

CHAPTER 5



PORTA/PORTO PALAZZO

Porta Palazzo, Turin, July 2015

Amira enters the courtyard of the condominium followed by the middle school class she is guiding on the visit to the neighbourhood. As always, she wears her headscarf, and on a day like today she wears a badge around her neck that qualifies her as an 'intercultural guide'. I was waiting for Amira while standing on the balcony of my apartment to say hello. As I go down the stairs to greet her, I listen to what she is telling the students. 'Come here, my friends! Let's put ourselves next to the entrance of the Mosque so we don't disturb the people who want to enter. Today is Friday, the most important day of the week for Muslims, and in an hour, the whole courtyard here will be full of the faithful who will come in to pray at noon. As you can see, those in charge of the Mosque are already laying down all the carpets. . .'. Amira is a young 24-year-old student from Italy and originally from Tunisia. She was born in a village near Monastir and came to Italy with her parents as a child. Her mother and father sell fruit and vegetables in Porta Palazzo and Amira literally grew up among the market stalls. Notwithstanding her present commitments, she never fails to lend her parents a hand at the market. Amira is a full-time university student in her third year of studies, reading for a degree in Law. She is full of energy and brings groups of students and tourists who want to learn more about the history of Porta Palazzo, and its relationship with migration, for a visit at least once a week. 'Guys, this is Francesco, a resident of this condominium, who can tell us more about the history of this building, which is very long and interesting since the building was built in the mid-nineteenth century.' Amira knows how to do her job very well and does not miss the opportunity to transform my fleeting greeting into an opportunity to chat

a little with the students she is accompanying and to share with them some anecdotes about daily life in a building that houses a Mosque in the courtyard and is home to people from all over the world. I point towards the intercom of the condominium on which there is a list of varying Italian surnames originating from different regions of the country (Piedmontese, Sicilians, Calabrians, Venetians), interspersed with the names of Romanians, Chinese, Moroccans, Nigerians, Albanians, Peruvians, Bengalis. In fact, this large building, with over a hundred apartments, reflects the dynamics that have characterized the entire neighbourhood in its 150 years of existence, starting with the arrival of internal migrants from the Alpine territories, then from the northeast and from the south of Italy, followed eventually by international migrants from Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Hamid, the head of the *Moschea della Pace* (Peace Mosque), tells Amira that students can now enter the prayer room. '*As-salāmu 'alaykum!* This is the greeting that we Muslims use and that in Arabic means "peace be with you". When someone speaks to you with these words, you answer *wa 'alaykumu s-salam*, that is, "and may peace be with you too". Shall we give it a try?' Amira sets the example, and all the schoolchildren respond to Hamid's greeting. After that, the group receives some instructions on how to behave inside the Mosque and, once they remove their shoes, everyone enters the prayer room.

While the meeting takes place, the courtyard gradually fills with more and more faithful who have come to participate in prayer. Other people converge here too, attracted by the fact that thanks to the Mosque the condominium is one of the most frequented places in the neighbourhood at this time of day. There are Moroccan women who sell bread and home-made *m'semen* flatbread, an Egyptian peddler selling dried fruit, another selling personal and home hygiene products and a couple of children who wave large bouquets of fresh mint on offer for one euro. Seated by the front door, two Romanian Roma women, a mother and daughter, both wearing a headscarf and greeting those who enter the courtyard in Arabic, beg for alms. Finally, two trucks park in front of the building. They are loaded with melons and watermelons that will be sold directly from the street.

Suddenly, a couple turns to me asking me for information in English. They cart along their two wheeled suitcases noisily over the bumpy pavement, which immediately gives them away as tourists. 'We booked an apartment on Airbnb but we can't find staircase D, could you help us?', they ask me with a strong German accent. 'It's that one over there!' I answer them, pointing to the opposite side of the courtyard. The two visitors look a little dismayed at the crowd of at least two hundred people who stand between them and their objective. 'But is it always like this here? Even at night?' Before I can put their mind at rest, Antonio, my neighbour, a sixty-year-old Apulian who



FIGURE 5.1. Amira in the Peace Mosque, Porta Palazzo, Turin, 2015.

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has lived in the building for fifty years, cycles past us with his bicycle and laughingly blurts out: 'Welcome to Morocco, folks!'

The City and 'the Others'

The (auto)ethnographic sketch presented above conveniently invokes some of the main characteristics of Part III of this volume. First of all, we find stratified immigration flows that have contributed to transform the urban environment over time. We are, therefore, in a city that resembles many other cities, and although not explicitly Mediterranean, has gained an identity through the arrival of people from the Mediterranean. Cities that are tourist destinations can also be attractive to particular groups of visitors who are interested in their multicultural character. Interspersed in the walls, and forming material or symbolic barriers that divide residents, migrants and tourists, you can find gates that connect different worlds. This is what we perceived following Amira and her students inside the courtyard of the condominium. It is a building with a gate that is always open to the neighbourhood, through which the inhabitants of the building, the faithful of the Mosque, tourists and other occasional visitors can pass. In this chapter and the following, we will try to cross the threshold of some of these gates. We will try to understand where they lead to, what opportunities, risks, traps

and challenges they pose, not only for the social actors directly involved, but also for the researchers who are interested in them. Both chapters feature the autoethnographic approach. In this chapter, I focus on the context of the city in which I was born and raised and, more specifically, on the events of the neighbourhood and the building in which I have lived for over ten years. In Chapter 6, however, I will reflect on a project focusing on responsible tourism, created in Turin and then replicated in other Italian and European cities, of which I have been the scientific coordinator for many years. This is the same project for which Amira, as mentioned above, works as an 'intercultural guide'. In the following pages, the analytical dimension will therefore be accompanied by questions related to the possibility of designing and implementing interventions that will lead to greater equality and social cohesion.

To begin with, I will reflect on the peculiarity of the location in this Part III. If in the previous parts of the volume we focused on the size of the 'transnational village' (as in the case of Ksamil, in Albania) and on the condition of insularity (as seen in Lesbos and Lampedusa), we will now focus our attention on life in the metropolises. This is a much-needed point for discussion, since large cities act as catalysts of contemporary mobility, in the Mediterranean region as in the rest of the planet. Both tourist and migratory flows are mainly generated and attracted by large urban settlements and their impact is particularly visible through the dynamics of transformation of the urban landscape.

The beginning of the new millennium has celebrated what has undoubtedly been the 'century of cities' with the manifestation of a symbolic leap in the history of human society. For the first time since settlements could be defined as 'urban', dating back to a few thousand years ago, the majority of the planet's population is living in urban environments, whereas in 1950 the world's rural population was still about twice as large as the urban.

Urbanization and migration are therefore two closely linked phenomena. The growth of cities has taken place through the combination of a dual migratory mobility. Internal mobility tends to concentrate migrants coming from rural areas into large urban centres. International mobility brings people, especially in the early stages of their migratory experience, to urban centres that can offer greater resources and services, employment and socializing opportunities. In both cases, the space where internal and international migrants settle – that is, what Doug Saunders (2010) in an interesting global survey on the subject has defined as the 'arrival city' – is almost always characterized by forms of exclusion and marginality. Here, aspirations for the future are intertwined with poverty, lack of infrastructure, overcrowding and social tensions which already exist (recall the season of the so-called 'Arab Spring' in the Mediterranean) and which will

increasingly play a central role in the transformation of our world in the future (ibid.: 332).

On the other hand, tourism also has its roots in cities. Since its inception as a modern phenomenon at the end of the nineteenth century, mass tourism has depended on the availability of free time and disposable income to spend on the practice of travel. These two conditions are mainly connected to urban life and the working conditions of the wealthy classes concentrated at that time in European and North American metropolises. Today the global megalopolises still receive the largest number of international visitors every year. Certainly, it is not only tourists on holiday but also many other travellers who, for work reasons, transit or stay in the cities to use the services of reception, overnight stays, catering, transport, and who contribute significantly to the economic income of the accommodation sector. Cities, such as London, Paris, Hong Kong, Bangkok and Dubai receive as many as thirty million visitors each year. This is much more than their already large populations, which explains why all the structures and dimensions of cultural, social and economic life in these metropolises (from transport to commercial services, from museums to the cost of rentals) develop in relation to the needs of temporary visitors at least as much as those of permanent residents.

