

From Communal Patriotism To City-State Chauvinism: Transformation of Collective Identities in Northern Italy, 1050–1500

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Abstract At the turn of the first millennium, the rise of autonomous communes and city-states in northern Italy coincided with the development of a particular sense of attachment to land and city, which is widely labeled as civic patriotism. Neither the transformation of these collective identities across time nor the macrostructural dynamics behind this transformation has received much attention. Through an examination of these communes and city-states from the eleventh to the sixteenth century, this paper unpacks different forms of collective identities that prevailed in northern Italy in different periods of time, all of which have previously been labeled as “patriotism” in the literature. The differentiation I propose between “communal patriotism,” “civic nationalism,” and “city-state chauvinism” presents a more nuanced picture which highlights the differences in the ways these collective identities are produced, reproduced, and transformed. My analysis also discusses the role played by macrostructural dynamics (e.g., changing climate in the macropolitical economy as well as inter-city-state system in the peninsula) in transforming these collective identities. Alongside a *longue durée* evolutionary transformation, there were two *conjunctural* moments which created ruptures in the transformation of collective identities in northern Italy: The first took place during the territorialization of the communes and the conquest of the *contado* in the mid-twelfth century and the second occurred in the aftermath of the crisis of the fourteenth century.

Keywords Northern Italian communes · City-states · Patriotism · Nationalism · Chauvinism · Crisis of the fourteenth century

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Introduction

Distinction between patriotism, nationalism, and chauvinism is often made according to subjective and normative assessments. In most conceptualizations, patriotism implies rational, moderate, tolerant, defensive, and peaceful form of love or attachment to a *patria* (fatherland, country, or land), while chauvinism is reserved for its irrational, excessive, intolerant, aggressive, and antagonistic forms. In such distinctions, nationalism usually maintains a relative position, somewhere in between. When compared to chauvinism it appears as a moderate, tolerant, and defensive form of collective identity; in comparison to patriotism, however, it seems to be a more excessive, intolerant, and aggressive form (Snyder 1976, pp. 38–48; Sparkes 1994, pp. 95–96; Orwell 1968; Appiah 1989; also see Viroli 1995, pp. 1–17; Billig 1995, pp. 55–56).¹ Unfortunately, unless properly operationalized, these normative distinctions do not go beyond calling similar collective identities either as “good” or “bad” based on one’s subjective attitudes and preferences (Calhoun 1997, pp. 86–87; Billig 1995). Moreover, because of their reliance on subjective and normative assessments, these conceptualizations cannot be used to examine social, geopolitical, and economic structures that produce, reproduce, and transform these identities.

A different—yet interrelated—problem occurs in studies of medieval communes and city-states in Europe, for which the term “patriotism” is widely used as a general concept to describe different—even antithetical—modes of collective identities and attachments to land, city, and state. Many historians and social scientists, for instance, tend to use the term “civic patriotism” as a generic term to describe diverse forms of collective identities in Italian communes and city-states spanning from the eleventh to the sixteenth century (Kohn 1956, p. 599; Hyde 1973, p. 60; Braudel 1981, p. 512; Armstrong 1982, p. 82; Smith 1986, p. 61; Waley 2013, pp. 97–104; Martines 1988, pp. 125–126; Gross 1999, p. 99). This tendency is also common among scholars of nationalism who recognize that nationalism and chauvinism are distinctively modern phenomena, but assume that social, political, and economic forces that helped produce them only emerged very recently (e.g., after the late eighteenth century).

This article has a dual purpose. On the one hand, I aim to propose a more nuanced distinction between patriotism, nationalism, and chauvinism, based on conceptual-theoretical frameworks provided by various modernist scholars of nationalism including Hechter (2001), Hobsbawm (2012), and Arendt (1945). On the other hand, I aim to show that forces that have widely been associated with modernity are not as recent as they seem by applying this conceptual-theoretical framework to a particular historical-geographical context—northern Italian communes and city-states from mid-eleventh century to the sixteenth century—where forces of modernity existed in an embryonic form (Braudel 1981; McNeill 1982; Arrighi 1994). Unpacking the differences in collective identities that prevailed in the northern Italian peninsula from mid-eleventh to sixteenth century, I argue that at least three distinct forms of collective identities—which I call as “communal patriotism,” “civic nationalism,” and “city-state chauvinism”—prevailed in this era. My analysis pays particular attention to the role played by macrostructural dynamics—such as changing climate in the macropolitical economy

¹ This is not the only distinction in the literature. Scholars that belong to ethnonationalist school of thought argue that nationalism is love of one’s nation and patriotism is love of one’s state (Connor 1994, p. 2002). This perspective, however, excludes all civic forms of nationalism from the definition of nationalism. Ethnosymbolist scholars prefer the term patriotism (instead of nationalism) when they talk about small-sized polities in world history—such as medieval city-states in Venice and Florence—despite similarities in their definition of (civic) nationalism and “patriotism” in these city-states (see Smith 2010).

(e.g., security concerns, economic crises, and expansionary tendencies) as well as changing inter-city-state relationships in the peninsula (e.g., transformation from a heterarchical inter-city-state system to a hierarchical one)—in transforming one type of collective identity to another.

My general argument is that transformation of patriotism into nationalism (and nationalism into chauvinism) is not a consequence of increasing solidarity among subjects or citizens but, on the contrary, it is a consequence of the declining internal solidarity and increasing divisions among people and of the emergence of an antagonistic and hierarchical inter-state system. I claim that these divisions and antagonisms increase during territorial and colonial expansions that are triggered by major political-economic crises, and push state elites to implement new measures to create internal solidarity among their subjects, create new basis of legitimacy for authority, increase people's identification with their states, and change people's perceptions and attitudes toward other states in the inter-state system. Differences in the ways these new collective identities are produced and reproduced within the inter-(city)-state system determine differences between communal patriotism, civic nationalism, and city-state chauvinism.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework I utilize in this paper mainly builds upon Hechter's (2001) distinction between "patriotism" and "nationalism," Hobsbawm's (2012) notion of "invented traditions," and Arendt's (1945) differentiation between "nationalism" and "chauvinism." Because these distinctions did not originally intend to analyze collective identities that existed in "premodern" social formations, their application to northern Italian communes and city-states requires certain adjustments in the way these scholars originally introduced them.

Hechter's definition of patriotism is a residual category of his typology of nationalism (Hechter 2001, p. 17). According to Hechter, all diverse types of nationalism are characterized by the absence of an overlap between the boundaries of the unit of governance and nation (see Fig. 1). This peculiar definition of nationalism follows in the footsteps of prominent modernist scholars of nationalism including Ernest Gellner (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm (1990) who define nationalism as a movement, ideology, or principle which holds that the "political unit" (state or governance unit) and "national unit" (people) should be congruent. The novelty and

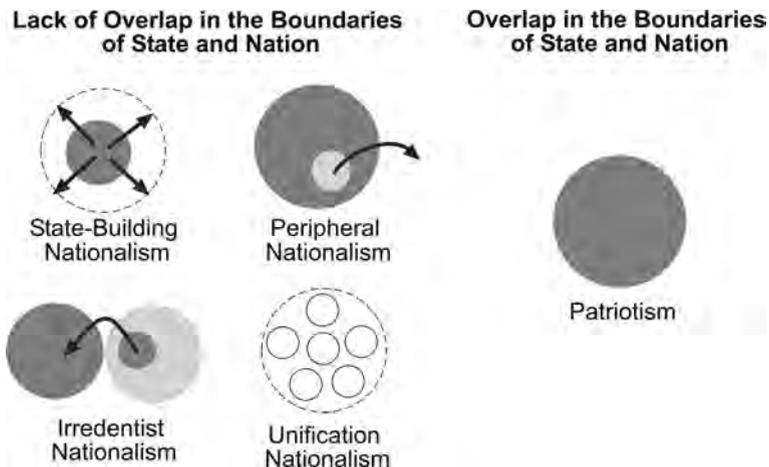


Fig. 1 Illustration of Hechter's definition of "nationalism" and "patriotism." Source: Hechter (2001, p. 16)

strength of these definitions comes from their suggestion that for nationalism to exist, there must be a mismatch between boundaries of “political (governance) unit” and that of a “nation” (Gellner 1983, p. 1; Hobsbawm 1990, p. 9; Hechter 2001, p. 17; Calhoun 1997, p. 9). If there is an overlap in the boundaries of these two units, then there will be no room for nationalism. Hechter defines this rare condition as “patriotism.” Especially when we define “nation” in a Weberian manner—not as a primordial, ethnobiological unit but as a community which desires to produce a state for its own (Weber 1946, p. 172)—patriotism defined by Hechter corresponds to almost a complete voluntary union among citizens of a state. Hechter himself states that patriotism defined as such hardly exists in any form of modern state (Hechter 2001, p. 17).

According to this conceptualization, dissolution of the organic congruence in the boundaries of “nation” and “unit of governance” is a precondition for nationalism (Gellner 1983; Hechter 2001). When there is no such congruence in social and political boundaries, state elites attempt to foster a sense of unity among their people, to promote a sense of communal identity, to establish their hegemony over their subject through coercion and consent (cf. Gramsci 2007), and to differentiate themselves from other states in the inter-state system. Hence, as Gellner (1983, p. 47) put it “[n]ations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, [and] as an inherent [...] political destiny are a myth; nationalism [...] sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures”. According to Hobsbawm (2012) “invention of tradition” plays a key role in this process. Hobsbawm defines “invented traditions” as

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past (Hobsbawm 2012, pp. 1–2).

In the process of inventing traditions, state elites not only construct new symbols and devices representing their nations—such as flags, anthems, and emblems—but also invent historical continuities linking the past and present of their nation by semifiction or by forgery (Hobsbawm 2012, p. 7). Through a process of formalization and ritualization of these symbolic complexes, they build social cohesion, legitimize their authority, and socialize new patterns of behavior that characterize nationalism (Hobsbawm 2012, pp. 4–9).

