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TOUCHING HER REPUTATION: MARRIAGE, GOSSIP AND SOCIAL NETWORKS IN EARLY MODERN VENICE

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ABSTRACT

An examination of gossip in early modern Venice, which begins with gossip about the making of marriages and is based on testimonies given to the Avogaria di Comun as part of their investigations into women from outside patrician circles who wished to marry patrician husbands. These kinds of prospective marriages were a source of great interest to people at all levels of society, both men and women. This interest was translated into gossip, much of which was gendered and localised. To test whether these forms of gossip represented wider patterns in the city, the social networks within which marriage gossip took place are compared with other patterns reflected in testimony given to the Holy Office (the Inquisition). The comparison suggests than women's contacts were geographically wider, crossing the city almost as much as men. The final part of the article argues that in a highly observational society like Venice, much gossip began from deductions based on visual behaviour.

Key words: Venice, gossip, gender, marriage, observation, networks

LA REPUTAZIONE DI LEI: MATRIMONIO, GOSSIP E RETI SOCIALI NELLA VENEZIA DELLA PRIMA MODERNITÀ

SINTESI

Il contributo, che propone un esame del gossip nella Venezia della prima modernità, si apre con il gossip sui matrimoni combinati e si basa sulle testimonianze rese alla Avogaria di Comun nell'ambito delle investigazioni da essa condotte sulle donne non appartenenti alla cerchia del patriziato e destinate a divenire spose di patrizi. Questo tipo di matrimoni era fonte di grande interesse a tutti i livelli della società, sia tra gli uomini sia tra le donne. Tale interesse si manifestava in pratiche di gossip, molte delle quali circoscritte agli appartenenti a un genere o a un particolare territorio. Per controllare se queste forme di gossip rappresentassero modelli di maggiore ampiezza all'interno della città, le reti sociali all'interno delle quali prendevano forma le pratiche di gossip sono state confrontate con altri modelli riflessi nelle testimonianze rese al Sant'Uffizio (l'Inquisizione). Il confronto suggerisce che i contatti delle donne fossero assai estesi dal punto di vista geografico, e attraversassero la città quasi quanto quelli degli uomini. La parte finale dell'articolo argomenta che in una società altamente basata sull'osservazione, quale quella veneziana, molta parte del gossip prendesse spunto da deduzioni basate sul comportamento visivamente rilevabile.

Parole chiave: Venezia, gossip, genere, matrimonio, osservazione, reti

My primary concern is to use the subject of this article, marriage, gossip and social networks in early modern Venice, as a hook on which to hang some broader conclusions about the role and context of gossip in a pre-modern urban culture. It important to emphasise that the use of "gossip" here may diverge from the way in which it has generally been used in the past and certainly from the way in which it is generally used in contemporary discourse – the malicious exchange of information about a person who is not present (De Vivo, 2007b, 116–117; Horodowich, 2008, 133–135, Burke, 1993, 89–117). Gossip in the past could almost be said to have embraced all forms of conversations. This involved not only the subjective transmission of information but also the interpretation of that information, the words in which this took place and the value systems which lay behind it and which were shared between the participants. The subject matter was potentially endless, but tended to fall within parameters established by the people engaged in the conversation. It did not necessarily concern other people, whether known personally by the participants or not, but could range from a discussion of a rise in the price of bread to meteorological phenomena, just as much as the exposition of heretical ideas. I am not particularly concerned here whether the intent of the conversation was either malicious or exclamatory, nor whether what was being said necessarily conformed to information which can be verified from other sources. Imaginative constructions in conversations can be equally revealing to the social historian.

The subjective nature of gossip as a cultural phenomenon also means that it is necessary to explore the context of the conversations concerned in order to make any kind of sense of them. We need to know something about the participants, whether this was a bilateral conversation, which seems most likely, or one in which the transmission of information was essentially one-sided, whether the conversation had several participants rather than the image frequently given by early modern Venetian sources of two men in conversation while walking along together or of two women collecting water from a communal well (ASV-SU, 95, Processi, 4–4v). Neither is all-embracing. Equally, we need to be aware that conversations were also exclusionary in character. Spoken information was a commodity which had a value which rose in relation to the extent that others, often physically close by were not allowed to be privy to it.

