

The people are the city:

The idea of the *popolo* and the condition of the *popolani* in Renaissance Venice

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The people are the city¹

In the closing years of the fifteenth century, the patrician and diarist Marin Sanudo proposed a deceptively clear description of Venetian society. « There are three orders (*generation*) of inhabitants », he wrote, « nobles, that govern the state and the Republic, [...] citizens, and artisans, or the common people (*popolo menudo*)². » Thus Sanudo placed at the peak the nobles or patricians, those who had been enriched by the economic expansion of the city from the thirteenth century, and monopolised the management of public institutions and international commerce. The intermediate group of citizens included those excluded from the patriciate at the moment of its institutionalisation, between the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth, but who possessed economic means and a recognised social prestige. At the lowest level was the *popolo*, composed of the great majority of inhabitants – artisans, workers, servants, marginal people and numerous foreigners – who did not belong to the two higher categories.

While this tripartition largely has been accepted as a way to describe the organisation of Venetian society from the communal period down to the fall of the Republic in 1797³,

1 - William SHAKESPEARE, *Coriolanus*, III, 1.

2 - « Sono tre generationi di habitanti: zentilhomini – che governano il stato, et la Republica – [...], cittadini, et artesani overo populo menudo », Marin SANUDO, *De origine, situ et magistratibus urbis Venetae ovvero La città di Venetia (1493-1530)*, ed. Angelo Caracciolo Aricò, Milan, Centro Studi Medioevali e Rinascimentali “E. A. Cicogna”, 1980, p. 22.

3 - See, for example, Brian Pullan, « ‘Three Orders of Inhabitants’: Social Hierarchies in the Republic of Venice », in J. DENTON (ed.), *Orders and Hierarchies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999, p. 147-168 ; Giuseppe TREBBI, « La società veneziana », in G. COZZI and P. PRODI (eds), *Storia di Venezia. Dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, vol. VI, *Dal Rinascimento al Barocco*, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1994, p. 129-214, at p. 4. Dennis ROMANO, *Patricians and Popolani: The Social Foundations of the Venetian Renaissance State*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 36-37, proposes a slightly different organisation, composed of « nobles, well-to-do commoners (the *popolo grande*), and workers (the *popolo minuto*) ». The category of *popolo minuto*, common people or plebeians, frequently was employed in Medieval sources. Here,

historians have focused more on the first two groups than on the third. Study of the citizens and patricians, and of the strategies they pursued in order to ensure their social and political primacy, by and large has dominated Venetian social history⁴.

The *popolo* between the late Middle Ages and the early modern period has not aroused the same interest. This group does not fit easily into the historical narrative of the Italian Renaissance, which often has been envisaged from the point of view of the elites, focusing on their role in the construction of a new culture, both political and artistic, fed by humanistic thought⁵. When the Venetian *popolo* has been studied, primarily this has been from the perspective of the history of work, of daily life or of popular culture⁶. Its famous

however, we prefer not to distinguish *a priori* between different levels of wealth or poverty and generally use *popolo* as a general term without differentiation between these two sub-groups.

4 - Among the principal works on the patriciate in the Renaissance, see Stanley CHOJNACKI, *Women and Men in Renaissance Venice: Twelve Essays on Patrician Society*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000 ; Gerhard RÖSCH, *Der venezianische Adel bis zur Schliessung des Grossen Rats: zur Genese einer Führungsschicht*, Sigmaringen, J. Thorbecke, 1989 ; Dorit RAINES, *L'invention du mythe aristocratique. L'image de soi du patriciat vénitien au temps de la Sérénissime*, Venice, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2006. On the *cittadini*, see Andrea Zannini, *Burocrazia e burocrati a Venezia in età moderna: i cittadini originari (sec. XVI-XVIII)*, Venice, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 1993 ; James S. GRUBB, « Elite Citizens », in J. MARTIN and D. ROMANO (eds), *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, p. 339-364 ; Anna BELLAVITIS, *Identité, mariage, mobilité sociale. Citoyennes et citoyens à Venise au XVI^e siècle*, Rome, Ecole française de Rome, 2001.

5 - John M. NAJEMY, « Politics: Class and Patronage in Twentieth-Century Italian Renaissance Historiography », in A. J. GRIECO, M. ROCKE and F. G. SUPERBI (eds), *The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century: Acts of an International Conference (Florence, Villa I Tatti, June 9-11, 1999)*, Florence, Olschki, 2002, p. 119-136.

6 - On the Venetian *popolo*, see the classic works of D. ROMANO, *Patricians and Popolani...*, *op. cit.* ; Brian S. PULLAN, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice: The Social Institutions of a Catholic State, to 1620*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1971 ; Richard MACKENNEY, *Tradesmen and Traders. The World of the Guilds in Venice in Europe, c. 1250-c. 1650*, London, Croom Helm, 1987 ; Robert C. DAVIS, *The War of the Fists: Popular Culture and Public Violence in late Renaissance Venice*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1994 ; Dennis Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft: Domestic Service in Renaissance Venice, 1400-1600*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996 ; Monica CHOJNACKA, *Working Women of Early Modern Venice*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001 ; Andrea ZANNINI, « L'identità multipla: essere popolo in una capitale (Venezia, XVI-XVIII secolo) », in A. SAVELLI and G. DELLILE (eds), special issue « Essere popolo. Prerogative e rituali d'appartenenza nelle città italiane d'antico regime », *Ricerche storiche*, 2-3, 2002, p. 247-262.

docility - there were never major popular revolts in Venice - has meant that the *popolo* has not been seen as a decisive political actor in the Republic. In contrast to the Florentine *popolo* which has generated an impressive bibliography devoted to its composition and political capacities⁷, the legal foundations of the Venetian *popolo*, its function in the State and role in the construction of the « myth » of the Serenissima, have been considered more rarely.

The study of the Venetian *popolo* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries must be placed within a broader perspective : that of the larger group or category of « the people » (*le peuple, il popolo*), whose historical construction is incorporated within a complex chronological framework. In European societies between the High Middle Ages and the end of the *Ancien Régime*, « the people » was both an entity and an idea in continual transformation. Historians have stressed two particularly important periods in this process: the communal era of the eleventh to twelfth centuries, and the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On the one hand, great attention has been paid to the role of « the people » as the major protagonist in the foundation of the Medieval communes and the urban revolution, in particular in the Italian peninsula⁸, but also in France and Flanders⁹. On the other hand, from the eighteenth century, « the people » became a potent category of political theory, with the emergence of an exogenous discourse which now recognised the group's political capacity¹⁰. « The people » referred as much to a collective status as to a political entity of growing

7 - On the Florentine *popolo*, see Samuel K. COHN, *The Laboring Classes in Renaissance Florence*, New York, Academic Press, 1980 ; Alessandro STELLA, *La révolte des Ciompi: les hommes, les lieux, le travail*, Paris, EHESS, 1993.

8 - Alma POLONI, *Potere al popolo. Conflitti sociali e lotte politiche nell'Italia comunale del Duecento*, Milan, Bruno Mondadori, 2010 ; E. Igor MINEO, « States, Orders and Social Distinction », in A. GAMBERINI and I. LAZZARINI (eds), *The Italian Renaissance State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 323-344. See also Enrico ARTIFONI, « Corporazioni e società di 'popolo': un problema della politica comunale nel secolo XIII », *Quaderni storici*, 25/74, 1990, p. 387-404 ; *Magnati e popolani nell'Italia comunale*, Pistoia, Centro italiano di studi di storia e d'arte, 1997.

9 - Pierre BOGLIONI, Robert DELORT and Claude GAUVARD (eds), *Le petit peuple dans l'Occident médiéval : terminologies, perceptions, réalités*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002.

10 - Déborah COHEN, *La nature du peuple. Les formes de l'imaginaire social (XVIII^e-XXI^e siècles)*, Seyssel, Champ Vallon, 2010, p. 23ff. ; Sandro LANDI, *Naissance de l'opinion publique dans l'Italie moderne: sagesse du peuple et savoir du gouvernement de Machiavel aux Lumières*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006, chap. 4, p. 139ff.

power, in France and England in particular¹¹. In parallel, an endogenous discourse was developing in this period, founded on a new « class consciousness ». In the second half of the nineteenth century, discourse about the « working class » would prevail over the idea of « the people », this semantic transformation reflecting a radical change in the political, social and cultural identity of the group¹². The history of the Venetian *popolo* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries forms part of this evolving story of « the people », and it is essential to keep in mind the specific historicity of the category when analysing its meaning in the Renaissance context. In this period, the definition inherited from the communal age transformed profoundly, without entirely disappearing. At the same time, the strong political connotations that the term acquired during the Enlightenment era must not influence our account of the earlier period retrospectively.

To understand what « the people » (*popolo*) was and who the *actual* common people (the *popolani*) were requires us to combine a terminological and conceptual study of these descriptors with a sociological analysis of the individuals described by them. To deconstruct the rhetorical foundation of the traditional tripartition of Venetian society effectively obliges us to rethink the categories upon which this hierarchy was based, refusing to accept an implicit equivalence between the three social groups and thus not assuming that the third group was an entity *a priori* defined by law. The common people of Venice do not seem to have possessed a specific juridical status, defined by law, conferring on them rights and responsibilities. Nonetheless, since social categories are the fruit of complex interactions between legal norms and social practice, institutions and individuals, representations and

11 - On the construction of a discourse about « the people », in France in particular, see Roger CHARTIER, « Les élites et les gueux. Quelques représentations (XVI^e-XVII^e siècles) », *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 21-7, 1974, p. 376-388 ; D. COHEN, *La nature du peuple...*, *op. cit.* See also Roger CHARTIER, « Culture populaire et culture politique dans l'Ancien Régime. Quelques réflexions », in K. M. BAKER (ed.), *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, vol. I, *The Political Culture of the Old Regime*, Oxford, Pergamon press, 1987, p. 243-258, at p. 245-246 ; Peter BURKE, « We, the People: Popular Culture and Popular Identity in Modern Europe », in S. LASH and J. FRIEDMAN (eds), *Modernity and Identity*, Oxford/Cambridge, Blackwell, 1992, p. 293-308, at p. 300-301. For a methodological discussion, see also Claude GRIGNON and Jean-Claude PASSERON, *Le savant et le populaire. Misérabilisme et populisme en sociologie et en littérature*, Paris, Gallimard/Le Seuil, 1989.

