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# Occupational Naming Conventions: Historicity, Actors, Interactions

*Claire Judde de Larivière & Georges Hanne\**

**Abstract:** »*Konventionen der Berufsbezeichnung: Historizität, Akteure, Interaktionen*«. Since the Middle Ages, governments have been using occupational titles and categories as some of the main criteria for the identification of individuals. Resulting from a complex interaction between endogenous categories created by the actors in the naming process and exogenous categories developed by public authorities, occupational titles and socio-occupational categories and designations are the product of negotiations, conventions and agreements between various actors. Therefore, it appears that as part of a pragmatic approach towards the development of socio-occupational designations, it would be pertinent for historians to apply the theories of the 'économie des conventions'. Doing so, this paper seeks to approach the issue of the historicity of occupational naming by considering the building of the state, followed by the role and autonomy of various actors in naming processes, and finally the way in which occupational registration and categorisation influenced the social prestige and 'grandeur' of those concerned in the creation and transformation of linguistic conventions.

**Keywords:** work, socio-occupational designations, social categories, state-building process, language, pragmatism, statistics.

## 1. Introduction

Since the Middle Ages, Western governments have been using occupational titles and categories as some of the main criteria for the identification of individuals. Resulting from a complex interaction between endogenous categories created by the actors in the naming process and exogenous categories developed by public authorities, occupational titles and socio-occupational categories and designations are the product of negotiations, conventions and agree-

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This contribution is based on the collective research work and conclusions of a symposium that was held at the University of Toulouse/Framespa in October 2008, 'Langage du travail, travail du langage. Approche historique de l'identité professionnelle dans les dispositifs de nomination et d'enregistrement des personnes' (Hanne/Judde de Larivière 2010).

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ments between various actors (Hanne/Judde de Larivière 2010; Judde de Larivière 2010). These occupational designations have long been approached empirically by historians who perceive them as an essential material of social history (Daumard 1963; Perrot 1975).

More recently, the historical processes of their creation have captured the attention of researchers. In French social history, there has indeed been renewed interest in the building of categories, especially socio-occupational ones, since the late 1970s. Several factors account for this particular orientation of French historiography: the appeal of debates sparked by the linguistic turn, the dialogue with the social sciences and the refusal of categories that are all too often considered as being ‘natural’ in traditional economic and social history. Thus, at a time when economic history was losing its supremacy, these various avenues of exploration were an invitation for historians to propose a more sociological and analytical approach towards the social categories that formed the very basis of their work. As such, for the past thirty or so years, many investigations have rekindled the analysis of socio-occupational categories, such as those specialising in the history of statistics, which are influenced by the work of Alain Desrosières and whose aim is to understand the way in which underlying categories were built (Affichard 1977, Affichard 1987; Desrosières 2000). Other researchers have sought to analyse the linguistic resources pooled by actors in response to various situations that they faced (Sewell 1980; Gribaudi/Blum 1990, Gribaudi/Blum 1993; Guerreau 1993); some of them achieve this via the perspectives opened up by pragmatic sociology, notably by investigating the mechanisms for building the designation categories of the social world (Boltanski 1982; Cerutti 1990; Scherman 2006).

Insofar as occupational designations reflect certain expectations and assumptions about the person described or who describes himself or herself as such, they are part of a wide definition of conventions understood as “a system of mutual expectations about competences and behaviours, which are designed to be self-evident and for the purpose of being self-evident” (Salais 1989, 213).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, practising an occupation corresponds to a predictable way of behaving that meets a widely-accepted norm. The very term ‘occupational’, which has largely come into common usage today, is the ordinary expression of an emphasis on competences as well as a defined behavioural framework that presupposes a set of more or less implicit rules and principles. Therefore, it appears that as part of a pragmatic approach towards the development of socio-occupational designations, it would be pertinent for historians to apply the theories of the economics of convention.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Un système d’attentes réciproques sur les compétences et les comportements, conçus comme allant de soi et pour aller de soi.”

<sup>2</sup> The French approach of the so called “économie des conventions”. See also the introduction to this volume by Robert Salais and Rainer Diaz-Bone.

The first issue that arises concerns the place of this particular system of conventions, i.e. naming practices, in the building of the state. Since the Middle Ages, the development of socio-occupational categories and designations has been contributing – alongside other identification and classification criteria – to the slow reinforcement of the state’s authority. The second issue concerns the role and autonomy of various actors in the naming processes. We will consider the ways in which people have used social and linguistic conventions in different historical situations, all the while modifying such conventions in negotiations relating to occupational designations. In a third stage of reflection, we will consider how occupational registration and categorisation influenced the social prestige and ‘*grandeur*’ of those concerned in the creation and transformation of linguistic conventions.

