

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



# Plague Time: Space, Fear, and Emergency Statecraft in Early Modern Italy

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Volume 44, numéro 2, printemps 2021

Experiencing the Environment in the Early Modern Period: Seasons, Senses, and Health  
Saisons, sens et santé : l'expérience de l'environnement au seuil de la modernité

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1082697ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37522>

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Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (imprimé)

2293-7374 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Eckstein, N. (2021). Plague Time: Space, Fear, and Emergency Statecraft in Early Modern Italy. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 44(2), 87–111. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i2.37522>

Résumé de l'article

Dans un ouvrage célèbre, Michel Foucault a soutenu que les mesures que déployait la classe dirigeante de la première modernité en réponse à la peste consistaient à placer les citoyens sous une étroite surveillance et à contraindre de larges pans de la population urbaine à se soumettre à une quarantaine. Pour Foucault, ces politiques des XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles représentaient les premiers pas vers un paradigme autoritaire qui n'émergerait pleinement qu'au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le présent article soutient que le modèle de Foucault est trop abstrait pour servir d'outil à l'examen historique de situations d'urgence spécifiques et propose un cadre d'analyse alternatif pour aborder ces problématiques. S'intéressant à des événements réels survenus dans l'Italie de la première modernité, cet article révèle que, lorsqu'ils se trouvaient sous la menace de la peste, les responsables de la santé florentins et bolognais se projetaient dans une dimension spatio-temporelle différente, dans laquelle seule la propagation de la contagion dictait les actions et les perceptions officielles. Cette dimension, le « temps de la peste », ne représentait pas une étape dans l'avancée inéluctable vers « l'utopie de la ville parfaitement gouvernée » que décrit Foucault, mais plutôt une réponse contingente à une menace récurrente. Le temps de la peste, qui apparaissait et disparaissait en réponse à des événements spécifiques, peut donc être considéré comme une saison.

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# Plague Time: Space, Fear, and Emergency Statecraft in Early Modern Italy

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*Michel Foucault argued famously that early modern European governors responded to plague by quarantining entire urban populations and placing citizens under minute surveillance. For Foucault, such sixteenth- and seventeenth-century policies were the first steps towards an authoritarian paradigm that would only emerge in full in the eighteenth century. The present article argues that Foucault's model is too abstracted to function as a tool for the historical examination of specific emergencies, and it proposes an alternative analytical framework. Addressing itself to actual events in early modern Italy, the article reveals that when plague threatened, Florentine and Bolognese health officials projected themselves into a spatio-temporal dimension in which official actions and perceptions were determined solely by the spread of contagion. This dimension, "plague time," was not a stage on the irresistible journey towards Foucault's "utopia of the perfectly governed city." A contingent response to a recurrent existential menace, plague time rose and fell in response to events, and may be understood as a season.*

*Dans un ouvrage célèbre, Michel Foucault a soutenu que les mesures que déployait la classe dirigeante de la première modernité en réponse à la peste consistaient à placer les citoyens sous une étroite surveillance et à contraindre de larges pans de la population urbaine à se soumettre à une quarantaine. Pour Foucault, ces politiques des XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles représentaient les premiers pas vers un paradigme autoritaire qui n'émergerait pleinement qu'au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le présent article soutient que le modèle de Foucault est trop abstrait pour servir d'outil à l'examen historique de situations d'urgence spécifiques et propose un cadre d'analyse alternatif pour aborder ces problématiques. S'intéressant à des événements réels survenus dans l'Italie de la première modernité, cet article révèle que, lorsqu'ils se trouvaient sous la menace de la peste, les responsables de la santé florentins et bolognais se projetaient dans une dimension spatio-temporelle différente, dans laquelle seule la propagation de la contagion dictait les actions et les perceptions officielles. Cette dimension, le « temps de la peste », ne représentait pas une étape dans l'avancée inéluctable vers « l'utopie de la ville parfaitement gouvernée » que décrit Foucault, mais plutôt une réponse contingente à une menace récurrente. Le temps de la peste, qui apparaissait et disparaissait en réponse à des événements spécifiques, peut donc être considéré comme une saison.*

For twenty-first-century people unaccustomed to thinking about time and space as fluid, historically contingent phenomena, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–21 has been nothing short of an epistemic shock. Received notions of all kinds, including common assumptions about the way the global economy works, and the unexpected consequences of our personal habits and bodily

movements for the welfare of our fellow human beings have been called into question. Meanwhile, for scholars interested in the history of early modern epidemics, Michel Foucault's classic analysis of European anti-plague measures between the late Middle Ages and the early eighteenth century has never seemed so resonant. In the monolithic system of discipline and surveillance that Foucault theorized, a bureaucratic army of plague officials partitioned, subdivided, and analyzed every quarter, every household, and every human body in the plague-ridden city. Each street was placed under the authority of a local syndic, who stood on the lowest level of a hierarchy that vested ultimate authority in the city's health office or mayor, and which mediated information up and down via a cadre of *intendants* who supervised individual urban quarters. No citizen was permitted to leave their house from the moment the quarantine was announced. The syndic himself locked each family in their dwelling, and as long as the quarantine lasted he returned daily, in person, to check that no one had left the premises. Syndics also collected the personal details of all inhabitants residing in their street, so that authorities could track and control the movement of literally every individual. To this end, at the beginning of a quarantine the system just described was used to generate a master document listing the personal details and state of health of every inhabitant then present in the town.<sup>1</sup>

By such relentless vigilance, policing, observation, and the exploitation of minutely detailed, constantly updated intelligence, Foucault's governors transformed the city into an urban panopticon *avant la lettre*, their primary objective being to eradicate what in the age of COVID-19 we have learned to call "spread." This city, to quote Foucault himself, is a place:

in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which the uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead—all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. The plague is met by order.<sup>2</sup>

1. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 195–96.

2. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 197.

For Foucault, the emergency of an epidemic reified “the utopia of the perfectly governed city” in the form of the plague-stricken town.<sup>3</sup> In a lecture delivered in 1975 at the Collège de France, Foucault described plague as “the moment when the spatial partitioning and subdivision (*quadrillage*) of a population is taken to its extreme point, where dangerous communications, disorderly communities, and forbidden contacts can no longer appear.” In Foucault’s theorization, plague “brings the political dream of an exhaustive, unobstructed power that is completely transparent to its object and exercised to the full.”<sup>4</sup>

Foucault’s account, however, is less a history of one population’s response to a specific epidemic than it is the formal theorization of a political paradigm, whose origins he detects in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and which, he argues, emerged fully in the eighteenth century. Abstracted as it is from the contingencies of everyday experience, his analysis elides the fine texture of particular intentions and local contexts. Foucault exaggerates and flattens reality by portraying governmental power as absolute and all-pervasive; and because there are no chinks in his administrative armour, there is no room for resistance, active or otherwise, on the part of the population. All this said, there is no way of reading the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century records left by Italy’s various state health offices without being reminded of Foucault’s model. One is struck repeatedly by the collective efficiency, competence, and foresightedness of the officers whose job was to anticipate and respond to the ever-present menace of epidemic. They were inveterate record-keepers and census-takers. At the height of a plague crisis the health officers routinely surveyed and mapped the spread of disease within the population, often street by street and at the level of individual households.<sup>5</sup> But the system they ran was far from perfect, and they could never hope to know what was happening at every moment in their principal cities, let alone in their subject towns and territories. Despite

3. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 198.