Migration and tourism can therefore be understood as forms of mobility that invite us to deny a crucial ethical and political debate of today: the relationship between city and otherness. As we have seen in the Introduction to this book, it is important to recall the complexity and ambivalence of the category of hospitality and its relationship with foreigners. According to Jacques Derrida, the city is in fact the place that shaped our political conception of the relationship between 'us' and 'them'. According to the French philosopher, the city is born and historically affirms itself in the meaning of 'city of refuge'. The forms of the city are the most suitable to give protection to the community, to give people the possibility to live, trade, prosper and defend themselves. But how are the mechanisms of reception and access to the city regulated for those who come from the exterior? Cities have always been places of exchange, of interaction with the outside world, and they may provide the opportunity to give protection to guests and to acquire new citizens (Derrida 2000).

In his important essay on the forms of building and inhabiting the urban environment, sociologist Richard Sennett (2018) argues that this is the crucial point to reconstruct the past history of the city and to confront the most delicate challenge that our increasingly urban societies face in the present and future. Starting from the intuitions of a great thinker such as Georg Simmel, whose thoughts on the individual and society in the context of urban life (1903) and on the tension between identity and otherness embodied in

the figure of the stranger (1908) remain crucial, Sennett reflects on the forms of openness and closure that cities have developed over time in the face of the issue of 'difference'. An emblem of the 'closed city' has been the solution of the 'ghetto'. The American sociologist recalls its origins by retracing the events of the Jewish ghetto of Venice, which are very significant from a Mediterranean perspective. Following the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain by the Christian rulers Ferdinand and Isabella of Castille in 1492, a number of Jewish refugees came to settle in Venice. Here, as is still often the case with immigrants, they found themselves both requested and rejected. They were appreciated for their expertise in the medical field and for their commercial networks, but they were also despised for their origins and lifestyle. The Venetian authorities therefore isolated the newcomers from the rest of the resident population, while maintaining the possibility of using their services. The physical characteristics of the city, crossed by canals and consisting of blocks of buildings located on an archipelago of islets, made it easy to find a solution to the problem. The ecology of the lagoon city proved particularly suitable for building a space of segregation. When the drawbridges were raised at sunset and the external windows of the buildings were closed, as required by law, the Jews of Venice literally disappeared from sight (Sennett 2018: 152). The walls of water that surrounded and isolated the ghetto also ensured its 'security'. The Jews could consider themselves physically safe from the majority of the other inhabitants of the city only by finding refuge within the walls of the ghetto, as happened for example during Lent in 1534 after a series of attacks by Christian fanatics (ibid.: 153).

The relationship between urban ecology, minority groups and the dynamics of the 'ghettos' is also at the heart of the birth of urban studies in the anthropological and sociological fields. Among the most significant results of the Chicago School's research was *The Ghetto* by Louis Wirth (1928), who studied the Jewish ghetto of Chicago, making it the symbol of a city designed as an environment divided into 'natural areas', homogeneous within themselves and differentiated from the outside. The 'patient methods' of ethnographic observation were used to understand the dynamics of these different 'moral worlds', according to the School's founder, Robert Park. This was so they 'could be employed in the study of customs, beliefs, social practices and general conceptions of life in the district of Little Italy' and in other areas inhabited by different groups of immigrants (Park 1952: 15).

Urban studies have crossed the twentieth century, gradually refining their reflections and developing a series of questions and methods, from network analysis to the mapping of space representations, which have overcome the mechanistic vision of the 'ghetto approach' of the Chicago School. And yet, the theme of segmentation in urban territory, of the borders that make the exchanges and movements between neighbourhoods used for different

social, economic and cultural functions so difficult; of the unequal access to the 'right to the city' that distinguishes the subordinate classes compared to the dominant ones – these are issues that arise again at the beginning of the twenty-first century in the context of globalization. According to the well-known category proposed by Saskia Sassen (1991), the 'global cities' are the privileged places in which to study what Appadurai (1996) defined as 'disjunctions' of globalization. Megacities such as New York, London and Tokyo, which Sassen studied in the late twentieth century, appear to be shaped by the unfair relations of power and wealth between migrations and global financial capital. The contrast between glittering downtowns housing the skyscrapers of large multinational companies and international institutions and the degraded and densely populated suburban areas corresponds to the divide between the elites that govern the processes of globalization and the masses of migrant workers who carry out the tasks to make their privileged status and the general functioning of the city possible.

The 'globalization from below', produced by the mobility of migrants, tourists, traders, itinerant workers, students and other people on the move, makes cities the hubs of a complex network of transnational connections. As the Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1996) pointed out, while examining the cases of Amsterdam, Stockholm and Sophiatown (a suburb of Johannesburg, South Africa, which played an important role in the history of the fight against apartheid), metropolises have become centres of global ecumenism thanks to the different categories of people that converge here. These people share the common characteristic of having transnational ties and therefore being able to materially and symbolically connect the city to many other locations situated in every part of the globe.

To return to Sennett, cities are, therefore, now faced with a dissociation between their 'built' dimension, materially anchored to a portion of built space, and the 'dwelled' one, which transcends physical boundaries and includes multiple intangible, transnational, global references. The lack of correspondence between these two views creates tensions, opportunities and challenges which, according to Sennett, constitute perhaps the most crucial political dispute of our time: a dispute between the promoters of a 'closed city', and therefore also of a closed, regimented society, dominated by borders and control (a model, Sennett notes, in constant expansion both in the North and in the South), and, on the other hand, the supporters of an 'open city', and therefore of an open society (Sennett 2018).

Many of us probably belong to the latter group. I certainly consider myself in favour of it. It is, however, far from an easy solution to imagine and practice, and could even bring some significant problems. What Sennett historically describes as the hypothesis of 'mixing' (class, religion, ethnicity) puts us in front of particularly complex outcomes. Just think, for example,

of tourism. In relation to this form of mobility, the 'closed city' model has often been tested, with the definition of clearly identified urban spaces for tourist consumption and attempts to reduce contact between tourists and residents who are not 'specialists' in the sector. Therefore, hotels and restaurants for tourists are grouped in specific districts of the city with dedicated shopping areas, arranged tours and clear identification of tourist attractions, and so on. In short, everything contributes to create that specific 'tourist bubble' in which visitors can move while rarely meeting residents. The most extreme form of so-called 'tourist enclaves' are the 'holiday villages'. In those locations (such as the Maldives archipelago) there are precise laws prohibiting tourists from staying in local areas, and locals from entering tourist resorts. It is a system that, as we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2, has often also been adopted by totalitarian regimes (Enver Hoxha's Albania or today's North Korea) to avoid any possible 'contagion' between the lifestyles of foreign tourists and the ideological model advocated for their citizens. The flaws and limitations of this system are evident. But 'opening the city' for tourists can also be risky: consider, for example, the consequences of opening residents' homes to visitors through the Airbnb short-term rental platform.

The hypothesis that visitors can interact more with local societies by staying in the homes of local people, rather than in hotels, and that the locals could thus financially benefit more from the presence of tourists in their cities, was soon confronted with numerous negative repercussions. Entire neighbourhoods experienced a drain in local residents, who were replaced by tourists. There ensued a lack of housing for residents, and property markets saw a rise in both rent and housing. In Mediterranean cities such as Barcelona and Athens, or even Milan or Lisbon, the impact of short-term Airbnb rentals has exacerbated inequalities, competition for resources and social conflicts. This has quickly led to anti-tourist feeling and the enactment of regulations to limit or prohibit these practices. This could be seen as a new form of closure (Gourzis et al. 2019; Amore, de Bernardi and Arvanitis 2022; Wilson, Garay-Tamajon and Morales-Perez 2022). 'AIRBNB GO HOME!', is graffitied all over the walls of the neighbourhoods of Exarcheia and Koukaki, in Athens; while succinct, it clearly summarizes the contradictory nature of this process.

Tourism is undoubtedly one of the vectors of gentrification. The touristification of districts that were previously untouched or only marginally touched by tourist flows is often one of the factors that promote gentrification and therefore the expulsion of residents with the least economic resources, in favour of new wealthier inhabitants and carriers of new lifestyles and consumption (Semi 2015). This change is often promoted by political, institutional and economic actors according to the categories of 'redevelopment'



FIGURE 5.2. Moroccan street vendors selling mint, Porta Palazzo, Turin, 2023.
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and urban ‘regeneration’. This opens a space for interested researchers to ask some crucial questions. For instance, is it possible to design projects and social interventions that integrate migration and tourism to actually push for greater mobility justice? Or is every initiative inexorably destined to produce new privileges and new conflicts, even if perhaps inspired by the intention to ‘open the city’?