## 2. Origins of the State and Occupational Designations

Historically, one’s occupational and, more generally, social and legal status has been an essential resource in the naming and registration of persons. Indeed, in order to study naming processes, we must address the issue of identification practices, which followed a non-linear evolution (Noiriel 2007; Denis 2008; About/Denis 2010). The history of the naming and identification of persons – in the West, at least – is founded on a major articulation marking both the transition towards a standardised anthroponymy that ceased to be descriptive and the advent of an occupational naming system that levelled out the differences between persons by incorporating them within common occupational categories (Beech 2002; AAVV 1989-2002).

In the two-element anthroponymic system (comprising first name and surname), the status of occupational elements underwent certain modifications: their position in the ‘anthroponymic chain’ (i.e. the position of each element with respect to the identity) changed (Buchi/Wirth 2005) and the occupational name was no longer preceded by an article. Thus, in Parisian ‘*taille*’ records of Philippe le Bel’s time (the ‘*taille*’ was a direct tax imposed on each household), such elements were incorporated into anthroponyms (Michaelsson 1951, xxviii).<sup>3</sup> It was only very gradually that they were separated from the latter, thereby losing the explicitly designative function that they had in a world of close relations; meanwhile, nicknames, whether relating to occupations, functions or other distinguishing traits, lost their meaning. The stabilisation of such anthroponymic uses was the result of a slow standardisation process undertaken

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<sup>3</sup> The author considered that “in many cases, one cannot tell if such a designation was purely onomastic or if it represented an occupation that was truly practised by its bearer”. This author also published family record books dating from 1296 and 1297 (Géraud 1991).

by public authorities in close interaction with individuals whose customs and practices were slow to evolve themselves.

Towards the late Middle Ages, as the use of the second anthroponymic element as a patronym spread and stabilised, its inscription onto any list of names was more and more frequently supplemented by an occupational element that was distinctly separate from the patronym. This transformation marked a change in the system of conventions and one may assume that it was related to the transition from a world where the expression of identity was mainly oral to one in which it was conveyed in writing (Kuchenbuch 2002; Clanchy 1979 for more on the relationships between the spoken and written word). While the various forms of naming constitute a very vast field that remains largely unattainable to historians as an oral phenomenon, the inscription of names and designations, on the other hand, offers a particularly rich area of research. These inscriptions should not be considered as mere transcriptions of pre-existing data. Rather, they were the subject of negotiations, agreements and conventions. Furthermore, the performativity of the act of registration was an essential aspect of the state's administrative work. The transition to writing and the incorporation of names and designations in registers had, in return, an effect on the naming process itself as registration changed the way in which each person was perceived or perceived himself or herself.

During the Middle Ages and all throughout the Ancien Régime, while an administrative system and increasingly reliable governing tools were being reinforced, the production of an occupational taxonomy became the subject of intense negotiations between various actors: tradesmen, corporations and state representatives. The categories produced by the first of these and recorded by institutions were evidently at the heart of discussions, which resulted not only in the establishment of an occupational title, but more generally, the recognition of a social status and function, and the determination of tax constraints and liabilities. Many documents allow us to analyse the historicity of the naming process and the classification challenges involved. However, there are two types of documents that give a particularly good indication of the origins of the stabilisation of occupational titles and the negotiations and agreements involved: first, trade statutes, and second, tax documents and censuses.

The drafting of trade statutes accompanied the rapid economic development of medieval towns, where occupations diversified and became more specialised. The chronology of the creation of statutes varies from one town to the next, starting from the early 13th century. Along with urban growth and economic development came the proliferation, diversification and specialisation of the crafts industry (Coornaert 1948; Epstein 1991; for the case of Paris, Lespinnasse/Bonnardot 1980; Lachaud 2006). Tradesmen and urban institutions collaborated so as to create an efficient and precise normative system aimed at regulating the arts and crafts industry. Many normative texts and statutes were thus produced to encompass the technical, economic, or even religious and

political implications of occupations. The drafting of these statutes was the fruit of constant negotiations between occupation holders, technically-competent masters and artisans practising the occupation in question, and the representatives of public authorities (town, county, kingdom) who sought to assist in the normative process and reinforce their authority.

The number of occupations increased as skilled artisans imposed and lay claim to specific know-how, whose recognition involved the creation of new occupations. This linguistic proliferation accompanied and supported the emergence and recognition of new guilds, the fruit of the gradual separation between closely related activities that were henceforth perceived and proclaimed as being distinct. The recognition of a new occupation by public authorities, which was not necessarily systematic, marked the culmination of a linguistic appropriation process that was accompanied by a gain in prestige and statutory legitimisation, a source of many privileges. Public institutions based their choices on arbitrations between competing groups – a manifestation of the latter's hold on their occupations.

