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Territorial (Re-) Configurations: The Catanese Market Fera o'luni facing globalization and European integration

A walk through the city center of Catania in Sicily reveals the consequences of globalization and European integration everywhere. On Via Etnea – the city's main shopping street and boulevard – the volcanic stone of the street and the unobstructed view of the 3 300 m high volcano Etna on a clear day are the only reminders that Catania is at the extreme southern end of the European Union (EU), on an island which is actually known for its own rules and ways of life.¹ Instead, one international retail chain after another has captured Via Etnea since the mid-1990s. Nowadays, the shopping mile is adorned by the same shops and branches that can be found in the same number and with the same range of products in every major European city. Even the local almond specialty *granita* can be enjoyed sitting on the *Askholmen* garden set of a large Swedish furniture chain.

The city's most important open-air market – the Fera o'luni – stands like a rock in the waves of the apparent loss of Catanese shopping culture, which was shaped by small local shops, local products and open-air shopping experience. Less than a two-minute walk from the Via Etnea, it represents Catanese market tradition and attracts customers and tourists with its chaotic atmosphere, buzz of voices, smells, colors and promise of authentic Catanese trade and identity. That the Fera o'luni faces the same transformational forces of globalization and European integration is equally obvious, but does not play a major role in the market's image and perception. On the contrary, its exoticism as well as the promise of tradition and authenticity is further enhanced by the multiethnic flair of the market traders from all over the world which changed dramatically in the last three decades. The market suggests an immersion in traditional Catania to the growing masses of tourists, although many retailers and products create a globalized ambience.

Originating from this contradiction, this article examines the Fera o'luni on the Piazza Carlo Alberto in Catania as a local microspace of international history. It analyzes the effects of globalization and European integration on eco-

¹ Jane Schneider, ed., *Italy's Southern Question: Orientalism in One Country* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1998).

nomic and social practices and orders as mechanisms for the construction of space. Space is understood as a set of relationships, constructed through economic and social practices that create connections (of different geographical dimensions).² This paper emphasizes the importance of local adaptations of macroscale transformations such as globalization or European integration. The guiding question is: how do globalization and European integration affect the structure, the mechanisms of creating socioeconomic order, and the economic and social interactions on the Fera o'luni in the last three decades?

Markets are particularly suitable for examining social and economic changes generated by global and European macro trends in terms of their local effects. They enable us to classify local phenomena in global contexts. The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has emphasized in that context that the local level is not just a place where global (or even European) processes are reflected or have an impact. Instead, it is only through face-to-face interaction and the practice of local actors that global (and European) interconnectedness is actually established.³ In addition to their purely economic distribution function, markets can, therefore, also be understood as social microcultures with their own societal practices and mechanisms of order.⁴ Heterogeneous actors with different social and cultural backgrounds come together to trade and sell goods. At the same time, the individual actors – traders, customers, the police and the local administration – follow a specific set of rules and ritualized practices to produce local identities. Markets are interfaces and nodes of economic and social relations of a society, i. e. a combination of economic and social interactions, which mediate differences and serve to integrate into general patterns of interaction.⁵ Historic markets such as the Fera o'luni continue to serve as social institutions. As described by Orietta Sorigi, they are:

2 Gudrun Benecke, Željko Branovic and Anke Draude, "Governance und Raum: Theoretisch-konzeptionelle Überlegungen zur Verräumlichung von Governance", *SFB-Governance Working Paper Series* 13 (2008), accessed May 13, 2025. https://refubium.fu-berlin.de/bitstream/handle/fub188/19115/sfbgov_wp13.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

3 Arjun Appadurai, "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology", in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. by Richard Fox (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002), 191–210.

4 Rachel Black, *Porta Palazzo: The Anthropology of an Italian Market* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Sophie Watson, "The magic of the marketplace: Sociality in a neglected public space", *Urban Studies* 45 (2009): 1577–1598, doi: 10.1177/0042098009105506; Clifford Geertz, "The Bazaar Economy: Information and Search in Peasant Marketing", *The American Economic Review* 68 (1978): 28–32.

5 John List, "The Behaviorist Meets the Market: Measuring Social Preferences and Reputational Effects in Actual Transactions," *Journal of Political Economy* 114 (2006): 1–37, doi: 10.1086/

still today a social fact [...] in which the mutual relationship between men, established through exchange, do not only affect economic aspects in a narrow sense, but also religious, ludic and aggravated ones in various forms. Hence it is not only a place for the exchange of goods but also one of cultural interrelations, of total communications, the founding element of every social organization: a phenomenon referable to the ancient life of the piazza [...] because of its continual harking back to collective and ritual behaviors that need to be expressed in a community dimension.⁶

We argue that the Fera o'luni demonstrates how multiple spaces can coexist within a single place. However, it also highlights that places possess their own logic, which can be understood as “consolidating cultural orders in and in relation to a place”.⁷

The Fera o'luni is one of those open-air markets in Sicily that has successfully managed contemporary challenges, whereas others have already died out. It stands for a specific kind of market, which – also as a result of the changes under consideration here – has a very differentiated range of goods.⁸ This paper argues that the interplay of socioeconomic transformations caused by globalization and European integration with the local practices of producing socioeconomic order has enabled the Fera o'luni to survive those changes that have led markets of this kind, with a daily open-air supply of all kinds of daily goods, to decline throughout Europe. The Fera o'luni continues to occupy a firm place in the economic geography of Catania, albeit with a changed functionality. Remarkably, encounters with otherness are renegotiated every day so successfully that Catania is considered particularly migration-friendly among refugees.⁹

As venues of economic and social change, markets have always been a favored field of study for historians across eras. They have been instrumental in identifying trading regions and the evolving roles of markets in economies and societies.¹⁰ With the onset of industrialization, markets became increasingly di-

498587; Michele de la Pradella, *Market Day in the Province* (Chicago: University Press, 2006); John Davis, *Exchange* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992).

6 Orietta Sorgi, “Historical Sicilian Markets: Tradition and Change”, in *Mercati storici siciliani*, ed. by Orietta Sorgi (Palermo: CRICD, 2008), 59–74.

