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Testimonies to the History of Crime: The Italian Police Memoir, 1861-2014

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The article analyses, for the first time, published memoirs by police officers following the unification of Italy. It argues that these memoirs are best considered as cultural artefacts, forming part of the popular literature of the period. That said, they developed into a distinct literary sub-genre. It is in fact a literary genre which developed as an editorial product in the wake of the nascent literature of investigation. Periodically, the memoir succeeded in arousing public interest, while never establishing itself as a stable genre in Italian publishing — something due to a lack of robust professional pride within the Italian police, which in turn provoked a lack of interest in the representation of their function and therefore an inability to enthuse the public. However, these memoirs contain stimulating pointers to the history of the social motivations, professional culture and ethics of police officers and officials, especially with reference to the history of the perception of crime and deviance in popular literature.

L'article analyse, pour la première fois, les mémoires publiés par des officiers de police après l'unification de l'Italie. Ces mémoires doivent être pris en compte comme des productions culturelles, faisant partie de la littérature populaire de l'époque. Il s'agit en effet d'un genre littéraire qui s'est développé comme un produit éditorial dans le sillage de la littérature d'enquête alors naissante. Périodiquement, les mémoires ont réussi à susciter l'intérêt du public, sans jamais s'imposer comme un genre stabilisé dans l'édition italienne. Cela s'explique par l'absence d'une fierté professionnelle établie au sein de la police italienne, cause d'un manque d'appétence pour la représentation de leur fonction et, en retour, de difficultés à susciter l'intérêt du public. Ces mémoires contiennent cependant des indications stimulantes sur l'histoire des motivations sociales, de la culture professionnelle et de l'éthique des officiers et des fonctionnaires de police, en particulier en regard des représentations du crime et de la déviance dans la littérature populaire.

Recent studies have highlighted the importance of police memoirs for the cultural and social history of the profession.¹ Prevailing historiographical interest is in the motivations of these publications, relating them to the democratisation of a society that, from the mid-19th century, made police issues the object of public debate. Police stories thus became editorial products that were made available to the public. Some historians have, more traditionally, made use of memoirs as a direct source of information with regard to the events narrated. This is not, however, the direction pursued in this examination. The memoirs were predominantly, in fact, a hybrid of non-fiction and fiction, a mix imposed by the editorial destination of the

¹ Kalifa (2005, 67-102); Milliot (2006); Lawrence (2014).

memoirs which, with the aim of pandering to audience tastes, distorted narrative in order to place certain aspects in a more adventurous light.² This of course does not exclude the presence of many realistic elements in the memoirs, mostly concerning the environment and working methods of the policemen and the ambitions and frustrations of the leading characters. The most interesting elements in this survey, which covers a long period of time, are the perceptions with regard to deviance and crime and their evolution in relation to the development of society in general and the world of crime in particular. The memoirs like to provide detailed descriptions of the criminal milieu that has to be dealt with, most of the time emphasising the aspects considered most degenerate according to the cultural stereotypes of the moment — something to which the police were obviously not insensitive. In most cases, the memoir writers were cultured people who held positions of responsibility; their narratives did not, therefore, passively adopt the clichés of the popular imagination with regard to crime, and they tried, sometimes superficially, to anchor their tales to social sciences and criminology. They added clichés of a more cultivated nature to the popular stereotypes of the time and their accounts thus constitute a further element in the cultural history of crime perception. In the memoirs, in other words, the story told is that of how the police saw things, rather than that of the police themselves. Memoirs are primarily literary products and it is above all in this context that they are presented here, as factors involved in the social history of popular culture.

In narrative terms, the texts discussed here were a hybrid genre. Memoirs required the interest and commitment of publishers who would prepare and distribute an editorial product suitable for popular literature, a genre to distract and educate readers — especially the lower classes and those who had only recently come to schooling.³ The texts, therefore, acknowledged and reworked other literary products that were garnering popularity from the mid-19th century on, especially in France and Great Britain, and which were starting to be translated into Italian.⁴ The primary literary model was the success of the story of police investigation,⁵ if only for the ability that these fictional texts demonstrated in attracting the interest of the public to the subject of policing.⁶ A complementary model was based on the memoirs of the new protagonists of the British police force — the detectives. These were still fictional stories, mainly written by journalists, but they were based on famous cases covered by the newspapers and on information partly gathered from the investigators.⁷ Compared to the highest literary models, these British pseudo-memoirs more realistically inserted the point of view of the common investigator, highlighting, amongst other things, certain typical characteristics of the job, such as the need for the continuous adaptation of knowledge and methods in relation to the

² In this sense, they anticipated a style that would characterize more modern crime and investigation stories, both in an Italian and international context. See Weller (2012).

³ Lepschy (2000, 177-189).

⁴ Cremante (1989); Pistelli (2006).

⁵ The most famous examples are: the *Mémoires* of E.F. Vidocq (1827); E.A. Poe's tale, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), in which the investigator Dupin debuted; and, later, the stories by É. Gaboriau featuring the police inspector Lecoq, which began to come out in France in 1866.

⁶ Worthington (2005); Kalifa (2017).

⁷ Waters (1863); Martel (1860, 1860b).

real situations of life: this added a sense of humanity to the investigators and greater substance to their profession.⁸

Even given a certain literary fictionalisation, in the memoirs of the Italian policemen, too, there was also a little police history, especially regarding the ambitions and frustrations of the narrators. As they compared the routine of their work with the changes in society, they reflected continually on the changes that were also necessary in the police force itself in relation to recruitment, training and the skills required in order to operate more efficiently. For this reason, this review, eclectically, also takes into consideration books that are not so much characteristic of the memoir but rather of the theoretical-practical essay on the police and their methods and functions. These were essays that the policemen-writers themselves cited as points of reference in their profession. Moreover, almost all police memoirs also had pedagogical and to some extent “political” ambitions: they expressed hopes for the reform of the police force and its duties and were written to rehabilitate the image of the policeman and his function in times when public opinion was hostile. They often gave space, therefore, to the personal conflict of the policeman with both colleagues and the police administration. In narrations of this type, then, autobiography, pamphleteering and crime-fiction intertwine, indicating the specificity of this hybrid literary “genre”.