These dimensions of gossip have already been identified by historians, sociologists and anthropologists (Tebbutt, 1995; Capp, 2003; Button, Lee, 1987; Merry, 1984; Brison, 1992; Heilman, 1976). It would seem that they are generic to an understanding of gossip at any time. But there are two other dimensions which are more time-specific and these have been placed at the centre of this discussion as they offer ways of extending our understanding of pre-industrial society urban society. These are the spatial context of gossip – both the locations in which gossip took place and the locations from which observations were made which generated gossip – and the social networks within which gossip was produced and reproduced. The discussion has consequently been organised into three sections which gradually but gently move us away from the sense of touch to the senses of speech and vision (for a discussion of the role of the five senses in understanding the history of urban culture, see the essays in Cowan, Steward, 2006). It begins by looking in some detail at gossip around the making of marriages, which allows us to consider the fragility of a woman's reputation in the words of others and the ways in which her contribution to its construction was often a minor one. The second section considers the social networks from which gossip originated and places marriage-making gossip groups alongside others engaged in gossip. The final section focuses on the function of observation in Venice as a context for gossip.

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In 1648, the Venetian magistracy of the *Avogaria di Comun* was presented with a complicated case for consideration concerning a twenty-nine-year old woman named Laura del Sol, the widow of Giulio Girardi, who lived in a palace in the parish of Santa Euffemia on the island of the Giudecca facing the main part of the city of Venice (ASV-AC, 212/83, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Laura del Sol; Cowan, 1995). It was one of the *prove di nobiltà*, where magistrates were required to make recommendations on applications by non–patrician women who wished to marry into the patriciate. Formal approval following such investigations led directly to a series of steps which fully integrated any sons born to such marriages into the patriciate. The marriage was registered by the authorities. When a son was born, his name was inscribed in the Golden Book, the *Libro d'Oro*. At the age of eighteen, he took part in a lottery to see if he could gain

accelerated membership of the Great Council, and, if he failed, he then entered the Council as a full member at the age of twenty-five. Growing concerns in the later sixteenth century about the dangers of allowing sons of women, who while legally married to patrician husbands in the eyes of the Church and society, might bring a stain upon the patriciate because of their social background or moral reputation, had resulted in extensive legislation in 1589 to sort out those women who did not meet the criteria for acceptance. The evidence which was submitted for consideration was a combination of pre-existing documents – baptismal records, marriage contracts, tax returns, genealogies, wills, statements by abbesses of convents etc. – and transcripts of interviews carried out by the Avogadori. In common with practice in other contemporary investigations, particularly those of the Holy Office and those ecclesiastical courts dealing with marriage, hearsay evidence, both general and specific, was deemed to be acceptable and was taken into consideration (for a detailed analysis of the Prove di Nobiltà, see Cowan, 2007. For the Golden Book and entry into the Great Council, see Chojacki, 2000; Crescenzi, 1996).

The case of Laura del Sol interested the magistrates for a number of reasons. On the one hand, she seemed to be an ideal candidate to become the wife of a patrician. Unlike several of her contemporaries who had made similar applications for permission to become patrician wives, she did not come from the shadowy side of commerce, where questions could be raised about the social acceptability of merchants who were also master craftsmen or shopkeepers. She was the daughter of a spice merchant. She was also the widow of a member of the secretariat, Giulio Girardi, and had become, by marriage, part of the privileged sub-stratum of Venetian society, the *cittadini*. Giulio had died the previous August of *febre maligna* (fever). Three linked issues made her case more complicated. Laura was a widow and consequently subject to anxieties, if not assumptions about her moral probity since her husband's death. Her reputation had already been compromised by her known association with a member of the patriciate, Domenico da Mosto.[1] He was the first cousin of her late husband and any projected marriage with Girardi's widow immediately contravened the consanguinity laws and would have required special permission from Rome before it could take place.[2]

It is not so surprising then, that the relationship between Laura and Domenico was the subject of much conversation both among members of Laura's household and others who visited the house. These conversations fit neatly into our conception of gossip. Definitions of gossip, particularly when considered at a research level, however, are not quite so straightforward, and this is something to which we will return shortly. At present, it is worth looking at the story in some detail in terms of what was said, by whom it was said and to whom, and what was being said.