12 - We must be content to cite here only the seminal work of Edward P. THOMPSON, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, Penguin, [1963] 1980.

customs, it is by means of a study of actions and discourses that we must establish a definition of the *popolo* ¹³.

In order to analyse how this negotiation between law and practice worked in the case of the Venetian common people, we believe it most fruitful to concentrate on how they participated in the construction of their « condition » ¹⁴. Inspired by the approach of Simona Cerutti, who recently proposed moving from the study of the foreigner to that of the « condition of foreignness » (*condition d'extranéité*), we wish to consider the condition - or conditions - of the *popolani*. In other words, we wish to understand how, according to their circumstances, and to the spaces and institutions in and with which they interacted, members of this group established who they were and what they could do ¹⁵. Throughout their lives, *popolani* experienced varied and variable conditions, contexts and situations; in their homes, workshops, neighbourhoods, confraternities and parish churches; in their interactions with each other but also with patricians and citizens. The decision to focus on social condition allows us to go beyond an essentialist definition of these individuals, which assigns them particular, and static, identities and qualities, in order to study instead the multiple configurations of their individual existences and experiences, and see how they constructed their own ways of being in the world ¹⁶. Our objective is thus to understand how members of a group theoretically deprived of the means of political action and excluded from the most

13 - Bernard LEPETIT, « Histoire des pratiques et pratique de l'histoire », in B. LEPETIT (ed.), *Les formes de l'expérience. Une autre histoire sociale*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1995, p. 9-22 ; Simona CERUTTI, « Normes et pratiques, ou de la légitimité de leur opposition », *ibid.*, p. 127-149 ; Peter BURKE, « The Language of Orders in Early Modern Europe », in M. L. BUSH (ed.), *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification*, London/New York, Longman, 1992, p. 1-12.

14 - The term « condition » commonly appears in Venetian documents, in particular in the expression « *de che condition che sia* », « whatever be his/her condition », that one finds frequently in the preambles to laws.

15 - Simona CERUTTI, *Etrangers. Etude d'une condition d'incertitude dans une société d'Ancien Régime*, Montrouge, Bayard, 2012, p. 11. The notion of « condition » evokes a rich tradition in French thought, if one thinks of Simone Weil, *La condition ouvrière*, Paris, Gallimard, 1951 ; Bernard LAHIRE, *La condition littéraire : la double vie des écrivains*, Paris, La Découverte, 2006 ; Lilian MATHIEU, *La condition prostituée*, Paris, Textuel, 2007 ; or Pap NDIAYE, *La condition noire. Essai sur une minorité française*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 2008.

16 - For a similar approach, even if applied to a different subject, see Robert DESCIMON and Elie HADDAD (eds), *Épreuves de noblesse. Les expériences nobiliaires de la haute robe parisienne (XVI^e-XVIII^e siècle)*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2010.

important public institutions, nonetheless, continually managed to shape the parameters of their own social and legal existence.

Popolo and popolani in Venice : A matter of definition

At the end of the Middle Ages, Venice was one of the most dynamic and wealthy urban societies in Europe, as well as one of the most densely populated. The *popolani* were by far the largest group within the population of the city, which numbered between 100,000 inhabitants in the middle of the fifteenth century and 170,000 at the end of the sixteenth. Thus the majority of Venetian inhabitants shared the fact of being excluded from the running of political institutions and international trade. Members of this group nonetheless practiced numerous economic activities and contributed in uncalculable ways to the prosperity of Venice, participating in everything from industrial production, to commerce, to artistic creation. Among them were many migrants from the Veneto region, Italy, Dalmatia, Greece and other parts of the Mediterranean, attracted to the city by its economic opportunities, or compelled to move there in search of survival. In effect, the *popolani* bore the brunt of the acute pressures that afflicted Venetian society in this period, from ruinous wars and the loss of parts of the Republic's mainland and Mediterranean empire, to episodes of famine and plague.

Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, master artisans with their own workshops, merchants, shopkeepers and street-sellers, labourers, apprentices and journeymen, shipbuilders and sailors, porters, fishermen, artists and performers, school teachers, prostitutes, domestic servants and gondoliers, barbers and doctors, policemen and public criers, beggars and vagabonds, and numerous others - the *popolani* were not simply the poor or the marginal ¹⁷. Far from being the margins of society, they were its core : the people *were* the city ¹⁸. To be sure, the lives of many *popolani* were marked by precariousness and poverty, as was the case for the majority of unskilled workers, servants, or single women. But

17 - Cf. the stimulating reflections of Giacomo TODSCHINI on the question of marginality and ordinary people in *Visibilmente crudeli. Malviventi, persone sospette e gente qualunque dal Medioevo all'età moderna*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2007.

18 - See the citation from Shakespeare which gives our articles its title. *Coriolanus* contains an ambiguous and ambivalent consideration of the respective roles of the people and the patriciate in city life, and there has been much argument about the politics of the play in this regard.

many others, artisans and merchants, had enough money to own shops and houses, to bequeath to their children objects, clothes and furniture, to travel regularly to the mainland on business or to visit family. Some achieved great wealth or reknown¹⁹. Perhaps these men and women did share a common knowledge of being neither patrician nor citizen, and thus of belonging to the *popolo*, yet it is doubtful how much this identity « by default » had real meaning for them. This categorisation reflected the perspective of the citizen and patrician elites on the rest of the population, more than the conception that the *popolani* had of themselves.

The term *populus/popolo* was commonly used by patrician observers like Marin Sanudo as well as in official documents produced by Venetian public institutions. Usually it referred to the crowd, the masses, the common people. « The piazza was full of *popolo*, so that I can say this: I have never seen so many *popolo* », wrote Sanudo in 1509, after attending a public execution in the main piazza of San Marco²⁰. In August 1500, when the chronicler Girolamo Priuli, also a patrician, referred to the great troubles in which « the Venetian *Signoria* with the *popolo* and all the city²¹» found themselves, he alluded rather to the community which the State was supposed to support and protect. Similarly, at the end of the fifteenth century, Venice's Council of Ten decided to build a new warehouse for flour near Piazza San Marco « for the *commodità del populo* », reported another patrician chronicler, Domenico Malipiero²².

In the political theory of the period, *popolo* assumed a more normative sense²³. It was employed to designate a specific, inferior group, as when Sanudo referred to the patriciate,

19 - Ugo TUCCI, « Carriere popolari e dinastie di mestiere a Venezia », in A. GUARDUCCI (ed.), *Gerarchie economiche e gerarchie sociali, secoli XII-XVIII*, Florence, Le Monnier, 1990, p. 817-851.

20 - « Era la piazza tutta piena di populo, adeo posso dir questo: nunquam vidi tanto populo », Marin SANUDO, *I Diarii*, ed. by R. Fulin *et al.*, Bologna, Forni, [1879-1903] 1969-1970, vol. IX, col. 358, 1 Dec. 1509.

21 - « La Signoria Veneta cum il populo et tuta la citade in grande melanchonia, travagli et fastidij et guerre », Girolamo PRIULI, *I Diarii (1494-1512)*, ed. by R. Cessi, Città di Castello/Bologna, S. Lapi/N. Zanichelli, 1912, vol. XII, p. 31, 12 Aug. 1500.

22 - Domenico MALIPIERO, « Annali Veneti dall'anno 1457 al 1500 », ed. by A. Sagredo, *Archivio storico italiano*, 7-1, 1843, p. 690, 26 June 1492.

23 - Angelo VENTURA, « Scrittori politici e scritture di governo », in G. ARNALDI and M. P. STOCCHI (eds), *Storia della cultura veneta*, Vol. III-3, *Dal primo Quattrocento al Concilio di Trento*, Vicence, Neri Pozza, 1981, p. 513-563. Naturally, Italian humanists and patricians who had received a humanist

citizenry and *popolo*. Other authors reserved the word to describe all those who did not belong to the patriciate, thereby refusing to differentiate citizens and *popolani*. The patrician theorist Gasparo Contarini, for example, distinguished the nobles, who were free, from the people (*populus*), who were servile²⁴. For his part, the Vicentine writer Luigi Da Porto, a few years before Contarini, expressed the view that there was in fact no *popolo* in Venice. Referring to the delicate moment which followed Venice's reversal of fortunes in the War of the League of Cambrai, Da Porto explained to a correspondent why he doubted that the lower classes of the city would rise up and challenge the patrician government : « In Venice, as you know, there is no *popolo* as such²⁵». Here, he used the term in the Tuscan sense, referring to a middling class with a strong political and legal identity and a claim to some role in government. In Venice, he added, aside from some citizens, all the rest « are people [*gente*] so new, that there are very few who have a father born in Venice ; and they are Slavs, Greeks, Albanians, come in the past to stay there to work on ships, and to make money in the various trades [*arti*] that one finds there ». The Venetian *popolo*, in sum, was too incoherent or heterogenous a group, « made up of so many parts » (*fatto ... di tanti membri*), ever to come together and revolt²⁶. Thereby Da Porto highlighted an important distinction between Venice and other great Italian cities of the period.

Thus, although of common use in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the term *popolo* remained a problematic category, even for contemporaries who gave it different meanings depending on the context in which it was used. It could thus refer to the population of the city as a whole, in a relatively indeterminate way ; to the group of inhabitants who did

education were strongly influenced by their reading of the classical authors and descriptions of Roman society when they used the terms « people » or « plebs ». Gerhard RÖSCH, « The Serrata of the Great Council and Venetian Society, 1286-1323 », in J. MARTIN and D. ROMANO (eds), *Venice Reconsidered...*, *op. cit.*, p. 67-88, t p. 72. See also Pietro COSTA, *Cittadinanza*, Rome, Laterza, 2005.

