the market, the least structured one, where stalls are dispersed along narrow streets.

If I define this as the periphery of the market, it means that I imply that the market has a centre. In the case of *La Pescheria*, I take the two main squares as the focal points: Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto, the fishermen's square, and Piazza Pardo, the fishmongers' square⁴¹. The former is also the market's most central section considering its proximity to the main city landmark, Piazza Duomo; while the latter is better equipped, and hosts the fishmongers' stalls. These two locations are differentiated from the rest of the market by the exclusivity of the goods sold; Piazza Pardo does, however, host two butcheries, a small vegetable stall and a grocery on its western side.

⁴⁰ Please see map n.6 in Appendix 1.

⁴¹ Please see map n.6 and n.7 in Appendix I.

Despite these exceptions, the squares illustrate the centrality of fish to this market and the majority of the customers pass through these two places when visiting *La Pescheria*. The boundaries between these two squares of the market are somehow neater than for the rest of the market, thus fish is the only commodity spatially segregated in two squares within the market. This is quite unlike the rest of the market, where commercial goods are not awarded specific spaces, with different commodities usually located in stalls next to each other.

Two other principal areas for the flow of pedestrians are Via Gisira and Via Pardo. Via Gisira intersects Via Pardo halfway through⁴². Via Pardo leads straight to Piazza Pardo, the fishmongers area, and it originates from via Garibaldi, a busy street hosting ethnic shops in the proximity of the market, university bookshops on its northern side and terminating at one of the city's remaining gates, Porta Garibaldi.

All the streets (Via Gisira, via Alonzo di Benedetto, via Riccioli, via Dottore) are straight, with stalls placed along two rows, facing each other. In the squares, however, the stalls are located in such a way as to create channels of movement around them. In the streets the pedestrian flow is two-way and it is sometimes very difficult to move around in the presence of large crowds.

The market is open every day from Monday to Saturday, usually between 8 am and 2 pm. There are no public toilet facilities, no cleanable floor surfaces, no storage spaces. The cleaning and garbage removal service is provided by the council, who clean the market daily around 2.30pm. After the garbage removal, the council operators rinse the pavement with soapy water in order to remove the stench of fish⁴³.

As far as the areas of the market are concerned, the central square, Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto, is the most 'informal' part of the market, with very little equipment. It has a life of its own, functioning as a symbol of the market

⁴² See map n.7 in Appendix n.1

and of its former nature. The formal part comprises the fishmongers and the butcher areas, with water and electricity supplies, and landline telephones. According to customers, stall-holders, here, provide a better, more standardised service and remarkable efforts are however made to reach higher health and safety standards.

3.3 Spatial description of the market

From Piazza Duomo, the market is not yet visible, as it is hidden by the fountain, but when the wind blows it is difficult to avoid the smell of fish, especially during the warmer seasons. When walking in the direction of the fountain, one can hear the increasing noise of the market, a noise made up mainly of voices, but also of the butcher's cleavers chopping through bones in the meat quarters, or the fishermen's scabbards slicing the heads off tuna or swordfish. The market area can be accessed from behind the fountain. The noise, the smell, and the general movement of people indicate the presence of the market and that's why it is impossible to visit Catania without being aware of the market. Piazza Duomo, the heart of Catania, draws the oblivious passerby towards the market. It seems like a natural flow towards the market, almost a natural path for people strolling around the city centre.

The western corner of the main square, in fact, could be considered the main access point to the market. On the busiest days, the first sight of the market consists of men sitting on the left hand side, right behind the fountain. They sell only a few seasonal products, such as fresh wild fennel, snails, fresh

43 The administration and management of the market needs to be further explored, for the reasons I have already mentioned in Chapter I. It was very difficult to gather information about the formal aspects of the market. My questions were perceived as invasive by the committee president, who refused to allow me to see the official documents of the committee. They all felt the danger of revealing too much about tolls, taxes and the like. None of the traders complain about rent or tolls, and the president of the market committee declares that they are moderate. It was not clear, however, who paid the tolls and who had a licence.

oregano, and wild vegetables. These men usually bring down their local produce from small villages on the slopes of Mount Etna.

On the right, the informality of the vendors from Etna seems to introduce us to *via Alonzo di Benedetto*, where the first lines of stalls appear with their colours. On both sides, the stalls sell vegetables and fruit and here one's eyes are struck by the colours of the stalls. It is easy to recognise the season from the predominant colour across the market stalls. During summer, piles of nectarines, peaches, and apricots are displayed. Oranges, mandarins and lemons dominate the scene in winter. If tasting is the enjoyment of the gaze, as Le Breton writes (2007:338), this is the visitor's first bite into a flavoursome market.

At the beginning of *via Alonzo di Benedetto*, just behind the fountain, a flight of steps leads down to *Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto*, which could be defined as the *Pescheria's* pulsing heart. *Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto's* relationship to the market is similar to that of *Piazza Duomo's* to the city of Catania: it stands as its physical and symbolic centre.

This square is surrounded by imposing Baroque buildings, built during the 18th century reconstruction following the 1693 earthquake. Strwn across the black, volcanic cobblestone pavement is a stinking mixture of blood, water, and fish trimmings. Many people in Catania refer to this square as *pescheria*, which is actually the name of the whole market, but they mean this particular square. *Pescheria* is the place where fish is sold, it could be basically any shop selling fish. The metonymy between the market and this square signifies the centrality of its role. Everything appears more intense in this part of the market: smells, voices - even the space between the stalls is narrower. This whole area was once closer to the sea before the shore was moved further away as a result of a landfill operation during fascist rule, when the government refurbished the harbour (Consoli 1987). This was the reason why fishermen originally started selling fish here with the harbour just a few minutes away from the square.

Onto this square, where fishermen operate, there are two openings. The first is a natural continuation of the square on the western side of it, which connects to Via Pardo. The second one, on the south-eastern side, is an arched opening leading onto a dark tunnel, where frozen fish is sold. The sign “*W Sant'Agata*” (which more or less translates into 'Viva Saint Agatha') towers above the arch.⁴⁴ Going through the passage on the right hand side of the square, one immediately feels the colder air where the pungent smells of fish, olives, and salted sardines mix into an acrid blend. Frozen fish is sold under these arched vaults. This location is very convenient as the products are protected from the heat of the sun. Vendors display only a few types of fish, with the rest being kept in a spacious freezer under the counter. Squid, shrimp, swordfish and other varieties are sold here. The tunnel leads in two directions: through another vault to Piazza Pardo, the fishmongers' square and, going straight on, to a busy street where some stalls are placed on the pavements of via Cardinale Dusmet. Here a few shellfish stalls try to catch one's attention, remarking the freshness of the clams. A few vegetables stalls are spread throughout this street among the congested traffic.

At this point, heading south the visitor might be overwhelmed by the noise; cars, motorbikes, *Piaggio Ape Cars* are all stuck in queues of traffic, their shouts and honking horns adding to the confusion of the busy market hours.

Ascending Via Pardo, between two butchers, there is, on the left hand side, a vast space with buckets of seasonal produce. This varies according to the

⁴⁴ As I have previously mentioned (see footnote n.36), *Sant'Agata's* cult is endemic to the city and it would be a terrible omission not to spend a few words on its role in the religious and cultural life of Catania and the market. Each February a crowd of approximately one million people takes part in the celebration of this saint: the whole city is transformed into a ceremony to worship the saint. Citizens and tourists crowd the streets and every urban neighbourhood celebrates the patron saint. As I was told by the market's committee representative Mr Finocchiaro, the market plays a central role especially in the days before the celebration, in the ritual of the *Candelore*, (*cannarole* in Sicilian) in which a group of men belonging to the same guild carry a reliquary around the city centre. The reliquaries are heavy baroque constructions. The corporations present within this ceremony are: the *pisciari* (fishermen), the *pizzicagnoli* (grocers), the *giardinieri* (greengrocers), the *fruttaioli* (fruit sellers), the *chiancheri* (butchers), the *pannitteri* (bread-makers), and the *pastari* (pasta-makers).

season: artichokes (autumn, winter), melons and watermelons (springtime, summer).

Turning left, one reaches Via Gisira, one of the main arteries of the market with the highest concentration of stalls. It is a vital road, which can become very busy and congested. Stalls are on both sides of the street, with few empty spaces in between. Dotted up and down the side streets enclosed in this area it is possible to find stalls selling vegetables or fruit. In via Riccioli there are three long vegetable stalls, one butcher, and one fruit stall; in via Dottore, four vegetable stalls and one fruit stall; in Piazza dell'Indirizzo two butchers, two veggie stalls, and one man at a small table selling salted anchovies and salted cod. In these areas however the crowded and noisy atmosphere is diluted and it gradually diminishes.

3.4 Movement in words

The daily experience of the market, and more generally of the city, is conditioned by the presence of the sea and the volcano and the market is the meeting point between them. “We are at the crossroads (*incrocio*)” says one of the fishermen on our way to the market from the harbour.

The dimension of the movement between these two poles is very relevant. It is indeed vital to understand the movements which characterise the market, in order to place the market itself in a specific spatial relation to the rest of the city and to the landscape. According to Farnell (1999), “[s]paces are mapped through indexical devices in words and action signs, through names, locomotion in and through places [...]” (*Ibid*:363).

In the Catanese everyday language people highlight movements in both directions: *scendere* – descend - and *salire* – go up or move up. The centre of the market is located below the level of Piazza Duomo, and as I have mentioned

customers go down a few steps to reach the fishermen's area. The perception of the market's southern location is reiterated every time people talk about going to the market. One of the semantic fields used at the market is to descend: *calare* – in Sicilian – and *scendere* – in Italian – are used as synonymous, indicating a movement from top to bottom. Expressions such as “*oggi sono sceso al mercato*” - today I went down to the market – are commonly used. The same verb is used in many different contexts, such as *calare la pasta*, to put the pasta into the boiling water; *calare le reti*, to cast the nets; *calare l'ancora*, to cast the anchor; *calare le vele*, to lower the sails. “*Calare*” always implies a downwards movement.

At the market, and in Catania in general, the verb *calare* also implies a movement from the periphery towards the centre. The historical centre is the geographical and community centre, and in the past, it was also the commercial heart of the city. It is located in the southern part of the city, while the metropolitan area has grown northwards, in the direction of Mt Etna. Geographically, the movement from the villages to the city market is indeed from top to bottom. The majority of the population lives on the slopes of Etna, or in satellite towns, which, in past years, have been welcoming a considerable amount of Catanese moving out of the city. As one of the vendors puts it:

You say “*calo al mercato*”, if you live in the nearby villages. And even if you live in Catania, you say “*scendo*” [descend] or “*calo al mercato*” [descend to the market], because you are going down town. Even at night you say “*scendo in centro storico*” [I go down to the historical centre].

In the first case, “*calo al mercato*” is used by people descending from the nearby villages to the market. However, people living in Catania also use the same expression, because the centre is considered downtown. This happens not only when speaking of the market, but also in reference to the whole historical hub of the city. As I have already intimated, the main square of the market lies at a lower level in comparison to the Cathedral square. Customers

need to go *down* the stairs to access the central part of *La Pescheria*. They have to descend into this special space, indicated as Pescheria. It is descending from the level of the city to a different one.

People descend to the market every day, but so do goods. From Etna, an avalanche of people and produce pours down on to the market. I will show, in the section dedicated to Mount Etna, how important the mountain is to the idea of landscape.

In his contribution to the threats of spatial cleansing, Herzfeld (2006) highlighted that due to the rationalisation of public space, markets, which might be relocated, can lose their reason for being (Herzfeld 2006). The market's centrality is vital, and that's why a change in location is perceived as a threat to its whole nature. My informants passionately discussed the possibility of moving the market to a different space. This option was proposed by the local council a few years ago, but vendors and regular customers understand that the market as linked to its location. The market belonged to that distinctive place and vice versa.

3.5 The market primary value: fish

Many stallholders highlight the fact that if fresh fish ceased to be sold, people would not shop at the market; in their opinion, customers come first for the fish, and then buy other goods. As Daniele, one of the butchers, pointed out:

People flock down because of the fish. It is a tradition, especially at the weekends. Then all the rest comes with it. I am sure I would sell less meat if the fishermen stopped selling their catch here. It is certain. [Daniele, 50 butcher]

But fish is associated with different spaces. Fishermen sell fish in the main square; fishmongers sell fish in Piazza Pardo, and small stalls sell frozen fish under the vaults.

3.5.1 The fishermen's square: the smelly heart of tradition

As already intimated Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto is an extremely controversial space. Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto is unique within this market, because it is the only space in which there are supposed to be no resellers, but only fishermen, who sell their catch straight away. Some of the customers prefer the fishermen's square because it is "*il mercato vero*" (*the real market*) but others choose Piazza Pardo, because it is cleaner, the service is better, and there is a greater variety of fish.

Yet it is undoubtedly the heart of the market and the right place to meet local fishermen and to purchase directly from them. The number of stalls normally present within this space is between 20 and 30. It is difficult to be more precise for specific reasons. There are more fishermen selling here at the weekend, when demand is higher⁴⁵.

Some fishermen do not come to the market, if the weather has been really bad the night before and they did not go out fishing. Moreover the number of illegal sellers is difficult to quantify and they usually come on the busiest days, making it more difficult to spot them amongst the others.

Fishermen do not respect rigid opening hours. They arrive at the market a bit later than everyone else, between 8 am and 10 am and they try to sell everything they have. They could be there until 2 pm on the slowest days or be gone by 11 am on Saturdays. Fishermen habitually attend the market Mondays to Saturdays, but some of them are not present on Mondays, being the quietest day of the week⁴⁶.

On their stalls the local varieties of fish play the role of protagonist.

45 Friday was a lean day according to the liturgical Catholic calendar. It means that people were not allowed to eat meat. In Italy fish was generally eaten on Friday. Today people have simply more time at the weekend to buy and cook fresh fish, but some families kept this habit.

46 Fishermen usually do not fish on Sundays. Thus regular customers do not go to buy fish on Monday, since the local fish is imagined to be held over from the previous week.

Locally it is possible to fish small pelagic fish like anchovies⁴⁷ (*acciughe* or *alici* in Italian, *masculine* in Catanese), sardines (*sardine* in Italian, *sarde* in Sicilian), horse mackerel (*sugarello*, *sauro*) and mackerel (*sgombro*), then there is also hake, shrimp, octopus (*polpo*, *pulpu*), red mullet, gurnard, grouper, white sea-bream, squid (*calamari*), Mediterranean tuna (*tonno*, *tunnina*), albacore, swordfish (*pesce spada*, *pisci spata*), and many others.

The square's appearance constitutes a cardinal aspect of this area, it needs to be understood in relation to its significance within the market and more in general in the city's context. In Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto some stalls form a circle in the middle and others are placed along the square's perimeter. Customers can easily stroll around, finding a line of stalls on each side. The stall-holders' equipment is very basic, according to some of my informants even 'primitive'.

The wooden crates, where fish is displayed, are balanced on the rims of blue plastic buckets, within which the majority of the catch is kept, swimming in a mixture of sea water and ice. This water becomes red due to the fish blood, if the buckets contain mainly anchovies or sardines. Stalls selling larger fish like tuna or swordfish have a small wooden table on which these are cut. The heads and the swords of these large migratory species are proudly displayed on the table, next to the scales. Those selling small local fish, like sardines and anchovies, have their scales placed on a little stool.

The fish prices are handwritten on a piece of wet paper, which makes them almost unreadable. Prices are lower than in Piazza Pardo, because there is no middleman between the fisherman and the buyer, but also because the service is less precise and standardised. The price of fish is always by weight. According to current regulations (Camera di Commercio di Catania 2012), scales in shops or markets should be controlled and standardised. Many of the stalls still don't have electronic scales and it is very difficult for the customer to

⁴⁷ For more details concerning the names of fish, please see Appendix IV.

be sure of the actual quantity of the product. Fishermen rent their scales from a man who has his little business on this square, paying a monthly fee to him in order to use the scale on a daily basis. It is not clear whether the scales are checked or not.

Once it is sold, the fish is put into a transparent plastic bag, then into a shopper bag. Some stalls use paper to wrap the fish in, but these are rare exceptions. Fishermen don't normally gut, scale, skin or clean the fish at all. Their attitude towards customers is particularly direct and straightforward. Their outfit is informal too, and they do not need a uniform in order to be recognised. In fact, they also don't wear white coats like the butchers or aprons like the fishmongers, but it is easy to recognise them thanks to their waterproof rubber boots and woollen caps, which they wear even during the summer. When it is very hot, some of them wear sandals or flip-flops.

Fishing is certainly a significant tradition, not only in Catania but in the whole region, especially in former fishing villages such as, Acitrezza⁴⁸, Riposto⁴⁹, and Porto Palo⁵⁰. The local fishermen's fleet can be defined artisanal, or at least small-scale⁵¹. Vessels are less than 8 meters long; the owner is usually one of the crew, and the catch is sold directly for fresh consumption. Only when they have a particularly large catch do they take it to restaurants, otherwise it all goes to the market. Usually fishermen go out at about 2am-3am in small ships.

48 A nearby coastal village about 10 km north of Catania.

49 About 30 km north of Catania.

50 Portopalo is about 100 km south of Catania.

51 The definition of a small-scale or artisanal fleet is a controversial one, but it is fundamental to understanding what I intend every time I mention the market's fishermen. I avail myself of the definition provided by Colloca et al. (2003), as the authors deal with a similar context to the Sicilian one. "By "artisanal fishery" it is intended small capital investment, mostly by the owner fishermen, as opposed to "industrial fishing" which implies significant investments by companies or financial groups. Artisanal fishing is often associated with the notion of "coastal fishing", i.e., essentially fisheries located on the continental shelf, or very close to it, exploiting areas which can be reached in a few hours from the ports or beaches where the fishermen are based. Consequently, this type of activity does not imply a very long stay at sea. Another characteristic of artisanal fishing is that it employs a great number of workmen at sea as well as at the landing place. The fishing gear is extremely diversified and the fleets are generally composed of a large number of boats, mostly of low tonnage, based in a multitude of ports and shelters (Farrugio, 1996)." (Colloca, 2000:2)

They travel about 10-20 miles away from Catania's harbour or from Brucoli's, another harbour about 40 km southern from Catania, near Augusta. The latter implies a much longer journey by car for fishermen, but at certain times of the year they prefer to fish there as it is less exploited in comparison to the gulf of Catania. The boats return to the harbour at about 7.30 am, or a bit later if they are fishing anchovies and sardines. In the latter case they are back by about 9 am. They load the cars with the buckets full of fish, sea water and ice, and drive straight to the market.

Despite the decrease in fish stocks, Catania's bay is still celebrated for the traditional fishing of anchovies and sardines, being sufficiently well-known for the Slow Food Movement to have initiated a Praesidium⁵² concerning the *Masculina da' Magghia* (literally anchovies caught in the mesh), small anchovies fished in a 'traditional' way⁵³.

3.5.2 Piazza Pardo, the fish resellers

All fishmongers operate in Piazza Pardo, where they have their steel stalls. *This contrast* between the fishermen operating at Piazza Alonzo and the fishmongers located in Piazza Pardo is very important at the market, as it is pervasive of the way vendors and buyers at the market think of these categories. Fishmongers are resellers, they choose the fish to buy at the wholesale markets, while fishermen provide an unmediated relationship with the sea.

52 "The Presidia are projects that involve food communities in safeguarding native breeds, plant varieties and food products (bread, cheese, cured meats, wines, etc.). Their objective is to save traditional, artisanal, quality foods, strengthening the organization of producers, raising the profile of geographic areas, preserving traditional techniques and knowledge and promoting environmentally and socially sustainable production models." (Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity 2008:2)

Certainly this approach to the 'preservation' raises questions about what kind of ideas it informs. Although some of the local products sold at the market were recognised as Slow Food Presidia, this denomination did not have any value (neither economic nor symbolic) in the local way of classifying food. In the next chapter local food will be placed in relation to the categories which are relevant within the market.

53 Fishermen use drift nets to catch anchovies and sardines. The head of the fish gets caught in the net. My informants say that the bleeding provoked when the fish is taken out of the net makes the fish tastier. Drift-netting, celebrated as a traditional fishing technique, rises questions of sustainability: it is not selective, and so it is believed to be dangerous for dolphins, sea-birds and turtles.

There are twelve fishmongers at *La Pescheria* and this number does not fluctuate as much as the fishermen, since their presence is more stable, due to the relatively safe supply from the wholesale market, but also due to the more structured nature of their stalls. These stalls are not improvised affairs with just buckets of fish. Thus fishmongers need to arrive at the market every day (Mondays to Saturdays) at 6.30 am in order to get the stall and display ready, closing around 2 pm.

A wide selection of local fish is sold, but it is also possible to find many new additions⁵⁴, i.e. salmon, a species which does not belong to the usual Mediterranean categories, but has arrived to cater to a new way of cooking, very often inspired by the media. One of the fishmongers defined this type of fish “*pesce alla moda*” (trendy fish), fish which is clearly not local. The price labels do not declare the origin of the fish. Sea-bass and sea-bream for instance are generally farmed in Brucoli, but that is not mentioned at the market. Another a large percentage of the fish is farmed in the Adriatic Sea, then shipped to Sicily.

Under the large orange umbrellas, fish is displayed on steel surfaces covered with ice. At the back of the counter there is a wooden table on which they cut, gut, and clean the fish. Together with butchers, fishmongers have the best equipped stalls, very often furnished with a telephone so as to take orders from restaurants and customers. The staff wear water-repellent bib aprons, waterproof boots, and woollen caps in the cold season.

The fish they sell comes mainly from three different wholesale markets: Aci Trezza, Catania and Porto Palo. The fishmongers habitually go to the wholesale markets during the night, so that they can supply fresh fish for the next morning. In these wholesale markets the range of fresh fish available is huge, and the markets can ensure a supply in all weathers. Only a few boats sell directly to the fishmongers. This availability constitutes an enormous change as

⁵⁴ Please see Appendix IV for the fish sold on the stalls.

compared to 15-20 years ago, when the market depended directly on the local fisheries. When the weather was bad and the boats could not go out fishing, then there was no fish at the market.

According to the regular customers, Piazza Pardo offers better choice and better quality than Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto, but it is said to be more expensive. It is interesting to pinpoint that caught wild fish is symbolically valued more, the but price is lower; while the addition of the fishmonger's services increases the price of the fish. Certainly the fishmongers provide a less rough and more customer-friendly service in comparison with the fishermen. They clean the fish according to the way the customer intends to cook it, and they advise on the best recipe for each species. They spend more time giving information about their goods, and are more willing to talk with customers.

As Marco, one of the fishmongers from the younger generation, told me, the market was poorer in the past, and choice was limited. It was possible to sell bad quality fish, since people were not able to afford quality. Marco belongs to a family with a long history within the market, to a trade normally handed down from one generation to the next. Marco recalls his family history, which goes back 100 years. It still a family business, like all the other fishmongers, but less remunerative in comparison to the past. He still has a vivid childhood memory of his grandfather sitting at the table on Sunday and making the *conto* (sum), counting the money to pay the family members. His narrative carried on as follows

11 families were living on this activity in the past. Imagine 11 families sitting around the table waiting for the head of the family to pay their salaries. It was a different era. Now there is just enough to survive. We are three families now.

Marco continues with the story of his family, stressing the most relevant differences he sees now, a time of prosperity in which even economically important species, such as swordfish, are more affordable. He remembers that swordfish would come to the market once every two weeks and it was so

expensive that only well-off people could afford it. Marco's father interrupted the conversation to recall an episode in which he fought against his brother for a slice of swordfish. It was so rare to have the possibility to eat swordfish that they started slapping each other, until the fish slice ended up on the floor.

Our anger was so powerful that we didn't even pick up the slice, but we kept fighting. It was hunger and anger.

Marco makes a bitter comparison between his father's anecdote, his own son's fussiness about eating fish and the fact that his own son doesn't appreciate their better-off social status

Now my son doesn't understand the value of certain fish and we have to push him to eat it. When I see the leftovers on his plate I understand how things have changed, how the value of things have changed. It is a pity.

According to the fishmongers, customers have changed too, as highlighted by many of my interviewees. They expect much higher quality and ask for more information about what they are going to purchase. This change confirms a recent trend in Italian food culture, in which people respond to abundance and wealth by demanding higher quality food products (Montanari 2006).

Despite a more demanding clientèle, the relationship between buyers and sellers is still based on trust and on affiliation, which recalls Geertz's (1979) assertion about the bazaar, where the

[...] participants realize how difficult it is to know if the cow is sound or the price is right, and they realize also that it is impossible to prosper without knowing. The search for information one lacks and the protection of information one has is the name of the game (*Ibid:125*).

It was, in fact, only after building up a relationship with the vendors, that they finally revealed to me the real source of their fish. Many customers of the market still believe that all the fish is caught locally, so is better not to buy fish if it has rained the night before. This myth is reiterated by the vendors and

by the customers themselves. They all pretend that all the fish sold at the market is wild-caught and local.

3.5.3 Shellfish and salted cod

The shellfish stalls stand apart from the fishmongers. There are six shellfish stalls, all quite small, consisting of steel trunks full of water, in which they keep live clams (*vongole*), mussels (*cozze*), and sea snails (*lumache di mare*). The clams and *Truncate Donax* (*telline*) are collected locally. The rest of the shellfish, such as oysters and scallops, which are new additions to the market, comes from the Adriatic or from France. These have only become popular over the last few years. By contrast, sea urchins are indigenous, although the massive consumption, especially in local restaurants, is putting them under threat of extinction. Pasta with sea urchin sauce is considered a local delicacy. The shellfish stall offers already -opened sea urchins to eat on the go with a splash of lemon on top. They also have stuffed mussels, ready to be grilled. A ready-to-go snack, strictly for the brave, consists of *mauru*, a local algae or seaweed, already seasoned with lemon⁵⁵.

Worth a special mention is the *baccalà*, dried salt cod⁵⁶, very popular in the whole of Sicily, and it has inspired many local recipes. It is sold only at Christmas time⁵⁷ at three specialist shops within the market, which are easy to spot for the long queues of people waiting outside these small outlets. Inside each shop, located behind the market stalls, the room is occupied by deep

55 It is said to be very tasty, but I have to admit I did not dare try it, as the sea around the bay of Catania is generally polluted and algae are known to be dangerous, if they are not controlled. These stalls are one of the few places in town still serving this seaweed.

56 The importance of salt cod in the history and economy of the Mediterranean is successfully pictured by Kurlansky (1997, 2003) in two books about the social history of salt and cod. Salt cod started to be prepared in the Basque countries and it was eaten everywhere in the Roman empire. Sicily played an important role in providing salt for curing fish, first blue fin tuna in the area of Favignana, then cod which was caught elsewhere, usually in Norway (Kurlansky, 2003)

57 Baccalà forms the principal ingredient in many of the traditional Catanese Christmas dishes, such as *baccalà alla ghiotta* (salted cod braised with olives, blackcurrants, pinenuts and potatoes) or *baccalà fritto* (fried salted cod).

marble tanks, where the salted cod is left soaking. Each tank has its own sink, in order to change the water every day. It takes several days and a lot of patience to get it ready for sale and consumption.

3.6 Meat between tradition and modernity

There are 24 butchers' shops, scattered along Via Pardo, Via Gisira and Piazza Pardo, ten of which belong to the same extended family. The butchers arrive at the market at 6 am to get business started and their first customers arrive around 8 am. They close at about 2 pm and only two butchers keep their stalls open until 7 pm on Saturday afternoons.

Butchers sell veal, horse, chicken, beef, lamb, goat and *castrato*⁵⁸. They offer innards, offal, lamb heads, tripe, chitterlings, and bowels too. Very often the whole chicken is displayed hanging and the pieces are cut off directly in front of the customer.

Some of the butcheries are quite large with two or three fridges outside their shop, while others consist of a single table on which they cut the meat. It is very important that they have a shop, because this is the only way to have access to water and electricity within the market. When they close in the afternoon they clean the fridges and move them back inside the shop for the night. Their stalls are located in front of their shops, inside which they have walk-in coolers. Out on the street is a fridge where they keep certain cuts of meat, along with ready-to-go items such as rolls, meatballs, sausages, burgers, mince and chicken *cordon bleu*. To one side there is a table, on which they keep the day's special offers protected by an electric device to keep the flies away, as the meat is neither covered nor refrigerated. This procedure does not meet the health and hygiene standards a butcher should follow according to Italian and

⁵⁸ “Adult sheep [...] castrated to get a softer meat and a less pungent flavour” (Parasecoli 2004:94)

European legislation⁵⁹, which regards the above methods as a health hazard for customers, especially during the hot season. Close to the table there are hook-rails where big quarters of meat can be hung.

The market's butchers' are really proud of belonging to the 'old-school' method of being butchers. When a customer approaches the meat stall and asks for meat, they cut it fresh on the table, there and then. Whilst the fishermen prefer not to consider themselves as sellers, the butchers proclaim the art of their job. Artisanal techniques are often opposed to more standardised ways of selling meat. Gaetano explained to me that they have no pre-cut meat and that they should be considered artisans.

Here we do this profession in the good old-fashioned way. We still have the art of butchery, an extremely rare expertise in this age. It is a dirty job, young people don't want to do it any more.

Nowadays the majority of the meat comes from wholesalers, but some of the butchers still slaughter the animals themselves in a licensed slaughterhouse (*mattatoio* in Italian)⁶⁰. In the past there was a public slaughter house, not very far from the market. Now they use private ones, located in nearby villages⁶¹ for a fee of 90€ for each animal they slaughter. Some of the butchers buy the animal whole and manage the entire process, but the majority buy through a middleman.

With the exception of lamb, which sometimes carries the label of *nostrale* (local), provenance is very seldom specified or discussed. The discussion between vendors and buyers concerns more the quality of the meat than where it comes from. Quality is a multi-faceted category and in the case of meat, my informants use terms very similar to the ones found by Ventura and Meulen (1994) in their research based in Umbria: customers ask for tender meat, which

59 Regulation No.854/2004 of European law regulates the hygiene standards for products of animal origin. The law is available on line (Eur-Lex 2008).

60 In her article about the slaughterhouse, Fitzgerald (2010) argues that the institution of the slaughterhouse at the end of 19th century facilitated the process of removing the slaughtering from public sight, relegating it to behind the scenes.

61 One slaughter house is located in a Catania suburb, and the others in Acireale and in Lentini.

does not shrink when cooked and that does not lose a lot of water.

There are not many women working at the market, but the right place to find the few that do is in the rear of the shop, behind the butchers' stalls. There are eight women dedicated to food preparation. They are for the most part the wives or the daughters of the stallholders. You can see them at 6am starting to fill the rolls or mixing spices and herbs to make sausages. Only on a few occasions do they help at the counter, but they do not butcher the meat. Butchery is seen as a male profession in Italy and all over Europe (Vialles 1994). Annarita Consoli, one of the few women working at the market, recalled when she started at the age of 18. Her grandfather used to have butcher's shops here at the market and she began to help her mum. She met her husband, also a butcher at the market. They opened their own butchery fifteen years ago. She has no doubt butchery is a male profession, because of the 'strength' one needs to lift the quarters. The gendered division of labour here is confirmed by the spatial distinction between the outside stall, where men face the clientèle, and the back of the shop, where women do the preparation.