4. Michel Foucault, “15 January 1975,” in *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974–1975*, ed. Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Verso, 2003), 47. See also Alan McKinlay, “Foucault, Plague, Defoe,” *Culture and Organization* 15.2 (1 June 2009): 169, dx.doi.org/10.1080/14759550902925336.

5. For an example of such a survey, Archivio di Stato di Firenze [hereinafter ASF], Ufficiali di Sanità [hereinafter, “Sanità”] 437. See also my “Florence on Foot: An Eye-Level Mapping of the Early Modern City in Time of Plague,” *Renaissance Studies* 30.2 (1 April 2016): 273–97, dx.doi.org/10.1111/rest.12144.

the officers' energy and good intentions, the daily instructions and sanctions that they promulgated during plague emergencies did not reach every subject. Significant numbers of people ignored official orders, or did not receive them at all; and while measures aimed at confining or excluding the sick or those suspected of carrying disease were often effective, the general picture never approached the immaculate completeness of Foucault's model.<sup>6</sup>

In the present article, I consider responses in Florence and Bologna to the deadly plague of 1630 to propose an alternative to Foucault's abstracted approach. What the records of the health offices in these two jurisdictions reveal is that, notwithstanding their different politics and administrative structures, officials in both places were motivated by an identical existential fear of pestilence. From the moment local authorities judged a new disease to be "true plague" rather than one of the numerous mundane ailments (*mali ordinari*) that circulated in ordinary times, Florentine and Bolognese health officers projected themselves into a spatio-temporal environment in which official actions and perceptions were determined solely by the spread of contagion. I call this dimension "plague time," a name which necessitates some prefatory remarks. The first is that I do not intend that it be understood as a metaphor. Plague time was process itself, a dynamic that contingent circumstances forced on health officers who needed either to engage with and conquer the disease or surrender the population to unchecked mortality. Second, plague time differs from Foucault's panoptic "utopia" in that it does not attempt to characterize governmental power as a monolithic system, but to explain the frame of reference in which the health officers operated during a plague emergency. Plague time was a relationship with time and place that circumstances imposed first and foremost on policy makers and executive officials whom the state had charged with the responsibility of confronting the epidemic. This is why this article exploits the records of official announcements, reports, edicts, and proclamations issued by the Florentine and Bolognese governments. Having said this, however, it does not follow that the effects of plague time were restricted to the governing class. As the following argument will make clear, many of the spatio-temporal consequences, mediated by emergency government directives, were felt by large numbers of the population, exactly as communities around the world

6. On the complexity and "messiness" of an actual plague response in this period, see Giulia Calvi, *Histories of a Plague Year: The Social and the Imaginary in Baroque Florence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

have recently experienced the spatial, temporal, and psychological effects of governmental attempts to stem the spread of COVID-19.

Whenever plague arose in early modern Italy, the imminent risk of uncontrollable mass contagion instantly enabled—indeed demanded—more far-reaching sanctions than governments were usually able or prepared to impose. One ironic side-effect of such emergency measures was that they revealed just how hollow were the government's conventional rhetorical claims to know about and control what was going on in every corner of its subject territories at times when no epidemic existed. Wading into the literally thousands of surviving proclamations (*bandi*) issued by the Tuscan grand-ducal government in such “ordinary” periods, one quickly discovers that regardless of the matter at hand—be it the illegal carrying of weapons, bird poaching, the public shaming of recidivist sodomites, or laws designed to stamp out illicit picnicking in the countryside on feast days—these laws share a feature in common.<sup>7</sup> In virtually every case, the legislators explicitly voice the aspirational fiction that in their perfectly regulated society, everything occurred in the approved manner, in the right place, and at the right time. Good Tuscans everywhere, for example, went about their business under the all-seeing eye of a beneficent grand duke. Examples of such idealizing language run the gamut from the banal to the genuinely dramatic. At the low end is an imposition in 1552 of new gabelles on all forms of flour milled “outside his [the grand duke's] most delightful ducal city of Florence, in whatever part or location of the rest of his most ample and happy state.”<sup>8</sup> Arguably more electrifying is a *bando* of 1593 that mandated the procedure for raising the alarm when a criminal sought to escape punishment by fleeing the city. This *bando* ordered the firing of cannons as a signal to lock the gates. All “artisans, tenants and other similar residents” within earshot outside the city walls were required to arm themselves with whatever implements they could find and effect citizen's arrest of any

7. ASF Leggi e Bandi del Granducato di Firenze [hereinafter Leggi e Bandi]. The matters referred to here, in order of citation, appear in: ASF Leggi e Bandi, Appendice 35, fols 219r, 242r–242v, 270r–271v; ASF Leggi e Bandi, Appendice 46, II, fols. 7r–9v; ASF Legge e Bandi, Appendice 35, fols 259r–v.

8. “fuori della sua diletteissima Ducal Città di Firenze in qual si voglia parte, o luogo del resto del suo amplissimo, et felice stato.” All translations in this article are mine. ASF Leggi e Bandi, Appendice 46, fols. 21r–26v.

suspicious-looking character approaching from the direction of Florence.<sup>9</sup> On hearing the cannons, rectors and syndics of all villages in the city's environs should run to their churches and sound the alarm. By these auditory means, the government's warning was mediated to more distant reaches of the *contado*. Radiating outward like ripples on a pond, concentric waves of politically charged sound called out the community of the grand duke's loyal subjects to the defence of the realm.<sup>10</sup> No one could doubt the motivation underlying such a law. As with so many *bandi*, this one reminded everyone that:

[...] the principal object of the Most Serene Grand Duke, our Lord [is] everywhere inclined to the universal tranquillity and security of his beloved people, and [he desires] especially that the inhabitants of his Ducal City of Florence may live there safe from the deceptions of those who, out of their evil nature and without the least fear of God or justice, have the audacity to commit assassinations, murders and other similarly atrocious crimes within the City.<sup>11</sup>

Such at least was the official view repeated in an ocean of governmental documents by the army of officials who ran the key magistracies on which the Tuscan grand duchy's existence depended. In fact, however, the grand duke and his ministers were neither omnipotent nor omniscient, as is immediately obvious if one even glances at the plethora of crimes and evasions of authority that fill the police records of the Otto di Guardia e Balìa.<sup>12</sup>

9. "tutti li contadini, Artieri, Pigionali, et altri simili habitanti." ASF Leggi e Bandi, Appendice 46, fols. 406r–47v.

10. On the role of sound in forging various kinds of community, including political, see Niall Atkinson, *The Noisy Renaissance: Sound, Architecture, and Florentine Urban Life* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), dx.doi.org/10.5325/j.ctv14gp0cj.

11. "Gli Spettabili Signori Otto di Balìa della Città di Firenze, sapendo il principale oggetto del Serenissimo Gran Duca nostro Signore esser tutto volto all'Universal tranquillità, et sicurezza de' suoi amati popoli, et spetialmente che li habitatori della sua Ducal Città di Firenze, possono vivere in essa sicuri dalle insidie di quelli, che per mala natura loro senza timore alchuno di Dio, e della Iustitia, tengono audacia di commettere assassinamenti, homicidij et altri simili atrocissimi delitti dentro la detta Città." ASF Leggi e Bandi, Appendice 46, fols. 406r–47v.