Hechter’s and Hobsbawm’s conception of nationalism can fruitfully be extended to Hannah Arendt’s definition of chauvinism. Arendt (1945) shares the liberal perspective of the nineteenth century scholars that nationalism does not contradict with the idea of liberty of other nations, and it exists in a heterarchical inter-state system, where no normalized hierarchy between states exists (also see Hobson 1902). Her description of nationalism, characterized by an overlap in boundaries of people, territory, and state—which is very similar to Hechter’s definition of patriotism—excludes the possibility that nationalism can coexist with imperialism without any distortion in its character. According to Arendt (1945, p. 457), chauvinism is an extension, “a perverted form” of nationalism that emerges in the course of imperialist expansion; hence, it is a “bridge” between nationalism and imperialism. Under imperialism, old trinity of people-territory-state dissolves and fading nationalist sentiments are compensated by “chauvinism” (Arendt 1945, p. 462). Arendt emphasizes that chauvinism justifies *endless expansion* of state territories in the eye of their citizens by promoting the idea of a holy “national mission” (p. 457) and a sense of “chosenness” (p. 458). Under chauvinism, myths, traditions, and images of nationalism are utilized to justify and normalize not only imperial

expansion but also oppression and domination of other nations. Hence, chauvinism is the adaptation of nationalism in a hierarchical inter-state system, whereby this hierarchy is seen as natural and inevitable.

Organization of the Article

In this article, I show that collective identities in northern Italy from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries have alternated between forms closely resembling patriotism, nationalism, and chauvinism as defined above. Each section of this article (1) focuses on a particular era of northern Italian communes and city-states² that I associate with a distinct form of collective identity and (2) explains social, economic, and (geo)political structures that produce, sustain, and transform them.

The section “[Communal Patriotism of Northern Italy, 1050–1150](#)” focuses on the early communal period (from the emergence of the communes in the mid-eleventh century to mid-twelfth century) which I associate with the emergence of “communal patriotism.” I argue that northern Italian communes and city-states from the eleventh century to mid-twelfth century constitute one of these rare instances in which we can observe patriotism—as defined by Hechter—as a historical reality. The section also shows that the overlap in the political boundaries of the commune and social boundaries of its citizens was not merely a result of their small territorial sizes but a consequence of their peculiar organizational structures. Some of these communes were voluntarily established sworn associations that were not necessarily fixed to a particular territory, and they were subject to dissolve after a period of time. Secession was frequent and was perceived as a nonantagonistic activity in these communes. Hence, as long as they maintained their voluntary, temporary, and nonterritorial nature, they did not attempt to impose their “hegemony” (in a Gramscian sense) on other people living in the same geographies. Since political boundaries of the communes were defined—by definition—through social boundaries of their subjects, in this early communal period, preconditions of “nationalism”—as defined by Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm (1990), and Hechter (2001)—did not emerge. Likewise, there was no need for “inventing traditions” (Hobsbawm 2012) to foster unity among subjects either. Communal patriotism in northern Italian communes was sustained through collective and voluntary participation in the commune affairs.

The section “[Rise of Civic Nationalism, Mid-Twelfth Century to Fourteenth Century](#)” investigates the period from mid-twelfth century to fourteenth century, which I associate with the rise of “civic nationalism” in northern Italy. I show that the former unity between social and political boundaries of these communes dissolved in the mid-twelfth century when communes started to gain a territorial existence and to incorporate their *contado* (countryside). As communes started to rule over new subjects, a new form of collective identity that is akin to Hechter’s “nationalism” started to emerge. Parallel to the emergence of a *disunity* between social and political boundaries and gradual weakening of naturally established internal solidarity, each commune started to boost their in-group sentiments and to create a sense of unity by constructing symbolic representations of their communes and city-states, embracing new myths about their origins, and creating new rituals which imply a sense of unity and continuity with the past. These “invented traditions” attempted to hold together their societies which were

² The distinction between “communes” and “city-states” is very difficult to make. Although historians often use these terms interchangeably (Scott 2012, p. 21; Epstein 2000), they are distinct but partially overlapping forms of communal associations or corporations known as *universitates*. In this paper, I use the term “commune” when these entities have partial autonomy, and reserve the term “city-state” for *universitates* that gained their full de facto or de jure sovereignty (Epstein 2000).

increasingly characterized by internal divisions, rivalry, and disunity. In this section, I also show that despite all attempts by communal governments to differentiate their commune from others, collective identities of these communes remained surprisingly inclusive and civic in this period.

In the section “*The Crisis of the Fourteenth Century and the Rise of City-State Chauvinism*,” I show that dynamics that produced and reproduced “civic nationalism” in northern Italy dissolved in the course of the fourteenth century crisis, when major city-states started to engage in a race of territorial/colonial expansion and started to subjugate other communes and city-states in the inter-city-state system. These transformations once again altered the way collective identities were produced and reproduced in northern Italy and gave rise to what I call “city-state chauvinism.” Rulers of expansionist city-states (e.g., Venice, Florence, and Milan) attempted to normalize and justify territorial expansion and subjugation of other communes and city-states using the products of the emerging Renaissance society, linking their heritage to “ancient Rome” and to sustain unity among people through redistribution of privileges and services aiming at gaining the consent of the masses, which was made available due to colonization and subjugation of other communes and city-states. Because colonial and territorial subjugation of other communes and city-states was at the heart of these processes, collective identities of this era became closer to Hannah Arendt’s (1945) description of chauvinism than Hechter’s definition of nationalism.

The “*Conclusion*” section interprets the general findings of our analysis from a *longue durée* perspective, by differentiating between the effects of a *longue durée* evolutionary transformation that gradually altered collective identities and the two *conjunctures* that created major ruptures.

Communal Patriotism of Northern Italy, 1050–1150

Communes of northern Italy were products of an unusual historical *conjuncture*—the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries—where three interrelated developments took place. The first was the territorial fragmentation and impasse created by the breakdown of the imperial regime after the death of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry III (Hydes 1973, p. 49; Epstein 2000, p. 278). The second was a series of conflicts between the Papacy and the monarchs of Medieval Europe—including the Investiture Contest—that shook the old regime from top to bottom. The territorial fragmentation and power vacuum coupled with the emerging chaos and rising inter-elite competition provided an opportunity structure for merchants and nobility³ in northern Italian communes to establish their autonomy (Lachmann 2000; Hyde 1973, p. 49; Trevelyan 1956, p. 77; Martines 1988, pp. 7–19). The third was the rising volume, increasing complexity, and quickening pace of trade after the eleventh century (Epstein 2000, pp. 278–

³ Lopez (2005, p. 70) once defined Italian communes as the “government of the merchants, by the merchants for the merchants”. Although this statement turns attention to the role played by merchants in these societies, it does not do justice to the complex class structure of these societies. Different and fluid forms of nobility also had a prominent place in the class structure of the early communes (see Jones 1997, pp. 143–145; Martines 1988, pp. 29–33; also see Vigueur 2003). Because some sections of the nobility also heavily engaged in trade, it was very difficult to distinguish between mercantile and noble/military classes in northern Italy. Nor was it easy to derive social classes based on professions since most were engaged in more than one type of economic activity (Waley 2013, pp. 12–30). Postan’s description of medieval Italian communes as “mixed societies of noblemen and rentiers (*milites*), of shopkeepers and artisans, notaries and peasants (*pedites*)” (1966, p. 348) describe this complex structure more effectively.

281; Lopez 2005; Waley 2013, pp. 3–5; Lane 1973; Tilly 1992, ch. 2; McNeill 1974, ch. 1). In the absence of direct political control, rising tide of commercial activities in a highly insecure and hostile region pushed merchant-bourgeoisie and merchant-nobility of northern Italy to invent new ways of arranging reciprocal rules and terms of trade, settling commercial disputes, protecting private property, and securing commercial relations (McNeill 1974, pp. 13–14). All these three interrelated processes played a role in the formation of novel autonomous political structures in northern Italy.

It is extremely difficult to know exactly how many communes were established in this period. As shown in Fig. 2, the earliest surviving references to the formal communal institutions date back to Cremona in the 1070s; to Pisa, Lucca, Milan, Parma, Rome, and Pavia in the 1080s; to Asti, Arezzo, Biandrate, and Genoa in the 1090s; to Como, Pistoia, and Ravenna in 1100s; to Bergamo, Verona, and Ferrara in the 1110s; and to Bologna, Siena, and Florence after the 1120s (Martines 1988, p. 18; Epstein 2000, p. 279). These communes emerged wherever conditions were propitious, including not only smaller towns but also villages and smaller communities (Hyde 1973, p. 57).

Residents of these medieval communes did not have to “distinguish their city from their society in general, which were the same concept. The limits of the organized group’s habitat marked the boundaries of the society itself” (Benveniste 1969, p. 364). This congruence in the political boundaries of the commune (or city-state) and social boundaries of its citizens who voluntarily belonged to the commune created a state-society nexus that closely resembled



Fig. 2 Earliest surviving references to formal communal institutions in northern Italy, 1070–1120s

Hechter's *patriotism*. This was not only a consequence of the commune's small size and population but—more importantly—of their unusual social and political structure. Communes in northern Italy were peculiar organizations. In contrast to our conventional understanding of “states,” they were *not* perpetual political structures that aimed to survive forever. Some of the northern Italian communes were established as “temporary associations” (Hyde 1973, p. 52; McNeill 1974; Epstein 2000, p. 279; Weber 1958). They were founded for a fixed term of 3 or 4 years and were subject to renewal when this period is over (Hyde 1973, p. 52; Weber 1958, p. 109). If the communal bonds were not renewed after this period, these societies were disbanded (Epstein 2000, p. 279).

In this early communal era, communes were not necessarily attached to a specific territory either (Hyde 1973, p. 96). At their early years, many communes could coexist within the same walls (Weber 1958, p. 109) or in overlapping geographies (Hyde 1973, p. 104). Furthermore, because the communes were nothing but sworn associations, they were—theoretically—mobile. Because of these unusual features, in contrast to traditional conception of states, northern Italian communes of this early communal period were not able to assert any claim to loyalty and obedience of people residing on their geographies. Hence, preconditions of nationalism did not emerge.

This peculiar structure makes sense when one realizes that the political organization of these societies was not distinct from any other economic and commercial organization in the region. In this era, northern Italian merchants and traders established ad hoc corporations, which were subject to dissolve when mutual contracts were over, in every aspect of their economic life. There was a complex web of reciprocal agreements made among these citizens, covering a large spectrum of areas including production, trade, and banking. Interestingly, however, “not all such corporations were economic in aim: military, religious, social and convivial purposes could also be pursued through such arrangements. Guilds and fictional brotherhoods, military units, hospitals, schools, monastic and other pious foundations, together with voluntary associations for humanitarian or aesthetic purposes, as well as governmental bodies of almost every kind, all qualify as examples of ad hoc corporations” (McNeill 1974, p. 15). The medieval communes of northern Italy, then, were actually nothing but another type of ad hoc corporation (McNeill 1974, p. 14).