In the Middle Ages and the early modern era, the stabilisation of occupations and the terms enabling their designation and distinction was also favoured by the keeping of tax records and the conducting of censuses, which reflected the refinement of the administrative system and governing techniques (AAVV 2006-2008). The establishment of conscription lists and tax and cadastral records involved the widespread registration of individuals that, in turn, called for the refinement of the categories used as populations increased and the state's objectives became clearer (Denis 2008).

A few specific examples relating to the Kingdom of France will enable us to shed light on the historicity of this process: individual tallage, which had been established since 1349 in the northern regions of the kingdom, led to the systematic registration of '*feux*' (households), whose social characterisation was achieved by means of a pre-established grid comprising a few sections, the basis of which was still purely tax-related. After ploughmen and tallageable commoners came those exempted on the grounds of poverty, who were assigned different appellations (such as '*gens de néant*' ('worthless people' or 'those without property'), '*infirmes et caducs*' ('infirm and invalids'), '*pauvres et mendiants*' ('poor and beggars') according to Dupâquier 1995, 26), 'new-comers' (*nouveaux venus*), and finally, the privileged.

At the end of the 17th century, Vauban's efforts to improve census and tax tools were an important step in stabilising the work-related aspects of the identification of persons. At the time, the characterisation of occupations was taking shape, and the very idea of an 'occupation' became fundamental to the modern concept of work. In 1686, Vauban employed this term while presenting his method for counting peoples: "above all, the latter [the investigation] must

reveal the number, status and occupation of subjects of all backgrounds” (Hecht 1977, 45).<sup>4</sup> Additionally, he proposed distributing printed tables among census takers to ensure homogeneity in the gathering and presentation of data, with one’s occupation being included in the sections to be filled in (Esmonin 1954; Vilquin 1975; Virol 2007, 133-134). The originality of this method lay unquestionably in the theorisation of the systematic registration of various types of information, as Vauban so clearly explained in his project for a royal tithe (*dîme royale*). In reality, the first real census was ordered by Pontchartrain in 1694, no doubt inspired by Vauban, and was based on a pre-established grid with a view to imposing a new levy. Although one’s occupation was not specifically asked for in this grid, it should nonetheless be noted that a distinction was made between ‘valets’ and ‘maids’ (*servantes*) on the one hand, heads of households on the other, and finally, beggars with no tax liabilities.

This census gave rise to the establishment of capitation in 1695, which in turn led to the general application and refinement of the individual tallage system. Initially, this involved a tax that was levied on twenty-two classes. These mainly distinguished between the different types of officers, and the occupational nomenclature remained very cursory for most jobs, which were grouped together in a few of the classes (Desrosières 1977). Although capitation was built on a hierarchical and corporate scheme, it nonetheless marked a fundamental stage in the population approach, which was characterised by growing concern about individuation even though the process was far from complete. In reality, it gave rise to local systematic registration, as observed in the case of Toulouse (Caubet 1998). Thus, the establishment of capitation was a pivotal moment in a long transformation, during which individualised laborious work gradually became commonplace in view of status, standing, and community and domestic affiliations. Indeed, under the Ancien Régime, one’s occupational identity was essentially determined by one’s affiliation to bodies and inclusion in communities, which constituted the cornerstone of identity and the source of specific rights that an individual could claim. As proof of this, during the Ancien Régime and in still in the 19th century, in the Spanish city of Zaragoza, ‘industrial’ tax lists (based on occupation, as opposed to those based on ownership) were still established on the basis of a divide between *cuerpos convenidos* and *no convenidos*, i.e. between professional groups with an acknowledged structure and those without such a structure (Hanne 2006). Although the term *convenido* refers to an agreement between persons having the same occupation, such an agreement was not deemed necessary for considering any occupation as being part of an organised group having an acknowledged identity.

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<sup>4</sup> “Surtout que celle-ci [l’enquête] fasse connaître le nombre et la qualité et profession des sujets de toute condition.”

In France, demographic surveys may be a prerequisite for establishing tax lists, as was the case in 1694. The opposite may also be true, as in the 1709 survey that was based on tallage and capitation records. This was also the case of the 1713 population census ordered by Desmarets, which used information from the 1712 tallage registers. In any case, the introduction of a large-scale tax system was the fundamental drive behind the impetus for the systematic registration of populations and occupations carried out by state-owned institutions. The monarchic state's desire for identification should be considered in this context. The monarchic state did not possess the former local institutions' means of knowledge and direct action, and required an increasingly larger administrative staff with specialised and varied duties for delegating its authority. While state officials were being professionalised, the identification of taxpayers and inhabitants implied the definition of their social position, which had tax implications, and therefore led to the gradual professionalisation of registered persons and, indeed, all of society (Denis/Milliot 2004, 7).