The mainly descriptive tenor of the article is determined by the need to present to scholars as many memoirs as possible of this kind published in Italy; the intention is therefore above all to present sources to illuminate an element of the history of popular literature in Italy. Finally, it should also be noted that, in this article, the only memoirs considered are those published by members of the PS (*Pubblica Sicurezza* — “Public Security” — in the original term, and more recently the *Polizia di Stato*, the State Police). This is a civil body dependent on the Ministry of the Interior, established in 1852 under the constitutional regime of the Kingdom of Sardinia, and then extended to the whole of Italy; the PS acts mainly in urban areas and is responsible for judicial policing, the protection of public order and the supervision of public safety.⁹

THE SLOW ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CANON: FROM UNITY TO WORLD WAR II

After a legal framework and the organization of the PS had been defined with the 1865 laws of administrative unification, in the following decade a discussion began regarding the need for a reform of the duties, methods and body of the police force.¹⁰ Policemen themselves also began to participate in this reformist climate. This was

⁸ A similar narrative model also spread to France, starting with the memoirs of Luis Canler (1797-1865), who, after a long career, became head of the Sûreté; see Canler (1986).

⁹ Other forces have — and have had — similar functions, including the *carabinieri*, a military unit founded in 1814 and dependent on the Ministry of War (now Defence). This body can perform the same tasks as the PS, under the orders of civil authorities and the judiciary.

¹⁰ Tosatti (2015).

the context in which the Italian police memoir came to exist.¹¹ It was the point of convergence for a number of different stimuli: to contribute to the improvement of the service; to explain the mechanisms of criminal operations and the behaviour of the criminals (positivism was beginning to spread through Italian culture); to encourage public interest in crime stories (true or romanticised). Given this context, it is only right that this survey should start with a text that, while not actually a memoir, was, for almost a century, seminal in guiding the opinions of many policemen-writers on the causes of crime and the understanding of the society that generated it. In 1871, Giovanni Bolis, a policeman and future director of PS services at the Ministry of the Interior (1879-1883), wrote the manual *La polizia e le classi pericolose della società* (*The police and the dangerous classes of society*). It was a weighty essay that took into consideration every aspect of police operation, from the most modest administrative issues to serious criminality — the Camorra and the Mafia. His interpretation of the latter was substantially in line with what emerged from a parliamentary report on brigandage in relation to the southern provinces:¹²

Governed for long years by corrupt men, while the public force itself was complicit in, or tolerant of, abuse and violence, it is no wonder that the masses became brutalized and that long hardship has made them indifferent and stupid.¹³

In every area that Bolis considered, he insisted on the pedagogical and moral vocation of the policeman, placing these qualities at the centre of the modernisation of the police, which, in order to succeed, must first of all be able to garner public esteem. It was a suggestion that many other policemen would echo in their literary output.¹⁴ They also borrowed the terminology “dangerous classes” from Bolis, essentially turning it into a fashionable expression.

The next example is a hybrid of essay and memoir — Paolo Locatelli’s *Misericordia e beneficenza* (*Misery and Charity*, 1878). Locatelli was a former magistrate, then a police officer and scholar of criminology, and he intended that his book should be a work offering a sociological analysis of the dangerous classes to a non-specialist readership. The book had a moral, historical and didactic tenor that praised the effectiveness of private charity and its expositive form favoured illustration by example — always anonymous, often invented — narrated, memoir-style, in the first person and starting with his experiences as a PS official. He put forward the idea of the importance of private charity for the weakest class of citizens and narrated the contribution of individual policemen to this practice of charitable social hygiene, which was more effective than their traditional role of repression. There are numerous events reported in the book in the author’s verbose manner; many reveal his philanthropic utopia, his hope for close collaboration between benefactors and police, identifying those who were most needy and deserving, and maximizing the effectiveness of charity. The regulations, however, did not allow this, since “in the matter of charity, the government has already declared itself exempt from all

¹¹ This survey does not include some examples of pseudo-memoirs written by adventurers who had been policemen, secret agents and even criminals. These works mixed police anecdotes and criminal and espionage stories with the intent of creating sensationalism. The best known case is Griscelli (1867), with regard to which see Colocci (1909).

¹² Massari (1863).

¹³ Bolis (1871, 721).

¹⁴ Similar ideas were also present in British memoirs: see Crone (2014).

obligations for a long time”, and “police headquarters cannot dispose of a penny of its funds for the relief of poverty”. However, in Locatelli’s opinion:

The honourable dispensers of alms should be transformed into mere collectors and distributors and purely informative matters instead be fulfilled by PS officials. [...] The people are much less prejudiced against salaried officials [...] because they see in them workers almost equal in rank and therefore have more trust in them.¹⁵

Locatelli therefore sent out his agents into the slums of Milan in order to identify the poor who required support, and then sought benefactors who could offer a donation, while guaranteeing the morality and innocent misfortune of the poor to whom the help would be given. He imagined a neighbourhood police, attentive to the poor inhabitants and at the same time able to control their behaviour.¹⁶

In 1882, Federico Giorio’s *Ricordi di questura (Police Station Recollections)* came out and was immediately subject to political manipulation.¹⁷ Giorio, a graduate in Law, had been a police officer for a few years; but, undisciplined, addicted to gambling and prone to fraud, he had been dismissed. He reacted to this with a hastily written pamphlet that treated the police in a sarcastic and rancorous manner. His memoir covered every area of police work (administrative, judicial, political and vice squad), recounting numerous and unsubstantiated episodes of police malpractice. It was a compendium of cases taken mainly from newspapers, with events assembled so that the biographical plot did not even appear plausible as narrative fiction. The author’s intent was explicit: “It is the people who hate the police! Yes, they hate them, and they are right to do so!”¹⁸ An affirmation of this sort, and the tenor of the work as a whole, was in strong contrast to the pedagogical and constructively polemical intent that was starting to typify this kind of memoir. Its testimonial value with regard to certain matters thus faded into indeterminacy. Author and book were tried for libel; the book was withdrawn and Giorio himself convicted, having taken advantage of the same illegal practices he had accused his former colleagues of indulging in — corruption and illegal appropriation.

The unfortunate fate of Giorio’s book helped cool the enthusiasm of Italian publishers towards investing in the police memoir as a genre. Things were different in Great Britain and France, where this kind of memoir was already well-established: publishers were interested in the genre and the narratives included intriguing aspects related to the investigative techniques of the scientific police.¹⁹

In Italy, a new collection of memoirs did not come out until ten years after the Giorio affair. The author was Domenico Cappa, who made use of the playwright Giovanni Arrighi as a ghost-writer for the two volumes with the overall title of *Thirty-two years of service in the Italian police*.²⁰ Cappa joined the police force

¹⁵ Locatelli (1878, 183, 187).

¹⁶ A deep empathy with the more disadvantaged classes was characteristic of the police memoir genre, something also found in several Italian and foreign examples in the following period: Lawrence (2000).

¹⁷ Democratic newspapers, such as Milan’s *Il Secolo*, picked up on the polemical aspects of the pamphlet and published extracts, briefly rendering Giorio popular. See Soresina (2017, 1108-1112).

¹⁸ Giorio (1882, 187).