12. E.g., witness the range of offences documented for the years between 1601 and 1642 in ASF Otto di Guardia e Balìa del Principato 1914.

But if the battle to know in real time what was going on in all parts of the realm was doomed inevitably to failure, it was in plague time that early modern governors may have come closest to realizing their dreams of full and transparent authority. Nowhere is this point better illustrated than in the enormous correspondence of the permanent body responsible for protecting Florence and its subject territories from plague, the *Ufficiali di Sanità*, known colloquially as the *Sanità*.<sup>13</sup> And nowhere else is the brittleness of the state's ideal of spatial and temporal authority so graphically laid bare. Threat of contagion instantly revealed how quickly the government's control of who and what was allowed to cross state borders could fail. Among the more serious threats posed by an epidemic were the large numbers of daily border crossings of people who wished to enter the state from other jurisdictions where disease had been confirmed. Even more difficult to control were the internal migrations of rural inhabitants who, in attempting to flee disease and hunger in lesser towns and small villages, converged on Florence, creating a logistical—not to mention medical—nightmare for authorities. Such risks explain the health officers' desperation to know what was happening at every moment in all parts of the Tuscan state and beyond, and the range of tactical measures that they implemented as they attempted to keep abreast of developments. Failure to do so was a horrifying prospect because it was the first step along a road to disorder, loss of control, and, ultimately, chaos.

For such reasons, the *Sanità* and comparable agencies in other parts of northern Italy maintained a permanent crisis-management operation on a grand scale. It is this operation that one sees playing out in the *Sanità*'s records of every plague crisis that arose in the sixteenth century, as well as in the early months of 1630 as disease moved quickly down the Italian peninsula towards Tuscany.<sup>14</sup> The foundation of the *Sanità*'s rapid response was a network of sophisticated and genuinely far-reaching communications.<sup>15</sup> Its lifeblood,

13. When referring to the officials themselves I will simply use the term “health officers.”

14. On the operation of the Florentine *Sanità* and its response to the plague of 1630–33, see Calvi, *Histories of a Plague Year*; John Henderson, *Florence Under Siege: Surviving Plague in an Early Modern City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), [dx.doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvk8w059](https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvk8w059). An older, though still useful, study is Carlo M. Cipolla, *Cristofano and the Plague: A Study in the History of Public Health in the Age of Galileo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

15. I have discussed this network in my “Mapping Florence and Tuscany,” in *The Routledge History of the Renaissance*, ed. William Caferro (London; New York: Routledge, 2017), 275–86, [dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781315226217-18](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315226217-18).



information, was kept flowing by a vast, unceasing correspondence with envoys and regional officials spread throughout the Tuscan grand ducal state and beyond. One instance is a letter that the health officers wrote to one of the grand duke's secretaries on 8 June 1630, as plague drew closer to Florence. Framed as a report, the letter described the global state of affairs at the moment of writing. Identifying themselves as the young Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici's "humilissimi signori officiali di Sanità," the health officers described the situation as succinctly as possible, basing their interpretation on the latest accounts of the public health situation in Bologna.<sup>16</sup> They announced that as of June 8 they were in possession of an official letter from a senior government lawyer in Bologna itself, who advised that the city of Modena had closed its borders to Bologna, suspending all commerce and traffic between the two centres. The Florentine health officers further informed His Serene Highness of other correspondence in which Genoa's health officials asked them to confirm or dismiss rumours that cases of contagion had been discovered in Bologna and Ferrara. Meanwhile, they continued, "it is understood in Venice" that the maritime republic may have banned Ferrara;<sup>17</sup> still other letters written by merchants suggested that this ban might already have been lifted. The most recent news to have arrived in Florence, dated June 5 and from Pietramala, stated that in Bologna two entire families had died, although in all likelihood these deaths were caused by *mali ordinarij*, not the kind of contagious illness thought likely to spawn an epidemic. Finally, the Florentine health officers advised Ferdinando that given Bologna's relative proximity to Florence it would be prudent not to rely on so many unverified reports from other places, but instead to ascertain the situation in Bologna for themselves by dispatching a representative to that city who could report back to Florence quickly. To that end, pending the grand duke's approval, they appointed their own superintendent (*proveditore*), Tommaso Guiducci, a man whose seniority and experience equipped him to formulate a speedy, reliable assessment. In literally thousands of letters like this, written during and between periods of crisis, one sees how large quantities of intelligence from near and far were translated into clearly articulated policy and practical action.

Ordering, assimilating, and analyzing the information that arrived every day on their doorstep, the health officers figured plague as an invisible menace

16. "most humble lord health officials." ASF, Sanità 37, fols 40r–v.

17. "et in Venetia s'intendi che hanno bandito Ferrara." ASF, Sanità 37, fols 40r–v.

borne forward through time across a cluster of amorphous spaces whose shape and extent shifted with each new report and rumour. Visible beneath the textual surface of the Sanità's letters are the lineaments of a process in which, when plague appeared, the health officers rewrote the comfortably idealized spaces of Tuscany's great and happy state as a volatile landscape charged by their own confrontation with plague. It is this rewriting that signals the discursive slip into plague time. Unlike Foucault's abstracted model, plague time lives in the detail; it is synonymous with the contingency of the health officers' engagement with a current emergency. Plague time suffuses and inflects the smallest happenings, including the movements and gestures of individual bodies at specific times and in determinate spaces and situations. At the moment they judged contagion a proximate threat, the health officers relinquished the government's sunny ideal of grand ducal authority for a logic that refracted all events through the single lens of the plague's physical and spatial progress. In the early stages of such a crisis, the Sanità might attempt to stave off this move by propagating the familiar image of a state controlled from the centre by sagacious governors whose vision and authority extended evenly to all corners of the grand duchy. In 1630, the health officers employed this tactic as late as September 3 in a letter copied to the governors of thirty-two Tuscan towns. Not only was the situation not as grave as rumours were suggesting, they wrote, but fewer deaths had been registered for the season than was normal for the time of year.

Our magistracy understands that in some locations outside the city of Florence and the territories of His Serene Highness, word has spread that the contagion is advancing here. In our opinion, however, the rumours are outstripping the reality of the situation, and with the approval of His Serene Highness we have therefore resolved to advise you and the other rectors of the state purely of the facts to this point. And it should be known to those couriers and communities that it is well to recognize that in Florence the numbers of sick this season are lower than in other years. Notwithstanding that among the various maladies some malignity has been discovered that may represent the beginnings of contagion, it is unlikely that this has the capacity to turn into pestilence.<sup>18</sup>

18. "Si è inteso dal Magistrato Nostro che in qualche luogo fuori della Città di Firenze et li stati di SAS si sia sparso voce che in questa il contagio faccia progresso et credendo noi che la fama sparsa sia maggiore di quello che è in effetto haviamo risoluto con participatione di SAS d'avvisare voi e tutti gli altri Rettori

As the crisis intensified, however, and as the health officers assumed their *de facto* status of emergency governors, they entered the ontologically different reality of plague time.