This is not altogether surprising since it was not easy to distinguish between “business enterprises” and “government organizations” in capital-intensive regions of Europe before the sixteenth century (Lane 1979, pp. 38–39; Arrighi 1994, p. 86). In this early communal era, there was almost no distinction between business enterprises and government organizations in northern Italy. Indeed, the Genoese commune was established as an umbrella association of existing commercial companies (Martines 1988, p. 20). That's why when the Genoese called their communes as *compagnas*—or *campagne communis* (Hyde 1973, p. 52; Weber 1958, p. 109)—they were using the term in its dual meaning: both as a political unit and as a company.

Akin to business enterprises and partnerships, membership in these political structures was not mandatory but it was linked to certain rights and privileges. In some cases, like the Genoese *compagna*, membership to the commune was a prerequisite for participation in capital investments in maritime trade (Weber 1958, p. 110; Hyde 1973, p. 52). Membership to the communes was made through oaths which defined the duties and responsibilities of each citizen to the commune (Hyde 1973, p. 52; Martines 1988, p. 27; Chittolini 1996, p. 57; Gross 1999, pp. 56–60; Bloch 2005, pp. 78–79; Coleman 2004, pp. 37–40). The content of these oaths resembled very much to business contracts between merchants, traders, and entrepreneurs. This resemblance is closely linked to the fuzzy boundary between business and government organizations and the emergence of communes as ad hoc corporations in northern Italy. It is true that historically these sorts of mutual trust and coordination relationships did not

exist beyond family and blood circles in most trading societies. Greeks, Jews, and Muslim traders established similar contracts, but it was very rare that they had partners other than their relatives. Although residents of northern Italy also preferred to entrust business to family and blood circles, rapidly expanding the scale of business in the region seemed to push them to make social and political arrangements with strangers, who, in return, became citizens of their communes or city-states (McNeill 1974, pp. 14–21).

These oaths, however, were more than business contracts. There is a long tradition in the literature of moral and political theory, which discusses the concept of citizenship in relation to imaginary and hypothetical “social contracts.” Oaths of northern Italian communes were actually existing social contracts between nobles and merchants in this era. As Marc Bloch (2005, p. 78) notes, oath of these medieval burgesses was a novel invention which not only defined the rights and duties of the citizens but also converted these isolated individuals into a *collective being*. Different kinds of oaths had always been at the core of feudal rule. But there was a significant difference between the oath taken by these communes and those taken under the feudal regimes. Under feudalism, these oaths symbolized a *vertical* engagement between the inferior and the superior, which made the former subject to the latter. “The distinctive feature of the communal oath, on the other hand, was that it united *equals*” (Bloch 2005, p. 78). These horizontal bonds among *equals* created a strong internal solidarity between merchant-bourgeoisie and merchant-nobility who depended on each other.

Precisely because (1) these communes were temporary, (2) membership to these political units was more or less voluntary, and (3) the commune was defined in terms of the relationship between oath-bound individuals—as opposed to group of people living in a particular territory—there was hardly any mismatch between boundaries of political (governance) unit and communal units.⁴ A good indicator of this “voluntary union,” which is the critical aspect of our definition of patriotism, was the absence of conflicts arising out of instances of secession. These communes

were personal, sworn associations and were, therefore, in theory terminable and potentially mobile. This possibility was clearly realized in the case of the maritime communes, which can be seen splitting amoeba-like, so that the over-seas expeditions are in a real sense the commune on the move, with consuls, senate and *popolo* all present and fulfilling roles similar to those they played when they were at home. The same characteristic appears from time to time in the inland communes, when the communal armies on campaign held councils and *parliamenta* in camp or in the field, and could legislate exactly as if they were meeting in the traditional council place in the city (Hyde 1973, p. 54).

Because failure to take or retake the *oath* technically meant seceding from the commune, secession in these societies was neither uncommon nor necessarily antagonistic. On the contrary, it was often a necessity imposed by the conditions of trade and commerce. Hence, together with their ad hoc and oath-based structure, instances of nonantagonistic secession or “amoeba-like splits” (Hyde 1973, p. 54; Coleman 2004, p. 28) acted as mechanisms that kept

⁴ It must be noted that there is still a dispute over the extent of the membership to the communes and if the oaths were voluntary in the early communal era. There is probably significant temporal and spatial variety in existing practices. Weber (1958, p. 10) writes that as inter-city-state warfare accelerated, more people were forced to join the commune. “[W]ars accelerated the internal structuring of the communes for within the city the mass of the burghers were forced to join the sworn communal brotherhood. Resident urban noble and patrician families often led the way in the institution of fraternization, taking under the civic oath all inhabitants qualified by land ownership. Whoever did not enter voluntarily was forced to join”. Yet, it is not clear when exactly this process started. As we will examine in the next section, after the conquest of the *contado*, there is an overall trend whereby each commune starts to *force* new inhabitants to make their oaths.

social and political boundaries congruent. Consequently, in this early communal period, preconditions of nationalism (as defined by Hechter, Gellner, or Hobsbawm) did not emerge.

Rise of Civic Nationalism, Mid-Twelfth Century to Fourteenth Century

Social and political structures that helped maintain communal patriotism in northern Italy were highly unstable. Not much long after they were established, oath-bound association of the largest community within each city wall won permanent importance over other sworn associations (Weber 1958, p. 109). This marked not only the end of the coexistence of multiple communes within a city wall but also the beginning of territorialization of the communes and the “conquest of the *contado*” (Fig. 3).

Although the reasons behind these processes are utterly complex, it is safe to argue that emerging political and economic contradictions were at the heart of this transformation. The key problem seems to lie in the sphere of protection. Through their militia system, communes were able to protect its members, but not the geography in which they operated. But without providing minimal security within the geographies of production, reproduction, and circulation, communes could not sustain their businesses. Furthermore, merchants did not have security outside the city walls. Even to make roads safer for merchants, communes needed

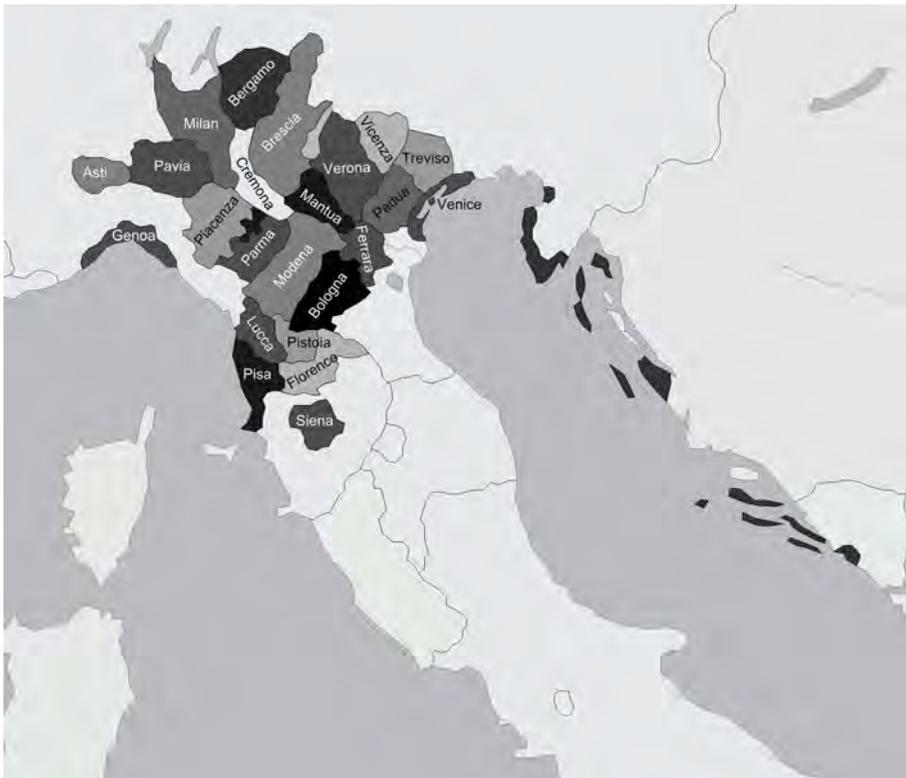


Fig. 3 Territorialization and “conquest of the *contado*” in northern Italy, circa 1250. Source: Author’s modifications using Reed (2008)

to extend their influence outside their city (Waley 2013, p. 69). In addition, there was the pressing problem of food security. As urban population of the cities grew, feeding the urban population was becoming more and more difficult without controlling the food supply in the *contado*, incorporating new or landlord or farmer-citizens who would be obliged to deliver food into the cities and commercializing the rural economy (Scott 2012, pp. 24–26). Without expanding the sphere of political influence, gaining a territorial character, and imposing its rule over a larger geography, it was also impossible to control the imports and exports of foodstuffs.

In the very early stages there was a tendency to restrict duties and privileges to full members of the commune, but once the communes took on responsibility for defense and taxation within a given area, their original character was lost and they set out on the long road that led to the acquisition of the highest jurisdiction over every person and corporation within the city and its *contado*. In particular, the powers over the regulation of trade, and especially the import and export of foodstuffs, which communes assumed at an early stage, made it impossible to accept that anyone should be allowed to stand aloof (Hyde 1973, pp. 105–106).

All of these pressures had a significant role in transforming the social and political structure of the early communes, which affected existing state-society nexus in serious ways. The nonterritorial, voluntary, and temporary nature of the communes disappeared around mid-twelfth century (Hyde 1973, p. 96). By the thirteenth century, city-states and communes had already started to extend their boundaries first to all people within their city walls, then to their *contado*/countryside in order to diminish the power of the feudal and imperial rulers and to increase the scope of areas within which they could impose taxes, levy troops, and satisfy the grain demand for the cities (Waley 2013, pp. 68–69; Chittolini 1990, pp. 72–73; Chittolini 1989, pp. 692–693). Through these transformations, a new state-society nexus—similar to Hechter’s description of “state-building nationalism”—came into being (also see Hechter 2013, p. 33).