Richard Sennett concludes his examination by arguing that an ‘open city’ has two other characteristics: being ‘crooked’, which means recognizing that it ‘contains blinding inequalities’ (Sennett 2018: 13), and being ‘modest’, in the sense that each citizen is required to ‘practice a certain type of modesty: living one among many, involved in a world that does not only reflect yourself’ (ibid.: 302). Sennett concludes that the ethics of the open city lies in the fact that everyone agrees not to feel fully ‘at home’ in their own city, so that everyone else can feel a little at home. In the words of architect Robert Venturi, quoted by Sennett himself: being for ‘richness of meaning rather than clarity of meaning’ (ibid.).

In the following pages we will see if and to what extent this choice can be pursued, returning through ethnography to the context from which we started: Turin, a Mediterranean city at the foot of the Alps.

Turin, a Mediterranean Port Away from the Sea

From the windows of my apartment, overlooking the Porta Palazzo market, you can clearly see the snow-capped peaks of the mountains. The city, moreover, is located a few dozen kilometres from the most important mountain range in Europe. In 2006 it hosted the Winter Olympic Games, a testament to its alpine vocation.

Yet, the scent of eggplant caponata that comes from the neighbouring apartment, the vans that sell boxes of tomatoes at your door to make homemade sauce, the groups of men who sip mint tea outside the Moroccan eatery across the street, the fragments of conversations in Arabic that I can pick up from down the road and the call to prayer that the Mosque is projecting via the upright speakers in the courtyard of the condominium give me another impression: that of being in the heart of a Mediterranean city.

A young anthropologist and artist residing in the district, Amarilli Varesio (2019), proposed renaming the district *Porto Palazzo*. Changing just one letter, from *Porta* (Gate) to *Porto* (Port), this wordplay makes audible the fact that this area acts as a kind of arrival place where people from all backgrounds cast their anchor after long journeys, arriving with their boats in a harbour that is only missing the sea.

Of course, not all areas of the city are as Mediterranean as Porta/o Palazzo, but it should not be forgotten that decades ago the capital of Piedmont, known internationally for the Fiat car factory, was commonly known in Italy as 'the third largest city in the South', after Naples and Palermo, despite it being in the northwest of the country, a few kilometres from the border with France. Today, Turin has about 850,000 inhabitants. It is difficult to say how many of the current residents are originally from southern Italy or the children of those hundreds of thousands of internal migrants who arrived in the city following the Second World War. It is likely that this is the majority of the city's population, if we think that between the 1950s and 1970s the population of Turin went from about 700,000 to 1.2 million thanks to the constant flow of people from Campania, Puglia, Calabria, Sicily and Basilicata, who in those two decades went to find work at Fiat and in its industrial sector (Capello, Cingolani and Vietti 2011).

The importance of international immigration to Turin, especially since the 1990s, clearly emerges in the numbers of foreign nationals residing here and who also keep the city demographics up. Foreign residents at the beginning of 2022 stood at 130,000, or 15 percent of the entire city population. Among them, the most numerous are Romanians (44,000), European Union citizens, followed by Moroccans (15,500), Chinese (8,000), Peruvians (7,000), Nigerians (5,500), Egyptians (5,400), Albanians (5,000), Filipinos, Moldovans and Bengalis (between 2,000 and 4,000). Overall,

Turin, while not as cosmopolitan as Rome or Milan, is representative of the widespread distribution of the immigrant population in Italy, where there are no particular territorial concentrations but a general and consistent spread throughout the country and increasingly even in peri-urban and rural areas.

The spread of foreign citizens throughout the city has changed over time, initially concentrated only in the districts of Porta Palazzo and San Salvario but gradually spreading towards the outskirts of the city in the areas that connect Turin's city centre with its suburbs. Despite these significant changes, at present, the Porta Palazzo area remains the second most densely populated area of the twenty-three city districts around Turin, both in terms of the absolute number of foreign residents (11,783 people) and also in terms of the total number of inhabitants (30.2 percent).

Turin and its hinterland over the twentieth century has represented a 'company town' connected to the industrial production of the automotive sector. Over the last thirty years, this broader region has undergone profound economic, social and cultural transformation. If the season of internal migration was connected to job opportunities that, although tiring and exhausting, allowed the working class from southern Italy to settle and take root in the city, the current phase of international immigration has developed enough to overcome the Fordist work model. The city thus ended the twentieth century imagining a different kind of future, but not knowing exactly what that would be. The beginning of the new millennium has seemed to provide reassuring indications. The new post-Fordist course envisaged a reduction in the weight of the large industry sector, opting instead for small and medium-sized enterprises and for new vocations in the fields of services, trade, cultural production and tourism. A series of 'major events' such as the 2006 Winter Olympic Games and the celebrations marking the 150th anniversary of the unification of Italy placed Turin, the first capital of the unitary state, back at the centre of things. This led the Turinese to believe that they were quickly landing on a new shore of a creative, innovative and 'always on the move' dynamic city – a phrase written on all the building sites that physically transformed the city in the build-up to the Olympics (Bondonio and Guala 2012).

The economic and financial crisis of 2008, however, made it clear that the city's new condition was extremely fragile and unstable. The loss of jobs due to the closure of factories and the relocation of production activities was not compensated by the creation of new jobs. The city administration was quickly confronted with budget shortfalls and debts contracted in the 'major events' season, which left the city with many unused structures and scarce resources to provide the necessary services to its citizens. Unemployment, especially among young people, hit the city, reaching rates that had previously been

witnessed only in the most disadvantaged regions of the South. Turin, by association, has taken on Mediterranean status, although this time for a reason quite different from that associated with food products or the family traditions of its citizens originating from southern Italy. As Carlo Capello and Giovanni Semi (2018) have noted, the city is therefore, to some extent, stuck in a liminal, or more precisely 'liminoid', condition, suspended in the middle of a 'rite of passage' which is never truly completed and which has deprived it of its previous status (the 'company town'), without giving it a new one that is equally satisfactory. A liminality that, as Capello (2020) reflected, is mirrored in the situation of the many unemployed who are victims of the structural changes in the labour market due to globalization and the neoliberal economic system. They adopt an attitude of rejection and opposition towards the only subjects against whom they can vent their frustration and whom they perceive as direct competitors for the available resources, both in terms of jobs and social assistance. These are immigrant fellow citizens against whom the right-wing political forces can concentrate their nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric.

These dynamics are particularly visible in the outskirts of the city, where the main problems of poverty, marginality and lack of services are concentrated. Areas where, as the last local elections of 2021 have shown, citizens reject any political will for change (with abstention rates between 60 and 70 percent of the eligible voting population). But what happens in the meantime to a neighbourhood like Porta Palazzo, which is also a central area of the city (five minutes' walk from the Town Hall and the historic centre), yet perceived and experienced as somehow distant and peripheral? How can a neighbourhood be transformed from what used to be described as 'authentically Turinese' for its historic market and for the Piedmontese dialect that is still spoken among its benches, yet at the same time be known as the most 'foreign' area of the city, and therefore sometimes labelled as dangerous, exotic, scary or fascinating?

Several anthropological studies have focused on this particular area of the city. The American anthropologist Rachel Black (2012) has conducted an interesting ethnography dedicated particularly to the centrality of the large market of Porta Palazzo in the construction of the cultural, social and economic features that characterize the neighbourhood. Working together with the market vendors, Black noticed that the sale and purchase of goods is one of the many types of exchange that take place between the market stalls.

While thousands of kilos of fruits, vegetables and other foodstuffs are sold here each day, friendships are made, families are reunited, ethnic and cultural tensions are negotiated, and local identities are built through the daily workings of the market. (Black 2012: 2)

This consideration can be extended from the specific case of Porta Palazzo to a broader reflection on the role of markets in urban dynamics. Markets are fundamental hubs that link cities and mobility. Indeed, the city itself, as Max Weber already noted, is essentially a 'market place' (Weber [1921] 1958). Whether it was the Greek *agorà*, the Ottoman *çarshia* or the herb square of medieval Italy, market spaces have historically had a strong centrality, not only urban but also symbolic in the structure of Mediterranean cities. At the same time, markets have often been a gateway in the city walls through which new food, ideas and inhabitants have passed. The relentless commercial exchanges that take place in the markets are connected to other forms of relationship, such as sharing information, meeting friends, making new acquaintances, learning the local language, finding work and looking for a home. The 'newcomers' find many other resources at the market besides the goods they want to sell or buy. The Turinese anthropologist Marco Aime (2002), studying the role of markets in West African societies, has noted how markets are open places, inclined to mediation and neutrality, and therefore, precisely because they are 'nobody's house', they can belong to almost everyone. Markets are one of the most common ways of accessing the world of trade for immigrants, both as workers and consumers. Among the stalls of the market, 'nostalgic goods' from their countries of origin, along with their fellow countrymen, can be found, and interactions are built within the settlement, with its products and people who live in the same neighbourhood, with traders, the local language and its daily practices (Mermier and Peraldi 2011).