1 Her case is exceptional in the extent to which her potential husband was discussed by witnesses. There was a convention that women petitioned in generic terms in order to marry a patrician husband, even though it was clearly understood by everyone concerned that such petitions were only submitted once a specific marriage had been negotiated by the parties concerned.

2 The records of this investigation are also the basis for what follows.

There are three parts to the story, two of which the magistrates were able to verify from the testimony of those who had direct knowledge, and the other one, which was based on suppositions arising out of this direct knowledge. It was generally known both within the household and outside that Domenico and Laura were planning to get married. Here, the key witness was a young man named Girolamo Benedetti. Benedetti was related to Laura's first husband, and had lived in the house for a while because of domestic difficulties with his father at home. He continued to visit the house even after Girardi's death, and was on good terms with both Laura and with the servants. He obtained some of his information directly from Laura and Domenico, and the rest when speaking to the servants in the kitchen. Benedetti confirmed that Domenico had visited the house during his cousin's lifetime and also after his death, and that he had done so *familiarmente*. He was at home there and came to eat almost every Sunday at lunchtime. He also called in after meetings of the criminal court of the Quarantia Criminale, where he was an elected judge. Benedetti distinguished this behaviour from that of other kin, whom he said came only on special occasions such as weddings or funerals.

Giulio Girardi's brother, Giacomo, had continued to live in the house with his widowed sister-in-law. When Giacomo became seriously ill, Domenico took Benedetti to one side, and told him that he "definitely wished to marry Laura. I said he should take care because marriages between close relatives were not usually known to lead to much happiness. He insisted that he wanted to do it, that the children needed protection and that Laura had property. He said he would administer this property with love and charity. He said that the marriage had been agreed with the consent of Laura and said that I should say nothing of this to Giacomo. I replied that Giacomo had to see to his soul. The next day, when Giacomo had still not died, Laura spoke to me about the wedding and I replied that I thought that it was a good idea" (ASV-AC, 212/83, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Laura del Sol).

It is not at all surprising that the servants were also aware of Domenico's visits. Maria Bon spoke of the way in which Giulio Girardi had invited his cousin to stay overnight and that he had continued his visits even after his cousin's death. But Benedetti also learned of Domenico's behaviour from the servants after he, Benedetti, had stopped living in the Girardi house. One of them told him that Domenico sometimes stayed the night, but always slept in a separate room. Indeed several of the servants noted that he stayed the night, something which was quite unusual behaviour.

The incident which interested the magistrates most was one stormy night when Domenico had been rowed across the Giudecca canal from Venice to eat with Laura and her family, and the weather was so bad that he was unable to recross what is quite a wide stretch of open water to return home to his palazzo. A frequent visitor to the house, a tailor's widow named Bernardina de Veroni, told the *Avogadori* that Laura had done her late husband little honour. They told her to speak freely and to tell them what she knew. What she knew was only hearsay evidence, but they took it very seriously. "Maria Camariera told me that one night after Giulio's death, Laura and Domenico slept together" (ASV-AC, 212/83, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Laura del Sol). She had been told this in secrecy while visiting Laura's house about a month earlier. The magistrates were duty bound

to find out more, and, after having convoked several female servants, all named Maria, (a very common name for servants in Venice), identified and interviewed Bernardina's informant. She denied ever having said that the couple had slept together. On the other hand, she made a number of connections between that night's events that explain the gossip. Domenico and Laura were very much at ease with one another. He came late and stayed the night. Above all, her mistress, Laura, had sent Maria out of her bedroom and closed the door. There may well have been practical reasons for this, but it was also widely recognized in pre-industrial society that closing the door of a room with a bed in it was a sign that the inhabitants wanted privacy (Gowing, 2000). In fact Domenico had not slept with Laura. She was several months pregnant with her late husband's posthumous child, and Domenico had slept in one room with Laura's sons, while Laura slept in another with her mother and grandmother.