In 2009 two butcheries closed down. This appeared to be the result of changing attitudes towards meat; an increasing amount of TV propaganda associated meat-eating with cancer, heart disease and cardiovascular issues. Butchers constantly complained about the way the media approached meat. One of them, Marcello, claimed that business went down due to the customers' health concerns. He also remarked that the attitude was the opposite of that towards fish: "Fishmongers are lucky. If you listen to any TV show they recommend eating a lot of fish. Fish will always sell". This is interesting, because meat consumption was really low in the early 20th century and then it doubled between 1940 and 1970 (Helstolsky 2004). As reported by another butcher

Ten years ago people used to buy big quantities of meat. Meat every day. It meant you could afford it. You could finally feed meat to

your children. Not like my grandfather used to tell us. It was not so easy fifty years ago. Now people can choose and they can afford to follow the recommendation of someone on TV. The other day they were talking about heart disease and I felt I should be considered responsible because I sell meat. Come on!

According to the butchers this putting the blame on meat is unsubstantiated and it is also a typical media attitude, without considering the consequences of what they say. Gaetano continues his plea

What about pollution in the sea? Why don't they say that many types of fish are dangerous because they contain mercury? It is all about trends. One day fish is going to be the bad guy. They will spread propaganda to tell us to stop eating fish. In the meantime they ruin us. The butchers here at the market are closing down, but the fishmongers are still doing good business.

The crisis in the meat trade is highlighted by other butchers, such as Danilo who explained the issue differently, pointing the finger at the new generation,

This year four butchers shut down, because of the crisis and because our sons didn't want to go on with this business. It is a hard job and they want everything easy.

Antonio, who has been butchering meat for 50 years, has a clear idea of how meat should be handled and displayed.

It is a choice I made some time ago. In the past we had live chickens in cages. We would kill them here. Now everything has changed. [...] You know, I hate it when you go in supermarkets and meat is pieces of red or pink stuff, wrapped in plastic. That's why I keep the whole chicken hanging here. It is an animal, it is meat. It is not an industrial product.

It was Antonio who pointed out that the very contemporary concept of butchery keeps the slaughtering process separated from the sale. It was, in fact, at the end of the 19th century that, across Europe, the slaughterhouses were moved outside city centres (Fitzgerald, 2010). This was justified by reasons of hygiene. The legislation about animal slaughtering constitutes an interesting example of how our ideas around these issues have been changing, as Herzfeld

(2006:131) pinpoints “the progressive removal of ‘polluting’ abattoirs to marginal spaces” belongs to a progressive rationalisation of public spaces.

According to some of the butchers at the market, the daily urban experience of meat purchase takes place in supermarkets, where customers are not exposed to blood, offal, intestines, and other sights that are very often considered disgusting. People don't see the animal shape and they don't see the animal alive. The market's butchers, who see themselves as artisans of the art of butchery, think that supermarket packaging prevents people from enjoying a 'real' experience of meat, as coming from an animal. Antonio insisted on this very point

The animal has become a piece of meat that the customers perceive only in relation to how to cook it . At the market meat is displayed in a different way. It is still possible to see the whole animal

Death is removed from view via the de-localisation of the slaughterhouse, but also through the displaying of meat already sliced, thereby losing any resemblance to the animal shape. Vialles (1994) highlights that meat raises questions of taboos, especially concerning blood. She writes:

The urban consumer is never, in terms of his daily alimentary experience brought face to face with the animal. His steps take him no farther than the butcher's shop where he buys his meat. (*Ibid*:28)

Dealing with meat opens up a discourse about hygiene. People find the sight of blood and animals disgusting, just as some think of fish trimmings and their smell. “People have nice shoes every day now, they don't want to make them dirty” says one of my informants. This feeling of disgust towards meat, especially when the shape of the animal is easy to recognise, is very often reported by customers. Being disgusted is connected to the moral order of society (Bubandt 1998), it seems that the exposure to death speaks against an idea of modernity, in which, as Bauman (1993) writes dealing with smells,

[o]ur world hides the secret of decomposition beneath its glittering surface, and decomposition is there because the inner energy of the

emancipation drive, needed to keep the bubble inflated and impregnable, is all gone (*Ibid:39*).

3.7 Vegetables and fruit, the visual triumph

Vegetables and fruit stalls are scattered throughout the market, with no set localisation. There are 18 vegetable stalls, another 10 selling only fruit and a further 4 selling fruit and vegetables together. It is very interesting to notice that fruit and vegetables are, on the whole, sold separately from one another, although there are a few exceptions: all vegetable stalls sell lemons, which are considered different from other types of fruit on account of their frequent use in cooking, especially in fish recipes. Tomatoes are often sold together with fruit, as they also have a special status in the Sicilian cuisine and oranges are another exception, making their appearance on vegetable stalls when in season.

3.6.1 Fruit

Fruit stalls open between 7.30 am and 8 am, when they start setting up and they normally close at 2 pm. Only a few remain open on Saturday afternoon. All varieties of citrus fruits are sold, plus bananas, apples, cherries, plums, pears, peaches, figs, pomegranates, strawberries, prickly pears, grapes, nectarines and kiwis. Certain fruits are sold all year around, such as apples, pears, and bananas. Other types are purely seasonal.

The variation of colours from yellow to red appears at the market with the “*Fichi d'India di Belpasso*”, prickly pears from Belpasso, also called *bastardoni* [*lit. big bastards*]. This larger variety of prickly pear comes from a town, situated about 30 km away from Catania. They are eaten fresh or used to make sorbets, liqueurs, desserts and *mostarda*.

May is not only the month of the first Pachino tomato harvest, but it is also the right time for “*Fragole di Maletto*”, incredibly sweet strawberries, to

make their appearance at the market. Renowned as very high quality strawberries, they come from a small village, about 60 km away from Catania.

This list could go on with a huge amount of produce, such as “*Nocciole, Castagne e Noci dell'Etna*”, hazelnuts, chestnuts and walnuts from the slopes of Etna; “*Mele dell'Etna*”, apples from Etna, which are characterised by a smaller size than normal apples, a very aromatic taste, and a firm crispy texture; “*Carciofi di Niscemi*”, artichokes from Niscemi, a village located 90 km away from Catania; “*Cipolla di Giarratana*”, the large white delicate onions, grown close to Ragusa in the small village of Giarratana.

A profound seasonal variation emerges between summer and winter. Winter is orange, lemon and mandarin season, and as many improvised stalls mushroom around the market, orange becomes the dominant colour at this time of the year. Summer is peach, nectarine, melon, and watermelon season.

Some of the fruit and vegetable stalls sell oven-roasted peppers⁶², aubergines and onions, which are displayed in voluminous oven-trays, constituting the only precooked food of the market. As one of the ladies buying at the market told me:

Especially during the summer, I prefer to buy the already-roasted vegetables, in order to avoid turning on the oven, which makes the houses very hot. It can become unbearable inside the house if you are not careful. Plus these vegetables are cheaper than cooking in your own in the oven.

At *La Pescheria*, fruit stalls have their produce piled in flat wooden crates, with a handwritten piece of brown paper functioning as a price label. Price is always per kilo. Even expensive fruits like pomegranates are priced by the kilo and not by the unit. Once sold, fruit is first put in brown paper bags, then into plastic shoppers. Some stalls place the produce directly into plastic bags.

⁶² This is a significant difference to the markets in Palermo, where many more cooked vegetables are available, such as boiled artichokes or grilled vegetables.

It is possible to encounter people who picked the fruit themselves, as this produce grows very well throughout the entire region. This is especially true for oranges, lemons, and tomatoes. Everything else comes from the wholesale market.

The wholesale market imports kiwis, pineapples, bananas, chestnuts from abroad and, surprisingly enough, Spanish *Navelate* oranges. Despite the great abundance of oranges in Sicily, Spanish produce has managed to penetrate the market because its production covers that time of the year in which Sicilian oranges are no longer available.

The price of seasonal local produce is influenced by the informal production. Tomatoes, for instance, when in season, appear on improvised stalls all over the city, pop-up stalls selling crates of tomatoes, aubergines, or any seasonal vegetables. This trade affects the market, because the stall-holders have to compete with the lower price offered on the street. A very similar process occurs with oranges, which in Sicily are to be found everywhere, and just as for tomatoes in summer, in winter small stalls spring up around the city, only selling citrus fruit. Again oranges belong to the list of products which are still sold or given away through an informal network rather than bought in supermarkets or at markets. In the same category it is possible to group lemons and olive oil. Everyone in Sicily has friends growing citrus fruit or they are simply able to access oranges and lemon trees in a nearby orchard. This network doesn't penetrate the market, and certainly not the supermarket. It belongs to the sphere of informal commerce, based on personal connections. When I asked one of my Sicilian friends why I did not find good olive oil in the supermarket, he answered that nobody buys olive oil in a supermarket. He said that the same happens for oranges and lemons. If people don't have their own, they certainly know someone who does. He added:

It's normal in Sicily to buy straight from the producers. Or sometimes they give away the produce just like this, for free.

Lemons you find them everywhere, you can pick them up everywhere. The price is so low, that there is no interest in selling them in Sicily.

When the orange season starts, it is very likely to find “*Arance di Leonforte*”, oranges from Leonforte. One of the greengrocers explained to me that they have a thinner peel in comparison to other oranges and that they are very juicy. They are quite cheap because the production is massive. Leonforte is located in the province of Enna, on the Sicilian mainland. These oranges are mostly used for freshly squeezed orange juice, while the ones with thicker peel are normally eaten as they are. This difference is sometimes underlined by the vendors, who ask customers “To be eaten or squeezed?” (*Da mangiare o da spremere?*) They are not to be confused with the “*Arance di Lentini*”, which are a bit more expensive, as the production is more limited. They are called “*zuccherini*”(sugary), and are appreciated for their sweetness. Lentini is about 20 km south of Catania, in the province of Syracuse.

3.7.2 Vegetables

Only a tiny percentage of the vegetables come from local small-scale farming. The rest is purchased at the wholesale market (*mercato ortofrutticolo*) in the suburbs of Catania. The wholesale market supplies all varieties of fruit and vegetables to the retail markets and small retailers. It is a public structure run by the city council, open every day from 4 am, from Monday to Saturday. According to the information provided by the stall-owners and the wholesale market's official webpage, 80% of the produce sold in the market comes from elsewhere in Sicily. Most of the vendors go there at 4 in the morning for their daily purchases, then drive to the market in the city centre and start displaying their produce. At about 7.30-8am they are ready for the customers, and they close at 2-2.30pm. Some keep their stalls open all day on Saturdays.

At the market there are no bagged salads, but it is possible to find packed carrots⁶³. The rest of the produce is loose and not pre-packed. The

63 Only one or two stalls sell fresh bunches of carrots when in season.

display is generally simple and very colourful - vegetables are displayed in piles inside wooden crates, and prices are written on brown paper, without any extra information about origin or class. Leaf vegetables, such as spinach, greens, dandelion, brassica rapa, broccoli springs and broccoli rabe are generally tied in bunches. This way it is very difficult to evaluate the weight of a bunch and also to compare the price from one stall to the other. On the stalls you can read “4 bunches €1” (of wild chicory), “2 bunches €0.50” (of spinach), “5 fresh garlic bulbs €2”, “2 bunches €0.50” (of flat leaf parsley). The prices are so low that it is not appropriate to ask for a single bunch of parsley. It would only be €0.25. A bunch constitutes, of course, no standard measure. This raises questions of fairness and sometimes it generates discussions between vendors and buyers, especially if less-than-fresh produce is found inside the bunch.

Other vegetables are here marketed in baskets, where one basket is normally €1 and contains an average number of units, for example four cucumbers, two heads of lettuce (Romaine, Frisée, Lambs Lettuce), three heads of radicchio, two escaroles, four to six aubergines, four to six courgettes, or four bunches of rocket. Aubergines and courgettes might be sold by the kilo, especially when in season. It is possible to ask for half a basket, but it is not guaranteed that it would cost half the price. It is more than likely to cost €0.75. If you ask them to mix the contents of two different baskets, e.g. one lettuce and two bunches of rocket, it will still cost €1. As you increase the quantity, the price decreases, because vendors try to get rid of everything before the end of the day, especially when it is hot and the produce rots easily, but also because they prefer not to store it. Storage spaces are in fact sometimes shared by different stall-holders. It is interesting to notice that after the introduction of the European currency, in 2001, one Euro is used as the unit. It makes the transaction quicker for people who just pop in at the market and grab some vegetables. It involves no change in the majority of the cases and no weighing. It simplifies the economic transaction.

Vendors encourage customers to try to buy bulk quantities of produce. “In the past, the market was serving housewives who used to cook for the whole family.” – one of the greengrocers told me one day, when I refused to buy bigger quantities, even if the price difference was negligible. Nowadays, many students and retired elderly people buy very small quantities at the market. People living on their own complain that you end up buying too much because of pressure and insistence from the vendors.

Ten years ago there was a notable difference between winter and summer produce. Nowadays it is possible to find everything all year around, in part due to the high number of greenhouses present on Sicilian territory. You can always buy potatoes, flat-leaf parsley, celery, carrots, onions, salad onions, spring onions, radicchio, fennel, cucumbers, red radishes, rocket, garlic, or lettuce. Broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage are regarded as winter vegetables; fresh broad beans, fresh dill, dwarf beans, fine beans, basil, asparagus and artichokes are sold only when they are in season in Sicily.

The majority of the seasonal products are locally grown, but there is no organic produce at all. Garlic, iceberg salad and artichokes often come from foreign countries, while white onions, potatoes, and cauliflower arrive from abroad when they are out of season in Italy.

Sicily is one of the largest producers of tomatoes in Italy and indeed in the whole of Europe⁶⁴, and is famed for the high quality and variety of its tomatoes. Consequently Sicilians are very proud of their tomatoes and their role in their cuisine. At the market, when the season gets warmer, all the diverse varieties of tomatoes appear on the stalls: cherry tomatoes, San Marzano, vine tomatoes, Piccadilly, plum tomatoes, and beefsteak tomatoes. At the end of May, the small greenish tomatoes from Pachino, belonging to the Heirloom Marmande variety, the first variety of “*Pomodori di Pachino*” [tomatoes from

⁶⁴ According to the national statistics, 15,636 hectares of land is designated for tomato crops (ISTAT 2010).

Pachino], to make their appearance at the market. Pachino is a town in the south-east part of Sicily, in the Province of Syracuse, renowned for its melon and tomato production. The whole area is packed with greenhouses, producing the three of the best varieties of tomatoes: the cherry vine tomato, the green marmande tomato, and a smooth round green tomato. The small green Pachino variety is considered of a higher quality in comparison to others, thus it is normally sold at a higher price on a limited number of stalls. These are marketed a bit everywhere in Italy and they are widely recognised as high quality tomatoes. The European Union labels tomatoes from this area with PDO (Protected Denomination of Origin).

Other types of tomatoes are displayed at the market in huge quantities and they are sold at a cheaper price. Tomato sauce is the most common seasoning for pasta and it is present in the vast majority of Sicilian dishes. One cannot imagine Sicilian cuisine without it. Many female customers proudly told me that they prefer to make their own tomato sauce during the summer and preserve it in sterilised bottles to last all year around.

Fruit, vegetables, dried fruit and other local specialities open up a discourse about locality, since Sicily has a remarkable history of cultivation, not only for its quantity, but for its high quality. Some products speak more than others about places, regional economy and local cuisine.

At the market the label of these quality goods are normally hand-written on a piece of brown paper and they are addressing local customers or expert foodies, so it is either for insiders or for connoisseurs that this knowledge has a value within the market. The following constitutes just one example of local produce specification.

“Where does this melon come from? (*Unni veni stu melone?*)”
asked a lady in Catanese dialect.

“Do they come from Pachino or are they all from Spain?⁶⁵(*Veni da Pachino, o sugnu tutti spagnoli?*)

The lady was also referring to the sign stating ‘*Vero melone di Pachino €2*’ (Genuine Pachino Melons €2). The vendor cut open up one of the melons with his knife, letting the lady trying the goodness of the product.

The lady said “It's very good. You are right”

It seems that the goodness was a guarantee of local products, trusting the ability of the lady to recognise a melon from Pachino from a Spanish one and assuming that a Pachino melon tastes better than any other melon.

3.8 Dried fruit and herbs: the stalls of Sicilian flavours

There are four stalls selling what could be defined as the ‘Sicilian delicatessen’. However this label is not appropriate within this specific cultural context, as some of the products sold by this type of stall represent daily ingredients in the majority of Sicilian dishes. Herbs, dried fruit and spices recall once again the many foreign influences which have been assimilated into Sicily's gastronomic heritage. Saffron, blackcurrants, pistachios or almonds are just a few examples of the food items, where vendors and buyers proudly boast the legacy of foreign cultures. In the words of the committee's president

You can smell it right? The oregano, the dried tomatoes, salted anchovies, the fish. We are like a suq. The Arab domination is still visible in our food. And the Greeks. We took the best from different traditions.

All these stalls sell oregano, dried herbs, olives, and tomato concentrate. The latter is called *strattu* in Sicilian, and plays an important role in many local dishes. It's a tasty sundried tomato paste seasoned with olive oil and basil, widely used in pasta sauce, to give flavour to fish, and in many other recipes.

⁶⁵ As I have already said above, Pachino is a small village, renowned for its production of tomatoes and melons. On the other hand in Sicily like everywhere else in Italy Spanish produce has gained a big slice of the market during the last few years.

The largest of the stalls has a proper shop at its rear. It is located in Via Gisira and sells some of the most important ingredients of Sicilian cuisine. This stall is most popular with tourists, as they buy what we can define as 'gastronomic souvenirs', such as marmalade, jams, jars of pistachio pesto and all sorts of local specialities. It is also a must for Catania's gourmards, as it was one of the first places to sell deli-style alternative foods or exotic foodstuffs.

This stall sells a broad range of dried fruits, nuts and candied fruit, widely used in the world-famous, gourmet Sicilian *patisserie*, which derives from the period of Arab domination of Sicily. During probably the most awesome interview with an amazing woman, who was teaching me how to cook the perfect *caponata* in her over-heated kitchen, the lively 80-year old Anna remarked that she could not find these kind of ingredients at the supermarket.

I have to go to the market. In Palermo it is easier to find blackcurrants for instance, but here there is only one stall at the market which sells them. I don't go often, once a month. I go for blackcurrants, pine nuts, pistachios, almonds. Dried fruit is just cheaper and better quality. I find all the varieties I need. You know the stall in Via Gisira right? That one is fantastic, I find everything. It is wonderful. [Recorded interview]

This is the right spot to find pistachios, almonds, nuts, walnuts, dried broad beans and other dried legumes. Other delicacies include berries, especially gooseberries when in season, as gooseberry *granita* is a summer favourite.

Two other stalls specialise in olives, pickled vegetables, dried tomatoes and salted anchovies and a small stall in *Piazza dell'Indirizzo* sells only salted anchovies and sardines. Not quite a stall, it is just an old man sitting on a stool, in a corner of the square. He has two open tins on the pavement, containing anchovies and sardines.

3.9 Daily needs: grocery stores and bakeries

Grocery stores in Italy are called *generi alimentari*. These can mainly be found on Via Gisira and Via Pardo. Grocers arrive at six in the morning to haul the fridge outside of the shop and get everything ready by 8am. They close at 2.30pm, but are also open on Saturday afternoons.

This type of business is comprised of two parts: the stall with fresh products outside on the street, and a shop at the rear. The stall is essentially a long fridge or chill cabinet, where it is possible to find dairy products, charcuterie, pickled olives, and some ready-made foods such as fresh pesto, sun-dried tomatoes in olive oil, or grilled aubergines and courgettes. Again it is important to notice that this kind of shop is not perceived as a “deli” in Italy; delicacies such as *Parma* or cooked ham are everyday fare for Italians. Behind the fridge there is a raised foot-board on which the staff stand and behind them, there is normally a table with slicing machines.

Hard cheese is wrapped in paper, while soft cheese and sliced charcuterie is placed in plastic boxes. All the shopping is then put into plastic bags. Long-life shelf goods such as pasta, rice, canned food, olive oil and biscuits are displayed inside the shop and sometimes this can include kitchenware, especially disposable plastic plates and cutlery, widely used in Catania⁶⁶.

Men work the counter on the street, slicing ham or cheese, with women selling their goods inside the shop. As in other market activities, women are to be found inside the shops; they don't stand on the street and they are they involved in food preparation only. As in other parts of the market, the indoors are an appropriate place for women, while men stay outside, on the front line.

⁶⁶ On a few occasions I was invited to dinner parties where food and wine were served in plastic containers. This was the case also at a Christmas dinner at some friends' house.

Bakeries don't have stalls at the market, but are hidden behind other stalls, making them very difficult to find. They follow market opening hours, but are very similar to other bakeries anywhere else in the city. Women also work in the bakeries, not making the bread, but selling it. You can see them helping customers or running the cash register.

3.10 Conclusions

In this chapter I have underlined that the chaos of the market is only skin deep and if one goes deeper structures do emerge, in which a specific order of relationships between people, places, institutions and goods expresses itself. Geertz (1999) dedicated the opening of his ethnography to the layout of the market.

It can be described. And described, it can extend our understanding of how the suq operates and why; can clarify just what sort of animal the bazaar economy is. (*Ibid*:213)

Geertz (1979) encourages exploring the market's organisation despite the apparent chaos. "The deeper physiology of the beast, assuming it has one, will have to wait" (*Ibid*: 213).

The description of the physical space and its surroundings helped disentangle its chaotic nature. I have defined its boundaries and its relational nature. The inside-outside movement has traced a few lines, connecting each commercial category to its sourcing and to its universe of significance. However at this stage it is necessary to stress that the market

[...] holds social statuses and their hierarchical arrangement at bay, a micro-society develops at the market, particularly around a given stall, where actors not only coexist as in a crowd but also relate to each other. (De La Pradelle 2006:185)

The surface of the display unravels layers of meaning as I have intimated. Firstly, the use of space informs a relationship with the city, the

agricultural landscape, but also with transnational forces such as the European Union.

Another layer of meaning becomes apparent thanks to the classification of goods within the market. As far as fish and meat are concerned, even in their differences, they find common ground in the ideas relating to hygiene, safety and contamination and the way these ideas contribute to creating the market organisation.

The grouping of foodstuffs also highlighted the fact that the local produce's symbolic meaning clarifies the special tie to the land and describing the layout of the stalls brought up some relevant themes. Catania and its markets define themselves in relation to the oriental coast of Sicily and to the villages on the slopes of Etna, rich in culture and agriculture. The city defines itself in relation to its surrounding countryside and to its volcano.

Local food here embodies the need to attach meaning to place, to exemplify it through food. It means characterising a place by its produce, by its soil and by placing what the market sells in a context that is meaningful for customers. Buyers can recognise the origin of the food and feel close to what they buy. They don't buy just an apple; they buy into a relationship with their land. Local food in Sicily is about villages, about a special combination of sun, soil, altitude, that, according to the people, makes the produce taste much better than in other places.

However localism as explanatory concept does not provide enough insight into this relationship. It is only through an analysis of the cosmology related to the landscape that the significance of local food becomes clearer.

Chapter IV

The Production of Landscape

Placido Giuffrida, dark skin and blue eyes, has always been a fisherman, like his father. He is 59 years old, 45 of them spent on the boat. He soon became my favourite informant, despite his unwillingness to talk and his mumbling between his teeth, which sometimes made our mutual understanding very hard. His smiley face, wrinkled from all the hours spent in the sun, would welcome me in the middle of the night, before embarking on his 25-year-old fishing vessel to spend the night fishing. He was as I had imagined fishermen were, but it wasn't even close to Hemingway's Santiago. He was neither poor nor desperate. Placido owns several properties in Catania, and he and his family enjoy a good standard of living. His son had attended high school, something not to be taken for granted in a working class context⁶⁷. He managed to build a house for each of his four children. Placido is a silent man who doesn't like to waste words. To a certain extent he embodies the Sicilian notion of '*menza parola*' (half a word). This expression is widely used in Sicily with the meaning of "half a word is enough", "I don't need to say more". When I started interviewing people at the market, they would often answer using this expression. It is also a bit like saying "You already know, everybody knows, there is no need to explain". Placido would rather say a word less, than a word more. He weighs his words carefully. Despite his reticence, there was one topic

⁶⁷ "Working class" translates as the Italian 'classe operaia', but it is not the correct term employed by my informants. During the interviews many vendors referred to themselves and to the people as *popolino*, a derogative way of designating the proletariat. With this term they indicate the mass of poor people who used to live in this rundown central city area and who used to go shopping at the market. Pardo (1996) reviews the literature about the definition of *popolino* in his book about morality in Naples (see page 2 of his monograph).

which would make him open up: his beloved island.

Placido shared with me his sense of belonging to Sicily and his habit of looking around whilst out at night, observing the outline of the volcano against the sea. Each night on the boat he demonstrated to me his love for the landscape, and his passionate relationship to his land.

You are learning to love this place, Brigida. You know a lot about our food already, now you are learning where it comes from. This corner of the world is blessed and you know why.[Placido, 59, extract from my fieldnotes]

On many occasions, we engaged in conversations about the blessed and cursed island, beautiful and hard at the same time. Placido was not the only person to praise the features of Sicily. Its beauty has been depicted by many authors, especially foreign writers. Much has been written praising the island's bounty (Dennis & Murray 1864, Brydone, 1775; Clarenza, 1833; Simeti, 1989). As Simeti (1989) reports in a chapter with the dense title of "*Of Ancient Abundance, Epic Appetites*", according to Greek mythology, Odysseus was one of the first foreign visitors in Sicily:

On the east coast, at the foot of Mount Etna, he saw the land of the Cyclops, so rich that despite the ignorance of its gigantic inhabitants, who neither tilled or plowed, 'grain- wild wheat and barley – grows untended, and wine-grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven's rain' (*Ibid*:3)

The devotion of romantic authors to myths and mythological stories has played a fundamental role in the local representation of the landscape. In his short story "Sun", D.H. Lawrence (1982) describes vividly the approach to Catania's coast. The main elements peculiar to the Catanese landscape are introduced by the English writer: the sea with its coast dotted with fruit trees, the sun shining and blessing this spot and the volcano, covered by snow.

And though the Atlantic was grey as lava, they did come at last into the sun. Even she had a house about the bluest of seas, with a vast garden, or vineyard, all vines and olives, dropping steeply in terrace after terrace, to the strip of coast plain; and the garden full of secret

places, deep groves of lemon far down in the cleft of earth, and hidden, pure green reservoirs of water; then a spring issuing out of a little cavern, where the old Sicules had drunk before the Greeks came; and a grey goat bleating, stabled in an ancient tomb with the niches empty. There was a scent of mimosa, and beyond, the snow of the volcano (Lawrence 1982:425).

This type of landscape has been always connected to mythology. Due to its diversity the Sicilian landscape has provided a wide range of possibilities for agriculture, fisheries, and farming over the centuries. Placido was correct when he remarked that knowledge about food would not be complete without information concerning its provenance. In order to imagine the importance of agriculture in Sicily today, it is necessary to understand its scale. Sicily, today, is responsible for 10.4% of all Italian production of agricultural produce, forestry, and fisheries. In 2010 Sicily could boast more than 200,000 farms, which amounted to 15.3% of the total Italian enterprises (Regione Siciliana 2011a:1). The main crops reported today are durum wheat⁶⁸, wine; tomatoes, oranges, courgettes, carrots, mandarins, grapes, lemons and eggs (*Ibid:1*). One fifth of the land dedicated to agriculture is utilised for cereals (330.000 hectares), while 160.000 hectares are dedicated to olives, 140.000 hectares to vineyards, and 95.000 to citrus fruits (Regione Siciliana 2011a:1). The production of citrus fruit, in fact, and of summer fruit such as peaches, nectarines, melons, watermelons and so on, are conspicuous too. Certainly, this picture would not be complete without mentioning fisheries, especially tuna, swordfish, anchovies and sardines, but also sea bass, sea-bream, octopus and many others. The economy of the island has been particularly connected to tuna fishing, being probably one of the most ancient practices in the Mediterranean (Kurlansky 2003). Fisheries today are still very important in Sicily, even if the local fleet is steadily decreasing (Regione Siciliana 2011b).

Tuna, wheat, wine, citrus fruit and olive oil have been symbols of Sicily

⁶⁸ *Durum wheat (grano duro)* is the type of cereal used to make pasta of higher quality, in comparison to the ones which use *grano tenero*. Sicily produces more than eight million quintals of *Durum wheat* (Regione Siciliana 2011).

and of its fertility for centuries. Today they are still widely-recognised for their excellence, after having been improved in the last decades by the introduction of new technologies, especially in the wine sector. Everywhere in Italy, and elsewhere among gourmards, the labels “*Arance di Sicilia*” (Sicilian Oranges), “*Melone di Pachino*” (Melons from Pachino), and “*Pistacchio di Bronte*” (Pistachios from Bronte) are recognised as quality products.

Quality and locality needs to be addressed and placed firstly in relation to the contemporary debate that social sciences and cultural geography have opened up about these themes; and secondly in relation to my own ethnographic data, in order to contextualise their meaning in their own cultural setting.

Locality signifies a relationship with a particular representation of a place. This phenomenon has been widely studied in the recent debate of food studies and social sciences⁶⁹ (DuPuis and Goodman 2005; Hinrichs 2000; Holt and Amilien 2007; Parkins and Craig 2009; Pratt 2007; Teti 1999). Localism has been mainly seen as “a counter-hegemony to [...] globalisation thesis, a call to action under the claim that the counter to global power is local power” (Du Puis and Goodman, 2005:361). However, cultural geographers have challenged this, pointing out that it can represent a conservative approach, reproducing inequalities in access to information and to resources. The notion of “defensive localism”, which derives from the work of Allen (1999) and Winter (2003), constitutes a useful explanatory concept of this critical view. The authors point out the need for more research regarding quality and localism, more research integrating

the economic and the social through studies that combine work on consumer and retail social relations and cultures of production and consumption. We need to understand the complex meanings and significations attached to acts of consumption so as to avoid false dichotomies between globalised food systems and alternative consumption practices (Winter 2003:30).

⁶⁹ An interesting review is to be found in Blake *et al.*(2010)

I believe that we can adduce the complexity of commodification and consumption of food in Catania without limiting our discussion to localism, which constitutes an interesting but not exhaustive angle. According to Black (2012), shopping at Turin's farmers' market and choosing the local produce (*nostrano*) “is a form of resistance to globalization and the speed of modern life” (*Ibid*: 154). This is probably relevant for contexts where there is a more overt political positioning towards globalisation and big corporations, such as the organic market in Catania, but it does not help us to understand the use of ‘local’ within *la Pescheria*, where it is one of the categories used when thinking or talking about food, and which needs to be addressed in its cultural context and in relation to the other categories.

This chapter investigates the categories used to order and define foodstuffs within the market, their sourcing and display; and also the mythic cosmologies they inform. In this chapter, I follow what Cosgrove (1993) calls ‘*mythic geography*’, the centrifugal movement in which the immediate environments of the city are gardened and cultivated, followed by the “pastoral economy of animal husbandry grading finally into untouched wilderness (*Ibid*:294).” This movement is perceived as being from ‘nature’ to ‘culture’. At the market, mythology, literature, geography and history mingle in a unique representation of the local identity. My informants widely used the term ‘*paesaggio*’ (landscape) to describe the environment. The market vendors and buyers reproduce and pay tribute to the landscape as characterised mainly by the volcano and the sea, and which is blessed by the mild, moderate climate of the Mediterranean.

Thus, I address the landscape as a conceptual rather than as physical space. This perspective implies a definition of landscape as cultural process, where symbolic meanings are attached to physical space (Hirsch 1995). This perception is continuously renegotiated at the market, but is also conceived as fixed in time, as stable and almost immutable (Bender 1993).