24 - Gasparo CONTARINI, *La Repubblica e i magistrati di Vinegia*, ed. by L. Domenichi, Vinegia, D. Giglio, 1564, p. 148.

25 - « In Vinegia, come sapete, non é popolo da ciò ; e da pochi cittadini in fuori, i quali in effetto odiano la nobiltà, ma sono di pochissimo ardire, tutt' il resto é gente si nuova, che pochissimi sono ch'abbiano il padre nato in Vinegia ; e sono Schiavoni, Greci, Albanesi, venuti a starvi altre volte per lo navigare, e per lo guadagno di diverse arti che vi sono, gli avanzi' delle quali ve li han potuti fermare », Luigi DA PORTO, *Lettere storiche di Luigi da Porto vicentino dall'anno 1509 al 1528*, ed. by B Bressan, Florence, Le Monnier, 1857, p. 128.

26 - « E cosi pure, per essere fatto il detto popolo di tanti membri, non istimo che possa mai per alcun tempo o accidente tumultuare, comeché sia tanto, ch'empia ed occupi una cosi grande città », *ibid.*

not belong to the elite (neither patriciate nor *cittadini*, as specified by Sanudo ; non-patricians as defined by Contarini), and thus similar to the sense of « the plebs », or *popolo minuto* ; to a more abstract political entity, deriving from the medieval and communal tradition (as in Da Porto), strongly conditioned by political theory, but which in fact corresponded more closely to the Florentine or Roman context than to the Venetian one. In fact, the myth of the Republican Venetian government centred on the collective authority of the patriciate and not on the political role played by the *popolo*, as was the case elsewhere in Italy²⁷.

Popolo and *popolani* were not, then, two equivalent categories, and they refer to different realities and distinct levels of analysis. *Popolo* was used by patricians - and sometimes by citizens - to describe what they were not. It constituted a meta-category encompassing all of the « others ». Here, we distinguish it clearly from the term *popolani*, more rarely used in documents of the period (although sometimes appearing in the form *popolari*). This permits us to identify the actual men and women who lived in Venice, the plural form encompassing the heterogeneity of their condition.

One does find a somewhat similar usage of the term in the dialogue on *The Republic of the Venetians* by the Florentine Donato Giannotti, published in 1540. One of the speakers, the Venetian patrician Trifone Gabriele, explains himself thus:

By popolari, I mean those that we might otherwise call plebeians ; and they are those who practice the most vile arts to support themselves, and have no status [grado] in the city. [...] The plebeians, or popolari, are a very great multitude composed of different inhabitants : such as the foreigners who come there to live, attracted by the greed for profit [...] In this same body of popolari, there is also an infinite number of low-level artisans [artigiani minuti], who, as they have never risen above the baseness of their fortune, have not acquired any status in the city. And then there are another multitude of popolari, who act as our servants, such as the boatmen [barcheruoli] and other similar people²⁸.

27 - James S. GRUBB, « When Myths Lose Power: Four Decades of Venetian Historiography », *Journal of Modern History*, 58-1, 1986, p. 43-94, at p. 46. Historians have analysed the sovereignty of the aristocratic government without really posing the question of the place occupied by the *popolani* in the myth.

28 - « Per popolari io intendo quelli che altramente possiamo chiamare plebei ; e sono quelli i quali esercitano arti vilissime per sostenere la vita loro, e nella Città non hanno grado alcuno » ; and further on : « I plebei, o vogliamo dire popolari, sono una moltitudine grandissima, composta di più maniere d'abitatori : sì come sono i forestieri i quali ci vengono ad abitare, tratti dalla cupidità del guadagno. [...] In questo medesimo corpo de' popolari entrano infiniti artigiani minuti ; i quali, per non avere mai

The « plebeians » invoked here, like the *popolo minuto*, were yet more categories that appeared occasionally in Venetian sources, without in fact corresponding to distinct and commonly agreed meanings. Both terms suggested above all the inferior status shared by those inhabitants without rights, and both generally carried derogatory connotations, but without possessing a precise definition.

The historical analysis of the people of Venice in the Renaissance must thus work within the dialectical relationship we have outlined, between the *popolo* on the one hand, considered an ideal group and a political category, and the *popolani* on the other, envisaged as a social group and a sociological category. The complexity and versatility of these terms forces us to overcome an overly rigid conception of Venetian society, taking account of the relative fluidity of social and legal categories in this period. However, in order to consider the *popolo*, we must examine the genesis of the two other groups, the patricians and citizens.

Patricians and Citizens : The Genesis of Legal Status

In Venice, as in numerous other Western societies, the eleventh and twelfth centuries were a crucial moment in the genesis of social descriptors and the elaboration of normative models aimed at ordering the social world. Economic and demographic growth provoked a major drive towards spatial and social organisation²⁹. Secular and ecclesiastical authorities produced numerous singular and collective categories allowing them to classify groups and individuals. From the beginning, each of the Italian communes adopted their own specific institutional organisations, depending on their history and their relationship with a superior power (the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire in particular), which broadly determined the nature of the tie between the ruling elite and the rest of the society³⁰. These varying paths

superato la bassezza della fortuna loro, non hanno acquistato nella Città grado alcuno. Abbiamo ancora un'altra moltitudine di popolari, i quali sono come nostri servidori : sì come sono i barcheruoli, ed altri simili », Donato GIANNOTTI, *Della repubblica de' Viniziani, in Opere politiche*, ed. by F. Diaz, Milan, Marzorati, [1540] 1974, vol. I, p. 27-152, respectively p. 46 and 50-51.

29 - Joseph MORSEL, « Les logiques communautaires entre logiques spatiales et logiques catégorielles (XII^e-XV^e siècles) », *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre*, special issue 2, 2008, <http://cem.revues.org/10082> ; DOI : 10.4000/cem.10082.

30 - Edward COLEMAN, « The Italian Communes: Recent Work and Current Trends », *Journal of Medieval History*, 25-4, 1999, p. 373-397.

created significant distinctions in the terminology used, and, more generally, in institutions and law : *milites*, *magnates*, *populares*, *cives* were terms whose conception and definition differed from one city to another. As a result, it is difficult to transpose to other Italian contexts the analysis of categories and the chronology specific to Venice. Venetian nobles who emerged from the merchant milieu were not the same as Florentine magnates of feudal origin, nor were the *popolo* of the two cities identical, their composition following from that of the elites. And yet, as different as they were, the historical processes which led to the construction of social hierarchies and the elaboration of legal statuses rested on similar stakes for the individuals who participated in them.

In the case of Venice, the articulation of a new discourse about society from the middle of the twelfth century accompanied the creation of the first communal statutes marking the city's independence from the Byzantine Empire³¹. To be sure, Venice's strong attachment to Byzantium had waned long before, however the foundation of the Comune signalled definitive independence. Thus the communal statutes reflected a social order actually existing since the tenth century, if not earlier³². Progressively this order was transformed and re-organised, new social institutions and structures emerging along with a vocabulary invented or adapted to describe them.

In communal discourse and medieval political theory, in Venice as in other Italian communes, the *populus* was the trustee of political sovereignty³³. This group, defined politically and juridically, encompassed the free inhabitants of the city who shared collective authority. The richest and most powerful men gathered in the popular assembly (the *Arengo* or *Concio*), led by the *dux* or doge. Thus the medieval Commune was governed by the *populus*, a political entity that, from its origin, was distinct from the group of the *popolani*. Wealthy merchants and artisans were members of the *Arengo*, but servants, labourers, sailors, porters and fishermen, slaves and beggars were excluded. Early on, a group of *optimates* or *primates*, later known as *judices* and *sapientes*, appeared within the Venetian *populus*. A

31 - Andrea CASTAGNETTI, « Il primo comune », in G. CRACCO and G. ORTALLI (eds.), *Storia di Venezia. Dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, vol. II, *L'età del Comune*, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1995, p. 81-130, at p. 98 ff.

32 - Giorgio ZORDAN, *L'ordinamento giuridico veneziano: lezioni di storia del diritto veneziano con una nota bibliografica*, Padua, CLUEP, 1980, p. 63.

33 - Giorgio CRACCO, *Società e Stato nel medioevo veneziano, secoli XII-XIV*, Florence, Olschki, 1967, p. 28 ff. ; Fernanda SORELLI, « La società », in G. CRACCO and G. ORTALLI (eds), *Storia di Venezia...*, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 509-548, at p. 520-526.

process of internal distinction progressively led this group of the most influential families to impose their will on the rest of the population. These families already perceived themselves as constituting a « nobility », even if this terminology would not be fixed until the end of the thirteenth century³⁴. The capacity of this group of *optimates* to distinguish themselves « from above » allowed for the gradual hierarchisation of Venetian society³⁵.

The roles of the doge, the *populus* and the elite in formation ; their relations and interactions ; the political functions of the assemblies and the guardians of power ; the dialectic between public and private - all these were established progressively, in parallel with the social and juridical definition of the inhabitants of the lagoon. Throughout the thirteenth century, the most influential families secured a monopoly on political authority, seeking to set themselves apart from the rest and gain recognition of their exceptional social status. Inventing and embroidering origin myths, they represented themselves as descendants of the founders of the city, asserting that their ancient status legitimated their seizure of the control and administration of the state. Economic pre-eminence was the other crucial justification for their social and political primacy³⁶. The establishment of assemblies such as the Great Council (*Maggior Consiglio*) and the Minor Council (*Minor Consiglio*) formalized the separation of this small group who managed to subordinate the rest the *populus*. In this way, the Venetian nobility gradually emerged from the *populus*. None of the noble families had feudal origins ; their fortunes and their legitimacy derived from commerce and investment in artisanal activities. As a consequence, there was no conflict, as in Florence or Rome, between an ancient nobility founded on feudal power and a new patriciate enriched by commerce. This is not to say, however, that their rise did not provoke any tensions, and the *Serrata* of the Great Council in 1297 is the best example of this.