The market that is held from Monday to Saturday in the octagonal Piazza della Repubblica, which constitutes the heart of the district (identified with the letter A on the map shown in Figure 5.3), is surrounded by a maze of streets that lead on one side to the historic centre and the City Hall, and on the other, along the axis of Corso Giulio Cesare, to the northern area of the city. It is therefore a border area, with a clearly visible border line in Corso Regina Margherita, the avenue that crosses the market square and divides the 'internal' area of the Roman Quadrilateral (B) from the 'external' area of Aurora (C). Giovanni Semi, a researcher from Turin who is particularly attentive to gentrification, and who has studied the ways in which neighbourhoods can be totally different worlds from one another, has reflected deeply on the tensions that involve these two areas (Semi 2006, 2008). In the sector south of the market square closest to the historic centre, the process of 'redevelopment' began as early as the 1990s and transformed it into an area known for its nightlife. Restaurants, bars and clubs, frequented mostly by young people, opened during evening hours between buildings that were once dilapidated and inhabited mostly by internal migrants from the south of Italy, and which have now become the subject of real estate speculation

for their potential to be turned into valuable buildings for professionals and bed-and-breakfasts for tourists. A particularly interesting aspect of Semi's analysis concerns the experience of 'proximity exoticism' that can be found between the streets surrounding the Porta Palazzo market, through contact with others according to the mode of 'consumption of diversity'. Many of the premises in this area are run by immigrant entrepreneurs or use the reference to the cultural diversity of migration as an element of attractiveness. So, while some foreigners are relegated to the 'background' of bars and restaurants where they prepare food and drinks, other foreigners act as entrepreneurs or traders, and

expose to the public a sought-after and elitist commodity, namely, the difference. Moroccan bazaars, cultural centres and bars with exotic names offer experiences that cannot be had elsewhere, such as enjoying the authentic pigeon meat tajine, buying spices that will transform an anonymous couscous into a true representation of the culture of Maghreb or sitting on Berber cushions enjoying mint tea. All this within walking distance of home, in the city centre. The exotic journey can now be reduced to an extraterritorial escape from your office to take an aperitif with an evocative name. (Semi 2004: 93)

The category of 'daily multiculturalism', proposed by Enzo Colombo and Giovanni Semi (2007), allows us to include other practices of negotiation of the differences that, for the Porta Palazzo neighbourhood, can take on the forms of strategic alliance, conflict, solidarity, violence, jokes, mutual recognition or indifference. It is mainly in the area north of the market square that gentrification is slowly spreading, although the process is not complete as yet. It is possible to observe the multiple forms of interaction here between old and new residents and among the many different actors of that wide range of economic, formal and informal, legal and illegal activities, which give rise to what Semi (2006) called a 'bazaar economy'. This is a kind of transnational economic organization originally studied in Marseille by Michel Peraldi (1999). Thanks, above all, to the large Moroccan community that lives and works in this part of Porta Palazzo, the area has become part of the trade routes that link Turin to Morocco, Spain, France and Belgium through the circulation of people, goods, ideas and imaginaries embodied in the transnational biographies of migrants. This dynamic is also reflected on the social and cultural level, strongly characterized by the importance of family networks and the strong presence of Moroccan entrepreneurs in the public space. These dislocations of relationships and meetings in public areas are also due to the housing conditions of many of the foreign residents of Porta Palazzo. The apartments are generally small, often overcrowded and inside very degraded buildings which lack essential services (Semi 2006: 94).

In recent years, the issue of housing has become a catalyst for social tensions, especially in the neighbourhood known as Borgo Dora (D). For more than a century there has been a flea market in this area that has been a resource for the poorest classes of the city's population, who have always found an opportunity to buy and sell second-hand goods. During the early 2000s, several buildings in this area were occupied by anarchist groups who had also made it a refuge for young immigrants and families who were victims of evictions and housing difficulties. These squats, which were tolerated by the city administration for a number of years, eventually resulted in their eviction so space could be made for new real estate and commercial projects. Borgo Dora was the first 'external' area of Porta Palazzo, located beyond the socio-economic boundary of Corso Regina Margherita, to be affected by a 'redevelopment' project. This included both the flea market (which has subsequently been transformed into an antique market, and informal sellers have been removed) and the built heritage (as can be seen, for instance, by the opening of a well-known school of creative writing in a previously abandoned building). However, these contemporary transformations have triggered protests and demonstrations involving a growing number of citizens outside the activist groups, who belong to the rich local network of socio-cultural associations and neighbourhood groups (Iandolo 2021).

The reference to the practices of 'daily multiculturalism' and the relationship between the domestic sphere of the house and the public space of the city represents a crucial hub of our discussion. It is through these dimensions that I would like to focus more directly on the issue of the intersection between migration and tourism in Turin. To do so, I would like to return to the ethnographic sketch at the opening of this chapter. The condominium I have lived in since 2009 in Porta Palazzo is located in that area north of the market square on which Semi (2006) focused his reflections. The large condominium courtyard where the encounter between Amira, Giuseppe, the faithful of the Mosque, the German tourists and I took place represents a very significant space on which to dwell. It is, in fact, perhaps one of those 'membranes', as Richard Sennett called them, which can 'open' or 'close' the city from time to time.

From this point on, my analysis will become clearly autoethnographic. I would therefore like to dedicate a few lines to the underlying methodological approach before I focus on the matter of my condominium. This autoethnography is based on the network of relationships I have built over time with my neighbours and on a reflexive stance regarding my own role as a resident in the condominium. The reflections that I will now present are the result of a collaborative and participatory research path that I have developed with some of the inhabitants of the building in an attempt to strengthen solidarity and mutual collaboration between long-term

residents (almost all belonging to different generations of internal and international immigrants) and others who arrived more recently (mostly off-site university students) or those who are present only for short or very short periods (tourists staying in the different bed-and-breakfasts in the condominium).

Autoethnography is a research method with analytical strengths, but also clear limitations (Anderson 2006; Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011). Here, I would like to briefly highlight two factors that prompted me to adopt this particular approach and to reflect on the connection between my personal life and my scholarly interests and activities. The first aspect concerns the possibility that autoethnography provides access to the dimension of everyday interactions. As pointed out by Semi and colleagues, 'the everyday dimension is relevant . . . because it is defined by relationships, as a "place", that is, as a set of ordinary, banal, constitutive, incorporated practices' (Semi et al. 2009: 69). It is precisely this flow of daily practices that I have been experiencing since I moved into the Porta Palazzo condominium in 2009. My family certainly belongs to the group of 'pioneers' of the gentrification taking place in this part of the city. The reasons for us living here correspond perfectly to the list of 'push factors' that Schlichtman and Patch (2014: 1493) include in their 'diagnostic tool' to identify the 'gentrifiers': the low cost of housing, the aesthetic appreciation of the neighbourhood atmosphere and a fascination for its history, interest in social relations and interaction with people of different backgrounds and social classes and flexibility about accepting annoyances and inconveniences related to the area (such as petty crime, dirt etc.). I moved to the condominium while reading for my doctorate in 'Migration and intercultural processes'. The daily life here which I shared with fellow citizens from about twenty different nationalities influenced all my subsequent studies about migration and urban transformation. However, for many years I did not think of the condominium as a research subject. The time spent together with neighbours (migrants and non-migrants) made it possible for me to hear stories, collect anecdotes and establish friendships and gain the trust of several residents in the building. This is the point where the second valuable feature of autoethnography comes in: the openness towards collaborative and participatory dimensions. As pointed out by Ellis and colleagues, co-constructed narratives illustrate the meanings of relational experiences and

use the personal experience of researchers-in-collaboration to illustrate how a community manifests particular social/cultural issues. Community autoethnographies thus not only facilitate 'community-building' research practices but also make opportunities for 'cultural and social intervention' possible. (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011: 279)

In my own case, the shared life experience had become, from autumn 2018, the basis for a participatory research project on the history of the building. The idea of constructing a 'shared memory' of the condominium through the exchange and sharing of memories among the residents came to me through the daily observation of the communication difficulties and frequent misunderstandings between the different people that inhabited the building, in particular between the 'old' and the 'new' residents (a division into groups according to two categories that we have already seen in Chapter 2 about Ksamil). As illustrated by comparative studies on a European scale (Pastore and Ponzo 2012), in immigration districts, groups are defined based on the intersection between different distinctive categories, therefore not only according to the boundaries of ethnicity, as often emerges in public debates, but also following other parameters, including their age and how long they have lived there. In the case of my condominium, one of the decisive parameters for eligibility in a group was whether someone was a resident 'before' or 'after' the building's so-called 'Mandatory Recovery Plan'. The 'great renovation', as it is often called by the inhabitants of the building, was imposed by the municipal administration of Turin and carried out through a general renovation of the building. This was a particularly complex intervention, which is part of the broader context of the 'urban regeneration' of the Porta Palazzo district carried out by the municipality since the early 2000s and still in progress. In the microcosm of the condominium, the fight against 'housing degradation' has caused the replacement of a significant proportion of 'old' residents (Italian and foreign immigrants who were unable to support the restructuring quotas and have moved or been evicted) and the arrival of 'new' residents (students, young couples and owners who have acquired one or more apartments to rent on Airbnb or to transform into guesthouses).