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the terms ‘territory’ and ‘landscape’, and with their respective political implications. I then address the specific meaning of abundance and its display, taking into consideration the products coming from the wholesale markets. I then move on to the 'wild' side of the market, exploring produce coming from Etna and the volcano's significance in literature, mythology and people's beliefs. This is followed by an excursus into the relationship between the people and their landscape as expressed through food, particularly when attributing the quality of the food to its origins. ‘Wild’ (*selvatico*), ‘local’ (*locali or nostrali*), and ‘foreign’ (*forestiero*) are the main categories used to sell, buy and talk about food. These definitions respect a hierarchical order within the market. The ‘wild’ sits at the highest place, indicating mainly herbs, fruits, plants coming from the volcano, Mount Etna, and fish caught in the Mediterranean by the local fishermen. ‘Local’ refers to Sicilian and Italian products. This can include the mass-produced agricultural produce and Mediterranean fish; even if they come from the wholesale market, they can be indicated as ‘local’. ‘Foreign’ is never declared within the market, but it is present and it is often used to indicate imported products of any kind. I conclude by examining the way in which these elements contribute to creating an idea of uniqueness of the island. Sicily itself is perceived as a very special environment, which provides a bounty of goods for its inhabitants, but which also imposes many constraints.

4.1 Why landscape?

Before getting into the details of the market, I would like to clarify my decision to utilise the word *paesaggio*, landscape, instead of *territorio*, territory. The definition of territory and landscape according to the *Oxford Dictionary of English* might help this discussion to take off. ‘Territory’ implies a defensive attitude, an “area of land under the jurisdiction of a ruler or state” (Oxford

Dictionaries 2010c). It is indeed a term derived from zoology, in which an animal or a group of animals defend an area against others of the same species. A territory has boundaries. Landscape, by contrast, is defined as “all the visible features of an area of countryside or land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal” (Oxford Dictionaries 2010b). *Paesaggio*, as I have mentioned, has a more romantic and nostalgic connotation. It is a contested space dominated by a sense of loss, facing the fear of change. Bender (1993:3) captures the ambiguity towards change, when he writes “historical change holds romance. In contrast, contemporary change threatens”.

From an etymological point of view, *territorio* comes from the Latin *territorium* composed from *terra* (soil, land) and the suffixes *-tor* or *-torem*, which imply an agent. Thus the word carries the significance of a belonging, a possession of the land. In current Italian discourse, *territorio*, territory, bears political implications. Engaging with the territory is an expression used to think of the environment in an active way: expressions such as *legame con il territorio* (ties to the territory), *politiche del territorio* (politics of the territory), *servizi del territorio* (territory services), *rivalutazione del territorio* (re-evaluation of the territory) are useful examples to place this word in the right context. Territory is used at an institutional level to enhance the active engagement between humans and the surface of the earth. It also implies some kind of responsibility, related to universalist values, such as environmentalism, indicated in Italian by *ambientalismo*.

The landscape is comprised within the territory, the latter being a wider concept, enclosing more dimensions. *Paesaggio*, however, implies passivity: people stare, admire, contemplate the landscape, but the human intervention to modify and shape the landscape is minimised. In the conceptualisation of my informants it is regarded as given, natural, unchanging. The notion of landscape implies a sense of balance and harmony, which “carr[ies] positive moral weight, so that a disordered or formless landscape seems something of a contradiction

(Cosgrove 2006:52).” The following paragraphs aim to demonstrate how this illusion of balance is constructed.

4.2 Domesticated nature and familiar landscape

It became clear that fishmongers and fishermen define their distinct and separate identities through their daily market practices. The fishmongers’ selection comes mainly from various wholesale fish markets around Catania. On the fishmongers’ stalls, fish is displayed on a lace-like plastic cloth, and it looks as if the fish is swimming away from the customer up along the sloping counters. It swims towards the fishmonger, displayed facing upwards, uphill, like it is still swimming away from the customer, showing its freshness while the fishmonger shouts “*Vivo è, vivo è*” (it’s still alive, still alive). It looks like a pyramid, with the highest position being occupied by the most expensive and the rarest fish, whilst the local common species are positioned closer to the customer. Lobsters are never placed in the lower part, but anchovies and sardines are.

Along these stalls, the most important concept is abundance. During the day, while selling the fish, the men keep rearranging the stalls; they constantly group and reorganise the fish, concentrating the same type in small mountains. It is important that it looks as abundant as possible.

Fishmongers put abundance itself on display; it symbolises the victory of modernisation over unpredictability. It is testimony to a vision of the sea which can be tamed through modern means. Salvatore Longo, probably one of the most popular fishmongers, his stall being an institution at *Piazza Pardo*, explains to me that the wholesale market allows them more stability and a constant supply as compared to the past, when the catch was highly influenced by the weather conditions. Marco, Salvatore's nephew, in his late thirties at the

time of my fieldwork, speaks with pride of today's availability.

You find everything at the market. Even if it has rained the night before. The distribution system allows us to sell every day. It was not like that before. Now we get fish from everywhere. It's good, people come to the market even if it has rained. They know we always have fish.

The same is true for the majority of fruit and vegetable stands which display abundance and a variety of choice. Fruit is left in wooden crates lined with plastic as at the wholesale market or otherwise in plastic boxes. It doesn't pretend to be hand-picked, it is proud of its provenance from the wholesale marketplace, almost resembling a supermarket display. Plastic baskets are used for cherries, strawberries, nectarines, leaving intact the same wholesale market packaging. Here the provenance is not specified for these fruit and vegetables, it is not declared. It is a cheap product and to a certain extent mainstream, the same type of produce a customer will be able to find in a supermarket.

I have already stated regarding meat and slaughterhouses that this mixture of local produce and imported goods comes from the wholesale market, located in the city's outskirts. Similarly to the case of the Provençal market as analysed by De La Pradelle (2006), the wholesale market and the retail markets are differentiated both in location and in function.

The relegation of the wholesale market to a location outside the city is a spatial reflection of the distinction between the roles of the two markets. (*Ibid*:15)

Slaughterhouses and wholesale markets are all situated outside the city, and this is typical of the “hyperseparated state” of food industrialisation (Fitzgerald 2010:60). However, at *La Pescheria* vendors are not ashamed to buy from the wholesale market. Many of them think it is much better since they can buy fish or produce every day, without having to rely solely on local production. The wholesale market's abundance and variety are seen as symbols of the present economic wealth compared with the famine of bygone days, when it was more difficult to guarantee food supplies. Scarcity of food was a

daily issue for Italian families up until the 1970s⁷⁰. This modern display of abundance constitutes an effective way to remember that poverty no longer affects Sicily and this achievement has been a very distinct Italian desire in the 20th century (Montanari 2006). It applies particularly to meat consumption. Italian meat consumption was one of the lowest in Europe, and Italians praise the availability of meat as a blessing of modernity (Vercelloni 1998). The *Pescheria's* model of abundance recalls what De La Pradelle defines as the most common one at Carpentras, where her fieldwork was based.

The implicit pictorial model is of course the horn of plenty, where the whole of nature is summed up in an assembly of fruits from the four corners of the earth. [...] In the garden of Eden, distance between continents and the alternation of the seasons are abolished. (De La Pradelle, 2006:112)

At *La Pescheria*, this means living in an age in which Sicily is not isolated, but placed within a huge network of food distribution, which has a positive connotation within the market. If the weather is not good, the fish comes into the market anyway; if the harvest has been damaged, fruit still reaches the market; the wholesale market has defeated seasons and what before was unpredictable. Speranza Gino, who runs the most colourful fruit stall in the market, has no doubt about the benefits of this change.

We get everything, like in the North. We have the amazing local produce from the surroundings of Catania and we get all the other stuff from everywhere. It is good, we have more choice, more variety.

He is referring to the intensive farming methods being used on the plains of Catania, which means that there is no concern about the modality of intensive cultivation. The wholesale market stands for a domesticated nature, for the human victory over seasonality and over weather conditions. In the past, the market supply was unpredictable; now it is more secure, as in the case of fish.

70 For more insight about this topic, see Sorcinelli (1999) and Counihan (2004)

This ostentation of abundance and fertility is very often connected to the agricultural landscape of Catania's plain and also to the area around Mount Etna. At the beginning of the 20th century, the prosperous agriculture generated a very specific phenomenon in eastern Sicily and in the suburban area of Catania: the growth of *agrotowns*, in which the peasants were living side-by-side with a well-off commercial bourgeoisie, which had been consolidating its financial power ever since the Unification of Italy in 1861 (Barone 1987b). The harbour at Catania and the local provincial railway network contributed to the prosperity of this 'wealthy countryside' (*campagna ricca*) (Barone 1987b:332). The railway was fundamental for the trade in sulphur, which had been extracted in Sicily on a massive scale since the 19th century. Furthermore, the availability of water, which was not controlled by any criminal organisation such as in Palermo's area (Aymard 1987), allowed for the improvement of the irrigation system for citrus fruit plantations. In the 1920s more than half of all Sicilian citrus farms were located in the Greater Catania area, and 66% of all exports went through the Etnean city (Aymard, 1987:21).

4.3 Local, foreign and wild: from wholesale markets to volcanic wildness

'Wild' (*selvatico*), 'local' (*locali*), and 'foreign' (*forestiero*) are the main categories used within the market to describe the goods on sale. The hierarchy is very clear. The wild herbs coming from the volcano, the hand-picked produce from the piedmont of the mountains and the wild fish caught directly by the fishermen occupy the top of this pyramid. At the market, an additional economic and cultural value is attached to the wild. Other "wild" items such as dandelion, chicory and sinapi⁷¹ can be found on "normal stalls". They are slightly more expensive, labelled as *selvatici* (wild) or *dell'Etna* (from Mount

⁷¹ One of the most common wild herbs also called cavuliceddi. According to the botanic categorisation, these plants belong to the genus of *Sinapis Arvensis*, including the species of *Brassica nigra* (black mustard) and *Brassica fruticulosa* (Fazio 2008).

Etna) and displayed in wooden crates.

In the case of fish no label is required: the presence of fish functions as guaranty and it is easily recognisable from the fishers. Greengrocers, on the other hand, distinguish between their usual produce, keeping the wild local one separated and in some cases writing on a piece of paper that it is local. In the majority of the stalls the wholesale produce is kept distinct from wild produce. The display of these items is always separate from the other types, and it is clear that they come from a different sourcing other than the wholesale market.

Placido, the fisherman, was generally critical toward the market, but one day he showed me what he liked about it. He took me to an area of the market near the main entrance of *La Pescheria*, where three or four men were to be found sitting on plastic crates and displaying their few items on overturned wooden crates. To Placido and other vendors, they symbolise the best part of the market, embodying the countryside and the volcano, where everything tastes better because of its wildness. Placido's description was explanatory of his opinion about these men.

You saw the people that sit right close to the fountain, right? They come exactly as they used to in the past. They descend from the mountain with their baskets of oregano, wild dill, and greens. They picked them themselves. We don't even want them to pay the toll. They can work without license. They are peasants from the mountain. You should try their stuff. The taste cannot be compared with the things from the city.

The men don't even look like sellers, simply dressed, wearing a *coppola*, a traditional black Sicilian cap, and smoking their cigarettes, while talking to each other. They are not there every day, and you are more likely to see them at the weekend. The produce they sell is neither grown, nor farmed: it is foraged. The wild herbs (*erbe selvatiche*) they sell are widely used in traditional Sicilian dishes, and they normally come from the areas surrounding Etna. Etna becomes the symbol of untamed nature, a magic soil from which the best ingredients still descend to the market. Wild plants and herbs are the ones which grow

spontaneously, without man's intervention.

The men from Etna symbolically lead the customer into *Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto*, the fishermen's square, introducing the visitors to the generous gifts of the island, which everyone has the right to gather. This is visible also through what they are selling: bunches of fresh dill, which in Sicilian is called *finocchietto selvatico* (literally wild fennel); *origano* (oregano), which is always hand-picked; *babbaluci* in Sicilian or *lumache* in Italian (snails), normally not farmed, but collected around the countryside after the rain. They are placed in a basket and the scales are positioned on a cardboard box. Only a cotton cloth or a wooden crate separates the volcanic stone pavement from the produce. Also, the men do not stand, but crouch close to the ground, sitting on the pavement. Generally speaking at the market there is normally a greater distance between the ground and the goods. Only in this case it is placed on the pavement⁷². These men recall an old-fashioned way of selling at the market, functioning almost as an introduction to what is special within *La Pescheria*. They remind us that in this market it is still possible to find wild produce.

The value of wild products comes from offering a product in which the human intervention appears to be limited and the relationship to the landscape seems closer. As Mary Douglas taught us (1966), there is a higher risk of pollution when something wild enters society and it needs to be contained. As is very well explained by Hell (1996):

The notion that the Wild needs to be confined within strict limits (ritual or otherwise) is part of a wider ideological configuration establishing a clear demarcation between the Wild and the Domestic. [...] With the domestication of plants, a different concept of the global cycle of fecundity was constructed, a basic symbolic change in the relation to nature (*Ibid*: 215)

Both realities, the wild vegetables and the ones from the wholesale market, are present, one next to the other, on the stalls without contradiction.

⁷² Near the market, African vendors place their items on the floor, but they constitute an exception and they normally don't sell food, but bags, shoes, and watches.

The labels ‘wild’ and ‘local’ are not synonymous. Wild herbs and plants can also be local, but not all local plants are wild. Local products can come from the wholesale markets as the result of intensive agriculture.

The *local*, that is recently probably the most studied category in food literature, is here identified as symbolic of Sicily, of its abundance and its goodness. This is the case for seasonal, mostly local produce, such as oranges, lemons, prickly pears, tomatoes, watermelon, melons, artichokes. They are displayed avalanche-like; a huge amount of produce is arranged in a mountain shape, or like the volcano itself. I asked many times why they displayed such large quantities. Certainly they won't sell them all in a single day! The most frequent answer was “because we have plenty”. All such produce is cheap, especially when in season. It is to be found pretty much everywhere; the informal commerce on the street is a widely spread practice, and vendors improvise stalls or just pile up crates of seasonal produce at every corner of the street throughout the city. This produce is local and abundant. The products affirm the abundance and fertility of Sicily. They are once again a gift from a very special climate and from the fertile soil. As I have described, what belongs to the island can be displayed loosely as a mountain of fruit, while what is wild or foreign needs to be controlled and transformed into something safer and cleaner.

The *foreign* is probably the forgotten category, hidden and unspoken of. It is clear that there is produce, fish and meat coming from outside of Sicily and outside of Italy, but it is not labelled as such. A good example is provided by the apples with the stickers of Val Venosta from the Tirol, easily recognisable from an intensive TV advertising campaign and quite popular nowadays in Italy. I could see the red ladybird labels peeping out, symbol of the apples grown in the South Tirol, while the vendor explained to me that all his produce was local. Foreign provenance needs to be concealed, since the market identity is based on the performance of locality. Foreign produce mingles in a sort of camouflage.

Sciascia wrote that Sicilians did not fear the sea because it isolated them, rather because it brought to them invasions (Renda 2000). This fear of being invaded (again) can be associated with the tendency to conceal the *foreign*, to hide the products which are not local, even if Sicilian gastronomy, as I have already intimated in Chapter 2, was probably made unique exactly through those exchanges brought from the foreign powers, which throughout the centuries ruled the island.

4.5 Physiology and metaphors of a volcano

Mount Etna, *Muncibeddu* (Mongibello, beautiful mountain) in Sicilian or simply *a' Muntagna* (the mountain), is one of the most active volcanoes in the world. It is the largest volcano in Europe and it is the highest mountain on the island (about 3000m).

People in Catania are very aware of Mount Etna's presence, both as a volcano and as a mountain. It is a hiking, skiing and picnic destination for families and friends on Sundays or on national holidays. It is also famous for its mushroom and chestnut seasons and people can go there to pick them. People seek 'genuine traditional cuisine' in Etna's eateries and restaurants because they serve wild lamb, wild boar, game, and homemade pasta. Etna also provides a refuge from the summer heatwaves. It is quite common to escape the city and its extremely hot sleepless nights, driving up to the villages, for an al fresco dinner and to try and cool down.

Carmelo Musumeci, one of my greengrocer informants, was the first to impart the common belief concerning the power of the volcano, which is that it affects the quality of the produce.

You know all our fruit has a lot of vitamins, it comes from the sun, from the soil. Try these apples. They grow on the slopes of Etna. They have the volcano inside, not like the tasteless stuff you get in

the North.

In this passage, Carmelo has touched some of the main themes surrounding the relationship with the landscape in Catania. The mighty entities, Etna and the sun, make the land fertile, and are considered a source of goodness and well-being. Even vitamins, a notion belonging to modern nutritional science, are related to the alchemy between the volcano and the sun. Quality of life is directly connected with the climate and the soil, because people are believed to take on the power of what they eat. This is because of the actual physical incorporation of food (Fischler, 1988), but is also related to the symbolic meaning attributed to Mount Etna.

Carmelo explained why he decided to come back to Catania after migrating to the North. The landscape is so important that it drove him to decide to stay in Sicily, although he could have had a better economic status elsewhere. He explained he earned less money, but he did not care, because every day going back home, he could drive along the coast toward the foothills of the volcano and feel happy. He said:

This land is tricky. It is so beautiful that you always want to come back. You too, after your research, you will see. You will have a tie to Catania and to its volcano. You will always want to come back. That's why we have so many foreigners living here.

The power of the volcano is embodied by the people living in Catania and by the produce, descending from Etna down to the market and it creates a bond with them. Many of the fruit and vegetable varieties grown on the volcano have darker colours than those grown in the rest of Italy. At the market, vendors used to tell me that this is because of minerals, which are present in a high quantity in the soil around Etna. In Carmelo's words:

The lava soil is dark, fine. Sometimes it is almost black. It is a rich soil and food grown on it tastes better. It is better for your health. You see the cauliflower! Here it is dark purple, if you go to the North you will get only the plain white ones. The taste is different here. It is because we have the sea, the mountains, the volcano. We

have everything.

So too, do certain unusual behaviours find their explanation in the volcano's magnetic power. Extravagant episodes which occurred during my fieldwork found their justification in the destabilising magnetic presence of the volcano. On my first hot day in Catania, for example, a man stepped inside the fountain close to the market. People had to call the police in order to ask him to get out of it. The people's comments were the ones I normally hear in this city: "the volcano makes people crazy", "the heat hits the head and makes you a fool". Heat and the volcano are common explanations of the local extravaganzas. Irrational behaviour finds its motivation and becomes accepted within the market.

It is quite clear that many people in Catania 'feel' the volcano, as they reported. Mount Etna is always connected to words such as energy, heat, fire, power, restlessness, passion. Carmelo went on with his account, describing how Etna acts on a person's mood and personality, and it is worthwhile reporting it in his own words.

We are passionate people, you can see that. We have fire inside. Northerners are dead inside. We are fire, you see. You feel it here, too. When the mountain is erupting, we all feel it. We are all restless. It's like a stream under your skin. We have the energy of the volcano. We feel the volcano. It is a magnet. It changes our way of perceiving things.

One particular statement easily reminds us what two English ladies wrote about their journey around Italy in 1859. Speaking about the inhabitants of the area, they state:

[t]o mention eruptions and earthquakes, only makes them add, "No spectacle in the world is so grand as her flaming lava; her convulsions also supply our cravings for deep emotions; all the poetry left with us comes from her" (Lowe, 1859:118)

The uncontrollable wilderness of Mount Etna makes people passionate, lively, irrational and emotional. Following the same line, I can place the

subsequent episode. One day upon arriving at the market I told Marco, my main informant among the fishmongers, about my sleepless night and he answered:

Of course. You felt the volcano, it is normal. Etna is erupting at the moment. Everyone is more restless. It is easier to have fights when we all feel like that. I am very conscious of it. When I drive home and I see Etna, I tell her: 'Be quiet, madame'. - *and he laughed.*

In Catania this type of discourse is very common and just as evident as when English people talk about the weather (Fox 2004), the Catanese would mention Etna and its influence on them, especially using expressions related to passion, heat and temper.

It is clear from this ethnographic material that Etna contributes to rendering the landscape unique. It differentiates Sicily from the north of Italy, due to the peculiar energy provided by the volcano. These beliefs find their roots in antiquity. To demonstrate this I avail myself of contributions, borrowed from mythology and literature. The fiery mountain was already depicted as fascinating, scary and generous. As Chester (1985) remarks in his book *Mount Etna. The anatomy of a volcano*:

Poetic description of Etna's activity go back as far as Pinder (522-422BC) who states "where out pure springs of unapproachable fire are vomited from the inmost depths: in the daytime the lava streams pour forth a lurid rush of smoke; but in the darkness a red rolling flame sweepeth rocks with uproar to the wide deep sea" (*Ibid*:22).

For the Greeks it was the shelter of Hephaestus, the Greek god of fire and volcanoes, the blacksmith of the gods (Ciaceri, 2007). Horden and Purcell (2000) write about Sicily and the volcano, recalling the ancient view of Etna as "gate of hell":

In his Dialogues, Gregory the Great created a Christianized topography locating Sicily both in the heart of the perilous communications of the Mediterranean and in intimate communication with the nether world (Boesch Gajano 1988). In his time, sailing to Sicily was a vividly felt metaphor for death and perdition, since Etna was so palpably a gate of Hell (Gregory, Dialogues, 4.36.8-9). (*Ibid*:444)

The volcano's mythology, still vivid in Catania and at *La Pescheria*, pervades a tradition of travel writings which dates back two hundred years or more. Already Brydone (1775) wrote about the 'obstinate attachment of the people to this mountain' (*Ibid*: 350) and he wonders why

all his terrors have not been able to drive them away from him: although he sometimes chastises; yet, like an indulgent parent, he mixes such blessings along with his chastisements, that their affections can never be estranged; for at the same time that he threatens with a rod of iron, he pours down upon them all the blessing of the age of gold (*Ibid*:350)

Despite the evident romanticisation of this landscape, this account is useful in introducing the counterpoint specifically related to the volcano: fertility and death, blessing and destruction. The volcano provides nourishment and richness on one hand, and a great 'spectacle' on the other. Again myth and reality are intertwined and Catania, as much as Sicily, is considered fecund and fertile, thanks to the volcano and the sea, both dangerous and untamed entities. On the one hand, these fearful powers make the island rich and prosperous; on the other hand this follows an idea of nature that can nourish and destroy at the same time. The ambivalence is pervasive, it is about fight and respect; challenge and fear.

For Catania Etna is a blessing and a threat, its "bane and its benefactor" (De Quatrefages, quoted in Dennis & Murray 1864:389). Tuzet (1955) describes the volcano as a "living antithesis" (*'une vivante antithèse'*, *Ibid*:255), which carries with it all the twofold themes of life: death and fertility, snow and fire (*Ibid*:255).

Less romantic approaches to Mount Etna also wonder why people decided to keep the settlements so close to the volcano, despite being destroyed several times and these features regard as much Catania as the whole Etna region (Chester et al., 1985:352). However Chester finds the reason for the attachment to Catania's location in the prosperity of this spot

these advantages would have included its established role as commercial and transport focus of the agriculturally most prosperous part of the highly productive Etna region, its functions as a port, and (not least) trade and industry. (*Ibid*:352)

Volcanologists point out that volcanic soils are amongst the most fertile lands in the world and they are intensively cultivated (Dibben 2008).

All these contributions highlight the dualism pervading the depiction of the volcano, which is considered a symbol of fertility and prosperity because of its wilderness, making the surrounding land fertile, but is also a dangerous and unpredictable presence, carrying a power of destruction and also affecting people's moods and attitudes. This power of transformation recalls Arens's (1989) conceptualisation of 'transformative capacity', in which the view of power is culturally constructed on the basis of ideas about nature, often linked to 'extra-human agency' (*Ibid*: XV).

Many people at the market explained the relevance of the volcano in the city's identity and in its history. Mount Etna is definitely the best metaphor to understand this city. It has destroyed the city many times, but it has also made its surroundings more fertile. In the words of a market vendor:

"Catania was destroyed 7 times and 7 times built exactly on the same spot. If an earthquake or an eruption would destroy it again, we will build it again in the same place." Salvatore is very proud and does not understand why I am so surprised. I ask why and he answers: "Because it is a very special place. It is like ... magic".

This "magical" spot between the volcano and the sea marks the city's location. The city and the market itself pay a tribute to the fertility myth of the volcano. Looking more closely at how the wilderness of Mount Etna is staged or talked about at the market, the volcano stands for what is not polluted by modernisation, as Placido described on many occasions. His remark about the pleasure he could get picking mushrooms on the volcano after fishing in the afternoon is explicative of his vision.

My ideal day is one like today. The night fishing at sea, the day in

the woods. I finish at the market and I go home, have lunch, then up to Etna to collect porcini⁷³. It's the contact with nature. People can be dirty but nature is clean.

Mount Etna is beyond corruption. The uncontaminated wilderness of the volcano provides an idea of nature which resists the pollution of human beings, the world pollution. It is perceived as a separate environment, just as the vendors sitting next to the fountain at the entrance of the market seem to belong to a different category of vendors.

As I have shown the bond between the city and the volcano is indissoluble. Dennis and Murray (1864) wrote a travel guidebook of Sicily, in which they describe the city as made of lava:

The very substance which once ravaged her plains has its own decomposition covered them with exuberant fertility, and on all sides the material of destruction is turned to the purposes of ornament and utility. The streets are paved with lava; the churches, palaces, and houses are all built of lava; the very decorations and even furniture of the dwellings are often of lava; while it is only through the lava that the inhabitants can reach the springs that supply them with water. The city, indeed, appears to be a direct product of the volcano, and is worthy of being the capital of a district that has been so fatally endowed (*Ibid*:389).

Catania appears to be made by the possibility to transform destruction into opportunity, death into life. The volcano makes Catania rich and more fecund. The mountain did lavish the city in the past with its lava. The city was destroyed but the volcanic eruption made the soil more fertile. My informants provided a description very close to Brydone's (1775):

[...] so that this wonderful mountain at the same time produces every necessity and every luxury in life. The first region covers their tables with all the delicacies that the earth produces; the second supplies them with game, cheese, butter, honey; it not only furnishes wood of every kind for building their ships and houses, it is likewise an inexhaustible store of excellent fuel; the third region, with its ice and snow, keeps them fresh and cool during the heat of summer, so this contributes equally to keeping them warm and

73 Porcini is the Italian word for wild mushrooms, belonging to the category of Boletus.

comfortable during the cold of winter. (*Ibid*: 348-349)

4.6 The sea in between

Catania, like all cities facing the Mediterranean⁷⁴, has a very close relationship to the sea. The bond to the sea is as strong as the one to the volcano. As I have already mentioned, fish is the primary reason for customers to shop at the market. The crucial location of the two squares selling fish, Piazza Pardo and Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto, informs the centrality of fish within the market. “*Oggi avemu u mari*” (Today we have the sea) shouts a fisherman in Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto. “*A boutique do mari*” (the boutique of the sea) yells a fishmonger in Piazza Pardo. Fishermen and fishmongers shout the freshness of their fish, their shouts recalling the closeness to the sea. The claim of freshness and genuinity is typical of markets in general (Téhoueyres 2007).

However the fishermen bring attention to their role within the market, just by screaming “Today we have the sea”: they bring the sea to the market. The fishmongers on the other hand transform the sea into a boutique. They both act as mediator but their “transformative capacity” (Aren, 1989:XV) differs.

The type of fish, what is sold and the way it is sold contribute to representing different ideas of the sea. When it comes to the local fishermen, fish arrives at the market primarily from the nearby harbour. In the case of the fishmongers, it is bought at the wholesale markets around Catania.

Fishermen never miss an occasion to boast their more direct relation to the sea. This highlights once again the difference between them and the fishmongers, who have a mediated experience of the sea. At *La Pescheria* fishermen define themselves in opposition to fishmongers. Their aim is to stress

⁷⁴ In this thesis the word “Mediterranean” will be used to indicate the actual sea. However, it is not used to depict characteristics or similar features in what is called the Mediterranean area. I believe this notion is problematic as it is very often romanticised in the literature. It will not be used to describe an assumed shared culture.

the difference between facing the waters and just selling fish. When I first asked Placido to describe his job, he was reluctant and he did not know what to talk about. We were in the fishermen's square at the market and, after hesitating, he invited me on the boat. His job was on the boat. The actual site where the fishermen think about themselves as such is not the market, but rather the sea. Fishermen fish. They never spend too much time talking about prices or customer services. They could have complained about the tolls or the market arrangements, but they never placed emphasis on their selling techniques; what they did want to explain to me were the fishing techniques and their abilities in the waters. As Pino, one fisherman from Placido's crew, says:

The fish sells itself. You don't need to do much. If you fish, you just need to come to the market, put it in a bucket. People see it. It's fresh. Just caught.

Even if in the market context they are selling fish, they don't consider themselves as merchants, and they don't want to look as such. Their informal outfit with no aprons and no caps makes them easily recognisable as fishermen. They don't want to look like fishmongers, but to distinguish themselves from the fishmongers. A customer can easily recognise the fishermen, the ones who were out in the deep seas during the dark night, fighting against natural elements and yet able to come back to the land with a prey.

This is also one of the reasons for which they opposed the changes introduced at the market. During September 2009, a new policy tried to homogenise the way vendors looked and how fish was displayed and sold (see Chapter VI). Having the same kind of counter as the fishmongers would mean transforming the fishermen into sellers, from men of the sea to mere men of the market. This was unacceptable for all of them - it didn't respect their profession and their identity. The resistance to change was not only a resistance towards changing their representation of nature in favour of a more hygienic one, but it stood for their identity as fishermen. Changing the display and their outfit meant changing the way they live their identity. Transforming them in ordinary

vendors would make their job ordinary.

At the market, the rhetoric of the confrontation with and the struggle against nature is endorsed by the fishermen's way of displaying their catch and performing its sale. Fishermen arrive later at the market from the harbour and they proudly place the fish buckets on the floor. At this point they re-enact the fishing. Fish is fished again from the bucket with a skimmer. They lift the fish from the buckets as they lifted the net from the sea to the boat. It looks like they fish it again from the buckets for the customers. Height is important once again, because from the square floor they elevate the fish to the customer. They are the ones to bring the fish up to the customers. Even illegal fishermen seem to have the right to sell their catch directly without institutional interference, their permission to sell comes from the relationship to the sea.

Placido's son, Gaetano Giuffrida, is twenty years old and has already spent half of his life on his father's boat. He explained to me with unrestrained enthusiasm how he could forecast the expansion of their activities, which is what he desires most. In the past, he refused a job opportunity as a harbour employee because of his zest for fishing. He loves fishing and sometimes even goes back to the sea in the afternoon, after lunch. He despises selling fish at the market, finding it boring.

My father tried to give me a different future. He obliged me to attend high school, but every day after school I would hurry towards the harbour. Once I finished school, I chose the sea, you see.- he says - I had no doubt. Here I am free, in contact with nature. I am outside. I would die locked up in an office all day. Look around you, dottoressa. This is my office. Beautiful, isn't it?

The idea of the landscape is intended as everything that surrounds a person, what one's eyes can see, the horizon is mentioned as a good enough reason for choosing a risky, hard job. Gaetano indicated the view, just like his father did; from the boat, we could see the volcano and the city, still sleeping at its feet.