Traditionally, historians have considered the *Serrata*, or closing, of the Great Council as the event which marks the institutional and political foundation of the Venetian nobility. Without rehashing drawn-out historiographical debates concerning this complex episode, we can summarise by saying that, between 1280 and 1320, the codification of a list of families authorised to sit in the Great Council marked the formal separation of the nobles from the rest

34 - G. RÖSCH, « The Serrata... », art. cit., p. 68.

35 - Paolo CAMMAROSANO, « Il ricambio e l'evoluzione dei ceti dirigenti nel corso del XIII secolo », in *Magnati e popolani...*, op. cit., p. 17-40.

36 - Gino LUZZATTO, *Storia economica di Venezia, dall'XI al XVI secolo*, Venice, Centro internazionale delle arti e del costume, 1961, p. 72 ff.

of the population³⁷. The richest merchants had managed to transform their economic and social power into a legally recognised authority and political rights. This new nobility benefitted from a legal definition and a formal political and economic monopoly.

The emergence of the noble group and their monopolisation of power led to the abandonment of any conception of the *populus* as an active political entity. The *Arengo* was theoretically retained until 1423 but it lost political authority from the beginning of the fourteenth century³⁸. As the crystallising elite appropriated the authority of the *populus*, the term lost its political value and slid slowly towards a looser meaning of the « non-noble ». However, the communal resonances of the term never quite disappeared, at least from a symbolic point of view. The fact that the *popolo* in other cities in Italy continued to hold some political sway also had significant consequences for how Venetian thinkers and governors conceived of the notion of sovereignty ; they could not entirely ignore the greater role and influence retained by the *popolo* elsewhere in Italy. When, in the middle of the sixteenth century, Contarini wrote that, in Venice, « all the *populus* is divided into two groups, so that some are of a more honourable kind, and others belong to the lowest plebs³⁹ », he referred more rightly to a distinction effective in Florence, where a part of the *popolo* played a political role. Contarini continued to use *popolo* to describe a group of recognised honour whom numerous other theorists called *cittadini*, employing here the Italian terminology rather than the specifically Venetian one.

After the *Serrata*, the strength of the Venetian patriciate lay in the constraining legal framework which defined it and which reduced to a minimum the possibility of any negotiation, adaptation or adjustment to its limits. Subsequent entries into the patriciate were extremely rare, at least until the seventeenth century, and patrician families followed a strict marital strategy of endogamy. However, the process of definition continued throughout the

37 - G. Rösch has also shown clearly how the reification of the institutional reforms of 1297 dates from the fifteenth century and reflects the conceptions of chroniclers from that later period more than the original event itself. G. RÖSCH, « The Serrata... », art. cit., p. 71-72 and 83.

38 - William J. BOUWSMA, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968, p. 60-61. From 1423, with the election of Doge Francesco Foscari, the new doge was no longer ritually submitted to the approval of the people, but presented to the public as one already chosen by the patrician governors.

39 - « Tutto'l popolo e diviso in due maniere, percioche certi ne sono di piu honorato genere altri della bassa plebe », G. CONTARINI, *La Repubblica...*, op. cit., p. 148.

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries⁴⁰. Assured of its exceptional status and political and economic control, the patriciate continued to reinforce its distinction and sovereignty by means of customs, lifestyle, behaviour and by the promotion of a discourse justifying its own social superiority. As in other parts of Western Europe, belonging to the noble group meant belonging to a lineage : the recognition and the hereditary transmission of a patronym and a patrimony, a familial memory, a genealogical line which inscribed the *ca'* (house) in the history of the city.

From the fourteenth century, the families excluded from the Great Council after the *Serrata* also strove to institutionalise their rights. By that point, whatever their fortune or position before 1297, these families were identified as part of the *popolo*, deprived of any political role. The richest and more prestigious of these families, however, were not satisfied with this situation and determinedly fought to obtain some recognition of their status as well as certain economic and political privileges. This « second elite » gradually acquired a recognised status of citizenship, or *cittadinanza*, an identity that would remain fluid, shifting, and long subject to negotiation nonetheless⁴¹. Those accorded the status of *cittadini originarii* were inhabitants who could claim an ancient residence in the city in addition to sufficient economic capital. They received a number of economic privileges, and had a monopoly on careers in the state bureaucracy, particularly in the Chancellery (*Cancelleria*). Nevertheless, they remained excluded from the patrician councils and assemblies which governed the state. Others, citizens by privilege, enjoyed certain economic rights, without being able to consider themselves entirely Venetian⁴². The distinction between citizens by privilege and the *popolo* was never easy to establish, in particular when it came to defining the limits and prohibitions surrounding the practice of manual trades⁴³.

40 - See G. RÖSCH, « The Serrata... », art. cit. ; Stanley CHOJNACKI, « La formazione della nobiltà dopo la Serrata », in G. ARNALDI, G. CRACCO and A. TENENTI (eds), *Storia di Venezia...*, *op. cit.*, vol. III, *La formazione dello stato patrizio*, p. 641-725, at p. 679 ff.

41 - Cf. note 4.

42 - Two levels of citizenship by privilege could be accorded to rich merchants or artisans who established themselves in Venice (*de intus ; de intus et de extra*). These statuses guaranteed economic and commercial privileges and obligations. Citizens by privilege, could not, however, participate in the running of the Chancellery. See Reinhold C. MUELLER, *Immigrazione e cittadinanza nella Venezia medievale*, Rome, Viella, 2010.

43 - Andrea ZANNINI, « Il 'pregiudizio meccanico' a Venezia in età moderna. Significato e trasformazioni di una frontiera sociale », in M. MERIGGI and A. PASTORE (eds), *Le regole dei*

In the course of this long process of formalisation, only the *cittadini originarii* seem to have established clear limits to their status, even if this was never perfectly delineated. In the 1480s, the Council of Ten decreed that *cittadini originarii* had to be able to show at least two generations of ancestors living in Venice, soon after raised to three. In 1569, new laws dictated the conditions of belonging to the group, affirming the requirement for three generations of ancestors resident in the city, none of whom could have practiced a manual trade. Despite this, the category of citizen never was completely stable, and processes of adjustment and negotiation continued.

The *popolo* : political fiction or legal reality?

From the fourteenth century, the patricians and citizens strove for the legal clarification and recognition of their status. But what became of the *popolo* in the meantime? As a category of political discourse, the term evolved significantly. It no longer described a collective entity at the heart of Venetian political life but rather signified a vaguely-defined group incorporating all those who were neither patrician nor citizen. The *popolo* was no longer defined in and of itself, but by default. Conscious of their exceptionality and superiority, the patricians - and to a lesser extent, the *cittadini* - had made themselves the measure of social prestige, the category of the *popolo* serving to better define them as well as to characterise those over whom they held power.

Following the *Serrata*, theoretically the patriciate became the only political group able to defend the interests of the community and the public good, supplanting the collective sovereignty of the *popolo*. This shift from the *popolo* as the incarnation of the common good, inscribed in the charters of the Commune, to the *popolo* as a collection of individuals without status or privilege, was a crucial one in the genesis of Venetian society. Nevertheless, this shift did not completely erase certain traits inherited from the earlier period. The communal tradition implied a definition of the *popolo* as agents with political and legal authority, and this persisted at a rhetorical level. In effect, the patricians co-opted the language of the *popolo*, of the common good and civic republicanism, in order to justify their oligarchical

mestieri e delle professioni. Secoli XV-XIX, Milan, Franco Angeli, 2001, p. 36-51 ; Anna BELLAVITIS, « 'Ars mechanica' e gerarchie sociali a Venezia tra XVI e XVII secolo », in M. ARNOUX and P. MONNET (eds), *Technicien dans la cité en Europe occidentale, 1250-1650*, Rome, École française de Rome, 2004, p. 161-179.

rule, as occurred in Florence⁴⁴. It is in the light of this complex Medieval heritage that the *popolo* in Renaissance Venice must be seen.

The legal definition of the *popolo* as a group remains harder to ascertain. In order to understand the nature and characteristics of any hypothetical « popular status », we must consider the dialectical and delicately balanced relationships between law and practice, between legal definitions and individual capacities, between the roles of institutions and the actions of people. However, the law is a necessary starting point, and it is a problematic one in the case of the *popolani*. In the Venetian records, no inhabitant of Venice seems to have identified him or herself as a *popolano* or as a member of the *popolo*, just as administrators almost never used these terms to describe a legal status⁴⁵. Patricians and citizens were, on the other hand, clearly identified by a terminology and specific titles : *gentiluomo*, *nobel homo* or *vir nobilis ser* for the first ; *fidel nostro*, *cittadin nostro* or *cives venetis* for the second. This is a fundamental difference, as the classic tripartite model of Venetian society leads to the assumption that the three social categories were equivalent to each other, so that membership of the *popolo* rested upon a recognised legal foundation. Up to now, no historian has examined the legal texts and laws closely in search of a positive definition of the status of the *popolo* in Venice. Despite the many, very erudite works of Venetian historiography produced since the end of the nineteenth century, none seem to have identified any document outlining the legal framework of the *popolo* in the archives. It is possible that such a document exists and has not yet come to light ; the only way to confirm this would be a systematic survey of key archival series, such as the deliberations of the Senate and Collegio, of the Great Council and the Council of Ten⁴⁶.

44 - John M. NAJEMY, « The Dialogue of Power in Florentine Politics », in A. MOLHO, K. A. RAAFLAUB and J. EMLÉN (eds), *City States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy: Athens and Rome, Florence and Venice*, Stuttgart, F. Steiner Verlag, 1991, p. 269-288.

45 - Indeed, in a survey of 65 trials prosecuted by the Avogaria di Comun (*Miscellanea Penale*) between the middle of the fifteenth century and the end of the sixteenth, collecting the declarations of 400 accused persons, plaintiffs and witnesses, we have found only one occurrence of *popular* to describe a person ; Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASV), Avogaria di Comun, *Miscellanea Penale*, busta 174, fasc. 14, Aug. 1500, « le zovene popular ».