¹⁹ Shpayer-Makov (2006); Kalifa (1995, 19-52). In Britain: Lansdowne (1893); Littlechild (1894); in France: Rossignol (1900); Macé (1884, 1890); Goron (1897, 1913).

²⁰ Cappa (1892-1893).

in 1859 in constitutional Piedmont and was dismissed from office in 1891 with a modest pension — the goal of his books was explicitly to earn money and to illustrate the figure of the “good cop”. The memoirs make for engaging reading, especially the first volume which features dramatic disguises, episodes of violence, frauds and forgers in the upper-class world, meetings with dangerous criminals and a great deal of fascinating background, especially in relation to the Count of Cavour. Between 1859 and 1861, Cappa was Cavour’s bodyguard and a trusted helper, especially in private matters — serving, for example, as go-between with the Count’s mistress, Bianca Ronzani. The quarrels between the lovers ended up enmeshing Cappa himself, who, fearing to have lost the esteem of his master, made an attempt at suicide; without, however, incurring any serious injury as a result. A few days later, Cavour died, and Cappa wrote that he was certain that *la signora* Ronzani was the culprit.²¹

To sum up, then, in Cappa’s memoirs, the typical literary *topoi* of the genre are present: a certain empathy for the poor encountered by the policeman and a description of investigative aspects entirely focused on the protagonist and on his intelligence in observation and deduction. Sometimes, however, he tended to exaggerate. As an investigator, Cappa was already showing signs of turning into a novelist — something the *questore* himself pointed out to him:

I made my report, and after reading it, the commissioner said to me: “You’re writing novels here. I understand and praise your work, even though it has come to nothing [...] Write a little less and be more active!”²²

Another characteristic feature of Cappa’s narrative is his great respect for undercover work and for informers, indispensable figures for police investigations, both criminal and political.²³ Tales involving disguises were very theatrical in tone, as in the case of the investigations carried out into a gang of counterfeit money dealers in Turin in the mid-1860s.

Disguised as an old beggar, with a long beard, crutches and a tray of matches, I wandered around the districts, offering my wares and observing all the passers-by with the eye of a lynx. My hopes were not disappointed. I heard a whistle, limped over, and found myself facing a blond man, handsome and elegantly dressed. But the “young master” had become suspicious, he was about take to his heels, when I, like Pope Sixtus, throwing the now useless crutches to the devil, leapt forward, got on top of him and grabbed him! [...] With a sturdy hand I squeezed his wrists and reduced him to helplessness. Meanwhile, the guards, whom I had previously told to hide in a doorway, came on the scene and [the suspect was captured].²⁴

²¹ Cappa (1892, 72-75).

²² Cappa (1892, 91).

²³ The long-standing prejudice against plain-clothes policemen and undercover agents was also disappearing in the memoirs and popular English literature of the time, given the usefulness of this kind of secretive activity, especially in the investigation of politically illegal groups and events. See Gamon (1907), Anderson (1910).

²⁴ Cappa (1892, 213-214). The beggar disguise was a favourite of his, which he also used in the (unsuccessful) operation to try to capture the notorious bandit Citt d’Vanchija (the “Vanchiglia Kid”, named after a suburban neighbourhood in Turin), aka Antonio Bruno (*ibid.*, 276-277). This figure had inspired several popular novels, including some by Carolina Invernizio (1895).

All the elements of the penny dreadful serial were present and correct: dramatic plot twists, narrative verve, a lexicon that was simple but not vulgar, some amusing rhetorical images. The crime story and the environment in which it took place remained in the background, the important thing being to entertain the reader: the “memoirs”, in fact, were above all a narrative device, especially in the first volume. The second volume was a much more polemical affair, mainly because of the author’s dissatisfaction in relation to his argument with the police over the matter of his pension. Here, Cappa focused mainly on the poor professional and moral quality of policemen and officials, including the *questori*, the provincial police chiefs, and described episodes of rivalry, corruption and *omertà*. The field chosen was the very delicate one of politics, ranging from electoral matters to the control and repression of dissent and union movements, especially in Milan, where Cappa was the chief of the police guards in the 1880s. He played the role of conflict mediator on several occasions in the city, winning the respect of many union representatives and the sympathy of the newspapers. He tells this story in his usual colourful and paternalistic style:

By all the devils! Once, the school teacher had the power to call the rebellious schoolboy before him, order him to join his fingers together in the manner of a nice bunch of asparagus, and to hit him a good smack on the fingertips with a ruler. [...] Nowadays, we are commanded to employ persuasion with words and correction with sweetness. Just as things must be done with children, so must they also be done with the multitudes: and never forget that *parva favilla gran fiamma seconda* [a great fire may come from a tiny spark].²⁵

In general, however, he was not keen on the predominant deployment of the police in the field of political dissent, feeling as he did, more than anything else, a sense of solidarity with those who fought to demand a more equitable distribution of wealth. Moderation and common sense were the weapons that Cappa made use of in order to calm things down during worker demonstrations.

I always urged them to remain calm, to think about the displeasure they would cause to their relatives, to reflect on the misery that would inexorably come knocking at the doors of their families [...] if, with impulsive rioting, they were arrested and locked up in prison, losing the pay with which they, however miserably!, were still able to give bread to their families. They always listened willingly to Uncle Cappa’s recommendations and advice: often with my sermons I managed to break up demonstrations that were about to take shape).²⁶

“Uncle Cappa”, in other words, knew how to speak to the people and which subjects to touch upon, because he was himself a man of the people, and he put intelligence and heart into his work. With the intention of providing a counterweight to the numerous negative figures in the second volume (many of them policemen), Cappa tended to highlight his own humanity, his good example, by developing the pedagogical function of the main hero figure.

In the early years of the 20th century, meanwhile, in Britain and France, the police memoir became an established literary genre, with a market independent from fictional narrative. Public and press interest had brought about a kind of

²⁵ Cappa (1893, 91), the quotation is from Dante, *Commedia, Paradiso* I, 34.