My positionality in the condominium has been characterized by instability and dynamism as an 'insider' and 'outsider' of these two different groups of residents, having moved into the condominium shortly before the start of the 'great renovation' together with my family. The fact that I am sometimes considered to be 'the newest of the old' or 'the oldest of the new' has allowed me to be a facilitator of 'transversality', by which I mean the practice of relationships of knowledge and meaningful exchange through differences (Wise 2009: 23).

Having obtained authorization from the condominium administrator, in October 2018 I composed a simple leaflet in which I proposed to the residents to make themselves available to be interviewed or to interview their neighbours, so as to build together a 'biography of the house' through the stories of its inhabitants.

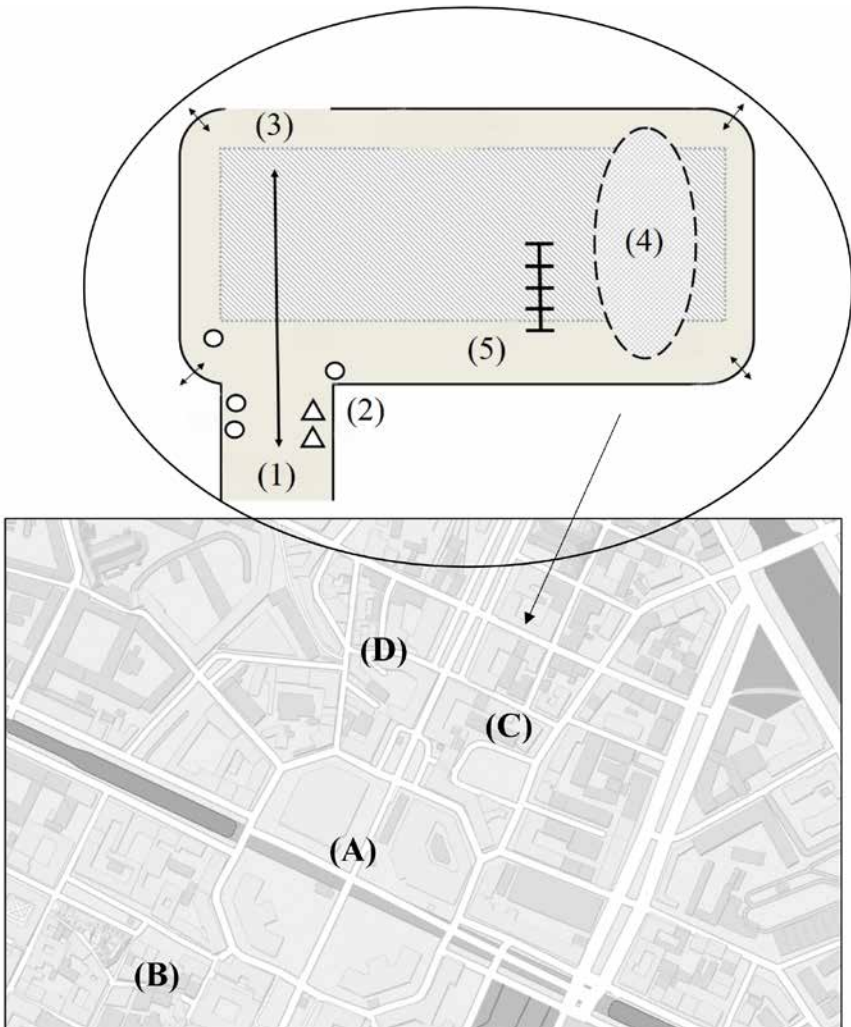


FIGURE 5.3. The Porta Palazzo area with details of the spatial organization of the condominium's courtyard. © Francesco Vietti

(Auto)Biography of a Tenement House

The history of my condominium, like that of many other buildings in Porta Palazzo and similar urban neighbourhoods, recalls the need to consider the homemaking process as a long-term dynamic, involving several generations of migrants and various national, international and transnational mobilities (Dolkart 2006).

According to Janet Carsten's inspiring observation, houses can 'be analysed as "biographical objects" . . . in the sense that houses have biographies that are inextricably entwined with those of their inhabitants' (Carsten 2018: 107). These are biographies that can be examined by 'thinking through the houses' about the different dimensions of social life in which individual biographical events, the dynamics of family relationships and the broader economic and political contexts at the local and general level are intertwined.

The connection between home and memory, as highlighted by Ratnam (2018), is a fundamental part of the identity-making process, on an individual and collective level. In this sense, what counts are not only the memories of the 'past homes' where people lived – and for migrants this often means the countries they left behind – but also the awareness of the experiences of 'past inhabitants' who had lived in the buildings in which they resided. This is a memory embedded in the materiality of domestic objects, in the physical structures of the house, in its spaces and in the transformations that have shaped it over time (Pink 2004).

From this point of view, as Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) argued, an interdisciplinary approach that brings architecture and anthropology into dialogue can illustrate that 'the house and the body are intimately linked. The house is an extension of the person . . . a ready-made environment fashioned by a previous generation and lived in long before it becomes an object of thought' (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 2).

Houses are, at the same time, built environments and cultural constructions that accumulate more significations through association with their resident social groups over time (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zúñiga 1999: 4).

Research on homes and housing relating to migration studies has been consolidated in recent years according to different lines of analysis that have allowed the domestic sphere to become more central in terms of reflection and conceptualization (Boccagni 2017). The Italian sociologist Paolo Boccagni, in particular, has developed a wide body of research that explores the processes of 'homing'. This means 'a range of actions and interactions – some physical, virtual or imagined mobility – whereby people orient themselves towards what they feel, see or claim as home, or at least as homely-enough' (Boccagni 2022: 585). Homing has thus emerged as the context in which to observe different 'social scales', which can be grasped by paying particular attention to how spaces are appropriated and the widening of 'home-oriented' forms of mobility. As always happens with social dynamics, by placing oneself at the 'margins', one can better grasp the dynamics of power, the inequalities and the ambivalences that characterize the practices of living (Boccagni, Pérez Murcia and Belloni 2020).

For this reason, it is not surprising that more studies have focused on the experience of living through the point of view of temporary residents, such as migrants in transit and tourists, who often reside in the same buildings, or at different times in the same dwelling. An example is the Chungking Mansions in Kowloon, Hong Kong, a large seventeen-storey building studied by the anthropologist Gordon Mathews (2011) and effectively defined as ‘a ghetto at the centre of the world’. It is a place of marginality and exclusion yet also a dense network of global mobility embodied by the thousands of migrants, businessmen, entrepreneurs, tourists and refugees who live and work there every day, weaving transnational links between the building and other places around the planet. Another example is the Hotel House in Porto Recanati, in the Marche region, along the Adriatic coast of Italy. It is a former hotel designed in the 1960s for holidaymakers who spent their summers on the beach and later became, as the sociologist Adriano Cancellieri (2017) has illustrated, a ‘multi-ethnic condominium’ where people from forty different countries live and experience conflicts of difference against the processes of ghettoization and stigmatization of which they are victims.

Although more informal and less ambitious, our initiative in Turin shares similar premises to other participatory research projects aiming to trace ‘home-city biographies’ through the experiences, memories and narratives of residents. Blunt, Ebbensgaard and Sheringham (2020), in relation to their research in Hackney, East London, noted how this approach allowed them to investigate the multi-layered and entangled temporalities of home and the city. The intersection of migration, housing and family histories helps to articulate narratives of domestic and urban change in terms of stability and instability, exploring the traces of the past in the present (*ibid.*: 2). These biographies not only connect the life stories of urban residents to particular dwellings, but outline ‘the interplay of their home lives with streets, neighbourhoods and the wider city’ (Blunt and Sheringham 2018: 827).