46 - The Venetian statutes date from the thirteenth century, Luigi GENUARDI (ed.), « Summula Statutorum Floridorum di Andrea Dandolo », *Nuovo Archivio Veneto*, 21, 1911, p. 436-467 ; Roberto CESSI (ed.), « Gli statuti veneziani di Jacopo Tiepolo del 1242 e le loro glosse », *Memorie del Reale Istituto Veneto di*

Nonetheless, as such documents have not emerged, it is more likely that they do not exist, and that, with Dennis Romano, we can affirm that « the mass of Venetian residents [...] enjoyed no special privileges or special legal status⁴⁷ ». Like many early modern societies, Venice did not possess a constitution, nor legal texts specifying the status of its people. Customs and ad hoc laws outlined the norms by which people lived but these cannot be found gathered in a single legal corpus. As such, the *popolani* were defined rather by what they were not and by what they did not have.

Popolani : a definition by default

Neither patricians nor citizens, the *popolani* were excluded from the institutions and structures of government. They were not permitted to participate in any assembly or council, nor in the running of the Chancellery⁴⁸. They were also excluded from the most highly remunerative economic activities such as the organisation of international commerce, especially the management of maritime trade.

In addition, while the patricians and citizens were identified by a family name and belonging to a lineage, the majority of the *popolani* did not possess surnames, even in the sixteenth century. In Venetian sources, most of them continued to name themselves using their first name and that of their father, to which they might add the name of their trade, their original place of provenance or place of residence in Venice. This is confirmed by a glance at the archives of the Cinque alla Pace, the magistracy of summary justice in charge of resolving minor conflicts between inhabitants of the city. In the case records of the magistracy, notaries dutifully recorded the identity of the plaintiff and the accused, the nature of the conflict and the amount of the fine to which the guilty party was subject, all according to pre-established formulae. The information recorded was the product of interaction between ordinary people and the notary. The *popolani*, when asked to present themselves, used common categories,

scienze, lettere ed arti, 1938, vol. XXX-2, p. 1-45. The laws and regulations prior to the Serrata are dispersed through the deliberations of various magistracies.

47 - D. ROMANO, *Patricians and Popolani...*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

48 - The *popolani* nonetheless performed many functions of urban maintenance, police and surveillance for the functioning of Venetian institutions. They provided the supply of these « street-level bureaucrats », whose importance for early modern societies we are now reevaluating. If it is not our intention here to develop this aspect of the capacities of the *popolani*, we note nonetheless that it was an essential dimension of their political condition.

presumably the same they employed amongst themselves in everyday life and which we find in other sources (contracts, wills or trials, for example). Nonetheless, notaries had to select and codify this information, sometimes translating it, and surely transforming it slightly. Hence identification was a double process of self-description and of description by a representative of power, and the resulting document reflects this negotiation and adaptation between common and quotidian categories and official ones ⁴⁹.

In this sense, the records of the Cinque alle Pace tell us something about the forms of identification used by and among the *popolani* in the sixteenth century. Surveying cases heard between October 1544 and July 1545, we can observe how three hundred of the accused were identified ⁵⁰: 125 were identified only by their first name; 56 by their first name and a geographical indication (Marco Antonio furlan, Francesco Cremonexe, Antonio Trentin, Battista da Venexia, Jacomo Tedesco, Madalena da Spalato, Jan Lituano *over polacho*); 25 by a first name and a nickname introduced by *ditto* meaning called or known as (eg. Julian *ditto* Cassan); 19 by a family tie such as son of, brother of (eg. Gasparo de Zuan, Zane *fo fiol de* Stephano, Agustin *fradello de* Zanmaria, Domenego de Lugrezia, Hercule *nevodo de* Bastian); 57 possessed what might be identified as a surname (Luca Moretto, Marco della Gobba, Domenego Pontoio), which would often have been inherited from the progressive transformation and stabilisation of a nickname or other elements such as geographical origin; the other eighteen combined a number of these elements.

The relationship of the *popolani* to the history of the city must have been conditioned by this common lack of a surname, a phenomenon that one finds in other Italian and European cities in this period, even though in most places by this point the majority did possess a name combining two elements ⁵¹. The Venetian *popolani* could thus not claim to be closely tied to the city in the same way as did the patricians ⁵². The lack of named *popolani* lineages no doubt hindered the preservation and transmission of family memory. That said, the

49 - On methods of identification in the early modern period, see Valentin GROEBNER, *Schein der Person. Steckbrief, Ausweis und Kontrolle im Europa des Mittelalters*, Munich, C. H. Beck, 2004.

50 - ASV, Cinque Anziani alla Pace, busta 2.

51 - Patrice BECK, Monique BOURIN and Pascal CHAREILLE, « Nommer au Moyen Âge : du surnom au patronyme », in G. BRUNET, P. DARLU and G. ZEI (eds), *Le patronyme. Histoire, anthropologie, société*, Paris, CNRS, 2001, p. 13-38.

52 - On the family memory of patricians and their relation to the history of the city, see James S. GRUBB, « Memory and Identity: Why Venetians Didn't Keep Ricordanze », *Renaissance Studies*, 8-4, 1994, p. 375-387.

memorialisation of origins and of belonging were enacted in other ways, thanks to oral tradition, to family stories and histories. When called to testify before other magistracies, such as the Avogaria di Comun, the *popolani* did demonstrate their capacity to articulate a discourse about time. For example, in October 1557, Valeria, a lay nun belonging to the order of the Pizzochere, confirmed that she knew a certain Alvise Negro, and that it was « forty years that I know him from the neighbourhood [*per vicinanza*], since he lives at San Rafael, in the courtyard of the Gradenigo house⁵³ ». Valeria, like numerous other witnesses, was able to date events, even ones long past, and to situate them in specific periods and moments.

The Condition of the *Popolani*

Denied political rights and economic privileges, deprived of a patronym, the *popolani* would seem to have been defined more by default than in any positive manner. Indifference on the part of the patricians meant they did not seek to clarify the status of these individuals without rights. While they refined the contours of their own group, and agreed on a legal definition of the citizens, the patricians allowed the *popolani* to remain in a state of relative uncertainty. In comparison to the relative clarity that distinguished the legally-defined entities of the patriciate and the original citizenry, the composition of the *popolani* appears vague.

From the legal point of view, the collective condition of the *popolani* thus remained uncertain. They did not possess a clear group status, determining rights and duties. The governors of Venice did not consider it either useful or necessary to produce a legal framework outlining any « popular » status, since they did not intend to concede this group rights and privileges, and the payment of tax did not depend on their status. In fiscal terms, the *popolani* were subject to innumerable commercial taxes and customs which weighed on daily transactions, but only the richest among them were expected to pay direct taxation, which was determined by property-ownership and thus in general the preserve of patricians and citizens⁵⁴. The fiscal obligations of the majority of *popolani* were not determined by a specific legal status : all the inhabitants of Venice were subject to indirect taxes.

However, their lack of rights and condition of legal uncertainty still left a space of possibilities in which the *popolani* could define themselves. To be sure, their political and

53 - ASV, Avogaria di Comun, Miscellanea Penale, busta 266, fasc. 7 (Oct. 1557).

54 - Jean-Claude HOCQUET, « Venice », in R. BONNEY (ed.), *The Rise of the Fiscal State in Europe, c. 1200-1815*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 381-415.

economic submission to the patricians, and to a lesser extent to the *cittadini*, determined their condition in part. Like all early modern societies, Venice was built on social inequality, the domination of the elites imposing a political, social and economic order which the *popolani* had little power to change. Hence, they shared a collective identity defined by their common position of inferiority. That said, if the subordination of the *popolani* defined and delimited their interactions with patricians, that subordination carried little weight in innumerable daily situations in which the existence of the *popolani* had nothing to do with their relationship to the dominant classes. Most of the time, the *popolani* of Venice inhabited a world to which the patricians had limited access, their inferior status thus not assuming the same import.

In their daily lives, the *popolani* defined who they were through practices which depended more on where, when and with whom they interacted than on their submission to the patriciate. To use the expression of Andrea Zannini, *popolani* possessed a « multiple identity », fluid, contextual, adaptable, and dependant on the places in which they found themselves, whether in the city or on the regular trips that many took back and forth between periphery and capital⁵⁵. The condition of the *popolani* was characterised by its versatility, and it was constructed in situations and interactions, according to the place, time and other people present. More significant than being a *popolano* or *popolana*, was being a man or a woman, young or old, in the workshop or in the neighbourhood, in the tavern or the street, at work or attending mass, with patricians or peers, one's boss or one's employees. Condition depended on context, and was the object of negotiation by individuals with social agency, in different situations. Of course the *popolani* were not the only ones to put their condition to the test in these ways. However, both patricians and citizens had the advantage of being able to stabilise and reinforce their condition thanks to legal categories and statuses which they had worked to define, which was not the case for the *popolani*.

So how and when did the *popolani* experience their various conditions? Certain places and institutions constituted privileged spaces and often left extremely detailed records, recounting the actions, decisions, discussions, and relations between *popolani*. As shown by the rich historiographical tradition devoted to ordinary people, the justice system constituted one of these spaces⁵⁶. In Venice, justice and equity were essential political values and were

55 - A. ZANNINI, « L'identità multipla... », art. cit.

56 - Within an extensive bibliography, one obviously thinks of Emmanuel LEROY LADURIE, *Montaillou, village occitan, de 1294 à 1324*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975 ; Carlo GINZBURG, *Il formaggio e i vermi. Cosmo di un mugnaio friulano*, Turin, Einaudi, 1976 ; Natalie Z. DAVIS, *Fiction in the Archives:*

among the principal rhetorical figures employed by governors and governed, judges and judged. All the inhabitants of Venice, « whatever their condition », could in effect have recourse to the courts and this was a foundation of the political community of the Republic⁵⁷. The condition of the *popolani* was constructed in relation to the justice system, via the possibility of appealing to judicial institutions, which established belonging to the city and the body politic.