²⁶ Cappa (1893, 294-295).

democratisation of the genre, both where the authors were concerned — increasingly often also ordinary policemen — and, of necessity, in the content, which now dealt to a far larger extent with urban policing and the routine and working environment of policemen.²⁷

In Italy, however, the genre was not dead. The tradition was carried on by Augusto Bondi, who, in 1907, after a twenty-five-year career, was made *questore* in Milan, tasked with a cleaning-up operation after a scandal that had involved the previous administration. Bondi, too, however, was indicted in 1910 for the ineffective management of the disagreements between his subordinates, in charge of the political and judiciary police. The first volume of his memoirs had been conceived and constructed as a kind of preventive self-defence with regard to his work throughout his career.²⁸ In the second volume, his conflict with the police administration, which had decided to fire him, was even more explicit.²⁹

Bondi's memoirs include all the typical elements of the genre, assembled in a fragmentary way as if echoing the form of diary notes, the alleged origin of the book. There is a series of anecdotes concerning missions abroad escorting members of the royal family and secret meetings in Sardinia to deal with bandits on the run; but there is also the daily routine of policemen in the poorer districts. In these marginal environments, however, unlike other memoir authors, Bondi did not come into contact with characters that inspired his sympathy or moved him to pity — in his opinion, criminals went into business, not out of necessity, but because they were anti-social:

The main factors of delinquency are first of all individual, then social, rarely occasional. The thief is not in the habit of stealing from hunger; cases are few in which the murderer plants the knife in someone's heart because at that moment a veil of blood has fallen over his eyes. [...] The prostitute, too, ninety times out of a hundred, took the first misstep due to the lack of inhibitory powers, not out of crude necessity. The whole world of delinquency is therefore formed, for the most part, by individuals who are antisocial from birth, and for them neither the persuasive methods of education and morals, nor repressive means, are of use in curbing their impulse to evil.³⁰

This meant that the main task of the police was to monitor criminals — both potential and those who already had a record — and to do so effectively would require greater resources, wider discretionary powers and more severe penalties. The first volume concludes with a chapter on the “Troubles and Remedies of the PS” — basically a defense of the honesty of the police force and its men, who, however, are oppressed by low wages, social uprooting, a lack of culture and insufficient training.

The guards! Now there's a thorny subject. The guards are almost all good lads, who perform their ungrateful duty with courage and skill [...] but, above all, there are too few of them than is required. [...] It is the provinces where industry has not yet arisen and agriculture does not thrive that provide the greatest number of guards, who are then transplanted into busy cities, where it takes a great deal

²⁷ Shpayer-Makov (2014). Perhaps the most relevant example of this development was the work of the French writer Raynaud (1923, 1925, 1926).

²⁸ Bondi (1911).

²⁹ Bondi (1913).

³⁰ Bondi (1913, 83-84).

of effort for them to acclimatise. [...] I am convinced that the material executor of acts of justice must belong to the same region, to the same city, in which he carries out his work. [...] To “make Italians”, in the words of Massimo d’Azeglio, the state has been unable to find any other solution than to toss its officials from north to south and vice versa. [...] And here I am logically forced to talk about the urgency and need that we have in Italy for special schools for the preparation of all PS agents.³¹

In Bondi, the narrative tone and lexicon were those of the social scientist, with ambitions as a reformer). The criminal cases and police activity, which took up a large part of his memoirs, were designed to exemplify the sensitive social questions that a policeman was required to deal with, and for which he had to be culturally equipped. A school for police science was established for officials in Italy in 1902,³² but Bondi, with the sensibility of a commissioner, believed that it was the guards who needed structured training in order to help them perform better. He saw them, prospectively, as professionals to be used according to their skills and not only as low-level foot soldiers called upon to maintain order.

His second volume of memoirs focuses on the “dark side” of the police, with the inclusion of cases of bribery, violence and the moral corruption of agents and officers. There’s a certain messiness to his prose and his reasoning tends towards the trivial.

I knew [one official] who induced his underage daughters into prostitution in order to have sufficient means to support his lover! [...] During the last years of my career, I denounced whoremongering officials and thieving clerks to my superiors. They were guilty and confessed, but they were defended by the administration without the intervention of any lawyer. Some had the Prefect as a defender, others a beautiful wife or pretty daughters. All the accused remained in their positions, and remain there still, as proof that I was a naïve fool to report them.³³

The background to Bondi’s story was no longer the study of society through a policeman’s eyes, nor the hope of making a contribution to improve the service, but controversy, and the examples chosen were designed to shock, rather than to educate, the reading public.

The period between the two wars was marked by the complete affirmation of mass society, but also by the crisis of liberalism and parliamentary institutions and then by the advent and consolidation of the Fascist regime. As far as this present article is concerned, it was also the period in which a mass public was formed for fictional police literature. Italian publishers got busily involved in the genre. Bietti printed adventures set in America written by Italian author Ventura Almanzi; Sonzogno and Bemporad published series in translation of French and Anglo-American crime fiction. Such publications were extremely successful, especially in the 1930s, when Mondadori published the *Libri Gialli* series (1929-1941). The bestselling author here became Alessandro Varaldo, and he was joined by other

³¹ Bondi (1911, 255-256).

³² It was a ground-breaking initiative, motivated by Salvatore Ottolenghi (2018), professor of forensic medicine. From 1920, the activity of the school, based in Rome, was also extended to the PS guards.

³³ Bondi (1913, 163-165).

Italians, such as Tito Spagnol and Ezio D'Errico, who were able to sell 10-20,000 copies of their “detective” novels.³⁴ The police memoir genre, however, did not fit into this publishing sector. In the new mass society, policemen were taking on new tasks and new roles: their presence in the urban area was becoming more widespread and they were required to develop a wider range of tasks and skills. This created difficulties and conflict with various areas of society. Faced with these challenges, the police force could not find the key to establishing its professionalism in the new society; at least from a literary point of view.

The aspect of the new mass society that had the greatest impact on the work of the PS was trade union conflict. In the immediate post-war period, this became a far larger and more intense phenomenon than it had been in the 19th century — something that could not be so easily solved by Cappa's courageous paternalism. In contrast to what happened in Britain, for example, the policing of protest did not seem to find space for expression in the memoirs of Italian policemen. Yet many policemen were also caught up in the political climate of those years, and in 1919 they set up a movement to put forward their own claims. In October of that same year, an advanced, democratic government led by the economist Francesco Nitti established the *Corpo della Regia Guardia di PS*, a special militarised body for the management of public order.³⁵

Between the wars, only two Italian books in the memoir genre were published; two very different examples. The first, very traditional in terms of style and content, was Giuseppe Manfroni's posthumous memoirs, published by his son Camillo, an academic historian.³⁶ This was an anthology of memories regarding the last thirty years of the 19th century, in which Manfroni held the position of police commissioner in the area surrounding the Vatican. The memoirs testify especially to the slowness in defining the boundaries between Italian and papal Rome, and also to the informality of contact between the Italian police and the Vatican gendarmerie — an official relationship between them not being possible because the pope did not recognize Italian sovereignty.³⁷

Another book, important in its own way, was written by Emilio Saracini, an official with forty years of service in PS, who had clearly recognized in the Mussolini government the harbinger of a new era that would also affect the organization and efficiency of the police.³⁸ The book followed the essay-style model of Bolis, narrating the historical evolution of the police force, criticising the organization in the liberal period and hoping for reform, in which the demands put forward by technical experts — PS officials, in other words — would also be taken into consideration. The title of the book, *The Twilight of the Police*, however, revealed its author's disillusionment. He believed it would be difficult to achieve any kind of improvement in the force, due to the profound moral corruption of many of his colleagues, low wages, inaccurate enrolment criteria and complex bureaucracy. The memoir aspect involved a selection of melancholy episodes taken from his career, invariably narrated with no precise reference to people or places, but simply as examples of immorality.