In order to understand why “civic nationalism” is more useful in describing these new collective identities than the term “communal patriotism,” one should look at a number of interesting developments that took place afterwards. First of all, unlike the early communal era—which was characterized by a voluntary union—new subjects of the communes were incorporated through a combination of coercion and consent, which included individual bargains, threats, bribery, or other forms of co-optation. Instead of turning other notables living in the city walls and in the *contado* into their imperial subjects, the communes “convinced” them to make *oaths* similar to theirs. In doing so, landlords, nobles, and merchants of these new territories started to pay taxes, provide military service, and participate (part-time) in the public affairs of the commune, and they received the promise of the communes to support them against their debtors and feudal subordinates (Hyde 1973, pp. 106–107). Hence, the “conquest of the *contado*” resembled more to a “treaty of alliance” than a pure military conquest (Waley 2013, p. 70; Scott 2012, p. 28). Put differently, the new so-called unity between subjects and the state was not neither completely voluntary but it was not achieved through brute force either. It was a combination of both.

Secondly, this “semivoluntary” unity provided the necessity for making political boundaries of the communes and new social boundaries congruent. Territorial crystallization and expansion of the communes not only increased the number of territory and persons to deal with but they also added to the complexity of the society the communes needed to govern (Hyde 1973, p. 106). Parallel to territorial crystallization and expansion, a mismatch between those who voluntarily joined the commune and those who “semivoluntarily” did so started to emerge. This is important because from the beginning the communes “lacked a convincing

rationale for their claim to loyalty and obedience, for there was no belief that the city-state embodied a way of life uniquely favored by God or nature such as had been prevalent in Greece and Italy in ancient times” (Hyde 1973, p. 107). After the territorialization of the communes and semivoluntary inclusion of new citizens, however, this legitimacy problem became a pressing issue. Communes aimed to solve it by utilizing precommunal practices that sustained collective consciousness in *precommunal* municipalities. Ecclesiastical boundaries—the *diocese*—which had contained both the city and the *contado* in the precommunal era served as an initial ideological justification for territorial expansion. One of the interesting aspects of the incorporation of the *contado* was that it was not an *endless* territorial expansion but it was limited by the *diocesan* boundary—the jurisdiction—of their bishops (Waley 2013, p. 67). In the precommunal municipalities, the city and the *contado* were a unity under the jurisdiction of their bishops, and now the communes were reactivating the symbolic images of this unity, which gave them an ideological legitimacy in return. So, as Jones put it “[t]he command of the city *territorium* [...] was] dictated first by motives of power—to extend, recentralize and maximize the control over local resources, of manpower, money and produce, and over movement of traffic—but also by sense of right” (1997, pp. 360–361).

Thirdly, conflicts and internal divisions within the communes also gradually deepened in this era. In the thirteenth century, there was a rapid escalation in interfeud competition and rivalry within each commune and city-state such as the one between *Guelphs* and *Ghibellines*, between former ruling classes of the communes and new migrant-citizens from the *contado*, and between magnates and *popolani*.⁵ This was when communes and city-states in northern Italy began to adopt new practices, which aimed to foster “unity” and a sense of “belonging.” In addition to seeing the incorporation of *contado* as a right, in this era, communes also embraced new symbolic representations of their communes, created new myths about their origins (in which patron saints played a crucial role), and produced new traditions and rituals linked to public life, all of which are examples of Hobsbawm’s (2012) “invented traditions.”

An interesting expression of “invention of tradition” was visible in the case of myths, rituals, and civic festivals associated with saints. In northern Italy, almost each commune traditionally identified themselves with one or more chosen saints and promoted myths about their origins in relation to these patron saints (Webb 1996; Lane 1973, p. 88; Chittolini 1990; Waley 2013, pp. 98–100; Thompson 2005, pp. 114–120). Although some of these myths date back to the precommunal era (Hyde 1973, pp. 60–61), after the mid-twelfth century, not only the number of these saints radically increased but also the way these myths were established and their functions radically changed (Webb 1996; Chittolini 1990).

After the twelfth century, many communal governments started to invent new homegrown saints for their cities (see Thompson 2005, pp. 114–119; Frugoni 1991; Golinelli 1988; Lerner 1980, pp. 246–247), whom they found more suitable for their new identities (Thompson 2005, p. 114; also see Webb 1996). For instance, Saint Ansano of Sinea, which symbolized Sinea’s communal identity, had no cult until the 1170s. Likewise, in 1187, Saint Alexander became the

⁵ There is an ongoing debate over the nature of these struggles and violence. Recent scholarship brings new political insights to the intensification of power struggles and to a paradox of state violence whereby attempts to prevent destructive violence through the use of violence gradually start a process of monopolization of violence. Zorzi (2010) argues that the magnates were attacked and demonized by the *popolo* in order to ideologically legitimize their newly emerging regimes. Marie Vigueur (2003) argues that the increasing raids of the countryside/*contado* by the urban *milites* in the thirteenth century were linked not only to the acquisition of spoils but also to the pursuit of diplomacy by other means. Vigueur (2003, pp. 313–315) also associates the emergence of “culture of conflict” in the thirteenth century with the adoption of “the knightly mentality” by “the more-well-to-do among the lower classes” (also see Zorzi 2010, p. 35).

new saint patron of Bergamo but his cult did not exist before the mid-twelfth century. Saint Petronio, who became the sole patron of the Bologna and a symbol of Bolognese communal identity, was also a “new” saint. He did not have a cult among the people of Bologna until mid-thirteenth century (Thompson 2005, pp. 114–119; Webb 1996, p. 7). The rise of St. Hilary in Parma in the later thirteenth century can also be given as another example of this phenomenon (Webb 1996, p. 8). Most of these “new” saints were figures local, homegrown people (including many laywomen) from humble backgrounds that ordinary people could easily associate with themselves (Webb 1996, pp. 130, 181, 196).⁶

In contrast to earlier periods, these “new” saints and myths regarding the origins of the communes were no longer promoted by ecclesiastical powers but by urban laity (i.e., communal governments) (Lerner 1980, pp. 246–247; Webb 1996; Chittolini 1990; Thompson 2005). Webb (1996, p. 6) maintains that after the twelfth century, lay rulers of Italian cities started to employ the image of the saints for their own purposes. Myths of these saints were used to enhance communal governments’ political power in the city and the *contado* and to promote a sense of collective civic identity (Webb 1996; Chittolini 1990). Communal governments and city-state elites “sought legitimacy through the cult of patron saints, they conceptualized their time and space in sacred terms, and these religious realities in turn formed the people” (Thompson 2005, p. 4; also see Waley 2013, p. 56). Gradually, there emerged a number of civic rituals and festivals associated with these saints that emphasized the unity of the commune or the city-state (Chittolini 1990; Webb 1996, p. 3). The image of the saint patron was seen as a sign and the guarantee of the unity between the city and the *contado* (Chittolini 1990, p. 73). This image was also reproduced by acts of submission by the people of the *contado* during saint-patron’s feast day, which “were used as annual demonstrations of obedience and submission, of territory to city, of population to saint” (Waley 2013, p. 56). Myths and legends about these saints promoted not only the “natural” boundaries of the communes but also their glorious past. In public ceremonies and festivals organized by the communal governments, “the city saw reflected its own identity and its distant past” (Chittolini 1990, p. 72).

Increasing reliance on symbols representing the identity and honor of each commune and city-state can also be seen in the use of *carroccio*, a sacred car with a special name bearing the altar, the banner of the commune, and sometimes the images of their patron saints (Waley 2013, pp. 97–99; Trevelyan 1956, p. 78; Hechter 200, p. 293; Hyde 1973, p. 60; Dean 2000, pp. 48–49; Thompson 2005, p. 118). Although its invention dates back to the early communal period,⁷ “by the later twelfth century, a number of cities had adopted the use of the *carroccio*” (Waley 2013, p. 98). *Carroccio* was not only a symbol of honor for each commune and city (Trevelyan 1956, p. 78; Waley 2013, p. 98) but also a symbol of social unity. “[B]ecause it was not a chivalric banner held and paraded by knights on horseback, [*carroccio*] enabled sentiments of common loyalty to overcome social divisions between the knightly and non-knightly classes” (Dean 2000, pp. 48–49). After the mid-twelfth century, they became an integral part of public life, public ceremonies, and civic identification with the city (see Thompson 2005, pp. 118–120). As Waley (2013, p. 98) rightly puts it “[...] *carroccio* was much more than a military symbol, [it was] being used as a focus of civic patriotism in all ceremonial occasions”. Oath-taking ceremonies, diplomatic

⁶ An interesting evidence for the mass popularization of these saints is the “antroponymic revolution” that started this era. “In the twelfth century names with a specifically Christian character were rare” but this started to change rapidly after the thirteenth century. For instance, “a recent investigation of the anthroponymy of Genoa shows 11.72 percent of a representative sample of the population with saints’ names from 1099 to 1199; 23.33 per cent in the years 1200–99; and 66.66 per cent in 1300–1401” (Lerner 1980, p. 247).

⁷ The earliest known *carroccio* was constructed by Archbishop Heribert in Milan in 1039.

relationships with other communes, peace agreements, liberation-day celebrations, saint-day feasts, and other public festivals all required the presence of a *carroccio* (Waley 2013, pp. 98–100).

From the perspective presented in this article, the emergence of such myths, symbols, and invented traditions about communes can be seen as attempts by the ruling class to create a new identity, which may help hold these communes together in a political climate characterized by growing internal divisions. As former voluntary union among citizens of communes dissolved and social divisions widened, the communes began to adopt practices, which aimed to nurture collective consciousness/in-group sentiments of their citizens and to differentiate themselves from other communes and city-states. That's why collective identities of this era became more similar to Hechter's state-building nationalism than his description of patriotism.⁸ In the course of the transition from "patriotism" to "nationalism," communes and city-states had to rely on "invented traditions" regarding their origins, glorious past, and new boundaries to nurture their intergroup solidarity and solidify their community. Indeed, Hechter himself also observes that "although the 13th century had little conception of a norm of *national* self-determination, something akin to *civic nationalism* was in full force in much of the Italian peninsula" (Hechter 2013, p. 33) and suggests that this attachment was nurtured by the promulgation of civic symbols such as the *carroccio* and a mushrooming literature glorifying the past, present, and future of their communes and cities.⁹

Inclusiveness of Civic Nationalism and the Heterarchical Organization of the Inter-City-State System

Despite gradual crystallization of the communes, however, there was still no evidence of a normalized hierarchy between citizens of different communes and city-states until the fourteenth century. On the contrary, in this period, collective identities within each commune were surprisingly inclusive, open and tolerant to foreigners, which can be observed at different spheres of social, political, and economic life. For instance, citizenship in these medieval communes "was not tied to [people's] ethnicity; although foreign born, they were members of the urban community" (Gross 1999, p. 58). Many city-states would admit any stranger as a citizen as long as he was rich enough to build a house but was not a usurer or murderer and not exiled or banned for any crime (Waley 2013, p. 63). Furthermore, in most of these communes, you did not even need to be a citizen to hold a position in civic office. In the thirteenth century, communes and city-states of northern Italy often hired "a non-native as *podestà* or other chief magistrate, the idea being that he would be neutral in the squabbles of the town" (Hay and Law 1989, p. 19; also see Webb 1996, p. 9). Although the person who acted as a *podestà* exercised the supreme power in domestic and foreign affairs of the commune (or the city-state)—both in times of peace and war—citizens did not hesitate to appoint "foreigners" to these positions. These *podestàs* were chosen from a network of alliances among the cities and exchange of *podestà* between cities was "a mark of respect and co-operation" (Coleman 2004, pp. 40–41).