Jacopo Russo, another fisherman in his twenties, confirmed what Gaetano said, recalling the moment in which he became aware of his life choice as a fisherman. Jacopo was in Spain fishing, when he received a call from his family. They asked him to come back to Catania, because one of their relatives managed to get him a job at the newly refurbished airport. Jacopo told me it was a great opportunity, well-paid, but it meant loading and unloading luggage all day. He went on with his memory of the day in which he had to take a life changing decision:

I thought about it. I was married at the time and we already had a son. Then, I looked at the lower deck. We caught I don't know how many swordfish that day. I calculated that my percentage of the catch was a month's salary at the airport and I decided I would not leave my job as a fisherman. It is a hard job, risky as well. What if one month you never have such a lucky day? But it is worth trying and not having to deal with stupid superiors. Here, you see, I have to deal with these losers (pointing at Gaetano), but I can tell them to fuck off, whenever I like, and they don't fire me.

The association between nature, landscape and freedom seem to be pervasive in the fishermen's world view. These young fishermen have clarified their relationship to the sea, which gives them freedom and power.

But the sea for fishermen is not a generic term: it is their own environment and they make distinctions. On the fishing vessel fishermen speak often of the difference between the local familiar sea – the one enclosed within Catania's gulf – and the deep waters⁷⁵. The small local Mediterranean fish, such as anchovies and sardines, is the easiest to catch in the city's gulf. Catania's bay stands, in fact, for the sea that fishermen perceive as domestic, familiar, not dangerous. This is clearly expressed by Placido when comparing local fishing to the one carried out in high seas. While driving the fishing vessel back to the harbour, he said to me:

⁷⁵ The information about fishing was gathered through participant observation on a local fishing vessel. I spent few months fishing with Placido and his crew. My experience is relies mainly on their narratives, but I also interviewed other fishermen in Catania and Brucoli's harbours.

You see, this landscape is familiar to me. I was a kid when I started fishing here. I am never scared here. This sea is like home to me. You see Catania and the volcano. You recognise easily where you are and you don't get lost. It is like home.

The view from the boat when drift-netting in Catania's gulf is indeed very specific. It is possible to recognise the volcano, and when getting closer to the shore Catania stands out as the biggest city on the coast for miles. This bay is a comfortable place for Placido and the other local fishermen, close to home and less dangerous than the high seas. According to the fishermen, here in the gulf, it is possible to get used to the sea and to become less scared. Placido remarked that even I had become accustomed to this sea.

In the gulf you get more used to it. Like you, do you remember the first time on the boat? (we both laugh) You were more scared and you felt sick. Now you are trained.

Placido does not enjoy going too far from the shore, he says “I don't like to go far away. I like to fish like this. In this area.” His attitude provoked the mocking of the younger crew members, who continuously teased him.

He is scared (*Si scanta in Sicilian*). For him fishing means this [indicating the sea around the boat]. He doesn't like deep waters. A few weeks ago we went for tunas. We were away for three days and Placido never slept on the boat.

Placido perceives the Gulf of Catania as an extension of the city, a place where he feels safe and at home. It is still the risky sea, but it is somehow domesticated, tamed, thus safer. The fisherman's activities are in this way normalised, the working hours are still tough, but more compatible with the family life. He used to say

I like my home, I like to go back every night. It is much better to go fishing close to Catania, then go back home. This way is just like for other people going to work and being back for lunch.

Domesticating the sea close to the city has a very important meaning. Fishermen considered trawling and fishing in deeper waters as more dangerous, for many reasons. They use sophisticated equipment, which is not easy to

handle, and it requires expensive maintenance. What's more, it compels much longer periods of time on the boat. As Placido explained to me:

I like to go to bed in my bed. When we go for swordfish or tuna, we remain off-shore for 15 or even 20 days.

Placido here introduces the two most prestigious local species: tuna (tonno in Italian, *tunnina* in Sicilian), and swordfish (*pesce spada* in Italian, *pisci spata* in Sicilian). These two big migratory species are the most challenging quarry with the highest economic value. They are seen as a risk since the local fleet has to invest more money and time to fish them. Local fishing implies less commitment of time and financial resources: it is considered safer than activities such as trawling or tuna and swordfish fishing.

In the past tuna and swordfish in Sicily were fished according to specific sets of rules. Fishing swordfish in the Messina strait was, for instance, associated to hunting, as swordfish are predatory fish, considered wild (Collet 1984). Collet (1984) also highlights that fishing swordfish was traditionally regarded not as a profession, but as art, an art in which the power struggle between man and nature was expressed. This fight was surrounded by rituals and magic, just as it was for the tuna fishing in Sicily.

Tuna fishing in Sicily has a long history (Longo and Brett 2012). According to my informants the *tonnaroti* (local name for tuna fishermen) had a different status among the fishermen. They were the ones conducting the *mattanza* inside the Sicilian *tonnare*. A *tonnara* is a trapping system, designed to capture the migrating tunas before or after spawning (Longo and Brett 2012).

As the main component of the trap, it is made up by many camere or 'chambers' that divide the large structure into multiple squared pens that capture, contain and move fish towards the final harvesting (*Ibid*:210)

The final stage is called *mattanza*, from the Spanish *matar* (to slaughter) (*Ibid*:210), and it used to occur in the *camera della morte* (chamber of death). This practice is not currently in use; the only operating *tonnara* is the one in

Favignana, but it has become mainly a tourist attraction.

It was within this context of ritual that tuna and swordfish were caught. Nowadays the industrialisation and technological modernisation of fishing has changed the meaning attributed to this activity (Mondardini Morelli 1990a; Mondardini Morelli 1990b), as much as industrial production of meat has changed our relationship with animals (Fitzgerald 2010). New generations of local fishermen push the boundaries of this significance, and I am about to show how.

Catching a tuna is still considered an event, something to celebrate. At the market itself, the special status of swordfish and tuna is confirmed not only by their economic value, but also by the way the fish are displayed. As I already mentioned, these two species are exposed as trophies, as they symbolise the victory of the fishermen over the wild, their triumph over the sea. Both fishes are displayed on a marble counter, like meat, cut in order to highlight each section, to show the consistency and the colour of the flesh. They are elevated to the same status of meat and they are also considered just as nutritious. In a nutshell, they assume a higher position on the marble counter.

Swordfish heads are placed on the stalls with their swords clearly visible to the customers; the large heads of these species seem to look right into the customer's eyes, with their mouths open and the fear of death in their eyes. They are on a higher plane in comparison to other fish, elevated also in a physical sense, placed in such a dramatic way that they recall hunting trophies or wild boar heads displayed in restaurants or hunting lodges.

Fishermen feel that fish are a gift which they have the right to collect if they are brave enough to face the sea. It is a very similar idea to what Hell (1996) stresses when dealing with the concept of wild in hunting practice throughout Europe.

In southern European countries and in the major part of France,

hunting is associated with the notion of free right of gathering. Hunters reject any idea of reasoned management of the wild fauna, considering that game 'grows on its own'; they prefer the beating method, which is described as an ancient and traditional hunting custom. In this hunting as 'gathering', everything is done to maintain a wide separation between the domestic and the wild. (*Ibid*:207)

The parallel between fishing and hunting is very important, as both activities happen in an environment that is considered wild and dangerous; they are both male dominated activities and they relate to the separation between domesticated and wild space. In the fishermen's square there is a dramatic vision of blood and dirt. Here, nature is lived as uncontrollable and dangerous, but the presence of fishermen in this square symbolises their victory over the unknown sea. The function of the fishermen is to “domesticate the wild”, and to do so they need to “draw it into the boundaries of the known, to 'fix' it into a (hopefully) secure state. (Anderson 1997:481)”. As one of Placido's regular customers pinpointed, while buying some tuna that Gaetano had caught that morning: “The sea is dangerous, unknown, full of perils. It is still the sea in which Ulysses got lost”.

According to Gaetano and Jacopo, fishing tuna and other big migratory species is not only much more adventurous than fishing sardines, but also more remunerative. As they journey to the market, there is a big discussion about how the fish was caught, who caught what, how big it is. There is normally a quarrel over the weight of the exemplar: heavier according to the fisherman and lighter according to the fishmonger. Gaetano convinced his father to invest a life-time savings in buying a new boat, fully equipped for tuna fishing. Placido's response to the son's ambition is ambivalent: on one hand he is proud of him carrying on “the art of fishing” (*l'arte della pesca*, Placido's words); but on the other hand he fears loss of capital, due to riskier operations.

I remember being young. When you are young, you tend to make false steps, to go beyond your possibilities. Fare il passo più lungo della gamba [literally making a step longer than your leg] is always dangerous.

Gaetano's vision was not impaired by his father's worries and he went on telling me about his dream.

It is going to be big. You will have a place to sleep there. Because if we take you with us for tunas [*per tonni, meaning fishing tunas*] we are away for week at least. Will you cope? It is hard stuff, but it is my dream. I don't want to keep doing the same thing here in the gulf my entire life. I want more money and more fun.

4.9 Conclusion

As I have described, food is displayed, sold and bought according to certain very specific categories: wild, local, and foreign. I have also underlined the contrapuntal nature of the landscape representation: the duality of the volcano and the sea. The counterpoint plays constantly along two main lines: the wild, and the domestic. It is only within this idea of landscape that it is possible to understand the role played by locality.

At the market, goods are grouped and classified following a specific hierarchy: the wild, the domestic or local, the foreign. The wild stakes a more prestigious position: it is rare, precious, and spontaneous. In the case of fish, this type is more difficult to catch, while plants are to be sought and collected. Wilderness needs to be challenged and transformed into domestic, but not totally. A small portion of wild products is still displayed next to the local and foreign goods, but kept separate from these. This constitutes a reinforcement of the value of the domestic and local; abundance is everywhere on display because food scarcity has been conquered despite the difficulties and in the face of challenges.

Whilst the adoption of the word 'territory' seems to imply an element of human intervention, the word 'landscape' with all its romantic connotations of a natural world seems to infer more of a gift, something bequeathed to mankind. This aspect is very relevant to my data, in which the landscape is looked at as

'nature', 'natural': it will always be the same and the sea and the volcano are too powerful to be changed by men. They will be eternal, no matter what humans will do. The illusion that the landscape provides relieves humans from any responsibility for their actions, since their consequences are not perceived as endangering their beloved island. The wilderness, filtered through social practices at the market, testifies to the power of the landscape, of nature, without taking into account any environmental concerns. It would be a mistake to think that everyone in Catania shares this point of view. Many groups of young activists, of left-wing tradition, engage in a struggle against this kind of view, but it is a political issue.

The interrelation between wild and domestic can be extended outwards from the market context to Sicily itself. In Placido's words: "Sicily is hell and heaven at the same time". It is a fertile island and Catania lies in a both blessed, and threatened spot, between the sea and the volcano. As I have previously shown, this duality is penetrating the whole representation of the landscape. "This island is like a curse. You hate it, you go away but you can't forget it" said Placido before I left the island.

The identity of the island in the words of the vendors: prosperous, fertile, blessed, rich, difficult, beloved, hated. The uniqueness of Sicily provides an explanation for centuries of invasions and for the perception of threat from the outside. In the words of a fishmonger: "Everyone has come to exploit Sicily. From the Greeks onwards. We are Sicilians, we have more rights than anyone else".

In the words of the people at the market, it appears that they conquered the right to inhabit the area, because they took the risk to live in a dangerous place. Another vendor takes that point further and explains: "We meet the challenge to live on this island. We deserve the right to take advantage of what it gives us".

My informants picture themselves as both challenging and respecting nature. The island is perceived as physically separate, but also always tied to an extraterritorial power, threatened and blessed within these dynamics between inside and outside.

The celebration of locality and abundance is staged articulating a discourse in which wild and domestic continuously interact with each other. The idea of *paesaggio* (landscape) provides a useful frame within which to contextualize these notions. As the words of an older vendor summarised:

The landscape (*paesaggio*) is special, unique. You don't find it anywhere else in Italy. That's why you are here. That's why all these people with cameras come here every day. They know you can't have this type of market in the north of Italy.

The Pescheria in Catania, though proud of being recognised as “traditional” and “historical”, does not share this kind of political agenda, but it does share the emphasis on locality, attributing a different meaning to 'local'. The celebration of locality is expressed through a powerful bond with the *paesaggio*, the landscape. Domesticating this landscape, at least partially, means conquering the right to be on the island and this process is a very specific “political activity embedded within concrete human practices” (Anderson 1997:481).

The cosmology of the market discloses implicit meanings underlying the use of space. Consequently, any urban interventions to this space do not permit viewing it as a *tabula rasa* (De Certeau 1984), because they don't only regulate the market, but interfere in a direct, or rather a less mediated, relation to food. “[R]elocation” and I would add new regulations about hygiene “mean[...] the end of markets as lived environments with forms of cultural intimacy that defy the surveillance of the state and the international economy (Herzfeld 2006:132)”

The progressive rationalisation of the market space carries an idea of

order, which may conflict with local ideas related to food and more generally to the meanings attached to significant places. These places' voices do not just speak, they involve all the senses and this chapter is meant to be an introduction to the narrative of this space.

Chapter V

The Market Practice: Sensing, Interacting, and Sharing

Wednesday 21.05.2008

I went to the market around 10. It was quiet. [...] I asked for half-a-kilo of anchovies (*alici* in Italian, called *masculini* in the local dialect). [...]

The vendor was very kind, he smiled at me. [...] He offered to clean them for me and I agreed in order to spend more time at the stall.

“Anything else?” “No, thanks. I come to the market every day, because I'm doing some research about food in Catania.” I said it in one breath. It was the first time I had told my story to the people of the market.

He answered “What are you looking for?” “Food habits in general” “So you are a spy” I laughed, embarrassed. It was what I had expected, but I felt myself blushing anyway.

“No, no. I just collect stories.”

He smiled and gave me my anchovies. “ €4 for you. A little discount, because you are going to be a regular customer [cliente fissa]. Why don't you come early in the morning? We are not very busy and I can tell you a bit more. I can also tell you about my tricks. Come around 8-9 in the morning. The best days are Monday and Tuesday. We are less busy.” “I will. Thank you very much.” [Extract from fieldnotes]

That was the day I met Marco Longo, who belonged to one of the most renowned families of fishmongers and who became one of my main sources of information (and fish providers, of course). From this excerpt it is already possible to infer two main rules of the market: regular customers get special treatment and vendors use tricks. This chapter deals exactly with this special treatment reserved for regular customers and the tricks vendors and buyers

deploy. What kind of knowledge and expertise is required in order to carry out the transaction between buyer and seller in a competent way? This the main question, which I am about to address.

Geertz's analysis of Sefrou's bazaar (1979) clearly addresses the way in which people acquire information. He emphasises how important knowing was within the Moroccan market. The bazaar is regarded as an environment where information is “generally poor, scarce, maldistributed, inefficiently communicated, and intensively valued”(Ibid:124). This applies to *La Pescheria* as well, where the sharing of information follows distinctive rules and where the labelling system is very poor. Geertz successfully captures the way “knowledge is transmitted, communicated, disseminated, or exchanged through social relations” (Dilley 2010:167).

The concept of practice is useful at this point in order to illustrate the inclusion of a set of bodily techniques, which gets left out when focusing solely on words and knowledge, and to give priority to the intellectual dimension of social life (Brant 2008; Chau 2008). I aim to take into account this practice which is valued as a constituent of competence by insiders at the market. In the case of *La Pescheria*, competence is acquired through the verbal interactions between seller and buyer, but it is also related to the “social sensorium”, borrowing Chau's definition (2008:489). At the market, it is essential to learn how to move in a "sensorially rich social space" (Ibid:489). Place, which is a major focus of my work, is indeed deeply interconnected with sensory perception. The landscape is constructed also through narratives, which

[...] are not just told with words; they can be told and heard with senses other than speech and hearing. Such narratives can be expressed through the sight of a rock that grew, through certain smells, in the way the wind blows, or the taste of a mango. (Rodman 2003:214)

Stoller (1989) uses the term '*tasteful ethnography*', to emphasise that dealing with food means:

not only investigate kinship, exchange, and symbolism, but also describe with literary vividness the smells, tastes, and textures of the land, the people, and the food" (1989:29).

Herzfeld (2001) suggests that senses are the primary 'arena of agency' "Thus, the view that perception is conditioned by culture, while unexceptionable in itself, does not suffice (Ibid:243)".

The performance of *Sicilianess* takes the shape of a synaesthetic opera, in which different actors play their role: acting, singing, sensing. The reciprocal orchestration of this piece is synaesthetic and kinaesthetic, marrying senses and movement together. It is exactly in the field of this cultural perception that one moves inside the market.

In order to portray knowledge, bodily practice, and sensory experience, I will borrow from Dilley (2010), whilst being aware that we are dealing with very different types of knowledge. She reflects on how, while doing her fieldwork among weavers in Senegal, she was allowed to undergo a proper apprenticeship:

Not knowing the appropriate ways to behave for a novice anthropologist is a commonplace experience during fieldwork, and this problem is highlighted when trying to learn a new set of body techniques. But rarely are such ways of incompetence rendered by those who work with as anything more than a 'cultural' mismatch. [...] Successful fieldwork hinges on a realignment of that mismatch over time as the fieldworker progressively assimilates the appropriate body techniques of his or her host community [Ibid:176].

Despite the difference between a food market and a community of weavers, this passage introduces a very significant perspective, when addressing the bodily techniques she needed to acquire in this specific context. Within the food market, apprenticeship is not formalised, but the use of this term refers to the idea of food as craft and to the combination of bodily participation and cognitive knowledge. Apprenticeship implies participation (Lave & Wenger 1991). "Participation is always based on situated negotiation

and renegotiation of meaning in the work” (*Ibid*:51). This way of looking at learning overcomes the dichotomy between body and mind, “between cerebral and embodied activity” (*Ibid*: 52). Learning in the form of apprenticeship implies acquiring first hand-experience and expertise (Marchand 2010).

A similar ‘apprenticeship’ was apparent during my own fieldwork. Learning to attain competence in 'the world of consumption' proved to be a multi-faceted process, transcending the mere activities of 'shopping' and 'buying'. My fieldnotes show how I gradually learnt to experience food through the senses, recognise the local products and name them appropriately in Sicilian, having friendships at the market means being competent within this context. Competence comprises the senses but one needs to go beyond and learn who to trust. Thus buying is not only about goods, it is about forging social relationships.

This chapter takes the market as its starting point and looks at the action of buying as a multi-dimensional process, which extends from its sourcing and its significance to the provisioning. I consider buying, cooking and eating food as actions which involve, in diverse degrees of directness, the market and its organisation. The process of buying food, especially at a market, involves the senses and this constitutes a fertile terrain of investigation for the social sciences (Chau 2008; Classen 1997; Geurts 2002). Anthropological literature has highlighted how vision is predominant in Western culture (Fabian 2002; Herzfeld 2001; Stoller 1989) and in my ethnography it is definitely more talked of than the other senses. Sight is the first sense to be involved in the interaction between vendor and buyer through the displays, however I also account for the other senses, which are not very often verbalised, but still contribute to the experience of the market.

I then analyse the interaction between buyer and vendor, zooming in on the actual local shopping practice. Here I draw on De La Pradelle's analysis of shopping for food at a Carpentras market (1994). She shows how successful

shopping requires a very specific body of expertise. In the case of *La Pescheria*, the customer has to demonstrate his/her belonging to the category of the *sperto* customers, the ones who are able to perform distrust without being disrespectful. This discussion is placed in the context of cheating, screwing and being smart in Catania. The practices are crucial to performing smartness. I also introduce codes of behaviour, related to friendship and honour, which have already featured prominently in anthropological literature about Sicily (Blok 1974; Gambetta 1988; Ginsborg 1998; Renda 2000; Schneider and Schneider 2003; Triolo 1993). The third sphere of practice concerns the local gastronomy, which occupies a different space within the market, an idea of place and territory which is shared by the majority of local people. I also discuss how the ability to recognise quality food is highly valued during social interactions at the market. Here the cooking of Sicilian dishes provides the key to entering into the niche of regular customers, who are regarded as experts. This latter dimension comprises my experience of conviviality, in which eno-gastronomic knowledge is involved and this will shed light on social distinction through taste (Bourdieu 1984), and gaining membership to the bourgeois⁷⁶ gourmand community.

All these elements converge into a body of competence which makes the interaction between vendor and buyer culturally appropriate. Social interaction at the market takes the form of an apprenticeship, in which the person moves from ignorance to competence. While Geertz (1979) focused on the complex system of kinship relations characterising the Moroccan market, my ethnographic work focuses on my own training within the market, providing an overview of the diverse competences required to achieve ‘insiderhood’ at *La Pescheria*.

⁷⁶ I avoid the English term middle class, since it is not appropriate for the Italian social stratification. I use bourgeoisie as a translation of the Italian “borghesia”, which was the term used by my informants.

5.1 Sensing: the good, the fresh and the beautiful

The experience of the market is synaesthetic, it is a totality of smells, sounds, consistencies, textures, and tastes, which follows customers home, into their kitchens and finally into their mouths. Le Breton (2007) argues that it would make little sense to isolate one of the senses, because in daily life the phenomenology of perception can only be holistic. He emphasises that it is not the senses that decipher the world, but each individual embedded in a specific history and culture. It is in this sensory *Weltanschauung* that I can place the market and its overwhelming combination of perceptions.

The synaesthetic experience of market has been the focus of Bonanzinga's work on '*soundscapes*' of markets in the Sicilian province towns (2007). In his sensory tour of markets, he highlights the peculiar nature of Sicilian street commerce and its colourful, noisy, smelly, tasty experiential character. Bonanzinga argues that a similar sensory experience characterises all these markets. The term '*soundscape*' derives from Schafer (1994), indicating the totality of the acoustic environment. Hearing is connected with sounds and with the spoken word. Recently anthropologists invited ethnographers not to be deaf to the sound of reality and to engage with it (Samuels et al 2010).

From the very first step towards the market, visitors need to distinguish relevant sounds and separate them from the hum of the crowd, from the butcher's cleavers and the fishermen's scabbards, and finally from the vendors' voices shouting "One Euro, only one Euro" or "One Euro, young lady (*signorina*)". Once the potential customers' attention has been drawn by their shouts, the sellers might add something more, to entice them to stop and engage in social interaction with them. Inside the market, the cries of sellers intensify and vendors hawk their wares loudly. "These artichokes are too beautiful" (*Troppu beddi sti caccocciuli*) cries the young boy at the corner of *via Gisira*; "Good, good!" (*Boni, Boni*) shouts Enrico Caruso showing his melons;

“Beautiful, very beautiful!” (*Beddi, Beddissimi*) screams Antonio Consoli pointing to his crates of tomatoes.

This way of celebrating the quality of the wares is called “*abbanniata, bbanniata, vanniata*” (Bonanzinga 2007:92). *Abbanniare* (or *vanniare*) means ‘to shout the wares’, ‘to announce what the vendor sells to the public’, or simply ‘to shout’. The ‘*vanniata*’ at the Pescheria indicates the vendor's cry to publicize his goods. In a paragraph entitled “*The efficacy of listening*”, Bonanzinga (2007) defines the “*imbonimento*” as “*rendere buono, magnificare qualcosa*” (*Ibid*: 89), which literally means to make something good, to extol or glorify its qualities. The “*imbonimento*” could be translated as the ‘sales pitch’, which identifies who is selling, what they are selling and is used to catch people’s attention.

At the Pescheria fishermen and vendors selling only one type of vegetable shout most intensively. Vendors also shout when announcing the arrival of a new seasonal product. Shouting has multiple functions, exactly as in Bonanzinga's case (2007). It can signal the presence of certain types of goods, such as for artichokes, figs and melons. An important element of the sellers' cries is the provenance of the produce. This concurs with Bonanzinga's (2007) observation: the vendors frequently praise the place of production. Another relevant aim of their banter is to point out the quality of their wares. This involves visual and gustatory description of the products, for example “*Rosse, rosse queste fragole*” (red, red these strawberries) or the already mentioned “*Boni*” (good), “*Beddi*” (beautiful). One sensory code is calling on others: the vendors’ voices stimulate the eyes of the passersby to notice the colours and the beauty of the produce, or even to prefigure the taste of the red strawberries. The vendors themselves allure to the synaesthetic experience of their products.

The *soundscape* varies according to different times during the day and the days of the week: it is at its loudest on Fridays and Saturdays from 11am to 1pm. These are the busiest hours of the week, in which the vendors have to

compete to attract the buyers' attention. The *soundscape* becomes more intense in the fishermen and fishmonger squares – *Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto* and *Piazza Pardo* – in which the competition between the neighbouring stalls is evidenced by cries such as “*Oggi avemu u' mare*” (today we have the sea) or “*Friscu, friscu, pisci friscu*” (fresh, fresh, fresh fish). To summarise, vendors shout so as to provide buyers information about the quality of their wares: their provenance, and their aesthetic and gustatory goodness.

As one might expect, the fishermen's square, which is widely regarded as the wildest area of the market, constitutes its noisiest place. Here fishermen orchestrate a dialogue: they challenge each other, and somehow disparage the competition. Here the fishermen occupy centre stage. The stalls form an oval shape and customers cannot avoid walking close to the stalls when they pass through the square. Each time the pace of a person slows down, or each time one's eyes pause for a bit longer on the fish on display, the fisherman addresses the person shouting the characteristic of his goods. These announcements regard not only the freshness, but also include details that only the fishermen would know. Statements such as “*We fished it two hours ago!*”, “*We fished it in Brucoli's area*” remind the buyers that here they are buying directly from the source. The competition also revolves around the price and this is particularly true for seasonal fish. *Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto* is ineluctably the centre of the market. Here, there are tourists going around taking photographs, looking for the ‘authentic’ experience of a Sicilian market. And there are expert customers, who have enough expertise to recognise fresh fish, dealing with fishermen appropriately so as not to be cheated. Apart from the playful prattle addressed to tourists and their cameras, the *vanniate* (cries) in the square are targeted mainly at the local experts, since the fishermen use the Catanese name to refer to fish: “*Puppo 10€*” (squid 10€), “*Masculini 3€*” (anchovies 3€), “*Saddi 4€*” (sardines 4€) and so. The language of this piece is Sicilian.

The acoustic is relevant, because it is probably the aspect that most

closely reflects the changes occurring at the market. The noise of the market represents the difference between a 'modernised' market and a 'wilder' one. Recently, in Istanbul, a law forbade vendors from shouting in the street market. Stallholders opposed the ban by arguing that it affected their trade. They insist that “shouting is a long-standing market tradition dating back hundreds of years” (Allen 2012). In Weare, a small town in New Hampshire, the regulation for vendors at the farmer's market read “[h]awking is not permitted (shouting prices or shouting about items for sale)” (Weare Summer Farmers Market 2012). Whilst shouting in a traditional market is considered ‘normal’, vendors at an organic farmer's market do not celebrate their goods loudly. According to my informants, the fish market was much louder in the past. “It was busier and the vendors would shout out poems, songs. You could spend a whole day listening to them. Now we are quieter.” comments Giuseppe, while rearranging the anchovies on his counter.

Orality is fundamental at the market. This is also evident in the difference between the written price and the one that vendors shout out or tell their customers. The unwritten price is for Sicilians, or at least for regular customers, for insiders; while the written one is for non-Sicilians. Outsiders and foreigners do not have access to this kind of information. One needs to listen and to understand Sicilian to be a competent buyer at the market. This is particularly true at *Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto*, the loudest spot of the market. Here the spoken word is trusted more than the written one. Here people have to interact with each other, speak up, discuss, and bargain. As Placido, the fisherman, explained

When a man, a man of honour gives his word, it has more value than a signed paper. In the past it was like that. Two men who shook their hands and agreed something had more value than a contract. The written word has always been the one of the higher classes.

The refusal to abide by the written word and the importance of the spoken word seem to be a form of resistance towards outsiders, because orality

is expressed in Sicilian. According to De Certeau (1984) writing

initiates another use, a new way of using that organization, a different functioning. It is therefore necessary to connect its establishment with the virtually immemorial effort to place the (social and/or individual) body under the law of writing (*Ibid*:139).

At the market writing symbolises the law of institutions, in opposition to its internal rules, as coming from above. Written rules are felt to be imposed by an intellectual elite.

Smell has been often associated with social order (Bubandt 1998, Degen 2008). In some ethnographies smell is the privileged sense, which together with taste, is seen as a marker of belonging and of difference (Walmsley 2005). Herzfeld (2001) provides the example of how exotic cooking smells can provoke strong reactions within neighbourhoods.

When approaching the market from a distance, its smell reaches people's nostrils well before getting to the Pescheria. As one approaches the fountain from the direction of Cathedral Square, it is possible to perceive a smell which assumes very different connotations depending on the recipient. During my last visit to the market, it was for me a familiar and almost comforting smell, easily recognizable as the market smell. Not many visitors shared the feeling that I associated with my fieldsite. It is very common to hear people complaining about the Pescheria: "The market is stinky"; "The smell of fish stays with you"; "I cannot go there, the smell is too persistent". Smell is a constant issue of contention at the market. Visitors often say that they do not like the smell of the Pescheria; it remains in the area day and night, despite earnest attempts by the municipality to wash it out each day. It is a mixture of water, meat and fish, especially because many of the trimmings end up on the pavement and during the hot season they start putrefying. According to Bauman (1993), smells are invasive and they can be unsettling for a society obsessed with order. Rationalisation tends to 'clean' public space of smells which could be considered unpleasant, such as the stench of fish.

Once a customer becomes used to the strong smell of meat and fish present at the market, then his sense of smell can be directed to the search for other produce, such as melons, strawberries, peaches and nectarines. Olfactory experience is sought after, and gives information about the ripeness and the goodness of the produce. People lean forward toward the baskets of peaches, to smell them. When it is warm, it is not even necessary to go closer to the produce, because the perfume of summer fruits floats in the air all the time.

As far as sight is concerned, traders highlight the aesthetic value of their goods at every possible occasion. One of the most common cries to attract attention to the colourful produce displayed at the market is “*Talia, talia!*” (Look, look). Customers stop by the stalls when they see beautiful goods, when the merchandise looks good.

Beddu (beautiful in Sicilian) and *lariu* (awful) have an aesthetic value. They describe the visual aspect of food. “*Su troppu beddi*” (They are too beautiful) shouts Salvatore, pointing at his artichokes. The remarks of vendors constantly draw attention to the beauty of the produce. The shining colours of the produce are displayed to catch the buyer's eye. Greengrocers often sprinkle their produce with water to keep it fresh and also to make it look fresher. The visual is not only the most important piece of information present at the market, but it is probably the most democratic one. Everyone can enjoy the wonderful array of a Sicilian market.

Sicilians associate *beddu* (*beautiful*) with *bonu* (*good*). A melon has to meet certain visual criteria: it has to be flawless, with no lumps or bruises, no discolouration, and with a regular shape (not too large, not too small). This is what can be defined as a beautiful or perfect produce.

Beauty is standardised in terms of shape, colour, and size through intensive agriculture (Freidberg 2004). I could argue that just as there is a culturally shaped beautiful body, there is also a culturally appropriate product,

which is considered beautiful, as cosmetic standards of supermarkets and big distribution demonstrate (Freidberg 2004).

Lariu (brutto) can be used to comment on the appearance of produce, but it can also be associated with taste. “*Mi dunasti nu meluni troppo lariu!*”(You gave me an ugly melon) complained a lady to Enrico, referring to her previous purchase. *Lariu* in this case means *cattivo* (bad). She is actually referring to the taste of the melon. If the melon tasted bad, it automatically became ugly as well. Thus, taste is not the only sense experienced at the market. At the market traders and customers often discuss it retrospectively, as we will see later in this chapter when dealing with the practices of Giulia La Rosa. Regulars go back to the stall to give feedback about the quality of their purchase, and this is particularly true as far as taste is concerned.