Early in his classic work on the origins of modern nationalism, Benedict Anderson invokes the term “plurals” to denote common features that proliferated on the landscape of a given society and which, therefore, were culturally resonant to contemporary inhabitants. Such plurals could be concrete objects, certain kinds of people, or belong to a range of sensory phenomena.<sup>19</sup> In plague time, early modern Italians would have recognized a plethora of such Andersonian “plurals.” It should be acknowledged at this point that from our twenty-first-century vantage point, we are surveying this panorama through the eyes of aristocratic state functionaries in the employment of the Tuscan grand duke, and through the eyes of their correspondents. This larger readership included courtly peers, bureaucrats, officers, emissaries, and factors of various kinds. Even at several removes, however, it is clear that certain landmarks and phenomena on the discursive landscape of the Sanità’s correspondence would have been chillingly recognizable outside this epistolary space, in the lived experience of contemporary men and women of every social station. Inside city walls, the urban scenography was redefined during an epidemic by material signs as confronting as they were ubiquitous: barricades

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dello Stato di quello che meramente sia e passi fin hora et sarà noto a cotesti rapportatori e popoli che è bene si riscontra chiaramente che in Firenze ci sono in generale minori numeri d’ammalati degl’altri anni in questa stagione. Nondimeno fra i mali che si sono scoperti si è veduto in alcuni malignità tale che vedendosi principio di contagio se è dubitato che potesse diventare pestilente.” ASF Sanità 55, fol. 107v–108r. On the official reluctance to declare epidemics in Venice, see Jane L. Stevens Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice* (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 32.

19. Anderson introduces the concept of plurals in the context of novels associated with nationalist movements between the early nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. The authors establish continuity between the *mise en scène* of their novels and the exterior world by building fictive environments that resonate with the lived experience, and therefore the collective nationalist imagination, of their readers. An Indonesian novel evokes “a world of plurals [consisting of] shops, offices, carriages, kampungs, and gas lamps”—mundane things instantly recognizable to an Indonesian public. By immersing oneself in this novel, “we-the-Indonesian-readers are plunged immediately into calendrical time and a familiar landscape.” Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 30, 32. Anderson elaborates and extends this concept in later chapters.

that transformed streets and entire districts into no-go zones; houses boarded up and daubed with the marks and symbols of the health officials; official locations where miscreants attempting to evade checkpoints at the gates were publicly displayed and shamed as a graphic warning to others, as happened to a prostitute (*meretrice*), named Maddalena, in Pescia in September 1630. Maddalena confessed to having left town during curfew by way of a grating. Apprehended and locked up by local authorities as she tried to re-enter through the same hole, she was sentenced on order of the health officers to an hour in the public stocks (*gogna*).<sup>20</sup> In city streets at such times, the urban populace also witnessed the frightening spectacle of the plague doctors who visited the houses of the sick. Truly the stuff of nightmares, these figures moved about in public enveloped in slippery, miasma-repelling coats, hats jammed down on their heads, eyes bespectacled against the invisible particles of deadly disease thought to be floating in the air, and wearing enormous, hollow beaks stuffed with herbs and perfumed cloth to prevent the vaporous stink of death from invading their nostrils.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, in places where people congregated and moved about the city in large numbers, governments posted the latest emergency proclamations in the form of large, attention-grabbing broadsheets.<sup>22</sup> These *bandi* were a feature of the plague response in both Florence and Bologna, though they have survived in particularly large numbers in the state archive of Bologna. Very big—so as to be noticeable from a distance—and often extremely detailed, the *bandi* featured prominent headlines like those on the front pages of our own tabloid newspapers. The following are just three examples chosen from the many *bandi*, *rinovazioni di bandi*, *dichiarationi*, *notificationi*, *provisioni*,<sup>23</sup> and other orders

20. ASF Sanità 55, fol. 141r.

21. Henderson, 108.

22. It is not always possible to know the exact places where the printed *bandi* were posted, but it is logical to assume that they appeared at what Stephen Milner, who has studied the proclamations announced by the Florentine town-criers (*banditori*) of an earlier period, has called the city's "information gateways." These included major piazzas, the entrances to churches, major intersections, bridges, and city gates. Stephen J. Milner, "Fanno Bandire, Notificare, et Expressamente Comandare: Town Criers and the Information Economy of Renaissance Florence," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 16.1/2 (n.d.): 112, dx.doi.org/10.1086/673412.

23. Respectively: announcements or proclamations, revised proclamations, declarations, notifications, provisions.

published by the Bolognese health authorities during the emergency of June and July 1630: “BANDO: that prostitutes not wander outside the City Gates”; “BANDO: against those who are locked in their houses”; “BANDO: on keeping the city purged of dung and other filth.”<sup>24</sup> The provisions mandated in these proclamations could be heard as well as read by the public, given that such government announcements were not communicated exclusively in print.<sup>25</sup> At the height of a plague emergency a new crop of such *bandi* appeared every day.

In plague time, city gates became round-the-clock checkpoints where travellers, whether subject or foreigner, were required to display a bill or proof of health (respectively: *bolletta di sanità*; *fede di sanità*). Without this document they were forbidden to enter territories and towns as yet untouched by plague. Highly conspicuous, checkpoints were distinguished by temporary sentry boxes constructed from timber and military-style palisades designed to prevent unauthorized entry. They were not limited to large cities. Similar structures could also be found in smaller towns and villages—Certaldo, Firenzuola, Palazzuolo, Pietrasanta, Scarperia, Vicopisano, and others.<sup>26</sup> Checkpoints also featured at frontier outposts where people sought to cross into the Tuscan grand ducal state from neighbouring regions. They would, indeed, have been all but impossible to miss, as anyone seeking to enter a town, cross a border, or merely travel along major roads and thoroughfares within state borders had to pass through them. Avoiding a checkpoint necessitated the consciously illegal tactic of leaving a recognized right of way in order, as the Florentine health officers put it in 1555, “that they might enter our territory by [one of the] paths or other indirect routes” that criss-crossed remote rural terrain.<sup>27</sup>

24. “BANDO: Che le Meretrici non eschino fuori delle Porte della Città.”; “BANDO: Contro quelli che sono riserati nelle Case.”; “BANDO: Sopra il tenere espurgata la Città dalli Lettami, et altre immonditie.” Archivio di Stato di Bologna [hereinafter ASB], Assunteria di Sanità, Bandi 2, 1628–1630 [hereinafter, “Bandi 2”], respectively, fols. 23, 26, 31.

25. On the contrary, the printed *bando* was to a large extent regarded as a visual reminder of an important measure that had been orally proclaimed by a town-crier. The Florentine name of the town-criers who performed this duty—*banditori*—points etymologically to the close relationship between oral and written communication. Milner, “Fanno Bandire,” 115 ff. On the Venetian example see Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 128 ff, dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199227068.001.0001.

26. ASF Sanità 55, fols 15v–16r (Firenzuola, Palazzuolo, Scarperia); 92v (Vicopisano); 94v (Pietrasanta); 140r (Certaldo).

27. “entrassino nel contado per tragettj o altre vie indirette.” ASF Sanità 45, fol. 6v.

