

**Manuscript version: Author's Accepted Manuscript**

The version presented in WRAP is the author's accepted manuscript and may differ from the published version or Version of Record.

**Persistent WRAP URL:**

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/136910>

**How to cite:**

Please refer to published version for the most recent bibliographic citation information. If a published version is known of, the repository item page linked to above, will contain details on accessing it.

**Copyright and reuse:**

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions.

Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

**Publisher's statement:**

Please refer to the repository item page, publisher's statement section, for further information.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: [wrap@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:wrap@warwick.ac.uk).

## Spaces of Unrest? Policing Hospitality Sites in Early Modern Venice<sup>1</sup>

*Rosa Salzberg*

As a port city, a great trading entrepôt, and a centre both of manufacturing and consumption, Venice by the late Middle Ages had developed an extensive infrastructure of hospitality offering food, drink and accommodation. *La Serenissima* was a city in constant motion, hosting numerous people in transit or coming and going for shorter periods as well as tens of thousands of migrants who came to work and settle, and refugees who had fled their homes. At the same time, in this crowded urban environment, there was a large resident population moving around in search of a meal or a drink, without the space and/or time to make or consume them in their homes. A large and sophisticated hospitality sector, including inns, wineshops, and lodging houses, employed large numbers of Venetian inhabitants, and brought in lucrative tax revenues to the government. Dispersed across the city, a wide variety of spaces allowed different groups of urban inhabitants, recent migrants and temporary visitors to come together, consume food and wine, talk, argue, sing songs, play games, share ideas and meet friends and associates.<sup>2</sup>

What role did these sites of hospitality play in the social and political lives of Venetian inhabitants and visitors, and in maintaining, or disrupting, the delicate social and political equilibrium of the lagoon city? Recent studies have demonstrated convincingly that early modern Venice was far from serene. Public spaces such as piazzas, bridges, churches, barbershops, and pharmacies were humming with discussion and debate involving men and women of all classes. Sometimes, the volume rose from “murmurs” and “chatter” to louder or more aggressive forms of protest, when shouts, songs, and snowballs expressed acute displeasure with the performance or policies of Venice’s governors.<sup>3</sup> Thus far, however,

---

<sup>1</sup> In transcriptions from early modern sources I have modernized spelling and expanded abbreviations. All translations are my own. Abbreviations used: ASV = Archivio di Stato, Venice; AC = Avogaria di Comun; CL = Compilazione delle leggi; CX = Consiglio dei dieci; ECB = Esecutori contro la bestemmia; GN = Giustizia Nuova; PSMC = Procuratori di San Marco de supra, Chiesa; SU = Sant’uffizio; b. = busta; reg. = registro. I would like to thank the editors of this volume as well as Beat Kümin, Matteo Pompermaier and David Rosenthal for reading or discussing elements of this chapter with me. The research for this article was funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 702296.

<sup>2</sup> On the development of this sector in the Middle Ages, see Bartolomeo Cecchetti, ‘Il vitto dei veneziani nel secolo xiv. Parte III’, *Archivio Veneto*, 15:30 (1885), pp. 279-333; Massimo Costantini, ‘Le strutture dell’ospitalità’ in Alberto Tenenti and Ugo Tucci (eds.), *Storia di Venezia, V. Il Rinascimento: Società ed economica* (Rome: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 1996), pp. 881-911; Fabien Faugeron, *Nourrir la ville. Ravitaillement, marchés et métiers de l’alimentation à Venise dans les derniers siècles du moyen âge* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> See Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Filippo de Vivo, ‘Pharmacies as Centres of Communication in Early Modern

hospitality sites offering food, drink, accommodation and, above all, space to gather have only been mentioned rarely in these accounts of Venice's "evanescent public sphere".<sup>4</sup>

This lack of attention is particularly striking since by now an extensive literature - albeit devoted above all to northern Europe - has considered the role and functions of hospitality sites such as inns and taverns in early modern communities. Historians, for example, have debated the political scientist James C. Scott's suggestion that taverns could be crucial locations for the articulation of "hidden transcripts" of dissent and subversion; spaces in which "the unspoken riposte, stifled anger, and bitten tongues created by relations of domination [might] find a vehement, full-throated expression".<sup>5</sup> Examples have emerged of protests, rebellions, and other co-ordinated acts of resistance organized or initiated in early modern public houses, often with the active involvement of publicans.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, recent studies have also emphasized the important part that sites of hospitality could play in the prosperity, stability and cohesion of urban communities, for example as locations of economic transaction and exchange, frequented also by members of the elite. Ann Tlusty, for example, in her examination of early modern Augsburg, argues that taverns were rarely a haven for disorder or popular resistance, but "more often ... supported and enhanced the orderly functioning of society".<sup>7</sup> Some have also suggested that such locales were too tightly controlled and closely surveyed to give rise to serious challenges to authority.<sup>8</sup>

---

Venice', *Renaissance Studies*, 21:4 (2007), pp. 505-21; Rosa Salzberg and Massimo Rospoche, 'An Evanescent Public Sphere: Voices, Spaces, and Publics in Venice during the Italian Wars' in Massimo Rospoche (ed.), *Beyond the Public Sphere: Opinions, Publics, Spaces in Early Modern Europe (XVI-XVIII)* (Bologna: Il Mulino/Dunker & Huboldt, 2012), pp. 93-114; Claire Judde de Larivière, *La révolte des boules de neige. Murano face à Venise, 1511* (Paris: Fayard, 2014); and especially Maartje van Gelder's chapter in this volume.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, De Vivo, *Information and Communication*, pp. 96-7; Salzberg and Rospoche, 'Evanescent Public Sphere', p. 94; Edward Muir, 'The 2001 Josephine Waters Bennett Lecture: The Idea of Community in Renaissance Italy', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 55:1 (2002), pp. 1-18, on a 1516 case of verbal rebellion in a hostelry on the Venetian *terraferma*, by local peasants against their feudal lords.

<sup>5</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> For examples, see William Beik, *Urban Protest in Seventeenth-Century France. The Culture of Retribution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 38; B. Ann Tlusty, *Bacchus and Civic Order: The Culture of Drink Early Modern Germany* (Charlottesville, VA and London: University of Virginia Press, 2001), p. 19; Beat Kümin, *Drinking Matters. Public Houses and Social Exchange in Early Modern Central Europe* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 139-40.

<sup>7</sup> Tlusty, *Bacchus and Civic Order*, p. 158. See also Susanne Rau, 'Public Order in Public Space: Tavern Conflict in Early Modern Lyon', *Urban History*, 34:1 (2007), pp. 102-13. For a useful recent overview of debates on this topic, see Mark Hailwood, *Alehouses and Good Fellowship in Early Modern England* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2014); as well as Beat Kümin and B. Ann Tlusty (eds.), *The World of the Tavern: Public Houses in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); and Kümin, *Drinking Matters*.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, James Brown, 'The Landscape of Drink: Inns, Taverns and Alehouses in Early Modern Southampton', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Warwick, 2007 and his article 'Drinking Houses and the Politics of Surveillance in Pre-industrial Southampton' in Beat Kümin (ed.), *Political Space in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 61-80.

There has been significantly less consideration of hospitality sites in the Italian context, perhaps with the assumption - not always justified - that outdoor spaces such as piazzas played a more important role in the warmer climates of southern Europe.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, in both southern and northern Europe, it is clear that commercial hospitality providers, frequented by a range of local inhabitants as well as by new arrivals and visitors, were crucial points of gathering and encounter between a variety of urban actors and authorities. As such, the provision of hospitality to both foreigners and locals, in early modern Venice as elsewhere, was a political and economic issue of the utmost importance, and one that deserves to be much better understood.

Venice merits further examination as an important case study in the wider European context because it was one of the most populous and most mobile cities in the region, meaning that catering both to the local inhabitants and to visitors and migrants was absolutely fundamental to its survival and success. During the sixteenth century in particular, a dramatic confluence of circumstances including rapid urban growth, hostilities with the Ottomans in the East and the other Italian and European powers on the *terrafirma*, religious schism, famine, and epidemic disease made the movement, gathering and mixing of different people in the city issues of acute concern, and as such encouraged various efforts to bring sites of hospitality under closer governmental control.<sup>10</sup> As elsewhere in Europe, Venetian authorities at this time tended to view these locales with suspicion, and tried to regulate them in a variety of ways, from licensing and oversight of their management to restricting them to particular zones/locations to day-to-day policing by low-level officials to check that rules were being enforced and to collect information about their customers, as well as taxes.