7 Martina Löw, *Vom Raum aus die Stadt denken* (Transcript Verlag, 2018), 165.

8 Sorgi, “Historical Sicilian Markets”, 61–63.

9 Nunzio Dell’Erba, *Storia di Catania dalle origini ai giorni nostri* (Pordenone: Biblioteca dell’Immagine, 2016); Maria Sorbello, “Multiculturalism in the Mediterranean Basin: An Overview of Recent Immigration to Sicily”, in *Sicily and the Mediterranean: Migration, Exchange, Reinvention*, ed. by Claudia Karagoz and Giovanna Summerfield (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2015), 179–194.

10 Karl Heinrich Kaufhold, “Messen und Wirtschaftsausstellungen von 1650 bis 1914”, in *Europäische Messen und Märktesysteme in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, ed. Peter Johanek (Köln: Böhlau, 1996), 239–294.

verse while simultaneously growing more abstract and expansive. As the local open-air market lost its economic significance in industrialized Europe and primarily served an upper-class clientele as a fixed location for goods exchange of regional origin, historical scholarship shifted away from this form of trade, which was dwindling in many places.¹¹ The focus turned to international, European, or global markets, value chains, and their infrastructural underpinnings.¹² Local markets have received scant attention from historical research, a trend that also applies to the Fera o'luni, although it has a completely different meaning for the local economy and society compared to the rest of Europe. Fera o'luni has been addressed only by a limited number of studies so far. These studies have been written either for a non-academic audience and focus on the general lines of Catania's urban history, or by (local) urban geographers whose primary interest was in the regional planning of Catania.¹³ "The discussion on the management of urban transformation was, however, largely confined to academia and in the debate between technicians and academia, with scant ability to penetrate local politics and society".¹⁴ Historical and anthropological research has only rudimentarily placed Catania in the context of globalization or European integration; if at all, this was in the broader context of urban development concepts and the regional structural policy of the EU.¹⁵ Research on international history, globalization and European integration has also hardly addressed the microscale effects in southern Italian microterritories, such as a market in Catania.¹⁶ Only Brigida Marovelli's doctoral thesis – based on ethno-

11 Robert Allen, *Geschichte der Weltwirtschaft* (Leipzig: Reclam, 2015).

12 Gerold Ambrosius, *Globalisierung: Geschichte der internationalen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018).

13 For the former, see Dell'Erba, *Storia di Catania dalle origini ai giorni nostri*; for the latter, see Gianni Petino, "Visioni urbane di un mercato storico catanese: Una prima definizione attraverso l'utile cartografico", *Agribusiness Paesaggio & Ambiente* 16 (2013): 162–168; Elena Finocchiaro, "A Fera O'Luni: un mercato storico in trasformazione", *Sociologia Urbana e Rurale* 91 (2010): 125–143; Filippo Gravagno and Laura Saija, "A Fera O'Luni di Catania: Racconto di una esperienza di ricerca-azione", *Archivio di Studi Urbani e Regionali* 90 (2007): 171–182.

14 Melania Nucifora, "Protection of Cultural Heritage and Urban Development: Catania and Syracuse in the Seventies – A Comparative Approach," in *Cities Contested. Urban Politics, Heritage and Social Movement in Italy and West Germany in the 1970s*, ed. Martin Baumeister, Bruno Bonomo and Dieter Schott (Frankfurt: Campus 2017): 264.

15 Dell'Erba, *Storia di Catania dalle origini ai giorni nostri*.

16 Wilfried Loth and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds., *Internationale Geschichte: Themen – Ergebnisse – Aussichten* (Berlin: Oldenbourg, 2014); Gerold Ambrosius, *Globalisierung: Geschichte der internationalen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018); Peter Fäßler, *Globalisierung* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007); Guido Thiemeyer, *Geschichte der Europäischen Integration* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023); Catherina Cirelli, *Gli spazi del commercio nei processi di*

graphic field research – dealt with the transformation of a local market in Catania, using the example of the smaller fish market (*pescheria*).¹⁷ In this, however, the impact of the history of globalization and European integration on the territorial (re-) configuration of a local marketplace remains vague.

This paper takes a first step towards closing a research gap at the interface of Mediterranean anthropology and the history of globalization and European integration.¹⁸ It will, however, not be possible to consider the Fera o'luni in all its complexity within the limited scope of a paper. We also have to limit our focus on the period since the 1990s because we can only obtain reliable data for this period, especially with regard to social practices. Due to the low level of writing among the market traders, there are few written records that would allow earlier periods to be reconstructed. The article therefore combines historical and anthropological methods. It is based on participant observation, interviews with contemporary witnesses, everyday conversation and analyses of the local press. Fieldwork was conducted, involving active participation in the daily lives and work of traders and their families, as well as observation of daily practices, alongside numerous interviews. The bulk of the data collection occurred through informal daily conversations, which were neither recorded nor structured as formal interviews. Therefore, the primary source for this paper comprises ethnographic fieldnotes taken by the authors, although these are not extensively detailed in the references. The fieldwork in Catania spanned from 2019 to 2024.¹⁹

In the following, this paper will, firstly, describe the history of the Fera o'luni and the mechanisms of social order at the beginnings of the 1990s. In a second step, the paper discusses the subsequent impact of globalization and European integration in three subchapters since the 1990s: the consequences for Catania, the consequences on the structure of the Fera o'luni and the consequences for the mechanisms of social order. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn.

trasformazione urbana (Bologna: Patron, 2007); Caterina Cirelli et al., “Trade as a cultural identity aspect in a city: A case study on Catania,” *Annali della Facoltà di Economia dell'Università di Catania* 50 (2004): 161–185.

¹⁷ Brigida Marovelli, *Landscape, Practice and Tradition in a Sicilian Market* (Brunel: School of Social Science, 2014); Brigida Marovelli, “‘Meat Smells like Corpses’: Sensory Perceptions in a Sicilian Urban Market Place”, *Urbanities* 4 (2014): 21–38.

¹⁸ Thomas Hauschild, “Epilogue – Mediterranean Survivals”, *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 2 (2020): 371–398.

¹⁹ This research was funded by the German Volkswagen Foundation in the project “Europe reversed? Sicily as a laboratory of hybrid statehood in Europe?”

History of the Fera o'luni

The Fera o'luni is the oldest market in the city and region of Catania, whose roots can be traced back to antiquity.²⁰ After changing its location and structure several times over the centuries, it has consistently been held in Piazza Carlo Alberto, which is located in the city center in the immediate vicinity of the main shopping streets Via Etnea and Via Umberto, since the mid-nineteenth century.



