



UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

COMPROMISE AND CONTRADICTION, STRIVING IN A SYSTEM
ONE CONDEMNS? A CASE STUDY OF THE RADICAL LEFTIST
BOOKSHOP PIENA LIBRERIA IN LISBON

Dissertation presented to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to
obtain a Master's Degree in Culture Studies

By

Giulia Degiorgi

Faculty of Human Sciences

September 2024



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Abstract

This dissertation dives into the world of radical leftist bookshops, taking Piena Libreria, one such businesses, as a case study. The aim is to explore the contradictions that arise from being a politically involved anti-capitalist business under a capitalist framework. Piena Libreria is an Italian bookshop, founded by Sara Cappai and Elisa Sartor in 2022, with a curated catalogue of feminist, LGBTQI+, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist books, located in the neighbourhood of Arroios, in Lisbon, Portugal. This study implements ethnographic research, combining semi-structured interviews and personal observation and analysis, in order to explore how Piena Libreria can survive, and even thrive, while operating under a system it condemns. What are the compromises the bookshop has to make and what contradictions does it fall prey to?

My research draws from Kimberley Kinder's theories in *The Radical Bookstore: Counterspace for Social Movements* (2021), expanding upon her spatial analysis through a political lens rooted in various works by feminist, Marxist, and anti-capitalist theorists and philosophers. These works were chosen specifically in accord with Piena's ideology, therefore analyzing the bookshop within its own perceived framework. The research aims at filling a gap in the field by providing a non-Anglo-American perspective on radical bookstores, specifically giving insights to the Portuguese and Italian context.

Each of the four analytical chapters of the dissertation address one key contradiction faced by Piena Libreria: worker's alienation within capitalist business structures, the resemblance between domestic labor and underpaid passion projects work, the bookstore's symbiotic relationship with its community and its potential role in gentrification processes. Each chapter highlights strategies for navigating these challenges while remaining true to the shop's radical views. The concluding section summarizes these insights, offering recommendations for Piena and similar commercial activities, therefore contributing to the broader discourse on the cultural and political significance of radical independent businesses in contemporary society.

Key words: anti-capitalism, bookshop, community, business, feminism

Resumo

Esta dissertação explora o mundo das livrarias radicais de esquerda, tomando a Piena Libreria, um desses negócios, como caso de estudo. O objetivo central deste estudo é analisar as contradições presentes numa livraria anti-capitalista e politicamente envolvida que está inserida num quadro capitalista. A Piena Libreria é uma livraria italiana, fundada por Sara Cappai e Elisa Sartor em 2022, com um catálogo comissariado de livros feministas, LGBTQI+, anti-racistas e anti-capitalistas, localizada no bairro de Arroios, em Lisboa, Portugal. Este estudo implementa uma pesquisa etnográfica, combinando entrevistas semi-estruturadas e observação e análise pessoais, a fim de explorar como a Piena Libreria pode sobreviver, e até prosperar, enquanto opera sob um sistema que condena. Quais são os compromissos que a livraria tem de fazer e quais são as contradições de que é vítima?

A minha investigação baseia-se nas teorias de Kimberley Kinder em *The Radical Bookstore: Counterspace for Social Movements* (2021), expandindo a sua análise espacial através de uma lente política enraizada em várias obras de teóricos e filósofos feministas, marxistas e anti-capitalistas. Estas obras foram escolhidas especificamente de acordo com a ideologia de Piena, analisando assim a livraria dentro do seu próprio enquadramento. A investigação tem como objetivo preencher uma lacuna no campo, fornecendo uma perspetiva não anglo-americana sobre livrarias radicais, especificamente dando uma visão do contexto português e italiano.

Cada um dos quatro capítulos analíticos da dissertação aborda uma contradição fundamental enfrentada pela Piena Libreria: a alienação dos trabalhadores no seio das estruturas empresariais capitalistas, a semelhança entre o trabalho doméstico e o trabalho mal pago dos projectos de paixão, a relação simbiótica da livraria com a sua comunidade e o seu potencial papel nos processos de gentrificação. Cada capítulo destaca estratégias para enfrentar estes desafios, mantendo-se fiel aos pontos de vista radicais da loja. A secção final resume estas ideias, oferecendo recomendações para a Piena e actividades comerciais semelhantes, contribuindo assim para um discurso mais amplo sobre o significado cultural e político das empresas independentes radicais na sociedade contemporânea.

Palavras-chave: anti-capitalismo, livraria, comunidade, empresa, feminismo

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Introduction

We are living in times of political and societal unrest. The world is becoming (or maybe always was?) everyday more dystopian so much so that fear for the future paralyzes me and I know I'm not the only one to feel this way. In the month I started writing this thesis, four different protests took place in the streets of Lisbon. Somehow every conversation I have in my daily life turns political sooner or later (it's getting sooner and sooner each time). In times like this I have started taking refuge in politicized recreational spaces, libraries, bookshops, cafes, social centres that I know hold the same political values as me, to not feel alone and to not feel like such a passive agent to the multiple global crises before our eyes. One such place is a little colorful Italian bookshop in one of the side streets off of Avenida Almirante Reis, Lisbon, Portugal. The atmosphere is always relaxed and the owners Sara and Elisa always greet you with a smile. The bookshop only carries titles in Italian that ranges from novels to comic books to non-fiction and essays. The bookshop per se is not inherently political but when you spent a few moments in it, looking around with a critical eye and having a chat with the owners a clear radical left-leaning line transpires. On the walls of the bookshop there are political protests posters such as one for the women's march of the 8th of March 2024 or one for the right to housing by Casa para Viver in September 2023. The books are personally curated by the two owners and despite ranging from all ages and genres a lot of political books can be found, whether essays and non-fiction but also as major themes of novels and comic books. Being a regular of the bookshop but also of other similarly politicized businesses I started asking myself in what ways their political ideologies interact with the actual functioning of the establishment, both in regards to the day to day activities and longer term strategies and goals. After all, these places are still businesses, they hold very clear anti-capitalist views, but they still have to make a profit and operate under a capitalist system.

In politicized circles, especially on the internet, the phrase "there is no ethical consumption under capitalism" gets sometimes thrown around to point out that capitalism is so exploitative in all its aspect that no business, hence any consumption can be considered "ethical". Despite being attributed to this and that philosopher, the slogan seems to have formulated in these exacts

words for the first time on Twitter (now X) in 2014, but it can be said to resemble the ideas around the concept of “ethical consumerism”. The concept of “ethical consumerism” started to emerge a while earlier, in the 90s, from the green and fair-trade movements. It advocated that consumers can use their spending powers to bring about positive changes politically and societally. Much like the boycotting movements against South Africa’s apartheid in the 60’s, ethical consumerism urges consumers to choose products which are produced in ways that reflect the consumer’s moral values (Irving, Harrison and Rayner, 2002). However, as Slavoj Zizek points out this concept is often used as an excuse for consumers to feel less guilty while still participating in capitalist, and therefore in what are still considered “unethical”, according to Marxist and anti-capitalist thinkers, practices and ignore the larger issues, which is the capitalist system itself (Zizek, 2010). Critics argue that no matter the consumer’s choice it is highly unlikely, given the features of the capitalist system, that no one down the line was exploited for the making of a product, whether the exploitation is of humans, animals or the earth (Rawlison and Ward 2017, 188). Does this mean that there is also no ethical production either? Businesses can be highly complicated structures and unless we shrink down to a straight line artisan-product-consumer it is impossible to control all factors in order to make sure that no exploitation has taken place at any point of the production line. Some businesses decide to advertise their products or implement some environmental or social measure merely according to economic reasonings, when their consumer base becomes more conscious of environmental issue the company greenwashes, flaunts around “green” policies which are either much more minimal than what they are painted as, or straight up lies, as to not lose them. However, in this thesis However, for other businesses ethical concerns are more than a marketing strategy, but an expression of political commitment. In this thesis I will explore the contradictions and the strategies to negotiate these contradictions of a business that, while being critical about capitalism, nevertheless is inserted in it and depends on the market economy. How does a business operate under the capitalist system while simultaneously condemning it? What are the compromises that such a business makes in order to survive while attempting to remain true to its values?

The reason why I chose to investigate a bookshop is two-fold. First, the fact that they sell *books*. From philosophical texts to political manifestos to pamphlets distributed in secret and to plain history books, the written word has always been at the centre of revolutions and resistance to the dominant culture. These texts give legitimacy to their movements, they help identify “nebulous feelings of dysphoria” and societal discontent as something clearer and easily recognized, something that can be resisted (Kinder 2021, 9). According to other theorists they can be a “vehicle for politicization and ideological transmission” (Slauter 2010, 1). Hence it makes sense that places that distribute books, texts and the such should have political relevance as well. Within the realm of text distribution centres, you have different categories, your large corporate chain bookstores, small independent bookshops, municipal libraries, library projects, archives and so on. Each of these, willingly or not, has some sort of political line, even if such line is to stay out of political issues as much as possible. Not just that, but when it comes to book, the sharing of ideas through the written word, it’s difficult to discern what is political and what isn’t, even something as simple as stocking/displaying books that include a gay or mentally ill character could be considered political (Burnett 2022).

I want to focus on bookshops that have a clear political line that can be considered “radical left”. Choosing a business that sells books makes the process of recognizing such political line a lot easier, by analysing the kind of books that are being sold, one can understand the ideas that the bookshop is trying to promote. The word “radical” has taken many meanings in various epochs, from advocating for a complete revolution of the current political system to just simply pushing forward innovative ideas for societal change (Kinna and Gordon, 2021). In my case, focusing on the “radical” left, I will consider places that have anti-capitalistic sympathies and that promote conversations about issues that are often overlooked or not discussed by the moderate left, such as gender issues (including trans and non-binary people’s struggles), decoloniality, sex work and so forth. In the current period we are living through, I would also say that a signalling factor for business that could be considered “radical left” is a strong and vocal support for Palestine.

Secondly, bookstores *sell* books. They are businesses that need to generate profit in order to survive. I will investigate how these radical left bookstores deal with the contradictions of

operating a business under the same system they criticize and what differences in the way they are run (compared to more traditional bookshop/business models) are implemented to mitigate the contradictions.

The bookshop I will use as a case study is Piena Libreria, an Italian bookstore, selling books in the Italian language in Lisbon. The project was started in 2021 and opened as a physical bookshop in 2022, by two friends Sara Cappai and Elisa Sartor (Piena Libreria, n.d.). Their political line is quickly transpires through book curation and event repertoire. The bookstore has an extensive selection of feminist, LGBTQI+, anti-racist and anti-capitalist books. They also host creative events that show a very clear radical left leaning vision such as an event with a collective whose aim is to combat fascist misinformation and historical revisionism or a creative writing workshop with a women's collective. The bookshop also has a very strong and consistent social media presence, as it is becoming a very important tool for businesses and even more important for independent ones, and it uses such platforms to advocate for its political ideas, on top of regular advertising. Piena also uses social media to promote other third parties' initiatives that match their political line, such as protests in Lisbon or other events. Piena is also supported by a tight community, fostered on social media and through events, and it needs one in order to survive. The community is obviously mostly Italian but can also count among its members Portuguese and Brazilian people or even other nationalities that are trying to learn Italian or that already know it for some reason or the other. The bookshop also holds several bookclubs which meet regularly every month, one of which, born very recently, is in fact specifically dedicated to (trans)feminist issues.

Finally, the choice to focus on Portugal (Lisbon, specifically) apart from convenience as it is the city I am currently residing in, stems from the desire to decentre the Anglo-American perspective on this subject and develop an analysis based on a European non-anglophone country. I could find a variety of papers on independent bookstores that focused on feminism, Afro-American authors, anarchist and communist ideologies but none of them about Portugal. One of these books is "The Radical Bookstore: Counterspace for Social Movements" by Kimberley Kinder (2021), which I will use for analysis throughout this dissertation. Her research is based on seventy-seven bookshops throughout the United States and "focuses primarily on

space and how people use constructive placemaking in contentious politics” (Kinder 2021, 13). The author does mention the contradictions of operating under capitalism while being, in fact, a radical bookstore but chooses to use a spatial lens instead for her analysis. She argues for the importance of constructive activism, of a fixed space durable in time (longer than ephemeral protests or other activist actions) and of being able to use a porous retail space to inform more people and perhaps persuade them to the cause (Kinder 2021). I will build on this research by using specifically a political lens, drawing an analysis based on feminist, Marxist, post-Marxist and radical left theories. My aim is to be able to analyse the contradictions between the bookshop’s ideology and its business implications.

Furthermore, my research aims at filling a gap in the field, as it gives a perspective from a country with a different socio-political environment than the one in the United States. Socio-political context which does, in fact, influence the operations of radical leftist businesses as well. As a brief political overview, Portugal was an authoritarian dictatorship (conservative, corporatist and nationalist) from 1933 up until 1974, when it was overthrown by left-wing military officers in the Carnation Revolution (Baiôa, Fernandes and Ribeiro de Meneses, 2003). After the revolution neither the extreme left nor the extreme right has rose to power and the main parties have remained, even now, the Socialist Party (centre left) and the Social Democracy Party (centre right). The latest elections, in 2022, were won by a Socialist Party majority but this government was short-lived as prime minister Antonio Costa resigned on the 7th of November 2023, after him, his chief of staff and other ministers started being investigated for alleged malfeasance, corruption of elected officials, and influence peddling related to lithium mine concessions (Le Monde 2023). The President dissolved parliament and called for early elections, which took place on the 10th of March 2024 (Silva, 2024). This is an important factor for my thesis as I will focus on the present day and therefore on activities carried out by the bookshop during (and post) the electoral period. Elections bring more public focus on politics which surely affects the way that people and businesses interested in politics behave and interact, as Kinder (2021) explores in her book through the Trump vs Clinton elections of 2016 in the US.

Another notable factor to take into account is the broader European and then global context that Portugal is situated in. Europe has seen in the last 10 years a steady and exponential rise of far-right parties. Italy, Sweden and Finland, together with the well-known Hungarian example, are currently run by far-right parties and they're gaining more ground also in Germany, France and the Netherlands, among others (Koutsokosta, 2023). Portugal, despite with a slower onset given its history, is no stranger to this phenomenon. In 2019 a new party called "Chega" formed and established itself as the new far-right, anti-immigration, anti-LGBTQ+ pillar in the Portuguese political landscape. In 2019 it gained one seat in parliament, in 2022 it gained 12 seats and it is now the third largest political force in Portugal (Chiappa 2024). This political climate is something to keep in mind while analysing bookstores that oppose all of these ideologies and that increases its efforts of spreading political counterinformation close to elections, especially with a far-right threat looming over them. Having chosen an Italian bookshop in Lisbon I will also take into consideration the Italian political climate, currently under its most far right-wing government after Mussolini, as the bookshop is embedded into both communities and embodies both identities.

My dissertation is based on case study analysis which is defined as "a research strategy based on the in-depth empirical investigation of one, or a small number, of phenomena in order to explore the configuration of each case, and to elucidate features of a larger class of (similar) phenomena, by developing and evaluating theoretical explanations" (Vennesson 2008, 226). In terms of methods, I implement ethnographic research combining interviews and personal observation and analysis. Ethnographical research has been defined as research that focuses on a specific culture and cultural practices and is used to analyse very ephemeral concepts and phenomena. It studies the daily lives of the people that are part of the case study through a varied range of sources (Flick 2014, 297-303). It has also been used in business research to analyse managerial methods, organizational culture, customer-company relations, working conditions and so on. This will allow me to analyse how these businesses are run, what meaning the people founding and/or working in this project assign to them and what the main challenges and/or successes they encounter are (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008, 149-54). This research method will also allow me to draw from different data collection methods such as participant

observation, analyses of artefacts and, as mentioned above, interviews. Furthermore, the exploratory nature of ethnography allows me to let the thematic foci emerge on their own through observation and semi-structured interviews as my aim does not lie in imposing meaning and theory but in understanding how this business operates, ascribe to functions, face challenges and deal with contradictions of capitalism (Hammersley and Atkinson 1996, 3–16). Furthermore, in ethnographical research “what is of vital importance for the researcher in turning her community into a ‘field’ is to take utmost care to maintain one’s relationships there while preserving her space to do research” (Özsan 2023). In order to maintain my space, I was always very upfront about my research to the owners of Piena. My research is emic (Pike 1988), meaning that I analysed the culture of Piena Libreria as an insider of that culture. First, I conducted semi-structured interviews with both owners of the bookstore, even if some questions were only answered by one or the other and only some questions were answered by both. The interviews were conducted in Italian, as it is the owner’s mother tongue (and mine), which will allow for clearer and more nuanced expression. The interviews were afterwards translated into English by myself for this dissertation. Each interview ranges between fifteen and thirty-five minutes and three interviews were conducted overall.