However, it is worth emphasizing that, unlike in other European contexts, records of the main magistracies that policed public order and sites of hospitality in Venice in this period, including the *Signori di Notte* and *Cinque alle Pace*, are mostly lost, while the

---

<sup>9</sup> However, see Maurizio Tulliani, *Osti, avventori, e malandrini: Alberghi, locande, e taverne a Siena e nel suo contado tra Trecento e Quattrocento* (Siena: Protagon, 1994); Giovanni Cherubini, 'La taverna nel basso Medioevo' in Simonetta Cavaciocchi (ed.), *Il tempo libero. Economia e società* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1995), pp. 525-555; AAVV, *Taverne, locande e stufe a Roma nel Rinascimento* (Rome: Roma nel Rinascimento, 1999); and more recently David Rosenthal, 'The Barfly's Dream: Taverns, Community and Reform in Early Modern Italy' in D. Toner and M. Hailwood (eds.), *Biographies of Drink: A Case Study Approach to Our Historical Relationship with Alcohol* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), pp. 14-29. Cherubini (pp. 552-3) does note briefly how taverns sometimes played a role in the organization of conspiracies and rebellions, for example during the Ciompi Revolt in late fourteenth-century Florence.

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion of these circumstances, see Rosa Salzberg, 'Controlling and Documenting Migration via Urban "Spaces of Arrival" in Early Modern Venice' in Hilde Greffs and Anne Winter (eds.), *The Regulation of Migration and the Materiality of Identification in European Cities, 1500-2000* (London & New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 27-45; and also Rosa Salzberg and Claire Judde de Larivière, 'Comment être vénitien? Identification des immigrants et "droit d'habiter" à Venise au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Revue d'histoire moderne e contemporaine*, 64:2 (2017), pp. 69-92.

archives of the *Avogaria di Comun* (State attorneys), who prosecuted many cases of this kind, were re-organized in the nineteenth century in a way that makes them extremely difficult to navigate.<sup>11</sup> As a result, it is often very challenging to understand how rules were enforced in the Venetian context, and how these sites operated at a day-to-day level. Nonetheless, by closely examining the language and context of legislation, as well as some surviving records of prosecution, it becomes clear that Venice's authorities demonstrated persistent concern about the potential, and the actual, incidence of a variety of disorderly activities in hospitality spaces, ranging from blasphemy to illicit sex, dancing to gambling, brawls and assaults to more overt, collective forms of political subversion.

The government's efforts to regulate this sector in the sixteenth century betray particular anxiety about two issues: firstly, about the disruptive presence of unknown foreigners coming to or passing through the city, who might commit crimes or transmit dangerous political and religious ideas to locals; and secondly, about the gathering of resident members of the *popolani* in non-domestic (and non-work) spaces in which alcohol consumption could pave the way for loose talk and behaviour, or more serious challenges to authority. However, the repressive efforts of government bodies always were tempered by the recognition that these sites were critical to the maintenance of a healthy economy; to the provisioning of essential goods (wine and food) to the resident populace; and to the precarious livelihoods of many people who made their living in this sector.<sup>12</sup> Most importantly, perhaps, policy was moderated by the awareness that hospitality sites were remunerative to the government both collectively (in the form of taxes on wine consumption) and individually (as many patrician families had financial interests in the hospitality trade). Taking into account this complex intersection of concerns and interests, as well as examining the urban geography of hospitality in Venice, this chapter argues that the Venetian authorities, especially in the sixteenth century, were unusually sensitive about the disruptive potential of spaces for gathering, eating and drinking in the city and went to great lengths to defuse this capacity.

### ***Sites of Hospitality***

So where could one go in search of hospitality in early modern Venice? In theory, this depended on whether one was a visitor or new arrival to the city or a resident. Different types

---

<sup>11</sup> In comparison, see, for example, the consistent series of judicial records from sixteenth-century Augsburg used by Tlusty in *Bacchus and Civic Order*, or from eighteenth-century Paris used by Thomas Brennan in *Public Drinking and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> The hospitality sector employed almost a quarter of heads of households in the city by 1624: De Vivo, *Information and Communication*, p. 96, citing Daniele Beltrami, *Storia della popolazione di Venezia dalla fine del secolo xvi alla caduta della Repubblica* (Padua: Cedam, 1954), pp. 208-9.

of spaces catered to these two groups, and to sub-groups within them, although distinctions between different categories of establishment were inherently blurred and shifting. Locales ranged across a broad spectrum from those fully-licensed and tightly monitored by the government to the semi-licit or entirely clandestine; from the purpose-built to the more ad hoc, temporary, or adapted; and from places whose principal function was to offer accommodation to those dedicated to food and drink provision.<sup>13</sup>

More is known about the establishments catering to visiting foreigners which arose throughout the Middle Ages, as charitable accommodation for pilgrims and poor travelers was gradually supplemented by a much more extensive geography of reception.<sup>14</sup> Some of the most prominent institutions were, at least in theory, reserved for particular foreign groups. These included the well-studied Fondaco dei Tedeschi, or trading house for German merchants, next to the Rialto Bridge, which included bedrooms, dining and drinking spaces as well as storage for merchandise, and the Fondaco dei Turchi for Muslim merchants which was established temporarily from the late sixteenth century in a former inn at Rialto before being permanently situated in a palazzo on the Grand Canal from 1621.<sup>15</sup> By the early sixteenth century around thirteen smaller houses (known as *case di comunità*) also existed to host eminent visitors from specific communities on the *terraferma*, such as Friuli or Vicenza. Beyond these spaces dedicated to particular “foreign” groups, twenty or so centrally-located *osterie* or inns offered a full service of accommodation, as well as sustenance, theoretically only to foreigners visiting or newly arrived in the city.<sup>16</sup> Although these were large structures that could accommodate dozens of guests, this was a small number of inns compared to other similar-sized cities in the period, suggesting that the Venetian government was particularly concerned to maintain a limited and closely-controlled series of sites for this purpose.<sup>17</sup> Increasingly, however, the inns were supplemented by a network of private lodging houses

---

<sup>13</sup> The blurring of such categories was common across Europe, as noted in Kümin, *Drinking Matters*, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to the works cited in note 2, above, see Franca Semi, *Gli ospizi di Venezia* (Venice: Istituzioni di recupero e educazione, 1983).

<sup>15</sup> Ennio Concina, *Fondaci. Architettura, arte e mercatura tra Levante, Venezia e Alemagna* (Venice: Marsilio, 1997); Olivia Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World: Lodging, Trade, and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; repr. 2006), chap. 9; Philippe Braunstein, *Les allemands à Venise (1380-1520)* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Costantini, ‘Le strutture’. Three inns at Rialto were reserved for arrivals from the Holy Roman Empire (*oltramontani*) who spilled over from the nearby Fondaco dei Tedeschi; on these, see Braunstein, *Les allemands*, chap. 5. After 1516, another *osteria* in the Ghetto catered exclusively to Jews. On *osterie* located at various points around the lagoon, which appear to have been mostly patronised by locals, see Faugeron, *Nourrir la ville*, pp. 669-70.

<sup>17</sup> On the requirement that Venetian *osterie* maintain a certain number of beds, usually at least twenty to thirty, see Cecchetti, ‘Il vitto dei veneziani’, p. 300. Cf. early modern Amsterdam which had as many one hundred inns: Maarten Hell, ‘Trade, Transport, and Storage in Amsterdam Inns (1450-1800)’, *Journal of Urban History*, 40:4 (2014), p. 742.

offering rooms or beds to migrants and visitors on a short or long-term basis (known as *albergarie*, or later *camere locande*), which again spanned a broad range from the licensed to the clandestine houses and which were dispersed throughout many of Venice's parishes.