Fig. 1: Piazza Carlo Alberto in the 1920s, Postcard (property of the authors).

The Fera o'luni consisted of a mixture of permanent shops and vendors, which had quite homogeneous market structures of predominantly Sicilian and Catanese traders.²¹ It had an important inner-city supply function for the local population: beyond the main shopping streets, which invited the local population to stroll in the evening hours and on the weekends, the Fera o'luni fulfilled a similar function during the day. Traditionally, it was a market for everyday goods, especially food – with the exception of fish, which was mainly offered at the local fish market not far from the harbor.²² A first functional change began with the gentrification of inner-city housing and the emergence of large suburbs,

²⁰ Gravagno and Saija, “A Fera O’Luni’di Catania: Racconto di una esperienza di ricercar-azione”, 171–182.

²¹ Elena Finocchiaro, “Metamorfosi urbane: Catania fra attività commerciali tradizionali e mercati etnici”, *Geotema* 38 (2009): 83–89.

²² Marovelli, *Landscape, Practice and Tradition*.

such as the satellite town of Librino, especially in the 1970s.²³ The range of goods which were offered in the market was supplemented by, among other things, clothing of Italian production at comparatively low prices.

The Piazza Carlo Alberto was – according to the unanimous narrative of the Catanese market traders – traditionally used both legally and illegally for commercial purposes. Part of the public space has always been used by ‘illegal’ market traders, who did not pay fees to the city, but, thus, could not claim guaranteed use either. Illegal traders, which historically were mostly of local origin, filled gaps on street crossings or at the edge of the market and sold their products there. The latter came from either their own production or the same wholesale market as the legal traders’ goods. Traditionally, illegal traders were mostly tolerated by the state and its representatives. The local police only curbed this type of market trade in order to prevent it from spreading too far, especially at the Piazza’s neuralgic points, or to combat fraud against customers.

Social practices and ordering elements of the Fera o’luni at the beginning of the 1990s

Social and economic practices have taken place in Catania against a background of pronounced interconnections and integrations since antiquity. Social practices and ordering elements of the Fera o’luni in Catania were therefore not detached from those of society in Catania and eastern Sicily. This paper deals with three ideal types of interdependent, competing and often overlapping ordering mechanisms which were important at the beginning of the 1990.²⁴

Firstly, a key mechanism was the *implementation of state order* in the Fera o’luni, which was the responsibility of the local administration and the local police. They took measures to establish order and security in compliance with Italian and international laws, among the latter, EU laws, which at the beginning of the 1990s were still quite limited in sectoral terms.²⁵ Formally, these measures concerned the entire public and economic order, including the cleaning of

²³ Nucifora, *Protection of Cultural Heritage*.

²⁴ Claudia Karagoz and Giovanna Summerfield, eds., *Sicily and the Mediterranean: Migration, Exchange, Reinvention* (Basingstoke: Plagrave, 2015); Volker Reinhard and Michael Sommer, *Sizilien: Eine Geschichte von den Anfängen bis heute* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2010).

²⁵ Simone Paoli, “The Schengen Agreements and their Impact on Euro-Mediterranean Relations: The case of Italy and the Maghreb”, *Journal of European Integration History* 19 (2013): 125–145.

the piazza during and after the end of the market. In practice, the state only partially supervised the market and enforced its order only to a limited extent. 'Legal' and 'illegal' were categories that remained rather blurred in the everyday life of the people on the piazza. These were often evaluated according to the individual actors' own benefit, rather than state law.²⁶ The breaking of state law did not have a fundamentally negative connotation and was socially ostracized. Instead, illegality (which was more the exception than the rule) in the Fera o'luni was accepted to a certain extent by state representatives, at least at the level of petty crime, child labor and other smaller illegal practices, such as gambling. It can be assumed that a pragmatic approach to smaller forms of illegality was taken, especially towards the poorer classes, in view of the poorly developed social security systems and an extremely low rate of female employment. This included unauthorized subleasing of stalls and the sale of goods without paying taxes.

Personal relations between local state authorities and vendors were an important element. On the one hand, local state authorities were well-known among traders. Often they had known each other since childhood and were even old acquaintances. Therefore, everyday practices were often shaped by mutual respect. On the other hand, small favors to state authorities promoted the acceptance of petty criminal activities which were part of everyday life in the Fera o'luni. The transitions between everyday petty crime and other forms of criminality were, however, fluid.²⁷ Local state representatives set limits on everyday practices based on pragmatic considerations. Catanese traders and state representatives, thus, succeeded in bringing constitutional formal legality and social informal legitimacy into a relatively stable equilibrium.²⁸

²⁶ Christian Giordano, *Die Betrogenen der Gesellschaft. Überlappungsmentalitäten und Überlappungsrationaltäten in mediterranen Gesellschaften* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1992).

²⁷ The mafia plays a central role in social processes and developments in Sicily, especially when it comes to legality and illegality. However, this article focuses on fundamental mechanisms of societal order. These do not exclude connections to the mafia, but are not limited to them. Clarifying when, where and whether the mafia actually plays a role on the Fera o'luni is not central to the research interest of this paper. Reference is merely made here to a wealth of works that examine the phenomenon separately, analyzing the Sicilian mafia and how it shaped eastern Sicily and Catania; Theodoros Rakopoulos, "The shared boundary: Sicilian mafia and antimafia land", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 25 (2020): 528–544, doi: 10.1080/1354571X.2020.1830526; Antonio Vesco, "The cultural foundations of political support in eastern Sicily: Mafia clans, political power and the Lombardo case", *Modern Italy* 23 (2017): 55–70, doi: 10.1017/mit.2017.1; Pino Arlacchi, *Mafia von innen. Das Leben des Don Antonio Calderone* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1995).

²⁸ Maurice Aymard and Giuseppe Giarrizzo, eds. *Catania – La città la sua storia* (Catania: IBS, 2012); Pradella, *Market Day in the Province*.