When it comes to fish, the keyword is not *bonu* -good-, but *friscu* fresh as opposed to *fituso* (dirty, smelly). Only expert customers can assess fish freshness. Here again the crucial aspect of the judgement is visual. I have learnt myself how to look at fish and how to recognise its freshness, thanks to Marco Longo's lectures. Marco, a fishmonger, started teaching me about fish types and qualities once I became a regular customer. Each day he added a little detail to my knowledge and trained me in recognising freshness.

You have to look into the fish's eyes. You see, they should be like this one – Marco says, grabbing a mackerel and holding it closer to me – The skin has to be shiny and firm. This one was caught locally today.

Marco told me, first of all, that expert customers look at the eyes, which should be protruding and not sunken, that the pupils should be shiny and not cloudy. Then the fishermen taught me to pay attention to the colour of the skin, which should also be shiny and firm. Marco then explained that a customer should first look at the goods, and then speak to the vendor.

When you arrive at the stall, you need to look carefully before speaking with the fishmonger or even with the greengrocer. If you

observe, you know what is fresher. You need to train the eyes.
[Marco, fishmonger, fieldwork notes]

What he made clear to me was that observing is not only important from an aesthetic perspective: it can provide the buyer with information necessary to carry out an appropriate transaction. This advice regards how to operate at the market: a competent buyer first looks around and observes the merchandise, then he might stop and ask the vendor.

In the case of fish, another element to be assessed is the firmness of the flesh, which can be ascertained by pressing it with a finger; it should not be soft and the trace of the finger's pressure should not remain on the fish. However, such proof is not normally necessary; it might even be considered inappropriate at the market. Customers are not supposed to handle the fish.

But, as far as other types of produce are concerned, people are in the habit of touching them to help them choose what they want. While the vendor is busy helping a customer, ladies approach the stall and start inspecting the wares on sale. Sometimes they walk away without any interaction with the stallholder. Otherwise they wait, going through what is displayed and on some occasions they might help themselves. It is not unusual for a vendor to interrupt the transaction in course to tell off other customers handling the goods. "Signora, I've almost finished. Do not press the tomatoes and put them back in the crate! They perish easily!" says Carmelo to one of the naughty customers at his stall. Carmelo is known for his patience and good manners. In other instances the conversation might become less friendly, as when a man, approaching Enrico's stall, started fingering kaki fruits (persimmons) to see whether they were ripe enough. "I would bite one if I were in your shoes. You squeeze them so much that if you do not buy them, I'm going to throw them away!" argues Enrico. The man answered in a very resolute tone "This is the market, right? Am I in the wrong place by any chance?" Enrico was red in the face from anger "Yes, but it is not a self-service. You wait for me to finish, then

you will be served. I am not here to waste my money!” “Why should I come to the market if I cannot even touch the produce?” terminates the customer walking out. This passage shows how customers invoke tradition to justify touching the produce⁷⁷.

Another defining element of market practice is the possibility to taste some of the products. Taste, especially in the case of fruit, is very often involved. Customers will try a mandarin or a slice of melon before buying. Vendors offer a sample to people stopping at the stall, to convince them to buy. “Try these oranges” tells me Salvatore, handing me a slice.

As I have shown, the sensory interaction with food displayed at the market is performed in a culturally specific way. However the senses are not enough to make a buyer competent. Social interaction needs to be addressed too, in order to understand how people engage with one another when buying food.

5.2 A respectable lady and her shopping practice

One of the regular customers warned me to be cautious when deciding what to buy at the market. “Do not buy with your eyes closed [*comprare ad occhi chiusi*]” she said “You need to be to be careful every time and every day.” Interacting in a competent way while buying food seemed to me a strenuous goal at the beginning. But after numerous transactions, I gradually learnt to position myself appropriately. My fortuitous encounter with a bourgeois couple at the market provides an apt example of knowledge and competence that appropriately characterises the modalities of communication between vendors and buyers.

It occurred in September 2009 at the Longos' stall, when I started a very

⁷⁷ See following chapter for the representation of tradition within the market.

pleasant conversation about the market with a gentleman, Mr La Rosa, who was waiting for his wife to finish her shopping. That day was a remarkable one for my fieldwork, because it altered my relationships within the market. La Rosa's openness facilitated my progression towards a closer association with the marketeers; it allowed me to take a step further, to be associated with someone respectable and to enter a different circle. What follows are extracts from my fieldnotes, in which I described our interaction and how Mrs Giulia La Rosa and Marco Longo carried out the shopping transaction.

That day Mr La Rosa was waiting by the stall and I presumed he was waiting to be served, but as I asked him, he reassured me

- No, No. I'm waiting for my wife. She is the one in charge of the shopping.– he said indicating a woman in her mid-fifties talking animatedly with Marco Longo. He carried on - I know nothing about fish. but now that I am retired, I come along to the market with my wife. We live very close. It is our morning walk, we come here and we buy everything we need. It's like a ritual. It is much better than the supermarket. It's much more fun and my wife is a great cook, especially for regional recipes. -

Mrs La Rosa was not only a regular customer of the market, she was regarded as a skilled cook and a smart buyer.

The dialogue between Marco and Giulia is the best possible example of how the vendor-buyer interactions conducted at the market, it shows clearly how, in a light and jovial atmosphere, the social actors position themselves according to their roles, their social class and their gender. I witnessed the following conversation between Marco and Giulia, on a summer morning when we bumped into each other again at the Longo's stall, a few days after I had met her husband⁷⁸.

La Rosa - What do you have today?

Marco -Today everything is beautiful.

L.R. -Of course, you say the same every day. But last week the

⁷⁸ I report the dialogue in its entirety to provide a sense of the complete conversation, then subsequently for analytical purposes I will break it down into shorter quotes, while commenting on it.

mackerel [*sgombro*] was not so good, the flavour was too strong.

M.-It can happen with the mackerel. It depends what type it is or where they fish. Come on, we cannot check what the fish has eaten the night before. - He laughs and the customer smiles.

L.R. -So what do you recommend today?

M.-The red mullets [*triglie*] are beautiful. And the cuttlefish as well. They are both local.

L.R. -Yes of course. Everything is local, everything is beautiful! I should always believe you. Anyway give me the cuttlefish [*seppia*].
- They both laughed

M.-Shall we clean them for you?

L.R. -Yes, but keep the ink please. I will make spaghetti with cuttlefish black ink [*spaghetti al nero di seppia*].

M.-Can I come for dinner, then?

L.R. -Any time, you are always welcome. Ok, then. I would also like some newborn fish [*neonata*] for the fritters. It's fresh, right?

M.- We just got it. It was fished this morning in Brucoli. You have decided to make all of us hungry today!

L.R. - Good. Give me 5 Euros of newborn.

L.R. - I do not know why I still come here. They are the most expensive ones. [said Giulia turning toward me] You know, they are capable of selling you everything. I always end up with more fish than I planned. To be completely honest it is always very good quality.

This dialogue is a standard one, when it comes to regular customers. The tone is always friendly with flattery and joking is involved. From this interaction one can observe the following features: questioning the vendor about the quality is appropriate, because the customer wants to get the best possible quality. Highlighting the quality of the stall to someone else is also appropriate, because “*you would be stupid to shop in a poor quality stall*” [Giulia La Rosa].

The conversation starts by reviewing the previous purchase. It might be a remark about what happened in the city or in Italy during the last days, or about the weather. It is small talk to break the ice, but also to reinforce and demonstrate a sort of continuity in the relationship with the vendor. In Giulia La

Rosa's remark about her previous purchase, she points out that her presence at the market is a regular one. As De La Pradelle (2006:195) highlights “such information attests only that the relation obtaining between these particular market partners is old, habitual.” In an analogical manner Giulia informs Marco that she will be careful this time, because last time the mackerel was “not so good”. In one sentence Giulia communicates that she comes each week and that she is not easily cheated, because she checks the quality of what she buys. Retrospective feedback about the taste of the fish emphasises that the customers are attentive when purchasing and consuming products for the household. La Rosa’s husband told me the following about her daily shopping habits:

She complains even afterwards. Last week the shrimps were not as good as usual and she came back to the market to tell them. They always get the feedback. That's why we are regulars [in Italian *clienti fissi*]

This shows that a regular customer has to reiterate her presence and the continuity of it. The customer goes back to the stall to report on the quality of the fish, how she cooked it, and the goodness or badness of the final result. This is to say “I come back, I check on you and I can spread the word that you sold me crap. This can harm your reputation!”

Referring to our dialogue, Marco, with a tone of laughter but not disrespect, reassures her, highlighting that fishmongers cannot control everything when it comes to fish. This cheerful way of being indiscreet was described by De La Pradelle in Carprentas too:

The stallholder must be both disrespectful enough (or this would not feel like the market) and opportunely disrespectful. [...] These forms of apparent aggressivity should not be taken literally (De La Pradelle 2006:183)

Immediately after their initial interchange, Giulia asks for Marco's suggestion. She shows that she trusts his opinion, but remains critical. Her remark about her ability provokes a reaction that shows closeness, but also it sets a boundary which is never crossed. "In no way does it [the conversation]

allow listeners to suppose it has originated or developed outside this public time and space” (De La Pradelle 2006:195). Neither does it intimate that the conversation will continue outside the market environment. Mrs La Rosa's invitation is not a real dinner invitation, and it would be inappropriate for Marco to accept it. But it enables Marco to flatter her cooking skills. The conversation respects the social boundaries of this public space and both actors play within the freedom that this space provides them. De La Pradelle (2006) argues that in the marketplace “subjects [...] recognise each other as equals” (*Ibid*:185). I believe that people do recognise the social differences within the market, but are allowed to act as if these differences do not matter.

By using Italian but specifying the names of fish and dishes in Sicilian, Giulia claims social status as bourgeois and as competent customer. For instance, she never questions the price of goods, but always the quality. This concern about quality expresses a bourgeois attitude, while people of lower class would engage in a similar squabble about price. As Montanari explains:

The links between food consumption and lifestyles defined in relation to social hierarchies developed in various ways in centuries closer to our own. The motif of quality became clearer. Consumers now took for granted that the domain of social privilege expressed itself in the right – or duty – to procure food products of higher quality. (Montanari 2006:126)

Giulia expresses her concern for the quality of her purchase and in doing so she places herself in a social hierarchy, confirmed by the choice of the fish she buys, which is usually locally sourced and slightly more expensive. Being able to afford quality constitutes a marker of distinction (Bourdieu 1984).

So the buyer has to prove his or her expertise and needs to question the goods' quality. “*Is it fresh? Are you sure?*” Doubting is allowed and appropriate. The regular customer confirms trust through daily shopping, but performs mistrust through questioning. The verbal interaction with the vendors has to keep them alert, you can choose any other stall of the market, and this is the

kind of power a buyer can exercise. While the customer has power to change stalls, the vendor can give poor quality fish or try to cheat on the price. For the vendors, the customer's trust is at stake, so they have to perform this game in the best possible way not to lose the customer. Both actors have to be alert: the customers not to be cheated and the vendor to get the best price for his goods. The crescendo of this tension between buyer and seller is not perceived as unpleasant; on the contrary it is a peculiar characteristic of the market that is not replicated at the supermarket. Once you trust the vendor and you are recognised as a regular, you *cannot* relax nor assume that the vendor will not cheat you. He will treat you in a very special way, by greeting you, shaking hands, and by kissing but when it comes to the transaction, one has to show alertness. Borrowing a metaphor from music, the movement of this interaction plays along the lines of a counterpoint, in which vendor and buyer play along two different melodic lines, but create a harmonic ensemble, as they are not in opposition. It is a dance between trust and distrust, distance and proximity, doubt and certainty. Just as in the opera, when the piece becomes really intense, the tension can sometimes have an unpleasant outcome. It can be a source of discussions or arguments. On certain occasions it is possible to witness quarrels between regular customers and stall-holders, but this was not the case with Mrs La Rosa.

Geertz (1979) shows clearly how the bargaining process is “a communications channel evolved to serve the needs of men coupled and opposed at the same time” (*Ibid*: 225). This is very close to what happens at the Catanese market between regular customers and sellers: they are both trying to obtain an advantage from the transaction. They are together in the transaction, because they need each other, but they are also one against the other, a sort of complementary relationship.

To summarise, once at the stall the customer has to perform distrust, questioning the quality, the price and the whole fairness of the transaction. This

is not offensive, it confirms the vendor's identity as a good seller. The good seller tries to make a profit at the expense of the customer, but the expert buyer is able to express his/her a fear of being cheated.

5.3 Screwing practice

In a classical contribution about a Sicilian rural village, Schneider and Schneider (1976) identified three main cultural codes in the village they studied in Western Sicily: *furberia* (shrewdness), *onore* (honour) and *amicizia* (friendship). The authors confirm the centrality of these three codes in their more recent publication (Schneider & Schneider 2003).

During my early stage of fieldwork, I kept noticing irregularities in the way the merchandise was displayed or sold. Vegetables are very often tied in bunches or grouped in baskets, which may contain two or three lettuces, always at the vendor's discretion. Other produce is sold by the crate and it is likely that the best goods are on the surface and the worst underneath. I recorded episodes of cheating at the market, including receiving the wrong change, or being given more produce than I asked for and consequently being charged more. As I wrote in my fieldnotes:

In this area of the market it is very easy to be cheated. They always try to rip you off. Fresh fish is mixed with bad quality ones, the prices are not shown, fish sold as local and fresh can be defrosted. I do not belong to any of the categories who are entitled to special treatment and that is why they cheat me every day.

Despite my early naïve comments about the market and my own discomfort regarding this practice, I could sense that screwing was not standard treatment. Mainly it was the usual treatment for foreigners or occasional buyers. Later on, after one month of daily observation of the market, I carried on complaining about the screwing practice, but I already had a clearer idea of the way this mechanism worked. I gradually started discerning a logic in the way

people dealt with transactions at the market. It was indeed easy to grasp that within the market knowing and consequently not-knowing (who to speak to, how to do that, how to carry a transaction) were part of a distinct social system.

Giula La Rosa and her interactions with vendors brought this practice to my attention. At *La Pescheria* only people who are not smart enough do not try to cheat, because “If everyone is a cheater, you are a cheater too” says Giuseppe Motta. The greengrocer agreed that people have to try to cheat, to be good sellers. Buyers also start with the preconception that “all stall-holders are cheaters” or better “all stall-holders will try to rip me off”.

The two words used within the market to indicate screwing are *imbrogliare* and *fottere*. *Imbrogliare* is the Italian word for 'to cheat', 'to deceive', 'to fool'. It also has the meaning of *ingarbugliare*, which means to tangle; to entangle, in other words to render something easy, complicated. *Imbrogliare* has the connotation of fooling someone by making an easy thing complicated and this is probably the best description of what happens at the market.

Fottere, which is the verb used in Sicily in the local form of *futtiri*, derives from the Latin *futuere* (Bonomi 2006), and can be translated with 'to screw' and it covers a wide range of meanings: to cheat, to steal, to fuck, to fool. It has an explicit sexual meaning in both the Sicilian and the Italian version. *Fregare*, another synonym in use at the market, comes from the Latin verb *fricare*, meaning to rub, to polish, to cheat (Bonomi 2006). The acceptance refers to rubbing the genitals. As we can notice, semantically, cheating and having sex are very often connected in the Italian words. For instance *inculare* means literally "to penetrate somebody's ass" and it is mainly used to indicate stealing. Speaking of the market with one of the vendors, he told me

Placido: What normally happens is... do you know the proverb? Isti pi futtiri u fusti futtutu.

Brigida: No, I don't.

Placido: It means “andasti per fottere e fosti fottuto.” - he translated it into Italian - You came to screw and you were screwed. That's what happens at the market: people come to get a bargain and we try to get a profit. The cleverer one wins. It's all a matter of *furbizia*, shrewdness.

Schneider & Schneider (1976) do not specify whether *furberia* is a local term. They define a *furbo* as

shrewd and cunning; he uses his astuteness to serve his own interests, to manipulate others, if possible without alienating them in the process. Of course, the *furbo* requires a *fesso* - one who is naive or gullible (*Ibid*:83).

At the market the terms in use are *sperto*, which stands for *furbo*, or being shrewd; and *babbo*, which indicates the *fesso*, or naïve. Marco Longo elaborated upon the meaning of *sperto*. The first time I managed being called *sperta*, instead of being screwed, occurred on a hot day, when I arrived at the market earlier than usual.

Marco was busy helping a customer when I arrived. I looked around and I observed the stall. The mackerel seemed really fresh and I also liked the way the bream looked. A customer paid for his squid and moved away to wait for the staff at the back of the counter to clean it for him. Marco greeted me, kissing me on the cheek and said:

Marco: What can I do for you today?

Brigida: I would like two mackerel.

M.: Well done! You improved! You spotted the freshest stuff! Anything else?

B.: Yes, please. 3 Euros of *mucco* (local term for newborn).

M.: Mucco! Well done! You also know our local specialities and their names. You are really *sperta* now. You know what I mean, right?

B.:Is it being smart?- I answered.

M.: Not really, it is a bit more. Someone *sperto* is someone who knows how to move around.

It required Sicilian words to make me *sperta*: a dish, a word, a gesture recognised as belonging to the island's heritage immediately connected me to the community. Sicilian is once again the language of knowledge, the one that

guarantees access.

One day I asked Giuseppe Torrissi, an old fishmonger, how he would describe a good seller, he did not hesitate: “He is the one able to sell everything, the good quality and the bad quality, in the biggest quantity at the highest price, but making the customers happy”.

When I asked him how he would describe a good buyer then, he laughed and said also without any hesitation: “He is smart (*sperto*) too. He is able to get the best quality in the biggest quantity at the lowest price. However these type of customers are normally regular. We know each other. So it is different”.

The term *sperto* can be translated by shrewd, but in Catania this term has a wider reference. In my experience on the boat with Placido and his crew, the difference between being *babba* and *sperta* was really evident. The first few times I was on the boat they would tease me about the many mistakes I made, especially concerning where to place myself physically on the boat. My inability to move appropriately on the boat constituted a danger for my safety and for the rest of the crew. One day Placido shouted at me, while I was sitting on the prow of the boat: “Are you *babba* (stupid)? You can lose a hand sitting there, while we are pulling the nets”. After gaining some experience on the boat, I started helping the fishermen with their daily routine.

During 2011, when I returned to Sicily, there was a new member of staff, who I met on his first day on the boat.

Placido joked immediately about that: “You see, Brigida, finally you are more *sperta* [experienced] than a fisherman. A fisherman? He still needs to become one! I am sure you will be better than him today. Look at him, he doesn't even know how to stand on the boat.”

The mocking went on for the whole journey, the new helper was in the spotlight, everyone was watching him: his own apprenticeship had started and he was probably going to acquire the specific abilities necessary for being on the boat.

‘The ability to move around’ has spatial connotations. The *sperto* moves, evaluates, interacts comfortably in a familiar space, deals in a smooth

manner with the market transactions and knows his or her way around the screwing practice.

Both seller and buyer want to be *sperto*, that's the reason why mistrust is perceived as an appropriate practice. The buyer needs to be *sperto* too, making sure he/she gets the best fish. "I buy fish here every day, do not give me the crap you give to foreigners" as another regular customer says. Another ethnographic example from my fieldnotes consists of the complaint by an elderly lady who had been given rotten tomatoes the day before. "He screwed me, that boy (*Iddu é, o' caruso mi futtii*)" – she shouted approaching the stall and pointing to the young helper working with them. Then she turned to me to explain:

He gave me tomatoes which were too ripe yesterday. I arrived home and they were already smashed. I was not paying attention because I was greeting a lady. Just for a few seconds and he put mushy tomatoes in my bag! Come on! Give us a break! I come every day, I'm a regular and I have always to watch! You cannot relax in this market, can you?

Another account concerning the screwing practice comes from Maria Torre. She is a regular customer of the market and one day gave me some advice about how to behave at the market. Maria is around 60 years old; she is married and has two sons. She cooks every day for the whole family. I report an extract from an interview with her, in which she clearly acknowledges that competence and the ability to recognise locality and quality have a value within the market. She also expresses how the sense of belonging is important: kinship-like ties have a value and they need to be pursued in order to consolidate the bonds in the community. Sicilian is highly appreciated and the use of the local name for fish or vegetables immediately shortens the distance between vendor and buyer. The screwing practice does not undermine the community, in a way the principle sustains it, creating a definite set of relations among its members.

If you go to the fish market and they do not know you, they try to

cheat. It's not because they are evil, it is in the culture. But if you go there and you recognise the fish and tell them a few words in Sicilian, they treat you better. Of course if you go and you belong to their clan, they won't give you any bad fish (*pesce fituso*). They just say to you- Hold on a second, this is not for you – and they give you the fresh one. This is valid also for vegetables and meat. If you go to the market and they see you *sperta*, you recognise the fish, you are nice to them, they give you 100 grams for free. When the market is about to close, they give away a few foodstuffs, but only if they like you. [Recorded interview]

Maria also justifies the screwing practice as part of the culture, as part of a heritage which people *cannot* change. Somehow it is impossible to blame someone for that. This attitude towards screwing can be associated with the Mafia, which is stereotypically regarded as a Sicilian cultural trait (Pezzino 1987). It is majestically expressed by Triolo (1993) when she addresses the Sicilian stereotypes.

[T]his "us/not us," or better, this "allegorical us," whether product of evolutionary happenstance or victim of centuries of oppression and exploitation, is bestowed with what for the West is that ultimate mark of otherness, the lack of agency. Thus, a moral discrimination emerges that unites these various representations; this Sicilian, sinning against modern individualism, provides us with a model of what we are not or should not be (*Ibid*: 314)

What I am suggesting is that this kind of perspective is embraced by many Sicilians themselves⁷⁹. I asked Placido why people were always trying to screw each other and what follows is his answer.

It's normal, right? It's business. What do you think banks do? Here it's just more visible. You have to make money and you take advantage whenever you can. By the way we have more ethics than the banks. If a widow with three kids comes to buy fish, I do not charge her. If you come one day without money and you are my friend, you do not pay. One day I might be the one without money and I have to hope you will do the same for me.

As in the previous passage about respect for the elderly, Placido

⁷⁹ For an in-depth discussion about trust, illegality and honour see Schneider and Schneider (1976, 2005), Blok (1974, 2001, 2010), Gambetta (1988, 1991, 1993), Wolf (2001), Herzfeld (1980), Pezzino (1987).

confirms that this is only apparently an environment where everyone is trying to screw each other. There are rules, in Placido's words, respect for people in need is expressed, when talking about widows. The ones in a position of inferiority are to be helped, while the people with greater economic capital have to be cheated.

There is also a definite moral notion about who to screw and who not. Friends are treated differently and they are exempt from the cheating, in a logic which is very often called "*Scambio di favori*", an exchange of favours, as Blok (2010:64-65) puts it:

All these elements of self-help, social skills and networking, are adaptive in an insecure world of weak central control and little social cohesion beyond the family (meo sangue, my blood), where patronage is not a system at all but a set of inherently unstable dyadic relations: voluntary on both sides and subject to disintegration. [...] The common practice to exchanging favours (scambio di favori), which comes down to what anthropologists call "generalized" reciprocity, can easily derail, especially in symmetrical relations between friends.

Placido carried on with his discussion about who to screw and how, highlighting that fact that transactions do not follow a democratic principle, they are not the same for everyone. Foreigners and outsiders are the favourite target of this practice, this helps to keep intact the boundaries of the community.

You need to know who to screw. Foreigners are the easiest, but we have to try with the locals too. People come here thinking they can get a bargain. You need to give them the illusion that they did, but you have to earn something.

The customer doesn't realise, we have been fishing all night. It doesn't matter to them how cold or wet it was out there. They just want to eat some fish. Of course when it comes to friends it's different. You have seen that, no? We are not stupid, we can distinguish. If you go to that guy over there and you tell him "I'm Placido Giuffrida's friend", he is not even going to try screwing you.

In this extract it is made clear that the screwing practice follows a specific set of criteria. Friends, socially disadvantaged people, and elderly need

to be protected. It can almost be described as a self-imposed justice system, in which the underlying assumption is that society is unjust and the state is not helping people, so there is the need to self-regulate "[...] in a politically and economically untrustworthy world which is not lacking in scope for social mobility, and where *le pouvoir de la faveur* prevails over justice and merit" (Gambetta, 1988:163)

The screwing practice also embodies an idea, which is connected to what I have already explored in the chapter about the landscape. It conveys people's perception of the right to decide, of being the ones in power in this space. The connection with a distinctive rhetoric of honour is quickly made, and as Davis (1977) explains:

the language of honour is that used by the weak to mitigate the consequences of their helplessness in this relationship; and because honour aids choice: it is at least potentially absolute differentiator; and a patron, choosing among several would-be clients, chooses the more honourable. It is in this way that honour is an allocator of resources, and creates conflict among those 'equals' who struggle for a livelihood. (*Ibid*: 132)

The screwing practice serves a similar function: it gives a sense of power and it establishes who is an insider and who is not. This definition is advanced by Placido, the fisherman, when I asked him why people cheated me at the beginning. What follows is his amusing answer:

Placido: They did right. They did not know you. I would have done the same. You come with your *parlare pulito* (literally 'clean talk', meaning intellectual talk). Then they know you are not Sicilian. I would probably assume you are from the north. People have to defend themselves (*il popolo si deve difendere*)”

Brigida: Defend themselves from what?

P.:From foreigners. From outsiders. We sell things cheap here, you see. We cannot sell them to everyone at the same price . We are not a supermarket”

Once again the borders of the community are protected from what is perceived as a threat, as a possible invasion from the outside. As one gains

insider perspective dealing with the symbolic meaning of the island, the rhetoric of the invasion from foreign powers is one of the most powerful within the market, which recalls Blok's statement (2001:59-60)

One of the most cited commonplaces about Sicily's history used to explain and justify the prevalent distrust towards public authority - vindicate the practice of self-help - is the statement that the island had a long history of foreign domination, going back more than 2,500 years: since antiquity, Sicily has been governed, dominated, and exploited by foreign powers, including Greek, Phoenician, Roman, Arab, French, Swabian, Spanish and British.

The historiography of Sicily has been transmitting this idea of an island without agency, as a passive receptor of an endless number of foreign dominations, as the Sicilian historian Renda points out (2000). This way of perceiving history is now shared by the lay-person and it was very often talked of at the market, as in the following passage in which Placido was expressing his point of view about the right of taking advantage of the island and of screwing other people.

That's why foreigners came to invade us and they exploited our resources. Everyone took advantage of Sicily. Why shouldn't we? Why should we leave it to someone else?

At the market it is important to be the one that *futti*, screws. A successful man is a man who screws, in the double meaning of the term: he has sexual power and he can cheat, steal and try to take advantage of situations and people. The representation of Berlusconi is not far from the kind of man my informants pictured as a *sperto*, or *furbo* (shrewd)⁸⁰. Screwing, as with other dimensions which I have analysed, is gendered and it conveys a powerful idea of

80 In 2011 *The Economist* dedicated its cover to Berlusconi with the title "The man who screwed a whole country" (The Economist, June 2011). This opened up discussion among Italian speakers about how to translate this sentence. The majority of bloggers or on-line commentators have chosen to translate the verb screw with the Italian "fregare"; the more daring ones haven't hesitated in using "fottere", which is closer to the English 'fuck'. Now it is very interesting to notice for our discussion that the English "screw" and the Italian "fottere" have double meanings: they mean cheat, but also to have sexual intercourse. It is of course evident in the Economist's articles that they used the possibility of this double interpretation in order to allure to the sex-gate, in which Berlusconi has been involved in 2010 and 2011. Berlusconi's popularity in Sicily has been maintained even after the sex scandals and Sicily kept being amongst its dearest stronghold of Berlusconi's party.

masculinity.

5.4 Cooking and Eating like a Sicilian

Before moving to Catania, I was already interested in Sicilian cuisine and I had already acquired a theoretical knowledge about the island and its food. Once my fieldwork started, it became evident that this type of knowledge, although useful on many occasions, was not enough to be considered competent at the market. Being competent within this context implies a relational ability, the customer has to be able to interact with the vendors and share his/her knowledge with them.

My apprenticeship in local cuisine was mainly based on the daily interactions with Antonio Consoli, the greengrocer, and Marco Longo, the fishmonger, and their customers played an important role too. Beside these direct experiences at the market, many social occasions contributed to my training, especially sharing meals with friends or acquaintances, such as the dinner invitation from a Catanese family.

I begin with Antonio, who did not miss a single opportunity to share his knowledge of local products and expertise of Sicilian cuisine with me. Antonio Consoli is a man in his early sixties with a dark complexion and green eyes. His beautiful vegetable stall is located in via Gisira and he sells many varieties of produce, but it is always easy to recognise what is in season: seasonal vegetables are displayed centrally and in huge quantities⁸¹. He did not seem very talkative, but I kept returning to his stall, mainly because it was one of the busiest stalls in the market. Whilst waiting to be served, I always had the chance to observe Antonio interacting with his customers: discussing the freshness and the provenance of the produce, praising his wife's cooking skills,

⁸¹ My quotes from the fieldnotes refer to July, 2008, which constitutes the best time in Sicily for tomatoes, aubergines, peppers and many other summer produce.

or animatedly arguing about the quality of his fruit in comparison to other stalls.

For the first few months our interactions were limited to my purchases, until the day I planned to host a dinner party for my new Sicilian friends and I went to do my shopping at Antonio's.

I first bought two kilos of tomatoes, then asked for one kilo of aubergines and Antonio answered - Are you cooking for the other students? You are always partying, right?-

Why? - I replied

I mean you must be cooking for someone. - replied the stall-holder. I looked at him puzzled, not really getting his reference. He explained further - You normally buy one aubergine or two peppers. Today it's a special event.

I attended his stall quite regularly and he recognised me as the student buying small quantities of produce each day. From this episode, it became clear to me that vendors identified me as a student, or to be more precise as a left-wing student living in the area. This judgement was based on my appearance, my educated Italian and on the way I bought food: small quantities of local produce. The next week I returned to the stall and Antonio smiled and indicated not only that he could recognise me, but also that he remembered what I had bought the previous week.

Antonio: Good morning! - he said, highlighting with his intonation that he had recognised me.

Brigida: Good morning! How are you? - I replied.

A.: Today it's Monday. It goes too slowly. How were the aubergines?

B.: Very good, thanks.

A.: How have you cooked them?

B.: I made *pasta alla norma*

A.: Really? Have you fried the aubergines?

B.: Of course! Aubergines should die fried! - we both laughed.

The choice of the dish was not a planned one; it was what I had actually cooked over the weekend for a dinner party. However, I had unconsciously

picked the correct recipe, because quoting *Pasta alla norma* to the greengrocer meant sharing with him my knowledge and my appreciation for Catania and its cuisine. This dish is probably one of the most popular in the Catanese cuisine⁸².

The vendor tested my knowledge too, he wanted to know whether I fried the aubergines or not. He did not trust me and I immediately associated his question about my cooking technique with the way my Catanese friends would tease me, when joining me for dinner. “Let's see how this Northerner interprets Sicilian tradition.” This kind of ironical remark would start a whole discussion, while eating the meal I had prepared. With the choice of *Norma*, I stepped into a shared territory of flavours, which people find familiar and comforting. In a similar manner, the greengrocer tried to understand whether my gastronomic knowledge was trustworthy. He was pleased with my answers. Stating that I fried the aubergines, I also placed myself closer to what is regarded as the appropriate way to cook aubergines, refusing the lighter version of the pasta dish, in which people sometimes prefer to grill or roast the aubergines. According to some of my informants, frying is also one of the trademarks of Catanese cuisine. They were proud of a more *vastasa* cuisine, a heavy, filling version. More recent trends in Sicilian cuisine are attempting to make it lighter, responding to the very contemporary concerns about calories, and dieting.

