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'Crowds are mad and criminal': The notion of public order in Italian manuals for police mobile units, 2000–2008

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‘Crowds are Mad and Criminal’:

The notion of public order in Italian manuals for police mobile units, 2000-2008

Introduction

The transition which took place after World War II in Italy from the fascist regime to the Republic has brought with it the need to rethink police organisation and structure (Labanca 2015). This process seems to be part of a broader tendency of police ‘democratisation’ that has occurred also in other European countries. Such a tendency appears to have been characterised by a shift in *protest policing*, which in turn would have been made possible by a change in the conception of *public order*. Basically, this notion seems to have shifted from an ethical meaning to a more neutral sense, in which state authorities, and specifically police forces, do not take a stand about specific political and moral principles and values, and hence do not repress social movements on the grounds of their ideas and views alone.

The article, moving from a sociological perspective, aims to contest the idea that a process of democratisation has actually and completely taken place in the Italian police by stressing the ambiguity of the notion of public order in Republican Italy and within a Republican model of policing. Through analysis of the discourses in which this notion is directly or indirectly employed, it will be seen that difficulties in the process of democratization of the police persisted many decades after the end of the fascist period. In carrying out this analysis, this article focuses not on police practices but on *police knowledge* in its relationship with concrete police work on the field. In particular, this paper analyses the *manuals* designed for and, between 2000 and 2008, employed in the training of Italian police officers and operators, especially of the *mobile units* that operate in policing activities dedicated to keeping the public order. In this analysis, special attention is paid to how these texts describe and depict *crowds*, and how such representations become a device for legitimising *preventive yet repressive* interventions. Such interventions take place before potential violent behaviours from demonstrators occur and therefore are not reactive. However, they are not based on mediation and dialogue but rather are coercive, and hinge on a strong use of force.

The analysis of manuals shows a gap between what is written in the texts for the training of personnel – according to which, the police act exclusively to protect individual assets and the possibility to move freely through the streets of the city – and the actual action of law enforcement. As these texts attribute characteristics to the crowd that work toward their delegitimization and justify preventive yet repressive interventions towards them, they enter directly into the sphere of ethical and political choices, by considering some individuals and groups to be acceptable and others to be unacceptable.

The first section of the article briefly introduces manuals as an object of study and clarifies certain

methodological aspects. The second stresses the notion of police knowledge, its changes and its persistence within the field of the policing of the public order. The third focuses on how the issues of crowds and public order are debated within some manuals of about the last twenty years. The fourth and fifth sections, respectively, are dedicated to illustrating the vision of de-rationalising crowds and the hyper-rationalising viewpoint. The sixth section is dedicated to the de-politicisation of crowds, their being equated with the figure of the ‘enemy’ and their de-legitimisation, which is the prerequisite for justifying preventive interventions. The final considerations summarise the main elements that have emerged from the analysis of the manuals, and stresses in particular how these texts contain and foster an ideal conception of public order.

Manuals as an object of analysis

The article focuses on four texts. These (D’Ambrosi and Adornato 2006; Donnini 2001; Gianni 2000; Girella and Girella 2008) are manuals explicitly aimed at training personnel and are written by officials who are experts in matters of public order. At the time when the books were published, Flavio D’Ambrosi and Antonio Adornato were *Commissario Capo* and *Vice Questore Aggiunto* of the Italian police respectively. Both of them were instructors for the mobile units and members of the SIULP (*Sindacato unitario dei lavoratori della polizia* [Unitary Union of Police Workers]) police union. Valerio Donnini, formerly chief of mobile units, by virtue of his long experience in protest policing, was a ministerial counsellor for the Special affair service of the Ministry of the Interior, and was charged with the task of training all the Italian mobile units before the G8 summit. Aldo Gianni was prefect of Milano, and formerly chief and instructor of the police mobile unit of the same city. Due to these professional roles and activities, he has gathered long experience in protest policing. Filippo Girella was chief of the *Gruppo Pronto Impiego* of the Italian *Guardia di finanza* – the equivalent of the police mobile unit – and instructor of shooting and self-defence, while Andrea Girella was a police officer and trade union leader of the right-wing union UGL (*Unione generale del lavoro* [General Union of Labour]).

The manuals analysed in this article were published between 2000 and 2008, a period of time marked by the end of the Cold War and political bipolarism, and following that of ‘the *riflusso*’ which had characterised the eighties – namely, ‘the great retreat into private life, the abandonment of collective action, the painful coming to terms with failure’ (Ginsborg 1990: 383). The first two books in chronological order were printed at the beginning of the new century, after a decade of at least partial political awakening marked by the development of different social movements which were focused on a wide set of issues – migrants’ rights, grassroots participation, equality in the access to economic resources, global justice, etc. – and quickly became more compact and united prior to the Genova G8 summit. More specifically, Gianni 2000 was published after the demonstrations that