Much more difficult to survey and describe are the sites which offered food and drink to residents of the city, particularly to the numerous *popolani*, in this period. As we shall see further below, by the sixteenth century there were very few commercial sites in which ordinary inhabitants of the city could legally gather to eat and drink on the premises, unlike many other early modern cities which had an extensive array of legal taverns. Nonetheless, there was no shortage of legal and illegal vendors of food and wine, both of which often became illicit spaces of encounter and sociability – a phenomenon which the government was aware of but could never entirely control. Most prominently, a network of officially licensed wineshops, many located on boats or rafts, were permitted to sell wine to Venetian inhabitants, to take away and drink in their homes. About twenty of these sites, by the sixteenth century most often referred to as *poste*, *stazi*, *bastioni* or *magazzini*, which sold cheaper wine in smaller quantities for poorer Venetians, were located in more peripheral areas of the city; larger quantities could be bought at the *riva del vin* at Rialto. In addition, the sixteenth century saw the proliferation of shops specifically permitted to sell (only) the sweet *malvasia* wine imported from Greece.<sup>18</sup> Alongside the licensed retail locations, there flourished a wide range of illegal vendors of food and drink operating from small shops or storerooms, or waterborne vessels and structures, often providing space for gathering and consumption as well. Often called *furatole*, these ad hoc establishments appear to have multiplied out of control by the early sixteenth century, causing much governmental hand-wringing about the threat they posed to the *osterie* and the collection of the wine tax, as well as to public order.<sup>19</sup>

Having briefly surveyed the main places in Venice in which both visitors and locals sought accommodation, food and drink (as well as conversation, entertainment and much more), we can now turn to considering what official attempts to control these sites reveal about their role in promoting order or disorder in the city.

---

<sup>18</sup> The word *taverna* appears to have been very rarely used by the sixteenth century compared to the earlier period, one of the factors which has led to much confusion in the historiography on this topic about the nature of the various categories of locale and how they evolved over the centuries. On the rather complicated early evolution (and terminology) of Venetian drinking sites, see Faugeron, *Nourrir la ville*, especially pp. 656-69. For some of the locations of the *poste* in 1513, see ASV, GN, b. 1, fols 85<sup>v</sup>-86<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> *Furatole* are often defined as food sellers not allowed to sell wine. See, for example, Vittorio Gottardo, *Osterie del leone. Il vino nella Venezia medioevale* (Venice: Stamperia di Venezia, 1993), p. 30. However, in the sixteenth-century documentation, the term *furatola* seems to have been used generally for any kind of clandestine hospitality operation.

## *Inns*

It is appropriate to begin with the inns or *osterie* as these were the most prominent and centrally-situated hospitality spots in the city, clustered tightly around the commercial district at Rialto and the political and religious nexus of Piazza San Marco [Fig. 1]. The location of the inns immediately highlights their ambiguous position in Venetian urban culture. They were strategically close to the main sites where ships from the Adriatic and ferries from the mainland debarked passengers and goods with unceasing regularity, and so comprised a core component of the infrastructure that underpinned the urban economy.<sup>20</sup> Some of the inns clearly were imposing structures that offered honourable accommodation to eminent arrivals such as visiting dignitaries, as in 1533 when a representative of the Ottoman sultan stayed at the Serpa near the Palazzo Ducale, along with his trove of official gifts (carpets, cloth), or in 1504, when the government sent three officials to visit the Hungarian ambassador at the San Zorzi inn near Rialto.<sup>21</sup> (Others were less luxurious, such as the Salvadego which, despite its prime position just behind the Piazza, a government inspection in 1574 revealed to be in a terrible state, even the innkeeper admitting that it was no longer fit to accommodate important guests).<sup>22</sup>

The restriction of the *osterie* to the city's central zones also was designed to facilitate surveillance of these spaces through which numerous foreigners passed. The *osterie* were located right under the noses of government offices at Rialto and San Marco who had the responsibility to police them on a daily basis.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, it is also noteworthy that during the sixteenth-century renovation of Piazza San Marco overseen by the architect Jacopo Sansovino, all the inns that faced directly onto the square were moved to nearby backstreets; still needed close to the action, but no longer considered an appropriate sight on the imposing, magnificent and (ideally) orderly public space.<sup>24</sup> Earlier, attempts had been made to prevent

---

<sup>20</sup> Guglielmo Zanelli, *Traghetti veneziani: La gondola al servizio della città* (Venice: Cicero, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Marin Sanuto, *I diarii (1496 - 1533)*, edited by R. Fulin et. al. (Venice: Forni, 1879-1903), vol. 5, col. 969; vol. 58, col. 560.

<sup>22</sup> ASV, PSMC, Atti, Proprietà di Osterie, b. 32.

<sup>23</sup> The *osterie* around the piazza were overseen by the Procurators of San Marco, one of the most prestigious government bodies, but in the early sixteenth century policing was carried out by a number of officials concerned with public order, including the Capi Sestieri, Cinque alla Pace and Signori di Notte, as well as representatives of the Giustizia Nuova which oversaw the hospitality trade, on which see more below.

<sup>24</sup> On the renovation of Piazza San Marco, see Deborah Howard, *Jacopo Sansovino. Architecture and Patronage in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1975); and on the specifics of the relocation of the inns, ASV, PSMC, Atti, Proprietà osterie, bb. 30-32.

prostitution from spreading to these inns so close to the centre of religious and political power in the city, while it was permitted to flourish in the less salubrious *osterie* in the Rialto zone.<sup>25</sup>

As well as the spatial clustering of the *osterie* to allow close oversight, the Venetian authorities also strove to restrict who could frequent the inns and to monitor activities in these spaces. Although these were recognized as essential reception points for foreigners involved in trade and diplomacy, and as a very profitable source of fiscal income (from the wine tax, the *dazio del vin*), the government early on tried to prevent Venetian inhabitants from entering these spaces and mixing with visitors.<sup>26</sup> A number of laws from the late thirteenth century on prohibited inhabitants from drinking in *osterie*. Subsequent exceptions were made for a handful of establishments at Rialto, and fines for residents found drinking in *osterie* lowered to the relatively insignificant sum of ten *soldi*, suggesting how hard the government found it to police this rule.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the desire to restrict the socializing of Venetians and foreigners in hospitality sites persisted into the sixteenth century.

In order to limit the potential for drinking by patrons to lead to violence and disorder in the streets of the city under cover of darkness, *osterie* were to close their doors at the third hour of the night, serving only overnight guests after this time.<sup>28</sup> In order to enforce such rules, the state closely oversaw the managers of these sites. Innkeepers were incorporated in a guild of *osti* from the fourteenth century and issued operating licenses, generally for two-year (renewable) periods, on payment of a pledge (*piezaria*) to guarantee obedience.<sup>29</sup> *Osti* were thus a clearly-identified and overseen group, who had an interest in obeying the laws if they wished to continue to operate in this sector. They could also make themselves useful to the government as informers. In 1616, for instance, one innkeeper offered his services as a provider of information to the Council of Ten, assuring them that his position gave him “the

---

<sup>25</sup> G. Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie venete sulla prostituzione fino alla caduta della Repubblica*, 2 vols. (Venice: M. Visentini, 1870-72), p. 54.

<sup>26</sup> In 1556, the wine *dazio* was farmed out for 124,400 ducats. Cecchetti, ‘Il vitto dei veneziani’, p. 285. See also Ugo Tucci, ‘Commercio e consumo del vino a Venezia in età moderna’ in *Il vino nell’economia e nella società italiana medioevale e moderna: Convegno di studi, Greve in Chianti, 21-24 maggio 1987* (Florence: Accademia economico-agraria dei georgofili, 1988), p. 192, on the wine tax as a steady source of income for the state, amounting to as much as six to seven per cent of its income in the eighteenth century.

<sup>27</sup> ASV, CL, b. 299. Faugeron, *Nourrir la ville*, pp. 671-2, notes that, finding it impossible to keep Venetians out the *osterie*, in 1322 the government made an exception for three establishments at Rialto where locals could now enter (but not drink!). However, I have found no evidence of these still operating in the sixteenth century.

<sup>28</sup> ASV, CL, b. 299, no. 118 (29 June 1329). On fears about night-time disturbances, see Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, ‘Recherches sur la nuit vénitienne à la fin du Moyen Age’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 7 (1981), pp. 339-56.