I realised much later that through this episode I had gained access to a different way of being in the market. My interest in food, especially in Sicilian recipes, gave me access to a whole body of knowledge, that vendors and buyers started sharing with me. The love of gastronomy can transform even a student into a regular customer. Recipes and food were the two topics in which the local reticence about talking too much was definitely suspended.

Being regarded as a regular also initiated a process of apprenticeship regarding the market and its rules. After the conversation about *norma*, the

⁸² As I have previously mentioned, it is a pasta dish, seasoned with tomato and basil sauce, fried aubergines and grated ricotta salata.

relationship between me and Antonio became more friendly.

Antonio: Where are you from?

Brigida: Tuscany.

A.: It's a beautiful region, too. Anyway, congratulations! You are not from Catania and you can make a good *norma*?

B.: My friends from Catania tried it and they said it was good.

A.: I'm amazed, so you know about Sicilian food, right? Great. Now you need a Sicilian husband - We both laughed again. - What's your name?

-B.: Brigida.

A.: Nice to meet you, Brigida. Call me Antonio.

After this interaction, I was closer to the vendor and we started discussing recipes and combinations of food at his stall. He started teaching me about Sicilian produce. When I approached the stall, he would show me the vegetables in season and provide me some information about them and about the way they are normally cooked. In some cases, they were totally alien to me, but he was very happy to show me something I did not know, like the *teneruni*⁸³ for instance. I would end up buying this new entry in my gastronomic knowledge, go home and start preparing it with great enthusiasm. My Catanese friends would come over to my place for lunch or dinner and try the food. It was very useful, because I had no clue about how it should have tasted. Sometimes the cooking experiment would pass the test of being served to my Sicilian friends, but in other cases I had to go back to Antonio and his regular customers for further advice. What's more, this process had a double function: on the one hand it was improving and consolidating my social life in Catania; on the other it was reinforcing the bond between me and the vendors. I unconsciously underwent an enjoyable apprenticeship in Sicilian products. I kept stopping by Antonio's stall, almost every day, even if I didn't buy anything, and the ladies shopping at his stall started being involved in my training too, after Antonio informed them of my interest in Sicilian food.

⁸³ They are the tendrils of a local variety of the courgette plant, called *zucca lunga* (long pumpkin) or *zucca serpente* (snake pumpkin).

On another sunny day that summer, in fact, Antonio explained my interest in Sicilian cuisine to two of his regular customers, while I was choosing some peppers at his stall.

Antonio: This girl is from Tuscany, but she can cook like us. You know, she loves Sicilian cuisine. - Antonio explained with enthusiasm my interest in Catania's gastronomy.

-Really? - answered a surprised lady in her mid-sixties, while palpating tomatoes, trying to spot the ones of the correct ripeness, suitable for making into a good tomato sauce. –

A.: Yes, she comes every day. She is doing research about the market. Imagine she is even studying Sicilian food. - replied Antonio

Another lady joined the conversation saying – We have an amazing variety of dishes and flavours, no wonder someone is studying it. The other day there was a programme on TV about Sicilian cuisine. We are quite famous, right?

I nodded and told them how much I loved their recipes and the new vegetables Mr Antonio introduced me to.

Lady 1: Have you tried the *broccolo affogato* (drowned broccoli)? It is slow-cooked with wine. - said one of the ladies

Lady 2: Yes, it is really tasty, but more of a winter dish. Now in this season you need to cook the aubergines. We are the best with aubergines. - Replied the other one

A.: This girl can make a good *norma*, ladies. She knows all the tricks already – And after Mr Antonio's remark, we engaged in a lively discussion about the different versions of *Norma*.

In this passage again Antonio commented on the unusualness of a girl from the north cooking Sicilian food. Cooking 'like them', cooking like a Sicilian was shortening the distance between our regional identities. I was making a step towards their culinary tradition and for them it meant respecting Sicily and its heritage.

Another fruit stall owner, Salvatore Catalano, showed me what was in season. Apart from bananas, all the other fruit was proudly declared as Sicilian and it probably was. He was selling it at higher prices than the other stalls but he would have all the *primizie*, the first fruits to be harvested of the season.

Salvatore was my introduction to the seasons: cherries, plums or oranges and always specifying the tiny little village they came from. Thanks to him I discovered the *sbergia*, a white-fleshed type of nectarine and my favourite fruit ever, the *pesca tabacchiera*, a flat peach, which gets its name from its similarity to the shape of a particular ashtray.

According to vendors and buyers, this passage from ignorance to knowledge meant acquiring an expertise, which was transmitted and communicated, valued and shared within the market. Learning in this context stood for tasting, and cooking: practical knowledge, based on experience.

Conviviality is another practice, which can serve as a marker of social difference (Seremetakis 1994). At the market I often heard people using the expression “*Abbiamo mai mangiato insieme?*” (Have we ever eaten together?), which means I do not know you, I have never shared food with you, thus I am not close to you. Eating together in Sicily, and in Italy more generally, means crossing a boundary, especially if it is eating in someone's home. This denotes an even more intimate relationship. My informants have all been very kind to me, but they have never invited me to dine with them at their place. We consumed food together at the café and one of the fishermen invited me to have a pizza with his family. However they never asked me to join them for a meal at their homes. We shared food in public environments but not in private, domestic ones and this distinction constitutes one of the most relevant in the Catanese context.

Eating at someone's table means belonging to a small circle of trusted people. In their writing about the economy of Western Sicily, Schneider and Schneider (1976) show how men reinforce their bond through eating together. These events would not happen in the domestic sphere, but in the *masseria*, which are typical Sicilian private country houses.

Paolo La Rosa belongs to the Catanese bourgeoisie. When we met for

the first time at the market, he was very casual, holding the “*La Repubblica*” newspaper under his arm, which is normally read by left-wing people. His newspaper and my appearance already said something to each other, talking the same language. That day, as I report in my notes, I was wearing orange Thai fishermen trousers, a silk scarf with an Indian pattern and a very colourful top. In a Sicilian market, but more generally in Italy, this kind of outfit is normally considered “alternative” to the mainstream trends and it is related to a left-wing political vision. This mutual political understanding created an immediate bond and I was very happy to meet him.

Brigida: I should have met you last year, so that I could interview your wife! - I answered, explaining to him what I was doing, and it was much easier than many other times at the market, as it turned out that both his two daughters were carrying out postgraduate research. He introduced me to his wife, who was still trying to get the best possible fish from Marco. She was really pleased to hear about my research.

Giulia: It's great – she said – I love the market. We come every day and we have everything fresh. I have so much fun cooking! -

Paolo La Rosa did not think twice and without hesitation, he invited me for dinner.

Paolo: You should come for dinner, darling! We haven't met before, but we can still meet up for dinner at our place this weekend. What do you think?”

B.:I would be delighted - I accepted joyfully their invitation. We arranged for the forthcoming weekend under the astonished gaze of Marco.

Marco was probably as much surprised as I was. Paolo's invitation came so suddenly that none of us would have expected him to have invited a complete stranger to dine with his family. Paolo's open-minded attitude was not common and he had a very special attitude towards solidarity and conviviality. Giulia had been working as high school teacher, before retiring a few years previously, and Paolo was the director of a social community centre for people in migration.

That weekend I went for dinner at the La Rosa's place. I arrived at their

centrally located apartment with a plant for the hostess and a bottle of my favourite Sicilian white wine for the dinner. He looked at it and said

Paolo: Thank you! We can trust anthropologists of food when it comes to the choice of wine and food, right? - We all laughed and he asked his early 30s daughter to put the bottle in the fridge and carried on - What do you think? Should we open it with the starters or with the pasta dish?

Brigida: I do not know, it depends on the menu.

P.: It's all fish of course! All from Longo's stall! But you need to talk to my wife about the details. I help her in the kitchen, but I do only the easy stuff... it is a 'slice the bread', 'bring me the parsley' kind of thing. I'm her assistant, or her slave”

Giulia laughed while she was placing the plant I brought her in the living room and she answered - Of course, this poor man surrounded by women. He is so spoiled by his two daughters! Let's sit down now – she said cutting it short

In this passage it is evident that my gastronomic knowledge was once again critically evaluated. Here it was more about my ability to recognise quality wine and food and this is related to sharing a pleasure for food. However it is performed in a class-related manner: this way of enjoying wine matching and gourmet food combinations creates social capital (Bourdieu 1977).

The night I spent eating and chatting with the La Rosa family was a very hot September evening, but in the spacious dining room the table was placed right in front of the two big windows accessing the balconies, which allowed in a refreshing breeze. The table was elegantly laid and the atmosphere was very cheerful and enjoyable. The conversation ranged over a wide mix of subjects and it was very easy for me to connect with them. The evening flew past pleasantly and we enjoyed a long conversation about food, politics, Sicily and Catania. Giulia started telling me about her love for the market, and all the family was very interested in my work. They have been shopping at the market for a lifetime and now that both parents are retired, they have time to dedicate to cooking. Cooking is a great pleasure for Mrs La Rosa and her dinner table

was a Sicilian feast of flavours and taste. She talked me through the menu when we sat down, so that I could choose when to drink the wine I had brought.

That night the menu was spectacular: marinated anchovies; grilled shrimps; pasta with grouper ragout, fennel, almond flakes and cherry tomatoes; pescespada alla ghiotta (swordfish with olives, capers, pine nuts, blackcurrants, tomato, celery) and roasted peppers with mint, followed by little baskets of pistachio ice cream.

Brigida: I think my wine would go well with the pasta and the swordfish. We can have something lighter at the beginning.

Paolo: Perfect. I have the right one for the starters - said Mr La Rosa – You see, that what I mean. - speaking to his wife - That's the kind of people we need in this country, instead they all leave. People who can behave and use their brain in every context: at the table and in the academia!

I knew how to operate in this bourgeois context. Here it was even easier to be *sperta*. It was very easy for me to connect with him and his family, and I felt at ease. He openly expressed his political opinions during dinner: Paolo was clearly not happy with Berlusconi's government. Probably also due to his profession, he was strongly anti-racist, racism was one of the dearest social issues to him. He believes Italy deserves a different political ethos, more equal and less discriminating towards the different social or ethnic groups. We also spent a considerable amount of our time together talking about the 'brain drain': many of the country's highly educated and qualified young people were leaving Italy to carry on their career elsewhere. This was also true in my case, and also one of their daughters, both of us having had experience in foreign countries. Paolo was deeply upset that highly educated people have few opportunities in Italy. The La Rosa family can be considered bourgeois, with both daughters educated to postgraduate level, and both parents retired from higher skills professions. As Marco Longo put it, the La Rosas were a very "*respectable family*".

A few days after this dinner, I went back to the market, and Marco thanked me, because I had been a perfect guest. Paolo La Rosa had returned to the market to tell Marco that I was a very pleasant guest and it had been an

honour to have such a nice person for dinner. He thanked Marco for having introduced me to them. That day Marco was very happy and said to me that he already knew I was respectable too. Marco was even more friendly than usual. This experience reinforced my position at the market and my relationship with the Longos became closer.

Conviviality as in sharing food in a domestic context creates closer ties, and being an appropriate guest gave me access to more intimate social spaces. Talking to Marco at the market, Paolo had commented positively on the gifts I had brought for the dinner

Marco: That's the way respectable people behave. I give and you give. You do not take advantage. I told Mr La Rosa that I was sure you were a good person. There are not many left in this world. Let's go to the café, I offer you a drink.

When we entered the café, the host shook Marco's hand and Marco introduced me:

M.: This is Brigida, our food expert. Be careful when you make coffee for her. She can teach you stuff. - We all laughed and Marco carried on, talking to me directly, while the bartender went on greeting the latest arrival. - Mr La Rosa told me you are *sperta*, he told me you know Sicilian cuisine very well. I taught you something about fish, though, right?

Brigida:- Actually you gave me a full training about fish. You know, I'm a mountain girl. I know about vegetables and meat, but fish. I did not know much before moving to Catania.

M.: I know the Longo family is the best when it comes to fish! - We laughed again.

5.5 Conclusions

The market practices emerged clearly and what also emerged is a "social system that is based on the exclusive, hereditary transmission of learning within bounded social groups (Dilley 2010:174)". This community is defined by distinctive sets of practices. Through the analysis of these practices I gained insight into what holds this idea of community together and this happened

mainly by observing how the boundaries between the inside and the outside are perceived, negotiated and preserved. As Téhoueyres (2007) explains clearly

Food matters are a particularly rich terrain where reflexivity operates because of the dimensions involved in the ingestion of food: from a biological necessity to the construction of our personality. Choosing what to eat, preparing and cooking food, sharing it in the form of a meal, all such elements follow patterns which define our belonging to a culture, a community. (*Ibid*:245)

Food choice is however a complex one (Fischler 1988). In the case of *La Pescheria* buying food involves the senses, building a social relationship, knowledge and competence about local cuisine and finally conviviality.

The discussion of the screwing practice introduced very masculine metaphors. I already mentioned that the market is a male-dominated environment. However it is possible for women to behave appropriately in this context. A certain degree of toughness and the right amount of distance are key elements to being respected, but more than anything it is the fact of belonging to a man, which makes the woman respected. Mrs La Rosa deals with Marco under her husband's attentive eyes. Women who shop at the market without their husbands in attendance tend to talk about them anyway with the vendors: they discuss their habits, their preferences in cuisine and the like. My apprenticeship as a good Sicilian cook very often implied making me ready for a Sicilian husband.

Accessing insider knowledge is possible for an outsider, like myself, due to an apprenticeship concerning the way of perceiving food through the senses, by the ability to carry out the transaction with the buyer without being screwed, by being aware of the screwing practice, by acknowledging the local tradition and gastronomic heritage via cooking and eating practices. The Sicilian dialect is throughout all these practices a fundamental element in recognising who is inside the community, especially when it comes to naming local food products.

Chapter VI

Fanta versus Orange Juice: Modernity, Tradition and Nostalgia at the Market

Every time I think about modernity and tradition, I cannot help recalling an episode that occurred, during my fieldwork in Catania in 2009. The city was blooming in one of its best seasons: springtime. It was a warm night in May. I was strolling around the city with my then Sicilian boyfriend. We stopped for the usual '*seltz, limone e sale*' (sparkling water, with lemon juice and salt), a very common refreshing and re-hydrating drink, sold at little kiosks on the street. The city's kiosks are an institution and some of them have built up an amazing reputation and a regular clientele. At my personal favourite kiosk a very talkative man is always busy squeezing pulpy lemons and adding colourful sweet syrups, with many different flavours, such as mint, tamarind, orange, mandarin, and almond.

That night, while we were drinking the tangy drink from our plastic cups, a young man with a strong Catanian accent greeted the bartender. Behind him was a foreign girl. There was no doubt she was English: her pale skin stood out in comparison to all of us. The beach season had already started and almost everyone was tanned and had already spent at least a few afternoons lying in the sun.

I could not help overhearing the conversation which was conducted partly in broken English and partly in broken Italian. I found the Catanese man's attempt to impress the pale Londoner very charming, also because it was not the

first time I had witnessed the Italian art of seduction being used at the expense of a nice tourist. When the man asked her what she wanted to drink, the girl answered without hesitation “*Orange juice*”. I immediately understood that she was dreaming about the freshly squeezed Sicilian oranges. However, the man spoke to the barman in Sicilian, who took out of the fridge a very prosaic can of *Fanta*. The barman wasn't so sure whether the girl meant a *Fanta* or the freshly squeezed orange juice, but her chaperone had very little doubt that an English girl would not appreciate a *Fanta*. Likewise he was not so sure either whether English girls drank fresh orange juice and in an aside said to all of us “*Chi sacciu si ci piaci*” (Sicilian for 'who knows if she likes it [meaning the fresh orange juice]'). I still remember the girl's expression, smiling at the man and very politely saying “*It's OK, thanks*”, and pouring the soft drink into a plastic cup, while surrounded by baskets full of blood oranges. It was during the last months of the orange season, and still one of the best moments to taste the dark ruby variety, which has a very intense flavour. I related this story many times to my friends and I received an entertaining explanation from a Catanese farmer, who grows organic vegetables nearby in Catania:

In Sicily everyone has always been able to afford oranges, you could go and pick them yourself. Orange trees are everywhere, *Fanta* doesn't grow on trees. It was much more difficult to buy a soft drink than to have a fresh orange juice. To impress a girl, in particular a foreign girl, you need to be modern and cool, and it is probably much cooler to buy a *Fanta* than to squeeze an orange. I squeeze oranges every day.

Assuming a linear idea of progress, *Fanta* is perceived as more evolved than orange juice; it is modern, while orange juice is backward. From this perspective the soft drink is the evolutionary development of orange juice. This example shows how values of tradition and modernity are attributed to food products. Mintz (1996) comments that:

[F]oods eaten have histories associated with the past of those who eat them, the techniques employed to find, process, prepare, serve, and consume the foods are all culturally variable, with histories on

their own. Nor the food is simply eaten; its consumption is always conditioned by meaning. These meanings are symbolic and communicated symbolically, they also have histories (*Ibid*:7)

Oranges in Sicily carry a specific history, such as their derivatives, orange juice and *Fanta* and these narratives cannot be placed in a linear idea of progress. Such a perspective would grossly simplify the relation between production, commodification and consumption. Food is a system “integrated into its specific type of civilization” (Barthes 1975:59).

The idea of linear progress has been widely observed by different scholars. Roy (2004) takes a clear position with regard to the idea of progress and its relation to modernity.

The idea of the modern is also an idea of progress. This notion of progress operates in time and space. If some places are seen as backward, then moving ahead also implies being ahead of such places, of being essentially different from such places. Such geographical articulations of development and underdevelopment constitute a key dimension of the modern. They imply that progress can only exist in relation to what is seen as backwardness; that the modern must put not only itself but also tradition on display: the other continents must arrive as contributions. (Roy, 2004:67)

These geographies of power represent a relationship between what is developed and what is underdeveloped; what is modern and what is traditional. This standpoint implies a movement from backward to modernised and attributes a positive value to this movement (Ferguson 1999). The distinction between primitive and developed societies, which posited an essential difference between archaic and modern, is clearly based on a Western prejudice and conceptions of superiority (Kuper 1999).

However, I argue that by avoiding looking at modernity or at tradition as positive values per se, we

denude them of their metaphysical mission and bring them back to earth to be transformed into open-ended terms of political debate and inquiry (Chambers 2008:9).

Argyrou (1996) suggests that, instead of setting modern in opposition to traditional practices,

it would be analytically more fruitful to conceptualize practises as strategies, acts that allow actors to manipulate conflicts and contradictions to their advantage - however this may be defined in different cultures or in different contexts within the same culture (*Ibid.*:164).

Huysseune (2006) brings this approach a step further, highlighting the necessity of a

critique of Orientalist and Eurocentrist approaches [...] not only for interpreting non-European and non-Western cultures, but also for understanding Western cultures. (*Ibid.*: 22)

The Eurocentrist approach implies a unitary, positive development based on rationality and efficiency. Huysseune (2006) explains it overtly in the following passage.

The focus on Western rationality, frequently reduced to the calculation of economic efficiency, also leads to a unilateral vision of Western society, downplaying social and cultural practices and traditions in the West that do not correspond with the iconic notion of Western rationality. Eurocentrist approaches are characterised by their lack of criticism of Western societies [...]. (*Ibid.*: 22)

This applies perfectly to the case of countries bounding the Mediterranean Sea. Many practices such as the evil eye (Galt, 1982), the honour and shame complex (Davis, 1977), notions of 'familism' (Banfield, 1958) do not fit the Western idea of rationality. The Mediterranean started to be considered as a cultural unity where the unity was based on the juxtaposition between its irrational backwardness and the efficiency of the northern countries. The South of Europe was located in a subaltern position in comparison to the North. As Renda (2000) puts it, geography is a central part of history, because being at the centre or at the periphery of a geopolitical system changes everything (*Ibid.*:56).

The modernisation of Italy is often depicted as either an incomplete process or as a process which is still ongoing (Huysseune 2006). In his

discussion, Huysseune (2006) shows how modernisation can serve as instrument of power.

By regarding Italy as an example of *incomplete* modernisation, the debate implies a Utopian standard (or standards) of modernity, and a comparison of contemporary Italian society against it. The focus on modernisation relates it at the same time to the international theoretical controversies surrounding this process (Huysseune 2006:41)

Furthermore, from the perspective of modernised and developed countries, what is backward is also seen as exotic, as closer to nature, as wilder (Anderson 1997).

The notion of tradition is controversial and needs to be theoretically framed. Tradition at the market can be identified as the taste of ‘the bygone’ (Baudrillard,1981) and also as a source of prestige, because it can be imagined to legitimise practices continuous with past (MacDonald 2012). According to Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983):

‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally, governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. (*Ibid:1*)

However, this definition of ‘invented tradition’ leaves space for further interpretation. As Jacobs (2004) highlights:

[o]f course, the residual problem, that the idea of invented traditions has left us with, is the sense that there was somewhere, sometimes ‘real’ traditions and that these present ‘invented’ traditions are but ideological malformations. (*Ibid:32*)

I would claim that it is a theoretical mistake to think there are ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’ traditions. In this work tradition, as much as history and modernisation, is seen as a non static concept, which is being continuously renegotiated. It is a dynamic construction which implies a social group or a community trying to re-imagine their history. In Sutton's (2008) words:

That is, how to live in the present remained a question of *what to remember and what to forget*, or *how to place oneself and others in time* in a way that both recognized continuity and acknowledged change. Which parts of 'tradition' and which parts of 'modernity' should make up the present? (*Ibid.*:85)

Within this framework people are not passive subjects of taboos or rules, but they shape their own positioning, and are subject to many complex influences. It is this complexity and this flexibility which interest me. Just as much as other categories of thinking and living, tradition and modernity are constantly undergoing adjustments. We have to think of ethnography as a snapshot, limited in time and space, but we should strive to locate this snapshot in a temporal frame. Again the metaphor of a counterpoint could be useful here to understand that these different melodies might play more or less harmonically, but they are not opposing. The counterpoint here is between modernity and tradition, or hegemony and subaltern, between wilderness and safety, once again between inside and outside.

This way of looking at tradition involves a renegotiation of the past, in which “[c]ities and associations artificially recreate a sense of community by inventing a common history, common roots” (Téhoueyres 2007:247). This quote alludes to “recreating” a sense of community, which again implies the loss of the original community; it provides the impression that there was a time in which the community was united, pure, untouched. The consequent search for authenticity has been addressed by many scholars (AlSayyad 2004; Bestor 1999; Roy 2004; Zukin 2010). Zukin (2010) reflects on the fear of change, which provokes a yearning for authenticity and she reminds us that

[t]o speak of authenticity means that we are aware of a changing technology of power that erodes one landscape of meaning and feeling and replaces it with another (*Ibid.*:221).

This longing for authenticity is related to nostalgia, which appears to be another derivative of modernity. Recalling the initial episode, it is only during a time of *Fanta* that people develop a nostalgia for oranges. Thus nostalgia can be

seen as 'historical emotion' (Boym 2001), because it is:

[...] a yearning for a different time - the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like place, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition. (*Ibid*:XV)

Nostalgia is also connected to the idea of folklore, because they both idealise a past which has been lost and is therefore impossible to recover. Green (2012) highlights the nationalistic connotation of Italian folklore. She connects its origins to the nineteenth century fears of unification, industrialisation and urbanisation, “which spurred nostalgia for the mythologized image of authentic peasant life” (*Ibid*: 291). Green describes the emergence of an “idealized Rousseau-esque peasantry” (*Ibid*: 291). The Sicilian tradition of folklore is intertwined with Pitré's work, who published 25 volumes between 1872 and 1913, 25 volumes containing the most extensive and systematic taxonomy of Sicilian popular culture. Through his class-biased gaze we see the lower-classes of the Sicilian society at the beginning of 19th century depicted with a piteous attitude and all the whilst expressing sympathy toward humbleness (Triolo 1993). His work is also permeated by the fear of losing these traditions (Greene 2012).

All these elements conflate in a representation which argues against the rationalisation of modernity, when applied specifically to space. An ideal example is the hypermarket, which tries to keep any irrational threat to its order at a distance (O'Connor 2011).

In this chapter I argue that the market allows space for irrationality and for active social participation in a public area which is under the threat of “commercial privatization and fortification” (Degen 2008:30) associated to urban regeneration. At the moment, even in its renegotiation of modernity, tradition and nostalgia, the market is still covering the functions of an “agorá”.

It operates as:

threshold space in which boundaries between the public and private sphere, public and private activities [...] constantly shifting and subverted by the free movement, discourse and engagement of people (Degen 2008:21).

In the reorganisation of 'collective memory' (Giddens 1994), people share a collective anxiety about losing control over change and about being left behind. In the first part of the chapter, I deal with the depiction of local tradition. I first analyse how the market offers a proper physical space for the representation and enactment of 'tradition' and the past. The fishermen's square stands at the core of the discussion. Delineating the main features of the square and the meanings attached to it, I show how people at the market speak of nostalgia and of folklore and why they regard the market space unlike other contexts of food commodification. The market also provides a space for extravagance which contributes to a performance of *Sicilianess*, more and more directed at the increasing number of tourists. I then discuss the vendors' attempt to preserve their representation of tradition while integrating new hygiene rules within the market.

The fear of being left behind comes together with the idea of modernity. At this point, in fact, I move on to the temporality of modernity, looking at the language used at the market to talk about modernity, going through its meaning and what kind of power relation it implies. I discuss a case in which an alleged European investigation put the market under threat. Finally I provide an example of a modernised context of food consumption: the hypermarket. The ethnographic data will help me in showing that market vendors do not totally refuse modernisation; they would like to accept some of the change and at the same time keep a space for tradition. Their criticism regarding hypermarkets is not political in the typical Italian leftist sense, as happens at the farmers market in Catania. Rather they criticise the lack of connection to the landscape, the de-territorialisation of the food culture, and the ignorance of tradition.

6.1 Folklore, extravagance and gastronomic souvenirs

La Pescheria gives space to locality and tradition in a distinctive way. 'Tradition' is performed, linking it to folklore, extravagance and tourism. The ideas of the committee president, Daniele Finocchiaro, are exemplary because he acts as an interface between the local authority and the vendors, constantly trying to marry the two factions. He is very proud of the media coverage that the market has recently received. He spoke about the TV programs, documentaries and journalists, who have all been interested in this historical market. When I asked him why they were so interested, he answered: "Because it is different". At his stall, everyone stared at me and gasped at my pointless question. Daniele carried on, ignoring me.

You see how many tourists, right? Why do you think we have thousands of visitors per year? It is the Sicilian folklore. Here they find the real stuff. People shouting, singing, gesticulating, fighting. It is a bit rough but also authentic. It is also good for tourist. Look how folkloric it is!

Daniele and some of the vendors referred explicitly to the notion of folklore, 'folclore' in Italian. According to my informants, 'folclore' is intended as something peculiar, typical, characteristic.

The committee president insisted on the importance of foreign visitors and the reason why they enjoy the market experience:

If you look at the square, with the fishermen shouting. Tourists love that. We are well-known everywhere in the world. Have you seen how many people there are taking pictures or shooting videos? This market is as colourful as an Arab market, but it is in a Western country, so it is even more characteristic.

Folklore is related to the archaic and exotic, along with the overwhelming experience of colours, voices, tastes and smells that the market offers visitors. What's more, local peculiarities or eccentricities are highlighted,

performed for tourists and foreigners. It has all the ‘exoticism’ of an Arab market, regarded as irrational, rather than efficient. Many people in Catania compare their market to a North African *sug*. Exotic imagery abounds, playing along the lines of the construction of the Sicilian otherness, due to its alleged closeness to Africa “in geography and cultural practices” (Greene 2012:302).

Daniele expresses this opinion more clearly than others, saying

That's what they want. The Sicilianess. Here it is. Look at the square – says Daniele while we are leaning on the balustrade – This is the Mediterranean, the South. You don't get it anywhere else. You have to go to Africa to get something more lively than this.

The president told me that Sicilianess ‘*la sicilianità*’ meant a unique mixture of cultural influences, which resulted in such a special combination that it cannot be found anywhere else. Daniele suggested what other people at the market confirmed. That Sicilianess means colourful, lively, exotic, closer to Africa, and closer to what stands for wilderness, to a less dominated nature. It is what tourists expect, it is why they like it, and it is what they get when visiting the market. This folkloristic representation “leave[s] us with localities and individuals emptied of their political dimensions and, thus, of the links holding them together.” (Favero 2007:77). Folklore is what is left historically to the lower classes in Italy. It “might be the object of curiosity or denigration, but did not require political recognition”(Pratt 2002:27).

At the market, folklore justifies extravagance, the irrational and the unexpected. The backward is allowed to be folkloristic, as Placido explained to me “It's the old-fashioned way of being Sicilian”. It comprises what is considered to be authentic and local, but also bizarre. This vision allows for a bit of extravagance, ‘*stranezza*’. At the market, just as there is a space for wilderness, so there is a space for tradition and for folklore. On the boat, the fishermen used to tell me peculiar stories about the market and one day the captain provided this explanation.

Al mercato son tutti un po' strani. [At the market everyone is weird] says one of the fishermen on the boat. Sugnu tutti scimuniti [They are all stupid] – and he goes on – You see the stuff that happens there, it's not a normal place. You put together a bunch of crazy people, under a volcano, in a hot spot of the earth and that's what you get. Catania is a crazy city, but the market is worse.

Besides the relevance of the volcano's presence, it is necessary to understand how this unusual, or dare I say “wilder”, behaviour is allowed at the market. The acceptance of irrational behaviour speaks a different language from the one of extremely rationalised contexts of food commodification, such as hypermarkets.

We have plenty of these unusual characters. You know the singing postman, right? He is part of the routine of the market. We wait for him in the morning. I love to hear his voice in the morning.

The singing postman (*Il postino canterino* as he is called in the market) works for the national mail service and he delivers post to the whole neighbourhood. This unique character leans from the balustrade and sings facing the square, choosing an opera aria or a very popular song, “*That's amore!*” and “*Nessun dorma*” being among his favourites. He sings as he enters the cafés in this area and the staff and the regular customers start singing along with him. He acts as if he is directing the chorus and he enjoys the applause of the audience. The singing postman is an institution at the market and he does not miss an occasion to display his vocal skills, whilst delivering a letter, or passing through the market. Daniele commented that extravagance can contribute to making the market a special place.

All this extravagance is part of the folklore. A little bit of craziness, a bit of drama and colour. It makes things lighter and more interesting. It's spicing up the market. It's an added value. We are not as boring as a supermarket. We are unique. And a bit weird too.

Vendors understand what tourists desire: “tradition without side effects” (Favero 2007:61). Tourists appreciate folklore but at an appropriate distance (Téhoueyres 2007). It is in fact due to the increasing number of tourists visiting *La Pescheria* each day that a few stalls sell ‘gastronomic souvenirs’.

Sebastiano's brother has a charcuterie stall, but he has also recently introduced some products targeted especially at tourists. Culinary tourism (Long 2004) is becoming more popular in Italy each year (Miele & Murdoch 2002), and in Sicily particularly.