In due course, the Avogadori approved the proposed marriage between Laura and Domenico and the couple also achieved the necessary dispensation from the Vatican for consanguinity. On the other hand, the magistrates' general suspicions of the sexual morality of widows, which were strongly influenced by the contrasting stereotypes of the chaste widow and the lusty widow, were justified in other gossip-based cases which came before them (Cowan, 2009). They turned down a retrospective application to register a marriage between Marietta Rossi, who had been married twice before, even though she was still only twenty seven, and the patrician, Marco Minio. They spoke to a number of neighbours in the Campo delle Erbe who all shared the view that Marietta's behaviour as a widow was far from chaste. One noted that her most recent husband was a gentleman who "made love to her" *gli faveva l'amor*. The phrase could simply be taken to be a form of courtship but it is unlikely that Pasqualin di Cesare, a carpenter, would have chosen to specify this if Minio had followed the usual conventions of courtship, even if it had been visible and audible in public such as a serenade. Betta, the wife of a boatman, entered the houses of both Marietta and Marco as part of her work as a washerwoman. She also used the same phrase about them, *gli faceva l'amor,* but specified not only that he had done so during the lifetime of her second husband while he was ill but also that Marco had made love to her from one balcony to another. This was the subject of generalised local gossip, represented to the Avogadori as "muttering". "People muttered that this young Minio had dealings with her before he took her as his wife and even while her other husband was still alive – that is what they were muttering" (ASV-AC, 213/3, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Marietta Rossi) (for fare l'amor as courtship, see Casanova, 2009, 431–432).

There are many other similar stories which drew the attention of local gossip, but the main association between gossip and the making of marriages was far from negative. On the contrary, the making of marriages was of considerable interest not only to the family and friends of those concerned, their households and immediate employees but also to those around them: the parish clergy (who took a professional interest), neighbours, shopkeepers, associates, indeed anyone looking for an entertaining event which would distract them from everyday concerns. It would take far too long to list all the different social dimensions of the making of individual marriages. Suffice it to say, there was a period of expectation during which girls of marriageable age and those widows who were also

considered to be on the marriage market were the subject of speculation by those around them. Unless it was clear that they were going to spend the rest of their lives in a convent, their contemporaries assumed that sooner or later, they would get married. There was then speculation over the identity of the groom, the value of a dowry which was being offered or discussion of the significance of the precise value of a dowry in a marriage contract once things had progressed to such a stage (Cowan, 2008, 330–332).

As preparations for a wedding began to gather pace, there was even more speculation about whether or not it had actually taken place. Given the propensity for many Venetians from the upper circles of society to hold wedding ceremonies in their own homes, or in churches away from the bride's parish and the common view that and engaged couple were, to all intents and purposes, married, it is not surprising that onlookers jumped to inaccurate conclusions (Zarri, 2000, 243–244; ASV-AC, 109/36, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Diana Mirandola; 207/81, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Chiara Marcello; 213/57, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Gratiosa Cubli). In 1626, gossip reached out into the street from the house of the lawyer, Antonio Cesana. According to one of his male neighbours, it was being said in public and "in particular by the women of the Cesana household" that Signor Cesana had married one of his daughters, Leonora, the previous Carnival to a gentleman from Cà Grimani – in other words to a patrician Grimani family – who was also then living in his house. Another neighbour was equally convinced by local gossip that the wedding had already taken place because he had seen the groom inside the house. It was only when they were questioned about the clothing which Leonora was now wearing that doubts began to creep in. "I think she was wearing ordinary clothing; I haven't yet observed her to see if she is wearing pearls or not". The confusion was understandable. There were indeed plans to marry Leonora to the young Francesco Grimani and he was already living in the Cesana house and eating his meals there but at that stage they had not yet exchanged promises before the local parish priest. Instead, Cesana had seen a golden opportunity to ally his family to the patriciate and had taken it at a time in the period before Lent when it was traditional to celebrate weddings. Francesco Grimani came from one of the poorer patrician families. After undertaking galley service, which was a common form of training for young male patricians, he had returned to Venice without anywhere to live. Cesana offered him his hospitality, and his daughter as a wife. While onlookers jumped to conclusions because sharing *loco et fuoco* (home and hearth) was one of the criteria for identifying a married couple, Cesana kept all the proprieties. Leonora slept in the same bedroom as her numerous sisters and a maidservant. Grimani slept in another room on his own and they neither spoke nor ate together alone. Nor were they allowed to touch hands (ASV-AC, 304, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Leonora Cesana; see also ASV-AC, 318, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Gerolama Foscarini).