<sup>29</sup> For examples of license arrangements, see ASV, PSMC, Atti, Proprietà osterie, b. 30. For the *mariegola* of the guild, see ASV, Arti, b. 430.

true way of hearing, dealing and reporting ... because every quality of people come to my place, and I can make them familiarize with me”.<sup>30</sup>

The role of innkeepers was to become particularly prominent in the surveillance of foreigners who moved through Venice and sought accommodation in their establishments. As time went on, *osti* were enlisted more actively to act as agents for the government in this regard. In 1510, it was decreed that most new arrivals had to stay at least a few days in one of the central inns before moving on to other accommodation elsewhere in the city. At this moment of heightened tension, with Venice engaged in wars with its *terraferma* neighbours and thus particularly concerned about spies and traitors operating in the city, as well as about possibilities of popular tumult, the government thereby set up the inns to act as a kind of funnel where foreigners who passed through the city or came to settle there for longer or shorter periods could be observed.<sup>31</sup> Already by the fifteenth century, *osti* had been obliged to submit daily lists of guests who arrived and left. In the following years, further laws placed increasing onus on them not only to report arrivals and departures but also to encourage guests to report themselves to the authorities and receive a sort of permit to stay in the city. In 1545, for example, the Council of Ten threatened innkeepers who failed to report their guests with a substantial (hundred *lire*) fine, and expressed concern about the many foreigners going around the city day and night carrying weapons and causing trouble, leaving officials unable to know “where they come from, or where they go, and so to bring these matters into some sort of order”.<sup>32</sup> In September 1569, a few weeks after a great fire in the Arsenal aroused acute fears about public security in the city, a raft of laws, again emanating from the Council of Ten, sought to promote public order and policing, particularly at night, and included a reiteration of these concerns.<sup>33</sup> Despite Venice’s reputation as an open and welcoming city, especially to those who benefitted trade, foreigners continually were regarded as serious

---

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in De Vivo, *Information and Communication*, p. 96. For other cases in which the Inquisitori di Stato sought information about gatherings at *osterie*, see *ibid.*, p. 97. Brown, ‘Landscape of Drink’, argues regarding early modern Southampton that inns and taverns in particular could be effective sites of surveillance; relatively open spaces where conversations were easy to overhear. Cf. also Scott, *Domination*, p. 129, who suggests that the presence of known or suspected informers disqualifies a place for the open expression of “hidden transcripts”.

<sup>31</sup> ASV, GN, b. 1, fols 70<sup>r-v</sup> (2 May 1510). Foreigners from the *stato da mar* had to stay three days in an *osteria* before moving to private accommodation while foreigners from the mainland had to stay six, a difference likely explained by the ongoing conflicts at this time with near neighbours such as Ferrara. On the political context of this period fostering anxieties about immigration and crime in the city, see Gaetano Cozzi, ‘Authority and the Law in Renaissance Venice’ in J.R. Hale (ed.), *Renaissance Venice* (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), p. 311.

<sup>32</sup> “Venendo ogni giorno in questa città molte sorte di persone così delle terre nostre, come de luoghi alieni, alloggiando in diversi luoghi di essa città con numero di compagni armati di arme da dosso, et di altra sorte di arme, iquali vanno por per la città di giorno et di notte, non si sapendo onde vengano, ne dove vadano, e a proposito metter circa di ciò qualche bon ordine”. ASV, CX, Parti comuni, reg. 17, fol. 68<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, reg. 29, fos 24<sup>r-v</sup>. Cf. Brown, ‘Drinking Houses and the Politics of Surveillance’, p. 70, on the interrogation of innkeepers in Southampton in the 1670s after some arson cases, to account for all strangers in town.

threats to urban order and security. As such, again and again throughout the period, and particularly at moments of intense concern about political security, *osterie* were identified among the places in need of close supervision, so that foreigners who passed through them could be watched.

There is manifold evidence, however, that the Venetian authorities never were capable of monitoring exactly who moved through these spaces, and what went on inside them. While cases of explicit political rebellion associated with *osterie* remain rare, we can find numerous examples of low-level disorder in these sites: of speech or behaviour that challenged the presiding moral, legal or social norms or disrupted the peace and security of the city. Research in Venetian police and court records surviving from earlier centuries has identified *osterie* as common locations for crimes ranging from sodomy to theft and violence. Foreigners appear as victims as well as perpetrators of these crimes, as in a 1399 case when a German baker and cook took a German cleric to drink at one of the *osterie* before robbing him there.<sup>34</sup> But locals could also be implicated in, and threatened by, crime and violence in the *osterie*, suggesting that the prohibition on residents visiting the inns effectively became a dead letter.<sup>35</sup>

For example, a murder case of 1583 depicts the Campana inn at Rialto as a place where local inhabitants went regularly to eat, drink and gamble. One Sunday evening, the tripe-seller Andrea, nicknamed Radicchio, made his usual visit to the inn, where he met his friend Santin, a fisherman from Treviso, and they proceeded to dine, play cards and drink heavily. Later on, the two men, by now very drunk, fell into an argument which resulted in Santin mortally wounding Andrea with his dagger. The victim's mother suggested to the investigating officials that this might have been an organized attack on her son (with a poisoned weapon), in retribution for an on-going dispute.<sup>36</sup> While such examples of unrest may not have been overtly political or co-ordinated acts of resistance towards government authority, they were clearly disruptive to peace and stability in the city, and suggest some of the reasons why Venice's authorities strove to limit the spaces where *popolani* could come together, drink and socialize, a matter discussed further below.

---

<sup>34</sup> Stefano Piasentini, *Alla luce della luna: I furti a Venezia, 1297-1403* (Venice: Il Cardo, 1992), p. 16. For other examples, see Guido Ruggiero, *Violence in Early Renaissance Venice* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980), p. 30; Braunstein, *Les allemands*, esp. pp. 367-8; Lorenzi, *Leggi e memorie*, pp. 216, 235-6.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Sanuto, *Diarii*, vol. 53, coll. 118-9: the son of a local banker was murdered by two foreigners with whom he had concocted a criminal plan to rob some soldiers. His body was found after three days in a locked room at the "hostaria dei furlani", likely the inn meant to be reserved for eminent visitors from the Friuli region.

<sup>36</sup> ASV, AC, Miscellanea Penale, P. 128, n° 4 (1583).

As well as crime and violence, *osterie* also were a source of anxiety to the government as places particularly likely to encourage the disorderly speech that had a tendency to flow forth when people gathered to drink. As Elizabeth Horodowich has shown, official attempts to control unruly speech were an explicitly political enterprise in early modern Venice, that revealed profound fears about the safety and tranquillity of the urban community.<sup>37</sup> As such, secular authorities investigated public spaces including *osterie*, as in 1519, when the court of the Quarantia Criminal tried a case of blasphemy overheard at the Bò at Rialto, committed by a group of locals including a barber and priest. The innkeeper apparently had listened to their sacrilegious talk for a long time and never reported them, so he too was detained.<sup>38</sup> The nexus of concerns about *osterie* (and other hospitality sites) hosting not only blasphemy but also other forms of moral disorder, particularly associated with the threatening presence of foreigners in the city, was clearly expressed in 1583 when the Council of Ten delegated control over these sites to the secular blasphemy authorities, the Esecutori contro la Bestemmia. The act granting these new powers and responsibilities to the Esecutori noted that “the many disorders and inconveniences that have occurred, and still occur, in this city [are] committed for the most part by a certain sort of violent person of alien speech” taking refuge in Venice.<sup>39</sup>

The disorderly potential of speech - even of comments made in jest and in a state of inebriation - became more troubling to the Venetian authorities in the era of the Reformation, when anti-clericalism was rife and Protestant ideas circulated widely in the city, as John Martin has shown.<sup>40</sup> For instance, in an incident investigated by the Venetian Inquisition, the blasphemous comments of two local boatmen drinking at one of the *osterie* around the edge of the lagoon again revealed how these sites could be spaces where people felt free to challenge religious norms (in this case, jovially denigrating the mass while enjoying a drink one Sunday). When questioned, the *barcarolo* Tonin da Chioggia conceded to the Holy Office that his irreverent words may have overstepped the mark, but countered that “when we

---

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Horodowich, *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> Sanuto, *Diarii*, vol. 27, coll. 241, 258.

<sup>39</sup> “Per li molti disordini, et inconvenienti, che sono successi, e tuttavia succedono in questa città, commessi la maggior parte da certa sorte di persone facinorose, et di aliena conditione, che scacciati, e privi della patria sua, et beni per diversi delitti, si riducono qui, et con scandolo universale continuano l’istessa mala vita”. ASV, ECB, b. 54, fol. 61<sup>r</sup>. In addition to dealing with irreligious speech and behaviour, the Esecutori were charged with monitoring the comings and goings of foreigners in Venice through the city’s spaces of hospitality. Note also Horodowich’s argument that “anxiety about blasphemy was, in part, anxiety about outsiders, foreigners, and the ‘other’ entering the lagoon in large numbers” in this period. *Language and Statecraft*, p. 83.