Thus, the general implementation and standardisation of population registration under the aegis of the state reinforced the role of work as an organising principle of social issues. The specialisation and characterisation of occupations and duties required the constitution of a horizontal nomenclature that contradicted the hierarchical principle on which the social structure had been organised until then. In this way, occupational taxonomy marked a break in the usual trends in 'social semantics' as it instituted a new system of conventions corresponding to the workings of a monetarised and sectorised economy as well as a new political model.

The widespread registration, identification and characterisation of subjects drew on the 'disciplinisation' and organisation of social issues, of which the control of language and classification categories was one of the main tools. This 'disciplinisation' of language, in which the state tried to bring order to language so as to bring more order to society, involved taking possession of the occupational categories used by tradesmen and the population and stabilising them in an administratively approved nomenclature that was progressively refined. Registration, especially that of occupations, drew heavily on Michel Foucault's concept of 'governmentality'. As Pierre Lascoumes reminds us, governmentality highlights a mode of authority that appeared at the end of the 17th century, and for which "it is no longer a matter of conquering and possessing, but producing, inspiring and organising the population to enable it to develop all its properties" (Lascoumes 2004, 5th paragraph).<sup>5</sup> Thus, registration and categorisation were not just instruments of the tax system, but well and truly, alongside this tax system and the laws, one of three major types of gov-

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<sup>5</sup> "Il ne s'agit plus de conquérir et de posséder, mais de produire, de susciter, d'organiser la population afin de lui permettre de développer toutes ses propriétés."

erning instruments. It does indeed appear that occupational taxonomy was a key element of the new technology of power offered by statistics.

But the registration of persons from the standpoint of the state should not be considered solely in terms of the gathering of pre-existing data. It was also an essential aspect of the deepening connection between the authorities and the people under their jurisdiction who acknowledged their legitimacy. As Benedict Anderson showed, registration is a creator of habitus in that it represents the opportunity for each person to become aware of his or her belonging to an invisible community, one that is intangible in immediacy, but develops in everyone's imagination (Anderson 1983). This internalisation of the social and political connection was all the more real as registration initiated an information chain in the form of a loop that returned to registered persons via developing media. Yet, at the end of the Ancien Régime, the state's relationship with registration underwent certain changes. Indeed, according to Alain Desrosières, "one important aspect [of Napoleonic statistics] is that, contrary to what was done in the administration of the Ancien Régime, it was intended for publication" (Desrosières 2000, 47-48).<sup>6</sup> (Soon thereafter, however, Napoleon resumed the practice of the Ancien Régime and it was not until the July Monarchy that statistics once again took up the ambitions declared by the Consulate). The aim of gathering information was therefore not merely to convey information to the institutions who requested and reserved the right to it, but also to grant an ever-increasing number of people access to a certain vision of society – i.e. a certain awareness of oneself as being an element of a set of shared representations – through the spreading and increase in the means of communication. This mirror effect led registered persons to appropriate their own image, such as it was conveyed to them while simultaneously driving them to conform to it.

There was a gradual abandoning of the previous norm of close relations in favour of a new vision of a wider world, where everyone could and had to recognise and establish their identity by becoming aware of the interdependency chains circumscribing the boundaries of their individual actions (Elias 1975, 206). The application of a precise socio-occupational taxonomy, followed by a socio-occupational categorisation as well as the production of lists, directories, tables, etc. (Desrosières 1977; Desrosières 1987, 47 on the 'certification of standardisation tools') had to be accompanied by the development of media (newspapers, magazines, brochures, notices, etc.) and meeting places for facilitating exchanges and the dissemination of information (scholarly societies, clubs, groups and associations in general). The development and disclosure of this set of discourses and representations reflecting a certain image of society corresponded to a new system of conventions, in which occupational

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<sup>6</sup> "Un aspect important [de la statistique napoléonienne] est que, à la différence de ce qui se faisait dans l'administration de l'ancien régime, elle est destinée à la publication."

elements existed as a well-ordered nomenclature classified into different categories.

### 3. Actors in the Naming Process

Just as we should not view occupational categories and their constitutive elements as a mere expression of social realities gathered by state officials, registered persons should not be considered as mere objects of an extrinsic designation. More often than not, declarants had some room for autonomy and were actors of their own registration. The history of the naming and registration of occupational elements is really that of the introduction of conventions that were the product of continuous tension between administrators' categories and those of the people being governed. The latter must be considered as situated actors with specific resources at their disposal and of a certain worth, which depended on their status, occupation and social position. The linguistic construction of occupational identities under the aegis of the state and occupational organisations was a process that relied not only on rules, but also on horizons of expectation contributing to the introduction of a normative environment in which economic activities developed.

Who did the naming, and under what conditions? We now know that the establishment of categories was the result of a gradual and collective development process. However, one question remains: in practice, who were the actors of this process, and how, where and when did these categories appear? Public authorities are generally considered to be the main commissioning parties in the history of naming, but other work-related or educational institutions have also appeared to generate discourses, as have the individuals themselves who contributed to the language development process, such as in cases of self-designation.