My dissertation is divided into five chapters. While the first establishes the theoretical framework of my study, the following four are each dedicated to a particular “contradiction” risen from being a radical bookstore that operates under capitalism, for a total of four chapters. First, I will give a brief overview of what my theoretical framework is and the main theories I will use throughout my dissertation in order to understand the various phenomena analysed. In the first analytical chapter (chapter 2), I will focus on workers’ alienation, one of the main criticalities of capitalism according to Karl Marx, a phenomenon that describes the detachment or estrangement of workers from their work, as they start to simply see it as a means of self-sustenance rather than self-fulfillment (Marx 2004 [1844], 278). I will apply this concept to Piena, in order to find out if being an independent, self-run bookshop has an impact on workers’ mental well-being and how this is different from chain bookstores and other big business, corporations or non-politicized establishments.

In the third chapter I will compare domestic labour to the labour of love carried out in the bookshop. Domestic labour is a concept that has been highly problematized and discussed by feminist scholars, namely its delegitimization and missed recognition as something valuable and having “worth”. I will use theories from the works of Silvia Federici (1975; 2004; 2018), Arlene Kaplan Daniels (1987) and more recently Gül Özsan (2023) to draw a clear parallel between the unrecognized labour carried out by women in the house and the “entrepreneurial volunteerism”, term used by Kimberly Kinder (2021) in “The Radical Bookstore”, carried by radical bookstores’ owners. I will also try to give legitimacy to this comparison due to the resemblance in physical/spatial characteristics of The Shop and The Home. By the end of the chapter, I will try to illustrate strategies to mitigate this contradiction, strategies that are either already implemented by the bookshop or that Piena could implement in the future if they so wish.

In the fourth chapter I will deal with the concept of community. Piena is undoubtedly a pillar for the Italian community in Lisbon, but beyond that it is a pillar for the community of its neighbourhood and, more marginally, for the radical leftist community of Lisbon in general. However, what I question in this chapter is whether with the decline of community feeling and the rise of individualism in our modern age, it is desirable, from a radical leftist point of view, for a business, an economic activity to be such a fundamental element for a community. I will use concepts such as the third place (Oldenburg 1997) and non-places (Augé 1995) to differentiate between the community created by big corporations, a community that is commodified in order to attract more customers and profits and the more genuine community created by independent bookshop and Piena specifically. I will also use theories on curatorial practices as modelled by Kinder (2021) to illustrate the different ways in which Piena engages with its community.

Finally, in my last chapter I will tackle the issue of gentrification. Gentrification has been generally identified as the same broad phenomenon of displacement of poorer inhabitants of a neighbourhood who are replaced by more affluent citizens as the area is requalified and rents increase (Shaw 2008). According to the model of gentrification I chose to utilize, in the first stage struggling artists and “hippies” move into the neighbourhood, usually a central one but that is decadent and does not have many services (Rose 1984). These people are attracted by the

centrality but at the same time relative affordability of the area (ibid.). Consequently, more arts and culture professionals and middle-class people are attracted by the stimulating environment of the neighbourhood, move in and as the area starts being renovated and services improve, increasingly more affluent buyers move in until the original residents are pushed out (Kerstein 1990). According to this theory Piena, as a “hip” cultural establishment, could aid in the process of gentrification. In this chapter I will try to investigate to what extent Piena fits within the theory and if there is something that Piena can do to mitigate this effect. I will also relate this process with turistification and the fact that Piena is an Italian bookshop in Lisbon, meaning that while the bookshop itself is well inserted into the local culture, it can attract Italian immigrant population and how these elements interact with one another.

In my conclusion I will pull the strings of the arguments made so far in order to try and give a full picture of Piena, a radical leftist Italian bookshop in Lisbon. I will summarize its strategies of political activism in a context in which they have to live in a system that, in part, runs contrary to its own convictions. I will also infer what are some tactics or improvements the bookshop could implement, tactics which I extrapolated from the feminist and radical theories Piena aligns itself with. This could be useful not just to Piena but to future entrepreneurs who wish to start a similarly politicized independent bookshop and more broadly a similarly politicized small business. My objective is to understand what the cultural and political significance of such places is and what are the main contradictions that arise by deciding to set up a business that ideologically disagrees with a system it has to operate under in order to survive, or even thrive.

1. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I will give a brief overview over the main theories I will use throughout my thesis and the exact framework I am working with. As already mentioned in the introduction, Piena is a radical bookstore, a bookstore that holds radical left-leaning values of anti-capitalism, feminism and transfeminism, decoloniality and anti-imperialism. These are values that transpire from Piena's book selection, social media presence and from the main themes of their events. I will use such views as the framework for my thesis, as I am trying to understand how this bookstore can balance criticizing the colonial-patriarcho-capitalist system while having to operate by its rules in order to be a functioning business. It is, therefore, important to first understand what this system is, according to the views upheld by the bookshop itself. Throughout this thesis when referring to the "current socio-economic system" I will intend it as the system as understood and envisioned by Piena's political direction, which I will give an overview of in this chapter.

One of the main concepts I will use throughout my thesis is the concept of commodification. This concept will be utilized in different chapters, in order to explain different phenomena such as the commodification of culture, the commodification of community, etc. It is also a useful concept to comprehend how the capitalist system is understood by anti-capitalist philosophers, and therefore how it is understood by Piena. According to Marx, a commodity is an object, good or service, which serves a purpose, hence which is useful to someone, and that can be exchanged in a market context. A commodity has certain fixed characteristics, first of all it is created by human labour and second it has both use-value and exchange-value. Use-value is the usefulness of the object, i.e. the degree to which the object serves a human want or need, and exchange-value means that a commodity can be swapped for another, directly or through money which is just a representation of the exchange-value of the object in question (Marx 2004 [1867], 27–52). According to Engels and Marx commodity production started out as a pretty simple equation with the producer of the commodity selling its surplus, however our economic society started becoming more intricate and new labour divisions emerged such as merchants, who just trade commodities but never produce them, or property owners (Sewell 2024). With the rise of capitalism, which according to Marx is around the 16th century, commodities are no longer

simply exchanged but the focus becomes generating surplus value (ibid.). The key Marxist theory is that the generation of profit, or of surplus value, by capitalists relies intrinsically on workers' exploitation (Wolff & Leopold 2021). John Roemer paraphrases it in the following way: "Marxian exploitation is defined as the unequal exchange of labor for goods: the exchange is unequal when the amount of labor embodied in the goods which the worker can purchase with his income [...] is less than the amount of labor he expended to earn that income." (1982, 30).

The concept of commodity is at the base of Marxist understanding of capitalism. In fact, according to Marx, capitalism is fundamentally characterized by profit maximization, as described above, and of capital accumulation through worker's exploitation (van Staveren, 2021). This understanding of capitalism weaves itself with the understanding of another philosophy which I will use extensively throughout my thesis, that of feminism. Marxist feminism, a philosophy which grounds the bases to understand women's oppression in Marxist theory, sees women's oppression and capitalism not just as interconnected but as one being the product of the other and vice-versa (Luxton 2014, 142–44). They build on Engels' theory that "The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male" (2010 [1884], 96). I will use Marxist feminist theories of capitalism and the patriarcho-capitalist system in order to understand phenomena such as the oppression of women through domestic labour, which I explore in my second chapter.

Furthermore, in order to understand anti-capitalist movements and theories, I believe it is important to also understand what is meant by neoliberalism as well. Neoliberalism is an ideology that emerged mid-20th century from economic theories that promoted a laissez-faire economic attitude, which favours free markets (Cameron 2023). From a Marxist perspective, neoliberal policies are viewed as upholding the capitalist system (Maher and Aquanno 2018). Neoliberalism is understood as a set of policies and ideas, embedded in modern institutions, which are governed by the need for capitalist accumulation (ibid.). The pillars of neoliberalism are free markets, deregulation and privatization, forcing the economy to rely on entrepreneurship and private businesses and competition as its main drivers (Young 2005).

According to Kevin Young (2005) neoliberalism also reproduces itself by promoting certain social values. Prioritizing the growth of the privately owned businesses and entrepreneurship sector, the same will get involved in political deliberation and lobbying, furthering the process of neoliberalization (ibid.). By prioritizing economic growth and the free market, neoliberalism also promotes individualism. By letting markets regulate everything and advocating for minimal government intervention, even for social programs, individuals are basically advised to care for themselves, by consuming products of the same neoliberal economy (Ballantyne 2023).

Aside from Marxism, anarchism also criticizes the current capitalist and neoliberal system. I will use anarchist understandings of the system throughout my thesis. Activist and theorist Uri Gordon defines anarchism as a cluster of base ideas which anarchist movement share, which include organizational forms which are horizontal, decentralized and based on consensus, a commitment to community, direct and grassroots action and a political language of anti-capitalism, anti-statism and more generally against hierarchy and domination/subordination dynamics (2008, 4). I chose to incorporate this ideology in my dissertation not only because it is one of the most far-left and anti-capitalist movements throughout modern history but also because there has been a resurgence of anarchist sentiments in the past few decades, as a form of anti-globalization/ alternative globalization, for example with the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011 (el-Ojeili 2012). I will use anarchist theorists and anti-capitalist views mainly as understood by American anthropologist and political activist David Graeber. In similarity to many Marxist and anarchist thinkers, Graeber (2007) views the capitalist system as “short-sighted” seeking only to maximize profits and as inherently violent as it continuously needs to rely on state violence, police and the military in order to protect property rights, suppress alternative movements and control the population. He also argues that the logic of the free market, on which neo-liberal capitalism stands, actually leads to an increase in rules and regulations as well as corporate surveillance of private citizens. He theorizes that the bureaucratization promoted by capitalism in the financial and corporate sectors actually influenced the broader cultural and societal landscape leading to more individualism and alienation from one’s work (Barassi 2021, 240–44).

Worker's alienation is, in fact, another one of the concepts which I will explore in this thesis. Alienation, as theorized by Marx (2018 [1844]), is the result of a process by which workers become estranged from their work as they do not own the products of it, which are instead accumulated by capitalists. Marx envisioned this theory of alienation as mainly relating to the working class of the factories, over which through repetitive tasks they had no control or agency, would become completely estranged from their labour (ibid.). However, this phenomenon can be applied also to other economic sectors and occupations. As Erich Fromm (1961) argues:

Marx believed that the working class was the most alienated class. [...] He] did not foresee the extent to which alienation was to become the fate of the vast majority of people. [...] If anything, the clerk, the salesman, the executive, are even more alienated today than the skilled manual worker. The latter's functioning still depends on the expression of certain personal qualities like skill, reliability, etc., and he is not forced to sell his "personality", his smile, his opinions in the bargain. (56 – 7)

This theory of alienation is something I will explore in my first chapter, proposing the work performed inside of independent bookshops as free from worker's alienation.

I will also use feminist theories extensively throughout my thesis, specifically radical feminist anti-capitalist theories, as Piena Libreria is both a radical and feminist bookshop. I use feminism in my thesis as an umbrella term to refer to all philosophies and social movements aimed at improving the conditions of subjects that are oppressed by the patriarchal system. Feminism in the present encompasses a range of social struggles, more mainstream or "liberal" battles such as the #MeToo movement, body positivity campaigns and the gender pay gap (Malinowska 2020, 1-7). However, it also includes transfeminism, a more radical sub-movement, on which I will draw more extensively in my thesis. As a term, transfeminism was born at first to mean feminism that concerns itself also with the struggle of trans women but that has evolved to mean a feminism that strives to be truly intersectional as it believes that the need for women's oppression stems from the rigidity of gender and the hierarchical structures that pervade our society, from the patriarchy to imperialism and class struggles (McCann et al. 2020, 83–90). Throughout my thesis I will also use, when appropriate, the term "socialized female", a term borrowed from the transfeminist movement and widely used in grassroots activist transfeminist

spaces, to mean people who, despite the gender they identify as, have been brought up and socialized as women, therefore suffering the specific patriarchal oppression reserved for women.

In understanding the anti-capitalist tendencies inside the feminist movement, I will use theories from Marxist feminism. This variant of feminism explores the way in which the capitalist system disadvantages and exploits women specifically, through the gendered division of domestic and reproductive/affective labour, for example (Goikoetxea & Clua-Losada 2024, 192). One important philosopher in this context is Nancy Fraser even though I will not specifically use her theories directly, she develops Marxist feminist ideas which I will use as framework. Fraser participated in several of the International Marxist Feminism Conferences and pioneered theories around the idea that we are living under a “care crisis”. According to Fraser, the role of “social glue”, of maintaining social relationships, whether among friends, neighbours, family or communities has been throughout history mainly performed by women. In an interview she explains:

The rise of capitalism intensified this gender division—by splitting economic production off from social reproduction [...]. Production moved into factories and offices, where it was considered “economic” and remunerated with cash wages. Reproduction was left behind, relegated to a new private domestic sphere, where it was sentimentalized and naturalized, performed for the sake of “love” and “virtue,” as opposed to money. [...] The gendered separation of social reproduction from economic production constitutes the principal institutional basis for women’s subordination in capitalist societies. So, for feminism, there can be no more central issue than this. (Leonard & Fraser 2020)

The crisis of care, she argues, stems from the same principles as the ecological crisis. Taking care of social reproduction, much like taking care of the environment, brings no monetizable advantage and therefore it is treated by capitalism as being freely available and an infinite resource. In the present age of “financialized” capitalism, capitalism that mainly relies on the financial sector and on financial relations (Lapavitsas 2013), the energies to keep social reproduction alive are being constantly depleted by the decrease in wages and rise in living costs, that make it harder to survive as a single-income household (in which the man works and the woman takes care of the affective, or social, tasks) (Fraser 2013). From another perspective,

however, liberal feminism has made it possible for women to more easily enter the job market. This is widely recognized as a form of progress in terms of gender inequality, but no corresponding reduction of men's labour has followed, and women are still expected to bear the brunt of domestic labour. With little to no state help or social welfare due to their increased wages, women are now working in their paid jobs, only to then go home and do more unpaid labour (Fraser 2013). This Marxist feminist theory will be the theoretical base for some of my arguments, both regarding women's relationship with labour and women's relationship with community building.

Silvia Federici is another Marxist feminist author I will use throughout this thesis. Not only is she one of the most prominent figures of this current, active since the 1970s until today, she is also Italian and a lot of her books can be found at Piena Libreria, which will also host a reading club meeting on her book *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), which will take place on the 21st of October 2024. The book talks about the rise of capitalism from a Marxist feminist perspective since, as Federici herself writes in the book's introduction: "there has been the desire to rethink the development of capitalism from a feminist viewpoint, while at the same time, avoiding the limits of a 'women's history' separated from that of the male part of the working class" (2004, 11). Some of her other important works, whose theories I will use, include the short book *Wages Against Housework* (1975), written as a manifesto of the movement that called for fairly renumerating women doing unpaid domestic labour. Finally, I will also take inspiration from one of her more recent books which is *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (2018), in order to further link feminism with theories on community.