It is also understandable why Cesana was happy to spread the news of the impending marriage, even if he was not entirely happy with the eventual results in terms of gossip. Association with a patrician family by marriage not only brought kudos to the bride's family, it could also bring practical economic, political or even juridical benefits. The Avogadori who were considering Leonora's case were so uncertain whether or not she was still a virgin, they decided to call in midwives to carry out a physical examination.

They confirmed that she was still intact (ASV-AC, 304, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Leonora Cesana). Much of the information which was given by hearsay to the Avogadori about impending marriages does seem to suggest however that rather than this kind of gossip taking place covertly about private information which had been unsuccessfully kept from the public domain, it was being deliberately spread by the bridal families concerned in order to enhance their reputations. Information out on the street among males enabled the symbolic power of upward social mobility through marriage along the female line to resonate more widely from a very early stage.

It was often also out on the street or on the thresholds of shops that men were to be found in conversation about impending marriages. We do know from Filippo de Vivo that there were public places indoors where men gathered for conversation – while waiting to be shaved or to have their hair cut or curled for example, and also in apothecaries' shops where the owners obtained an edge over their competitors by providing space for their customers to read newspapers and sit down in pleasant surroundings while waiting for their goods to be prepared and wrapped (De Vivo, 2007a). Barbers appeared frequently among the witnesses interviewed by the *Avogadori di Comun* about marriages past and present although it is clear that they only obtained some of their information through gossip in their own shops; the rest came to them as they exercised their occupation in the houses of their patrons (ASV-AC, 207/87, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Chiara Marcello; 217/100, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Laura Scaramella; 223/58, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Andrianna Paganuzzi).

Much gossip about marriage, however, took place either at the entrances to shops or out in the open. There were good practical reasons for this. Those retail merchants who had shops of their own rather than selling goods from trestle tables in the open, could only afford comparatively small spaces. So we find people like Santo Petrobelli, who sold oils and other distillations for medicinal purposes in a shop on the edge of the Piazza San Marco and "sat in a chair and discoursed on the quality of his goods to those who came to buy" or Zuanne Manzoni, who used to stand outside his stationer's shop at the sign of the Hen (ASV-AC, 209/24, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Laura Petrobelli; 207/65, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Andrianna Manzoni). Not only was this also an opportunity to collect and disperse information, their networks were largely made up of regular customers with whom they were at ease. Another Manzoni, this time a fruit merchant at the bridge of Santa Catterina, not only knew that his widowed neighbour Isabella Cigala had married a man named Dardani but had also heard through gossip that "la Dardana" had arranged a marriage between one of her daughters and a Venetian gentleman (ASV-AC, 215/57, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Gratiosa Cubli).