The pragmatic approach invites us to analyse documents and sources in detail, thereby allowing access to practical examples of individual actions. This would involve paying attention to traces or signs revealing hesitancy or doubts in the naming process, and the situations and micro-procedures at work in the creation and/or transformation of categories. Crossed-out words, deletions, text replacements, scribbles and additions in margins are all signs of a registration in progress, and contain clues as to how identities were perceived by those carrying out the registration, as well as the doubts and hesitancy that they faced (Laurens 2008; see also for the medieval period Chastang 2006; Anheim/Chastang 2009). Certain interactions in the process of developing socio-occupational categories are thus accessible, albeit in a fragmentary manner. It was during such interactions at the time of registration, whether unsolicited or at the behest of a higher authority, during the ultimate naming process, that occupational identities crystallised. Thus, as Alain Desrosières sums it up, there are three aspects that must be perceived

as being simultaneously co-constructed and closely related to one another in such a way that none of them determines any of the others [...] 1) the way we perceive society; 2) the ways of behaving within it; and 3) the ways of describing it, especially through statistics (Desrosières 2005, 20).<sup>7</sup>

During the slow creation of the ‘modern’ state from the 14th to the 18th century, the strengthening of authority required the refinement of governing techniques and methods. Thus, public authorities commissioned surveys, censuses and tax lists, and gave officers the actual responsibility for the registration process. These officers possessed a certain authority that was, admittedly, purely administrative, but vital to the building of states. Among the staff were administrators and secretaries, representatives and enforcers of authority who nonetheless constituted the keystone of interactions between the authorities and their subjects (see for example Brian 1994; Offenstadt 2004; Spire 2008; Buton 2008). At the precise moment of registration, these representatives of the authorities had limited but essential room for manoeuvre while noting down information. They asked questions, transcribed or even translated answers, and oriented the declarants’ accounts and words.

The identity and the actual duties and competences of registering officers in both medieval and modern times raise many questions. There were constant to-ings and fro-ings between registering officers and the persons being registered; quarrels or resistance about the identity (especially in terms of occupation) that was ultimately noted down could sometimes be fierce. The quality of the registration work varies among documents, which reveals the importance of the role of the registering officer, whose rigour, competence and communication skills had an influence on the final document contents. Some officers improved their technical skills as they went about their task, acquiring a more accurate and balanced perception of various occupations and their subclasses in the process. Within a given register or from one register to the next, the categories used sometimes changed, becoming more specific or, conversely, less so in cases where officers were pressed for time to meet certain deadlines.

The series of tax documents dating from the late Middle Ages in our possession also allow us to imagine the line of officers in charge of registration. Sedimentation, improvements or changes in the registration process appear over periods that sometimes spanned several decades, or even centuries. We may observe how succeeding secretaries and registering officers benefited from previous experiences, adding their own minor innovations that were, in turn, ultimately inherited and used by their own successors. Thus, the line of employees in a given administration contributed towards the stabilisation and renewal of categories. The identity and status of the registering officer is of

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<sup>7</sup> “Comme simultanément coconstruits, et étroitement liés entre eux sans que l’un détermine les autres [...] 1) la façon de penser la société ; 2) les modalités de l’action en son sein; et 3) les modes de description, notamment statistiques.”

particular importance here, as is the jurisdiction that he came under. Civil-law notaries (who wrote up wills or contracts) and administrators representing the state (who kept taxation or civil status records) did not adopt the same approach as regards naming categories. A comparison of sources dating from the same era but produced by different institutions and according to specific objectives clearly points towards the existence of diverging views and perceptions.

Starting from the 19th century, many institutions, alongside states, took on an essential role in naming procedures. Trade unions, collective labour agreements and occupational groups contributed greatly towards the development of categories of the working world by creating a place for technical competences as well professional integrity and identity. The categories produced in this context appear to incorporate internal hierarchies – both explicit and implicit – and more so than those generated by the state. Extremely precise and detailed classification systems that may or may not have been normalised were built within professional bodies of varying levels of organisation and legitimacy. In France, the general implementation of collective labour agreements from 1936 onwards played a key role in the standardisation of category titles.

Training and apprentice colleges as well as vocational schools of sufficient legitimacy all contributed to the naming process. Both theoretical and practical teaching sessions gave rise to the creation of fragile identities, which were likely to evolve as technical and professional competences were validated and recognised. The growing place occupied by scholastic institutions starting from the 19th century led to competition with occupational organisations, which were thus deprived of part of their competence in naming. The gradual undertaking of training and apprenticeships by schools, and therefore, directly or indirectly, by the state, brought about a major transformation: technical education, especially in France, enabled the state to partially override the competence and autonomy of professional bodies in the naming procedure (Bodé 2002; Bodé 2010). The very definition of technical or professional education and the categorisation of the relevant establishments were – and remain – major challenges for all the actors involved. However, there was never complete state monopoly as workshops, factories and trade unions continued to play an active role in the production of endogenous categories (Corcuff 1991).