My co-residents and I thus discovered that many aspects of migrant and tourist mobility that seemed specific to the building at the time actually extended throughout its history, as I would now like to briefly illustrate.

If, as we have seen in the Introduction of this book with James Clifford (1997), the hotel is the most emblematic chronotope of modernity, it will not be surprising that a condominium’s events start to appear similar to those of a hotel. This was in fact the original intended use of a wing of the four-storey building built in 1836 within the urban project that envisaged the expansion of Turin to the north in the stretch that led from the city centre to the Dora river on which the new Ponte Mosca had been designed. At that time, and until end of the nineteenth century, the palace represented the gateway into the city for those who travelled from Milan. The palace was surrounded by

open fields and gardens that extended to the river, whose waters powered the mills and the first small industries of the Borgo Dora area.

The location, just behind the first row of buildings of the largest market of the city, Porta Palazzo, was established in 1835 in Piazza Emanuele Filiberto (today Piazza della Repubblica). This explains why most of the buildings in the area were hotels and inns for merchant-traders and customers of the market. At the entrance to Corso Ponte Mosca (today Corso Giulio Cesare), there were, among others, the *Albergo Ristorante San Giors*, the *Albergo Italia* and the *Albergo Berretta*, housed in the same condominium building we are discussing. The building offered rest and refreshment to people who arrived in the city and would last for many decades. In 1920, the *Berretta* became the *Hotel-Restaurant Ala* and eventually the *Hotel Gran Colombo*, from 1950 to 1975, in which some of the residents of the building worked during their youth (Mr Giuseppe as night caretaker and Mrs Lucia as cook).

Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the market and the city could be accessed via railroad using the nearby Ciriè-Lanzo railway station, close to our condominium. The station, built in 1868 and closed in 1987, was the main channel through which thousands of people living in the countryside, in the valleys and in the mountains north of the city reached Turin, both for commuting, and to move to what had become by the end of the nineteenth century the first capital of the Kingdom of Italy and one of the first centres of industrial development in the country. Thanks primarily to this type of regional migration, the population of Turin increased from about 170,000 in 1861 to almost 600,000 in 1931.

During the Second World War, the structure of the palace underwent a change connected to another dimension of urban mobility that affected the neighbourhood in a particularly dramatic way. Porta Palazzo suffered serious damage from bombings that devastated the area in July 1943. Cluster bombs dropped by Allied forces destroyed numerous buildings next to it. Incendiary bombs also hit our condominium. A good part of the roof was destroyed, but the fact that the building had not been severely damaged made it a refuge for the inhabitants of the broader neighbourhood who had lost their homes. The entrance hall to the courtyard, where today the sellers of mint and Arab bread are stationed, was transformed into a Red Cross infirmary and then into a place to shelter families displaced from their homes by the bombings.

After the war, the history of the condominium allows us to witness the profound change that affected Turin and the Porta Palazzo district. An important feature of the post-war period was the rampant demographic growth linked to internal migration flows on a national scale. New residents began to join the first Piedmontese residents from other Italian regions, in particular from Veneto and the South. In the early days, newcomers often

settled in the Porta Palazzo district and the surrounding areas, waiting to move to the new dormitory districts that were being built in the suburbs to the north and south of the city. Numerous witness accounts of the time, from the journalistic investigations of the local press to the first ethnographic research on immigration in Turin, have highlighted the very serious problems of overcrowding and terrible living conditions that occurred in those years in Porta Palazzo and throughout the historic city centre. While reporting on the misery, dirt and the state of abandonment in which immigrant families, especially children, were found, they saw that they were forced to hang around in courtyards full of waste and infested with mice and insects (Stampa Sera 1973: 4). The memories of those who spent their childhood in our condominium at that time highlight the difficulties of everyday life but also evoke a certain nostalgia for the aspects linked to sociality and solidarity among tenants. Antonio relates:

I came to Turin from Puglia, with my parents, in 1958. Those were difficult years. There was poverty, many people lived in a room and they warmed up next to the stove, but they were also beautiful years, there was solidarity, we loved each other and we helped each other. My father worked as a garbage collector in that he collected garbage from the streets. At that time it was still being done with pitchforks and baskets. In the building there were so many children, all from southern families, and I spent all my time in the yard playing with them with the wood chips we took from the carpenter who worked on the ground floor. When I got a little older, though still a kid, I also started doing chores, like peeling potatoes in the kitchens of the Gran Colombo restaurant.

The consolidation of a certain ‘mythology of crime’, linked to the somewhat illicit activities that revolved around the building or which took place directly inside it, also dates back to this period. I speak of ‘myth’ because, in the absence of precise historical sources, these representations are passed down through different generations of tenants through legends, and perhaps imagined stories that some of the residents claim to be true and others reject as unlikely. One of the most common themes of this ‘dark side’ is cigarette smuggling. This widespread illegal practice marked the Porta Palazzo district for many years, and popular memory recalls other buildings in the area known to be ‘smugglers’ palaces’. Another dimension of the building’s divided memory relates to the illegal activity of prostitution. Some of the residents tell colourful stories of women and men who ‘were living life’ in some of the apartments and attics of the condominium, while others talk about a real ‘brothel’ housed on one floor. However, other residents deny that this ever happened, and these rumours have unfortunately contributed to the ‘bad reputation’ of the building, still known in the city today (and often cited in the chronicles of local newspapers) as a place of drug dealing and prostitution.

Following its complex history, the condominium makes another appearance in the 1980s, and even more recently in a new phase of Turin's history, the era of international migration. The settlement area of the pioneers of the different immigrant communities was once again Porta Palazzo, and research carried out around 2000 certified the exceptional situation of both the neighbourhood and the condominium. The Porta Palazzo-Borgo Dora area had the highest concentration of foreign residents at city level (9.8 percent of the total), and our condominium was then the most overcrowded building in the city, with a density of 1,026 inhabitants per hectare, compared to the 250 inhabitants per hectare of the Porta Palazzo area (CICSENE 1997: 31). It was also the one with the highest percentage of 'non-Italian citizens', 182 out of 244, or about 75 percent of the total residents (ATC 2004).

Apparently, the high population density and the high incidence of foreign residents were two related phenomena. The inhabitants of the building remember how the condominium then acted as a refuge for many immigrants who had just arrived in the city. These were almost exclusively young men, who were living in extremely precarious conditions together with a large number of compatriots. Fabrizio is a tenant who has lived in the building for about thirty years and who has always been very active in the anti-eviction movements that operate in the neighbourhood. He reports that the owners of the small, dilapidated attics were very exploitative and would not hesitate to rent the few square metres available to an excessive number of people to make a profit.

Despite these difficulties, during the 1990s the condominium established itself as a reference point for the new inhabitants of the neighbourhood, in particular for the Muslim community who began to give an identity to the palace due to the presence of the Islamic prayer room that was established here in 1995. In the words of Hamid, the head of the *Moschea della Pace*:

We opened the prayer room here, definitely because the rent of the space was lower than elsewhere, but above all because this was the centre of our community and we knew that many of our brothers in difficulty lived here, and they needed the support of the Mosque. Every week, just as they did twenty-five years ago, hundreds of people come here to pray, but also to ask for information and help. We have always organized many activities, such as the school of Italian for women or the school of Arabic for children of the second generation. We collaborate with the schools of the neighbourhood, with the university and for many years we have been opening our doors gladly to our Italian friends for exchange and learning initiatives, such as for the Open Mosques day.

The *Moschea della Pace* is one of the largest and busiest prayer halls in the city, and between the 1990s and 2000s it was the hub of stories and characters that marked the complex relationship between Muslim communities and Italian public opinion. The rhetoric of local and national news



FIGURE 5.4. The Friday prayer in the courtyard, Porta Palazzo, Turin, 2013.
© Francesco Vietti

made it the arena of the alleged clash between ‘radical’ Islam, represented by the self-proclaimed ‘imam of Porta Palazzo’ Bouriqui Bouchta, who ended up being expelled from Italy in 2006 on charges of terrorism, and ‘moderate’ Islam, embodied by Abdulaziz Khounati, the imam who went on to create the Union of Muslims of Italy in 2007, establishing about fifty prayer centres throughout the country. For the inhabitants of the palace, however, the presence of the Mosque has always meant, above all, a particular relationship with the spaces of the courtyard and the neighbourhood. To guarantee access to the place of worship, the entrance door to the condominium remains permanently open and, due to the limited internal space, the prayers on Friday and those made throughout Ramadan are held in the courtyard, which is covered for the occasion with carpets except for a corridor to allow access to the stairs. On these days, the door of the Mosque also remains open and the call to prayer and the sermons of those who officiate it are amplified through special speakers that spread the words in Arabic throughout the condominium.