³⁴ See: Rambelli (1979); Pistelli, (2006); Forgacs, Gundle (2007); Dunnett (2011); Facchi (2019).

³⁵ Madrignani (2014). This new body was suppressed in 1922 by Mussolini's government, which, to look after public safety, preferred to put its trust in the Fascist party's own militia.

³⁶ Manfroni (1920).

³⁷ For the political-diplomatic content of Manfroni's memoirs, see Bocquet (2003).

³⁸ Saracini (1922); Dunnage (2017, 26).

In both Manfroni and Saracini's books, many references were to the distant past, while the present was ignored, with no mention of either social conflict or the situation of the slums in big Italian cities — cities afflicted by chaotic immigration, poor housing conditions, the spread of petty crime and the development of organised crime.³⁹

In Fascist Italy social marginality was not a welcome subject, and even crime news was not as widely dealt with in the press as it had been at the turn of the century. On the one hand, little enthusiasm was shown from the press and publishing sector, and, on the other, there were no subjects capable of captivating a potential public for police memoirs. In an article in *Omnibus*, Alberto Savinio wrote that Italy completely lacked the settings and subjects suitable for detective stories, whether fact or fiction.⁴⁰ The regime wanted an Italy that was pacified, where people would not dwell on sordid environments and dangerous urban suburbs, whether in terms of narrating the deeds of criminals or of policemen. The public, however, did not go without this particular form of entertainment: in those years, the translations of comics and detective novels, mostly American, were very popular.⁴¹ Crime and the dangers of urban life continued to fascinate readers, but exclusively through the translation of foreign authors and with strictly foreign settings.

After the fall of the regime, some memoirs appeared from policemen who had been professionally active under Fascism. Carmelo Camilleri published *Polizia in azione (Police in Action)*, less interested in the regime and the functioning of the police than in the world of petty crime and “deviance”, with all the prejudices that influenced the actions of the policemen and that still intrigued readers at the beginning of the Italian economic miracle.⁴² He dedicated several pages, for example, with a diligence hitherto unknown, to the world of homosexual prostitution. His tales were often marked by disturbing superficiality and squalid commonplaces.

The state of immorality typical of homosexuals resists any police intervention. Homosexuals are generally predisposed to criminality. [...] Pederasty is one of the most dangerous social evils, one that should seriously concern lawmakers. In addition to causing damage to public morals, it gives rise to serious criminal actions: those which especially stand out being blackmail to avoid scandal, theft, fraud, violence and often murder. [...] Together with sexual anomaly, perverts always combine other ethical anomalies, which lead them to crime.⁴³

Camilleri expressed himself using the language and arguments of the Fascist period against homosexuality, which was not considered a crime but attracted repressive administrative police measures (and a great deal of police abuse), with a view to preventing its alleged links to crime.⁴⁴ In the 1950s, when the book was written, the prejudices remained the same, and the arguments for stigmatizing homosexuality had assumed different forms but were identical in substance, both on the right and on the left. The policeman was responsible for the careful surveillance

³⁹ British police memoirs were very different in this respect: Wensley (1931); Moss (2015).

⁴⁰ Savinio (1938).

⁴¹ Rundle (2010); Sinibaldi (2016); Billiani (2016).

⁴² Camilleri (1958).

⁴³ Camilleri (1958, 37-39).

⁴⁴ Benadusi (2005).

of homosexuals, while sexology tried to eradicate the “anomaly” with invasive therapies, such as electroshock.

Later, the memoirs of Vincenzo Brancaccio, who had entered PS in 1938, looked back at the Fascist period, choosing themes and examples more suited to the times in which he was writing.⁴⁵ Here, too, the author was inspired by a dispute with the PS administration, in this case relating to a failure to pay compensation after he had suffered a serious accident. His narrative thus placed particular emphasis on the rigidity of bureaucracy, the narrow-minded improbity of many of his colleagues and the inefficiencies of the service itself. Few references to time and place were provided. Sometimes, however, there was no need for more detailed indications in order to illustrate behaviour that was both endemic and incorrect, as in the case of the wartime blackout period:

All that was necessary for a fine to be given was for a weak ray of light to filter through a poorly screened window or for someone to be caught lighting a cigarette in the street. [...] Then, the next morning, starting in the early hours, an officer at police headquarters had the specific task of telephoning the various police stations indicating the names for whom the fine should be cancelled. In the end, out of 20 or 30 fines, barely 4 or 5 were left standing. These had mostly been given to poor people going back from work by bicycle [...] They were the few who did not, as the saying goes, “have saints in heaven”. “Well, I’ll do these ones myself,” I concluded, deleting the remaining names that were still on the list.⁴⁶

Here, the narrative is already more completely shaped by the different sensibility of the 1980s. The episodes are chosen to evoke a distant and wholly obsolete period — were it not for the persistence of improper behaviour and arrogance, virtually an endemic police disease, regardless of political regimes. Brancaccio’s position throughout his career in the police, from Fascism to the 1980s, is summed up in an observation made by an older colleague: “Don’t bother getting worked up about it, the [police] administration isn’t something to be taken seriously.”⁴⁷ Hardly an easy matter, then, to read the memoirs in order to understand something about the cultural impact of Fascism on the culture of policemen.⁴⁸ Instead, the resulting impression is that of a substantial continuity, in terms of mentality, of methods and attitudes. This is partially confirmed by studies on the continuity of administration between the liberal age and the Fascist era.⁴⁹

THE DEMOCRATISATION OF SOCIETY AND A NEW DIRECTION FOR MEMOIRS

From a policing point of view, the typical theme of the new era that dawned after World War II was the control of public order: while Italy sided with NATO, the country also possessed a strong communist party and a combative trade union movement. It was a theme that was also present as a dominant motif in the few

⁴⁵ Brancaccio (1984).

⁴⁶ Brancaccio (1984, 71-72).

⁴⁷ Brancaccio (1984, 76).

⁴⁸ Dunnage (2017, 37-70).

⁴⁹ Melis (2018).

police memoirs published after the war — a new variation on the social question that had permeated European memoir writing in the period spanning the 19th and 20th centuries.