Finally, I will use the concept of mutual aid and cooperation, as envisioned by anarchist thinkers. One of such understanding of mutual aid is the one of Peter Kropotkin, one of the most known anarchist theorists, part of the anarcho-communist sub-movement, who was born in Russia in 1842 and died in 1927. He envisioned a class-less, state-less society solely based on mutual aid and voluntary association, in which workers, much like in communism, own their own production (Morris 2018; McKay 2021). Despite having published most of his writings in the second half of the 19th century, Kropotkin's theories are still relevant today and in the

understanding of my case study. For example, his book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (2024 [1902]) challenges Darwin's theories of evolution and survival of the fittest, which are still regarded today as the most valid or accurate model, therefore shaping our views also on community and cooperation. He argues, instead, that cooperation and mutual aid are crucial elements which enhanced human's survival, especially when living under very harsh conditions (Kropotkin 2024 [1902]). He brings forward the argument by which collaboration is intrinsically human, rather than competition (ibid.). These theories go against the fundamental aspects of capitalism and neoliberalism, whose basis are competition between individuals inside of the market context. Dean Spade (2020) advocates for the validity of these theories in the modern context, positing that mutual aid and cooperation have emerged over and over in response to systemic crisis, such as the various mutual aid initiatives which have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

I chose to use these theories as my theoretical framework as they represent some of Piena Libreria's ideals, as I have understood them from analyzing their book selection, event repertoire and statements from the interviews I have conducted with the two owners, Sara Cappai and Elisa Sartor. Many of the books I have cited and I will cite throughout the thesis are books sold at the bookshop. I chose to use these theories in order to form an analysis which takes into consideration the philosophies and ideologies that Piena subscribes to and the contradictions that arise from advocating for certain anti-capitalist feminist radical ideas while performing some other actions which go against them.

2. Warding off Alienation

There hasn't been a time in which upon entering Piena Libreria I haven't been greeted with bubbly energy by either Sara Cappai or Elisa Sartor, the two Italian owners. The atmosphere inside the shop always seems to be somewhat relaxed and friends of the owners can often be found on the premises, passing by to just have a chat or let their kids play around on the floor looking at the small "3 and under" section. It does not take an anthropological in-depth analysis to feel a difference between a shop like Piena and the vastly more sterile and formal environment of a chain bookstore. If asked the question of where I would rather work my answer would be quite obvious. But beyond personal bias and generalization, is working in an independent bookshop, one you can shape at will and can use to push forward your ideas, political or not, really "better" than working in bigger, chain stores? And what does "better" even mean?

In this chapter I would like to explore the concept of workers' alienation, one of the main criticalities of capitalism as identified by Marx and relate it to my case study in order to understand whether this contradiction seeps into the management of the bookshop or not. I will explore the different ways in which work, and specifically the work carried out by the owners of Piena, relates to personal identity, in order to put forward a claim that given the nature of Piena as a passion project of its owners and the freedom of expression that comes with owning an independent shop, Piena is able to mitigate the feeling of workers' alienation. I argue that Piena's owners view their work as meaningful and fulfilling which is something that anti-capitalist theorist and activists preach for all people, not just those lucky and privileged enough to be able to open their own activity.

Piena Libreria is currently, as of 2024, only owned by the two persons I mentioned above, Elisa and Sara (I will use their first names from here on out, as it is how they introduce themselves and are known by inside the bookshop), and they are also the only two people who entirely run the bookshop on a day to day and long-term basis. In business terms the organizational structure of the bookshop is a classic partnership, with no other employees. Elisa and Sara co-founded the project in 2022 from a shared dream of an Italian bookshop in Lisbon, and even though they do think of expanding their team to more people at some point, it is still not something in the plans for a foreseeable future, since their priority is to be financially stable first (Sartor, 2024).

In interviews I had with Piena's owners, it has emerged a strong connection between the identity of the bookshop and the identity of its owners. It appears that the women running the business view their bookshop as part of who they are, at times as a life project: "For the first time in my life I was doing something for myself, sort of an egotistical project" (Cappai 2024). Even on their webpage you can find the pictures of the owners and under the "about" section, personal introductions. Many theorists (Gini 1998; Leidner 2006; Beech et al. 2016) have argued for the importance of work to construct one's identity. Since it is what we do for the majority of our waking life, it makes sense that it shapes who we are. This is clear even as simply as analysing our daily language: when asked what we do for work our replies are about us *being*, "I am a nurse", "I am a lawyer" etc. However, under our current economic system, this identification of workers with their jobs can lead to some idiosyncrasies. Drawing on Marx's critique of the factory system, according to which, workers, their work loses purpose and personality, and their agency and creativity are taken away, Al Gini argues that:

capital investment, machinery, the industrial process, and the product became more important than people. The owners and managers of industry looked on workers not as subjects, but as objects, or as just another material factor in the production process. For Marx, when workers are regarded as objects and treated accordingly, they begin to think of themselves as objects. They lose, or perhaps never gain, the sense that they are meant to be subjects (2001, 3–4).

As a result, workers become alienated, meaning estranged from their own work, therefore from part of their identity, work that is now seen only as a mean of self-sustenance instead of self-fulfillment (Marx 2018 [1844], 278).

or "late stage" – however one wants to define it – capitalism, also outside of strictly "factory" settings. In *The Mcdonaldization of Society* George Ritzer talks exactly about this, how in our modern society (in his case, modern American society but his theories can be applied to Portugal and many other western and westernized countries too) "speed, convenience and standardization" have become the main pillars of most businesses. We favor efficiency, predictability, calculability, over anything else, constantly optimizing in a desperate chase for increasingly higher profit standards (1983, 100–107). According to Ritzer "McDonaldization has become so pervasive that one can travel to nearly any city or town in America [and in the

world] and find familiar chain-style restaurants, shops, hotels, and other avenues for commercial exchange.” (100).

Bookstores, and for the scope of this thesis, bookstores in Portugal specifically, haven't been immune to this phenomenon. Every FNAC or Bertrand, two of the most known chain retailers of books in Portugal, you might stumble on is a déjà vu to any you have been to before. Chain bookstores are sterile environments, they all look identical (within the same chain, though even inter chain the differences are minimal) with white blinding light, the same “trending” titles pushed to the front and no distinguishable décor or “personal touch”. It is no surprise that the first FNAC in Portugal actually opened inside of Colombo, the biggest shopping mall in Lisbon, a place embodying capitalistic and consumeristic culture in every aspect, chain shops and chain fast food places all over, devoid of natural light and full of advertisements (not to mention the blatant glorification of Portuguese colonial past) (FNAC 2023)

The gradual changing of the conception of work under capitalism does not stop at the outward presentation of these businesses, but rather creates pervasive factory-like working environments to optimize and standardize “production”, in this case the interactions between store clerks and customers. In the modern chain bookstore, there is barely any difference between a bookseller and a supermarket employee, in terms of skills required and tasks to accomplish. This deskilling of labour for the sake of efficiency perpetrates Marx's workers' alienation I mentioned before, as even if the work is not inside factories anymore it is still stripped of its creativity, personal input and purpose (Yeoman 2014, 68–70). In David Graeber's vision “hell is a collection of individuals who are spending the bulk of their time working on a task they don't like and are not especially good at” (2013, 2) which is exactly what happens in chain bookstores, repetitive, boring tasks, such as restocking, cashing out customers, and labelling sections, similar to tasks carried out in a supermarket, which no one can be “good at” as they do not require advanced skill to complete.

Furthermore, another determinant of workers' alienation is autonomy in decision-making, agency over one's actions within one's job. However, these chain bookstores are large companies, sometimes even multinationals, like in the case of FNAC, with hierarchical structures of authority and centralization of power. This takes most of a worker's autonomy

away, decisions are mainly made by managers, who oftentimes, in the current digital age, don't even interact face to face with the actual day to day runners of the bookshops. The lack of interaction between managers/owners/higher ups and "simple" employees further alienates the latter category as the decisions are not only being made by someone else but they are made by someone unknown, seemingly arbitrarily, as they are not aware of the actual necessities of the daily operations of the business (Sarros et al. 2002, 289–300).

To give a concrete example of this, looking at an organogram of FNAC, one can get, apart from a headache, a sense of the true verticality of the company. There is one general director, followed by directors for each country in which the company operates, followed in importance by directors for each business department (such as HR or operations) and then different store managers and coordinators. Between a simple employee of one store in Portugal there are at least 4 people in the chain of command pyramid before the general director of the company, general director who is responsible for other 900-something stores all over Europe (according to data from 2022) (FNAC 2023). Furthermore, FNAC has a "programa de formação" (training programme) for its incoming employees, which are instructed on what to do in the shop, with very little margin of agency or creativity, not to mention a further deskilling of labour and expendability of the employees, as to say "you are expendable insofar, we can just train ten new employees to do your job in less than a week" (Vieira Garcia 2020)

Independent bookshops, and in particular the feminist/radical bookstore I am analysing, embody quite the opposite characteristics, according to the books they sell, their events repertoire and the owners themselves (Cappai 2024). On one hand, these women have a connection to the books they are selling, they believe in the feminist/transfeminist cause they push through their book selection. They assign meaning to their jobs through the belief of working for a bigger goal, to spread ideas and knowledge and steering the world towards a desired political direction, through books. Elisa told me that for her "books have a transformative capability, people can go through various different personal journeys and transformative processes thanks to reading and they can also unite people" (Sartor, 2024). On the other hand, their work also regains personality and creativity, they own and run their bookstore, they have full agency over which books get selected, how and where they are positioned within the shop, they are not bound by

“trends” or “hot titles”. Their jobs are not expendable or standardized, each choice, whether curatorial, about the physical space of the bookshop, or about what to post on social media, reflects the employees’ personality, history, skills and tastes. Finally, there is no hierarchical business model and chain of command, the workers are subjects in their own right, owners of their labour. The features mentioned here set these bookshops apart from their franchise/corporation counterparts and allow them to overcome one of the negative aspects of the capitalist-patriarchal system they condemn. Of course, the reason why these shops are run only by the people that own them are more often than not financial, in fact according to Sara it would take at least 4 people to smoothly run Piena, but it is not yet financially viable to pay two extra people when the shop is struggling to sustain the salaries of the two owners (Sartor, 2024).

From other interviews and from the literature about independent and radical bookshops (Kinder 2021; Liddle 2018) it appears that even in cases where some hierarchical structure is present, these bookshops still manage to keep the alienation of their workers at bay, or at least try to implement strategies to mitigate it. For example, at Tigre de Papel, another independent bookshop in Lisbon whose employee I interviewed, but that is not subject of this study, workers have monthly meetings with the bookstore’s owner to decide jointly which books to stock and review the overall curatorial process. In the words of the employee that I interviewed, Tigre de Papel is *de facto* a company, which follows some of the “rules” that come with being a company, there’s someone who is the owner and others who aren’t, which introduces an inequality of power. He says that they “try to compensate this [inequality] by having personal relationships with each other [...], and by a method for which the bookshop is made by the people who run it, by the decisions they take, their choice in books and all that” (Anonymous, 2024). This allows for a more horizontal form of organization, in strong contrast with the organizational structure of chain stores, which is shown to decrease workers’ alienation as choices are made jointly and everyone has agency over decisions made for the business they work for (Slade 2018). These and other strategies such as the ones of anarchist management, which promote self-organization and mutual aid (Hogan 2022; Stoborod and Swann 2014) can be implemented in Piena as well. That is, when, and if, they ever decide to hire more employees to help out in the shop, which is something they mentioned in interviews as a future goal (Cappai, 2024)

To conclude this chapter, radical bookshops have to deal with several peculiar situations that come from the very essence of being a radical business, which might sound like an oxymoron to some, the words radical and business next to each other. The first one is the problem of worker's alienation, something that is talked at length in every critique of capitalism, starting by Karl Marx himself. This problem is mitigated in Piena, and other radical shops, as the people working there have full agency over their jobs, the decisions made for the shop's upkeep, its daily operations, the physical characteristics of it and, since we are talking about bookshops, on its curatorial practices. This is in contrast with chain bookstores, owned by huge, often multinational, companies which are vertical and bureaucratic and whose lower tier employees are mostly doing deskilled automated tasks and are easily replaceable.

3. Domestic Labour, Labour of Love

In the second weekend of February 2024, like every other February, and like every “self-respecting” Italian I was watching Sanremo, an Italian national singing competition similar to Eurovision and that every year keeps millions of Italians glued to TV screens for a few evenings. This year I decided to watch it in Piena Libreria. Being an Italian bookshop in Lisbon focused on Italian books and events for the Italian speaking community, to me it made sense they would also promote this event and decide to organize a watch party. The feeling while entering the space was no different than entering someone’s living room, there were people sitting on the floor and all over the place, bottles of wine were being passed around and a lively chatter fills the air. From the outside, the owners of the shop, Sara and Elisa, were indistinguishable from any of the guests, apart from the few moments when everyone turned to them to ask for more chairs or Elisa wrote the lists of favourites on the chalk board on the door. If it wasn’t for the books that cover every available side of the small rectangular space and the cash register shoved to the furthest corner of the room, this could be any other private living room in Italy (or abroad) watching the singing competition, Elisa and Sara as the hosts, us, around 15 to 20 people, as the houseguests. And this is not a rare occasion, the cozy atmosphere is taken to an extreme during such an informal event but even when I would go shop at Piena, browsing the books, or to do the interviews for this thesis, I would most likely than not be offered a coffee or a cup of tea, when available, just as you would be when visiting someone at their place.

In this chapter I would like to touch several points that all relate, in some way, to the parallel home/bookshop. I will analyse in what ways The Bookshop can resemble The Home and how this parallel can play out taking into consideration domestic labour and comparing it to “activist volunteerism” and the self-sacrifice that, to some extent or the other, goes into these kind of radical, independent feminist projects. The contradiction presented in this chapter consists in having a bookshop that promotes books on the importance of not overlooking women’s work and the importance of not overworking oneself, while its owners at times overwork themselves and overlook their work. I will also explore what are some alternative lenses through which to analyse this contradiction that aren’t domestic labour. Finally, I will present some tactics to

combat this contradiction and further considerations already implemented, or not, by the bookshop.

In the previous chapter I discussed how thanks to some features of the independent, political bookshop, Piena is able to “escape” one of the downsides of capitalism. However, the business still operates under this system, meaning that its owners might encounter other contradictions they could even not be consciously aware of. In her paper about empowerment struggles of independent women shopkeepers in Istanbul, the author Gül Özsan points out that the women-ran businesses in her study often broke the standard private/public sphere dichotomy. She notes that the women in her study “regard their shops as their own ‘personal’ spaces which they can shape and reshape as they wish – spaces to where they can take several items of their ‘private’ life” (2023, 102). I found this to be true also for the women-ran bookshop in my study. As I have mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Piena libreria has a very cozy, home-like atmosphere. It is not rare, in the winter months, to be offered a warm cup of coffee or tea while in the shop. Even the fact that one of the houseplants present in the shop seems to be on the brink of death, adds to the informality, and personality of the place, to its sense of authenticity and homeness. This can be a business advantage, which will be better investigated in later chapters, while also constituting a risk of falling for another one of the system’s “traps”.

Özsan writes that these women “often present their shops as an ‘extension of home’ or their shopkeeping labor as an engagement similar to ‘housework,’” (2023. 102). And this is indeed true for Piena as well, in the interview with Elisa, when asked what the bookshop represented for her the answer I got was exactly this “the first thing that comes to mind is that in this two years Piena has become sort of like a home and kind of like a community” (Sartor, 2024). I will talk about the concept of community and the creation of a community around the bookshop later but I would like to focus now on the bookshop being “sort of like a home”. The physical resemblance of the bookshops with the home brings with it a series of implications to be analysed. Firstly, it brings a sense of logical continuum, of safety, to gendered labour. The Woman, in our western culture, has for several decades been associated with the taking care of the house and having authority over the house, strictly when it comes to upkeep and chores

exclusively, of course. It follows logically that The Woman, specifically these women, are in charge of this shop now.

These women also tend to overwork and underpay themselves to keep their projects alive. “Since we started and even up ‘till now we know that there are very intense periods in which we are working more than what we are being remunerated for”, Elisa told me in the interview (Sartor, 2024). This draws the clear parallel with domestic work and the work carried out inside the bookshop even further. Even though a clear definition of domestic work does not (and should not) exist, it has broadly been defined as including any “practical work on people or things” inside the home, meaning housework and care work, as well as child bearing and child rearing (Šikić-Mićanović 1998, 733–736). It is work that in our capitalist economies is predominantly carried out by women, or rather by one woman per each nuclear family, and it is largely overlooked and unpaid. Reproductive labour, the category of labour under which domestic labour falls under in Marxist philosophy, has been continuously delegitimized as it seemingly does not produce capital (contrary to productive labour). Of course, feminists have pointed out for years that reproductive work does indeed have value as it is what produces labour power in the first place, raises future workers and keeps current workers in the appropriate conditions to work (Benston, 1969; Federici, 1975).