More obviously, *popolani* experienced and elaborated their condition as they made their way through the social spaces and institutions they frequented on a daily basis, above all the professional community and the guild. Professional activity - one's place in the workshop, position in the professional hierarchy, role in the guild - contributed to the condition of the *popolani*, for both men and women, even if people might also change professions over their lifetimes. As an example, if we consider the three hundred cases judged by the Cinque alla Pace mentioned earlier, almost 260 out of 300 defendants were identified by profession : from a diamond cutter (*diamentier*) to a sausage maker (*luganegher*), from a housekeeper (*massera*) to a secretary (*scrivanello*), from a bombardier (*bombardier*) to a prostitute (*compagnessa*) and an interpreter (*truzeman*). This habit of identifying people by their professional activity was a way of categorising used by the people interrogated as well as by representatives of the state.

Guilds included the more qualified workers, men but also numerous women who participated in a profession by virtue of being daughters, wives or widows of masters⁵⁸. The 1563 census recorded that about 127,000 of Venice's population of circa 168,000 were

Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1987 ; Claude GAUVARD, « *De grace especial* ». *Crime, État et société en France à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1991 ; Arlette FARGE, *Le cours ordinaire des choses dans la cité du XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1994 ; D. COHEN, *La nature...*, *op. cit.*

57 - See James E. SHAW, *The Justice of Venice: Authorities and Liberties in the Urban Economy, 1550-1700*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 209 ; Gaetano COZZI, « Authority and the Law in Renaissance Venice », in J. R. Hale (ed.), *Renaissance Venice*, *op. cit.*, p. 293-345 ; Edward MUIR, « Was There Republicanism in the Renaissance Republics? Venice After Agnadello », in J. MARTIN and D. ROMANO (eds), *Venice Reconsidered...*, *op. cit.*, p. 137-167.

58 - R. MACKENNEY, *Tradesmen and Traders...*, *op. cit.* ; D. ROMANO, *Patricians and Popolani...*, *op. cit.*, p. 65 ff. ; A. ZANNINI, « L'identità multipla... », art. cit., p. 253 ff. ; Robert C. DAVIS, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal: Workers and Workplace in the Preindustrial City*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

artisans or members of artisan families. Although only perhaps a third of these individuals, or less, belonged to guilds, most of the rest moved in one way or another in the economic and social sphere governed by them⁵⁹. Guilds were spaces in which masters of particular trades could gather, forge useful social and business connections, protect the interests of their professional group, publicly demonstrate their piety, patriotism and contribution to the economy, and seek aid and support in times of trouble. Individuals elected to positions of leadership within the guilds generally were the more established, influential and upstanding, members of prominent families within the trade. Hence, guilds were spaces in which *popolani* could perform essential political functions which shaped the daily life of Venetian inhabitants, even if guild members could not exercise wider public authority⁶⁰.

The *mariegole* – the trade statutes that began to be drawn up from the thirteenth century – reveal that members of each profession produced and employed a multitude of social and professional categories, indicating the density and complexity of the identities and statuses produced inside the workshop and the guild⁶¹. Here again, the text of the *mariegola* reflects negotiations between the scribe and artisan members of the guilds, even if, in this case, the scribe was himself often a guildsman. It was up to him to adapt and record in an official language the words and expressions employed by the guildsmen to describe the organisation of their corporation. The result was a precise discourse about the institution and the hierarchies that cut across it. For example, the *mariegola dei veluderi* (velvet makers), compiled in the fourteenth century, shows a complex use of categories such as male or female master (*maistro over maistra*), workers (*lavoranti*), male or female apprentices (*garçoni o garçone*), journeymen (*compagni*), male or female slaves (*sclavo, over sclava*), Venetian or foreigner (*veneciano, forestier, si terrero como forestier*), boys or servants (*puti e famuli, puti e garçoni, puto o fante*)⁶².

59 - A. ZANNINI, « Il ‘pregiudizio meccanico’... », art. cit., p. 41-42.

60 - Rosa M. SALZBERG, « Masculine Republics: Establishing Authority in the Early Modern Venetian Printshop », in S. BROOMHALL and J. VAN GENT (eds), *Governing Masculinities in the Early Modern Period: Regulating Selves and Others*, Farnham/Burlington, Ashgate, 2011, p. 47-65.

61 - M. MERIGGI and A. PASTORE (eds), *Le regole dei mestieri...*, op. cit.

62 - Simone RAUCH (ed.), *Le mariegole delle arti dei tessitori di seta: i Veluderi (1347-1474) e i Samitari (1370- 1475)*, Venice, Fonti Storia di Venezia, 2009. On professional categories, see the classic work of Alain DESROSIÈRES et Laurent THÉVENOT, *Les catégories socioprofessionnelles*, Paris, La Découverte, [1988] 2002. See also Claire JUDE DE LARIVIÈRE and Georges HANNE, « Occupational Naming Conventions: Historicity, Actors, Interactions », in R. DIAZ-BONE and R. SALAIS (eds), special issue

In this way, members of guilds helped to determine normative categories which also worked to order and categorise Venetian society beyond the trades. Even if the laws enacted by the patrician government did not recognise the status of the *popolani*, the rules of each trade were established as norms and ultimately provided something of a legal framework which informed the condition of working *popolani*. Nonetheless, unlike in cities such as Florence where, under the Republic, guilds were important actors in political life, in Venice the guilds had no role whatsoever in the government of the state. Because of the great number of guilds in Venice (nearly 200 by the sixteenth century, of varying sizes and levels of prestige, but more numerous than anywhere else in Italy), no single one could become too influential, possibly helping to fragment the artisan community and prevent them forming a political pressure group⁶³. Furthermore, many workers in Venice did not belong to any guild at all : the vast majority of unqualified workers, street sellers and porters (*facchini*), servants and prostitutes, for example. The census of 1563 recorded 13,000 servants, who had no guild to represent and organise them⁶⁴. Instead, the private environment of the household must have offered servants something of the social identity that a guild could not give them, while popular literature gives some indication of a feeling of belonging among servants, as in a satirical work from the sixteenth century which imagined a « conspiracy » of housekeepers (*massare*) against some street singers who slandered them in song⁶⁵.

Whether part of a guild or not, the great majority of the *popolani* worked and this was a crucial aspect of their condition. Their social world was defined by the daily practice of a professional activity. Trades were criss-crossed by multiple hierarchies, determined by the functioning of the workshop, by knowledge and talent, experience and skill⁶⁶. Certain activities were more honourable than others ; some required daily contact with wealthy clientele and expensive merchandise in central city spaces, while others were relegated to the margins of the city, such as small shops in the peripheral neighbourhoods frequented by

« Conventions and Institutions From a Historical Perspective », *Historical Social Research*, 36-4, 2011, p. 82-102.

63 - Luca MOCARELLI, « Guilds Reappraised: Italy in the Early Modern Period », *International Review of Social History*, 53-S16, 2008, p. 159-178, at p. 163.

64 - D. ROMANO, *Housecraft and Statecraft...*, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

65 - *La congiura che fanno le massare, contra coloro che cantano la sua canzone. Con la risposta, che elle debbano tacere per suo meglio. Cosa molto ridicolosa & bella*, Venice, Al Segno della Regina, 1584.

66 - See Richard SENNETT, *The Craftsman*, London, Penguin, 2008.

fishermen and arsenal workers. The *popolani* possessed their own spaces, to which patricians had little access, and in which they experienced and constructed their condition.

Beyond their professional activity, *popolani* could participate in numerous *scuole* or lay confraternities⁶⁷. There were about one hundred *scuole piccole* (minor confraternities) and six *scuole grandi* (major confraternities) in the city by the sixteenth century, another very important space for *popolani* to find community and a sense of belonging. The two types of institution were somewhat different, the *scuole grandi* enjoying greater prestige and gathering in large, lavishly decorated buildings which reflected the fortune of their members, many of whom were patricians. They were nonetheless places of encounter for different elements of Venetian society, particularly important for *cittadini* who could socialise with patricians there. The *scuole piccole* included mostly, if not exclusively, *popolani*, brought together by their shared place of residence, professional activity, devotion to a particular saint or shared geographical origin. The religious and charitable practices associated with the *scuole* were also forms of social and political action which encouraged a feeling of belonging and contributed to the condition of the *popolani*.

The *popolani* were equally tied to other social spaces in the city, in particular the parish, which corresponded in Venice to the administrative district of the *contrada*, and was the location of numerous civic and religious celebrations, both quotidian and extraordinary⁶⁸. All inhabitants of Venice, patricians, citizens or *popolani*, might identify themselves by their parish of residence, this piece of information, along with their professional activity, being among the most commonly used, especially when lack of a patronym rendered necessary other criteria of identification⁶⁹. Even if numerous studies have insisted on the declining

67 - See B. S. PULLAN, *Rich and Poor...*, *op. cit.*, p. 96, on the composition of the *scuole grandi* of San Rocco and San Marco, classified by trade. There were numerous textile and clothing workers in both *scuole*, as well as many in the food and wine trades in the first, and many Arsenal workers, seamen and boatmen in the second. On the *scuole piccole*, see also Francesca ORTALLI, *Per salute delle anime e delli corpi: scuole piccole a Venezia nel tardo Medioevo*, Venice, Marsilio/Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 2001.

68 - The parish was the sacred space defined by the church, the *contrada* the basic administrative and civic division of the city. See Edward MUIR, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981, p. 140 ff.; Joseph WHEELER, «Neighbourhoods and Local Loyalties in Renaissance Venice», in A. COWAN (ed.), *Mediterranean Urban Culture, 1400-1700*, Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 2000, p. 31-42; D. ROMANO, *Patricians and Popolani...*, p. 119 ff.