Some policemen were especially motivated to publish their memoirs by the rapid democratisation of Italian society that took place in the late 1960s, something that had also involved the police.⁵⁰ Several police groups started a movement in 1969 for the recognition of trade union rights in the sector, with a reference point in *Ordine Pubblico* (*Public Order*), a monthly professional journal that the editorship of Franco Fedeli had turned into the voice of the democratic movement. The result of a long and controversial work of sensitisation in the police force itself, in the world of public opinion, and in the political sector, came with Law n. 121 of 1981: this reformed the police, abolishing its military status, which had been temporarily established in 1943.⁵¹ The police force thus returned to being part of the civilian body, and, by virtue of the principles of the Republican Constitution, in 1982 they were able to organize their own union, the SIULP, initially a single, apolitical entity.

The democratisation movement within the police opened the way for self-reflection amongst officials and agents with regard to the more general issue of citizenship. The right of the police to organise in order to improve their professional situation was accompanied by observation of the social conditions and behaviour that the police were called upon to repress. It was a form of understanding that could give rise to sympathetic attitudes towards the social subjects with whom the police came into contact. In the memoirs of the Italian policemen in this new era, the struggle of the workers and student protest, as well as the world of urban social outcasts, drug addicts and their micro-delinquency, were observed with an eye that was sympathetic and sometimes supportive.

The paradigmatic memoir in this sense is the book *A Commissioner* by Ennio Di Francesco, which was reprinted several times with the addition of new experiences.⁵² After graduating in Law, Di Francesco first enlisted in the *carabinieri*.⁵³ But, as he says in his memoirs, the force in which he had enrolled was not the right one:

I had been fascinated by the tradition, the esprit de corps and the organizational efficiency of the carabinieri. However, I was convinced that my vocation for the fight against crime would be better expressed in a less rigidly military apparatus and that for the activity of PS a civilian structure was more congenial — elastic, free from formal constraints, able to be moulded in a way more suitable to the social fabric. In other words, it served to strengthen my intention to become a PS commissioner.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Di Giorgio (2019).

⁵¹ With one of the first provisions of the Badoglio government after the fall of Mussolini, law n. 687 of 31st July, 1943. Before this, the police were called a “militarily organised civilian body”, as defined in Law n. 383 of 2nd April, 1925.

⁵² Di Francesco (1990, 2009, 2014).

⁵³ In post-World War II memoirs, many policemen are the sons or brothers of *carabinieri*, and their professional ambitions can involve both bodies, but it was easier to be taken on by the PS. It is also perhaps due to this contiguity that the operational rivalry between the PS and the *carabinieri*, criticised on several occasions by the press and political commentators, and featured in many recent television crime series, finds no echo in the police memoirs themselves.

⁵⁴ Di Francesco (2014, 27).

In 1970, Di Francesco joined the police. His first experience in the force, however, involving the night shift at Genoa police headquarters, was not a happy one:

On duty for the first time! It had taken me a long time to fill a briefcase with what I thought was essential: regulations, handcuffs, the tricolor sash and lastly, with meticulous care, a Bernardelli 32 caliber revolver, bought in installments. Nobody had been able to explain to me why police officers were not supplied with a weapon, but had to pay for one out of their own pocket. [...] The police station was bleak. Some calendars tried in vain to pass themselves off as paintings. Faded police circulars and old photos of wanted men hung from a kind of notice board. [...] The toilets, used by both men and women, consisted of stinking latrines and two washbasins, enough to make any health inspector shiver. This, I thought worriedly, is not going to be easy.⁵⁵

Di Francesco's story is that of a professionally aware man who chose to join the police, preferring it to his previous experiences in the *carabinieri*. His aim was to put his skills at the service of a civil institution for a specific social goal, the fight against illegality: the sad story of his first impressions on the job foreshadow many of his future disappointments, since, in the author's opinion, the force was incapable of valorising its men and their abilities.

Di Francesco develops his narrative by dwelling on the minute detail of police station life, drawing heavily on the sad, routine cases that a big city night shift presents him with: prostitution, minor thefts, domestic violence, fights. It was the drug problem in Genoa in the 1970s that really made an impression on him and he frequently expressed his point of view on the issue — one that was sometimes at odds with the rules he had to apply.

Patrol cars were increasingly bringing into the station minors found in the possession of marijuana joints, syringes, doses of heroin. [...] I listened to lots of reasons: all of them arose from a deep sense of solitude. Society's instinctive reaction involved marginalization and repression [...] The 1958 law in force included a ruthless article forcing policemen and judges to send people to jail even if found in possession of minimum quantities. Prison was certainly not the best school for their social recovery. Indeed the suspicion was that not infrequently they found the most hardened inmates waiting for them, for foul practices that would never be reported.⁵⁶

Pervaded by a profound Catholic religiosity, Di Francesco became friendly with Don Andrea Gallo, the “anarchist” priest who set up a well-known community in Genoa where the marginalized could find refuge. Together with Don Gallo and some colleagues, he tried to arrange for drug addicts to be sent to recovery communities, as an alternative to imprisonment.

In the typical style of an autobiographical memoir, Di Francesco's book goes on to follow his career. He held a number of important positions, especially in the fight against drug trafficking, and was involved in investigations into fascist terrorism, working closely with judge Emilio Alessandrini, who became a good friend.⁵⁷ In line with other memoirs, his narrative of the cases he actually dealt with is intertwined

⁵⁵ Di Francesco (2014, 30-32).

⁵⁶ Di Francesco (2014, 90).

⁵⁷ A magistrate who investigated right- and left-wing terrorism and banking scandals; he was killed in 1979 by the *Prima Linea* terrorist group; De Lutiis (1988).

with Italy's most important judicial and criminal events: the fascist murders, the era of political terrorism known as the *anni di piombo* (*years of lead*), the role of organized crime in the international drug trade, the big trials of the Mafia and the Red Brigades, the *Mani Pulite* (*clean hands*) investigation into political corruption in the 1990s. From 1979 to 1984, Di Francesco served as a drug trafficking expert at the General Secretariat of Interpol. It was an experience that did a great deal for his reputation, but he was extremely critical of how things were done there, tending sometimes to exaggerate.

Considering the organization's enormous strategic potential, I was amazed at the lack of care our administration had shown in terms of valorising the Italian presence in the General Secretariat. [...] The Serious Violence Group, which dealt with organized crime, was led by an official from Norway who followed on from one from Hong Kong! Was it possible that none of the leaders in Rome had ever noticed this deficiency and its consequences in the international arena? Wasn't it at all evident that our country was becoming a receptacle for criminals of all nationalities and a privileged hub of underground interconnections with terrorism from all over the world and with the international trafficking of drugs and arms?⁵⁸

Advancing in rank and responsibility, Di Francesco transformed his disillusionment into an attempt to represent a critical voice within the police, with the aim of seeing competence and experience rewarded. He began to be regarded as something of a troublemaker and, as his career started to suffer because of this, he asked to be transferred to the Foreign Ministry, returning to the police in 1997 until his early retirement in 2004. His memoirs were explicitly written in order to take issue with the police administration, which he felt had not properly appreciated him, to the extent that he even saw himself as being a victim of mobbing.⁵⁹

Di Francesco also participated in the movement for police democratisation, taking on organizational roles, which, however, he abandoned in the mid-1980s, dissatisfied as he was with the politicisation of the unions.