This does not mean that illegal acts were accepted by the state in principle and not punished. Over that, illegal market traders had no formal claims against the state arising from customary law. On the contrary, the police (often nonlocal police forces like the Carabinieri) repeatedly took individual actions against illegal practices, which, in the perception of the market traders, did not follow any pattern or calculable rhythms but were instead spontaneous and emotional. This made them incalculable, increased the latent presence of the state and ensured that the state remained accepted as the highest authority. Perceived arbitrariness was a core element. House arrest and imprisonment for several months were punishments that sometimes caused entire market families to experience temporary financial emergencies, which were bridged, among other things, by the work of children and women, who then took over the positions and functions of the fathers during their absence.²⁹

There was hardly any active cooperation between civil society, traders and the state authorities in establishing state order in the market. State representatives monitored state order largely on their own. Vendors and customers usually looked the other way when illegal practices took place. ‘Looking the other way’ played a central role in the organization of the market and was a mutual practice in the Fera o’luni among the non-state actors. Illegal practices or criminality were usually not reported. Customers and traders often had very ambivalent ideas about the state’s rights and duties to enforce order. Illegality was often also seen as overcoming state obstruction through shrewd business practices, with state representatives generally being eyed critically.

Secondly, widely ramified *family and kinship networks* shaped the Fera o’luni as a second mechanism of order. In practice, the main section of the stalls, especially the legal ones, was limited to a few Catanese families. These were often inherited over generations, whereby children, especially the male offspring, were integrated into working life through the market. This was – as described above – not infrequently born out of necessity. Young people had to support the family as soon as they were able to contribute to the family income or in special cases when fathers were no longer able to do so – for example due to illness or temporary imprisonment. Social security systems hardly compensated in emergency situations, and the lack of a life and household management that built up capital reserves also had an impact.³⁰ Families or kinship represented the long-term stable element of the market. Although mutual trust was sometimes low even within families, it was still greater than towards people outside

²⁹ Interview with Giuseppe, December 15, 2020 and February 7, 2022.

³⁰ Eva Carlestål, *La Famiglia: The Ideology of Sicilian Family Networks* (Uppsala: University Press, 2005).

the family. Between the market families was a kind of respect for each other, however, entrepreneurial autonomy was of high value and a big burden for any type of long-term cooperation. The long lines of development of the Fera o'luni seem to be closely interwoven with the history of the market families.

The third mechanism was supporter networks. These emerged through anticipatory measures of mutual help and support that could well entail temporary, minor dependencies, but which were not necessarily as structurally anchored as in clientelist relationships, whereby the difference between the two was rather a gradual one.³¹ Asymmetries and hierarchies were far less pronounced. Gradual differences were important for everyday social practices and the mechanisms of order-making, which allowed for forms of 'cooperative coexistence' beyond clientelist dependencies between traders and families of the market.³² Supporter networks were found in many situations, including warning networks against civilian police, protection against price dumping by other traders or for small errands. Coffee stalls and well-established individual traders represented nodes in the supporter networks.

Supporter networks and family networks can both be interpreted as a phenomenon of the specific configuration of trust and mistrust in the market. On the one hand, there was a superficial tolerance in society towards national or cultural otherness and illegality. On the other hand, people fundamentally distrusted the state and other people, so it was considered legitimately cunning to illegally outsmart the state or take advantage of other people.

The impact of globalization and European integration (1): Consequences for Catania

As it is impossible to discuss all the consequences of globalization and European integration with regard to Catania, this chapter focuses on those that are most important for the Fera o'luni. Perhaps one of the most visible signs of globalization is the increasing number of migrants which have reached Sicily in

³¹ Jane Schneider and Peter Schneider, *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* (New York: Academic Press, 1976); Mattina Cesare, "Changes in Clientelism and Urban Government: A Comparative Case Study of Naples and Marseilles", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 31 (2007): 73–90, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2427.2007.00717.x.

³² Dorothy Zinn, *Raccomandazione: Clientelism and Connections in Italy* (London: Berghahn, 2019).

different waves.³³ Strong immigration from Asia began in the 1980s, bringing many migrants from countries such as China, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to Catania.³⁴ Eastern European migrants from Ukraine, Romania and Poland followed after the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, which was merely a female migration bringing people for service jobs or the tourist industry. According to a survey by Caritas and the Migrantes Foundation, the number of foreign residents in Catania rose from 24,900 in 1991 to 114,000 in 2008.³⁵ After the turn of the millennium, especially in the 2010s, migration from Africa to Europe intensified, with Sicily being one of the first regions of arrival.³⁶ Catania became a gateway for migrants from Africa hoping for work in the industrial centers of Europe and Northern Italy. Many of them were stranded in Catania and its environs. For Catania, this meant strong immigration from West Africa, for which it is impossible to give an exact figure because of the high number of illegal immigrants who are not recorded statistically.³⁷ Although Sicily is often perceived as an EU border region with a hard external border in recent times, a closer look reveals the opposite: Sicily is not to be understood as a border in the sense of a barrier, but as a border zone in the sense of a place where cultures meet and transform each other – and have done so for many thousands of years.³⁸

Other major issues are the intensification of the global division of labor and the increase in trade. Migrant traders mirror the global economy on the Fera o'luni regarding products and product groups. They often sell exactly those products which their home countries have concentrated on in the last three decades. They are, for example, part of global trade and value chains from production sites in Asia to sales in Catania, which focus on cheap products and counterfeit brands. The latter are becoming more relevant against the backdrop of global trade agreements within the World Trade Organization (WTO), espe-

33 Orazio Licciardello and Daniela Damigella, “Immigrants and Natives: Ways of Constructing New Neighbourhoods in Catania, Sicily”, in *Negotiating Multicultural Europe: Borders, Networks, Neighbourhoods*, ed. Heide Armbruster and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof (London: Springer, 2011), 141–158.

34 Aymard and Giarrizzo, eds., *Catania – La città la sua storia*.

35 Dell’Erba, *Storia di Catania*.

36 Teres Fiore and Ernest Ialango, “Introduction – Italy and the Euro-Mediterranean ‘migrant-crisis’: National reception, lived experiences, EU pressures”, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 23 (2018): 481–489, doi: 10.1080/1354571X.2018.1500787.

37 Elena Ambrosetti, Cela Eralba and Tineke Fokkema, “The Differentiated Impact of the Legal Status of Migrants in Italy on Transnationalism. Just a matter of time?”, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 22 (2013): 33–60.