⁸ It must be noted that in addition to these new practices, former practices of the early communal era—which marked patriotism—also continued. Oaths were still made. Almost every citizen continued to devote their time remaining from their professional and other preoccupations to the administration of the commune affairs (Waley 2013, pp. 46–52). Likewise, citizens of the Italian city-states originally organized their protection in the form of "militias" (Lane 1973, p. 49; Abu-Lughod 1989, p. 113; McNeill 1974; McNeill 1982, pp. 72–73; Waley 2013, pp. 50–51; Mallett 1974, p. 11; Davis 2013, p. 223). So the transition from "communal patriotism" to "civic nationalism" also had some elements of continuity.

⁹ For examples of the manifestations of these "patriotic"/civic nationalist attachments in social life and in the literature, see Martines 1988, p. 125; Burckhardt 1914, pp. 338–342; Dean 2000, pp. 121–124).

Hechter (2013) cites the Genoese *podestà* practice as a rare instance of “alien rule” by election. But this practice was neither merely limited to *podestà* institution nor to the Genoese. *Capitano del popolo*—constitutional head of the *popolo* which acted as a public body after the second half of the thirteenth century—was also an outsider. Likewise, when necessary, communes and city-states did not hesitate to make contracts for hiring people from other city-states and communes as “mercenaries” either (Waley 2013, pp. 95–97).¹⁰

These inclusive sentiments are puzzling especially for those who see the strong collective consciousness within each commune and city as “a product of enmity and warfare between cities and communes” (Waley 2013, p. 97). After all, if this had been the case, communes would have produced antagonism and distrust against citizens of other communes and foreigners in general. The answer lies in the fact that despite ongoing competition and rivalry, there was a curious cooperation between communes and city-states of northern Italy that was not independent from the political-economic climate of the region. This “contentious cooperation” continued as long as it was perceived as being mutually beneficial for the merchants and traders of different communes/city-states. This perception was almost the rule before the crisis of the mid-fourteenth century, when the fruits of Mediterranean trade were ample. Until then, each commune and city-state preserved its own distinct identity but they protected their inter-city-state subsystem together. The inter-city-state system remained more or less heterarchical because they conquered neither territory nor niche of one another (Chittolini 1989, pp. 695–696; Arrighi 1994, p. 89). Until the fourteenth century,

Cooperation rested primarily on a division of labor among the commercial-industrial activities of the city-states. Even the “big four” occupied fairly distinct market niches in the trading system. Florence and Milan both engaged in manufacturing and in overland trade with northwestern Europe; but while Florence specialized in textile trades, Milan specialized in metal trades. Venice and Genoa both specialized in maritime trade with the East; but while Venice specialized in deals with the southern Asian circuit based on the spice trade, Genoa specialized in deals with the Central Asian circuit based on the silk trade (Arrighi 1994, p. 89).

As Arrighi noted, this specialization of and cooperation between northern Italian communes and city-states reduced the risks of trade in a fundamentally insecure region by expanding their collective knowledge of the world economy (Arrighi 1994, p. 89). Likewise, when the inter-city-state subsystem was threatened by external enemies, communes and city-states often established ad hoc confederations for protection. The most famous of these occasions was the Battle of Legnano in 1176 in which the Lombard League established by a number of northern Italian city-states countered Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa. But it was not the only one. When the grandson of Barbarossa, Frederick II of the Holy Roman Empire, attempted to restore imperial power in northern Italy in the thirteenth century, the Lombard League was reestablished. Such confederations were also established by *oaths*, which sometimes led historians to erroneously assume the existence of a primordial national feeling among the “Italian” people. Members of the Lombard League, for instance, took an oath to “oppose any army from Germany or other land of the Empire beyond the Alps attempting to penetrate into Italy, and should such army nevertheless gain entrance to persevere in war till the said

¹⁰ These examples can also be extended to communes’ attitudes toward religious minorities as well. In his comparison of the ethnic and religious hostilities in Early Modern port cities of Europe, Barrington Moore (2001) observed that Genoa had a positive record in treating Jews between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, which he saw as a “good index of its general attitudes toward ethnic minorities [in general]” (Moore 2001, p. 696).

army be again expelled from Italy” (Kohn 1956, p. 599). However, at the time, *Italy* was merely a geography. Each commune and city-state preserved its own distinct identity but they protected their inter-city-state system together.

The Crisis of the Fourteenth Century and the Rise of City-State Chauvinism

Many structures that linked citizens of communes and city-states together and sustained diverse forms of collective identities before the fourteenth century emerged as indirect and largely unintended consequences of the material expansion of production and Mediterranean trade. Voluntary and semivoluntary membership in the communes, mutually beneficial citizenship agreements, active participation in production and administration of the communes, and the heterarchical structure of the inter-city-state system worked as long as merchants, merchant-nobility, and landlord-citizens of the communes benefited from the rising tide of commerce. When this material expansion of trade came to an end, these structures also dissolved.

Starting from the fourteenth century, there was a general economic stagnation in Europe and the Mediterranean (Lopez and Miskimin 1962; Pirenne 1936; Hyde 1973; Arrighi 1994; Abu-Lughod 1989; Miskimin 1969; Martines 1988, p. 168). The Black Death may have played a role in it, but as Hyde (1973, p. 179) observes, actually the Black Death “was preceded in Europe by a series of lesser misfortunes of various kinds which suggest that something was seriously wrong with the economy.” Many historians highlight that massive migration of rural middle-classes and landlord-citizens of the *contado* to cities—which helped them evade taxes—was a factor in the economic difficulties the communes and city-states were facing. Although there is a truth in this observation, this phenomenon was not new and it was bearable as long as material expansion of trade continued. But the profits that could be squeezed out of the Mediterranean trade reached its limits by the fourteenth century (Arrighi 1994; Miskimin 1969; Lopez and Miskimin 1962; but see Brown 1989).

Dissolution of Social and Political Structures of Communes and City-States

Economic stagnation and the crisis suddenly changed the former social and political structures of these communes and city-states. The first changes took place in the organization of the inter-city-state system. The virtuous cycle of mutual cooperation turned into a vicious cycle of competition and rivalry, and soon, economic rivalry turned into an inter-city-state war. As the Mediterranean trade switched from a positive-sum game to a zero-sum game, a cutthroat competition took off. Consequently, inter-city-state conflicts escalated dramatically in the fourteenth century. Until 1375, wars were relatively brief in duration. Beginning with 1375, however, “Italy entered a seventy-five year period of longer, more costly, nearly non-stop warfare” (Najemy 2004, p. 199), which was labeled by Braudel as the “Italian Hundred Years’ Wars.” This catastrophe “constituted one of the clearest historical instances of ‘war of all against all’” (Arrighi 1994, p. 92; Mattingly 1988, p. 49).

Rapid escalation of inter-city-state warfare radically altered the social and political organization of the communes. First, the militia system dissolved. The self-protection of the militia was fit for protecting a ship, a town, or a city. Yet this was not an efficient strategy if campaigns were lengthier and if they were taking place in faraway locations. As inter-city-state wars intensified, the locations of the battles were getting further away from the cities. But “civic militia could not permanently garrison border strong points located as much as fifty

miles from the city itself, since militiamen could not afford to stay away from home for indefinite periods of time” (McNeill 1982, p. 73).

In the course of the fourteenth century, the militia system was gradually abandoned and paved way to *commercialization of organized violence* in northern Italy (McNeill 1982, pp. 51–74; Waley 2013, pp. 96–97; Hyde 1973, pp. 183–184). Communes started to rely more and more on mercenary-companies known as the *condottiere* (contractors), which sold their services to the communes at a particular price (Mallett 1974, pp. 25–50). This, of course, solved the problem of protection by creating another problem: “by the fourteenth century, war had also become cripplingly expensive” (Hyde 1973, p. 183). The ability to burden these costs—hence the chance of survival—highly depended on the individual financial capacity of each commune. Among the Lombard region, cities like Genoa, Milan, and Venice were the three major city-states who could burden these costs (see Fig. 4). The only other city to compete with them was Florence in northern Italy.

The cost of inter-city-state wars constantly increased fiscal strain on these city-states (Davis 2013, p. 225). Under these fiscal pressures, these communes imposed direct taxes to the *contado*, increased *gabelles* and other forms of indirect sales taxes, and invented a system known as “forced loans,” where the communal governments imposed mandatory loans on their citizens with a promise of interest (Martines 1988, p. 177; Najemy 2004, p. 201; Hay and Law 1989, pp. 100–101). Although forced loans were initially imposed on the wealthier citizens, soon they were expanded: “Even beggars were sometimes made to cough up a few forced-loan shillings (*soldi*)” (Martines 1988, p. 180). Furthermore, upper classes tried to compensate their losses by squeezing the peasantry and the newly emerging working classes. These policies, however, created a strong wave of resistance and led to the intensification of class struggle in northern Italy.