Sebastiano introduced me to his brother, Leonardo, a very handsome and charming man in his late twenties, who owns a charcuterie counter with a shop at the back. The shop is full of products aimed at tourists: wine, olive oil, pistachios pesto, mandarin and orange marmalade, and so on.

Let me introduce you to my brother. He has the charcuterie shop, the one next to me. He sells wine and other local specialities. It is good because also tourists buy these kind of merchandise

Tourists interested in food are a recent phenomenon at the historical market and vendors try to address their needs. What is not new is the market's commitment to upholding the gastronomic memories of the city. Anyone looking for special, rare or traditional Sicilian food needs to visit the market. As I mentioned in the description, some of the stalls offer *mauru*, a local algae, already seasoned with lemon and one of the vendors was very proud of still serving it. A market *aficionado* proudly remarked the importance of local specialities:

You can have it only at *La Pescheria*. It was easier to get before, now they are the only ones serving it. The market is the only place in town, because they don't care about health hazards. They care about tradition. If it is traditional, it's good, that's the principle.

Restaurants in the market also embody what is considered the Sicilian gastronomic heritage, offering traditional dishes. This is the case at *La Paglia*, a fish restaurant located on *Piazza Pardo*, well-known as a city spot, where you go to taste the local fish and the local cuisine. This small *trattoria*⁸⁴ at the corner between *Piazza Pardo* and *via Pardo* has become an institution, as it has been

84 A *Trattoria* is often a family business restaurant, which serves local and traditional food, usually at lower prices, in a very informal style. Customers mostly attend the place on a regular basis.

serving food inside the market for about 70 years. In the past it was the vendors' eatery, in which you would be able to eat the leftovers of the market at very cheap prices. I was told there were other similar places in the past, but that they have closed down. They were the official lunch providers for the people working at the market, which used to be open all day long in the past. Nowadays, even if you can still see the lady of the *trattoria* popping out and buying food at the market, prices are much higher and the average customers are mainly tourists. The other two fish restaurants inside the market area have become really popular too, as they have been included in all city guide books.

They all serve what is regarded as traditional and local food. Dishes are 're-discovered' in a folkloristic revival, as Montanari (2006) affirms

The inversion of meaning is linked to the transition from a society of hunger to one of abundance. This transition leads us, for example, to upgrade into emblematic signs of up-market social standing certain products traditionally viewed as poor and rustic (*Ibid*:126)

6.2 Locus of Tradition: Nostalgia in Piazza

A sense of nostalgia for the bygone community permeates the market and it finds its highest expression in *Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto*, the fishermen's square. I have already mentioned the physical and symbolic centrality of this square, at this stage I need to frame its significance from the perspective of nostalgia and tradition. This square is a powerful symbol interpreted in different ways, but there is general agreement in defining it as the main stage of the market's tradition. The 'tradition' performed within this square is ambivalent and interpreted in various ways. For elderly people it can be the most beloved part of the market or indeed of the city, but others find it offensive. They think of the market as the representation of a dirty past. Luca, the city centre's bookshop owner, described the market as a metaphor for the city.

You can see the decadence of the city in the market. I don't like the market any more. It shows the ancient corruption, not the modern one. The market is as decadent as Catania. It is dirty, stinky, corrupt.

Tradition creates ambivalence and Wilson (1991) reminds us that ambivalence “expresses fear and desire fused into one” (*Ibid*:157). A different vision emerges when asking people what they think of the Pescheria. The entire market area is pedestrian during the day, but open to traffic at night. There are a couple of night-life venues close to the market and when one drives or walks through the market at night to reach them, you can still smell the market. The fish and meat trimmings left on the floor along with years of poor drainage have saturated the area with a pungent smell. The negative remarks about the market always involve smell. As a university student told me

I hate it. That square is so behind the times. The other night I had to reach the bar of the hostel and I went through the Pescheria's square. It is disgusting. I think the smell stays with you. I kept having the smell of fish in my nostrils.

In an article about trade and economy in Catania, Cirelli, Blasi, et al. (2004) report that

[t]he entire fish market area, once the day's sales are concluded, is at the mercy of rubbish and bad smells while most of the surrounding housing has been abandoned or taken over by non-EU residents. An area which, thanks to its particular folklore is a tourist attraction during the day, but by night shows its squalid side and is to be found in a state of total abandon, not easily enjoyed by visitors (*Ibid*:7).

In his remarkable history of France through smell, Corbin (1986) remarks that the bourgeoisie did not tolerate the “stench of the poor”, which characterised the decadent neighbourhoods of Paris in the nineteenth century. Smells in a city can become a distinctive marker of status (Bauman 1993). Even one of the vendors recalled the experience of this inconvenience, when he used to live closer to the market:

When I used to live above the market, we could not keep the windows open, in particular during summer. The whole area always stinks. In this area the commercial value of estate property is lower

than in other parts of the city centre. It's normal. Who wants to live here? It's smelly, you have more traffic than in other areas, you can't park your car!

The market therefore represents tradition and it evokes a sensory directness, which is often despised. However modernising the market would imply a sense of loss, which is comprised in the transition from backwardness to modernisation. It is in this loss that nostalgia finds its root. From the point of view of the modernised and developed, what is backward is also exotic, closer to nature, wilder, authentic (Huysseune 2006). Tradition at the market can be identified as the taste of the “bygone” (Baudrillard 1981). Téhoueyres (2007) writes about the historical evolution of food markets in Bordeaux:

The market operates a celebration of the past, like a tradition, a cultural heritage as well as an expression of solidarity. Shopping at the market is the perpetuation of tradition, a sign of adhesion to the spirit of the place. (*Ibid:247*).

Vendors speak of the *Piazza* as though it has remained unchanged for 50 years. They feel that it symbolises the market's original nature and claim that it is the oldest fish market in Europe. The fishermen's area becomes in stallholders' eyes, a symbol of the past, of the way it was, of how things started, and of what they define as 'tradition'.

This square embodies a contemporary anxiety of how places change (Zukin 2010). The romanticised vision of the past is shared by many people in Catania as well as by tourists, foodies, and gastronomic travellers, who portray the market as a place in which time has stood still. This rhetoric, upheld by many of my interviewees, maintains an illusion of things as immutable, it is attractive and comforting. It also provides a sense of continuity with the past and adds a reassuring feeling of having preserved tradition. Such aesthetics were influenced by Romanticism, which praised folklore (Greene 2012), wilderness (Anderson 1997), and the bygone (Baudrillard 1981).

La Pescheria becomes a privileged space in which to perpetuate an

image of tradition and *Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto* acts as the main stage of this performance. Still, in Daniele's vision, it was necessary to preserve the square from any change, so that it could be kept as symbol of the way the market was in the past. When, a few years ago, the committee renovated the market structures, they left the main piazza unchanged. As Daniele explained:

A few years ago we had to relocate some of the stalls. We also needed a new drainage system⁸⁵ for the market. We did the refurbishing as well, but we all agreed to leave the main square as it was in the past.

There are two main reasons for this choice. First this square symbolises Catania's relationship with the sea, with local fisheries and with the fishing community itself. Once again we are dealing with ideas of wilderness and with a direct relationship to the landscape. In this square this connection takes a very specific shape: it is the victory over the sea, over the wild. It is the central square, the heart of the market, where the memory of 'bygone' days (Baudrillard 1981) is kept alive. The second reason lies in the committee's attempt to preserve 'Sicilianess', overtly and proudly displaying the folkloric side of the market. Vendors encourage the attention they get from foreigners and tourists. In its relationship with the past, the market responds to the

[...] nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like place, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human conditions (Boym 2001:XV).

At the market the nostalgic gaze seems to be embodied by groups of elderly people standing close to the main square. The stall-holders always leave an empty space in *via Alonzo di Benedetto* even on the busiest days, and all vendors respect this space. Here elderly people spend half a day observing the events at the market. They go there every day, and particularly on the weekends. Men in their sixties or seventies lean on the balustrade and watch what is

85 The works on the drainage system have been repeated many times throughout the years. It is fixed almost once a year, but the system does not last and needs continuous maintenance. There are always discussions about how expensive it is to fix it and whether the money provided by the European Union or by the local government is adequately employed.

happening in the square below. They buy only at the very last moment, to get the best price, before returning home. They watch what is happening in the main square. These men are a stable presence at the market and they very often interact with the vendors and with people passing by, creating an ambience of jokes, laughter and gossip. When I asked one of them why he came down to the market every day, he answered

This square is as it should be. It was busier , louder in the past. But over the weekend it is still as beautiful as in the past. I like to see what happens. The fishermen shout, fight, discuss. I like to look at the tourists too, with their cameras and their mouths wide open, like kids in a playground. It is beautiful, don't you think? And why do you come here every day?

It was a very good answer and it kept me thinking for a long time. Old men stood watching a snapshot from the past, the main square is regarded as a tie with the past. These men guarded this space, keeping alive an illusion connected to the landscape, to locality and to nature in general.

6.3 Tradition modernised

Vendors seek ways to modernise their stalls, selecting the type of modernisation they desire, modernising tradition, whenever appropriate. The Longos' large family have modernised the service at their fish stall. They have a landline for taking orders, they deliver, they clean fish and they do some basic preparations. For example, they prepare skewers with different types of fish, they butterfly the sardines, and try to save time for housewives and restaurants. As the two heads of the family Salvatore and Alfio Longo explained to me, they realised they needed to change some of their practices in order to maintain their clientele.

We need to keep the customers coming down to the market, otherwise we lose the business. To do that we need to give more, to try to understand what people need now. It is not easy. People are

lazy nowadays.

At the market, vendors describe modernity as requiring efficiency, standardisation and affordability. Being ‘modern’ also means constantly adhering to the new regulations. This process is seen as contradictory at *La Pescheria*. Introducing Sebastiano's narrative about his stall's “*ammodernamento*” (modernisation) offers acute insight into this process. Sebastiano Valenti is a butcher, belonging to a new generation of stallholders. He knows the needs of city dwellers and he tries to give the customers the type of products they would find in bigger outlets. He is aware that many people do not trust supermarkets and that they prefer to buy meat at the market. He has invested in his shop, trying to make it as modern as possible. He constitutes a good example of the attempt to marry modernity and tradition.

I don't know if it is worth to invest in the shop any more. I try to be positive, but sometimes it is hard. It is the family business and I want to keep it going. There are too many people basse (low, referring to low status). They come here and they don't care about the norms, about hygiene.

Sebastiano's story resonates with De Certeau's (1984) description of Robert's shop. However while “Robert's customers experience an equilibrium between the permanence of the past (because he has been a grocer for forty years) and the 'necessities of progress' (because his store is 'modern')” (De Certeau, 1984:75), it seems that this balance is still lacking within the market. Sebastiano explains to me:

They want cheap meat. They compare us to a supermarket, it's impossible to make them understand we are not a supermarket. Our costs are different. Also our way of working is different, but they don't see it.

The senses are directly involved not only in the market experience, as shown in Chapter 5, but also in market relations. I provide evidence of how hygiene rules interfere in this relation. A valid example is the habit of eating raw fish, which is not infrequent, especially among older customers. In *Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto* it is common to see a customer grabbing a fresh anchovy,

taking off the head and trying it straight away, to test the freshness of the fish. I was told

My grandfather used to take the bus to come down town to the fish market. He did not live nearby. Everyone knew it. They used to call him Zio Turi (Uncle Turi). He normally would taste the fish as it was raw, the masculini⁸⁶, shrimps, all raw. He would swallow⁸⁷ them like this at the stall.

Another good example is related to the handling of the produce. Vendors don't want to give up one of the advantages of shopping at the market, i.e. the possibility to choose one's own fruit and vegetables. But on the other hand they know that according to the hygiene rules, it is not appropriate to handle fruit and vegetables with their hands. Vendors normally try to display the vegetables in a way that makes it difficult for the customers to help themselves. As one of them explained to me:

People here touch everything. Sometimes we have to discuss with the ladies. They touch even very delicate fruit. Like cherries or apricots. But you know, I understand that.

Sergio Maugeri for instance tries to intervene in a nice way asking the ladies “*Let me give you the best ones*” in an attempt to convince them that it is better if he chooses on their behalf. However he says that there are certain ladies, with whom this strategy does not work: they come to the market, because they want to touch what they are going to buy. Another vendor displays his goods so as to protect it from people's habit of touching it. He explained that he puts tomatoes, aubergines, and salads closer to him, so that customers can start choosing a cauliflower or a bunch of broccoli, but they don't reach out for the more delicate stuff.

It works – he says – This way I don't have to tell them off and be disrespectful. You know if you start fingering the tomatoes, at the end of the day they will all be rotten. Especially when it is very hot. I try to preserve the quality of my produce, but it is difficult to explain to a customer. The customer is always right and they think

86 The name for small anchovies in Catania.

87 In the conversation “se li calava”

they can do whatever they want, even if they don't buy the ones they touch.

According to the vendors, the challenge is to be able to provide a modern service without losing the directness of the market and without interfering too much in the direct experiential relationship to food. Enrico is alert to this situation and worries about this conflict:

This is one of the reason why this market is so different from a supermarket. You don't need to wear a plastic glove to touch a peach. I know it is not very hygienic, because your hands can be dirty and I don't want to buy the fruit you have touched.

As shown in Chapter 3, pre-wrapping is almost totally absent from the market. In the Pescheria customers' point of view, a plastic wrap imposes a barrier between the senses and food. If supermarket-like packaging were to be introduced at the market, it would hinder this experience. As Mrs La Rosa states clearly

I like to come to the market because I can be close to what I buy. I don't need to wear plastic gloves or put everything in a plastic bag. I prefer this direct relationship to produce.

Pre-wrapping would also impose a distance between the consumer and the products. As de Certeau (1984) puts it

Modernization always brings along a certain number of suspicions with it about the quality of the products; standardization, prewrapping, all the modern procedures in food preparation worry people (*Ibid:75*).

As I have shown, a direct sensory relation with food is represented as the traditional Sicilian way of experiencing food and maintaining a specific relationship to the landscape.

There are constant suspicions that modern procedures introduce a new order, by imposing cleanliness and banishing dirt (Douglas 1999).

Dirt avoidance is a process of tidying up, ensuring order in external physical events conforms to the structure of ideas. Pollution rules can thus be seen as an extension of the perceptual process: insofar

as they impose order on experience, they support clarification of forms and thus reduce dissonance (*Ibid:111*)

Thus, regulations about hygiene introduce dissonance in this ordered system, and that explains why these changes were a major concern among vendors and buyers at *La Pescheria*. People at the market worry that they won't be able to touch or even taste their food before buying it. It has been clearly demonstrated that buyers at the market express the 'need' to experience food directly.

By contrast, when food is processed, like in a supermarket, the sensory experience is mediated or at least postponed to the moment during which the customer unwraps the food. The direct experience of food is thus deferred and relocated to the household, and does not happen at the market any more. That means a shift from the public to the private space. However, for many customers the market constitutes a familiar public space, a space in which it is possible to experience food directly. Degen (2008) writes that:

[e]ach society constructs certain assumptions about what is permissible to see, taste, hear, feel and smell in a public space. We can conclude that sensuous geographies are important elements in the construction and maintenance of *social order* in place (*Ibid:67*)

6.4 Modern temporality

Ferguson's (1999) ethnography on expectation of modernity in the Zambian Copperbelt shares some similarities with Catania. He defines modernity as a myth. Anthropologists are aware of:

its ambiguity, because it is often used in two quite different senses [...]. First, there is the popular usage, which takes a myth to be a false or factually inaccurate version of things that has come to be widely believed. Second, there is the anthropological use of the term, which focuses on the story's social function: a myth in this sense is not just a mistaken account but a cosmological blueprint that lays down fundamental categories and meanings for the

organization and interpretation of experience.(*Ibid.*:13)

This could be applied to modernity as much as to tradition. They are both founding categories that organise experience and social relations at the market. However, just because tradition and modernity are invented or imagined, they cannot be dismissed. These constructs tell us something about how people locate themselves in time and space. I concur with Ferguson's position, when he finds challenging

to keep such appropriate skepticism toward the modernization story close to hand while at the same time taking seriously the place that it occupied in the conceptions of my informants. [...] the narrative of an emerging urban modernity set against the dark background of a static rural tradition is a myth, but to say this is not to be done with the matter. On the contrary, they require to be analyzed, and not just refuted (Ferguson, 1999:85)

Being aware of this, I need to place the idea of modernisation in the context of Catania's historical market, as it is not possible to take it for granted and we cannot analyse the ideas which relate to tradition without addressing modernity.

The local terms to indicate modernisation are “*diventare moderni*” (to become modern), “*ammodernarsi*” and “*essere al passo con i tempi*” (keep up with the times). All these words imply a process of linear change. They do not indicate that something has already happened, rather a movement towards modernisation. They also allude to the need to keep up with Italy and Europe. The idea of modernisation carries the vision of being subaltern. It informs a self-representation of a place where time has stood still, a place, which has not been able to evolve.

This feeling of the necessity to speed up is often expressed with relation to the European Union. When Italy joined the European Union, political discourse focused on making Italians willing to catch “the train to Europe” (*il treno per l'Europa*). Another common idea is the one of being “*fanalino di coda dell'Europa*”, the tail-end of Europe, the last bit of the European empire.

Geographically speaking this perception is seen as being particularly apt when speaking of Sicily, it being an island on the southern borders of Europe (Renda 2000). Sicily has moved from being a periphery to becoming a border, a bridge and latterly a frontier and such geo-political repositioning requires a continuous renegotiation of the island's identity (Renda 2000:12). Drawing on Gramsci, Chambers (2008) suggests that:

struggle or conflict lay not between *tradition* and *modernity*, but between the *subaltern* and the *hegemony*. This historical and conceptual perspective radically alters the whole critical axis. It charts *within* modernity itself the political, cultural, and historical complexities that compose the present (*Ibid*:8).

The local people, however, use modernity and tradition to indicate the tension they perceive between their representation of the past and of themselves and the changes introduced by authorities through new legislation.

Perceptions about future changes of the city centre demonstrate local understandings of modernity. The market has been facing a crisis for a long time. The debate around its declining profitability constitutes a daily topic of conversation. Stallholders provided two different explanations for the reasons why they believed the market would be closed or moved to another area of town. Some vendors think that the local council just wants to get rid of the market without having a specific plan about the area. According to Sebastiano, the modernisation process has already happened in more northerly regions. "It is completed over there", while it has failed to happen or is still ongoing in Sicily.

This city is not modern, it is not like in the North of Italy. The city centre is not becoming trendy or expensive. I think it is just a way of making the interests of big investors, but it is not a re-qualification of the area. I wish it was.

Other stallholders think that a gentrification process has already started and that administrators are trying to transform the city centre into an expensive residential area. One of the fishermen explained to me, when I asked him what

he felt about the future of the market:

Do you think authorities care about the families that make a living here? They don't care when they fire people working in factories, why should we be different? There is a political will. Come on! You don't need to be a genius to see that! It is clear to me. They want stallholders to spend money, to make the market modern, we have to fit their plan, but they don't do anything.

When Salvatore says “we have to fit their plan”, he conveys the idea that the modernisation of the market is imposed from above. The vendors seem not to participate in this decision. And he continues along the same lines, elucidating what modernisation implies.

External authorities will try to make this area expensive, they want to speculate on the buildings. They have started restoring some of them. The will is clear to many of us.

In “Nostalgia of the modern”, Roy (2004) describes the gentrification of the Lower East End in New York as the embodiment of modernisation. The “teleology of progress, of renewal and remaking”, he argues, “operates through an appropriation of tradition, through a 'looking backward'” (*Ibid: 63*). In Catania it is not very clear from an institutional point of view how far this process has progressed at the market. It is important to understand the internal discussion and conflict it generates within the market.

Vendors at the market blame administrators and the media for giving a negative image of the market, despite their attempt to become ‘modern’. Once again it was Sebastiano who very passionately shared with me his feelings of helplessness.

You know how much I have invested in my shop, you see the difference. Thousands of Euros to modernise my business and follow all the rules, but how am I going to pay this money back, if they close the market, if they keep trying to show only the bad side of this market. It is a joke. They should be kidding.

The representation of modernisation carries an idea of backwardness, of subalternity, which cannot be disclosed if not connected to what Pratt (2002)

describes as:

Italy's self-representation, rather than being centred and unified, continues to be built around a duality of North and South and the tensions between them. In dominant versions of this opposition, geography and history are elided: the North represents development, rationality and modernity, the South is backward, magical and archaic (*Ibid.*:29).”

The north becomes one of the places of modernity. Although this juxtaposition is very strong, it is not a dichotomy. People at the market do not look at the north or at modernity as something evil. They feel modernity threatens many characteristics of the market and its organisation, however they also strive for a more efficient, business-oriented environment. For the vendors there is no contradiction in thinking of tradition as a value and in trying to incorporate the supermarket model, or at least some elements of it. It is a selective modernity the one they desire, a modernity in which they can exercise choice and agency, instead of one imposed by the authorities.

6.5 Hygiene, German Tourists and the European Union

The European Union embodies modernity, being regarded as the agency introducing regularisation, and as the globalising force operating against the local knowledge. In this frame, the local and the traditional become what needs to be protected and preserved. A whole rhetoric about nostalgia emerged very soon after the European Union became an institutional entity.

A good example is provided by Seremetakis's (1994) account of European regulations introduced in Greece.⁸⁸ However, some of the main themes she highlights are still very relevant, especially to locate people's point of view. Seremetakis (1994) connects nostalgia to broader social phenomena,

⁸⁸ Seremetakis referred to the European Economic Community (EEC), as the European Union was created in 1993 after her fieldwork.

such as the "the rationale of trans-national uniformity" (Seremetakis 1994:4) of the European institutions, that

have initiated a massive intervention in the commensal cultures of its membership by determining what regional varieties of basic food staples can be grown, marketed and exported. (*Ibid:4*)

A consistent body of anthropological and sociological literature focuses on the role of the European Union regulations, perceived in juxtaposition to local traditions (Leitch 2003). The European Union has introduced a body of regulations concerning food labelling, food production, and fisheries. In a few cases these laws banned traditional local practices and generated controversial debates.

The European Union has two departments which engage directly with food-related issues: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. Agriculture and Rural Development engages in issues related to food quality, food security and sustainable agricultural production whilst Maritime Affairs and Fisheries tries to make fisheries more sustainable along scientific lines. According to this approach it is necessary to impose rules on what to fish, when and how, in order to ensure the survival of sea life.

Italy as a European Member State is obliged to follow the European policies about food labelling and sustainable fishing. But the local governments are seldom able to impose these rules at *La Pescheria*.

During September 2009, I returned to Catania after reading in the Italian newspapers, that the city mayor had ordered the market to be closed. According to the press, a German tourist, had visited Catania during the summer, taking pictures and filming the market, in order to expose its poor hygienic conditions and to report them to the European Union. Some newspapers described the German tourist as a physician (La Sicilia 2009). Despite the questionable reliability of these reports, some of the elements they contain demonstrate my

argument. The 'spy' was supposed to be a tourist, thus a foreigner, someone who is unaware of the local 'traditional' ways; a German, who embodies efficiency and modernisation more than any other European national in the Italian imagination. He is also perceived as a medical doctor, as someone holding distinct ideas concerning public health and hygiene.

Summarising, there is an external force, located outside of the local system of meaning, which interferes with the market organisation. Apparently the European Union had started an investigation and was about to send inspectors to the market. Some newspaper even reported that it was the European Union that had decided to close the market (La Sicilia 2009; Sicilia Informazioni 2009). This is definitely misleading as the European Union does not have any authority to exercise its power locally without the synergy of the local authority.

Before any inspectors appeared, the city council temporarily closed the market. They installed public toilet facilities in the main square and kept the area of Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto clear for about ten days. When I asked my informants what was happening, they said there were riots between the unlicensed fishermen and the police every day. They were worried about the future of the market, about their businesses, and about what would happen next.

While the rest of the market ran as usual, the main square was empty. Prior to September 2009 in *Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto* the staff equipment was very basic and somehow 'primitive'. The fishermen didn't wear white coats as did the butchers, but you could recognise them thanks to the waterproof rubber boots and the woollen caps, which they wore even during the summer. When it was very hot, some of them wore sandals or flip-flops. Their outfit was very informal and also their attitude towards customers was direct and straightforward. Fish was kept in big blue plastic buckets containing sea water and ice. This mixture becomes red with fish blood if the buckets contain anchovies or sardines. Wooden crates displaying fish were balanced on the rims

of these buckets.

During my visit in October 2009 the square had changed. I felt very uncomfortable, because it was half empty and much quieter than in the past. The council had reopened it, but didn't allow the unlicensed fishermen to sell their catch. In order to sell their fish , the vendors now needed a stainless steel display stall, a scale and a paid-up license. Fish was now displayed on steel surfaces, layered on ice, as in the fishmongers' area of the market. The old plastic buckets were hidden underneath the stalls and the fishermen were wearing aprons and caps, giving them a more professional appearance. Gaetano commented on these changes:

We look like nurses, don't you think? My friends say I can pretend I work in a hospital now, with this white coat. It is much better anyway, it is not so bad, isn't it?

Gaetano, one of the youngest fishermen, is not upset about the changes. He thinks the new procedures can guarantee more safety to the customers, but he also believes it is a good way of excluding all the unlicensed fishermen, who used to come to the market without permission. Placido, his father, shares his son's vision completely. The council measures may also help them to resolve some of the issues related to illegality within the market. They complained about the lack of proper controls when I interviewed them. Their discontent concerned those vendors who paid neither taxes nor tolls. However, Placido, Gaetano's father, was pretty sure that these improvements were not going to last for a long time.

You will see – he said to me, almost whispering in my ear – in three months they will forget about us and the market and everything will be the same, as it has always been.

Others at the market agree with him, about the superficiality of the changes and Sebastiano also thought they were not going to last.

There is no structural change. It's just the surface, so it will be easy to go back to where we were. You'll see.

They were right as by July 2010 the market was, in fact, back to what the vendors consider 'normal': no aprons, no caps, only the steel containers are left, in addition the toilets had been removed. Fish is again being sold from the blue plastic buckets.

This sceptical attitude was reinforced by the belief that no formal European investigation had occurred. The vendors did not believe that there had been any actual intervention; they explained to me that the episode was due to the lack of confidence on the part of the local authorities. Salvatore believed that the European Union was just functioning as a scapegoat

The inspectors never came. They were announced, but we never saw them. No-one believes in this story of the tourist. They made it up. The local authorities didn't want to be the ones to bear the blame. They were afraid. We could have made a mess. A riot. But they put it in a way in which they are not responsible. What are we gonna do? Complain or fight the European Union? It's much easier to blame someone who is in Brussels. We will never go and protest in Brussels.

The game of blame and responsibilities was fascinating and also very symbolic. The fishermen blame local authorities, who blame the European Union. It expresses ideas about trust and distrust. Gambetta (1998) writes

trust (or, symmetrically, distrust) is a particular level of the subjective probability with which an agent assesses that another agent or group of agents will perform a particular action, both *before* he can monitor such action [...] When we say we trust someone or that someone is trustworthy, we implicitly mean that the probability that he will perform an action that is beneficial or at least not detrimental to us is high enough for us to consider engaging in some form of cooperation with him. (*Ibid*:217)

Any sense of cooperation with the authorities is totally absent at the market and the relationship with them is based on scepticism and distrust. There is an ongoing power struggle, which becomes very visible in rumours about the European intervention. Placido the fisherman keeps following this line of reasoning

Do they need a German tourist to show them what is wrong? It is no surprise to the local police. They know what happens at the market. Don't they see it every day? What German tourist? They must be kidding!

Distrust of authority is regarded as a feature of the Sicilian societal organisation, which has been stressed by many authors (Blok 2010; Gambetta 1988a; 1988b; Misztal 1996). In Blok's (2010) words:

Distrust discouraged cooperation with authorities and promoted reliance on informal relationships, including kinship, friendship and patronage, with their attendant behaviour codes that emphasized respect, loyalty, reciprocity and solidarity. In turn, self-help and patronage helped undermine government intervention: one became a condition to the other (*Ibid:59*)

In this power struggle, what emerges clearly is the shared vision of the lack of authority of the local government. Salvatore, another fisherman, freely shared his opinions with me, when we meet up the at harbour after fishing.

The administrators are trying to give a false picture. They are picturing us, the fishermen, as the illegal, dirty ones. It is so easy. I am not denying there are people selling fish illegally. I know it. I have been fighting against it all my life. It is a reality at the market. However the local authority hasn't done anything to improve our working environment.

He continued:

There is no running water, no public toilets, no drainage system. The European Union gave the local council the money, and it was enough money to refurbish the market, especially the pavement. Apparently they did something, but after three months it was all the same. We are still the guilty ones, but what about them? If they really wanted a better market, why don't they provide us a different place? Still in the city centre, but if they want this area to be clean, give us another option. Or change whatever needs to be changed! We are the ones to blame, but not for the structural problems.

For the sake of my argument, it is not really relevant whether the new regulations are introduced by the European Union or by the town council. What really matters instead, is that this type of control is perceived as external, and as being imposed from above. Hygienic standards, health and safety regulations

are perceived as impositions that often interfere in what is considered ‘the traditional way’. They create a distance, and erect a barrier between the vendor and the buyer. They not only intervene directly in the sensory experience of food, but they also interfere in the social relationship to landscape between the vendor and the buyer.

6.7 Hypermarkets, modernity condensed

Hypermarkets respond perfectly to these ideas of hygiene and health regulation. They are perceived as the rationalised context for food consumption *par excellence* together with fast foods. Large shopping malls have been only recently established in Sicily. According to Camarda (2008), the province of Catania counts 650,000 sq metres of shopping malls.

While I was visiting one of Palermo's daily food markets, I asked one of my local guides “Where do the people of Palermo do their shopping?” I meant in which one of the food markets I was visiting. He answered “In supermarkets”. I think it is one the best examples of how the attitude towards markets has changed in the last few years.

My informants in the Pescheria defined the market in constant relation to supermarkets and hypermarkets. Almost every conversation at the market mentioned supermarkets and hypermarkets. They all agreed that the increasing number of shopping centres was responsible for the current crisis at the market. When I asked Daniele what had been the most important change in the last ten years, he answered

The sales have decreased. A lot. You have to pinpoint in your research that the metropolitan area of Catania has more supermarkets than anywhere else. We can't have 15 hypermarkets, maybe 3 huge structures. For the way the area is we could have 2 or 3, but not 15.

Residents of Catania keep seeing massive shopping centres with huge parking spaces opening up everywhere, while they face parking problems each day. Some vendors are thinking about relaunching and creating new initiatives such as providing trolleys for customers at the market entrance or ensuring more parking spaces. According to the vendors, customers do not drive down to the market because it is not possible to get close to the city centre, as the traffic is so congested. They attribute the success of the big distribution outlets to their provision of parking facilities, and their capacity to concentrate a diverse range of shops and services under one roof. .

Vendors do not see the shopping centres in a negative light, being aware of what they can offer when it comes to service and facilities. They believe that these places provide a valuable service. Placido had no doubt about the sociality of shopping in a mall and even argued that supermarkets served social ritual functions.

Today for example the young couples, they don't come to the market. They go to big supermarkets. In summer there is air conditioning. They go on Sundays, it is like a *passeggiata* (promenade).

My informants see the hypermarket as a contemporary form of ritual, finding its equivalent in the *passiu* (*passeggiata*, city walk) on the main street. The social aspect is deemed to be particularly important for the younger generation, who attend the shopping centre almost weekly. Davide, one of the greengrocers, tried to provide me a comprehensive picture of the reasons why everyone has to go to hypermarkets.