In her book *Invisible Work*, Arlene Kaplan Daniels argues that the “the difficulty of recognizing it as work is compounded not only by the realization that no one else will see it as work, but also by a woman's own sense that much of it ought to be offered spontaneously as a gift or expression of love for her family” (1987, 407). As for the bookshops the situation results to be quite similar, instead of love for family, it ends up being love for the project, for the cause, and for their space: “Being that it is our business, and if we are not open, we do not sell, the line between ‘am I doing too much?, am I working the appropriate amount?’ is very undefined and often it ends up being that we take it on as a personal cause and we do much more than what our work should be based on our pay” (Sartor 2024). Much like the mother, these women find themselves in a situation of non-choice. The mother knows that she either does the work herself or no one else will and her children will go hungry, the house will be unkept. Being part of a (trans)feminist project such as Piena leads to a further double bind, a situation in which (at least

at first impact) you can only lose no matter which choice you take. On the one hand not doing the work, and hurting the cause by “letting” a (trans)feminist project fail, or doing the work, and hurting the cause by replicating the same dynamics as the patriarcho-capitalist system your beloved books condemn. It makes sense that a lot of these women, like a mother will not let her kid go hungry, do choose a certain level of self-sacrifice in order for their business to function smoothly.

The idea of self-sacrifice in activism and activist-adjacent projects is not in any way a new concept. It is also discussed in *The Radical Bookstore* by Kimberly Kinder, using the term “entrepreneurial volunteerism”/“activist volunteerism” (2021). The author does point out the contradiction that some of the bookshop employees/owners in her study feel with regard to the counterproductivity of not paying oneself when that is exactly one pillar of the feminist fight. However, she also claims that many radical print-based spaces wouldn’t be able to survive without the labour of love carried out by the people running these businesses (2021, 105). Despite agreeing with this and convening that “labour of love” – a phrasing that Kinder uses to describe entrepreneurial volunteerism in radical bookshops and that ironically is the same word feminist scholar Silvia Federici uses to describe the devaluing of housework – a phrasing that Kinder uses to describe entrepreneurial volunteerism in radical bookshops and that ironically is the same word feminist scholar Silvia Federici (1975, 76) uses to describe the devaluing of housework – is not necessarily a terrible evil to eradicate, I think that drawing a parallel between domestic labour and the extra labor put into the radical bookshops is crucial. The (trans)feminist and anti-capitalist fight will most probably always require a certain amount of unpaid labour, provided by people simply as an act of solidarity and love for the cause. However, this work needs to be recognized for what it is, which I believe especially female “activist entrepreneurs” have trouble doing, exactly because of the normalization of the unpaid, domestic, invisible work done by women. Silvia Federici in her essay “Wages against Housework” writes: “This fraud [...] affects all of us, even if we are not married, because once housework is totally naturalized and sexualized, once it becomes a feminine attribute, all of us as women are characterized by it” (1975, 79–80).

Just because of this contradiction, however, it does not mean in any way that the whole project is tainted, counterproductive as a whole. These are still extremely important projects for the feminist and anti-capitalist cause and they are revolutionary in their existence alone, without needing to be perfect. Furthermore, capitalism itself is full of contradictions (Bell 1970; Glyn 1990), so as long as it is the hegemonic system, no matter how much we try to work within it, our projects will always embody some of them in one way or another.

For example, we could look at the contradiction presented above through another lens. The current capitalist system is full of alienating jobs, jobs that late American anthropologist David Graeber (2013) calls “bullshit” jobs, for example, in the administrative sector, financial services or telemarketing, corporate law, academic and health administration, human resources, and public relations. Jobs that according to Graeber are considered without much value to society even by the people working those professions (2013). At the same time, in recent decades, western work culture has increasingly been centered on a popular discourse of “following your passion” and “get a job you like and you will never work a day in your life”. However, the jobs that tend to be the most fulfilling (teachers, social workers, artists to name a few) are also the ones that are most overlooked, underpaid and considered “second rate” jobs. Graeber asks the question “what does it say about our society that it seems to generate an extremely limited demand for talented poet-musicians, but an apparently infinite demand for specialists in corporate law?” and then answers himself saying that “the ruling class has figured out that a happy and productive population with free time on their hands is a mortal danger” to the system of financial capital they desperately try to uphold (2013). The narrative of the “dream job”, adds another layer of cognitive dissonance to this capitalist loop. It individualizes the problem of labour unhappiness within capitalism, it becomes one’s own fault if they cannot find happiness in their jobs, the solution being to simply try and find your “calling”, while the problem is, in fact, systemic. In an already highly individualized culture, one more burden to carry on your own (or in the utopian case, a success of your own) is a mindless “logical” conclusion for most people.

However, this is another reason why it is easier to overwork, and consequently underpay, yourself doing a job that you like, or accepting to be paid less for a job you find enjoyable. In a

world where alienated labour is so pervasive and the legitimacy of remuneration hinges precisely on people's unwillingness to perform a certain task, in the extraordinary cases in which you are able to exchange your time and labour for income in a way that is also personally fulfilling and socially useful it is seen as "not really work". The system is designed in such a way that it presupposes that if you gain fulfillment and personal realization from a job, you should be willing to work for less. Of course, for some this is not just a symptom of capitalism, even though I would add it certainly hasn't helped, but rather a much more deeply set belief that creative life and suffering go hand in hand, namely recalling that the idea of the "struggling artist" is in no way a new one. AS Andrew Ross, who is the scholar who popularized the term "entrepreneurial volunteerism" that I mentioned earlier, in his essay "New Geographies of Work" writes, "this credo is surely one of the reasons why employees in the creative sectors tolerate long hours, discounted compensation and extreme life pressure in return for their shot at a gratifying work product" (Ross 2008, 39).

How do we try to mitigate, at least partially, this tendency of "self-sacrifice", "activist volunteering", overworking and underpayment within the bookshops, no matter where exactly it arises from? Firstly, I would like to point out that in certain cases just shining a light on such contradictions is already a step forward, and at times the only thing to be done.

In addition, the attitude towards work, to what is good work and in general work-life balance has been changing a lot with the new generations. Studies have shown that generation Z, which is currently in the process of entering the workforce, is less interested in professional career and is becoming more and more aware of exploitation and wary of overworking (Özgünay 2023). For example, a term that has been popularized recently is "quiet quitting", doing the bare minimum the job requires you to do in order to not be fired, as the general feeling is that doing more will not be rewarded anyway (Klotz & Bonino 2022). As this trend grows, it is ever as important to keep talking about these issues, at least, even when fixing them does not seem possible. As mentioned before, some contradictions within radical projects will always be present, bringing them to the surface and raising awareness around them is itself part of the revolutionary process.

Furthermore, it is of vital importance simply to keep imagining new solutions to these contradictions. New, creative, out-of-the-box, improbable and never-tried-before solutions. This is to say as well that I cannot propose a fix-all-solution to such a complex problem, but hopefully I can offer ideas, which can be reshaped, rethought, reimagined, completely thrown out except for one minimal detail, and then tried and retried and adjusted by Piena, or any other present or future radical bookstore. As Mark Fisher argues in *Capitalism Realism* (2009), it has become impossible to imagine not only an end to capitalism but a world without it and in Donna Haraway's words "the managerial, technocratic, market-and-profit besotted, modernizing, and human-exceptionalist business-as-usual discourse [...] saps our capacity for imagining and caring for other worlds", we should go back to imagination (2016, 49–50). Radical (trans)feminist bookshops should continue to cultivate the ability to envision and experiment new alternative possibilities, as it is crucial in challenging the perceived constraints and inevitabilities of the current social and economic order.

In the meantime, since overworking is indeed a problem that the bookshop is aware of, regardless of if it is taken as seriously as it should or not, Elisa and Sara have talked about ways to resolve the issue. Elisa mentioned forcing herself to not work on Sundays, the only day the bookshop isn't open, and shutting off social media and work accounts after five pm in the evening, even if it sometimes hard to resist the impulse to catch upon leftover work or start getting ahead with things to do. They chose, instead, to focus on rest being in itself also resistance. This is a slogan of one of the books on sale at Piena, which they also sponsored on their Instagram page. The book by Tricia Hershey recites that "rest is resistance as it disrupts and pushes back capitalism", so that we can escape from extreme productivity and "grind culture" (2022, 13). Another book Sara and Elisa invited their Instagram followers to read was *Manifesto Pisolini*, which translates as "The Naps Manifesto", by Virginia Cafaro. This one also talks about the revolutionary power that exists in resting, through a feminist lens. The book mentions how in the current digital hyper-capitalism, resting has become progressively harder, thanks especially to technology. As basic examples, the author asks how many times we have sent emails outside of work hours or received messages about work from bosses or colleagues when we were supposed to be on holiday (Cafaro, 2024). This and the previous book also suggest

ways to escape from this “hustle culture” of overworking and praising labour as the fix-all emancipatory tool. These strategies to disconnect, reimagine and reshape our views around work and especially overworking are very similar to what the owners of Piena try to not only preach, but also implement, in the running of the shop.

Another strategy that I have seen being implemented by the bookstore and that is talked a lot about with regard to domestic and reproductive labour, is relying on community, when necessary. This may come as a surprise or even as an outrageous comment to some. However, feminist thinkers have long advocated for the communalization of housework as a “solution” to the domestic work “problem”. Silvia Federici, cited before for her collaboration on “Wages against Housework”, talks about this in *Re-enchanting the world. Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*, praising the building of collective kitchens and cooperative housing as a pillar of women’s liberation (2019, 141–143). But how does this apply to the management of a radical bookstore? Of course, the same way that one communal kitchen in a neighbourhood is better than nothing, even though it is not a full deprivatization of the home sphere, relying on community with certain tasks for the running of the bookshop is better than nothing, even though it is not a communally run business. According to many scholars, capitalism tends to commodify everything, to turn every aspect of human life into something you sell and exchange in hope of a profit (McNally 2006, 88). This goes hand in hand with the belief that everything is better run as a business, that profit-centered structures are more efficient (Fisher 2009, 21).

Radical shops try to break free of these ideas, even when they are operating mainly like a business. Piena Libreria relies on community for specific events, such as the Feira do Livro Independente in September and the Festa del Cinema Italiano (Italian film festival in Lisbon) in April. During both these events Piena has a stand selling books, run by rotating volunteers. This allows Piena to gain visibility through these events and for its owners to not fully burn out by having to split multiple day to night working days between only the two of them. Is it not incredibly unethical to make these people work for free and would they not underperform without the incentive of a monetary reward? I believe these questions are just a product of the current economic system. The volunteers are in the big majority of cases long supporters of Piena, loyal customers, sometimes even friends. The reward for a couple hours spent at the

bookstand, a different weekend activity, is to see an important space for the community to survive and for the community to continue reaping the benefits of having a radical bookshop around. Furthermore, no one is profiting off of the free labour of these volunteers and the motivations behind people signing up to do a shift might be similar to the ones of Sara and Elisa themselves, love for the cause and believing in what the project stands for. According to many leftist thinkers, namely anarchist philosopher Piotr Kropotkin (2024 [1902]), cooperation is at the basis of social structures and human life, and that mutual aid is embedded within us and it ought to be something we should go back to in order to live happier in society. This is how I would interpret Piena relying on its community in order to keep operations running in cases when it would be impossible to do so alone and the “transaction” is actually mutually beneficial, if you look at it from the angle described above.

In conclusion, a radical bookshop such as Piena, especially if run by women, might end up blending together the private and public sphere and start to resemble a second home, which is not necessarily a bad thing, except when the comparison goes as far as some labour performed in the bookshop resembling domestic labour. This parallel holds in the sense that sometimes these women tend to overwork and underpay themselves, just as it happens with domestic work, and keep doing it because they know that if they do not, nobody else will and they love their project/home/kins too much to not do it. Another lens through which we can look at this from is the constant undervaluing of social and artistic work under capitalism. Whichever lens we look at it through, the “problem” or contradiction can be mitigated in several ways, shining light on it and recognizing self-sacrificing labour for what it really is, raising awareness and keep imagining new ways to deal with it, trying to self-discipline oneself to get out of the capitalist “hustle” and “grind” culture, and finally not being afraid to ask for help and relying on your community when necessary. This last point especially will be the focus of the following chapter, exploring in what other ways Piena Libreria, and radical bookstores in general, interact with their community and how that can be, as expressed above, mutually beneficial for everyone involved.

4. Community Binds

When I first asked Elisa what Piena meant to her she used just two words: “home” and “community”. Community, the feeling of belonging, of not being alone, the idea that there are always people ready to support you, a net that no matter how far you fall will never allow you to actually reach rock bottom. I chase community everywhere I go and it even surprises me a little bit when other people do not have it as much as a priority as I do. It is no surprise then that one of my favourite aspects of Piena is its vibrant community and the symbiotic relationship the bookshop has with it. On one of the first events of Piena I took part in, we were mostly women and there were actually not that many people in general. The event was led by a feminist collective doing a presentation of the newest edition of their journal. The event was very interactive, everyone got to talk and share their story starting by various creative writing prompts. By the end of it I felt like I knew each person at least a little bit. Towards the conclusion of the event/workshop one of the women present shared with the group that she is a researcher and she has just moved to Lisbon for the next few months and is struggling to find housing, if anyone has any leads, she can share her phone number with us. I met her randomly some weeks later and she told she had indeed found a place to live. This is just one of the many examples that come to mind when I think of Piena and community. In the following chapter I would like to explore this relationship and see if it is possible for a business to truly not only be beneficial to community but actively help fostering it.

Community is an extremely difficult concept to define, even for someone that is so attached to it, given that it is something that it is believed to be linked to the very nature of humans as social beings. Cambridge dictionary defines community as “the people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, social group, or nationality”, Merriam-Webster gives a broader definition, “a unified body of individuals”, followed by various examples and instances of different meanings of community depending on context, such as “a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society” and “a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests”. The definition does not differ a lot from mainstream

to academia, in which community has been broadly defined as a group of people (in the earliest definitions a group of *men*) sharing a specific trait, whether it is geographical proximity, identity, interest based or a combination of the three (Clark 1973; Agamben and Hardt 1993; Defilippis et al. 2006). Nonetheless, community as a concept carries a certain level of vagueness and multiplicity of meanings when used in academic fields. Authors such as Raymond Plant (1978) propose that the concept of community takes on different meanings depending on the political and ideological framework it is situated in, and therefore can only be understood within context.

Thus, in this chapter I will use the concept of community as envisioned by feminist philosophers, mainly anti-capitalist feminist philosophers Silvia Federici and Iris Marion Young. I will also use theories on mutual aid, and indirectly about community, taken from the anarchist ideology, mainly Piotr Kropotkin's ideas. The reason why I chose these authors is that based on the selection of books offered by Piena (and their general implied political line), I feel like this is the perspective that aligns the most with the bookshop's values, which stocks books on community by these same authors and several other books on care and mutual aid. These theories combine feminist thinking and anti-capitalism, in accord with Piena's categorization as both a feminist and anti-capitalist bookshop. Furthermore, the choice of Silvia Federici specifically as an Italian philosopher, is to try to be as close as possible to the bookshop's context. Finally, I will also use the concept of community linked to spatial theories of Ray Oldenburg and Marc Augé. Neither of them subscribed to specific anti-capitalist ideologies however, the theories they present have some points in common with the feminist and anti-capitalist ideas of community, which makes it possible to construct a coherent argument using these theories complementarily.

Feminist anti-capitalist scholars, as generalized by Penny A. Weiss in *Feminism and Community*, published in 1995, argue that the current neoliberal capitalist society envisions an isolated man with his own rights, preferences and objectives that are completely detached from the social context he finds himself in (Weiss and Friedman 1995, 161–187). According to these feminists, capitalism and the liberal society produce, by design, the complete opposite of community (ibid.). Isolated, or “atomized” workers who only see each other as competition and

everything in life as a commodity (Barber 1984, 33; Lebowitz 2020, 19–29). Marx wrote that, as he was writing in the mid-1800s, we were entering a “time when everything, moral or physical, having become a marketable value, is brought to the market”, including community (Marx 2018 [1847], 12). Robert Putnam, in his book on the decline of civic engagement in the American society writes that critic of capitalism from “Georg Simmel to Karl Marx, argued that market capitalism had created a ‘cold society,’ lacking the interpersonal warmth necessary for friendship and devaluing human ties to the status of mere commodities” (2000, 331). Ray Oldenburg (1932-2022) and Marc Augé (1935-2023), also hold similar views. Ray Oldenburg pioneers the idea of “third places”, informal gathering places such bookshops, cafés and pubs, as a vital component for community building, and in turn how they can promote civic engagement, democracy and counteract isolation (1997). Marc Augé also advocates for a return to community values as opposed to the perceived individualism of modern society, which he attributes to “supermodernity”, the current condition for which we are constantly being subjected to new information and stimuli as part of modern life (1995).