Solicitous of the conditions that the guards were expected to endure while maintaining their twenty-four-hour vigils—or more likely concerned that they should not have any excuse for shirking their duties—the Florentine health officers insisted repeatedly on measures that would have made the checkpoints even more prominent than they already were. They directed that, regardless of expense, all necessary funds should be employed to ensure that the soldiers and ordinary citizens responsible for monitoring incoming traffic had adequate shelter. Niccolò Luparelli, the Sanità's representative in Certaldo, ordered that in addition to reinforcing the palisades protecting the town, the watch should be provided with a shelter (*stanza*) “to which the guards must repair when the cold and rainy weather arrives.”<sup>28</sup> In other places, the shelter is described as a hut or a cabin (*casino, capanna*).<sup>29</sup> Guards were also to be provided with sufficient fuel for torches (*lumi*) to illuminate checkpoints, and for fires that would keep them warm and could also be used to sterilize (*purgare*) items presented for inspection by travellers who might be carrying plague.<sup>30</sup> Fulfilment of such provisions meant that the checkpoints would have assumed the character of small, fortified camps. It is likely that they were even more visible by night than they were during the day, given that the glow of torches and fires in the surrounding dark would have announced the presence of the guards from a considerable distance.

Visibility, however, is only a small part of the equation, and there is a deeper sense in which the significance of the checkpoints would have imprinted itself on the collective consciousness of large sections of the population. They were key points of the infrastructure by which the health officers defined people's ontological status in plague time. At checkpoints, travellers were assessed either as risk-free—because their documentation, appearance, and possessions cleared them of immediate suspicion—or as “suspect” (*sospetto*) because they had arrived from a place where communicable disease was known to be present. Travellers who had run the gauntlet on previous occasions would have approached a checkpoint with mounting apprehension, aware that they and their credentials, personal effects, and merchandise were about to be subjected to minute scrutiny. They knew that in the eyes of the guards they

28. “dove le guardie devono ripararsi venendo li tempi freddi e piovosi.” ASF Sanità 55, fol. 140r.

29. ASF Sanità 55, fols 24r–v, 95r.

30. ASF Sanità 55, fols 15v, 92v, 94v–95r, 140r.

were guilty until declared innocent, or, rather, suspect until cleared *prima facie* of the suspicion of contagion on the evidence of their external appearance. At such moments, it can only have heightened travellers' sense of isolation when guards kept them at bay. A set of ordinances and provisions published by the Bolognese health office in April 1630 mandated extreme caution. Guards, to quote the rules, "are not to touch travellers, nor [...] approach them any closer than is necessary to hear and to see them clearly until, as stated above, they have been cleared." To avoid the obvious risk of handling the documents that they were required to examine, the guards were "not to receive *bollette di sanità* other than by lodging them in a split at the tip of a long rod; and before reading them, they must pass them over the fire, purging them thoroughly."<sup>31</sup>

The mental image of officials gingerly handling flame-sterilized documents focuses attention on another of the plurals that proliferated amid plague time's temporal dispensation: the *bolletta* or *fede di sanità* itself. Effectively a passport, this was a printed form on which one's personal details and movements were entered, without which one could not travel and which must be produced on demand. Normatively speaking, these documents depersonalized the traveller by passing their subjectivity through the filter of a bureaucratic box-ticking exercise. In 1630, the Florentine officials ordered that in addition to full name, place, and duration of the bearer's most recent residence, the health passes carried by travellers entering or traversing grand ducal territory should also declare the bearer's age and physical features—"height, beard and other distinguishing attributes"—to ensure that the person described in the document was really the one standing before the inspectors. Any merchandise or fauna travelling with the said person, including its place of origin and manufacture, also needed to be accounted for in the *bolletta*.<sup>32</sup>

The *bolletta* transformed people into spatial and temporal products of plague time, defining them by location and movement: where they had come

31. "Non tocchino i Viandanti, e non se gli accostino se non tanto, quanto basti per udirli, e vederli distintamente, fin tanto, che non havranno giustificato come sopra. Non ricevano le Bollette di sanità altrimenti, che in cima, e per la fessura d'una canna longa, e prima di leggerle, le faccino fare sopra il fuoco, e ben purgare." ASB Sanità, Ordini e Provvisioni pel Contagio 1, 1:51.

32. "età statura, barba et altri segnali." ASF Sanità 55, fol. 9r. On this and on related kinds of ephemeral and mobile printed documents, see Alexandra Bamji, "Health Passes, Print and Public Health in Early Modern Europe," *Social History of Medicine* 32.3 (1 August 2019): 441–64, dx.doi.org/10.1093/shm/hkx104.

from, how long they had been there, when they had departed, the route they had taken, where they had stopped, and where they were headed. In other words, the *bolletta*'s spatio-temporal taxonomy distilled human beings as potential vectors of plague. Just how much the health officers relied on this instrument emerges in a detailed bulletin concerning one pair of villagers who went off the health officers' radar to become objects of what we would today call an all-points alert. On August 18, the health officers communicated the following information to the health officials in Campiglia Marittima:

Notification has been given to Our Magistracy that Antonio di Francesco, from the Case de' Gori,<sup>33</sup> approximately fifty years old, of small stature, with a middling beard, chestnut or pepper-and-salt in colour, on a horse with a yellow saddle, [and] Fedro di Goro, approximately eighteen years old, clean-shaven, of middling stature and with black hair, both from the Commune of Sambuca in the Montagna of Pistoia and Pavana at the Case de' Gori, who are practically attached to each other, departed from Pistoia on the twelfth day of the present month of August, each bearing a *bolletta* and travelling in the direction of the Maremma di Carpigna, reportedly having been previously at Bagno alla Porretta in the jurisdiction of Bologna. And if this is true, by returning into the state of His Highness [the grand duke], they have rendered their lives forfeit. For which reason we urge you to be diligent in discovering whether the said Antonio and Piero [sic] have appeared nearby or in the Maremme and subject to that jurisdiction. And having found them, you are to arrange for their capture in order to keep them in custody on the authority of Our Magistracy, by which you will be advised as to what further action and diligence is required of you—and may you stay well.<sup>34</sup>

33. Today Ca' di Gori, a *frazione* of Pavana.

34. "E' stato dato notitia al Magistrato Nostro che Antonio di Francesco dalle case de' Gori d'anni circa 50 statura bassa barba mezzana castagnina o brinata con un cavallo con basto giallo, Fedro di Goro d'anni 18 in circa sbarbato di statura mediocre, capelli neri, ambedue del Comune della Sambuca della Montagna di Pistoia e Pavana alle case de' Gori che sono quasi attaccate insieme partirono da Pistoia il di 12 di agosto stante con bulletta per verso la Maremma di Carpigna che si dicono essere stati al Bagno alla Porretta, iurisdizione di Bologna, il che essendo vero per essere tornati nello stato di SA sarebbono in pena della vita, però vogliamo che facciate diligentia per trovare se [i] detti Antonio e Piero [sic] sieno comparsi costì o nelle Maremme sotto poste a cotesta iurisdizione e trovati né facciate far cattura per



Implicit in this bulletin is the authors' confidence in the *bolletta* as a mobile tracking device equal to the challenge of following one pair of errant individuals amid the flux and confusion of a regional crisis that might well engulf the entire population. Equally striking is the level of energy and resources that the health officers were prepared to invest in the manhunt, which further bespeaks their confidence in the Sanità's infrastructure of surveillance and security. As I have already argued, no government response to a plague crisis was perfect. Even where mandated penalties were severe, there were always people who ignored emergency rules and special orders.<sup>35</sup> In addition, and especially in rural areas, people often failed to follow emergency rules because they were oblivious to them. However, given the scale and reach of the Sanità's operations in such periods, there can be little doubt that significant numbers of people, especially urbanites, were aware of the strict measures that authorities enacted to control and restrict physical movement. In crisis after crisis, the surviving evidence demonstrates not merely that people knew about rapidly evolving emergency measures, but that their everyday lives were affected as emergency governments remapped the physical space of the state, and as the passage of time itself was keyed to the campaign to stamp out disease.