<sup>40</sup> For other examples of heterodox discussions in Venetian *osterie*, see John Jeffries Martin, *Venice’s Hidden Enemies: Italian Heretics in a Renaissance City* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004; first published 1993), pp. 170-1 and his chapter in this volume.

are at the *osterie*, you drink, I drink and like that we all get drunk and we say certain things that we don't remember".<sup>41</sup>

Despite efforts to control them, some *osterie* clearly remained relatively free zones of heterodox discussion in the second half of the century. In the late 1570s, the papal nuncio to Venice reported with great chagrin how philo-Protestant and anti-Catholic religious and political talk occurred openly in at least two of the three inns designated for German visitors at Rialto, the Lion Bianco and Aquila Nera.<sup>42</sup> The Venetian authorities appear to have been more tolerant of such behaviour in spaces (theoretically) reserved for foreigners who were of great importance to the city's trading economy. But both secular and religious authorities in the city continued to show concern about *osterie* as sites of dangerous and disorderly speech involving both visitors and locals.

The concerted efforts of the government to police speech and comportment in these spaces were frustrated for a number of reasons. These include the inherent difficulty of monitoring sites in which so many people came and went; the high potential for corruption of officials overseeing this sector; and the conflicting interests of both innkeepers and of the patrician governing class who, for both personal and political reasons, often wished to promote the *osterie* as much as to control them.<sup>43</sup> A number of Venetian patricians had a personal or familial stake in the inns as owners. For example, the family of diarist Marin Sanudo owned the Campana at Rialto, while Marino Grimani (doge from 1595 to 1605) was proprietor of the Sturione, over which he could keep an eye from his palazzo across the Grand Canal.<sup>44</sup> Other families, like the Malipiero, not only owned inns but also had investments in related "industries" such as prostitution.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, pleasure-seeking patricians might also enjoy frequenting *osterie*, as in 1508 when young members of one of the *compagnie delle calze* followed a dinner in a private home with a feast at one of the Rialto inns in the company

---

<sup>41</sup> "Potria essere che havesse straparlado et che non mi aricordo perchè noi quando semo alle hostarie, bevi ti, bevi mi, et cosi bevemo el cervello et poi dissemo delle cose che non si aricordemo". ASV, SU, b. 7, fasc. 12, fols 3<sup>v</sup>, 5<sup>r</sup>. On the often fluid boundaries between secular and religious space in public houses, cf. Kümin, *Drinking Matters*, chap. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Aldo Stella, *Chiesa e stato nelle relazioni dei nunzi pontifici a Venezia. Ricerche sul giurisdizionalismo Veneziano dal xvi al xviii secolo* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1964), pp. 279-80. In 1586, the Esecutori contro la Bestemmia fined the German *osti* of the Aquila Nera and Leon Bianco and of the other German inn, the San Zorzi, the rather modest sum of ten ducats, but this appears to have been for not registering guests. ASV, ECB, b. 57, fo. 36<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> On similar conflicting interests governing (and tempering) the control of public houses, see Beat Kümin, 'Public Houses and Civic Tensions in Early Modern Bern', *Urban History*, 34:1 (2007), pp. 89-101.

<sup>44</sup> For Marino Grimani's ownership of the *Sturione* inn, see Andrea da Mosto, *I dogi di Venezia nella vita pubblica e privata* (Florence: Giunti, 1977), p.132. Ecclesiastical institutions also had *osterie* among their property portfolios, such as the convent of San Servolo which owned the Sole at Rialto.

<sup>45</sup> See the sixteenth-century *decime* tax declarations of Dionisio and Priamo Malipiero who owned several *osterie* at Rialto that also rented out rooms on the ground floor to prostitutes, in Roberto Cessi and Annibale Alberti, *Rialto. L'isola - il ponte - il mercato* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1934), pp. 323-6.

of buffoons.<sup>46</sup> The financial and personal interests of individual patricians help to explain why the government vacillated continuously, for example, about whether to permit activities such as gambling and prostitution in these spaces, aware both that these could be attractive to patrons (and thus drive up tax income) but also presenting as potential threats to moral and social order.<sup>47</sup>

Innkeepers, too, were in an ambiguous position – compelled to act not merely as government agents, but also as mediators between their customers and individual patrician owners.<sup>48</sup> Many were first-generation migrants (frequently from the Bergamo region on the northern periphery of the Venetian empire, but also many Germans), who might have more in common with their customers – sharing a language, dialect, or the common experience of coming to Venice – than with their patrician employers and overseers. The *mariegola* of the guild of *osti* suggests how often they shirked their duties by the early sixteenth century, when the corporation appears to have been in considerable disarray.<sup>49</sup> As we have seen already, innkeepers could be (or claimed to be) ignorant of crimes taking places under their watch, from blasphemy to murder.

It remains difficult to assess the degree to which the government’s fears about serious disorder in the *osterie* actually manifested themselves, until further research is done in the (very disorderly and incomplete) criminal records of the period. What is clear, however, is that the local authorities registered acute concern about the potential for these spaces to foster unrest in the city, even of the most serious kind, especially at politically-sensitive moments. This was particularly because of their role in hosting new arrivals or people passing through Venice who might disseminate ideas that challenged local political or religious dogma, and whose foreignness made them harder to trace, to account for, and to identify.

### ***Lodging Houses***

A similar dynamic is evident in the case of another major category of commercial hospitality establishment operating in the city at this time. These were the *albergarie* or lodging houses which appear to have proliferated rapidly from the late fifteenth century, although they certainly were present earlier. In many ways, *albergarie* were an even greater security

---

<sup>46</sup> Sanuto, *Diarii*, vol. 7, col. 256 (26 January 1508).

<sup>47</sup> For the vacillating laws on these matters, see ASV, CL, b. 299, ‘osterie’.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Michael Frank, ‘Satan’s Servant or Authorities’ Agent? Publicans in Eighteenth-Century Germany’, in Kümin and Tlustý (eds.), *Public Houses*, pp. 12-43; and Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History, 1200-1830* (Harlow: Longman, 1983), p. 86, on alehouse keepers walking a “precarious tightrope” between customers and the authorities.

<sup>49</sup> ASV, Arti, b. 430.

concern to the government in the sixteenth century because they were more dispersed around the city and much more difficult to identify and monitor than the centrally-clustered inns run by accredited *osti*. Around mid-century, for example, the Council of Ten complained about the appearance of “an infinite number of houses of individuals which lodge foreigners without a license”, estimating that as many as five or six thousand had sprung up in recent decades.<sup>50</sup>

These establishments evidently covered a broad spectrum from more luxuriously-appointed houses catering to foreign diplomats, scholars, army officials and highly-skilled artisans who sought more privacy or comfort than they might find in the *osterie* to the most squalid dosshouses providing beds to beggars and vagabonds. While officially prohibited in the central zones of Rialto and San Marco (to prevent direct competition with the *osterie* located there), sources from the sixteenth century suggest that lodging houses, both licensed and clandestine, were clustered particularly in a second ring of parishes surrounding these nodes, such as San Moisè, San Luca, San Giovanni Nuovo and Santa Maria Formosa.<sup>51</sup> In close proximity to key spaces of transit such as the port area on the Riva degli Schiavoni, these houses played a fundamental role in allowing Venice to function as a major centre of migration and mobility.

Yet, again, these sites presented dilemmas to local authorities who both recognized the need to provide accommodation to many visitors and migrants to the city but at the same time held concerns about the uncontrolled movement of foreigners through Venetian space, and about locations where they could mix and interact with locals in relative privacy. In 1498, for example, the Venetian Health Board (Provveditori alla Sanità) noted with alarm that “many, many people, both men and women” were illegally offering lodging, and feared that these crowded houses of mobile people posed a serious risk of contagion.<sup>52</sup> From early in the sixteenth century there were more concerted efforts to bring this sector under closer supervision. A series of reforms sought to ensure that lodging houses could be monitored and

---

<sup>50</sup> “Uno infinito numero de case de particular person che tien albergaria et alloan forestieri senza licentia, el qual numero è cresciuto da pochi anni in qua adeo che del 1500 che solo se trovava case 13 che tegnisse albergaria et alloanse forestieri, hora è fama ne sia da 5 in 6 mille case allozi forestieri cosa quasi incredibile, ma per la verità l'è grandissimo et infinito numera et ogni zorno va più multiplicando”. BMCV, manuscript PD 396c-II, vol. II, no. 524. The document is undated but is stored with other laws from around the mid-sixteenth century and other references within the text point to this dating. For earlier regulations, see ASV, CL, b. 12, ‘albergarie’.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, the locations where a 1502 law against *albergaria proibita* was to be proclaimed, listed in ASV, GN, b. 1, fol. 30<sup>v</sup>. For more on the locations and nature of these houses, see Rosa Salzberg, ‘[Mobility, Cohabitation and Cultural Exchange in the Lodging Houses of Early Modern Venice](#)’, *Urban History*, 46:3 (2019), pp. 398-418.