38 Sarah Davies-Secord, *Where three worlds met: Sicily in the early medieval Mediterranean* (Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 2017).

cially the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Property Rights in Services agreed in 1994. Signatory states of the WTO agreements, such as Italy, declared their intention to protect intellectual property more strongly, among other things, by taking action under criminal law against product counterfeiting and imitations.³⁹

The single European market, in place since 1993, with its four freedoms (free movement of goods, capital, services and people) also has an impact on Catania.⁴⁰ It shifted Sicily and Catania from the center of a Mediterranean trade and migration network to a strictly guarded physical EU external border with highly protective tariff walls, which became more impermeable, especially for people and goods from African states.⁴¹ Centuries-old trade relations and migration routes are being torn apart or devalued. Even Malta, which had been an important foreign trade partner of Catania before joining the EU, in 2004 became part of the EU's internal market, gaining nondiscriminatory access to the much more lucrative markets in Northern Europe.⁴² The freedom of establishment resulted in large European retail chains competing with the traditional traders in Catania. Local traders had to face competition from food discounters, such as Lidl, or textile conglomerates, such as H&M. Six large shopping centers were established on the outskirts of Catania, meeting the needs of the sprawling residential areas. Catania, unlike many other cities in Southern Italy, shows a strong decentralization of economic activities, more akin to northern European patterns.⁴³ This trend has been further pushed by large industrial settlements, which have repeatedly been generously realized with EU funds. Catania has risen to become a center of microelectronics in Europe since the 2000s, which is becoming even more significant with the EU Commission's efforts to establish an independent European chip industry.⁴⁴

39 Klaus Elfring, *Geistiges Eigentum in der Welthandelsordnung: Auswirkungen des TRIPS-Übereinkommens auf den internationalen Schutz geistigen Eigentums unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rechtsdurchsetzung und der Rechtsentwicklung* (Köln: Heymann, 2006); Christian Henrich-Franke, *Globale Welt. Europäische Geschichte 1970–2015* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2019).

40 Michael Gehler, *Europa: Ideen, Institutionen, Vereinigungen, Zusammenhalt* (Reinbek: Lau Verlag, 2018).

41 Giuliano Beniamino Fleri, "The (Re) Birth of a Mediterranean Migration System: The Case of Tunisian Migration in Sicily", *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 27 (2001): 623–642, doi: 10.1080/1354571X.2021.1965743; Maurizio Ambrosini, *Irregular Immigration in Southern Europe: Actors, Dynamics, Governance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2018).

42 Mark Harwood, *Malta in the European Union* (London: Routledge, 2014).

43 Cirelli et al., "Trade as a cultural identity aspect in a city".

44 Dell'Erba, *Storia di Catania*.

In addition, tourism has been massively promoted by the EU's deregulation of the transport markets, especially cheap flights and holiday offers on cruise ships.⁴⁵ The expansion of the airport and the port with EU funds supported this trend. The Catanese airport, Fontanarossa, increased its passenger volume from 2.05 million in 1993 to 10.2 million in 2019. The number of overnight stays in Catania doubled between 2000 and 2009 to about 289,000, which has led to a doubling of hotels and overnight accommodation, especially in the inner-city area, and a shortage of living space.⁴⁶ In 2019, the number of overnight stays in the region of Catania peaked at 2.1 million. Tourism accelerated a gentrification process that had been going on for decades and had a massive impact on the structure of the inner-city population. On the one hand, more and more Catanese moved from the inner-city areas to the suburbs.⁴⁷ On the other hand, many migrants settled in inner-city residential areas that had been abandoned and not put to any new use.⁴⁸

The impact of globalization and European integration (2): Consequences for the structure of the Fera o'luni

If we take a closer look at the effects of globalization and European integration on the structure of the Fera o'luni, four phenomena can be identified.

Firstly, new heterogenous market geography and traders: The shop structure in the buildings along the Piazza Carlo Alberto has changed in a particularly striking way in the last three decades. Smaller shops for food and everyday needs have settled there to meet especially the needs of Asian migrants. These replaced similar shops that were run by Catanese dealers, especially shops for everyday needs like butchers, bakeries or grocery shops. The overall number of permanent shops with retail space along the piazza has decreased significantly.

⁴⁵ Christian Henrich-Franke, "Initialzündung oder Katalysator einer wettbewerbsorientierten Verkehrspolitik? Die Untätigkeitsklage und Verurteilung des Rats durch den EuGH im Mai 1985", *Journal of European Integration History* 26 (2020): 247–266. doi: 10.5771/0947-9511-2020-2-247.

⁴⁶ Dell'Erba, *Storia di Catania*.

⁴⁷ Nucifora, *Protection of Cultural Heritage*.

⁴⁸ Andrea D'Urso, "San Berillo e il suo milieu rimosso: modernità, rappresentazione e attività socio-economiche dell'antico quartiere", in *Urban Cultural Maps. Condividere, Partecipare, Trasformare L'Urbano*, ed. Andrea D'Urso and Guiseppe Reina (Catania: CUECM, 2013).



Fig. 2: A Bangladeshi shop and market stall.
Source: ©Franke, Fera o'luni, February 2021.

Asian traders, mainly Bangladeshi and Chinese, often rent shop premises along the piazza as well as the associated market stalls on the Fera o'luni immediately in front of these shops to serve different customers. While the permanent shops tend to focus on food, especially for the own (national) community, the market stalls by majority sell cheap technical and textile products from Asia for a heterogeneous clientele.

The Chinese community are even organizing the wholesale market and logistics to an ever-greater extent. African traders, mainly Senegalese and Nigerians, by contrast, frequently set up mobile stalls illegally, often only on blankets in the peripheral areas of the market. They mostly offer counterfeit brand products or smuggled goods, such as bags, clothes, shoes, sunglasses or DVDs.⁴⁹ Both groups – Asians and Africans – must be seen as an enrichment for the market and the long-established market traders because they increase the product variety and attractiveness without resulting in competition.

⁴⁹ Petino, "Visioni urbane di un mercato storico catanese".