Over the years, the condominium administration has maintained an ambivalent attitude towards the Mosque. On the one hand, it has repeatedly debated whether the door should be closed at times other than those of worship, and has proposed direct access from the street to the prayer room without crossing the courtyard, or to have all the external elements (names,

signs and anything else) to signify it as a place of worship removed. On the other hand, it has always shown a substantial awareness of the need for its existence, even criticizing the city institutions for not having found a more adequate solution to accommodate the prayer room. In several meetings in which I have participated, the residents who have lived here since the 1990s have also recognized how the Mosque, over time, has played an important role in removing from the building, or at least limiting, the long-standing problem of drug dealing.

The most evident transformation in the recent history of the building is linked to the total renovation of the building implemented under the Mandatory Recovery Plan completed in 2012. The so-called 'redevelopment' project was entrusted to the Gate Committee, the office of the City of Turin responsible then for numerous other 'regenerative' interventions in the Porta Palazzo area (Gilli and Ferrari 2018). In view of the broader meaning that the 'new image' of the condominium would come to imply, in the context of the renewed identity of the neighbourhood and of the city, it is not surprising that during the long process of renovation there were official visits to the site by the mayor of the City of Turin and even, in 2006, the president of the Italian Republic.

Since the renovation, the new resident populations, mostly for short and medium periods, have become part of the life of the condominium. In particular, the proximity of the new University of Turin campus has made the building particularly attractive for students. These young people once again bring mobility-related stories to the building, as Cristina relates:

My boyfriend and I are both doing our PhDs here in Turin. I'm from Rome and he's from Palermo. We are renting here and our landlord, Luca, is a doctor who is about our age, who is currently abroad, in London, for a specialist course. We've been here for a year, and we'll stay for another year, then he'll come back and we'll have to find another place. I think we'll still look for a house nearby, because I really like the neighbourhood, and also the condominium. I don't know how to say it, but it makes me feel really comfortable, like I can even go down to the bakery in slippers and I don't have to worry. I'm relaxed, just like being at home, even if we're just passing through.

In recent years, moreover, the building has come to fulfil in some way its original function as a hotel, though in different forms. The Porta Palazzo district has become included in the tourist circuits of the city of Turin (Gilli and Ferrari 2018). Several residents and owners of the building have taken advantage of this touristification process by putting their homes on the Airbnb website and becoming hosts. Among the various apartments, there is also one located in what, merely a decade ago, was an attic overcrowded with young Maghreb immigrants and which today is presented as a 'charming attic'. The reviews left by tourists on the Airbnb website following their

stay provide a fairly clear picture of the expectations and impressions of a short stay in the condominium. Most write that they appreciated the ‘multi-cultural’ atmosphere of the place, calling Porta Palazzo an area that ‘is worth visiting’ and with ‘many places to eat well’ (Matteo, April 2019), a ‘special, truly unique place, a crossroads of flavours and traditions from around the world’ (Valentina, March 2019). However, there are many who make it clear that they did not like the peculiarities of the condominium, complaining that ‘the presence of a Mosque in the courtyard means that there is a continuous coming and going of people and doors left open’ along with the risk of encountering ‘some Tunisian waiting for you to take the lift since they do not have the remote control to call it independently’ (Augustine, March 2019).

Although anecdotal, these comments and reviews actually capture the complex reality of the condominium today. Even just looking at the apartments next to mine, we find a Calabrian family who arrived fifty years ago living alongside four Bengali men who work as street vendors selling roses, an elderly woman of Venetian origin who returned to Turin after forty years in Germany, two Nigerian women who sell beauty products in front of a Chinese mini-market, a Chinese family who owns a store specializing in Asian and African products, and Italian and foreign tourists who are temporary guests of the B&B ‘Colours of Porta Palazzo’.

Conviviality in My Courtyard

One of the most recurrent themes among the stories and memories collected from the residents between the autumn of 2018 and the spring of 2019 was the crucial role of the large courtyard. The condominium courtyard connects the private domestic spaces of the apartments and the public space of the city. The courtyard is an ideal common space, shared among all the residents, but it is also a communication channel between the house and the city and between those who live in their apartment in the condominium and those who enter or pass through for many different reasons.

Some of the older residents expressed their nostalgia for a time when people would socialize in the courtyard, where benches were placed and people would spend time chatting in the evening. Others complained that the courtyard, which always remains open, is perhaps the real problem of the building, since it allows anyone to enter for their own convenience, even to consume alcohol and drugs. In general, most residents today seemed to consider the courtyard as mainly a place of ‘transit’.

Yet, observing the courtyard at different times and on different days of the week, it was not difficult to see how the space could be used for different reasons by different groups of people. As we saw in the initial sketch, every

Friday and throughout the month of Ramadan, the courtyard is transformed into a place of prayer and small business (the areas involved are indicated by the numbers 1 and 2 on the map). At least a couple of mornings a week, groups of students and tourists enter it to visit the Mosque (3). During the afternoons, the youths of the building come to use it (4), playing football (especially the young boys of the Moroccan families) or badminton (the Italian-Chinese girls use it for this); and then, especially in the evening, Bengali street sellers come and go with their carts full of flowers ready to be sold at the tables of the restaurants of Borgo Dora (5).

However, these were activities that concerned specific groups of people from time to time, without significant opportunities for interaction and dialogue. By the time we had collected all the stories, we considered giving back to the residents the outcome of this initiative by organizing a collective event in the condominium courtyard. We therefore thought of and implemented, without funds and in a completely voluntary manner, a 'Condominium Feast', which finally took place on a Saturday afternoon in June 2019.

In architecture, to borrow a typically anthropological concept, the courtyard is interpreted as a 'liminal space', neither completely public nor totally private, which presents itself as a threshold capable of connecting and separating at the same time (Rapoport 2007; Varga-Harris 2016). This *limen* (Latin: threshold) characteristic makes it a porous space. It lets things pass through while holding some things back. Its significance and ambivalence can perhaps be further captured by relating this type of space to the concept of hospitality (Selwyn 2000). Just as hospitality refers to a relationship connected to dimensions of power and control of the other, the courtyard is also a space in which the management of the proximity/distance between 'us' and 'them' is crucial.

The courtyard belongs to everyone and no one at the same time. It is here that we can most clearly grasp the heterogeneous panorama of cultural diversity in a condominium (Bonfanti, Massa and Miranda Nieto 2019): the smells of the food cooked in the apartments coming out of the open windows; the rhythms of Asian, South American and African music played at full volume on satellite televisions and web radios; different clothes of various fashions hanging out to dry on the balconies. The sensescapes (auditory, tactile, olfactory) are a significant element to include when analysing the interaction between residents in the urban environment (Low and Kalekin-Fishman 2019). Indeed, it is often through these sensory dimensions that the logic of distinction is practised, the repulsion against mixing is expressed, or the interest in hybridization is conveyed (Earl 2018). The relationship between urban sensescapes and migration is captured particularly well in two aspects. On the one hand, tastes, smells and sounds take on a translocal character, activating memories of mobility and dwelling that revolve around

references, contrasts and harmonies between the contexts of origin and immigration (Lahiri 2011). On the other hand, particular attention should be paid to how power is expressed by the politics of senses. According to Low (2013: 223), the perception of a 'sensory invasion' of neighbourhoods with a lot of migration can be traced back to the existence of a 'local sensory order', with respect to the sensory behaviours of migrant bodies which produce infractions and that are 'hence interpreted as transgressive conduct'.

For all these reasons, the courtyard of the condominium appeared to us as the most significant place to imagine our 'Feast', in the knowledge that the characteristics of the space would allow a variety of meetings, the outcome of which we could hope for, but which would not be predetermined. The initiative was configured as a 'transversal ritual', to adopt Wise's (2009) concept, capable of enhancing collective awareness of the opportunities for mutual understanding and solidarity among the residents.