The experience of police unionisation formed the basis of the professional and political maturity of two agents, whose biographies were brought together by a journalist in the volume *Policemen's lives*.⁶⁰ The book was prompted by Pasolini's famous poem, published after the clashes at the Valle Giulia Faculty of Architecture in Rome in March 1968. In the poem, Pasolini asks for the policemen who were on duty to maintain public order, and who had been vilified by the demonstrating students, to be treated with respect.⁶¹ The two testimonies are important, being rare examples of Italian police memoirs featuring characters with a modest level of culture and describing the material and ideal motivations that led two young people from the south to join the police. Basically, these motivations arose from the extreme poverty of their families, together with the desire to build a social role for themselves and their own sense of personal dignity. The memoirs also include many examples of the widespread male-dominated rhetoric that formed the character of the policemen

⁵⁸ Di Francesco (2014, 171-172).

⁵⁹ Di Francesco (1990, 1-3). These statements, present in the first editions, were omitted in the last reprint in 2014.

⁶⁰ Medici (1979).

⁶¹ Pasolini (1968). The poem was above all a denunciation of the mechanisms of exploitation present in the police at the behest of political power. See also Pasolini (1999).

in barracks life, and descriptions of the training process, focusing above all on the control of public order during worker and student demonstrations.

The only preparation they gave us [...] was in the technique and use of the truncheon. On the tracks of the Foro Italico sports fields [in Rome], they got us to attack rag-doll dummies. Blows, they informed us beforehand, were to be delivered to the head.⁶²

Unionisation was the key to finding the courage, and the issues, to open up the professional environment to criticism and to attaining a new ethical awareness of the police in terms of their service to the citizenry.

For one of the two policemen, the impulse to change came through reading, starting with Jack London's *The Iron Heel*:

I read it over and over again, even when I was on guard in some enclosed space. Like an obsession. [...] I read it slowly and then read it again. I imagined the scenes of the revolution, of that catastrophic, twilight atmosphere.⁶³

The book's other police officer, who declared himself to be right-wing and voted for the neo-fascist MSI party, came to political catharsis through the evictions of occupied houses in Rome and then by meeting the anarchist Pietro Valpreda, who he was standing guard over in hospital.

We had long talks together, Valpreda and I. He told me how he had been treated in half the police headquarters around Italy, what he thought of the police and the judiciary. I went to buy him the newspapers and we often commented on the news together. I wasn't feeling too bad at that time, and not only because I wasn't doing very much work, but above all because I felt I had a great responsibility. And then Valpreda and I got along. Sometimes he talked to me about his colleague Giuseppe Pinelli:⁶⁴ not to make me feel guilty or anything like that. He suffered a lot because of that unjust death.⁶⁵

The same critical themes present in the testimonies collected in *Vite di poliziotti* are to be found in a contemporary collection of letters from policemen sent to the magazine *Ordine Pubblico*, and in later memoirs.⁶⁶ These include some examples written, finally, by women, such as those by Lisa Domenici, a chief-inspector involved in trade unionism, and officer Daniela Bona.⁶⁷ With regard to their reasons for joining the police, the female perspective was not very different from that of their male colleagues — emancipation, an escape from poverty, the desire to feel

⁶² Medici (1979, 21).

⁶³ Medici (1979, 43).

⁶⁴ Pietro Valpreda, an anarchist, was initially accused of placing a bomb in a bank in Piazza Fontana, Milan, on December 12, 1969, killing 12 people. He was later acquitted after a long period of imprisonment. Giuseppe Pinelli, another anarchist, was arrested immediately after the bank explosion and died after falling from the window of Milan police headquarters on December 16. See Giannuli (2019).

⁶⁵ Medici (1979, 110).

⁶⁶ Fedeli (1981). For example, Forleo (2003). Former secretary of the SIULP union and an ex-commissioner, Forleo wrote his memoirs to defend himself from a murder charge (during a police operation). However, rather than choose the formula of the trial story, he adopted the typical structure of the police memoir, punctuating his narrative with various events from his career.

⁶⁷ Domenici (1987); Bona (1988).

that they were doing something important for society. In women, however, the need to separate work from life, to prevent the former from shaping their personality, was more profound: emblematically, agent Bona's memoirs were entitled *Non sono poliziotto, faccio il poliziotto (Policing's what I do, not what I am)*. The sexist culture denounced by the two women authors, however, continues to be a presence in the police force and also makes an appearance in more recent works, such as Nicola Longo's, who mentions female colleagues only to talk about their attractiveness or their fragility in action.

They often sent female police assistants to the Flying Squad to get some experience [...] Once, this pair of pretty girls arrived, they asked us if they could see a bit of action. I decided to choose something that wasn't too risky, because with two girls along with us you didn't want to take too many chances. In Centocelle [Rome] you could always dig up a bit of trouble. I went to a bar I knew where drugs were usually on the go; I spotted a couple of guys who were right for us. [...] We decided to carry out a blocking manoeuvre; our driver accelerated right past them and pulled in to cut them off. Meanwhile, the girls got all excited: "Wow, this is great! I love this!" They really enjoyed this adventure stuff. [...] At the police station, the other female assistants complained that they didn't get any excitement, they were very envious of our two companions, who were just getting more and more excited and turned on. [...] They didn't want to go back home, they wanted to go out for the night, the commissioner was happy to agree, and so all four of us ended up in a nightclub in Trastevere. In the end, I left with one girl and the commissioner with the other.⁶⁸

Women first entered the Italian police force in 1959 (law no. 1083). Longo's experiences relate to the 1970s and 1980s,⁶⁹ and the book was published in 2013: sexist bias, in other words, persisted for a long period of time. But, as the extract shows, there was more to his book than that: the writing had a sense of rhythm uncommon in the memoirs of Italian policemen and had, in fact, originally been planned by director Federico Fellini and screenwriter Gianfranco Angelucci as a screenplay for a television series (subsequently never made). The result is that Longo's memoirs are an enjoyable read, with a novel-esque liveliness and action, but in many ways they depart from the tradition of police memoirs, lacking both polemical verve and the zeal to reform. The appearance of the policeman as a heroic figure is preserved from previous memoirs, however, and even emphasised — a solitary hero in Longo's case, given his long experience as an undercover agent in the world of international drug trafficking. After leaving the police, Longo taught Investigation Techniques at university level until 2012. While he was equipped with the necessary skills to reflect on the spread of organised crime (Mafia, Camorra, 'Ndrangheta, etc.), a phenomenon that developed throughout Italy in the 1970s, this is not something that his memoirs deal with — they do not, in other words, follow on from the tradition which had been displayed in distant predecessors such as Locatelli and Bolis, or even the more modern Di Francesco.