Such gossip among women often emanated from within the household as we have seen in the case of Leonora Cesana and the patrician husband captured for her on the streets by her father, but it would be inaccurate to suggest that gossip networks were strictly gendered. Wives and husbands often shared information about others. Zuan Moreti was convinced that his neighbour Zanetta Cucina had got married because two weeks before being interviewed by the Avogadori, he had seen great confusion around the Cucina house and many gentlemen going inside. Everyone he had spoken to outside the house had told

him that they had joined hands before the priest. Because this ran contrary to statements by the priest that no such ceremony had taken place, Moreti was asked to testify again, having identified his information source. It was his wife (ASV-AC, 312, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Zanetta Cucina). Sebastian Marcolini, a physician, also identified his wife as his source for another wedding which had not yet taken place (ASV-AC, 340, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Fontana Pigna). Neither husband had doubted their spouses at the time. But mixed gossip was not limited to married couples. A local blacksmith heard of the impending marriage of Fontana Pigna in 1611 from a local school teacher named Cecilia (ASV-AC, 340, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Fontana Pigna). And while barbers tended to have an exclusively male clientele from whom they garnered gossip, boatmen, either ferrymen or the employees of individual families, learned much from conversation with their regular passengers of both sexes (ASV-AC, 207/87, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Chiara Marcello; 207/75, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Camilla Spini; 211/67, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Marina Priuli; 222/47, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Vittoria Grotta).

The networks of people who either had direct knowledge of impending marriages and spoke of it or learned the information from others tended to be comparatively localized. They were close neighbours, or people living in the same or a contiguous parish. Information exchanged by males with others tended to reach out further geographically because they were linked by occupation or by common membership of a confraternity, particularly the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista (Davis, 1998). This builds up a picture of Venice as a city in which gossip networks were relatively spatially compact. It is only when we move the focus away from gossip about marriages that more extended networks come to light. The investigations by the Holy Office also relied to a certain extent on gossip. Once again, much talking was local and much was between women. A woman named Giovanna from the parish of San Steffano was investigated in 1556 for possible witchcraft. While she had a number of regular visitors who had been going into her house, one of her neighbours, a textile worker reported that "the whole parish is marvelling at her generosity in giving alms" (Milani, 1994, 27). But the net could be wider, even for female witnesses. The widow Paulina Raferta was told by her daughter Antonia, the wife of a boat-builder, that a certain Angela, known as La Turca, cast beans in order to tell the future. Paulina lived in the parish of San Zaccaria, behind St. Mark's, but Antonia lived in the parish of S Pietro di Castello, at the Eastern extremity of the city. Paulina was quite clear that she had been given the information by Antonia in her house, not once but several times and obviously travelled some distance to see her. Another witness in the same case, a young widow who told them that she worked in the houses of different people wherever she was called, lived in the parish of San Benedetto, quite close to the Rialto, but had been called in by Anzola Turca to her house in San Martin, near the Arsenal (ASV-SU, 95, Processi).

If the conversation between Father Carlo Bernardi, priest of San Stin and a woman with pock marks and a big nose named Cecilia who lived opposite the church seems to fit into a pattern of neighbourly contacts, it is clear that Cecilia ranged much more widely in the city. Father Bernardi had come to the Inquisition in 1690 to tell them that although he had refused Cecilia's request to supply her with a piece of the Host which she could

then give to a patrician to keep in his sleeve so that he could win at cards, she had then told him that she had succeeded in obtaining some from another source. Again, the source was local and ecclesiastical but its destination was not. Cecilia's network ranged much more widely. She had given it to a tailor from the parish of San Barnabà so that he could pass it on to the servant of the nobleman. The tailor corroborated the story. As in the case of Father Bernardi, she had called out to him as he was passing her door to ask if he was friendly with the patrician's servant. It is obvious that she had already obtained this information from someone else and that this activity was part of her general work as a go-between for those who wished to influence the outcomes of gambling by being in contact with a consecrated host (ASV-SU, 126, Processi, 4 March 1690).

Earlier on, it was suggested that the starting point of gossip was not necessarily the transmission of a piece of information from one person to another along the lines that the master's daughter was going to get married soon, but arose out of visual observation. Venice was a highly observational society (Cowan, 2008, 219–221). Reputations and especially the reputations of women were frequently based on the extent to which they could be seen to be conforming to expected kinds of behaviour. It was part of everyday life to observe others and to draw conclusions from these observations. If this concerned a stranger, then the observations would probably have centred on the signals about their wealth, occupation or social status given by the way in which they were dressed, how they walked and whether they were accompanied by servants.