On that sunny afternoon, over 150 people gathered in the courtyard, attracted by word of mouth and some simple flyers posted in the surrounding block. About half were residents, and half were people from the neighbourhood, friends and schoolmates of the children of the building, together with their parents. The programme was specially designed for the young ones. It began with a circus performance staged by a family of street artists, also living in the house, known as the 'Circo Famiglia Show'. To watch it, the public sat on carpets made available by the Mosque, normally used for Friday prayers, now instead becoming a shared space for all those present. Whoever could, sat cross-legged on the ground, while others took their seats. Everyone laughed heartily at the jokes and sleight of hand of the circus performers. A treasure hunt then continued the entertainment. Six teams of children and adults challenged each other to find clues scattered around the courtyard and the common areas of the building, solving riddles about the history of the house, for which they had to interact with some of the co-residents. Finally, all participants were invited to enjoy a snack of almond pastries inside the Islamic prayer room. For many co-residents, this was the first opportunity they had had in many years to remove their shoes and enter their neighbours' place of worship. The issue of access to the Mosque arose that day in a new and different fashion.

All those who attended the feast also received a gifted copy of the booklet in which we had collected the historic accounts and photographs of the history of the condominium, and the same materials were printed on a large panel permanently affixed in the courtyard. Among those who seemed to like the gift that day were Beatrice, the owner of one of the Airbnb apartments in the building, and Melanie, a French girl who was staying in her apartment with her boyfriend at the time. When she received her copy of the booklet, Melanie told me:



FIGURE 5.5. ‘Circo Famiglia Show’ performance in the courtyard, Porta Palazzo Turin, 2019. © Francesco Vietti

I lived here in the Porta Palazzo district during my Erasmus exchange and every time I come to Turin I try to stay in this district. Now it’s already the second time I’ve gone back to Beatrice’s house, but this feast was a real surprise. Last time I didn’t understand what a special place I had come to and I thought it was forbidden to enter the Mosque. But now I have found myself chatting in French with a Moroccan lady who has relatives who live in Lyon, my city. I really feel at home!

Beatrice asks me if she can have more copies of the collection of stories and whether she can translate them into English:

I would like to always keep some copies in the apartment, so that all the tourists I host in the future can learn more about this house. Honestly, when I bought my place and thought about renting it on Airbnb I thought that the fact that there was a Mosque and, in general, the not always beautiful things that you hear about the neighbourhood could be a problem . . . instead I realized that many tourists come here for this reason, not only because it costs less than in other parts of the city.

As is evident from this account, the feast took on different, and even conflicting meanings for the various people who took part in it, as well as for those who explicitly chose not to participate. For Hamid, the head of the *Moschea della Pace*, this was an opportunity to prove wrong those residents in the building who have wanted to close the prayer room, as this event

involved the full participation of the Muslim community in the convivial life of the condominium. For the children and young people of the building, it was an opportunity to invite their school friends and play together in the courtyard, which until then was used by only a few, but which a few months later, with the closures imposed by the Covid-19 lockdown, would become the main, if not the only, space for socialization and meeting. For the owners of rental apartments and bed-and-breakfasts, the feast was a tool to enhance their investment and their accommodation activities. It was an initiative that gave validation to the building in the eyes of their guests and therefore increased the reputation of their properties.

For some of the long-time residents, it was a day that brought back memories of bygone times, and they expressed the wish that the feast would not remain an isolated event. According to Antonio:

We should do more initiatives like this, I feel like I was back when I was little and all of us children in the building were celebrating our birthdays here in the courtyard. We all knew each other, went to school together and spent every afternoon here, not like nowadays when people come and go and we don't even know them. The problem here is not the foreigners, but the fact that none of those who buy the apartments really come to live here. They rent to students or tourists. They are all people who are here one day and the next they are not, that's not good!

On the other hand, a good number of the house's inhabitants did not take an interest in the feast or even openly contested it. Some took what I would call a passive attitude. They simply looked out of the windows overlooking the courtyard to see how it was going and then quickly resumed their activities inside. Others, on the other hand, explicitly refused the invitation to participate. This was mainly due to the fact that there were people who were involved in the organization of the day with whom we had clashed in the past or, for whatever reason, were considered a source of problems for the condominium.

Overall, I believe that the condominium's feast was an experience that, despite its limitations, showed how conviviality could be approached.

Conviviality, alongside other somewhat interconnected concepts, such as 'super-diversity' and 'cosmopolitanism', has emerged as one of the interpretative paradigms for exploring the socio-cultural dynamics linked to migration in urban areas (Wise and Noble 2016: 427). This is a concept with a complex genealogy, which has recently been at the centre of a wide debate within anthropology and between different disciplines. A growing body of case studies on convivial collectivities, spaces and everydayness has thus been consolidated, providing a basis for a comparative approach aimed at grasping how this category is situated in different contexts (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014).

Living together is a process, located in a specific space and time, that requires work to build connections, relationships and meanings (Heil 2015). Authors who have focused on the ambivalence of this analytical category have highlighted how the reference to conviviality should not be understood as a simplistic celebration of the ‘joy of differences’, but as an invitation to expand on the clear practices, efforts, negotiations and conflicts that run through living together while trying to understand one another’s differences (Hemer, Povrzanović Frykman and Ristilammi 2020). In a remarkable contribution, Meissner and Heil (2020) draw attention to the conviviality-integration nexus. In particular, they note how the concept of integration is used in a normative way, prefiguring an idealistic, pacified, stabilized, ‘integratable society’ where differences do not matter. In contrast to this assumption, Meissner and Heil propose the provocative option of a ‘convivial disintegration’ capable of giving space to the dimensions of conflict, uncertainty and alternative possibilities. In this perspective, the use of the category of conviviality should point ‘to difference never ceasing to matter’ and invite us ‘to think about the necessary interventions that strengthen resilience in living with difference’ (Meissner and Heil 2020: 753).

The condominium courtyard emerged as a ‘space of transversality’ (Wise 2009) in which it was possible to create a habit of interaction, exchange and mutual learning. Contact, Wise points out (*ibid.*: 37), offers opportunities for mutual understanding and solidarity, but also presents risks linked to the unease and conflicts that can arise from missed or failed encounters. It is therefore necessary for ‘transversality facilitators’ to work to create ‘spaces of intercultural care’ by paying attention to the differences in power and inequalities that affect conviviality (Wise and Noble 2016). The same critical stance should be applied when we look at the ‘community’ that is created through the practices of conviviality: a community that we can precisely define as a ‘community of practice’ (Wenger 1998), without defined and stable boundaries (determined by ethnic or other differences), but rather produced and reproduced through continuous activities of interaction, cohabitation and sharing (Neal et al. 2019).

The conviviality experienced at the condominium feast in the particular space of the courtyard can therefore be considered to ‘open the city’. As other authors have already noted (Nowicka and Vertovec 2014; Heil 2015; Wise and Noble 2016), it should perhaps be more properly expressed by recalling the category of *convivencia*. Unlike the English term, which implicitly conveys the idea of a joyful and fun togetherness, the Spanish concept of *convivencia* rather emphasizes the procedural, negotiated, practical dimension of being together, and does not exclude phases of friction and conflict. *Convivencia* is also a deeply Mediterranean category, which has a long history linked especially to the period of peaceful coexistence between

Muslims, Christians and Jews in Al-Ándalus. The debate on religious and cultural tolerance in the Islamic Spain of the ninth–tenth century is detailed and complex, but the most important aspect here is that the encounter between residents, migrants and tourists in terms of a practice of *convivencia* can help us to understand that sharing one's spaces, times and ways of life through differences is certainly a struggle, but that effort is productive and can generate new shared identifications and a common sense of belonging.

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the Porta Palazzo neighbourhood, like many other neighbourhoods of Mediterranean cities that have welcomed migration and tourism, is at the centre of complex cultural, social, economic and political dynamics. On the one hand, the effects of gentrification have become increasingly evident, but they also resist voices and dimensions that challenge the changes in progress, sometimes assuming positions of radical criticism (as in the case of groups of anarchists active in the area), and in others a more 'dialoguing' attitude that aims to limit the deleterious effects of the transformations implemented 'from above'. They balance them with micro-operations of 'stitching together' the social fabric of the neighbourhood 'from below', like the various associations and groups of residents that have recently been formed around the ideas of participation, good neighbourliness and active citizenship.

The experience of collecting stories and celebrating the condominium has given us the opportunity to reflect on one of these small 'stitching' actions, inscribed within the rather restricted limits of a small community of residents. In the next chapter, I will instead investigate the dynamics of a much larger-scale project, which has now extended to many other European and Mediterranean cities, proposing a direct involvement of anthropology in the design and implementation of an innovative form of intercultural urban tourism.

NOTE

This chapter builds on the same (auto)ethnographic materials I presented previously both in Italian (Vietti 2020a) and English (Vietti 2023b). The latter contribution is a chapter of an edited book, part of the IMISCOE Research Series, and it is available online under open access (https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-23125-4_3).