<sup>52</sup> “In questa nostra città siano molte molte persone si mascoli come femine, i qualli tengono albergarie, et dano alozamento a molte persone, contra i ordeni et leze statuide sopra de ciò, lequal inhihisseno et devedano a tal alozamenti, et albergarie ... in esse albergarie se redusseno assaissime persone i qual sono causa de apizar morbo, et contagion in questa città, per la moltitudine sono in esse albergarie”. ASV, PS, b. 2, fol. 40<sup>r</sup>.

taxed, by requiring that anyone who wished to accommodate foreigners first obtain a license or *bollettino*, for a fee. Some order was meant to be maintained in these transient spaces by limiting the number of tenants and setting minimum periods of tenancy (no less than four months, later lowered to one).<sup>53</sup>

The fragmentary surviving evidence of compliance or non-compliance with this system of regulation suggests that the lodging sector continued to expand beyond the control of the Venetian authorities during the course of the sixteenth century. This was in part because many visitors and migrants to Venice preferred to stay in *albergarie* and also because numerous inhabitants of the city could make or supplement an income by renting out rooms or beds. Both housekeepers and tenants found ever-new ways to get around the rules, to avoid the hassle and cost of paying fees and obtaining licenses; for example, circumventing the prohibition to lodge more than one guest by claiming falsely that additional tenants were not paying anything.<sup>54</sup>

For the government, a particularly worrying aspect of the *albergarie* was that those who ran them (*albergatori* or, in many cases, *albergatrici*) were not gathered into a guild.<sup>55</sup> That many lodging housekeepers were women aroused even greater suspicion, that their establishments would foster various kinds of moral disorder. In 1524, for instance, courtesans were prohibited from taking lodgers who they claimed were merely (non-paying) friends or lovers, but similar prohibitions continuing into the seventeenth century suggest that there persisted a high degree of interaction between the sex industry and the lodging sector.<sup>56</sup> Fears also were expressed for young female migrants who arrived in Venice and found lodging in the houses of pimps or prostitutes, often as servants, and thereby were lured into sex work.<sup>57</sup>

But the *albergarie* also were perceived as spaces that could nourish social and political unrest, if foreigners were allowed to flow into the city and through them unmonitored. In the 1520s and 30s, years of recurring food shortages in which Venice was flooded with poor migrants from the mainland, the Health Board decreed on various occasions that vagabonds

---

<sup>53</sup> ASV, GN, b. 1, fols 23<sup>r-v</sup> (7/9/1502); fols 51<sup>r</sup>-52<sup>r</sup> (2/6/1505). See also subsequent laws collected in ASV, CL, b. 12, 'albergarie'.

<sup>54</sup> ASV, GN, b. 5, fol. 42<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. on guilds of *albergatori* in other Italian cities in this period, see Tuliani, *Osti, avventuri*, chap. 2; Angela Lanconelli, 'Il controllo comunale', in *Taverne, locande e stufe*, p. 53.

<sup>56</sup> ASV, GN, b. 1, fol. 109<sup>r</sup>; ASV, CL, b. 299, no. 214 (1684).

<sup>57</sup> Nelli-Elena Vanzan Marchini (ed.), *Le leggi di sanità della Repubblica di Venezia*, 4 vols (Vicenza: Centro Italiano di storia sanitaria e ospitaliera del Veneto/Neri Pozza, 1995-2003), II, p. 415 (16 September 1539). Cf. also Joanne Ferraro, 'Youth in Peril in Early Modern Venice', *Journal of Social History*, 49:4 (2016), pp. 761-83 and her chapter in this volume.

and idle beggars should not be accommodated in these houses.<sup>58</sup> The mid-sixteenth century Council of Ten law quoted above insisted on the importance of registering guests that passed through lodging houses, and recording if they carried any weapons, “for the public benefit... so that from day to day it might be known how many foreigners are coming into this land and where they stay and who they are and where they come from”.<sup>59</sup> In 1569, as part of the legislation that followed the Arsenal fire discussed earlier, the Ten ruled that lodging housekeepers must be Venetian-born or subjects, presumably on the assumption that these would be more trustworthy and reliable. Nonetheless, it would appear that many recent migrants (both subjects and non-subjects) found ways to circumvent this rule and set themselves up as lodging housekeepers: in 1588, the Ten complained that foreign women were simply obtaining a license in the name of their Venetian-born husbands.<sup>60</sup> In 1590, the Esecutori contro la Bestemmia grumbled again that “allowing all sorts of men and women”, many of them poor, to lodge foreigners without restriction, gave rise to numerous “disorders and errors”, since they committed “many evil deeds” in the city.<sup>61</sup>

*Albergarie* also were perceived as sites of moral and religious disorder, because of the close interaction they allowed between people of different faiths, and between foreigners and Venetian inhabitants.<sup>62</sup> The Inquisition in the second half of the sixteenth century investigated a number of lodging houses and housekeepers, as in a case from the 1580s of one such establishment in the parish of San Giovanni Nuovo where the Christian housekeeper was accused of conducting sexual relations with her Muslim lodgers, while a young Christian Armenian servant staying in the house allegedly was forced to dress and act like a Muslim by his Turkish merchant master.<sup>63</sup> Prohibited meat dishes for consumption on a “lean” day, supposedly for Protestant guests, were discovered in a lodging house run by the wife of an

---

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Vanzan Marchini, *Le leggi*, I, p. 143 (12 October 1525): “Frustrato da San Marco a Rialto e bandito chiunque alloggiasse birbanti, furfanti e mendicanti”.

<sup>59</sup> “Per beneficio publico che tal leze et ordeni siano osservati acciò de zorno in zorno se possi saper quanti forestieri vien in questa terra et dove allozano et chi sono, et dove vengono”. BMCV, manuscript PD 396c-II, vol. II, no. 524.

<sup>60</sup> ASV, CX, Parti comuni, reg. 29, fol. 64<sup>v</sup>; ASV, ECB, b. 54, fols 63<sup>v</sup>-64<sup>r</sup>. Cf. Barbara A. Hanawalt, ‘The Host, the Law and the Ambiguous Space of the Medieval Tavern’ in Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (eds.), *Medieval Crime and Social Control* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 215: from 1285, in a climate of public security fears, foreigners in England were prohibited from becoming inn or lodging housekeepers.

<sup>61</sup> “Dall’admetter ogni sorte de homeni, et donne indiferentemente a poter tener camere locande nascono molti disordini, et errori, et si comettono molte sceleratezze in questa città”. ASV, ECB, b. 54, fols 64<sup>v</sup>-5<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>62</sup> See Salzberg, ‘[Mobility, Cohabitation](#)’. On Venetian and foreign women hosting foreigners, see Joanne Ferraro’s chapter in this volume.