When talking about community, however, it is important to also problematize the concept of “organic community” and the general positive associations with the concept. Critics of the romanticization of community argue that the concept can also be used to justify exclusionary practices and discrimination (Weisberg 2003, 28-30). As Iris Marion Young writes:

The ideal of community, I suggest, validates and reinforces the fear and aversion some social groups exhibit toward others. If community is a positive norm, that is, if existing together with others in relations of mutual understanding and reciprocity is the goal, then it is understandable that we exclude and avoid those with whom we do not or cannot identify. (1990, 235)

While it is often regarded as something to strive for, community can lead to exclusion of “the other”, as members attach identity to their communities and recognize each other as “same”, which makes it difficult to integrate for newcomers or people who can be considered socially different. This can be the case with immigrants or people with disabilities. It is important to keep these contradictions in mind when discussing the positive aspects of social cohesion and community, which I will try to do in my analysis.

Given the decline in community and solidarity between people, and assuming that it is indeed a direct result of the current economic and political system, as envisioned by the feminist and anti-capitalist philosophers mentioned above, how can a commercial establishment help alleviate this condition and help rebuild these sentiments of unity and togetherness? In “Shopping for Community: the transformation of the bookstore into a vital community institution”, Laura Miller asks a similar question. According to Miller, “the case of the bookstore raises questions about whether a for-profit business, even one that adopts an anti-commercial stance, can best satisfy those needs that lie behind the desire for community” (1999, 388). In this chapter I would like to give my contribution to this debate, in order to decentralize the discussion from an American context into the Portuguese/Italian one, using my case study to give concrete examples to prove my point. I will draw from communitarian, anarchist and feminist theories to assert that an independent radical bookshop such as Piena can indeed fulfill this social role of “community building facilitator”. I argue that the approach of the radical bookshop to its clientele is fundamentally different than other commercial chain venues and show how it can foster community, while other businesses, following a more capitalistic approach, use community as a business advantage and a commodity. I will also identify Piena as a “vital community institution”, how that happens and what effects it produces, bringing forward the thesis that in the current climate of decline of community, a *business*, when done sincerely and with the right motivations and goal can respond to the needs that lie in the desire for community, bridging that gap in a way that feels familiar to people who are not used to organic community building anymore, who feel safer doing it through something more familiar to modern day society.

Firstly, I would like to start by exploring why this question is relevant in the first place. Why is it that a bookshop, being a “commercial” activity, shouldn’t foster community? How is it a contradiction, apart from the nebulous connection that business equal capitalism, and as I’ve shown before, equal enemy to community? Well, the link is not so straight-forward. The problem does not seem to be that businesses started providing community for people but how they’re doing so, with what goals and especially, to what end result. Businesses are increasingly trying to commodify this sense of community, mainly because it indeed works. It works given

the end goal of a business under a capitalist system is to maximize profit and developing a strong community around your business is indeed helpful in various different ways to bring profit to the company. A Harvard Business Review article explains how a strong community engagement can be a “competitive advantage” for a business now that civic participation is on the decline. Some of the advantages mentioned are “[e]nthusiastic members help acquire new members, resulting in lower customer acquisition costs” or “[m]embers are loath to abandon the community, resulting in increased retention and therefore improved lifetime value” (Bussgang 2020).

The first, big problem with companies “selling you the promise of community” is that these tend to be gated communities, inaccessible to the poorer strata of the population. Sometimes the pay-for-play is obvious like gym memberships, sport associations fees, creative classes you need to pay for etc. (Jennings 2023). Other times the paywall is more subtle, like social (or self) exclusion from a brand community due to not being able to afford the lifestyle presented as the standard in that community. The Harvard article mentions the Harley Davidson community as an example of this phenomenon, imagine being a bike enthusiast but not being able to afford one of their bikes, or fuel for long trips, one is automatically excluded (or at least extremely discouraged) from accessing this community. This is happening worldwide with a decrease in civic communities and an increase in business “brand” communities. It follows a trend of privatization that sees the disappearance of public spaces and the commons. Instead of public squares and neighbourhood activities and associations, our socializing (in the western world, at least) revolves more and more around coffeeshops and bars (once again, unaffordable to some) and community becomes a competitive advantage instead of a human need (Putnam 2000). Furthermore, a community that is not organic but, literally, managed by a third party is easily manipulated by the business it revolves around, which might not (and oftentimes does not) have the community’s best interest in mind.

In order to analyse whether the bookstore in general, indie bookshops and then Piena in particular, are and should be places where community is formed, I will use the concept of the third place (Oldenburg, 1989), conception of the non-place (Augé, 1995) and feminist theories of community. Third places are “social anchors of community life” and provide people with a

space “to gather easily, inexpensively, regularly, and pleasurably” (Oldenburg 1997, 6). According to Oldenburg “the joie de vivre cultures of the world are those in which third places are regarded as just as essential as home and work” (1997, 7). Non-places, on the other hand, are places of contractuality and anonymity, according to Augé (1995). I will argue that the independent/radical bookshop in its virtue of being a true third place, in contrast to chain bookstores, can foster communities. I will also argue that the community that the radical bookshop fosters is one in accord with the feminist and radical ideals of community.

Analysing chain bookstores, the criticism around the commodification and privatization of community still stands. It is possible to categorize the chain bookstore as a non-place, according to Marc Augé’s definition. He writes “The space of non-place creates neither singular identities nor relations only solitude and similitude” and that “alone, but one of many, the user of a non-place is in contractual relations with it (or with the powers that govern it). He is reminded, when necessary that the contract exists” (Augé 1995, 101). This tends to be true for big corporate owned bookshops, they are a place of transit, not of community. Very rarely you will find chairs to stop and take a look at a book comfortably or to chat with someone. Signs pointing at the cash registry to pay for your books remind you of the contractuality Augé describes, and so do the uniforms the employees wear, for example, which remind you of the formal distinction between you, the customer, and someone working at the store. Another example are the big store alarms placed at the entrance of a lot of chain stores, and bookstores as well. They are big grey structures placed after the cash registers, which one has to go through to enter and leave the store and they ring loudly if the anti-theft tag has not been removed from an item by an employee, signalling that you are trying to steal something. Obviously no commercial activity wants to have something stolen, but the fact that they are so visible are a further reminder of the contractuality of the space, you are constantly reminded that this is a place where a financial transaction needs to happen, otherwise you would be doing something wrong. This sentiment is reproduced even when a financial transaction is allowed to not take place: many people report feelings of unease and inadequacy while leaving a supermarket without having bought anything, as if they were doing “something wrong”, namely, breaking the perceived “contract” of the

“non-space”. These, according to Augé, are not places where one can foster community (ibid.). These, according to Augé are not places where one can foster community (ibid.).

Almost diametrically opposite to considering them non-places, there has been an on-going debate on whether (chain) bookstores can be considered third places, since third places are, according to Oldenburg “a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (1999, 16), places where the heart of the community can meet. While I argue that the chain bookstore cannot be considered a third place based on the characteristics described above, some researchers believe the recent phenomenon of the “bookshop-café” hybrid could fall into such a category (Harris 2007). Places where you can browse and buy books but also sit down to get a coffee or a snack with a friend, according to Laing and Royle (2013) can be in fact third places as the presence of the café stimulates socializing which the (chain) bookshop alone does not. I believe this trend of the coffee shop-bookstore hybrid stems from the same conditions described a few paragraphs above. In a society in which civic community is on the decline, commercial venues that provide this sort of spaces brings a “competitive advantage” and responds to a “need” of the “market”. However, even the chain bookstore-coffee shop does not comply with all of the characteristic of the third place as described by Oldenburg (1999). It is not, for example, a “neutral ground” where “no one plays the role of host” and most importantly, it is not accessible to everyone. Going back to the issue of gated communities and pay-for play, third places are envisioned as places that level differences in the population where the community can meet and mingle regardless of their status or their economic situation (Oldenburg and Brissett 1982, 275). However, this does not happen in the coffee shop-bookstore, which remains inaccessible for people that can’t afford to buy something to drink or eat, to *then* sit down and socialize. Even if it has the façade of a third place, even the coffee shop-bookshop cannot create genuine organic community.

The various example cited above are examples as to why commercial venues should not be considered vital to community creation and why it is dangerous to leave this responsibility to them. The case for the independent and especially for the radical bookstore, I would argue, is different. Firstly, a number of studies have already shown that independent bookstores do

perform tasks associated to the building and maintaining of local community. Whether one talks about indie bookshops (Laties 2011), feminist bookshops (Liddle 2018) or radical bookstores (Kinder 2021), research has found that these places provide the perfect opportunity for healthy community building. The reasons are multiple and they vary slightly for different independent bookshops or types of independent bookshops but the main characteristics that lead to this outcome are: a truly accessible space, regardless of social and economic status, inviting and informal physical space for lingering and conversation and a neutral ground in which no one is playing a fixed role.

Piena, as a radical independent bookshop, tries to create a community that is as accessible as possible. There is no paywall to access the community, the vast majority of Piena's events are free and you are not obligated to buy any books when visiting the shop. Piena also hosts regular book club meetings at the shop, which are also free and do not require you to buy the books from Piena in order to participate. Oldenburg in describing the characteristics of the Third Place writes "third places, especially those which are not insulated by formal membership requirements, often uniquely provide a common meeting ground for people with diverse backgrounds and experiences" (1982, 275). This diversity in backgrounds and life experiences seems to be, according to its owners, also the case for Piena's customer base (Sartor 2024). Oldenburg states that this feature is reminiscent of a past where it was much more likely to be in daily contact with members of different economic classes, either through village life or because of big extended families (1982, 275). Elisa herself told me in the interview that the clientele of Piena is very diversified. Through the bookshop it is possible to meet people from all walks of life, from students to professionals to retirees and families with small kids, from lower to higher classes and from different nationalities too, Italians obviously but also Portuguese and Brazilian people learning Italian (Sartor 2024).

However, Oldenburg also writes that in the third place one enters a place of "pure sociability" as described by Simmel (1949), in which people that "are expressing their unique sense of individuality are equals as nowhere else. They are truly different but truly equal" (1982, 271). This idea of levelling of all differences and of "true equality" is in part in contrast with some feminist ideas of community, or rather, feminist philosophy believes that these parameters are

utopic and not reflecting the world we actually live in, in which social differences of gender, class, race, economic status etc. cannot ever truly be ignored because of the effects they have, even on a subconscious level, on the interactions between people. Feminist theorist Iris Marion Young writes in regard to communitarianism that

All these formulations seek to understand community as a unification of particular persons through the sharing of subjectivities: persons will cease to be opaque, other, not understood, and instead become fused, mutually sympathetic, understanding one another as they understand themselves. Such an ideal of shared subjectivity, or the transparency of subjects to one another, denies difference in the sense of the basic asymmetry of subjects. (1995, 242)

Despite it referring specifically to communitarianism, this reading can be applied to Oldenburg's idea of a truly equalizing place, what Young calls a "totalizing impulse" to "deny difference" (1995, 237). The problem with this formulation, still according to Young, is that upholding this "impossible" [naïve? utopic?] "ideal of shared subjectivity can tend to deflect attention from more concrete analysis of the conditions of [...] elimination" of the systems of oppression born out of the social differences between subjectivities (1995, 243–44). Feminist theorists place more importance on recognizing the other factors and forces that exist within and outside of a community. While, at times, communitarians idolize the family or the tribe, feminists know that these models can be and have been oppressive to women and are therefore more critical and careful with, as mentioned before, all the forces involved. These can be also related to race or class or other "differences" within a community and obviously not all feminists are as aware of each and every one of them themselves (Weiss and Friedman 1995, 165–169).

I would argue that Piena, while embodying the characteristics of the third place described above and being open and accessible to everyone, also embodies the feminist critique and philosophy in virtue of the cultural objects present in the bookshop. Piena's selection includes books on racial issues, the class struggle, white privilege, LGBTQ+ topics and the (trans)feminist fight (Annex 5 and 6). While anyone can enter the shop and participate in the free events, the books being sold at Piena and also visibly present inside the shop, constantly remind people occupying the space that those differences do exist and they do hold significance. The physical presence of

these cultural objects allows for a more nuanced understanding of the third place in which interactions between people are based on the ideal of reciprocal equality but are informed by the differences between them. The true fight to level them is a focal point, instead of something that has already been achieved simply by virtue of interacting inside a third place.

To have a clearer and more complete picture of Piena, however, it is important to also analyse its shortcomings as well. First of all, being an Italian bookshop in Lisbon, selling only books in Italian, it cannot be said that it is accessible to everyone, but in fact just to the Italian speaking community in Lisbon and people learning the language. Secondly, it is indeed true that there are no economic barriers to enter the shop, there are no paywalls, however, because of its context, most of Piena's customers tend to be Italians that emigrated to Portugal. Even though the sort of inter-class relations Oldenburg mentions do happen within Piena, the poorest strata of the population is not reached, because Italian people moving to Portugal tend to have at least some sort of financial stability, and because the poorest strata of the Portuguese or foreign population in Lisbon does not speak/is not interested in learning Italian, a language that does not really have any "useful" practical uses for employment, for example. Furthermore, being it a bookshop it is accessible to literate people and even though there is no formal requirement to buy books when visiting the shop, and the contractual reminders of the non-place are not present, people that cannot afford them might still fear the pressure and the shame of not being able to, and avoid going to Piena anyway. In these regards, a community centre or similar would be a "better" third place, but of course each fulfills a different community need.

Another characteristic of the third place is that they are "playful places", "homes away from home" and in which "conversation is the main activity" (Crick 2011, 65-66). In the previous chapter, I have examined the ways in which a bookshop like Piena can resemble in certain aspect the home and in a way be a "home away from home" for its workers. However, it is also a convivial and inviting place for its customers. Kimberly Kinder in *The Radical Bookstore: Counterspace for Social Movements* (2021, 148–170) divides radical places, including bookshop, into three categories based on the way they present themselves to the outside world, through décor and physical predisposition of the space. She calls them landscapes that either shout, entice or heal. Spaces that shout are meant to "shock people out of complacency" and to

bring atrocities or inequalities to the light in a way that people, even passersby, cannot ignore. Spaces that entice are meant to spark curiosity, in which new information, different cultural paradigms, are presented inside of a familiar yet intriguing setting. Finally, spaces that heal are meant for people already inside of a radical social movement, to face their fears and learn how to better navigate an oppressive system. I would argue that Piena embodies mostly the second landscape, despite having some characteristics of the other two as well. Piena is above all a place that entices, which fits nicely also with the characteristics of the third place and for the construction of a community.

In certain occasions Piena has displayed a “landscapes that shout” attitude, namely by at times pushing “the most contentious material to the front” (Kinder 2021, 154). For example, during a few months in which Piena was hosting many events, some even political such as one on historical revisionism, the book *Brigate Rosse: una storia italiana* was displayed on one of the shelves of the shop, very visible when entering the establishment. The book talks about the history of the Red Brigades, an Italian communist terrorist group active in the 1970’s and it is written based on interviews with Mario Moretti, one of the group’s main members. The book is displayed face out, which according to Kinder is also typical of movement-oriented bookstores, which tend to put this provocative material at the centre stage (ibid). The cover art of the book is very simple, it catches the eye as it is all red with just the symbol of the Red Brigades on it. This material is particularly provocative given the mostly Italian clientele of Piena. The older customers will remember the events, recognize the name and symbol, as they were of national importance at the time, while the younger audiences might still recognize them due to the resurgence of that time’s “aesthetic” in the radical left new wave rap/hip hop scene (Rolling Stone it, 2022).