Meanwhile, in many instances of registration during both ancient and modern times, people were led to name themselves or their peers; hence the appearance of a ‘native’ and ‘endogenous’ vocabulary that interacted constantly with the nomenclature proposed by institutions. Private sources, letters, wills, diaries and ‘livres de raison’ (family record books) constitute a choice corpus in this area (Bardet/Ruggiu 2005), just as political and propagandist literature have proved to be a powerful vehicle for designation in more recent eras (Faure/Rancière 2007). As for the naming systems used within workshops, they reveal the power of hierarchical relations in which bosses or workshop supervisors had the discretionary power to state and name (Steffens 2010). Appren-

tices were therefore given many nicknames that were a reminder of their inferior status and technical incompetence, which bore elements of the internal hierarchies of the workplace.

But just how autonomous were people in older eras? Did they actually enjoy true autonomy in the self-defining process? Did the public authorities allow them such room for manoeuvre and did these authorities themselves possess adequate critical tools for developing a proper line of reasoning for classification? Evidently, this issue concerns more than just occupational naming; it is at the heart of a pragmatic approach to history that aims to assess the tools and competences that actors possessed for classifying the social world. We cannot just content ourselves with assuming that actors adhered strictly to the categories issued 'by the top', nor that such categories were used in a non-critical manner. Even in ancient societies, where certain social models constituted powerful means of domination and seemingly obligatory referents, actors possessed 'competences' that allowed them to adapt their actions to the models by making use of the leeway at their disposal.

Naming conflicts were thus the setting of negotiations between competing categories, as in the case of conflicts between guilds and municipal authorities in medieval towns. In the event of a disagreement about identity content, actors and public authorities were able to negotiate the terms used and the subtleties to be added, with actors possessing the critical ability to enable an endogenous understanding of social issues. Therefore, naming and stating one's own occupation depended on such negotiations. When claiming tax privileges or political rights, actors had to base their request, whether individual or collective, on their resources and qualifications.

Silence played a significant role in such negotiations as well. Thus, the unstated and the withheld – achieved by not naming one's occupation – were of equal consequence, albeit, obviously, harder to detect in the sources. Keeping silent about one's occupation or dependence was part of the creation of a general conception of work. Given this, were actors capable of withholding what they might have considered as degrading or merely contrary to their immediate interests? Furthermore, within the hierarchy of a given occupation, members did not enjoy the same opportunities of being heard, nor share equivalent legitimacy as to creating designations. Apprentices were often deprived of the ability of self-designation and had to accept being designated by their peers, before being able to become actors themselves in the naming process.

In addition, it is important to consider the role of fictional texts in identity production and naming (Anheim/Lilti 2010). During the Ancien Régime, commissioning parties and the authors whom they turned to reproduced and formalised the hierarchies and prejudices that were omnipresent in society at the time. In the same way, the working-class and committed literature of the 20th century contributed to a critical view of work and an analysis of the social world and its constituents. Literary texts thus contributed to the categorisation

of social issues by producing models and figures that, once distributed to the public, became powerful classification tools. Literature and theatre provided figures and characters that were often archetypal but embodied social realities. By definition, none of the views conveyed by fictional works was of normative or legal value. And yet, they sometimes succeeded in establishing themselves, or even supplanting the official nomenclature issued by public authorities.

By exploiting the intrinsic value of words to portray either their positive or negative dimensions, authors and playwrights inspired feelings of sympathy, admiration or contempt for the occupations portrayed by the characters of their books or plays. In this way, the militant aspect of some works took on a fundamental role – within particular political and ideological contexts – in building certain occupational categories. Each period produced its own ‘ideal-typical’ masks and characters embodying sociological figures that were just as worthy as the socio-occupational categories established by statisticians, for example, at the *commedia dell’arte* theatre or the depictions and images of occupations that were circulated during the Ancien Régime (Milliot 1995).

Therefore, naming was the fruit of multiple processes involving many actors, who possessed various powers and competences and represented specific jurisdictions and authorities. The state, public authorities and other institutions such as occupational groups, workshops or schools, being well aware of the stakes in occupational naming, contributed to the development of categories by instituting rules, nomenclatures and criteria, which the actors that these concerned adopted and adhered to, more or less voluntarily. But the latter subsequently reworked these rules by incorporating elements of endogenous classification, inspired by their knowledge of the various technical aspects of their occupations and the resources of occupational groups. This naming and characterisation process relied on constant negotiations, whose purpose was, beyond establishing an occupational taxonomy, to characterise a certain social status, prestige and ‘*grandeur*’ related to occupations.