<sup>63</sup> ASV, SU, b. 47, fasc. 2. On a similar case involving the conversion of a Christian servant, who took refuge in a lodging house for Muslim merchants in 1573, see Ersie Burke, ‘Francesco di Demetri Litino, the Inquisition and the Fondaco dei Turchi’, *Thesaurismata*, 36 (2006), pp. 79-96.

engineer near Rialto in 1566.<sup>64</sup> In another case that touched on the transmission of illicit ideas and practices in a lodging house, Prospero, a hat pedlar who supplemented his income renting rooms to visitors, was said to have picked up heterodox religious ideas from his Protestant tenants (including a Florentine banished for heresy and some Englishmen), whom he too witnessed eating meat on prohibited days.<sup>65</sup>

Efforts would continue into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to make lodging houses in Venice more tightly monitored spaces, clearly identified, as inns had to be, by signs that hung on their exterior.<sup>66</sup> If it was possible to know where they were located, who ran them and who stayed in them, these houses could be acknowledged to play an important part of the economy of hospitality in Venice, especially as the city became ever more a destination for tourists. But the hybrid public-private nature of these quasi-domestic spaces, dispersed through the backstreets and courtyards of numerous Venetian neighbourhoods, continued to render them subject to suspicion.<sup>67</sup>

### *Hospitality Sites for Locals*

Having examined the main sites of commercial accommodation catering to foreigners visiting Venice, we can now turn to the spaces dedicated primarily to a local clientele in search of a drink (and perhaps a meal). Official rhetoric repeatedly expressed the conviction that a controlled network of wine retailers was essential to ensuring the provision of this staple good at a reasonable price to the lower classes resident in the city, necessary for their health and well-being at a time when the quality of drinking water was poor.<sup>68</sup> In this sense, these places were believed to promote good order among the highly diverse and fluid social body of the Venetian *popolani*, which incorporated many more or less recent migrants. In order to ensure the provision of wine throughout the city, even in the most peripheral neighbourhoods, licenses to run these shops were auctioned off by the magistracy of the Giustizia Nuova to members of the guild of wine merchants or *bastioneri* for limited periods.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> ASV, SU, b. 21, fasc. “Contra Maximum de Maximis Ingenierium et Complices”.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., b. 33, fasc. “Prosperum Capellarium”.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, the register of names and locations of around 2000 *albergatori* from 1784, in ASV, Inquisitori di stato, b. 760.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, a 1517 law complaining of *albergarie* where housekeepers would not open their doors to official searches. ASV, CL, b. 12, no. 363.

<sup>68</sup> For example: “Si per comodità de la povera zente, come etiam per sanità della terra”. ASV, GN, b. 1, fol. 88v (13 September 1515). See also Robert C. Davis, ‘Venetian Shipbuilders and the Fountain of Wine’, *Past and Present*, 156:1 (1997), pp. 55-86.

<sup>69</sup> ASV, Arti, b. 405ter.

However, as was the case elsewhere in early modern Europe, such establishments were considered to have a legitimate social function only in retailing alcohol to take home, and authorities tried to severely limit their capacity to become places of gathering and social drinking.<sup>70</sup> The fear was that wives and children would be left to starve while men drank away their earnings in taverns that had become places of dissolution, blasphemy and violence.<sup>71</sup> In 1320, the Maggior Consiglio outlawed Venetian locals from drinking on site in these locales, citing concern about *popolani* getting up to no good in these spaces.<sup>72</sup> However, again there seems to have been division within the government about enforcing this rule, likely for reasons similar to those that influenced treatment of the *osterie*: because of the profitable *dazio del vin* and because many patricians had financial interests in the wine trade. For instance, gambling for small sums of money sometimes was permitted in these establishments in the fifteenth century, because it contributed both to tax and private revenue through wine sales.<sup>73</sup>

Nonetheless, as the city faced new and serious threats in the sixteenth century, there was a resurgence of concern about places where *popolani* might gather, drink and carouse, and hence about the proliferation of wine retailers, particularly those that effectively became taverns by allowing drinking on site. In 1502, the Senate decreed ten *lire* fines for “those who go to drink or eat in *furatole* and *magazzini* dishonestly consuming their money, leaving their poor children and family to suffer”.<sup>74</sup> In 1515, the Giustizia Nuova lamented that there was more confusion in this regard than ever before, because wine retailers were installing, without permission,

---

<sup>70</sup> Cf., for example, Hailwood, *Alehouses*, p. 25: local customers were technically only permitted to stay and drink on site for one hour in early modern English alehouses; only overnight guests could stay longer. Brennan, *Public Drinking*, pp. 276-7, notes that in Paris locals were prohibited from drinking in taverns, although this law had fallen out of use by the eighteenth century.

<sup>71</sup> This kind of rhetoric was very common in other parts of Europe. See, for example, Tlusty, *Bacchus and Civic Order*, p. 120.

<sup>72</sup> ASV, CL, b. 299, no. 104: “quod homines venetiarum vilis pro conversando in eis malem agunt, et quod propriam familiam derelinquunt tam propter vinum, quam propter baratarias et alia inhonesta”. The Venetian authorities also struggled to prevent Venetian inhabitants from entering and drinking in the *osteria* within the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, which was meant to be restricted to German merchants and other employees of the place. Braunstein, *Les allemands*, p. 177.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, ASV, CL, b. 299, no. 152 (6 May 1426): “pro bono, et utili nostri Communis et etiam pro comodo taberniariorum sit licitum quibuscumque possendo ludere in tabernis ultra summam librarum decem”. In 1502, when the Senate elected a body of seven new officials to oversee the Giustizia Nuova, to ensure their impartiality, these *savi* had to have no financial interest in the wine trade. ASV, GN, b. 1, fols 10<sup>r-v</sup> (9 February 1501 m.v.).

<sup>74</sup> “Quelli che vanno à beber o manzar in furatole e magazenì consumando dionestamente in essa i danari suoi, lasciando patir ogni sinistro e desasio a poveri fioli e famegia soa, i quali poi astretti dal bisogno li è forza incorrere in molti mancamenti”. ASV, Arti, b. 405ter, fol. 4<sup>r</sup>.

benches and tables, as if they were *osterie*, and in the summer [they put] vines [for shade outside] to host many people, and they allow confectioners and tripe vendors to come in with various delicacies and sell them ... making these places ... into public dens of iniquity and conventicles of gambling, blasphemy and other objectionable things, and often also allowing dancing with pipe music as if [they were] public houses and brothels.<sup>75</sup>

Those permitted to retail wine to take away were strictly prohibited from fitting out their establishments with furniture and paraphernalia for drinking and eating in this way, that would allow them to become sites of suspect sociability and consumption.<sup>76</sup>

Nonetheless, the few surviving sixteenth-century registers of the Giustizia Nuova suggest that Venetian wine retailers continued regularly to offer space for consumption on site, while scores of unlicensed vendors (*furatoleri*) provided other, ad hoc spaces for sociable eating and drinking. Numerous instances appear such as that of Giacomo de Costanzo, who in 1557 appealed his five-ducat fine for the discovery of drinking vessels and tables for eating in his *posta da vin* on the Zattere in Dorsoduro.<sup>77</sup> A case from the same period concerning insults and violence that erupted in the *magazzino* at San Geremia after an argument over paying the drinks bill indicates that, as in the *osterie*, locals (in this case, some weavers and a shoemaker) regularly gathered to drink on site in these places, despite the fact that only a few months earlier the barkeeper had been punished by the Health Board for allowing eating and drinking in the same establishment.<sup>78</sup>

One of the reasons that illegal tavern-like spaces continued to flourish was that, while they could be sites of violence and disorder as the authorities feared, they might also play more positive roles, for example in promoting social cohesion and communal identity in Venice's peripheral neighbourhoods. After all, for people who lived in cramped quarters, these provided some of the only indoor spaces available for sociability and entertainment.

---

<sup>75</sup> “Più contrafation, et disordeni che mai fusse, et questo per causa de li condutori, et ministri de tal poste, i qualli non curando se non del proprio se hano fatto licito far in tal poste banche, et tavole drezade, a guisa de hostaria, et la instade frascade per dar recetaculo a più persone, et in questo se hano in escando a vegnir li scaleteri a vender; et triperi cum diverse sorte de licharie ... le fatto ditti luogi, non hostarie, ma publice spelunche, et conventicole cum zuogi, biasteme, et altri inconvenienti, et molte volte facendosi far balli cum pive come publice bastie, et postribuli”. ASV, GN, b. 1, fols 88<sup>v</sup>-89<sup>f</sup>.

<sup>76</sup> In 1531, it was decreed that musicians found entertaining in *magazzini* would have their instruments confiscated. Ibid., b. 5, reg. 12, fol. 262<sup>f</sup>. On prohibitions against food sellers coming into wineshops to sell to drinkers, see *ibid.*, b. 1, fol. 119<sup>f</sup> (28 Nov. 1528)

<sup>77</sup> “Per bochali trovati in la detta posta et taole drezade”. Ibid., b. 5, reg. 13, fol. 29<sup>f</sup>. See also registers 11 and 12 in this busta for other examples.

<sup>78</sup> ASV, AC, Misc. Penale, 323, no. 19; PS, b. 730, fol. 81<sup>v</sup>.