Another “landscape that shout” characteristic present in Piena is the “use of embodied performances to model a protest-oriented response to atrocities” (Kinder 2021, 155). According to Kinder this is when the workers of the bookshop participate in protests and political actions that happen outside of their business space (ibid). The bookshop might invite its customers to participate in these protests either directly, through social media posts/stories (Annex 7) or indirectly by simply showing their participation, giving legitimacy to the protest as an

appropriate and effective response to injustices. In the months I have been in contact with Piena, I have seen this happen on a few occasions. One of them was the women's march on the 8th of March, for which Sara and Elisa invited their followers on Instagram to meet up in front of the shop half an hour before the start of the march, to then join it all together. Another instance has been for the Casa Para Viver demonstration in September of 2023, a march for housing rights in Lisbon. In this case too, Piena advertised the event on their Instagram page and the poster for it is still to this day displayed inside of Piena, hung on the wall (Annex 8). This, even if it fits within the "landscapes that shout" category, also aides in the creation of community, as customers are invited to spend time together, with the owners of the shop and with each other, also outside of Piena.

However, these are just a few instances and they do not represent the main features of Piena, which can be better identified as ones of the "landscape that entices". Firstly, the main feature of this category is being a familiar environment. Piena's outside appearance and interior design very much resemble a typical independent bookshop, a very colourful space, the colours soft and easy on the eyes; green, yellow and brown stools to sit around and skim through books; plants decorating some of the nooks and crannies of the shop. Elisa and Sara change the art displayed in the front facing window of the shop, art that is painted directly on the glass, every once in a while. In the period I have been observing Piena it has changed a few times, from cute children's illustrations about the rain, during the winter months, to red *cravos* [carnation] in the spring, symbols of the 25th of April revolution (Annex 9). While the latter might be considered part of "landscapes that shout" to an external observer, in Portugal the 1974 revolution is not yet as divisive as other antifascist/anti-dictatorship historical movements are in Europe right now, even though the trend is starting to appear there too. In Italy with the far-right Meloni government the figure of the *partigiani* (people who fought to liberate Italy from its fascist government) has become very divisive, with the government even struggling to define itself as antifascist. This European shift to the right has affected Portugal too, with the rise of the far-right party Chega, which one of the many slogans was "they've been speaking for the past 50 years, time to give us a chance", referring to the 50 years anniversary of the revolution. Despite this, the situation does not seem to be as dire in Portugal, at least on a superficial level with X

people flooding the streets of Lisbon this year, the 25th of April is still celebrated as a national holiday and the red *cravo* mostly seen as symbol of freedom and an inviting, not intimidating, premonition on an independent bookshop's window. Furthermore, the internal décor and external presentation of the bookshop also follows with the idea of a third place being “playful” and “joyful” (Crick 2011, 66).

Kinder also mentions that landscapes that entice, compared to landscapes that shout, carry the same titles but they label their sections less provocatively and more generically (Kinder 2021, 162). Piena actually does not label any of their sections, the only one very clearly separated from the others is the children's section, right by the entrance, full of graphic novels and illustrations and some games too (Annex 10). This has the same effect as labelling the sections generically, which is to “minimize the avoidance response that prevents some people from browsing at all” (ibid). The sections are actually separated by publishing houses, all independent. This translates into having sections that are more fiction, non-fiction or a nice mix of the two. Still according to Kinder, having different typologies of books, rather than the strictly theoretical and political non-fiction allows for people to get closer to themes of feminism, queer issues and class struggles in a way that feels “safer” and encourages “people to nondefensively explore different perspectives, including ones that feel uncomfortable or that they may otherwise avoid (Kinder 2021, 164). Piena does so by carrying a diverse range of genres from romance to graphic novels, a large portion of which, even if it is fiction, still touches on relevant political topics. Finally, Kinder points out that “intermixing” or having a lot of different viewpoints without clearly labelled sections can lead to minority voices drowning in the crowd. A proposed solution is to highlight those books by putting them face out and this is something that Piena definitely takes into consideration. Most of the books presented face out are indeed by members of underrepresented communities, immigrants, citizens of the global south, LGBTQ+ and so forth (2021, 163).

All these features of Piena combined create a third place that is warm, welcoming and inviting. As described by Oldenburg and Crick, Piena too is a place for joyful moods and full of conversations (1982, 271; 2011, 65-66). Being a physically small place, it is hard to ignore someone else inside of it, and the owners also welcome in visitors with radiant smiles and chirpy

offers to help you out on your book search. Being also a radical bookstore, they follow Kinder's praxis in landscape that entice which is to "spend less time proselytizing and more time feeling out people's comfort zones so they can recommend books nudging them into more progressive directions" (2021, 164). This allows for stimulating political dialogue inside the bookshop and for the creation of a community that does not have a very strong and hard barrier to enter based on political alignment, even if the goal is to nudge people into a certain desired direction. Even people who are uninitiated to the social activism/politics world are still welcome to join, thanks to an environment that invites them to do so. As Oldenburg states, the third place is also a place which fosters political debate and discussion (1996, 8). However, there might be a harder barrier for people with ideologies that are diametrically opposite to the ones of Piena. Kimberly Kinder addresses this issue by considering the radical bookshop as a "filtered third place" (2021, 210–215). People that interact with filtered third places go through a process of self-selection for which, given the sort of themes and books that the bookshop promotes, someone with strong views that are too far from the one's advertised will tend to choose not to enter the shop (ibid.).

Finally, the last characteristic of the third place I would like to draw attention to is that in third places "there is no host" or the host does not play a necessarily important role. (Crick 2011, 65,71). Even if Piena has two identifiable hosts, Sara and Elisa, most of the times, this is true for the bookshop as well, in which the owners are not forced to play a role. The interactions that happen inside the bookstore can happen naturally and are not dictated by perceived roles as either host or customer. In *Feminist Reflections on Community* the author of the introduction Penny A. Wise writes that "the first theme in the literature on feminist communities is that they generally ignore the boundaries between friendships, families, the social and the political, integrating them in different ways" (Weiss 1995, 12). While the book analyses these interactions in feminist *collectives* (even when they end up being able to pay wages, such as the Jane collective which provided safe illegal abortions in 1970s America) I find this to be true also about Piena, where the boundaries between the social, the political and, lastly, the economical are also somewhat blurred. Many members of Piena's community, who end up supporting it financially by buying books or participating in the, very few, paid workshops/events, are friends with Sara and Elisa, and with each other. Sara herself told me that one of the things that she is

proudest about, is in fact Piena's community. In her words "the true gratification is the people, [...] building something that isn't just mine, seeing some girls deciding to go to dinner together after having met here [...] it makes me happy" (Cappai 2024).

In another essay in the same book another feminist writer, Virginia Held, writes about the differences between the "economic man" and the "mothering person" and how our current contractual society is almost uniquely based on the former while ignoring the latter in any sphere that is not the familiar one. As Mark Fisher reiterates: "Over the past thirty years, capitalist realism has successfully installed a 'business ontology' in which it is *simply obvious* that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business" (2009, 21). While feminists have focused largely on domestic labour and getting their work recognized for what it is, Held proposes something different, not opposite but complimentary, she writes "instead of importing into the household principles derived from the marketplace, perhaps we should export to the wider society the relationship suited for mothering person and children" (1995, 217). The author specifies that such a relationship is not the one that currently exist within families, but the relationship between mothering person and children without the patriarch. She also mentions that as an imagined model of society she does not mean one in which there is a certain group or category playing the role of the mothering person and another that of the children but rather a society based on "on-going relations of caring and trusts such as those of mothers and children, where as adults we would be sometimes one and sometimes the other" (ibid, 229). I believe Piena and other such radical establishments to be a representation of the practical exploration of such theories. Piena is a business yet very little of it, especially when it comes to the relationship between workers and customers is dictated by contracts and the rules of the "economic man" but rather by the non-rules of friendship or in another view by those of motherly care for each other.

In conclusion, based on the characteristic of the third place that are embodied by Piena, the bookshop can indeed create community, in an organic way and as envisioned by communitarian and feminist theorists. That is, taking into account the definition and conception of the third place by Oldenburg as a pillar of neighbourhood social life. Piena is a playful place, that entices and encourages people to explore different views, to talk to each other and form bonds and that

at least theoretically is accessible to everyone. In comparison to their chain bookstores or more generally standard big brands counterparts, Piena's agenda in creating community is not one of maximizing profit. Rather, Piena opens its space for workshops hosted by friends and members of the community, on Piena's Instagram page they share events and call to action regarding problems that directly affect the city and the community they are embedded in. Of course, what business theory teaches, community being a vantage point for businesses, an important resource and a unique selling point is in fact true. A huge reason why Piena is able to survive as a small independent Italian bookstore in Lisbon is in large part due to the existence and constant upkeep of a strong community. It is not terrible and evil to use such "resource" for the success of the bookshop, however it would be quite a dissonance if community was completely commodified, as it would go against the political line brought forward by Piena. Fortunately, this does not seem to be the case and Piena and its community live in a symbiotic relationship that is mutually beneficial for both.

5. The Gentrification

After my first interview with Elisa Sartor and Sara Cappai, owners of Piena, right as I was leaving a man with a small child came into the bookstore. He had two coffees in his hands and gave one to Elisa, which asked me if I wanted it instead (I declined). Elisa explained that he is one of their neighbours who works in one of the small cafés on their street. From the interviews I had with Piena's owners I have come to understand that this was not a rare occurrence and that they have a relationship with a lot of their neighbouring businesses. Elisa herself told me that "he often brings his kid here" (Sartor 2024). Piena Libreria is situated in a peculiar neighbourhood, it is very multi-ethnic, walking down the street of the bookshop, in a relatively central area of Lisbon, one can see many Bangladeshi and Indian restaurants and stores, in nearby streets one can find Brazilian supermarkets and African restaurants. Elisa told me that they try to weave relationships within their local network even through language barriers, which are indeed often a problem (Sartor 2024). However, in stark contrast with the colourful multi-ethnicity of the neighbourhood, on the same street as Piena we can also see a huge multiple stories building, all shiny and metallic, it looks very polished and very new. From this general description, the word "gentrification" immediately jumps to mind. It is a term that nowadays describes the vague and nebulous process in which a "poor" neighbourhood, which can also be a "multi-ethnic" neighbourhood, is transformed into a high-end residential or touristic area. But how does this process actually work and how do radical cultural businesses such as Piena Libreria fit into it?

Gentrification is not an easy term to define, despite the fact that it has been increasingly entering our daily lexicon and takes the centre stage as one of the main phenomena of the modern big city. Urban geographer Neil Smith defines the gentrification phenomenon as "the process by which working class residential neighbourhoods are rehabilitated by middle class homebuyers, landlords and professional developers" (1982, 139). However, it has been sixty years since this first definition and our cities and their dynamics have morphed and changed since then. Gentrification has been defined as a "moving target", meaning that both the phenomenon and its conceptualizations have ever changing definitions which have varied through the years and

according to geographical context (Knieriem 2022, 10) and a “chaotic concept”, meaning that it “cannot[es] many diverse if interrelated events and processes; [which] have been aggregated under a single (ideological) label” (Beauregard 2013 [1986], 10). Therefore, each instance of gentrification will be somewhat different, based on the specific characteristics of the area, city and country it is happening in and also on the personal context and experience(s) of the urbanists and geographers studying the phenomenon in that particular time and space.

While it lies beyond the scope of this study to either understand gentrification in general or the specific process gentrification process in Lisbon as a whole, I will try to understand how my case study fits in the gentrification process of the neighbourhood it is situated in, according to one model of gentrification. The reason why I think it is relevant to understand Piena’s role in the gentrification of its neighbourhood is that, being a radical leftist bookshop, its owners are ideologically opposed to it. This transpires, on one hand, from Piena’s general political line, the books they sell and the events they host. Even if they do not sell specifically books on anti-gentrification, it follows logically that being an anti-capitalist bookshop Piena would also subscribe to anti-gentrification sentiments, as part of that ideology. On the other, it also evident from the bookshop’s vocal support, through its social media channels, of local initiatives aimed at counteracting processes of gentrification in Lisbon such as the “Casa para Viver” marches for housing rights. I chose to analyse gentrification by using the stage model of gentrification, focusing especially on the concept of “marginal gentrifiers”, as theorized by Damaris Rose (1984; 1996). I chose this model because it fits with my understanding of the gentrification process of Piena’s neighbourhood and also because of Rose’s feminist and anti-capitalist views, which are aligned with Piena’s political ideology. I use Luìs Mendes (2017; 2018) papers on gentrification as he implements Marxist theories to understand the process and also mainly focuses on Lisbon for his research. I chose these two scholars as I am trying to understand Piena on its own terms, through the ideologies and philosophies that the bookshop itself subscribes to, in order to better understand its contradictory position as opposer and facilitator of gentrification.

While there are several approaches or theorizations of gentrification, one of them, the one I chose to utilize concerns the “temporal dynamics” of gentrification and is the stage model (Rose

1996). This model predicts a first stage of gentrification in which “well-educated but economically struggling avant-garde of artists, graduate students and assorted bohemian and counter-cultural types” move into a neighbourhood that is central or central-adjacent but that is “run-down” and that they therefore can afford (Rose 1996, 132). These first movers are “attracted by low prices and tolerance of unconventional lifestyles”, according to Holcomb and Beauregard (1981, 42). Then come the early gentrifiers who are still tolerant of alternative lifestyles, usually work in the cultural sector but have more purchasing power. This in turn brings investments into the neighborhood in the form of community events, refurbishment of local buildings, and community initiatives, which make the neighbourhood appealing to higher income buyers. Thus, gentrification “proper” starts, displacing poorer inhabitants by investors that see an opportunity to buy houses to renovate and resell to these buyers (Rose 1996).

Scholars, Rose herself included, have long questioned this model, particularly to claim that the initial move of artists and other “bohemians” into a neighbourhood does not always necessarily kickstart the entire gentrification cycle (Rose 1996; Lees 2013; Van Criekingen and Decroly 2003). Lees, for example, criticizes the idea of an “end stage” as she argues that in certain cities, like London and New York, the gentrification cycle actually continues on into “super-gentrification” in which the income bracket of residents keeps rising (2003, 2487). Van Criekingen and Decroly, instead, observe that there exist neighbourhoods, in Montreal for example, which have existed for several decades in the early/marginal gentrification stage, with long-lasting artistic and “alternative” communities residing in the area (2003, 2453). Finally, this model has also been criticized as over-simplified, as the linearity of stages overlooks that different stages of gentrification could be happening at the same time in the same neighbourhood due to the complex nature of the phenomenon and the many actors that help shape it, which might be the case for Piena’s neighbourhood (Kerstein 1990).

According to several authors (Mendes 2018; Sequera and Nofre 2019; Accornero and Carvalho 2023) after the economic crisis of 2008 and the Great Recession, Portugal started a rapid process of gentrification and touristification of its urban areas, especially of its capital. This rapid increase in tourism has had huge consequences on the urban landscape of Lisbon and the lives of the people that inhabit it. Some of them, can be argued, are positive such as the regeneration

and revitalization of certain degraded areas, however it has also had a negative impact on its long-term residents. Without proper urban and social planning, due to the large influx of tourists, which led to landlords preferring short-term rentals, and people with more spending power, the poorer strata of the population has been forced to move out to increasingly less central areas of the city (Mendes 2018). One neighbourhood in which this process is very evident is the neighbourhood of Alfama, considered a historical quarter, and traditionally inhabited by lower income residents. Many authors (Sequera and Nofre 2019; Daly et al. 2020; Fontes et al. 2022) have recognized that the area is undergoing drastic urban changes, due to Alfama having become a tourist hotspot. This has created new economic opportunities, but also some disadvantages such as the displacement of many long-term residents and the dilution of local heritage, though, for example, the renovation of historical building to cater better to tourists and offer a more polished experience (Sequera and Nofre 2019).