#### 4. Status, Prestige and ‘*grandeur*’

Occupational naming did not have the sole purpose of developing administrative categories for governing populations. Indeed, a lot more was at stake than just the relationships between individuals and public authorities. The feedback effects in the social world were of the utmost importance, and actors, in turn, used these categories when considering their relations and positions in various social hierarchies and situations.

During the Ancien Régime, an artisan or tradesman’s occupation could strongly condition his legal status, rights and privileges. Titles and orders that conferred a particular status guaranteed certain privileges, as in the case of masters, for example. Occupational titles could represent the granting of political or economic rights. The right to citizenship or gentry status was related to

the practice or, conversely, the prohibition of certain occupations: the former guaranteeing and the latter withdrawing rights, all of which depended on the characterisation of these occupations (Cerutti 1990). This was the case of commerce, which could assume different forms: applicants for citizenship in Venice, for example, knew how to turn the job of retailer into the 'non-manual' job of a seafaring merchant, precisely by playing with words and their meanings so as to obtain the much desired status (Bellavitis 1995; Zannini 2000).

Social hierarchy was formalised by statuses, especially dependence, resulting from legal inferiority. The practice of certain occupations conferred a restrictive status in terms of rights. Servitude, of varying degrees and contexts, was at the heart of the challenges in the naming process. Having to state one's occupation essentially boiled down to having to declare one's dependence, servitude and subservience, which therefore gave rise to avoidance strategies to conceal one's legal inferiority. Similarly, one's status could, in turn, ban access to certain occupations or, conversely, encourage their practice. The interaction between occupational and social naming and legal status featured constantly under the Ancien Régime, each of these contributing to the definition of one's identity, rights and position within the society.

Occupational titles were a key element in the distribution of criteria of prestige (Crocq 2005). A conjunction of a status and an activity, one's occupational title reflected both one's social position within a given hierarchy as well as one's competences and qualifications (Cosandey 2005). In the 18th century, as a result of the attempt to eliminate corporations and the upheaval brought about by the French Revolution, the issue of social and occupational hierarchies and their formalisation became the subject of impassioned debates (Kaplan 1986; Cosandey 2005). Today, titles are still commonly used in many countries. They determine hierarchies that are virtual in some respects, but nonetheless efficient, as in the case of professional or university titles. Such titles should be perceived more in terms of prestige and social recognition than rights or privileges, but they do nevertheless attest to the importance of language and naming in the assertion of social and occupational identities.

Thus, occupational naming characterised and contributed to the expression of hierarchical position and worthiness. Stating one's occupation was akin to placing oneself on a scale of worthiness, claiming a certain '*grandeur*' for oneself or for others (Descimon 2010). Artisans were well aware of this: the use of a specific linguistic repertoire for naming their own occupation and a technical vocabulary were some of the constituents of a positioning strategy (Perrenoud 2010). Actors thus developed systems for justifying and legitimising occupational identities based on a specific vocabulary. Language enabled the assertion of relative degrees of '*grandeur*' that were based on the competence being claimed, the type of work done, and the identity and status of the commissioning parties.

Thus, there were a myriad of social hierarchies and scales of worthiness, and the whole point of historical or sociological analysis lies precisely in understanding the way in which these parallel and sometimes competing hierarchies, with all their different classification levels, articulated with one another (Boltanski/Thévenot 1983). Whether considering ‘positions in the field’ or ‘*grandeur*’ within each ‘*cit *’, both critical and pragmatic sociology offer analytical tools that, far from contradicting one another, enable us to consider the relative hierarchies and positions according to two complementary systems, depending on various contexts and situations, and articulating scales and viewpoints (about the relationship between the two models, see Boltanski 2009, 39-82; Benatouil 1999).

Occupational naming was therefore one of the means of carrying out this critical and analytical work enabling the judgment and attribution of relative positions to others and to oneself. Admittedly, we do not always know the exact terms of the discourse produced on this occasion – discourse that sparked off the classification process itself. But what was said and noted down during trials or written in wills, letters or ‘* crits du for priv *’ (first-person writings) reveal the critical ability of actors to develop frameworks of interpretation and recognition codes, in which occupational criteria featured widely (M n tra 1982).

The more recent the source, the more it brings us closer towards a sort of professional ‘integrity’, which could be the expression of a certain ‘pride’ (without conjuring up a romantic and mythicised vision of the ‘traditional’ job), and which may be deduced from many sources prior to the 18th century, albeit a little less clearly (Ranci re 1986). In their study of workers’ newspapers of the 1830s, Jacques Ranci re and Alain Faure highlighted the emergence of this ‘class awareness’, which was combined with a specific occupational identity that developed with increase in this awareness and the clarity of the discourse (Faure/Ranci re 2007; Thompson 1980).