As a general rule, in the most recent memoirs by Italian policemen, the biographical element is very significant, starting with the reasons for enlisting, followed by the evolution of the writer's career, intertwined with major national political

⁶⁸ Longo (2013, 98-99).

⁶⁹ In 1981, the reform law also unified the male and female police workforce. See Minesso (2018).

events and criminal incidents both large and small, not necessarily experienced in the first person. Constant elements include denunciation of disorganisation in the force, especially from the point of view of the policemen, struggling with low wages, frequent transfers and the malfunctioning of police stations and operational equipment. The sense of unease also involves military-style discipline, arbitrarily determined punishments and an *esprit de corps* marked by the detachedness of the police from the rest of society. These working conditions created difficulties in terms of social integration for the policemen and their families, starting from their relationship with their local neighbourhood. One other interesting element that is always present is that of the versatility of the police profession — the need, in other words, to supplement compliance with the law with the ability to mediate, to listen and to improvise.⁷⁰

If the management of public order is one of the most significant experiences in the policing profession in Republican Italy, the silence of memoir writers regarding police violence during the G8 in Genoa in July 2001 is astonishing.⁷¹ No memoir talks about it, with one exception: Di Francesco mentions having expressed perplexity in the preparatory meetings dealing with urban control during the heads of state summit, and regrets that “young policemen, tired, frightened, angry, trained up like pit bulls” were sent into the Diaz school to clear it out.⁷² With a certain congruity, the policeman Di Francesco talks only about the police, condemning the excesses and asserting that the errors had been a trap. It was an event that weakened the trust of the citizens in the police, and it had happened in the city of Genoa, the very cradle of the democratic police movement.⁷³ The cathartic function of witness testimony does not therefore find the police point of view in the memoirs.⁷⁴ This lack is partly made up for by a work of fiction, *Genova sembrava d'oro e d'argento* (*Genoa looked gold and silver*), written by a former policeman.⁷⁵ It is the setting, more than the plot, that is of interest, given that the main characters form part of Rome's 7th Flying Squad, specially trained to handle public order in football stadiums and in the streets. There's an urgency to the rhythms of the prose as it deals with the unrest taking place in Genoa, and to the reflections of the characters on what is happening around them. The feeling that something has gone wrong emerges, with the assault on the Diaz school ruining a job that until that moment had been carried out well. Above all, the sense of chagrin regards the *esprit de corps*, thanks to the “error” that is a stain on the department record. There is no compassion for the victims, perceived by the police as the enemy, or at least as belonging to a different world.

⁷⁰ Lacquaniti (2002); Trevisi (2008).

⁷¹ Memories, testimonies and above all recriminations and debate can be found on the forum of a non-institutional site, opened by certain policemen in 2001: <http://www.poliziotti.it/> (last accessed January 2019). See also Jansen (2010).

⁷² Di Francesco (2014, 267). During the protests against the G8 in Genoa, the extremely violent PS raid on the temporary headquarters of the Genoa Social Forum seriously injured 63 activists of different nationalities. See Mantovani (2011).

⁷³ Di Francesco (2014, 331-333).

⁷⁴ Centemeri *et al.* (2004).

⁷⁵ Gensini (2009).

CONCLUSIONS

This article has presented an over-view of the police memoir published in Italy. While it is a sub-genre that has been little developed in the field of police literature, fiction and social analysis, it still forms a contribution to the history of Italian culture that is by no means negligible. The memoirs provide us with testimonies to the history of crime and above all to the perception of crime on the part of the police and public opinion, together with indications regarding change in society, in its prejudices and fears. These are the most interesting interpretative keys with which to approach police memoirs as narrative texts.

This research started out with the idea of a closer analogy with French and British memoirs, bringing out the point of view of police officers regarding the organization of the service and the evolution of a professional culture within the force.⁷⁶ This is an interpretative perspective that is rarely present in Italian memoirs, however, and something mostly considered by the authors themselves as of little importance. This is due to the fact that a sense of professional pride has developed only very slowly within the Italian police force, centred around their specialised skills but also around their ability to feel both wholly part of civil society and at the same time at its service. Several Italian memoirs confirm this idea: those who write them often do so because (rightly or wrongly) they feel betrayed by the institution in which they served. It is disillusionment, rather than professional pride, that emerges from many memoirs. There are few elements in the texts, however, that explain the causes of this weakness with regard to “professional pride” in Italian policemen. References tend to be rather generic, touching on the low wages and thus the lack of motivation to choose the PS as a professional vocation. It is also often repeated that the profession has kept police officers separate from the rest of society, starting with the type of training they receive, which has educated them to avoid getting involved in the tensions and passions of their own times.⁷⁷ It is this training that gives rise to the reluctance to deal with certain contemporary political problems, in order not to display what they are trained to hide. Serious crime, terrorism, investigations into political corruption (whether at the end of the 19th century with bank scandals or at the end of the 20th century with illicit party funding) appear in the background to indicate chronology, but are not narrated or analysed.⁷⁸

The one constant thing that unifies the memoirs presented here is criticism of the PS administration. It very rarely, however, becomes constructive criticism: complex arguments seem not to apply to the memoir genre, in which disillusionment, controversy and resentment prevail. Memoir writers, in essence, break the pact that connects them to the institution, but without abandoning their own particular mindset.

⁷⁶ Issues of this kind emerge naturally from the trade union newspapers, such as the aforementioned *Ordine Pubblico*. For the (weak) voice of policemen between the 19th and 20th centuries, see Labanca and Di Giorgio (2015).

⁷⁷ On “morale” training for policemen after World War II, see for example the Ministero dell’Interno - Direzione generale della PS (1966).

⁷⁸ There is one recent example, however: G. Costanza (Tessarini, 2017), the driver for judge Giovanni Falcone, assassinated by explosives in Capaci (Palermo) in 1992. Dictating his memoirs to a sociologist, Costanza gives his interpretation with regard to the organisers and strategy behind that attack, attributed to the Mafia.

In their memoirs, Italian policemen have always found it difficult to represent themselves as everyday heroes, to talk about their work without resorting to stereotypes or sensationalism; some of them, rather, in order to justify their ego-narratives, created an emphatic and caricatured self-image. In fact, the numerous cases of abnegation are not enough to define police heroism — it is necessary to feel wholly part of one's own time, to feel the need give an account of one's life, to propose models and examples to the public. Where and when this interchange between professional pride and the need to recount takes place, the police memoir is able to generate interest in both the publishing market and in readers.

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