In 2017, Luís Mendes, urban geographer and permanent researcher at the Center for Geographic Studies of the University of Lisbon wrote an “Anti-gentrification Manifesto” about the city of Lisbon. In this paper Mendes takes a Marxist geography approach to gentrification, stating that it is not as inevitable as we might think, but part of a precise capitalist “plan”:

The processes of urban development or urbanization are the spatial manifestation of capital accumulation. [...]. The contradictions experienced in the built environment are partly due to the steps taken to make financial capital the mediator between urbanization [...] and the underlying dynamics of capitalism. In the process of gentrification as a form of urban (re)development, real estate capital seeks not only to respond to the needs of capital realization and discover new urban market frontiers but also to satisfy the demands of subsequent phases in the accumulation cycle. Therefore, the boundaries of gentrification align with those of capitalist expansion and restructuring, resulting in the capitalization and commodification of all spatial objects in the urban environment. (323)

Urbanist policies in Lisbon after the economic crisis have been characterized by austerity measures such as budget cutting and a reduction in social welfare spending. These policies, combined with the targeting of tourists and foreign investors, transformed the city of Lisbon as a city managed like a business and designed to attract more affluent consumers, rather than

satisfy the needs of its citizens, such as more reinforced housing rights (Accornero and Carvalho 2023).

Urban theorists have recognized that cities' governments, following a neoliberal logic, in the past few decades have increasingly tried to attract artists and cultural initiatives in order to fight urban crises by branding the city as a creative hub and therefore increasing its competitiveness in the global market of cities (Shaw 2013). This strategy also follows the stage model of gentrification, in which the early gentrifiers, artists and later on art-related projects and cultural businesses, can help "revitalize" a neighbourhood and attract investors and increase rents (Rose 1984). This appears to be the case for Lisbon as well, several authors (Estevens & Carmo 2023; Estevens et al. 2019; Sequera & Nofre 2019; Florida 2002) have identified different cultural projects promoted by the city council and various public policies aimed at attracting the creative class in order to kick-start a regeneration of "degraded" urban areas. In 2009, the "Programa de Ação do Quadro de Referência Estratégica Nacional" [National Strategic Reference Framework Action Program] was introduced to revitalize public spaces in Lisbon. It focused on cultural promotion through arts and culture, focusing, for example, on fado music, and popular parades, aiming to attract tourists and support urban regeneration (Estevens & Carmo 2023). One initiative promoted by the Lisbon city government, for instance, is the Bairros e Zonas de Intervenção Prioritária (Priority Intervention Neighbourhoods and Areas) program, which aims at creating public-private partnerships to fund cultural and community initiatives in order to "revitalize" different neighbourhoods (Tulumello 2015). Some other studies on this refer to the historical central areas of Lisbon, which through the years have been rebranded for tourist consumption by building on "a narrative of the idealised 'past' of a former working-class neighbourhood" while ignoring its present (Sequera & Nofre 2019, 3178).

In the case of the neighbourhood of Piana Libreria, the area in question is found between the green line metro stops of Anjos and Arroios, in Lisbon. Arroios is usually described as the most multicultural neighbourhood of Lisbon, according to data of 2017 looking at the country of origin of its inhabitants, counting up to 92 nationalities (RTP 2017). This neighbourhood is part of a larger area undergoing the same social and urban transformations, which is the area surrounding the street Almirante Reis (one of the main streets of Lisbon), including the

neighbourhoods of Arroios, Anjos, Intendente, and Martim Moniz. These are areas that have been long burdened with stigma, through the 1990s they have been associated with prostitution, poverty, drug addiction, and alcoholism, which led to their reputation as marginalized, dangerous, and unhealthy (Estevens et al. 2020). The perfect pre-gentrification conditions: a relatively central but “run-down” area with a high immigrant population, which despite the rising rents all over the city, has maintained so far lower housing prices compared to more central or more “prestigious” areas of the city (Sadock 2023), making it attractive to “alternative groups of young and tolerant middle-class people” (Estevens et al. 2020, 6).

Piena itself, its owners, recognize that this process is taking place in their neighbourhood and the contradictions it brings. Elisa told me in an interview that the most stark change she has seen in the last few years is the massive increase in the amount of tourists that pass through the neighbourhood, mostly American, she then continued: “We still see a lot of poverty... until the other day we had tents in the street behind ours... now I don’t know where the Junta [de freguesia, municipal parish] took them” but also “they are trying to do housing speculation here too, in our street they renovated a building, in a super cool way, for it to become a luxury residential building” (Sartor 2024). As gentrification is not a linear process (Knieriem 2022) in Piena’s neighbourhood it is possible to see different stages of the stage model of gentrification at once, and each affecting the others (Sequera & Nofre 2019). This overlapping between stages of gentrification is exactly one of the shortcomings of the stage model which Kerstein (1990) argues for. On one hand, it is possible to see the “degradation” and poverty characteristic of the area over the past decades, decadent and unkept building, signs of drug abuse and prostitution present in the neighbourhood and, as mentioned by Elisa, people living in tents planted on the street (Duarte 2019). On the other hand, marginal or early gentrifiers are also present on the territory, such as cultural initiatives like Piena, attracted to the area by the lower rents, which is a strong pull factor to a certain location for a small business with a low starting budget. This situates Arroios between the second and third stage of gentrification. According to the stage model, this would be followed by the private investors, who see potential in the area for speculation, this the first passage of hands in “gentrification proper”, in the second one

buildings, such as the one Elisa was describing, will be sold to more affluent renters or buyers at a much higher price (Shaw 2008).

As Estevens et al. (2020) and Estevens & Carmo (2023) argue, arts and cultural initiatives can have a dual, and opposite role in the process of gentrification. This is the case for Piena as well. On the one hand, according to Rose's model(1984), Piena is an early gentrifier. Its presence in the neighbourhood attracts "tourists, students and new users that change the image of the place and stimulate both property markets and the opening of new retail services that cater to these populations" (Estevens et al. 2020, 4). Estevens et al. then continue to argument that this, however, is only the "preliminary stage" of gentrification and that the process "needs" places like Piena in order to "clean up" the neighbourhood, turn it "from 'marginal' to 'diverse'" and from "'chaotic' to 'exciting'", through the organization of events and social-cultural activities which bring people with a certain cultural capital to the area (ibid).

On the other hand, however, Piena Libreria's values go against the neoliberal logic of gentrification and since their opening they have sympathized with association protesting this very process in Lisbon. For example, Sara and Elisa have frequently reposted the flyers of the protest "Casa para Viver", a march through the streets of the city organized and subscribed by several radical left organization and grassroots movements in order to manifest dissent towards the government treatment of the housing crisis. The most recent ones in Lisbon have been held on the 30th of September 2023, 27th January 2024 and the next one which will be on 28th September 2024 (Casa para Viver 2024). According to Esquerda.net, the online newspaper of the Bloco de Esquerda [Left Block] radical left Portuguese party, Casa para Viver, with a total of four demonstrations in the span of a year and a half and a platform subscribed by over a hundred associations, between feminist and students' collectives, anti-racist and other housing organizations, brought thousands of people to the streets (2024). The manifesto of Casa para Viver mentions, among other things, that they want to raise awareness around "those truly responsible for the [housing] crisis – those who speculate on housing and the politicians who defend and encourage it" (Casa para Viver 2024). Still according to Estevens et al. this is part of the duality of cultural organizations and businesses which often try in different ways, such as posting on social media about local housing protests, to raise awareness to urban changes and

to “empower the local community and build alternative spaces for social and political discussion” (2020, 3). On top of this, according to Cox and Mergler there is a link between gentrification and the decline in place-based community ties, as described in my previous chapter, and that instead it goes hand in hand with the “ideology of independence” that is inherent to neoliberalism (1982). In complete opposition to this, Jon Caulfield, in his essay “Gentrification and desire”, describes the period of marginal gentrification as a time of social intermixing and community building (1989). Sara and Elisa, through Piena, try to uphold these practices, they are trying to build a network with their neighbours, who are still mostly ethnic restaurants and small cafés, and to create interpersonal relations with them, hoping that that “they won’t kick us all out, there’s not much else we can do”, as Elisa told me in an interview (2024).

It is necessary, however, to analyse the fact that Piena Libreria offers another layer to this discussion, provided by the fact that it is an Italian bookshop, selling to a mostly Italian audience, while based in Lisbon, Portugal. Whereas the initiatives mentioned in the previous paragraph do indeed show a willingness to resist the process of gentrification, it is important for Piena to also be aware of the role that the clientele it sells to and attracts, plays in this process. According to Grodach (2010), certain artistic and cultural venues, even when inside a gentrification process, can create opportunities for marginalized social groups to engage in and access to social and cultural activities, which they are often denied in other settings. This is not the case for Piena, while Elisa and Sara try to build connections with marginalized people living and inhabiting the area their shop is in, their social and cultural events are not target at them, as they are meant mainly for an Italian audience. Many Italians moving to Lisbon can be, in fact, considered “life style migrants”, people who move not out of necessity but making the conscious choice to move for an “improved” lifestyle (Benson and O’Reilly 2015, 21–22).

Piena’s customer base is very diverse, as is the Italian population of Lisbon. Immigration to Portugal, which has an estimated resident population of about 10.6 million, has been increasing exponentially in the last decade. According to the Immigration and Borders Service (SEF) as of 2022 there are 752.252 foreigners residing in Portugal, 33,707 of whom are Italians (Silva 2024). Italy appears to be the fifth country from which people emigrate to Portugal, first is Brazil

(233.138), followed by the United Kingdom (36.639), Cape Verde (35.744) and India (34.232) (ibid.). Many Italians have moved to Portugal after retirement, for example (Il Sole 24 Ore 2023). This is largely due to an exemption in taxes on pensions given by the Portuguese government since 2012 to foreign retirees residing in the country for more than six months a year (ibid). These people can live out their retirement in a sunny warm place, near the beach and get more money out of their pensions. These concessions will end in 2024 (they will remain for people who already benefit from them) but it is estimated that by 2021, 3500 Italian retirees had already moved to Portugal and a big majority of them to Lisbon specifically (ibid). Another section of Piena's customers are Italian students on an exchange program, an economic sector that is expanding in general in Lisbon (França et al. 2021). Most of these students are in Portugal thanks to the Erasmus Programme, a project of international mobility funded by the European Union, which allows students from European universities to study at a foreign European university for a period of 5 or 10 months (Calvo 2017). In an interview by Calvo (2017), Rita Ferraz, CEO of Erasmus Lisboa (EL), an association which, among other services, helps international students find accommodation in Lisbon stated that in the area of Avenida Almirante Reis, including neighbourhoods such Anjos and Arroios, "there are students flats everywhere" (2147). According to Calvo these international students through "their distinctive lifestyles often (re)produce new, transnational, middle-class urban identities, mobilising several economic sectors directed to foreigners that are different from those directed to locals" (2017, 2144). As the phenomenon of international student mobilization increases in the city, the presence of Piena could attract these young people to the neighbourhood of Arroios, thanks to its busy cultural and social calendar, thus facilitating the gentrification process.

Lastly, an important section of Piena's customers composition is Italian radical left-wing people. These clients are attracted to the political line of Piena and become regular customers due to the book selection and politically aware events. The strong presence of Italian left-leaning people in Portugal, and especially Lisbon has not been investigated yet but it might be partly due to the idealization of Portugal as a more left-leaning country, due to its relatively "recent" revolution and the strong presence of communist and radical left ideologies in parliament through the years. In a paper titled "Marginal gentrifiers, networks of mobilization and new contentious collective

identities. The struggle for housing in post-austerity Lisbon” Accornero and Carvalho analyse the role of marginal gentrifiers inside of the social movements in Lisbon (2023). Many of the foreigners interviewed for their research are Italians that actively participate in movements such as Habita and Stop Despejos, two associations that fight evictions and the housing crisis, sometimes even taking leadership roles (ibid). According to the authors:

[T]he newcomers constitute an important pool of people that are not only available to mobilize and be mobilized, but who also introduce new practices in an environment highly pressured by gentrification and commodification of the city. In particular, this happens, through their interaction with previous and already existing contentious hubs and groups strengthened throughout the previous cycle of contestation. (ibid, 17)

This shows that despite being a facilitator of gentrification, spaces like Piena can also attract actors who can be beneficial to the fight against the process itself, bringing new radical knowledge and strengthening international bonds between groups in different countries who are dealing with similar phenomena.

Lastly, it is important to take the government into consideration as one of the main actors in the process of gentrification. This is the actor that the radical left associations fighting gentrification appeal to in order to contain this phenomenon (Casa para Viver 2024; Mendes 2017). As mentioned before, the Portuguese government and the Lisbon city governing body have undertaken several austerity urbanism measures in the last decades and invested in art and cultural activities in order to attract tourists and affluent consumers, speeding up the process of gentrification of certain areas. Platforms such as “Casa para Viver” point their finger at the government as perpetrator of the housing crises, calling for the end of tax exemptions for foreigners and “golden visas” (residency permits granted to non-EU citizens who make significant investments in Portugal, such as in real estate (Silva, 2024) (Casa para Viver 2024). In the “Anti-gentrification Manifesto”, Luìs Mendes also reports on some strategies to control and combat the process of gentrification such as revisions on the Lei do Arrendamento Urbano [Urban Housing Law], which currently includes policies which facilitate evictions (Mendes 2018, 204) and the Lei do Alojamento Local [Local Accomodation Law], which is currently

very permissive of short-term rentals (Mendes 2017, 327). These are just some of the policy changes that the radical left movement against the housing crisis and against gentrification calls for however, as predictable, these all go against the neoliberal logic which the current Portuguese government subscribes to.

In conclusion, gentrification is a complex and chaotic process (Beauregard 2013 [1986]) which involves several different actors, from the government, to social movements, associations, cultural and art businesses, citizens and foreign residents, poor and affluent renters, immigrants and marginalized sectors of the population. Each actor plays a role that is more often than not non-linear and contradictory. Cultural businesses such as Piena, attracted to a certain area due to the low rents. despite having a political line which preaches against gentrification, could become a facilitator to the same process they condemn. Thanks to their cultural and social agenda they might attract young people with a high cultural capital and kick-start a process of “cleaning up” of the neighbourhood, from “marginalized” to “exciting” and “vibrant” (Estevens et al. 2020, 4). On the opposite end, they could also attract Italian people who sympathizing with the anti-gentrification struggle become important members of associations and collectives fighting against it, adding their own knowledge and know-how to the struggle” (Accornero & Carvalho 2023, 17). However, the irony of this process is that even by taking part in the gentrification cycle, marginal gentrifiers such as Piena and its customers will also, eventually, be at risk of eviction and relocation from the neighbourhood they “helped” “clean up” and gentrify. Elisa herself commented it in one of the interviews we had together, when I asked her how she had seen the Italian community in Lisbon she noted “there is a lot of coming and going. Many, desperate, are forced to go back to Italy as they cannot afford a house here anymore.” (Sartor 2024).

Conclusion

Piena Libreria is not just a bookshop. It is not just a business or a place of commerce. As a radical leftist establishment, I have argued, it is also an embodiment of resistance, a place where customers can gain knowledge on radical social movements and come in contact with radical political activities, associations, and in general radical political ideologies. In our western society, dominated by mainstream narratives, these places play an important role in making marginalized voices heard, in bringing alternative viewpoints to the spotlight, promoting discussions about social issues, and nurturing grassroots movements. They can become promoters of community engagement and provide a platform for marginalized writers and artists, hence creating a space where radical ideas can challenge the established structures of power. However, these places do not exist in a vacuum and, instead, have to interact with these structures of power in order to function. Some of them choose to carry out their activities in complete, or close to complete, alignment with their political ideology, hence presenting in diametrical opposition to the neo-liberal and capitalist institutions and regulations, for example settling in occupied buildings and spaces (as no one should own land) or setting up libraries instead of bookshops (as no one should own knowledge). Other places, instead, choose different levels of compromise between their ideological views and life within “The System”. In this thesis I have analysed the level of compromise of one such radical leftist bookshop, the contradictions that follow it and how they are, or can be, mitigated.