Therefore, naming processes encompassed matters of distinction. Respectability and worthiness required the mastering of a speech and the use of words for designating, as much as the occupation itself, the associated prestige and presumed technical level and competence, as well as the distinction that made it unique. Other than language itself, many supplementary elements played a part in increasing the attractiveness and worth of an occupation. For example, objects took on important roles in defining ‘masks’ or ideal-typical jobs by contributing to the development of figures that embodied the stereotypical views of occupations and those practising them. Therefore, raw materials, objects, tools and uniforms were all elements that formed a social grammar, just like the terminology used to characterise work and occupations.

Although work was often valued and value-adding, it could or may well have, conversely, encompassed a highly derogatory aspect. The Greek and Roman concept of work was based on the distinction between men who were

free from those who were not; the former lived in *otium*, while the latter lived by working. After centuries of questioning this model and the recognition – via Christian and medieval philosophy – of the virtue of work, it was among the occupations themselves that a certain hierarchy, which distinguished valued occupations from those that were not, succeeded in expressing itself. Some occupations inspired derogatory views that were expressed by a generally offensive vocabulary. Similarly, those occupying the lowest ranks in any occupation were often stigmatised. Being branded as ignorant, for example, was generally experienced by apprentices who were forced to accept being the butt of jokes, or even insults, which were both an endorsement and a means of their subordination (Steffens 2010). The belittling of apprentices was, moreover, proportional to the prestige associated with the job. Initiation and rites of passage were a test of one's ability to rise above the experience of humiliation, considered to be necessary for reproducing values and renewing the community.

However, there have always been occupational groups that have known how to make use of language to turn stigmatising or even insulting terms into native categories of greater worth. The innumerable terms used to refer to law enforcement officers – often in a highly pejorative manner – have quite often been taken up by these very officers themselves. The reappropriation of the meaning and contents of this vocabulary allows workers to curb and neutralise the violence associated with the words. In some cases, the formalisation and reification of the terms used have led to them being transformed into actual occupational 'categories'. This was seen recently in the case of the RMI (*revenu minimum d'insertion*), a social benefit paid by the French state, which gave birth to the '*RMiste*' category that was reappropriated by the actors themselves.

Similar objectives may prompt the euphemisation and recharacterisation of the most depreciated jobs. We all know how terms like 'checkout operator' and 'crew member' in the fast food industry have managed to become part of contemporary speech, mainly because the actors themselves took possession of these terms that appeared to better suit their own idea of the job and, most of all, made it possible to downplay the low recognition faced by the holders of these unqualified and poorly paid jobs, through the use of a seemingly more complex vocabulary. In view of the harsh realities of the social world, it is better to be a 'floor technician' than a mere 'sweeper', just as it was better to be a 'shoe manufacturer' than an employee and 'dependent' of a cobbler in fifteenth-century Treviso (Scherman 2010). Euphemisation can thus become a political tool enabling dominant groups to downplay or even conceal the reality of their domination. In French, the word for describing the state of not having a job is '*chômage*'; it comes from the verb '*chômer*', which carries the notion of being idle. A person in this state is called a '*chômeur*', which reifies the absence of work. In other languages, there are terms that are used to highlight a

deprivation of work that may be perceived as being temporary or even accidental (unemployed, *disoccupato*, *Arbeitslose*, *desempleado*) (Salais 1999; Topalov 1994, 116; Salais 2007). Similar issues may be identified concerning the end of working life, which, in some languages, draws on the idea of a departure or withdrawal (*retraité*, retired, *retirado*), while others emphasise a new status (*pensionato*).

## 5. Conclusion

Socio-occupational designations, ever the subject of continuing negotiations, constitute a particularly relevant case study for approaching the issue of interactions between public authorities and individuals in the development and implementation of governing tools and methods. Indeed, occupational titles and socio-occupational designations form an area in which the actors possess a major competence – in terms of know-how, technical expertise and knowledge – and prerogatives that they would never hand over entirely to governments. But these designations have also been at the heart of the identification of persons carried out by public authorities since the 13th century. They have thus been the subject of disputes, debates and negotiations that have enabled the gradual and ever debatable emergence of conventions. The latter are the product of agreements, whether stabilised or fragile, between categories generated more or less formally by the designated individuals and groups, and the categories reified by the state. In attempting to address these conventions in terms of their historicity, we assessed the extent to which specific naming situations evolved according to the historical context, the role and legitimacy of the public authorities, and the actors' position and room for manoeuvre. Consequently, we observed that while the processes by which conventions were created and established were part of identifiable and known schemes, periodisation revealed that the relative competences of various actors and their ability to act followed a non-linear progression. However, the fact remains that occupational terms and categories were constituents of a historically situated system of conventions, whose origins, appearance and development deserve to be analysed, and whose current transformations and subversions should be carefully scrutinised.

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