While each Italian plague crisis in this period was enveloped by a complex of unique circumstances, it is equally the case that all shared common features. One perennial fact is that whenever the threat of plague was judged as sufficiently serious to trigger the dictatorial emergency powers of the health officials, the populace was affected in ways that cannot but have caused large numbers of subjects and citizens to entertain existential concerns. First and most obviously, people feared that they or members of their families might contract a mortal disease; in a less direct but equally serious sense they feared the potential impact of disease—not to mention the strict measures designed to stem its advance—on the economic activities on which their livelihoods depended. It hardly needs saying that, regardless of period or society, people perceive such breakdowns of everyday rhythms and structures as a radical

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ritenerli a ordine del Magistrato Nostro dal quale vi sarà avvisato quanto bisognerà fare esequite con diligentia e state sano." ASF Sanità 55, fol. 85r.

35. Calvi, *Histories of a Plague Year*, esp. ch. 3, contains many examples of people flouting regulations designed to prevent the spread of plague, from minor misdemeanours to criminal activity. For a systematic analysis of this aspect of the Florentine plague crisis of 1630–33, see Henderson, ch. 8.

contrast with times when no such challenge is present.<sup>36</sup> Rebecca Bryant, an anthropologist, has recently described such transitions as “critical thresholds”<sup>37</sup> to emphasize the sense of these moments as both decisive and liminal, or outside ordinary time. These moments can properly be termed “crises” because of their propensity to “bring the presentness of the present to the fore.” Bryant means that at such moments people become preternaturally conscious of the present as an “uncanny” space in which time and space are suspended. Cut off from a past to which they cannot return, people affected in this way desperately anticipate a future whose shape remains unclear because it depends on action taken in the liminal moment.<sup>38</sup> Plague time generated exactly this kind of liminal suspension: a protracted, uncanny moment when borders collapsed, the clock ground to a halt, and large numbers of people were forced into a spatio-temporal holding pattern.

As with the other phenomena already discussed in this article, examples of the consequences that plague time could engender can be found in any contemporary jurisdiction. An especially vivid example involves poor women in Bologna whose occupation was scouring the large cauldrons (*caldiere*) used in the production of silk. On 25 July 1630, Cardinal Bernardino Spada, papal legate and director of the city’s fight against the disease, published a *bando* forbidding the scourers (*caldirane*) to leave their houses for fifteen days as of the next day.<sup>39</sup> Having reflected on the “inconvenience and prejudice” (*l’incommodo, e pregiudicio*) that this order would cause (to the silk industry, not to the women), the cardinal and his advisors adjusted the initial law after only twenty-four hours: as of the 26th, a woman could not commence work at a new cauldron but must continue at her present place of employment. Moreover, she must have been working in the same place for at least one week, that is,

36. On fear of plague and disease see Nicholas A. Eckstein, “Mapping Fear: Plague and Perception in Florence and Tuscany,” in *Mapping Space, Sense, and Movement in Florence: Historical GIS and the Early Modern City*, ed. Nicholas Terpstra and Colin Rose (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 169–86; David Gentilcore, “The Fear of Disease and the Disease of Fear,” in *Fear in Early Modern Society*, ed. William G. Naphy and Penny Roberts (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 184–208. The theme of fear winds its way through Calvi, *Histories of a Plague Year*.

37. Bryant’s emphasis.

38. Rebecca Bryant, “On Critical Times: Return, Repetition, and the Uncanny Present,” *History and Anthropology* 27.1 (1 January 2016): 20, [dx.doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2015.1114481](https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2015.1114481).

39. ASB, Bandi 2, 25 July 1630, fol. 32r.

since July 20. To work at all, she must be able to display a *fede di sanità* signed by the rector of her parish (or an authorized substitute) and by her official parish doctor. In addition to demonstrating that she was healthy, she must possess written proof that the house in which she was living had been untainted by disease for the previous forty days. This additional testimony was to be provided by the said rector and doctor, as well as by the city health inspectors responsible for her parish, and the priests charged with inspecting the quarter in which the parish was located.<sup>40</sup>

As it so often did, plague forced authorities to contend with a wicked problem. Forbidding these women to work was not an option because of the economic damage that such a prohibition would do to the Bolognese silk industry. To allow the workshops to remain open in the normal way, on the other hand, meant conceding liberty of movement to the *caldirane*, whose bodies were perceived as an existential threat to the city's population precisely because these workshops were associated with the noxious, miasmatic odours thought to spread plague. In attempting to mitigate the consequences of this irresolvable dilemma, the cardinal included an aggressive and invasive spatial expedient among the nine conditions in his revised *bando*. This was condition number three, in which he endeavoured to control the daily physical movements of each *caldirana* through the city:

In walking from her dwelling to the cauldron workshop, and in returning home from the cauldron, she must take the most direct street, that is to say, the shortest, and she must not deviate from the street on any pretext or for any reason. And similarly, she must not pause and she must not enter any other house or place of any kind.<sup>41</sup>

By this measure, the *caldirane* who were permitted to go outdoors were nonetheless sent—albeit temporarily—into an internal, bodily exile in plain sight of their neighbours, whom they must not approach. For as long as the crisis lasted, in other words, the right of these women to govern the autonomous movement of their bodies in Bolognese civic space ended at the

40. ASB, Bandi 2, 27 July 1630, fol. 34.

41. "Nell'andar dalla sua Casa à quella della Caldiera, e nel tornar dalla Caldiera à Casa, faccia la strada più dritta, ò più corta, e non divertisca fuori di strada, per qual si voglia pretesto, ò causa, e similmente non si fermi, e non entri in alcuna Casa, ò altro luogo di veruna sorte." ASB, Bandi 2, 27 July 1630, fol. 34.

surface of their own skin. Neither was this interior banishment merely spatial; it follows, axiomatically, that it was also a temporal condition. The Bolognese sought deliberately to relegate the *caldirane* to an emergency space-time in which they might function, Escher-like, alongside the population at large, but without intruding upon or intersecting with the rhythms and movements of everyday life.