69 - More than three quarters of the three hundred defendants of our sample from the Cinque alla Pace archives (cited above, n. 50) were identified by the place where they lived, which could be the *sestiere*, the parish, or a more specific location (Rialto, rio Marin, ai Frari, in Biri).

importance of the parish from the Late Middle Ages, it seems, nonetheless, that even in the sixteenth century, this local attachment remained a potent one for the *popolani*⁷⁰. Many social and political institutions continued to be organised partly on the basis of the *contrada* or *sestier* (one of the six districts of Venice), such as the police patrols in which *popolani* had to participate. Charity for the poor also was tied to belonging to a neighbourhood⁷¹. And it is well-known how the registration of births and deaths from the second half of the sixteenth century reinforced the administrative role of the parish ; the first civil status documents preserved in Venice came out of this context⁷².

Parishes and the more restricted neighborhood (*vicinanza*) were important spaces of association and belonging where many everyday activities took place, and where people could experience and construct their condition. In legal sources, witnesses frequently evoked the *vicinanza*, a space where people exchanged information, recognised and interacted with others. In a city as densely populated as Venice, where the majority of inhabitants had no patronym, it was necessary to be able to identify people at the neighbourhood level, also the primary space where reputations were built⁷³. The *popolani* thus constructed this space of interaction, communication and knowledge which they themselves sought to shape and control. In 1510, after Zuan Orsini complained against his servant, Lucrezia, who he accused of trying to poison him, the judges of the Avogaria di Comun interrogated the woman :

- *They ask her : Do you have friendships in the neighbourhood ?*

70 - On the decline of local belonging at the end of the Middle Ages, see Elisabeth CROUZET-PAVAN, « *Sopra le acque salse* ». *Espaces, pouvoir et société à Venise à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Rome, École française de Rome, 1992.

71 - Brian S. PULLAN, « The Famine in Venice and the New Poor Law 1527-1529 », *Bollettino dell'istituto di storia della società dello stato veneziano*, 5/6, 1963-1964, p. 141-202, at p. 172-173 ; *id.*, « Support and Redeem: Charity and Poor Relief in Italian Cities From the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century », in J. HENDERSON (ed.), special issue « Charity and the Poor in Medieval and Renaissance Europe », *Continuity and Change*, 3-2, 1988, p. 177-208, at p. 186.

72 - Even before the influence of the Council of Trent, see the Necrology of the Health Board (Provveditori alla Sanità), organised by parish : ASV, Provveditori alla Sanità, reg. 794, Necrologie 1537-1539.

73 - On the role of *fama* or reputation in the construction of popular identities, see the works of C. GAUVARD, in particular « *De grace especial* »..., *op. cit.* ; *id.*, « La fama, une parole fondatrice », *Médiévales*, 12-24, 1993, p. 5-13.

- *She responds : Yes.*
- *Have you spoken with anyone ?*
- *No.*
- *Is this matter known in the neighbourhood ?*
- *Yes, all the neighbours know it* ⁷⁴.

Anna de Pastrovich, another servant called to testify, confirmed that « it is said here in the neighbourhood » that Lucrezia had poisoned her master, but cited another witness, Bona, the wife of a *barcaruol*, « who resides in the neighbourhood ». Bona instead claimed to have heard Lucrezia explain : « on the quay there, in the neighbourhood, it is believed that [*è fama che*] Madonna Marietta, the wife of Mister Zuan Orsini was the one who poisoned him ».

The neighborhood was a particularly crucial space for the definition of female identity and honour, as testified by the numerous references to *vicinanza*, as to the courtyard or the street, encountered in the gossip or public rumors circulating in the city in this case and many others ⁷⁵. Nevertheless, this does not mean that women were restricted to their immediate neighborhoods ; as Monica Chojnacka has shown, *popolane* might range all over the city on social or business matters ⁷⁶.

The shared spaces of everyday life - the street, the courtyard, the workshop, the tavern or the markets of Rialto - created a common sense of belonging to a social world, which in itself generated different possible and changing conditions. More than being a *popolano/a*, one was an « inhabitant of Venice » (*abitante di Venezia*), a description one finds in numerous documents, not synonymous with « *da Venezia* ». Situation and contingency compelled people to claim one identity or another. At times these myriad smaller identities could amount to a larger one, such as the sense of belonging to the body of city dwellers, cutting across class lines, or to the larger and more disparate entity of the Venetian state and empire. For example, the gatherings of inhabitants around the benches of charlatans and street

74 - ASV, Avogaria di Comun, *Miscellanea Penale*, busta 243, fasc. 1 (June 1510).

75 - See, for example, ASV, Avogaria di Comun, *Miscellanea Penale*, busta 159, fasc. 22 (Nov. 1434) : the complaint of Isabeta, widow of ser Marco Bonacorsi, against her brother who came « chridando per tuta la visinanza ... le qual cosse per molte persone de la visinanza ve se pora provar ». See also Elizabeth HORODOWICH, *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 134 ff. ; M. CHOJNACKA, *Working Women...*, *op. cit.*, p. 50 ff. ; Dennis ROMANO, « Gender and the Urban Geography of Renaissance Venice », *Journal of Social History*, 23-2, 1989, p. 339-353.

76 - M. CHOJNACKA, *Working Women...*, *op. cit.*, p. 103 ff.

singers in the piazza must have been a source of shared experiences, hard as these are to evidence. Songs, cries and spoken accounts of recent battles or the latest political events brought audience members together into animated discussions and speculation. Important too were the impromptu congregations at moments of civic celebration, such as the recovery of Venetian territories lost and regained in the Italian Wars. This was testified in 1512 by Jacopo son of the late Natale, a maker of oars (*remer*) from Ragusa (now Dubrovnik, then part of Venetian territory) who lived on the little island of Murano, less than one kilometre north of Venice. Jacopo was tried for having taken delivery of contraband goods along with some other *popolani* whom he had met in Piazza San Marco, where they had gone to « hear the publication of the League ⁷⁷» (undoubtedly the Holy League of October 1511). Away from the main piazza, the forecourts of parish churches and the squares or *campi* of the city hosted regular gatherings, where people exchanged information, discussed and debated current events, participating in a city-wide political culture that went far beyond the boundaries of the ruling class ⁷⁸. The condition of the *popolani* could not be reduced to a picturesque « popular culture » ; there could be a clear political intention in their actions and words.

The *popolani* of Venice thus shared places, institutions and moments which generated a sense of belonging to the city and a common condition, even if a fluid and flexible one. The city *made* the people, who more than a legal and political entity were a collective founded on quotidian trials, on the experience of communal life, on the construction of a common space in which to test out their condition. That they « belonged » to the *popolo* was not the most important fact. More significant was their position in a professional hierarchy, their networks within and beyond the neighbourhood, their involvement in significant events which defined, at least temporarily, who they were and what they could do. For some, this condition was strongly marked by social and economic vulnerability while others enjoyed more substantial and secure resources. But all were able to adapt their actions and their discourses to specific situations, above and beyond their submission to the elites.

77 - ASV, Podestà di Murano, busta 212 (4 March 1512). On rituals in Venice, see E. MUIR, *Civic Ritual...*, *op. cit.*

78 - Filippo DE VIVO, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, especially p. 89 ff. ; Claire JUDGE DE LARIVIÈRE, « Du Broglio à Rialto. Cris et chuchotements dans l'espace public à Venise au XVI^e siècle », in P. BOUCHERON and N. OFFENSTADT (eds), *L'espace public au Moyen Âge. Débats autour de Jürgen Habermas*, Paris, PUF, 2011, p. 119-130 ; R. M. SALZBERG and M. ROSPOCHER, « An Evanescent Public Sphere... », *art. cit.*

‘Terrier o Forestier’

A visitor to Venice at the beginning of the sixteenth century might have passed by the *calle degli Albanesi* (street of the Albanians), the *Scuola degli Schiavoni* (Confraternity of the Slavs) or the *Fontego dei Tedeschi* (the German merchants’ house), reminding him or her that Venice, already one of the great cosmopoli of the Middle Ages, was by then a veritable melting pot⁷⁹. Foreigners were numerous ; they settled in Venice more or less permanently, married and worked there, or resided there for short periods before returning to their place of origin or departing for more favourable horizons. The image of Venice populated by foreigners became a rhetorical commonplace, as exemplified by the comments of Da Porto or Giannotti cited above, or the famous declaration of the French ambassador, Philippe de Commynes, that « the majority of their people are foreign⁸⁰ ». In the literature and theatre of the period, the customs and accents of foreigners were a target of derision, particularly the

79 - Hans-Georg BECK, Manoussos MANOUSSACAS and Agostino PERTUSI (eds), *Venezia, centro di mediazione tra Oriente e Occidente (secoli XV-XVI). Aspetti e problemi*, Florence, Olschki, 1977 ; D. CALABI and P. LANARO (eds), *La città italiana...*, *op. cit.* ; Donatella CALABI, « Gli stranieri e la città », in A. TENENTI and U. TUCCI (eds), *Storia di Venezia...*, *op. cit.*, vol. V, *Il Rinascimento. Società ed economia*, p. 913-946 ; Paola LANARO, « Corporations et confréries. Les étrangers et le marché du travail à Venise (XV^e-XVIII^e siècles) », *Histoire urbaine*, 21-1, 2008, p. 31-48 ; Andrea ZANNINI, *Venezia, città aperta. Gli stranieri e la Serenissima, sec XIV-XVIII*, Venice, Marcianum Press, 2009. While individual immigrant communities in Venice have been studied, there remains little general work on the nature of immigration and the presence and conception of the immigrant in the city. However, on different communities, see Luca MOLÀ, *La comunità dei Lucchesi a Venezia. Immigrazione e industria della seta nel tardo Medioevo*, Venice, Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 1994 ; Andrea ZANNINI, « L’altra Bergamo in laguna: la comunità bergamasca a Venezia », in A. DE MADDALENA, M. CATTINI and M. A. ROMANI (eds), *Storia economica e sociale di Bergamo. Il tempo della Serenissima*, vol. II, *Il lungo Cinquecento*, Bergamo, Fondazione per la storia economica e sociale di Bergamo, 1998, p. 175-193 ; Maartje van GELDER, *Trading Places: The Netherlandish Merchants in Early Modern Venice*, Leiden/Boston, Brill, 2009.