The testimony given to the Holy Office about Giovanna, the herbalist and suspected witch from the parish of San Steffano is an eloquent example of the way in which a woman's behaviour outside the house was under observation. In Giovanna's case it was her absence from the street and the nature of her male visitors which caused comment in the neighbourhood based on visual observation. Niccolò, a textile worker who lived nearby, had seen her receive visitors, in particular a fat man called Bartolomio. Paulo, another neighbour, noted that she rarely went out of her house, only every three months or so, but that when she did so it was in Bartolomio's company and without the expected presence of a female servant. A third neighbour told the authorities that he had never seen her leave her house, a subject of interest as women of her social status would normally have been expected to go out at least weekly to church. On the other hand, he had heard from local gossip that she was unable to go out because of her great weight and consequently priests came to her to take confession (Milani, 1994, 27–39).

Some observation-based gossip about women related to their good reputation. This was not so much the case that behaviour in accordance with expectations of modesty and retirement from the public gaze raised eyebrows (Labalme, 1980). On the contrary, for male observers at least, there was always a question about the availability of any females whom they could observe and the conclusion that they were in some way "protected" was valuable information which they registered. Antonio Cesana often saw his neighbours, the mother and daughter Grimana Peracca and Benetta Grimani on the balcony of their house. When he stated to the Avogadori, "I could see them clearly on their balconies and never saw or heard anything which could possibly cast a shadow on their honesty", he was also admitting that it was customary to observe one balcony from another and to lis-

ten to the conversations of others in order to determine their status and reputation (ASV-AC, 208/17, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Betta Grimani).

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Why did people gossip about the making of marriages? It was not only the physical element, although this played a part. They did so because in principle it was a major life cycle event for the families concerned, signalling not only a change in the status of the woman who was to marry, but also potentially the development of the next generation, the creation or reinforcement of links between the two families, and, from a local perspective, the prospect of a spectacle which could be seen from a distance, or perhaps participated in directly. Because the marriages discussed here all involved non-patrician women marrying into the social elite, there was the added frisson for onlookers and gossips of a vicarious association with the patrician world of social, if not necessarily economic or political power. It would be interesting to compare this with gossip about other kinds of marriages lower down society.

Gossip about the making of marriages took place between pairs of individuals and among groups, inside houses and out, and not uncommonly on the threshold at an open door, an open window or between a balcony and the street. It crossed social distinction, gender boundaries and generally developed from information which had been deliberately released into the public domain by the families of those concerned as a kind of extension to the act of bearing witness which lay at the heart of the rituals of engagement and getting married. We might almost call this benign gossip rather than malicious gossip, even if many jumped to the conclusion that "words had been exchanged before the priest" when this was not so.

Gossip took place among pre-existing groups in most cases. A distinction has to be made between group gossip and information which had generally circulated among a much larger body of people – the point at which witnesses spoke of *pubblica voce et fama*. What defined these groups was what they already had in common. Different subjects of gossip sometimes engaged different groups as Elizabeth Horodowich and Filippo de Vivo have shown in the case of gossip about Venetian politics (Horodowich, 2008; De Vivo, 2007b), but the evidence of the social networks within which gossip groups developed suggests that it was not only in the case of gossip about the making of marriages that there was a strong local component within a single or contiguous parishes. Accusations of witchcraft or heresy considered by the Holy Office also partly reinforce this pattern but not entirely. Certain other solidarities need to be taken into account. The most significant of these were kinship links, particularly among women. Antonia, who lived a considerable distance away from Paulina Referta but who told her things about a woman considered to be a witch, whom we considered earlier, was her sister. It was common practice for sisters to continue to visit each other even after they had got married. It was equally common practice for the majority of Venetians who rented their accommodation rather than owning it to move from one part of the city to another (Megna, 1991, for similar patterns in Bologna, see Casanova, 2009, 422). They participated in local gossip until they

moved away, but then sank below the visual horizon of their former neighbours, who, when questioned by the Avogadori di Comun, were at a loss to provide any more information about them, or indeed to show any further interest.[3] More still needs to be known, however about the other reasons which led ordinary Venetians as opposed to patricians, civil servants, lawyers or merchants to cross the city and come into regular contact with others with whom they gossiped.