In chapter 3 I tackled what is, in my opinion, one of the most evident contradictions provided by the capitalist system, that of worker’s alienation. I have argued that chain bookstores such as FNAC or Bertrand, as Portuguese examples, prioritize efficiency and standardization, leading to work conditions similar to the once experienced by factory workers in Marx’s time. They hence become estranged from their labour, the process of work, and ultimately, from their own sense of identity and fulfillment. I advanced the argument that this is not the case for Piena Libreria, due to the fact that it is an independent bookshop and also that it is entirely run by its two owners, Sara and Elisa. They have full agency over when and how they work, which books they sell, how they are positioned inside the shop and which events to offer. This creative

freedom and the absence of hierarchical structures, typical of chain bookstores and other types of capitalist employment, allow them to see their labour not as a repetitive task but as an extension of their political and personal identities. Given more time and resources it would be interesting to expand this research to a larger pool of independent, and especially radical, bookshops that have more employees and that have existed for a longer period of time. Analysing the different types of managerial styles and types of structures that arise from independent and ideologically left-leaning businesses could offer insights that extend beyond academic research and have broader political significance. In light of Mark Fisher's (2009) call to reimagine alternatives to capitalism, such businesses may serve as practical examples of how exchanges of labour, goods, and services can still be functional while operating under different rules than the ones of maximizing profit and capitalism as a whole.

In the following chapter, I explored the various ways in which Piena Libreria resembles a home, not only in its atmosphere but also in the labour involved in running the shop, carried out by Sara and Elisa. Most importantly, I drew a parallel between the work performed inside the bookshop and domestic labour. By highlighting this comparison, I argued that there is a clear contradiction at play, as the bookshop advocates against overworking and undervaluing women's labour, in accord with the most prominent feminist and anti-capitalist theorists and activists, such as Silvia Federici (1975; 2004; 2018) and Nancy Fraser (2013). However, its owners often find themselves replicating those very dynamics by overworking and underpaying themselves. While no perfect solution exists, I posited several tactics that can help alleviate this tension, which are implemented by Piena with different degrees of success. These tactics are: acknowledging the invisible labour being carried out by women, even inside the bookshop, maintaining a critical awareness of these dynamics, setting boundaries to resist capitalist "grinding" culture, and remembering that relying on the community when needed is an option. In the future, a comparative study could be conducted on overwork, underpayment, and undervaluation of one's own labour among individuals that work in independent and radical bookstores that are socialized as women, compared with their socialized male counterparts. My research theorizes that women tend to undervalue their work due to the perceived similarity with domestic labour and its internalized normalization as something to devalue. Further research

could investigate if patterns in the way work is perceived, valued, and compensated, vary depending on the worker's gender. Analysing how gender influences the reproduction of capitalist labour practices within alternative, activist-oriented work environments, could be very valuable for feminist and anti-capitalist studies.

In the chapter five, I explored the role of Piena inside of its community and, inversely, the role of its community for Piena. Using Oldenburg's theories (1982; 1997; 1999), I categorized Piena as a third place, a place of informal, voluntary gatherings that create social cohesion. Piena embodies these characteristics through its welcoming and cozy atmosphere. I compared my case study to chain bookstores, which tend to commodify community and become "non-places" (Augé 1995). On the opposite side, I have argued that radical independent bookstores like Piena encourage genuine community-building. I also used Kimberly Kinder's framework (2021) of various curatorial practices to further show how Piena can indeed create the perfect environment for community building and especially for the fostering of politically active communities. According to Kinder, radical spaces fall into three categories: those that "shout," "entice", or "heal" (ibid.). I proposed that Piena Libreria is mainly a landscape that primarily entices with its familiar and cozy aesthetic, encouraging exploration and curiosity, while occasionally embodying elements of landscapes that shout as demonstrated by its promotion of provocative books and participation in political demonstrations. Piena allows for an accessible introduction to radical ideas for its customers and promotes conversations and political discussions. I also showed how Piena blurs the lines between business, politics, community, and friendship, creating a space that can challenge traditional economic and social hierarchies. This aligns with feminist visions of reimagining societal structures beyond neoliberal capitalism (Weiss 1995). I believe it to be extremely important to, if not practice, a least imagine, worlds that are governed by care, trust, and "mothering" values instead of utilitarian principles of profit and competition. My thesis tries to present a case study in which these values are put to practice, in hopes that more independent bookstores, but in general more commercial places, can follow its example and, hopefully, create positive societal change.

Finally, in the last chapter I focused on the multifaced and complex topic of gentrification and its dual, contradictory relationship with radical activist cultural spaces such as Piena. On the one

hand, I have argued that Piena can be viewed as a “marginal gentrifier” (Rose 1984), as it attracts a students, artists, and lifestyle migrants who contribute to changing the social and economic makeup of the neighbourhood it is situated in. This presence inadvertently aligns with processes of gentrification by increasing cultural capital and making the neighbourhood more appealing (Mendes 2018; Estevens et al. 2020). On the other hand, Piena actively participates and promotes anti-gentrification movements, for example the "Casa para Viver" housing movement. Piena, through its commitments, the political ideologies it subscribes to, and the local ties it fosters, tries to resist the exclusionary effects of gentrification. The role of Piena, and of radical cultural initiatives and businesses more broadly in gentrifying neighbourhoods is, therefore, controversial and paradoxical: on one hand they actively support resistance to displacement and advocate for the local community, on the other, they indirectly facilitate the economic and social transformations of these areas (Estevens and Carmo 2023). Even more ironic is the fact that the very “marginal gentrifiers” that Piena attracts, such as its Italian customers, along with Piena itself are not immune to the negative effects of these transformations. These groups, initially seen as agents of urban revitalization, will also, eventually, become victims to the same forces of displacement that they inadvertently contributed to creating.

With this thesis I hope to have clarified what the main contradictions are for Piena Libreria, a radical anti-capitalist feminist Italian bookshop in Lisbon, Portugal. I hope that this study can be useful to Piena to view their bookshop under a different light and perhaps take into consideration some of my analyses and suggestions. Furthermore, my analyses, while relating mainly to my case study, can be extrapolated to apply to a broader range of radical leftist bookshops and even more broadly to radical businesses in general, which might have to deal with the same contradictions of advocating for certain ideologies while still having to survive under the current socio-economic system. The literature on radical businesses can and should be further amplified, so that we can better understand how to construct resistance, even through seemingly unlikely allies, such as commercial venues.

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Annex 1

First interview between author (GD) and Sara Cappai (SC) and Elisa Sartor (ES), owners of Piena Libreria

Original language: Italian, translated into English by the author

Duration: 35 minutes

GD: What is Piena, how was this idea, this vision born?

SC: Piena is an independent Italian bookstore in Lisbon. That means it has only Italian-language books, at least for now, then we will see if we expand the offer with Portuguese books by Italian authors, but for now we only have the books in Italian, which means that they are also by foreign authors translated into Italian. Independent means that our choice of catalogue and proposal is totally independent, so it is made by Elisa and myself, with a focus on independent publishing, so they are publishing houses that even in the Italian market are not distributed by many, I mean, they are yes distributed, but they are not part of big publishing groups, so they have different, more curated, very specific editorial lines. Anyway, independent precisely means that we are not dependent on anybody and therefore we have more freedom in proposals and programming.

GD: Why this choice of an independent bookstore in Lisbon?

SC: Let me tell you first, let's say the personal life anecdote, I, Sara, arrived here in Lisbon in 2020, right after the first lockdown in Italy, it was July 2020, I moved here at a time when it was very difficult to create relationships, to make friends, I brought my work from Italy, so I had no excuse to meet anyone because I was working from home and then it was very difficult because from gyms to classes everything was pretty much closed let's say. I was using social networks a lot, I had met Elisa who at the time had another business, she had a project related to graphics, design, to events, however especially also the production of design objects related to food and words in Italian. So, we were both on social media for that, to promote her business, to promote mine, which was a business of professional editing, manuscript evaluations, other things always related to editing let's say, and she had proposed to me after we got to know each other to do a reading group. So, we set up this reading group which kind of gave the basic idea that had been in my head for a while to open this bookstore. When I proposed it to Elisa, she immediately embraced the idea because we had seen there was a lack of a slightly more cultural agenda. And that it was growing anyway, maybe even after the pandemic, the attention towards books, people really had the time for reading. So, it was born because of that, but also because especially here, because the Italian community is big, in general also the community of students and speakers and readers in the Italian language, because we have many customers who are not

Italian, we have a slice of foreign customers as well, Portuguese or Brazilian mainly, which stands at 30-55%. So the sense is that people reading and looking for books in the Italian language have the big online giants as their only reference, Amazon, the biggest competitor is Amazon, which is a competitor against here we can do very little, in the sense that they obviously have infinite tools and resources but they don't have one thing that we have, which is the real relationship with people, the real knowledge of the publishing market, the ability to listen to the people who come in here and so it's probably longer, more tiring work, but also more satisfying.

GD: How did you insert yourself into the community, how did you create your own community for Piena here in Lisbon?

SC: Our strategy built a lot on experience, we probably lack a more theoretical and scholarly approach. We definitely worked a lot on events, though, so a lot of reading groups, a lot of events, a lot of free events, many events also that do not exclusively revolve around books, in here we have done documentary screenings, meetings with journalists, we did a tattoo night, we did a presentation of a photo exhibition related to an NGO that deals with ship dismantling, in short, we've done a lot of things that go even beyond books, even with children, workshops, readings, many book presentations, with guests who came from Italy, in collaboration with the Italian cultural institute or through other projects and initiatives...

GD: Looking at your line of events and the curatorial choices you make, it's clear Piena has some radical left tendencies. Do you feel like this is true and if so, how has it happened?

SC: Well, it starts from what our positioning is as people, and also from observations of what is the reality that we live in, there is a need to talk about certain issues, things happen, all around us, and we believe that books can be an important tool to understand reality, to have the tools, to understand the world. Yes, inevitably this turns into a certain positioning, precisely because, this I speak for myself, but I think Elisa then can also agree, these are not times when neutrality is allowed anymore in the face of what happens, it is necessary to take a position that is with respect to issues of feminism, of anti-racism, anti-fascism, ecology, to the Palestinian issue, in short, we've tried to deal with all the things that we care about. Also because, precisely, it wouldn't even respect our editorial line not to. Another thing we do, that I believe to be political as well, is that we don't re-price books. Some bookshops in Germany, Belgium, other countries re-price books in order to cover the shipping costs. We don't do that because we know that we are in Portugal and Portugal is a country where the wages are very low and it's also an issue of accessibility, not everyone will have the budget to spend on books, we try to make them as accessible as we can while also surviving ourselves.

GD: And do you feel that your political events are as participated by the community as the others? Is the community as politically involved as you are?

ES: Yes, yes, I think it also really helps to be in this neighbourhood specifically where there are already some political initiatives, that is a neighbourhood that is already in some sense accustomed to certain political discussions, I'm thinking right now of Sirigaita but there's also other ones.

GD: Did you ever think being so political could be detrimental to the business in some way?

ES: No... no not really. We don't really have a business strategy, or rather we try to, but our strategy always ends up being to stay authentic, to remain true to ourselves.

GD: Moving on, how does your bookshop work on a managerial side?

SC: Oh... well... it's just the two of us, we don't really have a management style... it would be nice to hire someone else... to look at the data, the business data. I think the perfect number for a small independent bookshop would be four people, one for communication, one for logistics, one for admin and one that runs the shop. It's really hard to do everything and do everything well just the two of us.

GD: And do you plan on ever hiring these two extra people?

SC: It would be nice... I don't know how sustainable it will be, especially in the short term... We don't even pay ourselves a full salary yet... maybe we should do that first.

GD: Finally, a more personal question, what is the thing about the project that is Piena that you are the proudest of?

SC: For the first time in my life, I felt like I was doing something that I wanted to do for myself, an egoistic act if you wish, but then I realized that it is something from which other people can benefit too, and this makes me happy. The big gratification of this job, in the end, is the people you meet. What is born out of it... the other day I saw two girls that were organizing to go out to dinner together and they had met right here. It makes me happy knowing you created a place where people meet and create relationship.

ES: Yes, for me too. I wanted to do something that was socially useful. I love the community that we have created. I also like it for myself, I'm learning a lot from it too.

Annex 2

Second interview between author (GD) and Elisa Sartor (ES), owner of Piena Libreria

Original language: Italian, translated into English by the author

Duration: 24 minutes

GD: What is Piena for you, on a personal level?

ES: The most trivial thing I can say is that it's a bit like home. After these two years that Piena exists, I can say that it is a little bit like home. And also a little bit like community. Let's say that I firmly believe that through books, I mean that books possess a transformative capacity. And that people can take paths and personal journeys through reading books. And that books unite people and reading them together can create a bit of a community.

GD: All right. Were there times, maybe at the beginning or maybe even now, that maybe you felt that you were doing, let's say a little bit too much in the sense that you were overworked, that your work wasn't being paid enough, or you were maybe pushing little bit too far?

ES: Yes, I can tell you that since we started and still now, there are very intense periods when we know that we are working more than we are actually being paid. Unfortunately, the bookshop still doesn't give us the opportunity not to do that. So yes, being it our business and being that if we don't work we don't sell, that line between am I doing the right thing, am I doing too much is very blurry and very often we blur to the other side that of that. We take it right on almost like a cause, and so we do more than what we should based on the pay, which is still not enough. Yes, sometimes there are periods when we work too much. That is one of the weaknesses in this business that we would like to be able to balance.

GD: And precisely, have you found some methods, some ways or something to be able to curb this a little bit, some strategies?

ES: Eh, trying to account for all the hours, not working in the evening and not working at least on the one day when we can totally unplug everything, phones, computers, on Sunday, but sometimes we have things to catch up that maybe we do on Sunday. No, there is not really a method.

GD: What is the community of Piena, how is it structured?

ES: It's varied, for sure there are really different types of people. At the beginning of the business, we did kind of the map of the typical customers we expected, let's say they all really fell into those categories. And more categories maybe unexpected. Different ages, different social classes. People doing different kinds of jobs, from call centres to researchers in universities, to students, to Portuguese retirees and Italians. Then precisely, they also speak different languages. They are Italians, but there are also a lot of Portuguese and Brazilians, and every now and then nationalities that maybe speak Italian for different reasons. We have our little community of families, children who attend our activities.

GD: Then very last, how is the relationship with the community, of the of the neighbourhood, I mean is there any interaction, any movement even with just the physical location of the place, I mean this one rather than another one?

ES: We absolutely wanted to stay in this neighbourhood. A neighbourhood that welcomes a lot of different nationalities. Immigrants, migrants, refugees, a bit of everything, Portuguese even. So far we are happy with our choice. Let's say we have established relationships with neighbours and other shops especially. Let's say through food is always the easiest first way to know people and so in our street we know a little bit everyone that owns a restaurant or a café. And we like to stay here because precisely, you can have a relationship between neighbouring stores and it's fun to go by our neighbours who are Portuguese from different parts, not only from Lisbon. And then from Middle East, Bangladesh. I mean, it's interesting to have all this "mistura" [mixture] even just in our street. It's not always easy because sometimes there is a language barrier, sometimes maybe some communities are more closed, that is, our neighbours are very shy, however, then they are very nice. We speak in English, their baby always comes here. You say hello, you try to help everybody, when we have a problem, they have always helped us and we try to help others. And also precisely these are the values that we try to bring with our books.

Annex 4

Extract of interview with an employee at the bookshop Tigre de Papel who wished to remain anonymous

Duration of extract: 5 minutes

GD: What is Tigre Papel, what is the project?

A: Tigre de Papel is an independent bookshop, we sell new and used books as well as school textbooks, we also a small space where we host events.

GD: How is the bookshop managed and who is part of this process ?

A: The bookshop is formally a company; it has one owner. He is not always here but he is definitely involved in the bookshop as well. Then it is 4 of us running the bookshop, we have shifts, someone does the morning, someone works in the evening. But yes, formally it is a company it has its “rules”, like any company.

GD: Is there any other aspect of the bookshop that you believe to be political, that isn't the books being sold or the events hosted, but more on a managerial level, or of how the business is run?

A: Yes, yes even though there's a limit to this, that is the fact that Tigre de Papel is a company. Companies have their rules, there's someone who is the owner and others who aren't. This introduces an inequality of power, we try to compensate this [inequality] by having personal relationships with each other [...], and by a method for which the bookshop is made by the people who run it, by the decisions they take, their choice in books and all that workers have monthly meetings with the bookstore's owner to decide jointly which books to stock and review the overall curatorial process.

Annex 5



Books displayed in Piena's window

Annex 6



Books displayed inside Piena

Annex 7



“Manif” [protest] today! Come visit us before and after
Story on Piena’s Instagram page.

Annex 8



“Casa para Viver” poster hung on Piena’s wall

Annex 9



Piena's window display in April 2024

Annex 10



Piena's "3 and under" section