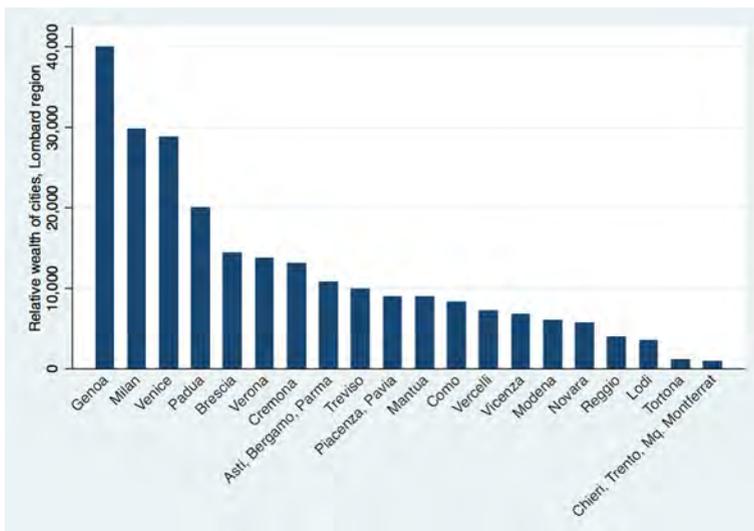


Fig. 4 Relative wealth of chief northern Italian cities in the Lombard Region, 1311. Source: Hyde (1973, p. xxii) explains the logic of these numbers as follows: “In February 1311 Henry of Luxemburg tried to impose a tax on his Italian kingdom north of the Apennines to his Vica-General, Amadeus V of Savoy, his staff and a standing army of 1500 cavalry. An annual sum of nearly 300,000 florins was divided among some fifty Lombard cities and territorial magnates. Although political factors may have influenced some of the bargains made, and there is no reason to doubt that the figures do represent, in a general way, what Henry’s advisers believed the various cities and lords could reasonably pay. The assessment is the best source for the relative wealth of the Lombard cities that we have”

As Fig. 5 shows, the period from 1280 to 1420 became a unique period in northern Italian history in terms of the number of revolts and struggles against “forced loans,” attempts to impose *estimos* or direct taxes, and often rise in indirect taxes (Burg 2004). Florence was the hotbed of these kinds of revolts and revolutions in the course of the fourteenth century (Becker 1967; Burg 2004, pp. 93–94, 112, 121; Cohn 2006, p. 97; Merriman 1996, p. 58). In the *Ciompi Revolution* of 1378, for instance, unskilled workers, especially cloth-workers, vegetable sellers, and various vendors of Florence, carried out an insurrection demanding political recognition together with other segments of the *popolo minuto*, managed to seize state power, and put a wool-comber—Michele di Lando—at the head of the republic’s government (Arrighi 1994, pp. 103–104; Cox 1959, p. 153; Cohn 2006, pp. 97, 177–180; Merriman 1996, p. 58). Between 1360 and 1370, the Venetian salt makers, who are known as the “poorest and the most despised of all occupational groups,” repeatedly revolted and tried to move to other mines as a means of evading Venetian taxes (Burg 2004, p. 121). In Genoa, the post-1348 period saw a rapid increase, may be the highest in the peninsula, in the number of peasant revolts and uprisings, some of which were overwhelmingly political in character. Similar movements in which peasant armies invaded cities occurred in Parma in 1308 and in Bologna in 1334. In the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the most commercially developed cities of northern and central Italy, especially Florence, Ferrara, Milan, Parma, Bologna, and Friuli, were the locations of these sorts of peasant rebellions (Cohn 2006, pp. 44–49).

The rise of riots, revolts, and revolutions was not simply one of the indirect consequences of “commercialization of violence” in the peninsula. Increasing class conflict also contributed to the spread of “commercialization of violence” by making it almost impossible for the rich and poor to cooperate in military affairs (McNeill 1982, p. 73). Increasing social unrest, rebellions, and revolts that were raging all over the century made rich merchants and bankers of Italian city-states realize that their poorer cohabitants were no longer reliable for the task of protection. In this period, all states prohibited the carrying of weapons. Using swords or knives

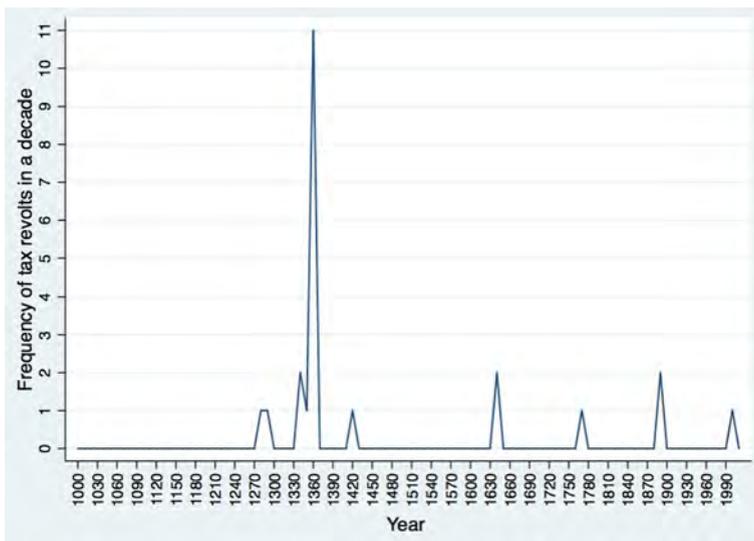


Fig. 5 Total number of year-regions in a decade with strong tax revolts, in Italy, in 1000–2000. Source: Author’s calculations from Burg (2004)

was allowed for merchants' self-defense when traveling, yet peasants were limited to their tools (Najemy 2004, p. 196). From then on, segments of the classes were also taken away from the task of carrying arms, weapons, and protecting the commune. Together with the demise of profits from trade in the late fourteenth century, not only the protective capacities of the inter-city-state subsystem but also the tradition of collective participation in the protection of the commune—the militia system—started to dissolve.

Furthermore, a series of radical changes in the political administration of the communes and city-states took place. First, they drifted toward single family or oligarchic rules under the *signoria* and then most of the major city-states were taken over by circles closely related to financial interest. While the first transformation occurred in response to growing internal and external political instabilities that marked the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the second transformation occurred in the aftermath of the crisis of the fourteenth century, when it became apparent that communes would not be able to pay interest (and principle) due on “forced loans” back to its citizens. The solution required the restructuring of the administrative apparatuses of existing city-states (Martines 1988, p. 179). In 1407, Genoa's public revenues and public administration were put in the hands of the *Casa di San Giorgio*; in the 1430s, the Florentine government was taken over by the Medici family; and in Milan—the most territorialized of all major city-states—the dual treasury developed close ties with the city's big business and financial families (Arrighi 1994, pp. 92–93; Hay and Law 1989, pp. 99–119; Martines 1988, p. 179). And Venice, in this period, became the ideal type of the state as exemplified in the *Communist Manifesto*, whose executives turned into nothing but “a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie” (Arrighi 1994, p. 37). All major city-states were being administered as financial corporations with very sensitive cost-benefit analyses, which could not have possibly been sustained with the amateur ad hoc workers of the earlier era. Gradually, the part-time civic employment system, which had long been the essence of the communes and city republics, was replaced with a body of full-time bureaucrats (Chabod 1964; Schiera 1996).

Race for Territorial and Colonial Expansion

As emphasized above, in the course of the crisis of the fourteenth century, the decline in the rates of profit, the constant increase in public debts, and the inability to impose direct taxes or forced loans without causing social unrest were the key problems for all major city-states and communes. Stronger city-states attempted to solve these problems by expanding their territories beyond their *diocesan* boundaries, colonizing other communes and city-states, and creating “subject populations” on which they could impose direct taxes (Hay and Law 1989, p. 113; Najemy 2004, p. 201; Martines 1988, p. 185; Molho 1995). Hence, a massive wave of territorial and colonial expansion took off in the peninsula (Chittolini 1989, p. 697). Subjugation of the formerly independent cities into territorial states was the single most important change in Italy's governmental map after the mid-fourteenth century (Najemy 2004, p. 192) (Fig. 6).

When this expansionist wave started in the early fourteenth century, Milan was the pioneer. But the actual race for territorial and colonial expansion started after the 1380s. Milan, Venice, Florence, and—to some extent—Genoa were the great powers in competition. By 1430, Milan had become the largest territorial power; Venice had acquired Verona, Treviso, Istria, Vicenza, Verona, Padua, Friuli, Brescia, and Bergamo. In the same period, Florence conquered Prato, Pistoria, San Gimignano, Volterra, Arezzo, Montepulciano, Pisa, Cortona, Livorno, and

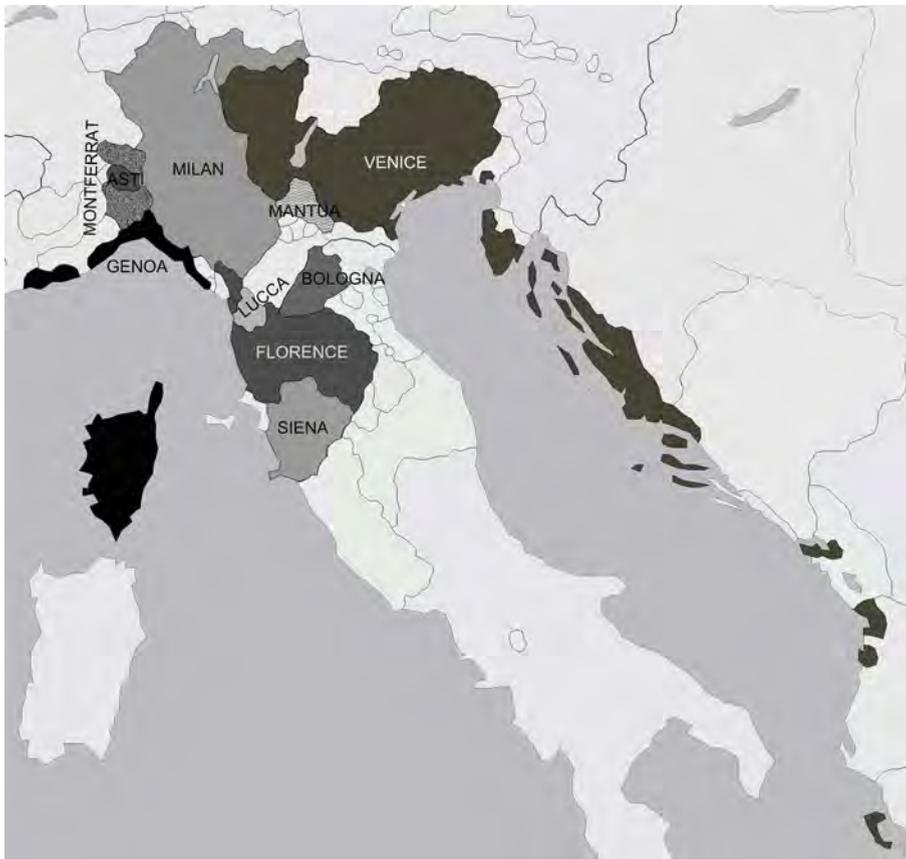


Fig. 6 Territorial/colonial expansion and subjugation of other communes and city-states, circa 1450. Source: Author's modifications using Reed (2008)

Sansepolcro (Hay and Law 1989, p. 112; Najemy 2004, p. 193; Martines 1988, p. 185; Chittolini 1989, pp. 697–698).