The Fera o'luni's traders have acquired a different social and ethnic composition in two consecutive steps.⁵⁰ First, the European internal market has torn holes in the market's shop structure. Transnational retail chains, such as H&M, Ikea and Lidl, and suburban multifunctional shopping centers have replaced local traders in Catania's overall economic geography since the 1990s.⁵¹ Second, the abandoned shops were then often taken over by Asian migrants who came to Catania from China, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka after the end of the Cold War. In that context, the market has expanded from Piazza Carlo Alberto into the surrounding streets, where new traders offered their new goods. All in all, this gave the Fera o'luni the character of a market with different departments.

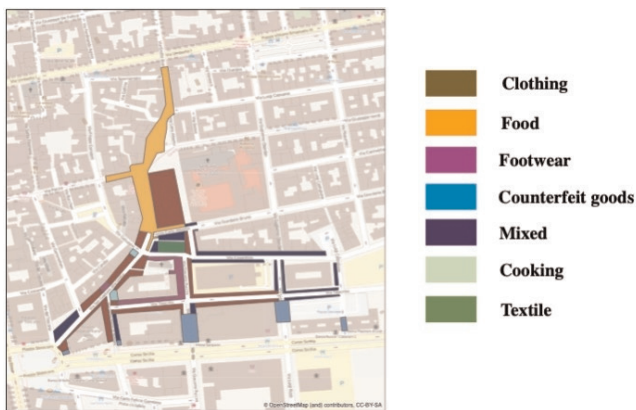


Fig. 3: Map of product groups. Source: Petino, Gianni. “Visioni urbane di un mercato storico catanese. Una prima definizione attraverso l'utile cartografico”. *Agribusiness Paesaggio & Ambiente* 16 (2013): 162–168.

At first glance, the market appears very inter- and transnational, although (fluid) boundaries between groups of goods, which are almost synonymous with nationally contoured spaces, can easily be identified. A spirit of cooperative coexistence between traders with different cultural backgrounds and different products is discernible. As soon as the piazza is no longer used commercially in the evening, however, the social and national borders immediately become apparent. In the afternoon and evening hours, the piazza becomes mainly a place for migrants to

⁵⁰ Petino, “Visioni urbane di un mercato storico catanese”.

⁵¹ Caterina Barilaro et al., “The Centre-Periphery Dialectics in Eastern Sicily Retail System: An Exploratory Research”, *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* 14 (2020): 147–153. doi: 10.36253/bsgi-1000.

stay, while the Catanese population retreats into their private space or other urban areas such as the neighboring Via Etnea. In the evening hours, the migrants' shop structure along the piazza comes to the fore, clearly distinguished from the remaining other shops by particularly long opening hours.

The second factor is that of new, heterogeneous product groups: It is striking that the increasing cultural and national heterogeneity of traders has resulted in a correspondingly increasing heterogeneity of products and product groups. The range of goods on offer at the Fera o'luni has become increasingly differentiated. On the one hand, lower price and quality segments were opened up. These include cheap Asian products, for example, in the electronics sector, as well as the many counterfeit products in the textile sector. Second-hand textile goods were added, which (often originating from Northern European used clothing collections) are usually sold by weight. Ironically, some of the clothes are even sold back via internet to Northern Europe as 'vintage' for a lot of money.⁵² On the other hand, the variety of goods has increased. Even in the traditional market segment of food, both trends can be traced. Traditional Sicilian fruits have long since been replaced by products from Spain and the Netherlands, which are sometimes cheaper. Then again, Asian and African traders offer their domestic vegetables, which are often grown in Sicily.

Thirdly, new, heterogeneous customers: Tourists and migrants are two new groups of customers with very different demands that have become important pillars of the Fera o'luni, especially in the holiday season from March to October. They are a heterogeneous group who compensate for the lost Catanese customers who have moved to the suburbs or use the shopping centers and grocery shops there. The resulting new, much more heterogeneous demand mirrors the change in goods and product groups. Asian migrants and traders turn out to be clearly visible as both customers and traders in the Fera o'luni.

Fourthly, illegality as a structural principle: Illegality is generally increasing in various forms in the Fera o'luni. It has changed in quantity and quality to such an extent that it can be described as one of the market's structural principles. On the one hand, formerly non-market areas on the periphery of the piazza (bordering streets) are being taken over, often without permission, by traders of foreign origin.⁵³ Many counterfeit products are sold there, which means a double form of illegality: once as a breach of local market law and once as a breach of international trade law. On the other hand, illegal sales are also increasing in traditional Catanese businesses, which are triggered by the increasing competitive pressure from transnational retail chains in these product groups (food,

⁵² Interview with Giorgia, November 20, 2020.

⁵³ Petino, "Visioni urbane di un mercato storico catanese".

clothing). Illegal practices, such as selling without taxes, have become the rule rather than the exception over the years. A narrative dominates among the domestic traders of the Fera o'luni according to which only the immigrants engage in 'illegal activities', while the petty criminals of Catania are not classified as criminals. Selling without paying taxes or illegally taking possession of stalls are repeatedly presented by the traders themselves as necessary and legitimate actions: "If I sell these light bulbs with VAT, I have to sell them for 1.30 to earn at least 30 cents, although they actually cost 1 euro. But then I can't pay the VAT. The state doesn't let you work here".⁵⁴ According to their narrative, the legitimacy of such forms of illegality stems from the state's lack of ability (and willingness) to fulfill its obligation to take care of its citizens.

All in all, it is noticeable that the consequences of globalization and European integration have fundamentally changed the structure of the Fera o'luni. The market has become much more heterogeneous and diverse and has been assigned new functions in Catania's overall economic geography. While the Fera o'luni nowadays supplies the city population with everyday food and goods only to a limited extent, it increasingly serves to supply poorer classes with cheap consumer goods and textiles. In addition, it provides the tourist masses with souvenirs, cheap counterfeit products and the feeling of a traditional Catanese shopping experience. The Fera o'luni has, thus, become part of the tourist program touted by the city's marketing. This is further encouraged by the fact that the way of selling has been preserved in the open air, protected by umbrellas and with day-to-day setting up and dismantling. The Sicilian tourism operator SunTripSicily advertises the Fera o'luni accordingly:

This folkloric Street Market is one of most interesting thing to visit in the City [...] Walking among the stalls you can admire the passion that local merchants have to sell their products, which can be food, fruits or vegetables or clothing or objects of any type [...] If you are looking for fresh, smelly [sic] food, vintage clothings [sic] or just a full immersion in Sicilian way of life [...] this is the place for you!⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Interview with Gabriele, December 1, 2020.