The *caldirane* did not occupy this limbo on their own. Excepting doctors, barbers, and parish priests, who were subject to specific provisions, it was shared by all who ministered to or interacted with the sick.<sup>42</sup> As always, the lowliest unskilled workers were regarded with most suspicion, in part because their socio-economic status associated them with the squalor in which infection was known to flourish, and because they performed a range of essential plague-fighting services that rendered them more dangerous than the silk-workers. These were the workers who cleansed and fumigated the dwellings of people who had contracted the disease, who bore sick people to the *lazzaretto*, or transported and disposed of the corpses of those who had died.<sup>43</sup> In an exhaustively detailed update (*rinovazione*) of emergency rules and restrictions published in Bologna on 22 July 1630, the authorities specifically addressed this essential yet reviled cohort of plague workers (*ministri*). Those who purged the city's infected houses were forbidden to make contact with the occupants of these properties, who for obvious reasons were thought likely to be infected; they were forbidden to remove any object from the said properties, however small.<sup>44</sup> To minimize the risk posed by the bodies of house-purgers, porters, undertakers, and other such unskilled workers, the health officers mandated rules that aimed not merely to distance them from other people, but, as with the *caldirane*, to remove them from ordinary time and space. They must in the first place identify themselves visually: all were required to wear a white smock (*saccone bianco*) emblazoned with a cross, the exact visual warning that appeared on the doors of the houses into which the authorities locked infected householders with an exterior deadbolt. In the twenty-first century, high-visibility clothing usually draws attention to workers for their own protection; the *saccone bianco*, by contrast, was an announcement that its wearer must be

42. ASB, Bandi 2, 14 June, fol. 10.

43. ASB, Bandi 2, 22 July 1630, fol. 30r.

44. ASB, Bandi 2, 22 July 1630, fol. 30r.

shunned because they were a potential vector of plague. Such workers, for their part, were expected to keep their distance at times when the general populace was out and about. Cardinal Spada, accordingly, ordered them on pain of death not to have contact with any other person. These functionaries were not even permitted to set foot under Bologna's famous porticoes in daylight hours, unless for the specific purpose of removing the bodies of the sick and dead.<sup>45</sup>

As de Certeau has argued, much of the texture and significance of urban culture inheres in people's quotidian use of the city. Citizens ceaselessly animate and renew urban experience in the myriad small interactions with people and places that are the stuff of their everyday lives. By dint of long-habituated use, the familiar itineraries that they walk and retrace imprint themselves on the individual and collective consciousness as mental maps of the cities they inhabit.<sup>46</sup> Plague time halted this process, limiting or removing the spatial autonomy of large numbers of people while shattering the temporal frame in which everyday life unfolded. Familiar routines became impossible, accustomed places were placed out of reach or, more disturbingly still, transformed and estranged.

Because the emergency regime of the health officers subjected everything to the logic of stamping out contagion, plague time strained even Christian space and observance. Church interiors did not easily lose their status as refuge and sanctuary. Half a century before the Bolognese health officers wrote the emergency *rinovazione* of 22 July 1630, for example, their predecessors addressed a *bando* to Bologna's curates on 28 July in the pestilential summer of 1576. While the title is long-winded, its meaning is clear: "TO THE MOST REVEREND CURATES OF THE DIOCESE: THAT YOU PRAY THE LORD GOD THAT HE PRESERVE the good health of this city, and that he deign to liberate every place of the faithful currently infected by contagious disease."<sup>47</sup> In its opening sentences, this document exhorts the curates to

45. ASB, Bandi 2, 22 July 1630, fol. 30r.

46. On the twentieth-century city as a dynamic entity constantly re-authored by walking, see Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91–110, 218–21. On mapping the city as an array of familiar and unfamiliar spaces defined by "the interaction of activity and time," see Jim Masselos, "Appropriating Urban Space: Social Constructs of Bombay in the Time of the Raj," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 14.1 (1 June 1991): esp. 8, 39, dx.doi.org/10.1080/00856409108723147.

47. "ALLI REVERENDI CURATI DELLA DIOCESE PER PREGARE IL SIGNOR DIO CHE CONSERVI sana questa Città, et che si degni liberare tutti li luoghi de' fideli infetti di mal contagioso."

intensify their devotions in order that they might appeal more forcefully to God and help atone for the collective sin responsible for the plague. Alarming to those of us newly versed in the arts of mask-wearing and “social distancing,” this redoubled devotion was to take the form of more frequent processions inside churches. Curates were instructed to lead small groups of the faithful around church interiors on feast days, singing the litany and praying for deliverance. Priests should incorporate these prayers every day in the morning Mass; after Vespers they must have their congregation kneel and pray for the relief of the city and the diocese. Everyone should pray more fervently and regularly, observe the sacraments more frequently, and more actively flee from sin. Following the long-established tradition that concerted group supplication was more efficacious than individual prayer, the devout community of clerics and laity sought safety in numbers in Christian space.

Church interiors were not immune, however. In the *rinovazione* of 22 July 1630 one sobering rhetorical elision reveals how the regime of plague time breached Christian defences. Concerned that domestic animals might pass on contagion, the authors moved to control them:

And because dogs and cats easily acquire this rampant scourge (*male corrente*), and because they can infect both people and houses, His Eminence [Cardinal Spada] commands every person to keep these animals locked inside if they do not want them to be killed. And anyone is permitted to kill dogs and cats belonging to other persons if they find them wandering the city or entering the houses of other people. And for every dog killed in the streets the person who has slaughtered it will earn three *scudi*, even if the dog belongs to another. And the money is to be paid by the dog’s owner: to this effect that, the dog being declared dead, the payment is authorized in light of the present instruction.<sup>48</sup>

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ASB, Assunteria di Sanità, Bandi bolognesi sopra la peste 1, fol. 68r.

48. “Et perché li Cani, e Gatti pigliano facilmente il male corrente, et possono infettare le persone, e Case; Però comanda Sua Eminenza à ciascheduna persona che debba tenerli serrati non volendo ammazzarli, et permette, che ogn’uno possi ammazzare Cani, e Gatti d’altri, che si troveranno vagare per la città, ò entrare nell’altrui Case, et per ogni Cane ammazzato nelle strade guadagni l’ammazzatore Scudi trè, purchè il Cane sia d’altri, da pagarsi dal Patrone del Cane, che à questo effetto riconosciuto il Cane morto, se li concede in virtù del presente il precetto opportune.” ASB, Bandi 2, 22 July 1630, fol. 30.

In the following line, the authors of the *rinovatione* consciously linked the authorization to exterminate domestic animals on sight to their next provision:

In like manner, to avoid the same danger in our churches, His Eminence expressly forbids holy water, benches, and pews to be kept in any church or public place. And for any failure or contravention of this order, the punishment will be to serve in the plague hospitals, on the order of His Eminence.<sup>49</sup>

At the moment of writing this ordinance, the health officers saw no difference between the stray dogs and cats that defiled Bologna's streets, the holy water with which worshippers spiritually cleansed themselves, and the liturgical furniture that the public used for their devotions. The logic of plague time recognized these things solely as potential contaminants.

This article has focused on proscriptive measures passed by emergency governments in Florence and Bologna in periods when plague threatened mass morbidity and mortality. I have argued that at such times the unavoidable necessity to view every person, object, and situation through the lens of the plague response altered the spatio-temporal matrix in which governors perceived and reacted to daily events. I have also differentiated plague time from Foucault's vision of the plague-stricken town, noting that the practical reach of plague-time governors never extended to all subjects or to every part of their subject territories. What plague time did enable, however, if only temporarily, were an intensification and extension of state power that were impossible in ordinary times.