Davis, in his study of the “*guerre dei pugni*” that became exceedingly popular in early modern Venice, notes how local groups of fighters would gather in taverns and wineshops before a battle, or to celebrate a victory.<sup>79</sup> Increasingly throughout the period, these same establishments also offered another, very valuable resource to Venetian *popolani*: lending small sums of money in exchange for pawns, or *pegni*, that could provide a much-needed font of ready cash in difficult moments.<sup>80</sup>

These spaces, especially the unlicensed *furatole*, also clearly were very important to the people who worked in them, many of them *popolani* struggling to survive who took to selling wine and/or food from their houses or boats. While being vexed by such operations because they were extremely difficult to tax and survey, the authorities also recognized that they provided essential livelihoods to people who might be considered deserving of pity and charity.<sup>81</sup> In 1517, for example, Polleto the carpenter was made to sit in a public place with two wine jugs strung around his neck as punishment for *furatola*, because he did not have the money to pay his fine.<sup>82</sup> A few years earlier, after being convicted for the same offence, Nicoletto *detto* Bragasse was released from prison without paying a fine because of his poverty, but warned that next time he would be whipped around his neighbourhood of San Moisè.<sup>83</sup>

Nonetheless, as noted in the case of the *osterie*, the religious climate of the later sixteenth century also saw a harsher attitude develop towards spaces in which immoral and disorderly speech and conduct could flourish when people gathered to drink. On 31 July 1571, a moment of high tension because of the ongoing war with the Ottomans in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Council of Ten lamented again the proliferation of sociable drinking in “magazini da vin, et malvasie”. At a time when the Republic needed all the divine aid it could muster, the Ten thundered against the perilous moral consequences of this practice, which they worried “gives birth to many and serious errors, besides drunkenness, by those who, in order to satisfy their immoderate appetites, leave their wives and children to die of hunger at

---

<sup>79</sup> Robert C. Davis, *The War of the Fists. Popular Culture and Public Violence in Late Renaissance Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 60-1, 120. However, on drunken arguments that broke out in these spaces between neighbourhood factions, see p. 37. Rau, ‘Public Order’, argues that taverns could also be spaces of conflict resolution, and were at any rate less dangerous than the streets, where the majority of violence occurred.

<sup>80</sup> Matteo Pompermaier is researching the very common practice of *bastioni* lending against *pegni* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and I am grateful to him for discussing his findings with me. For a law regulating this activity, which seems to have been already well-established by the late sixteenth century, see ASV, GN, b. 1, fols 169<sup>v</sup>-171<sup>v</sup> (1603).

<sup>81</sup> Faugeron, *Nourrir la ville*, p. 673. Cf. Brown, ‘Landscape of Drink’, pp. 167, 220, on granting alehouse licenses or allowing people to operate unlicensed as a form of charity.

<sup>82</sup> ASV, GN, b. 5, reg. 11, fol. 44<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>83</sup> ASV, GN, b. 5, reg. 11, fol. 22<sup>r</sup>.

home. Because in these conventicles of drinkers they speak without respect about all kinds of people; they blaspheme, swear and indulge in lascivious behaviour”.<sup>84</sup>

This time, more than targeting the providers of hospitality, the Ten threatened the drinkers themselves: with a harsh sentence of eighteenth months of galley service if they were found eating, drinking, or gambling in these spaces. This law also specified that wineshops could not open on Sundays and religious holidays, but only serve alcohol to take away through a small hatch (*balconcello*) on these days. Notably, there is no evidence that such prohibitions were reinforced by significant grass-roots support, as occurred in Florence in the same period, when several of the major textile guilds prohibited their members from frequenting taverns for moral reasons.<sup>85</sup>

Although more research is needed to understand how ordinary Venetian inhabitants used and regarded their local drinking establishments in this period, a brief survey of governmental attempts to control these spaces raises some of the same complex issues that we have seen in relation to the *osterie* and *albergarie*. The Venetian authorities certainly were not opposed to the consumption of alcohol by city residents; believing, indeed, that wine and food provision were essential elements in urban stability. A telling example of this was the installation of the famous “fountain of wine” within the Arsenal in the seventeenth century, for the benefit of the workers in this important workspace and as a symbol of the munificence of the Venetian state towards its people.<sup>86</sup> The Arsenal, however, was a demarcated and secure space, subject to high levels of surveillance, and the Arsenalotti a closely-monitored corporate body, with particular privileges. The same could not be said for all of the elements in the city’s network of wine retail sites, particularly the unlicensed vendors operating out of private homes or on temporary (and potentially mobile) sites such as boats and rafts. Striving to achieve a delicate balance of political, economic, social and health risks and benefits, of individual and collective gains and losses, the authorities in the sixteenth century exerted themselves to keep a close eye over this network, not only to ensure provision, regulate price and enable the collection of profitable taxes, but also to prevent, as much as possible, these becoming sites for unsupervised gathering and social exchange.

---

<sup>84</sup> “Nascano molti, e gravi errori altra la imbreageza di quei tali quali per sodisfar il loro immoderato appetito, lassano morir da fame in casa la moglie, et figlioli loro perchè in queste conventicole de bevagni si parla senza rispetto d’ogni qualità de persone biastemano, giurano, lusuxiano”. Ibid., b. 1, fols 146<sup>v</sup>-147<sup>v</sup>. Famagusta, in the important Venetian colony of Cyprus, fell to the Ottomans on 1 August 1571 after a long siege, paving the way for the Battle of Lepanto in October of that year.

<sup>85</sup> On this campaign of “disciplining and self-disciplining”, which lasted for a few years from 1588, supported by the ducal authorities, see Rosenthal, ‘Barfly’s Dream’.

<sup>86</sup> Davis, ‘Venetian Shipbuilders’.

## *Conclusion*

As should be evident, already by 1500, Venice had in place a complex and variegated infrastructure providing hospitality to both locals and foreigners, from longer-term migrants to short-stay visitors, spread across the city. While these sites were regarded as essential to the well-being of the community, the economy and thus to the maintenance of order, the sixteenth century was marked by the efforts of various government bodies to bring them under closer surveillance: to restrict who was allowed to run them, where they were located and who, when and what they were permitted to serve.

Although further investigation is needed into the surviving criminal records from this period, contemporary legislation and some evidence of enforcement strongly suggest that hospitality sites were seen by the authorities as potential flashpoints of unrest in the city, and that those authorities worked very hard to neutralize that potential, even if they never entirely succeeded.<sup>87</sup> The presence of numerous urban spaces dedicated not to domesticity or work or devotion but to drinking and leisure was inherently challenging to the structures of authority on which the organization of the state and society were founded. Investing innkeepers and other hospitality workers with important roles in the surveillance and control of disorderly behaviour was one way to mitigate this problem, but as we have seen these remained ambiguous figures with conflicting loyalties, while scores of others ran their establishments without permission and thus without oversight.

The anxiety about hospitality sites was motivated particularly by the suspicion of foreigners as agents of disorder in the city, but also of the disruptive capacity of Venetian locals who came together to eat and drink, as well as the mixing of these two groups. The religious and moral unrest associated with drinking and conviviality were viewed by the government as inherently political problems, that directly threatened their authority and ability to maintain order and security.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, in attempting to radically restrict any spaces in which members of the *popolani* could gather in this way, the Venetian authorities seem to have been more than usually sensitive to their potential for unrest, compared to most other Italian and European cities where locals were permitted to frequent taverns, even if only in

---

<sup>87</sup> In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Venetian *osterie* continued to act as spaces of political gathering and subversion; for example, the anti-Austrian resistance fostered at the Osteria del Colombo: Elio Zorzi, *Osterie veneziane* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1928), p. 182.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. on the particular role of the Council of Ten in this period as the city's "most resolute guardian of religion and morality, the pillars which upheld its prime goals, public peace and order", Cozzi, 'Authority and the Law', p. 334.

limited hours.<sup>89</sup> We might view this prohibition as indicative of a political culture which could not conceive of allowing space or time for members of the *popolani* to come together and engage in discussion or action that might be deemed political or to permit the emergence of a popular public sphere that could ever be more than evanescent and fragmented.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> For examples of other places which did prohibit locals frequenting taverns, see above, note 68. The prohibition of locals frequenting drinking places in Venice does seem to have loosened from the seventeenth century, even if I have found no indication that the laws were changed. *Bastioni* in particular proliferated (there were fifty-two by 1683, while still only twenty-two *osterie* in operation) and seem to have been acknowledged to operate as taverns with drinking on site. Tucci, 'Commercio e consumo', p. 194.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. De Vivo, *Information and Communication*; Salzberg and Rospocher, 'Evanescent Public Sphere'.