This expansion must not be confused with the incorporation of the *contado* that started two centuries earlier. Rather than a treaty of alliance, the territorial and colonial expansion of the fourteenth century resembled more to full-fledged imperial colonization and domination. And there were no limits for this territorial expansion. In this era, “big cities ate smaller ones” and “the boundaries of the victors widened ominously towards one another” (Mattingly 1988, p. 49). Communes and city-states were annexed and conquered mostly through brute force and they were not granted any rights or liberties. They were “governed as subject territories with no right of representation or participation in the councils of the dominant states, which controlled security, defense, criminal justice, and taxes” (Najemy 2004, p. 193). Furthermore, expansionist territorial and colonial powers imposed symbols of their own communal identity over their new subject cities. The dukes of Milan, the Venetians, and the Florentines indicated that their own patron saints should be venerated in these subject cities, and instituted celebrations commemorating their conquests (Webb 1996, pp. 13–14). In contrast to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, they included detailed regulations of the exact amount of tribute subject cities would give during the feast of the patron saints (Webb 1996, pp. 1–7; Chittolini 1990, pp. 72–73).

Not surprisingly, colonized or annexed communes and city-states, of course, did not want to be a part of Venice, Genoa, Milan, or Florence or to pursue these subordination ceremonies. Many subject cities and communes continually rebelled for their independence from the 1340s to the 1440s (Cohn 2006, pp. 86–88; Chittolini 1990, pp. 76–77), which became a major theme in Niccolò Machiavelli's writings a century later (Machiavelli [1532] (1964, pp. 37–39). These secessionist movements—which were frequent and antagonistic—were manifestations of the fact that the unity between states and people in northern Italy was no longer a voluntary one.

Justification and Normalization of the Hierarchical Order among Communes and City-States

As major city-states found their survival in the conquest of their neighboring lands, towns, communes, and cities, there emerged a double standard, sense of superiority and perception of a hierarchical order within the inter-city-state system.

In its conquest of neighboring lands and towns, the city-state betrayed a double vision, one for itself and another for its subject territories. To threaten the political independence of Florence, Venice or Milan was an intolerable outrage in the eyes respectively of Florentines, Venetians or Milanese. But when they took over a lesser state, as when Venice grabbed Padua or Florence “bought” Pisa, they viewed this acquisition as an act of defense, a safeguarding of vital lifelines, or a restoration of peace and order. In most cases there was little to support this viewpoint other than the argument of a Milanese statesman (and canon lawyer) in 1420: he held that ‘right’ is in the force of arms (*ius est in armis*) (Martines 1988, p. 185).

Emerging hierarchical order of the inter-city-state system in northern Italy was finally institutionalized with the Peace of Lodi (1454). Signed between Milan, Florence, Naples, Venice, and Papal states, this peace normalized the emerging hierarchy among existing communes and city-states by creating a proto-Westphalian system in which a small number of ruling city-states formally recognized each other as equals and others as subjects who were “destined to be governed.” This new wave of territorial expansion and emerging double standard could no longer be justified through “the right of to incorporate the *diocesan* boundaries.” Violation of *diocesan* boundaries, territorial/colonial expansion, and subjugation of other communes and city-states required another ideological justification, which became available thanks to the rise of the Renaissance society.

As many heterodox historians and sociologists argued, the Age of Renaissance was itself an indirect consequence of the crisis of the mid-fourteenth century (Lopez 1962; Lopez and Miskimin 1962). In this period of political and economic insecurity, merchant-traders and bankers who could not find profitable activities in trade and production started to invest not only in warfare but also in arts, art patronage, and “conspicuous consumption” of cultural products (Burke 1986, p. 227; Arrighi 1994, p. 95). This also had serious economic and political consequences. As Arrighi put it,

In part, the conspicuous consumption of cultural products [that marked the Age of Renaissance] was a direct result of the adverse commercial conjuncture which made investments in the patronage of the arts a more useful or even a more profitable form of utilization of surplus capital than its reinvestment in trade. In part, it was a supply-driven phenomenon associated

with the invention of mythical collective identities as means of popular mobilization in inter-city-state warfare. And in part, it was a direct result of the struggle for status among competing factions of merchants whereby ‘building magnificently’ became a strategy for distinguishing some families from others (Arrighi 1994, p. 95).

Civic humanists of the age of Renaissance era—the literati, historians, philosophers, architects, and other artists—helped legitimize, justify, and normalize the new wave of territorial expansion by inventing a new “national mission” for these “chosen cities” through promoting the image of their communes, city-states, and republics as inheritors of Roman legacy with an imperial destiny (Najemy 2006, pp. 197–210; Hörnqvist 2000; Davis 2013, p. 225; Martines 1988, pp. 191–217). In his *Laudatio*, to give one example, Bruni not only depicted Florence as the most distinguished and splendid city on earth, but also he argued that because of her splendor and noble origins—linked to Rome—she was “worthy of attaining dominion and rule over the entire world” (Baron 1968, pp. 232–239; Viroli 1995, p. 28). These sentiments were not confined to Florence either. Pier Candido Decembrio of Milan immediately published a panegyric (*De Laudibus Mediolanensium Urbis Panegyricus*) “to counter the theses of Bruni’s *Laudatio* by matching them one after the other with similar claims for Milan” (Baron 1966, pp. 69–70). Decembrio claimed that Milan was the only city besides Rome where emperors were crowned and, hence, the only city to have a legitimate claim to be the second imperial city. Likewise Bernardo Guistiniani—famous Venetian humanist of the fifteenth century “who gave himself to government service and to the furthering of Venetian expansionist policies”—skillfully used his studies to laud the achievements of Venice and to justify Venice’s imperial expansion with reference to Rome (Martines 1988, p. 197; Parry 2008, pp. 185–187). In this era, “Florence was proud of having been founded by Rome, Milan wanted to be a second Rome, Venice was declared a happier and saner Rome, and Viterbo had local “documents” forged to prove that its past was even more cultured than Rome’s” (Marcu 1976, pp. 29–30). Civic humanists of major city-states did their best to demonstrate that territorial expansion did not contradict with the idea of *liberty* [in the context of other communes and city-states] because expansion was the destiny and natural political ambition of their states (see Hörnqvist 2000, pp. 107–108).

While shifting the ideological justification of territorial expansion of communes and city-states from precommunal ecclesiastical *diocesan* boundaries and homegrown Christian saints to ancient Greco-Roman legacies, the Renaissance society changed the dynamics of collective identities in northern Italy once again. Although collective identities resembled very much to “civic nationalism” of the 1150–1300 era at first sight, in reality, they were adaptation of civic nationalism into an age of colonial/territorial expansion and a hierarchical inter-(city-)state system. For this reason, these emergent collective identities became more similar to Arendt’s notion of “chauvinism.”

Gradual transformation from a heterarchical inter-city-state system to a hierarchical one—and from “civic nationalism” to “city-state chauvinism”—can also be observed in the way poets, humanists, and artists glorified their communes and cities after the fourteenth century. In the earlier era, artists and poets were more preoccupied with praising their own cities’ achievements, their citizens’ qualities, their saints, and *carrocci*. After the fourteenth century, however, “the fashion was to belaud one’s own city even at the expense of others” (Burckhardt 1914, p. 339). Waley (2013, p. 100) makes a complementary observation by arguing that the patriotic literature in northern Italy gradually shifted from praising qualitative assessment of their cities’ or citizens’ qualities to citing quantitative/statistical assessments of their cities’

financial and military power. A good example of the literary genre of the former era is *Liber Pergaminus* by Moses de Brolo. In this poem, Moses is proud of Bergamo's "strong walls, its gates, its piazzas, its excellent water supply, and the [...] virtues of its citizens, [who are] peaceful [...], justly governed, respecting the law and living in dignity, charity and concord" (Waley 2013, p. 100). In contrast, Giovanni Villani (of Florence) and Opicino de Canitis (of Pavia), both of whom wrote during the crisis of the fourteenth century, can be given as examples of the latter era, which I associate with "city-state chauvinism." Different from earlier scholars, these authors were not merely interested in citing the qualities of their cities but were concerned with demonstrating their cities' social, financial, and military superiority. According to Opicino, for instance, Pavia is "the most noble of Italy, the flower of Liguria," having the "most healthy and subtle air," and possessing "an army of 2000–3000 cavalry and over 15,000 infantry, able to fight on land or water" (cf. Waley 2013, p. 101). Likewise "Giovanni Villani's confident account of 'the power of our commune' in 1336–1338 is based on the belief that 'figures talk'. He overwhelms his reader with statistics, fiscal, bureaucratic, military, demographic, educational, ecclesiastical, industrial, financial and commercial" (Waley 2013, p. 101). Villani is also proud that no city-state, other than Florence, can shoulder the burden of increasing costs of warfare (Hyde 1973, p. 183). Villani's accounts of Florence not only illustrate economic and political might of his native city with great enthusiasm but also are full of comparisons with ancient Rome.

Territorial/colonial expansion and "city-state chauvinism" also helped the ruling elite to buy the consent of the rebellious masses by offering them privileges that became possible, thanks to colonization of other city-states and communes. In the earlier periods, as Gramsci (2007, p. 13) once noted, the bourgeoisie of the northern Italian communes was not able to "create a state based on the 'consent of the governed'." These communes and city-states were not in a position to provide allegiance of citizens by establishing hegemony on them in any meaningful way. After all, it was the allegiance of the merchants and merchant-nobility, and their active participation in commune affairs that created these communes and the city-states, not vice versa. However, taking the consent of the masses became an urgent necessity after the mid-fourteenth century crisis because all elements that contributed to the cohesion of the earlier communes suddenly dissolved. Communes were no longer voluntarily (or semivoluntarily) established, oath-based communities in which each citizen took part in the organization and protection of the communes. Increasing class conflict made any kind of cooperation between the working classes, peasants (*popolo minuto*), and large bankers, traders, and bourgeoisie (*popolo grosso*) almost impossible. And "[b]ecause the state (that is, the government) could not count on the automatic, customary allegiance of its citizens, it had to win and hold that allegiance by intensifying the community's self-consciousness. It had to serve, or appear to serve, at least some of the interests of at least some of its people" (Mattingly 1988, p. 49).