⁵⁵ "A Fera o'luni market street – Catania," *SunTripSicily*, accessed May 13, 2025. https://www.suntripsicily.com/92-events_in_sicily-a-fera-o-luni-market-street-catania.php.

The impact of globalization and European integration (3): Consequences for the social practices and ordering mechanisms of the Fera o'luni

If a fundamental change can be identified for the structure of the Fera o'luni, the situation is different regarding social practices and the mechanisms of societal ordering. Generally speaking, the state has a high degree of continuity in its dealings with the Catanese traders. Migrant traders fit into the practices of dealing with the state and its representatives, however, with clear differences depending on their origin. None of the migrant groups actively cooperate with or support state representatives in enforcing state law and establishing order. Regardless of origin, they are all (for different reasons) anxious to minimize contacts with the state, which is also justified by a fear of reprisals. In conversations with them, it can be heard again and again that the majority also come from countries in which little trust is placed in the state.⁵⁶ Patterns of action in dealing with the state, which they know from their home countries, can be continued in the Fera o'luni, including, for example, contact reduction through inconspicuousness and special caution. Asian traders tend to most easily adopt the traditional Catanese style of ambivalent dealings with the state and the practice of 'looking away'. On the one hand, they officially buy or rent the salesrooms and market stalls as they usually have a residence permit that enables them to engage in commercial activities. On the other hand, they often sell goods without paying taxes. African traders often operate much more illegally, for many reasons. As asylum seekers, they seldom have a work permit. Many have entered Italy illegally. The products they offer often violate trade laws.⁵⁷

The gradually expanding illegality in the Fera o'luni is countered by police forces with an increase in the demonstrative enforcement of state order and law in staged individual cases. Behind this is a general pressure for legitimacy, the claim of ultimate authority of state regulations and growing international obligations, according to which action must be taken against illegal migration and

⁵⁶ Interview with Mehedi, November 4, 2021.

⁵⁷ Maurizio Avola and Anna Cortese, "Commercianti cinesi a Catania: risorse competitive e strategie imprenditoriali", in *Il profilo nazionale degli immigrati imprenditori*, ed. by Antonio Chiesi and Deborah De Luca (Roma: University Press, 2011), 32–57; Maurizio Avola, "The Ethnic Penalty in the Italian Labour Market: A comparison between the Centre-North and the South", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41 (2015): 1746–1768, doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2014.973841.

product piracy. Police controls by nonlocal police forces and punishments continue to take place rather incalculably, but – according to the actors involved – are mainly directed against traders with a migration background. Africans are a primary target of police activities because of their often illegal – against international law – presence and products. The actions, punishments and seized illegal goods are very demonstratively displayed in the various local media in order to show the state’s regulatory authority and power to act and the validity of state law, as can be seen in the following article taken from the local online newspaper *Catania Today* from December 1, 2020:

The finance police [*Guardia di Finanza*] carried out an operation in the area of counterfeiting and copyright protection, seizing more than 1,200 illegal products consisting of counterfeit clothing, counterfeit CDs and DVDs. The operation was carried out in Charles Albert Square [*Piazza Carlo Alberto*] and surrounding areas. The military caught, in the San Cristoforo area, a subject of Senegalese origin as he was leaving his home, used as a storehouse for illicit goods, to go to the Fera o’Luni. The house search turned up numerous counterfeit clothing products, as well as ‘pirated’ CDs and DVDs [...] At the end of the operations, four Senegalese citizens were reported to the Etna prosecutor’s office and ordered to leave the Italian state.⁵⁸

The increase in state intervention also depends on the competence of the different forms of Italian police. While market and trade laws are regulated mostly by local authorities and the local police, the rupture of international laws (WTO and EU) makes supralocal police forces, such as the *Guardia di Finanza* and the *Carabinieri* responsible in the market. They, thus, become part of the state mechanisms of order on the Fera o’luni that had previously been a purely local matter within Catania. Far fewer conflicts arise with the illegally operating domestic fruit, vegetable and textile traders, which is also explained by the jurisdiction of local police forces which largely follow traditional practices of dealing with petty crime. That this is also about following specific practices of dealing with tensions between legality and legitimacy is clearly shown in the conversations with the different actors in the market. It is repeatedly reported that new police officers or municipal officials, when transferred to Catania from outside, initially ignore or undermine existing practices, tolerances and interpretations of legal and legitimate. They need time to ‘learn’ how state mechanisms of order work in practice in the Fera o’luni. “Sometimes even locally es-

58 “Contraffazione, sequestrati oltre 13 mila supporti ‘pirata’ alla Fiera di Catania,” *Catania Today*, accessed November 8, 2023. <https://www.cataniatoday.it/cronaca/contraffazione-sequestrati-cd-pirata-fiera-1-dicembre-2020.html>.

tablished police officers warn of raids by other police units, civilian police officers, or motivated new colleagues”.⁵⁹

To sum up, state mechanisms of order in local authorities’ areas of competence and responsibility remain predominantly constant and ensure relative stability even against the background of the noticeable changes of the market’s structure. This counts particularly for the traditional market sectors. However, the increasing heterogeneity of traders and products also results in new practices of ordering in the market. Particularly in the nontraditional parts, new forms of illegality, such as the violation of international or EU laws, lead to partially changed regulatory activities by the supralocal state representatives. Here, the illegality of trade activities exceeds a level that is manageable within the traditional local practices.

Family and kinship networks remain an important mechanism of social order in the market even in the 2020s. Family constraints carry on ensuring pronounced continuities across generations: family members help out at the market (including grandchildren with grandparents), the male offspring must temporarily support the family, or young people (and older children) must help out their parents or grandparents just as they did in the 1990s. Social change, nevertheless, dissolves the close intrafamily (or intergenerational) ties more and more. On the one hand, the Italian state’s new social and unemployment benefits help to bridge the worst emergencies in a better way.⁶⁰ On the other hand, new opportunities for earning a living and shaping the future are emerging. Especially tourism and transnational companies, for example, in the electronics industry, which are also being brought to Catania with EU regional support, provide new job opportunities. Despite noticeable changes, family obligations and responsibilities continue to guide actions and still often prevent social change within market families. Widespread Catanese families remain the continuity in the traditional part of the market, although their number is decreasing in absolute terms, corresponding with the relative decline of the Catanese food trade. Still, stalls mostly continue to be inherited within families, even if they change their goods. One example is a vegetable seller who inherited the traditional family stall from her father. She gave up selling due to economic problems and handed over the stall to her daughter-in-law at the age of 55, who then continued to run it, but changed the primary product (meat instead of po-

⁵⁹ Interview with Giuseppe, February 2, 2023.