I don't like it, but I go there. Everyone goes. I feel bad if I don't take my wife. She wants to look at things, to buy stuff for the kid. Also when we were engaged we used to meet there. She would come with her girlfriends and I was with mine. We did meet a lot also in via Etnea, on Saturday afternoon especially. I prefer via Etnea. I don't like to be locked inside and here the weather is always good.

This perspective is very interesting. The literature often portrays

markets, squares, and streets as the places of sociality, juxtaposing them with supermarkets, which are mere, cold, rational consumption contexts. The results of my research show the distinction to be more blurred, and this standpoint speaks against the romanticisation of the market as the last social place for food consumption. For example, Black (2005) defends Turin's market as “important social spaces in cities where public spaces are disappearing and contact between city dwellers is limited” (*Ibid*:6). For the market vendors, supermarkets are social spaces, in which people meet. I can draw a parallel with what I have illustrated until now. The market is identified with tradition, while supermarkets are seen to exemplify rational modernity. This polarisation is artificial, and does not capture the complexity of daily life. My informants emphasize the entertaining side of the shopping mall. As Placido explained:

I went there sometimes, you know with my wife. It is a place for families and it is good also for young people. You can spend a whole day there without getting bored. It is entertaining.

This ability to entertain the entire family is seen as one of the advantages of shopping malls.

You go there on Saturday, there are a lot of shops, you walk around, you meet people. You can have an ice cream. Then because you are there, what do you do? Your grocery shopping. It is clean, pre-packed. Ready. What's the point of coming here?

There are two main differences between supermarkets and the city market. One is cleanliness. Informants describe the supermarkets as a clean and safe environment, and juxtapose it with the dirty and dangerous traditional market. The greengrocer, Salvatore, explained it very clearly, after one of his regular customers came to greet him and told him he had spent the past Saturday afternoon in a supermarket.

I can understand it. You go there, it's clean, so your girlfriend doesn't complain about the smell of fish. You see here, your shoes get dirty. People have nice shoes nowadays, they don't want to make them dirty.

However, the market vendors are all very critical of the quality of the

food sold there. What the supermarkets lack leads us to the second difference, which is that the shopping mall has no tradition. It is modernity without a past, without connection to the territory, to the landscape. Sebastiano was very explicit about this.

Hypermarkets know nothing about Sicily and our produce. They are big corporations. I don't dislike it, but I would never buy meat there. Everything is wrapped in plastic, already cut. It is like buying something which has already been eaten.

The hypermarket embodies an idea of modernity, in which everything is clean, safe and controlled. It is

an artificial, sanitised 'public space' by excluding nearly all manifestations of collective life as well as those existential aspects of reality which are sequestered by an abstract systems of modernity" (O'Connor 2011:3).

"Tradition has no place in there" says Daniele, highlighting the difference between these big outlets and the market. As I have demonstrated, it is at the market that 'tradition' finds its place.

6.8 Conclusions

This chapter addressed the significance of the concepts of modernity and tradition at the market. I argue that both tradition and modernity are used to represent power relations between different authorities, from the local to the national and international ones, such as the European Union. Modernisation theories along with the globalisation ones often picture people as passive victims of these de-territorialising forces. My ethnography shows vendors select aspects of modernisation and they are actively engaging in combining elements of what they perceive as not conflicting with their representation of tradition. Institutions and transnational forces do play a role, but people search for reasons in addressing change, simultaneously negotiating the past and their perception of the present. Giddens (1994) writes about memory

Memory, like tradition - in some sense or another - is about organizing of the past in relation to the present. [...] Memory is thus an active, social process, which cannot merely be identified with recall. We continually reproduce memories of past happenings or states, and these repetitions confer continuity upon experience. [...] Tradition, therefore, we may say, is an *organizing medium of collective memory*. (*Ibid:63-64*)

I think this could apply also to modernisation, because both modernity and tradition unravel the conflict of the present, and constitute useful tools when looking at the way people negotiate their identity and their sense of belonging. Montanari and Flandrin (1999) claim that history teaches us that change is inescapable. Nostalgia tends to ignore that the past was a past of scarcity.

I have shown that the market offers a space in which to debate ideas about modernity and tradition, and also for integrating social changes. Vendors share ideas of incomplete modernisation (Huysseune 2006), but they do not refuse it in its totality. They try to avoid having it imposed from outside, thus gaining some control over this process.

Throughout this thesis, I have shown how the history of Sicily has been represented as the history of a people without agency, with no choice, victims of foreign invasions in the past. At the present moment, this rhetoric is still very powerful; the agents of invasion have changed, and have become more contemporary ones. Agents such as the European Union, globalisation, modernity, and the north of Italy are all converging into this representation of unbalanced power, in which the island is left helpless. However, at the micro-level of the market, as I have shown in the previous chapter, the market actors are not only carrying out an economical transaction, they are exercising social strategies, in which their competence becomes clear. They exercise their agency when they choose where to buy and from whom. This corresponds to what Argyrou (1996) observes about Greece:

people are actively engaged in shaping their lives, manoeuvring as

they do through obstacles raised by the exigencies of life. In this process, they often resort to practices that are seemingly contradictory to theoretical models, even when they reproduce the system further down the road (*Ibid:164*).

Chapter VII

Conclusions

Comu finisci, si cunta
(One can tell, only when it ends)
Catanesse proverb

The market, as it has been demonstrated by De La Pradelle (2006), was the ideal anthropological object to challenge our understanding of cultural values within an economic system. It is a place for exchange of goods, ideas and values. At the market social relationships and economic transactions are combined in the daily interaction among people (Black 2009).

The complexity of urban contexts poses a challenge to contemporary anthropology (Gupta & Ferguson 1997), both from a theoretical and methodological perspective. My focus on the market as significant place in Catania provided a vantage point for observing the exchanges between the city, the local authorities, the island, the nation, and the European Union. Without compromising the richness of my ethnographic data, I tried to frame the narratives of my informants in their power relations to broader contexts.

A mythological narrative of the island informed perceptions at *La Pescheria*. These narratives had profound political implications. The paradox of Sicilian identity (Buttitta 1984) is the paradox of any identity, but paradox here becomes a *raison d'être*, founded on embracing contradictions. De Certeau (1984) warned us that stories are temporal and spatial and this thesis aimed to locate the *Pescheria's* narrative in relation to time and space.

My examination of this paradox started from the history of Sicily, or

better from the way the past is used to confer legitimacy (Herzfeld 2001:86). I did not approach history as a static sequence of events, rather as cumulative and as constituting an exchange between the past and the present. The past, especially the ‘monumental past’ (Herzfeld 1991:6), performed in the city centre was renegotiated within the market by the social actors interacting by daily social interactions at the market. Sicilian history was necessary to understand this market mainly for two reasons: the succession of foreign invasions are recognised, some more than others, as contributing to the present gastronomic culture of the island. Moreover the controversies of the Italian Unification, and consequently of the nation-building process, play a relevant role in the construction of otherness and alterity, on which the idea of *Sicilianess* is based. The stereotypical representation of Mafia as cultural code also contributes to this picture.

After paying close attention to the spatial organisation of the market, including its boundaries and its geographical relation to the city centre, I started looking at the stalls display, following the grouping of the foodstuffs as leading criterion. I first provided some structural information about each category of stalls (location, opening hours, stallholders gender, type of goods on sale and modality of sale). Then I approached the main themes emerged during my fieldwork, giving more relevance to fish, meat, vegetables and fruit, which were the prevalent foodstuffs sold at the market. According to De La Pradelle (2006), each stall produced a micro-society around itself. In my case, however, the observation of how the space is utilised disclosed a distinctive modality of defining quality and goodness, of attributing meanings to food and to its provenance. The apparent chaos unravelled gradually an order which conveyed ideas of dirt and pollution (Douglas 1966).

The local ideas about cleanliness, dirt, and distance inform a distinctive social order, and conflict with regulations enforced by the European Union and the Italian government. The European food safety legislation often overlooks

the local notions of hygiene, creating a clash between the market vendors and the municipality. The latter in fact was supposed to compel observance to these rules. My observations supported Rodman's observation (2003) that places are "local and multiple" (*Ibid*: 208), not only in the way they are organised, but also in the way they are experienced. It is this complex and multi-modal experience that is under the threat of the rationalisation of urban spaces (Degen 2008).

The concept that better represented the relationship between the market and its surroundings is the landscape. I intended landscape as cultural process (Hirsch 1995a), which founded the "mythic geography" of the market (Cosgrove 1993:294). The classification of food into wild, local and foreign informed a distinction into three different spaces: the local or domestic, the wilderness and the foreign. The market functioned as link in between these three dimensions.

The local here represented what is safe, intensively farmed products can also be defined local as much as their provenance is Sicilian. The domestic stood for the control over nature (Anderson 1997).

The wilderness was symbolised by the volcano and by the sea; the products coming from these environments entered the market only through the mediation of men, either fishermen or the occasional sellers of wild plants. This idea of wilderness supported the mythological representation of the island, simultaneously blessed and threatened by the environment. This representation was highly gendered: the volcano is a feminine power, which was transformed into a less threatening entity by men. Domosh's lucid assessment (2001) went straight to this point: "the control of nature by men [...] is made ideologically easier if nature is feminized (*Ibid*: 179)."

Kuper (2005) argues that the right to the land often relies on "[...] obsolete anthropological notions and on romantic and false ethnographic vision

(*Ibid*: 218).” In the unique case of Sicily, ruled by many different populations throughout history, the right to be on the island and to define oneself as Sicilian was based upon on a powerful masculine metaphor. The foreign was what lays outside of Sicily, or in some case outside of Italy. The foreign needed to be filtered as much as the wild does, but sometimes foreign foods were disguised among the local products from the wholesale market. Although customers feared to be given Chinese garlic and Spanish oranges, these products were sometimes sold as local ones. Like in the history of Sicily, the foreign mingled and interacted with the local.

This cosmology however raised a question concerning how the boundaries of the market’s community were protected and maintained. I argued that the interaction between vendors and buyers was articulated though a unique set of practices, which was highly valued at the market. The *sperto* (smart) customers, regarded themselves as insiders, who were able to engage in a series of competences, going from the sensory perception to the ability to prove one’s shrewdness, from an expertise in the local gastronomy to conviviality.

An essential dimension was given by the senses. People constantly spoke about and stimulated sensory perception. I became soon involved in the bodily dimension of the relationship to food, undergoing a training which I defined ‘apprenticeship’. This form of learning considers the “interdependence of minds, bodies, and environment (Marchand 2010:52)” and it overcomes the dualism body/mind, including both aspects in the human cultural interactions.

The market experience, though, is not only synaesthetic, but also kinaesthetic. Conducting oneself appropriately at the market involves a spatial dimension: the ability to ‘move around’. My informants did not merely refer to actual spatial movement, but rather to the dialogic capacity of moving between trust and mistrust, whilst interacting with vendors.

Cooking and eating according to the local tradition were the other two

elements included in the expertise to acquire. Cooking was especially relevant in my own experience at the market. Women at the market instructed me, a single woman, into cooking dishes regarded as the most peculiar to the Catanese tradition, necessary for getting (and keeping a Sicilian husband). Learning the local names for foods and dishes became essential too.

The market claims to be ‘traditional’ and the word ‘*tradizione*’ (tradition) was on everyone’s lips during my fieldwork. Recent scholarly contributions challenge the dichotomy between tradition and modernity; and see tradition as a consequence of modernity (Ferguson 1999; Boym 2001). It has been argued that Italian modernisation is incomplete (Huysseune 2006) and my informants also perceive modernisation as an ongoing process. They speak of modernisation, intended as a movement from backward to modern; they embrace an evolutionary idea of progress, in which different degrees of backwardness or modernity are placed. However they do not see any contradiction between this process and tradition. Within the market, the ideas of modernisation and tradition proceed together.

My ethnographic data show two distinct but interdependent fears: the fear of being left behind and the fear of losing control. The fear of being left behind derives from the drive to modernisation, in which ideas such as efficiency, hygiene, safety and rationalisation play a vital role. The comparison to a mythic representation of the North reinforces the image of Sicily and the South as backward, inefficient, and almost ‘primitive’. The stress on rationality in modernisation does not find a proper space in the representation of Sicilians, as passionate and unpredictable people.

Similarly, the fear of losing control over change goes hand in hand with progress. The perception of a loss is linked to nostalgia for an idealised past. “It is a world to which we would, apparently, wish to be returned, a world in which culture does not challenge nature” (Kuper 2005:218). As I have previously intimated, the romanticised landscape together with a representation of people

as victims of history and nature allows a relief in the collective responsibility. People do not feel responsible for what surrounds them, such as in the case of exploiting the fish stock.

This picture would not be complete without mentioning the importance of tourism within the market. The tourists' quest for authentic food products, translated in a new marketing target for gastronomic souvenirs, found a response within the market. The vendors remarked how foreigners appreciated the folklore of the market and its peculiarities.

Finally the market constitutes a space for irrationality, and for social active participation: a contemporary version of a Greek agora, an agora with insufficient parking spaces. The point I tried to make throughout the thesis is that the market still functions as a centre of the political and social life of the city, but it is caught between diverging forces, which have not found a harmony yet.

Recalling the metaphor of the counterpoint, notions of space and time with their derivatives, tradition and modernity, nostalgia and folklore, collective anxieties and romantic landscape, all these melodic line contribute to the symphony of the market. Although the sound emerging is not always pleasant, not always harmonic, it is only without fearing this complexity that urban contemporary contexts can be approached without reductionism. According to me, it is essential to look at the way people reflect and act upon change, even when they fear it. This is relevant in the mainstream discourse about modernisation in any country, because historiography and social sciences contributed to an idea of people as passive recipients of global trends, oppressed by the power of de-territorializing forces (Jacobs, 2004).

The market is a centre, which functions as filter between the city and the wilderness coming from the volcano and the sea. The city represents the order, the centre of the system and the market allows people to be in contact with the

landscape without being overwhelmed by it. Mary Douglas' notions of pollution and order are here very useful to contextualise this process. In Mary Douglas's words: “[r]eflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death” (Douglas 1966:5).

As much as Geertz's kings (1983), the market manifests charisma, in its function as a political centre of the city. The centrality stands for its sacredness. The artisans of the market, butchers and fishermen, seem to be in charge of maintaining a 'traditional' way of doing, which at *La Pescheria* means occupying the space in a very specific way, and this applies particularly well to the fishermen's square. The heart of the market seems to embody its essence and it does speak through practices about the relationship to the city and to the whole island.

I believe that this research has heuristic value and if I would have the chance to proceed, I would probably choose to keep the notion of landscape central for further investigation. One possible path would be a comparison between the rationale of this market and other markets in Catania. My fieldwork experience at the farmers market and at the other historical market was too limited and it could be interesting to compare the different representations of the landscape and their consequent political implications.

Another thread which could be worth mentioning is to study the historical market of the Sicilian capital, Palermo. Palermo's market seem to be more touristic than *La Pescheria* and a possible line of research could be to explore ethnographically how the market has changed in this direction. A question to answer would be whether the landscape constitutes a central feature of Sicilian identity in general and whether the mythological representation of the island plays a role on the western coast of Sicily too.

I recognise the limits of my own work and the possibility for further

research in this field. My ethnographic account does not provide enough insight into the institutional politics of the market and in the official history of the market. This flaw comes from my positioning towards the vendors. In the conflicts between the vendors and the local authority I took the side of the former. This decision was not strategic; it came as a natural consequence of my daily relationship with them. As I have demonstrated, the rapport between vendors and authority is much polarised and it would be very difficult not to decide where to stand.

The weight given to social relationships was apparently unbalanced in comparison to the economic aspect of transaction. The irregularities of the market, i.e. the vendors do not meet the Italian fiscal requirements, are not investigated in-depth, because of the high level of diffidence in discussing economic issues, even among friends. I believe this aspect could have been explored changing ethnographic approach, but I made a clear choice about what my main interest was.

This is linked to the next inconvenience, because my positioning allowed me closeness and trust, but it also created a tie which did not permit unrestrained movement within the market. The advantage of this is that I became aware of the market's systems of affiliation, but also caught in its meshes. To recall Mauss's metaphor of ethnography as fishing, Ferguson (1999) writes "[a]nd when it comes time to inspect the haul, it is not always so clear: did you catch it, or did it catch you?" (*Ibid*: 17). We also choose where to cast our nets and when to haul them out. I preferred to be on the boat learning to fish anchovies, than in the municipality's office looking for official information.

Appendix I

MAPS



0 95 190 380 570 760 Kilometers

Maps Visualization by Guido Robazza; Source: OpenStreetMap; Credit: © OpenStreetMap contributors

Map 1. Sicily and Catania in relation to European and Mediterranean Sea.



0 25 50 100 150 200 Kilometers

Maps Visualization by Guido Robazza; Source: OpenStreetMap;
Credit: © OpenStreetMap contributors

Map 2. Map of Italy with Sicily and Catania in foreground.



0 5 10 20 30 40 Kilometers

Maps Visualization by Guido Robazza; Source: OpenStreetMap;
Credit: © OpenStreetMap contributors

Map 3. Map of Sicily with Mount Etna Natural Park highlighted.



0 125 250 500 Meters

Maps Visualization by Guido Robazza; Source: OpenStreetMap;
Credit: © OpenStreetMap contributors

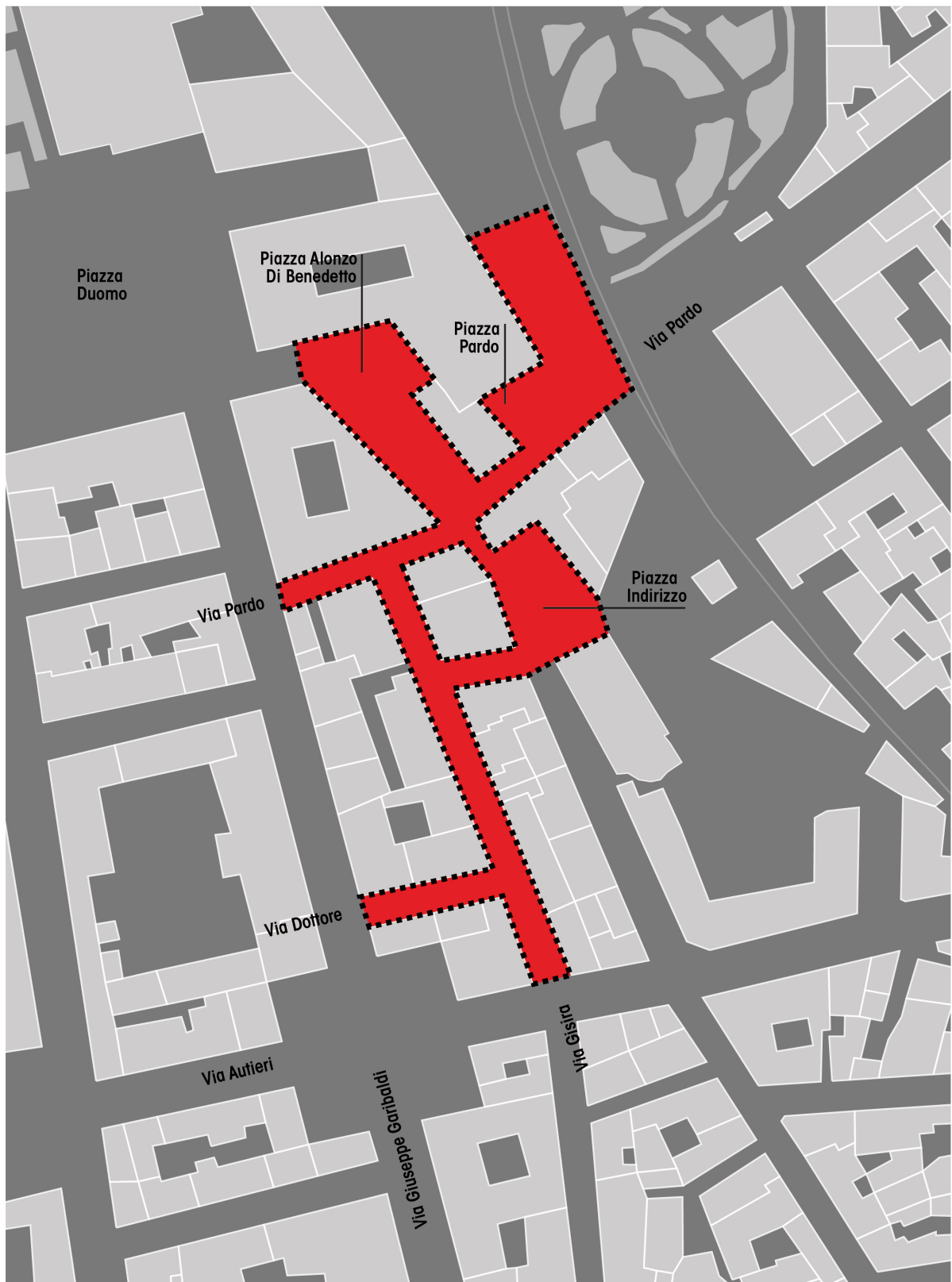
Map 4. Map of the city centre with Piazza Università, Piazza Duomo, and La Pescheria .



0 125 250 500 Meters

Maps Visualization by Guido Robazza; Source: 2012 Google Earth Satellite Image; Credit: © 2012 Google, Image © 2012 GeoEye, Image © 2012 TerraMetrics

Map 5. Satellite view of Catania's city centre. It is possible to identify the harbour on the right handside of the map.



0 12.5 25 50 Meters

Maps Visualization by Guido Robazza; Source: OpenStreetMap;
Credit: © OpenStreetMap contributors

Map 6. The market area with Piazza Pardo and Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto highlighted.



0 12.5 25 50 Meters

Maps Visualization by Guido Robazza; Source: 2012 Google Earth Satellite Image; Credit: © 2012 Google, Image © 2012 GeoEye, Image © 2012 TerraMetrics

Map 7. The satellite view of the market area.

Appendix II

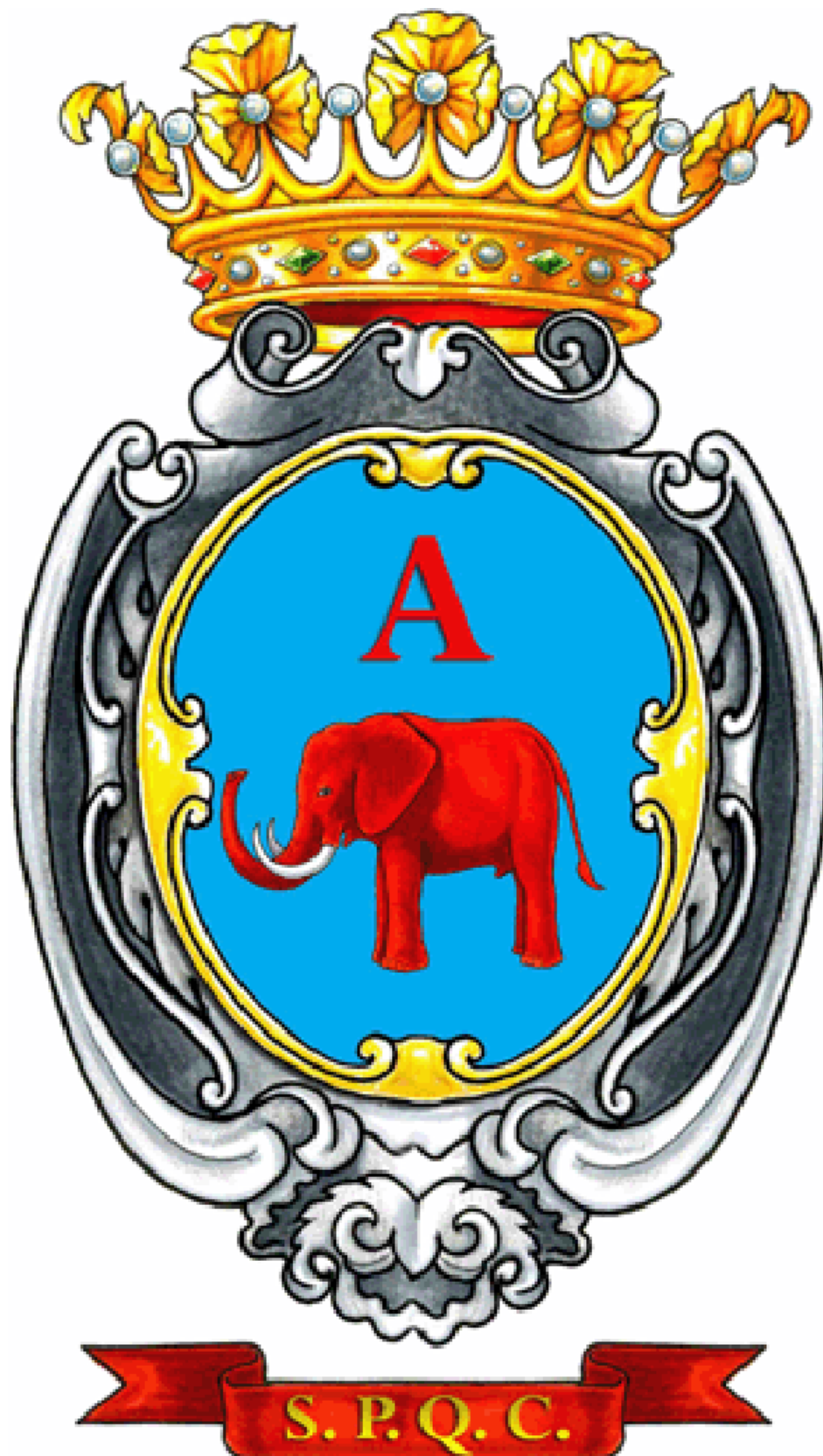
ILLUSTRATIONS



*Illustration 1. Ancient symbol of Sicily
from the webpage http://rici86.altervista.org/celti/simboli_triskell.php*



*Illustration 2. Current flag of Sicily
from the webpage http://pti.regione.sicilia.it/portal/page/portal/PIR_PORTALE/*



*Illustration 2. Symbol of the city
from the webpage http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stemma_di_Catania*

Appendix III

DIFFERENT EYES

This appendix was thought to provide visual aid to the reader. The general idea is to create a photo-story, which follows the stages of the ethnographic analysis.

I tried to embrace different perspectives and “having different eyes” could help in ‘seeing’ angles, which I might have overlooked.



Fot. Sergio Cumitini, 2012

Picture 1. Piazza Duomo, Catania.



Fot. Sergio Cumitini, 2012

Picture 2. Piazza Duomo, The Cathedral. Catania.



Fot. Sergio Cumitini, 2012

Picture 3. Piazza Duomo and the elephant statue, symbol of the city.



Picture 4. Fontana dell'Anemano (Anemano's Fountain), before accessing the market, which is located behind the fountain.

Fot.Sergio Cumitini, 2012



Fot. Roberto Di Bona, 2009

Picture 5. Piazza Alonzo di Benedetto (Alonzo di Benedetto Square), the smelly heart of tradition.



Fot. Roberto Di Bona, 2009

Picture 6. People's movement on the stairs to descend towards the main square.



Fot. Athanassis Lomef Zacharopoulos, lomef.net, 2010

Picture 7. The fishermen selling their catch. Please notice the blue buckets under the counter and the white apron. This picture was taken after the alleged 'European intervention'.



Fot. Athanassis Lomef Zacharopoulos, lomef.net, 2010

Picture 8. Fishing anchovies on a small local vessel. The picture shows the driftnet and the fishermen (and the ethnographer) taking each anchovy out by hand.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011

Picture 9. Piazza Pardo, the fishmonger's square.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011

Picture 10. Sea urchins (ricci di mare) ready for consumption on the shellfish stall.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011
Picture 9. Lamb hanging on the hook-rails of the butcheries.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011
Picture 10. Fruit selection from the wholesale market.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011
Picture 11. Vegetable stall.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011
Picture 12. Bunch of spinach.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011
Picture 13. Buckets of seasonal vegetables, in this case arti chokes (cacocciuli in Sicilian).



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011

Picture 14. A selection of Sicilian dried fruit: almonds, pistachios, hazelnuts. Essential for the Sicilian patisserie.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011

Picture 15. A fishmonger's display. Fish faces upwards, giving the impression it could still swim away.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011

Picture 16. Lemons.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011

Picture 17. Cherry tomatoes from Pachino.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011

Picture 18. An avalanche of oranges.



Fot. Athanassis Lomef Zacharopoulos, lomef.net, 2010
Picture 19. The small tasty apples from the volcano.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011
Picture 20. Men from Etna selling wild dill, oregano and snails at one of the passage to access the market.



Fot. Athanassis Lomef Zacharopolous, lomef.net, 2010

Picture 21. Landscape. Drift-netting at dawn with view of Mount Etna.

Images from Page 238 >>>

Picture 22. Landscape of Mount Etna. (Top of the page)

Picture 23. View from the volcano.. (Bottom of the page)



Fot. Andrea Nucifora, 2012



Fot. Andrea Nucifora, 2012



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011

Picture 24. Swordfish heads displayed on the counter.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011

Picture 25 . Tuna on the marble counter.



Fot. Giuseppe D'Alia, 2011

Picture 26. Customer and stall-holder discussing quality, prices and goodness.

Appendix IV

FISH

Table 1**Name of the fish on sale at the market.**

Italian Name	Sicilian Name	English Translation
acciuغه, alici	sardi maschulini	anchovies
alalunga	angileddi	yellowfin tuna
anguilla	angilla	eel
aragosta	aragosta	spiny lobster
bianchetti	ianchettu	newborn,tiny fish (usually anchovies)
calamaretti	calamaricchi	little squid
calamari	calamaru	squid
cannocchia	canocchia	mantis shrimp
caponi	capuni	gurnard
cernia	cennia	grouper
dentice	dentici	dentex
gamberi	iammuru	shrimp
granchio	rancio o granciu	crab
lattume	lattume	tuna sperm
marmora	mammura	striped bream
merluzzo	miruzzu	cod
moscardino	muscardeddu	curled octopus
neonati	nunnatu maccu	newborn
orata	orata	gilt-head bream
pagello	luvaru	bream
palamita	palamitu	bonito tuna
palombo	palummu	smooth hound, a variety of dogfish
pescatrice	rana piscatrici	monkfish or angler
pesce	spatu	spada swordfish
pesce San Pietro	pisci i S. Petru	fish John Dory
polipo	puppu	octopus
razza or arzilla	razza	skate
ricciola	ricciola	amberjack
rombo	rommo	turbot

Table 1**Name of the fish on sale at the market.**

Italian Name	Sicilian Name	English Translation
sarago	saracu	bream
sardine	sardini	sardines
sauro	sauru	Atlantic horse mackerel
scampi	scampi	langoustines
scorfano	scoffini	scorpion fish
seppie	sirccia	cuttlefish
seppioline	seppiceddi	little cuttlefish
sgombro	sgommuru	mackerel
sogliola	patella	sole
spigola or branzino	spicula	sea bass
tonno	tunnu	bluefin tuna
totano	totanu	flying squid
triglia	sparacacaci	red mullet

Table 2

Shellfish – sold on separate stalls at the market

Italian Name	Sicilian Name	English Translation
arselle	telline cozzuli	smooth-shell clams
cannolicchio	cannuleddi	truncate donax
capésante	capisanti	razor-shell clam
cozze	cozzi	scallops
ostriche	ostrichi	mussels
patelle	pateddi	oysters
ricci di mare	rizzi	limpet
tartufi di mare	tattufi	sea urchins
vongole veraci	vongoli	warty Venus clams

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