One might mistake this intensification for pure authoritarianism, were it not that the health officers were clearly motivated not by a thirst for power but by fear. Implicit in every plague-time letter and edict is the authors' fear of losing control, and of the terrifying consequences of the disorder that would inevitably follow. It is this fear that lies behind the health officers' relentless attempts to deny autonomous time, space, and movement to all those over whom they were able to exercise power. Fear explains why the health officers did not merely mandate but frequently enforced harsh, exemplary penalties

49. "Per evitare parimente l'istesso pericolo nelle Chiese, proibisce espressamente Sua Eminenza il tenere Acqua benedetta, et banchi, et inginocchiatori in alcuna Chiesa, ò luogo publico, et in caso di ommissione, ò contraventione s'impone pena di servire ne' Lazaretti ad arbitrio di Sua Eminenza."

for a range of mundane infractions in plague time. When, for instance, one Andrea Morvidi was found to have falsified (*adulterato*) a health pass in July 1630 in Montepulciano, the Florentine Sanità condemned him to “two drops of the rope.”<sup>50</sup> This excruciatingly painful punishment involved tying a prisoner’s hands behind their back and suspending them by the wrists from an overhead pulley, after which their torturers allowed the body to drop a specified number of times, only to arrest its fall before it reached the ground. By these means the weight of the victim’s own body typically dislocated the shoulder joints. In Morvidi’s case, the Sanità officials explicitly directed that the punishment be executed on market day in the presence of the people (*a frequenza di popolo*) “so that the crime not function as an example.”<sup>51</sup> Identical exemplary punishments were meted out on two occasions in the following month, again in public, to guards in Firenzuola and Pescia who arrived late for or abandoned their watch.<sup>52</sup> In September, a group of citizens from Popiglio, in the mountains behind Pistoia, were tried for allowing a prisoner to escape. Despite protests that they were blameless, each received two drops on the rope, in public. When the prisoner himself was recaptured, he was hanged.<sup>53</sup>

In a spatio-temporal environment whose sole organizing principle was the suppression of contagion, anyone or anything that did not respond to this purpose was treated as matter out of place.<sup>54</sup> In the above-cited *rinovazione* of 22 July 1630, Cardinal Spada offered a reward of six scudi for the denunciation of thieves who stole any object, no matter how trifling, from anyone sick with plague or who had died of it.<sup>55</sup> By the logic of plague time, thieves resembled stray dogs and cats more than they resembled undertakers and house-purgers. Thieves facilitated the uncontrolled migration of objects that could spread infection; in so doing, they disrupted the ordered spaces that health officers sought to establish.<sup>56</sup> Invisible, unregulated movement was among the health

50. “due tratti di fune.” ASF Sanità 55, fol. 23r.

51. “acciò il delitto non passi in esempio.”

52. ASF Sanità 55, fols. 74r, 99v.

53. ASF Sanità 55, fols. 138r-v.

54. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2003), 44–45, dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203361832.

55. ASB, Bandi 2, fol. 30r.

56. An example of the obsessive concern of the Bolognese authorities with potentially infectious objects is ASB Bandi 2, 1 August 1630, fol. 39.



officers' worst fears, because it threatened plague time itself, and the alternative to plague time was not ordinary time but chaos.

Aside from exemplary punitive measures, health officials sought to limit the scope for chaotic, clandestine movement by promoting a single, transparent regime of spatio-temporal rules that, ideally, would be visible to and understood by all. On 11 May 1576, nervous that the plague then ravaging other northern Italian towns might assail Bologna, the authorities published a *bando* announcing their decision to purge the city of contaminants and impurities. Every type of detritus must be removed within three days. Leather tanners, skimmers, furriers, and anyone else who dealt with the hides or viscera of animals must dispose every evening of the waste left by their day's work by taking it to specified locations outside the city. Innkeepers, taverners, and anyone offering food or accommodation must keep their premises clean and remove all waste several times a day. Silk manufacturers must abstain from those activities in their productive process that generated noxious odours. Penalties for flouting any of the above rules included the confiscation of merchandise and three drops of the rope.<sup>57</sup> The health officers were explicit: the emergency strictures of May 11 applied to "every person regardless of condition or rank,"<sup>58</sup> and they suspended ordinary distinctions between public and private space. Using the sole criterion of dirt, the government effected a temporary remapping of intramural Bologna as one uninterrupted governmental space geared to the purging of rubbish, whether from inside private homes or from the places where it accumulated in public.

Proscriptions, sanctions, and punishment were not, however, the only weapons at the disposal of emergency governments in plague time. In Bologna in 1630, the government mobilized the city's parishes as the principal conduit for communication, both upward and downward, between the health office and the urban populace. In the middle months of 1630, the health officers ordered a cadre of specially appointed plague officers in individual parishes (*assonti delle parrocchie*)<sup>59</sup> to perform rounds of daily duties that recall the surveillance regime of Foucault's plague city. The *assonti* were required to survey and log the numbers of sick and suspect parishioners, confirming that the sick were being

57. ASB Assunteria di Sanità, Bandi bolognesi sopra la peste 1, fol. 61r.

58. "di qual si vogli conditione et grado."

59. ASB Assunteria di Sanità, Bandi 2, 1628–1630, 22 July 1630, fol. 30r.

separated from the well<sup>60</sup> and that the carers of the former were isolated. Every morning, the *assonti* must confirm that the quarantine was being observed, and ascertain whether there were new infections. If new cases were discovered, they must immediately be isolated. The parishes also became the setting for public meetings at which all male parishioners would compulsorily assemble at the sound of the parish bell, to elect one of their number to perform a specific duty or to hear the latest emergency orders from the health office.<sup>61</sup>

It is in Cardinal Spada's cooptation of city parishes as an emergency system of command and control, and as a network for the collection and dissemination of information, that Bologna's plague response appears most closely to assimilate itself to Foucault's political dream of the city as a machine for the exercise of transparent, uninterrupted power. Whether one is examining the plague response in Bologna or in Florence, the health officers' desire to exercise maximal control can be observed in every emergency measure that they passed. In practice, however, Bologna, Florence, and their subject territories never achieved the icy perfection of Foucault's panoptic vision.<sup>62</sup> Viewed in its historical context, the early-modern Italian plague response looks less like a stage along the irresistible journey towards "the utopia of the perfectly governed city,"<sup>63</sup> and more like one highly experienced government's contingent response to a present emergency. Attempting to capture the historical character of these moments, one may perhaps use the cyclical metaphor of the seasons. Like all such epidemics, the plague of 1630 rose and subsided, and with its passing, governmental measures were relaxed. Authorities remained vigilant, but ordinary life resumed until the next credible reports of plague appeared in the health officials' regular correspondence, at which time plague time returned. Like plague itself, plague time rose and fell.

60. ASB Assunteria di Sanità, Bandi 2, 22 July 1630, fol. 30r.

61. E.g., 6 August 1630, when the parishes were brought together to elect an *assonto* in each parish who was "mature, experienced and known for his integrity" (*persona d'età, d'esperienza, e di bontà conosciuta*), and who would receive his instructions the following day from the government palace. ASB Bandi 2, 6 August 1630, fol. 43.

62. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 195: "It [the plague town] is a segmented, immobile, frozen space. Each individual is fixed in his place. And, if he moves, he does so at the risk of his life, contagion or punishment."

63. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 198.