⁶⁰ Giovanni Sgritta, “Il Reddito di cittadinanza”, *Politiche Sociali (Social Policies)* 1 (2019): 141–148; Catalfo Pierluigi and Valerio Gugliotta, “The Guaranteed Minimum Income (‘Reddito di Cittadinanza’) in Southern Italy: From a Labour Market Policy to a Local Development Strategy”, *Rivista economica del Mezzogiorno* 4 (2021): 805–827.

tatoes and vegetables). After a failed attempt to get an ordinary job, she continued to work at her former stall for her daughter-in-law because “I can’t stay home [...] this is my life, I started working here when I was ten years old!”⁶¹

Supporter networks react flexibly to changes, especially where contacts occur in a very small space, for example, with Asian traders, who are loosely integrated into the networks. Asian retailers are merely not perceived as a fundamental threat. They remain outside local clientelist power structures and help to increase the product diversity of the market and, thus, its attractiveness for new types of customers like tourists. It makes sense to speak of a ‘cooperative coexistence’ between Catanese and Asian trader groups. On the one hand, relations are ‘cooperative’ as they complement and support each other in small everyday matters of the market. On the other hand, relations are ‘coexistent’ as the Asians stay outside many areas and functions of these networks. Illegal gambling and the supply of alcohol to the market traders remains in Catanese hands. People accept each other, coexist and maintain a cooperative but distanced relationship. People grant each other access to sanitary facilities, pay attention to similar prices and sometimes buy from each other. Relationships mostly only develop in a commercial context, which then dissolve when it goes into the private sphere or noncommercial times.

Conclusion

The Fera o’luni in Catania is a place where the changes in global and European macrospace, which highly impacted local microspaces since the 1990s, become tangible. Many of the effects of globalization and European integration are converging on the Piazza Carlo Alberto like in a magnifying glass. Traders, customers, locals, migrants, police forces and tourists negotiate global and European interconnectedness in everyday social practices in the local context. We have observed a fundamental impact on the structure, interactions, economic and social functions of the Fera o’luni as part of Catania’s overall economic geography. A structurally reconfigured market territory, new traders, new groups of goods, new groups of customers and a greater extent of different forms of illegal trading and residence are its most visible signs. The Fera o’luni is no longer a marketplace solely for a domestic Catanese society, as it had been up to the 1990s, but also one for tourists, migrants and socially vulnerable groups. It looks like a colorful open-air shopping mall with many departments and differ-

⁶¹ Interview with Maria, February 2, 2023.

ent product groups, characterized by manifold national communities of merchants. In fact, the Fera o'luni is a place where modern global and European macrospace and traditional local microspace overlap.

Cultural and social patterns of behavior and practices in the local space have proven to be much more resistant to changes in the global and European space. Social practices and the mechanisms of order in the Fera o'luni show a relative but nevertheless striking stability since the 1990s. The consequences of globalization and European integration are largely dealt with within the historically grown social practices. These are proving to be extremely flexible and offer a range of scope for new balances between old and new elements of the market. One might even say that Catanese mechanisms of order represent a specific combination of tradition and modernity. The social practices seem to pragmatically process the consequences of modern transformations in the Fera o'luni, although they are often evaluated in literature and public opinion as backward and traditional. They are, instead, permanently renegotiated and balanced by the actors involved (traders, customers, police forces) in complex everyday mechanisms of social order. Migrants have adopted these practices over the last three decades and coexisted quite cooperatively with domestic Catanese traders. They contribute to configure social order on the territory of the Piazza Carlo Alberto according to traditional social practices. In this way, everyday practices generated spatial and social stability and made a contribution to ensure the survival of the Fera o'luni in times of dramatic socioeconomic change.

A significant change for the local context came with the refinement of international and EU law. It threatened the dynamic balance of customary law and local market law, among other things because it brought new actors into the market in the form of supralocal police forces. The more the local legal framework was exceeded and international law was violated, the less the local practices could be applied. The increasing number of new stalls with counterfeit products or smuggled goods, which settled at the fringes of the Fera o'luni, posed new challenges to actors and regulatory mechanisms. It becomes obvious here that globalization and European integration have an enormous impact on local spaces. One might even argue that this paper has shown how they are worked out in localities.

International history and the local market history of Fera o'luni have proven to be two sides of the same coin. Changes in spaces that cross national borders can be reflected in the narrowly defined place of local markets without necessarily having the characteristics of transnational developments. Zooming in on specific places, such as the Fera o'luni, illustrates the extent to which individual areas of international history like economy, politics, or culture are subject to different temporalities, even in their interdependencies. Due to its own

temporal logic of development, the same territory of Piazza Carlo Alberto can change rapidly as part of global economic spaces, while at the same time exhibiting a high degree of continuity as part of culturally globalized spaces. Such tension in the processes of globalization and Europeanization draw attention to the fact that international history is ultimately shaped and produced by individual people, whose practices of shaping territory only become tangible in individual places. Therefore, international history is well advised not to limit its scope to the study to macrospace. On the contrary, this paper has shown that small microspaces like a marketplace in Catania/Sicily can be fruitfully explored through the lens of international history. This paper is, however, just a first step in analyzing the consequences of globalization and European integration on the local level. Much more research is necessary to draw a more detailed picture. It also remains to be asked to what extent the developments, transformations and adaptation phenomena observed here for the Fera o'luni can be generalized and found in other local contexts. Are local adaptation processes to globalization and European integration rather heterogeneous? What does this mean for a generalization of the interdependencies between spaces of different scales?

Finally, we have to emphasize that bridging international history with anthropology has helped us to illuminate connections and interdependencies between different spaces, which are hardly traceable in a historian's sources, especially on the local level in an environment that tends to have little written culture. This article has demonstrated the added value of combining historiography and anthropology for the epistemological interest of international history by making barely documented socioeconomic practices accessible to research.