80 - Philippe de Commynes, *Mémoires*, livre VII, chapitre XVIII, Paris, Renouard, 1840-1847, p. 411.

strange manners and incomprehensible speech of the most ubiquitous groups (Greeks, Slavs, Germans and Bergamasks)⁸¹.

However, in legal terms, there was no real difference between a migrant fresh off the boat and a native-born *popolano*⁸². Birth and residence in Venice, even for many generations, were not sufficient for one to be considered Venetian, a qualification reserved to patricians and citizens. *Popolani* might call themselves « *da Venezia* », « *de Venetiis* », but they were not Venetian citizens⁸³. So what were the differences between native Venetian *popolani* and those born elsewhere, and how were they distinguished in practice?

Sixteenth-century documents make frequent use of the term *forestier* and of the binary *terrier/forestier*. *Terrier* refers to the *terra*, the land, the Venetian way of naming their territory, and sometimes even the community itself. In *mariegole*, for example, a number of decisions concerned the obligations and rights of craftsmen, according to their origin. In the *mariegola* of the ferrymen, certain rules applied « to natives as well as foreigners [*terriera come forestiera*]⁸⁴ ». The *mariegola* of the *corrieri* (couriers), on the other hand, distinguished clearly between *corrieri forestieri* and *corrieri venetiani*, as did that of the sausage makers⁸⁵. During the investigations and trials of the Avogaria di Comun, witnesses and defendants regularly employed the term *forestier*. For example, in 1501 Andrea Vassalo, head of the guards of the Lords of the Night, mentioned the arrival of a « foreigner dressed as

81 - Manlio CORTELAZZO, « Canzoni plurilinguistiche a Venezia nel XVI secolo », in I. CAVALLINI (ed.), *Il diletto della scena e dell'armonia. Teatro e musica nelle Venezia dal '500 al '700*, Rovigo, Minelliana, 1990, p. 27-38.

82 - Many attempts were made in the sixteenth century to entrust various magistracies with the registration of foreigners, a task that was evidently impossible to ever achieve fully. See Renzo DEROSAS, « Moralità e giustizia a Venezia nel '500-'600: gli Esecutori contro la bestemmia », in G. COZZI (ed.), *Stato, società e giustizia nella Repubblica veneta (sec. XV-XVIII)*, Rome, Jouvence, 1981, p. 431-528, at p. 452.

83 - For example, see ASV, Avogaria di Comun, *Miscellanea Penale*, busta 27, fasc. 16, April 1591, testimony of « Bernardinus cornegiatus de Venetis q. Francisci barcarolus » ; *ibid.*, busta 323, fasc. 19, Feb. 1556, testimony of « Petrus frutarolus, filius quondam Aloisii de Venetiis ».

84 - Biblioteca del Museo Correr (BMC), *Mariegole, Barcaioli del traghetto di San Pietro dei vigaroli di Chioggia*, Dec. 1517, chap. 5-6, « persona si terriera come forestiera ». See similar examples in *La Mariegola dell'arte della lana di Venezia (1244-1595)*, ed. by A. Mozzato, Venice, Il comitato editore, 2002, chap. 65.

85 - BMC, *Mariegole, Corrieri*, chap. 6, 1489 ; BMC, *Mariegole, Luganegheri*, chap. 17, 1507.

a *fante* [valet]⁸⁶ ». Zuan Antonio Corso, a draper with a shop on the Rialto Bridge, testified in 1574 that he had seen « a foreign man » on Piazza San Marco, just before a large fire broke out amongst the stalls of the Sensa fair⁸⁷. The expression « dressed as a foreigner » (*vestito alla forestier*) was one of the most common ways of referring to foreigners in these trials. Clothes seem to have been a way to identify people more effectively than language, accent, or even physical characteristics, much more rarely mentioned⁸⁸. « *A la forestier* » thus referred to a non-Venetian appearance, a way of being, an air, even if it is not easy to know what it was that made this identification possible.

In general, one was identified as a *toscan*, *greco* or *schiavon* rather than a « foreigner ». Certain inhabitants who resided in Venice for decades sometimes continued to be described by their city or region of origin, which, even if now long departed, formed a part of their identity, as in the case of a « Simon de Venetia toschan », presumably a Tuscan now living in Venice, mentioned in a trial of 1556⁸⁹. To be a foreigner was also a condition, that did not depend only or even primarily on one's place of origin, but rather on one's activity and function in Venice, integration into networks and belonging to a community⁹⁰.

Venice was also the capital of an empire stretching from the Aegean Sea and Dalmatia to the Alps. It exerted an irresistible pull on non-elite Venetian subjects, attracted to the metropolis as a market for their goods and as source of work, particularly in the maritime state, directly threatened by the Ottoman advance. Subjects from Dalmatia, Albania and the eastern Mediterranean came in great numbers from the late fifteenth century, along with Paduans, Trevisans and other inhabitants of the *terraferma* who took refuge, often temporarily, in the lagoon at moments of crisis during the Italian Wars⁹¹. Undoubtedly, migrants from the Italian mainland had a different experience to those from the maritime colonies. Whether the former came from Tuscany or Sicily, they shared certain common linguistic elements with Venetians ; the latter often were orthodox Christians and hard-pressed to make themselves understood, even if they could claim a status as subjects of the Republic. The Venetian government also tended to encourage or discourage the settlement of

86 - « forestier vestido da fante », ASV, Avogaria di comun, *Miscelleana Penale*, busta 146, fasc. 22, May 1501.

87 - « un' homo forestier », *ibid.*, busta 183, fasc. 11, May 1574.

88 - See, for example, *ibid.*, busta 122, fasc. 24, May 1556 ; busta 323, fasc. 19, fol. 7, Oct. 1556.

89 - See, for example, *ibid.*, busta 27, fasc. 24, Nov. 1556.

90 - S. CERUTTI, *Étrangers...*, *op. cit.*, p. 129 ff.

91 - A. ZANNINI, « L'identità multipla... », *art. cit.*, p. 252.

migrants according to the economic advantages that they might bring to the city. For example, they lured the silkworms from Lucca to establish themselves in the lagoon, but did not hesitate to expel numerous beggars in years of terrible famine⁹².

In theory, migrants did not enter freely into Venice. New arrivals had to request permission in order to enter the lagoon, and declare themselves to the *capi sestieri* (heads of one of the six districts) and the Lords of the Night (who organized police patrols and oversaw public order), to receive authorization to stay. But once settled in Venice, how long did these migrants remain *forestier*? How long before someone could identify themselves as *da Venezia*, and before other inhabitants considered them as such? A certain degree of integration into the city must have been necessary before foreigners could call themselves inhabitants of Venice and frequent the same institutions as other *popolani*.

Once again, this question depended more on the capacity of individuals to articulate and to shape social identities than on any specific legislation⁹³. Foreigners residing in Venice might have recourse to Venetian justice, just as the various courts of justice frequently questioned foreign witnesses as part of their enquiries. Recognition of this legal capacity signified a certain belonging to the city. Nor did being born outside Venice prevent one participating in the contexts discussed earlier - guilds, confraternities, the neighbourhood. It was there that migrants created social and economic networks, business and marital relationships⁹⁴. Nevertheless, we do not know if certain public positions were barred to foreigners, such as those as guards, door keepers of the Ducal Palace, boatmen of the Council of Ten, or public criers, assumed by *popolani* but which may have been reserved to those born in Venice. But if so, how did *popolani* produce proof of their origins, as births were not systematically registered until the end of the sixteenth century? It seems, in fact, that identity still depended mostly on *fama*, or reputation. It was other inhabitants - neighbours, friends, relatives, colleagues - who had the prerogative of saying who belonged to the community.

92 - L. MOLÀ, *La comunità dei lucchesi...*, *op. cit.* ; B. S. PULLAN, « The Famine... », *art. cit.*

93 - The recent attention of historians of migration to more continuous forms of mobility has shown the fluid nature of identities in the early modern period, particularly in the Mediterranean. See Eric R. DURSTELER, *Venetians in Constantinople: Nation, Identity, and Coexistence in the Early Modern Mediterranean*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006 ; Ella Natalie ROTHMAN, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects Between Venice and Istanbul*, Ithaca/London, Cornell University Press, 2012.

94 - See, for example, the preference of migrant printers for certain *scuole*: Cristina DONDI, « Printers and Guilds in Fifteenth-Century Venice », *La Bibliofilia*, 106-3, 2004, p. 229-265.

The category of *forestier* was less an identity founded on solid substance and more a condition determined by experience and experiment.

The question of the difference between a foreigner and a « Venetian » allows us finally to approach the problem afresh : not from the point of view of legal status, but rather from that of social categories determined by practice and custom. The category of the *popolo* belonged to the realm of ideas and did not describe the people who actually lived in Renaissance Venice. Patricians, the holders of public authority, employed the label as a way to think about Venetian society and to order it in a discursive sense, subsuming within it almost everyone who was not part of their group. They generally had no need to distinguish a « native » from a « resident » or a « foreigner », whose legal inferiority sufficed, in their eyes, to define their status. The *popolani*, for their part, coped with the legal uncertainty which characterised them, and in many ordinary social spaces found the resources to elaborate and define their conditions. The social world of the *popolani*, complex and heterogeneous, cannot be grasped by typologies or arbitrary divisions into groups and sub-groups, established on the basis of often artificial representations of this society. It is rather by means of close attention to processes of description, ordering and qualification, such as those that *popolani* themselves used in their everyday social and political interactions, that a way can be found to understand how the conditions of the *popolani* were developed.

A state of legal inferiority and submission to the dominant members of society did not dispossess people of a critical competence - of a capacity to articulate, to define, to create and to construct their condition by means of discourses and practices, observable in numerous sources. The societies of early modern Europe were not only a product of the authority exercised by those who governed, and endured or absorbed by ordinary people. They were also produced by the labour of all those who, in their innumerable daily activities, developed categories of discourse, constructed hierarchies, fashioned identities, and asserted legitimacy, providing the social and political energy which built the city from the ground up.

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