Subjugation of other communes and city-states provided an opportunity for the political elite in city-states like Venice or Florence to ease social conflicts at home and to take the consent of the masses. These new subject territories provided communes and city-states with a resource of income, easier access to food supplies, raw materials, markets, and trade routes which would stimulate their economies. Furthermore, these colonization attempts provided citizens with new opportunities for investment and created a large amount of surplus which could be used for alleviating poverty and easing social unrest as well (Hay and Law 1989, p. 113). If rulers of northern Italian communes and city-states wanted to avoid civil war, they had to be "imperialists." Italian city-states discovered this formula long before Cecil Rhodes did.

Among all city-states, Venice is probably the textbook example of this transformation. After all, the strong sense of solidarity within Venice, with its high level of fusion and spirit of pride in the fifteenth century, has been marked by many historians and historical sociologists (Lane 1973, pp. 88–89; Burke 1986, p. 209; Burckhardt 1914, pp. 65–67). Although a complex set of factors played in the creation of this exceptional unity within Venice, an important part of the story lay in its populations' relationship with other subject cities and communes. As Burckhardt once mentioned “the inhabitants [of Venice in 15th century] were [...] united by the most powerful ties of interest in dealing with both the colonies and the possessions on the mainland, forcing population of the latter, that is, of all the towns up to Bergamo, to buy and sell only in Venice” (1914, p. 65). Venice's relationship with her colonies was integral in the forging of the unity within Venice. Her aggressive colonial policies created a monopoly of trade which benefited merchant-bankers, traders, and other middle classes of Venice. Her “proto-mercantilist” economic policies—which took off after the crisis of the fourteenth century—also aimed at creating areas of privileges to which only their full citizens were entitled (Rösch 2000, pp. 82–83). These policies were integral in aligning the interests of the upper and middle classes with those of the city-states, creating a sense of unity based on the exclusion and suppression of other communes and city-states. Not surprisingly, this sort of social unity and harmony went hand in hand with rising antagonism against other rival city-states and against “foreigners” in general (Rösch 2000, pp. 82–83).

The effects of these colonial policies on forging state-society unity within the city-states were not limited to the upper and middle classes. Redistribution became an important political tool which linked the poor, the middle classes, and the rich into the newly emerging states. After all, in addition to creating areas of privilege, these “proto-mercantilist” and “colonial” policies also provided an additional surplus, which in return provided “a broad enough distribution of wealth within the Venetian polity to sustain a vivid patriotic consciousness up and down the social scale” (McNeill 1974, p. 64). As McNeill observed

[Although] Venetian taxation was heavy and in the provinces it often seemed oppressive, [...] within the city itself [...] the tax patterns actually helped the poor—assuring relatively cheap food for instance; and insofar as Venetians enlisted in the armed services or held other jobs with the government, the tax system acted as a redistributor of income within the city (McNeill 1974, p. 72).

In terms of redistribution, Venice has a long list of achievements. “Care for the people, in peace and as well as in war, was characteristic of the Venetian government, and its attention to the wounded, even to those of the enemy, astounded other States. Public institutions of every kind could find their model in Venice; the pensioning of retired servants was carried out systematically, and even included a provision for widows and orphans. Wealth, political security and acquaintance with other countries had matured the understanding for such questions” (Burckhardt 1914, p. 63).

Although less successful than Venice itself, other city-states did not hesitate to emulate this Venetian strategy through implementing policies aiming redistribution and philanthropy, which aimed at gaining the consent of the large masses. In the fifteenth century Florence, for instance, there was an increase in attempts by wealthy merchants and bankers to establish hospitals and care centers for abandoned children (Najemy 2004, p. 205; Gavitt 1990). Likewise, in Milan, hospitals were centralized, expanded in size and scope of care activities they provided by the mid-fifteenth century (Najemy 2004, pp. 204–205). In short, “[a]fter about 1400, Renaissance governments, especially the republics, regularly intervened in social and moral issues.

Increasingly, they [...] provided social assistance, philanthropy, care of abandoned children and elderly widows, dowries for poor girls” (Najemy 2004, p. 204).

Without doubt, a number of factors including increasing complexity, growing bureaucratic power, and political capacity of these cities played a role in providing these provisions. However, from the perspective presented in this article, two points are essential to underline. These provisions were used to provide social unity, and they were not possible without converting their former neighbors into their colonial subjects. In other words, order in these city-states was provided through bringing chaos to the colonies; social unity within the cities was achieved through subjugation of their former neighbors.

Conclusion

The comparative-historical analysis provided in this paper brings some light to the limits of the term “patriotism” in describing diverse forms of collective identities that prevailed in northern Italian communes and city-states in the first half of the second millennium. From the eleventh century to the sixteenth century, the nature of collective identities in northern Italy constantly changed together with the alterations in economic, social, and political macrostructures that produced, reproduced, and sustained them. In the course of the *longue durée* evolutionary transformation that gradually altered collective identities, there were two *conjunctures* creating ruptural changes in collective identities in northern Italy (see Table 1). The first of these moments was the territorialization of the communes and the conquest of the *contado* in the mid-twelfth century, and the second one was the ruptural transformation that occurred in the aftermath of the crisis of the fourteenth century.

The *longue durée* evolutionary transformation of the collective identities in northern Italian communes and city-states suggests that manifestations of seemingly strong forms of in-group collective identities (e.g., nationalism and chauvinism) were not products of strong bonds between people living in a particular geography, but products of dissolution of such bonds. As Table 1 shows, from the eleventh century to the sixteenth century, citizens’ voluntary participation in commune affairs declined and the unity between people and communes gradually turned into a nonvoluntary one. These processes went hand in hand with the quasi-monopolization of the legitimate use of violence and the birth of modern bureaucracy, hence the emergence of modern-state (in a Weberian sense) in an embryonic manner. As voluntary unity between subjects/citizens and their states disappeared, it became necessary for the elites to establish their hegemony on their subjects in a Gramscian sense. Hence, conscious attempts to boost in-group collective identities and to create a sense of unity through “invented traditions” gradually increased.

In the course of this evolutionary process, two *conjunctures* created major ruptures in the transformation of collective identities. First of those *conjunctures* took place during the mid-twelfth century, when economic and (geo)political security problems pushed the commune to assume a territorial nature and to incorporate *contado*. These processes undermined communal patriotism of the former era and prepared the preconditions of an embryonic form “civic nationalism.” Because former socio-political structures of the northern Italian communes were very unusual historical formations, it is very difficult to find analogous transformations—such as the conquest of *contado*—that also took place in other geographies in the world. Emergence of communes was already rare but similar communal structures could still be found beyond the Alps. Yet, “it would be hard to find a equivalent of an Italian city’s *contado*” (Chittolini 1989, p. 693).

Table 1 Communal patriotism, civic nationalism and city-state chauvinism in the context of northern Italy

	Communal patriotism	Civic nationalism	City-state chauvinism
Time period	11th century–mid-12th century	Mid-12th century–14th century	Post-14th century
Congruence in social and political boundaries	Congruent	Noncongruent	Noncongruent
Nature of differences between communes and city-states	Subjective	Subjective	Objectified
Organization of the inter-city-state system	Heterarchical	Heterarchical	Hierarchical
Antagonism toward “foreigners”	Low	Low	High
Participation in protection of the commune or city-state	Very high	High	Low
Participation in public affairs of the commune or city-state	Very high	High	Low
Nature of unity among people	Voluntary	Semivoluntary	Nonvoluntary
Nature of secessionist movements	Frequent and nonantagonistic	Low	Frequent and antagonistic
Internal divisions within the commune or city-state	Low	High	Highest
Attempts to increase consent-making capacity of states	Low	High	Highest
Attempts to differentiate from other communes and city-states	Low	High	Highest
Ideological basis and legitimacy for territorial governance	N/A	Precommunal diocesan boundaries	Ancient Rome (the “Renaissance”)

However, the second *conjuncture*—race for territorial/colonial expansion after the crisis of the fourteenth century—is a different matter. As Arrighi (1994) argues, the crisis of the fourteenth century in northern Italy and race for colonial/territorial expansion was the first of a series of generalized crisis tendencies linked to the demise of material expansion of trade and production (and the beginning of a period of financialization) which have been a recurrent feature of historical capitalism. Arrighi shows that other major financial expansion periods in world history (from the 1550s to the 1640s under the Genoese-Iberian systemic cycle of accumulation, from the 1760s to the 1810s under the Dutch systemic cycle, from the 1870s to the 1930s under the British systemic cycle, and from the 1990s to today under the contemporary US systemic cycle) are indeed comparable to the post-fourteenth century developments in northern Italy in a number of interesting ways. Each of these periods were characterized by the end of the material expansion of trade and production; emergence of economic, social, and political crisis; increase in inter-state rivalries; and escalation of territorial and colonial expansions. Extending Arrighi’s framework, Karataşlı (2013) argues that world hegemonic crisis and financial expansion periods of capitalist world history have also created analogous/comparable transformations in nationalist movements.

In light of these observations, our analysis of the transformation of collective identities from “civic nationalism” to “city-state chauvinism” in northern Italy, in the aftermath of the crisis of the fourteenth century, opens up the question whether/not similar transformations were

observed in other analogous *conjunctures* of world history. Although there is no space here to discuss this argument, I must highlight that the very conceptual framework we borrowed from Hannah Arendt also emerged out the multifaceted transformations that took place in the British Empire during the general crisis of the 1873–1896 period, which marked the beginning of the crisis of the British-led world hegemony, rise of financial expansion, and British-led imperialism. From critical liberals such as John Hobson to Russian social democrats, many scholars of the early twentieth century observed changes in the form of nationalism (in the direction from patriotism/nationalism to chauvinism) especially in centers of capitalist world economy in the same *conjuncture*. Hence, it is the task for future comparative-historical studies to explore whether or not similar changes from nationalism to chauvinism took place during analogous conjunctures of the world economy and whether or not they have been taking place in front of our eyes today.

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