Journeys such as these had starting points, just as chains of gossip had starting points. In the final section of this article, an attempt has been made to make the case that the constant visual observation of others from vantage points: doors, windows, and balconies, took place within the framework of sets of shared cultural norms which led to judgements based on clear assumptions about others. From the perspective of gossip then, the spatial dimension was all-important in establishing how gossip-chains began and the circumstances in which they continued to operate.

KAJ PA NJEN UGLED? ZAKONSKA ZVEZA, OBREKOVANJE IN DRUŽBENO MREŽJE V ZGODNJENOVOVEŠKIH BENETKAH

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POVZETEK

Prispevek je nastal kot nekakšen skupek nekaterih širših zaključkov glede vloge in konteksta obrekovanja v predmoderni urbani kulturi. Razdeljen je v tri dele in začne s podrobno obravnavo obrekovanja glede sklenitve zakonske zveze, kar nam služi kot izhodišče za premislek o ranljivosti ženskega ugleda, kot so ga ustvarile tuje besede, in o majhnih možnostih, ki jih je ženska običajno imela, da bi si ugled ustvarila sama. V drugem delu osvetlimo družbena mrežja, v katerih so govorice nastajale, in primerjamo skupine, ki so čenčale o porokah, z drugimi obrekovalskimi skupinami. V zadnjem delu si za predmet obravnave izberemo Benetke kot opazovalne družbe in preučimo vlogo, ki je ta lastnost beneške družbe igrala pri oblikovanju govoric. Ljudje so radi tračarili, ker je poroka pomenila enega pomembnejših dogodkov v življenjskem ciklu posamezne vpletene družine, ki ni privedel le do spremembe statusa bodoče neveste, temveč potencialno tudi do nastanka naslednje generacije, vzpostavitve ali okrepitve vezi med družinama in, gledano s stališča lokalne skupnosti, je taka priložnost predvsem obetala spektakel. Ker

3 When the Dutch merchant Giacomo Stricher's fortunes changed for the worse, he moved out of a large house in the parish of Santa Maria Formosa and his former neighbours did not know what had become of him (ASV-AC, 247/80, Prove di Nobiltà, case of Isabetta Stricher).

je pri obravnavanih sklenitvah zakonske zveze, zabeleženih v arhivu uprave Avogaria di Comun, vedno šlo za nepatricijsko žensko, ki se je s poroko vzdignila med družbeno elito, je bilo opazovanje in obrekovanje toliko bolj vznemirljivo početje, saj je običajne ljudi povezovalo s svetom vladajoče elite patricijev. O bodočih zakonskih zvezah se je čenčalo tako v dvoje kot v skupinah, običajno takšnih, ki so obstajale že pred poroko, znotraj in zunaj hiše in zelo pogosto s hišnega praga, okna ali z balkona na ulico. Obrekovanje ni bilo omejeno le na določen družbeni sloj ali spol, govorice pa so se praviloma razvile iz informacij, ki so v javnost pricurljale s strani vpletenih družin. Dokaze, da je bila za družbena mrežja, znotraj katerih so nastale obrekovalske skupine, značilna močna krajevna komponenta, najdemo tudi v študijah o obtožbah čarovništva ali herezije, ki jih je obravnavala sveta kongregacija. Slednje opozarjajo tudi na velik pomen sorodstvenih mrežij in drugih, geografsko bolj raznolikih odnosov. Beneška družba je bila izrazito naravnana k opazovanju. Neutrudno opazovanje drugih z dobrih razglednih točk se je odvijalo znotraj okvira skupnih kulturnih norm, tako da se je druge presojalo na podlagi jasnih domnev o njih; to pa predstavlja pomembno kontekstualno podlago za razumevanje zgodnjenovoveških govoric.

Ključne besede: Benetke, govorice, spol, zakon, opazovanje, mrežja

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