occurred during the WTO conference of 1999, which marked the birth of the anti-globalisation movement and represented a new challenge for police institutions. Donnini 2001 was printed in the aftermath of the violent repression which took place in Naples in March 17, on the occasion of the protests against the Global forum. It specifically takes into consideration the strategies adopted by the demonstrators to enter red zones and resist police charges, with the aim of developing better counterstrategies to face such situations in view of the Genova G8 summit. D'Ambrosi and Adornato 2006 as well as Girella and Girella 2008 were published on the other hand after the Genova summit, in a period of time marked by the trials against the members of the police¹ and the demonstrators, as well as some important changes in the training of mobile units. In 2008, a Training Centre for the Managing of Public Order (*Centro di formazione per la tutela dell'ordine pubblico*) was established in Nettuno, near Rome, with the aim of teaching the members of mobile units how to properly face public protest events both in psychological and operational terms. More generally, this period was strategic for the renewal of the image of the police. The two manuals have somehow contributed to this process of makeover. In contrast to the previous texts, they are not reserved for internal use but can be purchased also by people not belonging to the police. From the perspective of police institutions, these manuals are thus able to spread a desired appearance – namely, a pacified and professional appearance – of mobile units and their work in society at large.

The tables of contents of the four manuals show common elements and some differences when compared to one another. Gianni 2000 is the most complete and internally articulated text. It ranges from legal issues concerning the concept of public order, restrictions on the freedom of association and the chain of command of protest policing to technical instructions about how to break up a gathering of people and the specific methods that can be used to this purpose. It also contains theoretical considerations on the characteristics and behaviours of crowds and football fans. It is equipped with many illustrations and schemas depicting specific tools and situations and is oriented toward making operational directives clearer. Donnini 2001 is more aimed at providing technical instructions, and hence almost completely lacks analysis of legal and theoretical issues about public order and protestor behaviours. Like Gianni 2000, which is explicitly mentioned as a source of concepts and information, this book contains illustrations and schemas. It also includes pictures, some of which depict scenes of the protests against the Global Forum that took place in Naples in 2017. D'Ambrosi and Adornato 2006 is in turn less general than Gianni 2000, as it is strictly focused on the topic of the legitimate use of the means of physical coercion. Nonetheless, it contains brief passages on more theoretical issues such as the nature of crowds and how to face them, and the rule of law between Hobbes and Locke. Girella and Girella 2008, in terms of broad setting is quite similar to

¹ At least two of the authors of the manuals here analysed – Antonio Adornato and Valerio Donnini – have testified at these trials.

Gianni 2000. It covers a wide range of topics, also urban warfare and collective psychology.

The aim of the four manuals is to *describe* the contents of the work of the mobile units and to *define* the object of their intervention in more detail, but also – and above all – to prescribe correct attitudes and appropriate behavioural standards, adopting in this regard a clearly *performative* register. Consequently, the analysis of the manuals was carried out using the tools provided by the *critical discourse analysis* (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Van Dijk 1997). Within this theoretical and methodological perspective, discourses are considered *social practices* that, in producing meanings, relate the plane of language to that of social reality in two ways: by shaping the circumstances, institutions and social structures are at the same time being shaped by them. From this kind of perspective, the discourses are instruments through which *power* can be conveyed and exercised, and can therefore take on an *ideological* value, contributing to the construction of a shared belief system made up of representations and categorisations – often simplified and stereotyped – of processes, institutions, individuals, and social groups.

Police knowledge and protest policing between changes and continuities

According to many scholars, after World War II the general orientation of the police towards society shifted from an idea of *Staatspolizei*, within which police serve the interests of the state, to an approach called *Bürgerpolizei*, where police serve the interests of the citizens. More specifically, if in the *Staatspolizei* conception ‘the police protect the existing legal order, the *status constitutus*’, since ‘in their strictly legalistic thinking, highest priority is given to law enforcement, criminal prosecution, and the principle of legality’, in the *Bürgerpolizei* model ‘the police must protect the democratic framework of opportunities for change’, and therefore ‘the underlying understanding of democracy and the state emphasizes the changeability of the legal system’ (Winter 1998, 189).

Clues indicating such a transition might be traceable in protest policing, namely, in that field of police activity aimed at handling protest events (Della Porta and Reiter 1996, 1998). This is a key element in the self-definition of police (Morgan 1987). Consequently, transformations of the ideas and practices of protest policing are a sort of litmus test for broader changes in the relations between police and society. According to some scholarship, an idea of *authoritarian policing* (Reiner, 2000; Waddington, 1999) is replaced by a more democratic view of handling protest, as a *reactive* police model, the only objective of which is the maintenance of ‘law and order’, is substituted for a *preventive* model, based on the idea that avoiding the use of force is possible by means of dialogue, intelligence activities and a dissuasive attitude towards demonstrators on the part of operators (Fillieule and Jobard 1998; Jaime-Jiménez and Reinares 1998).

More generally, a ‘democratic’ style of protest policing is accompanied by a change in *police*

knowledge, namely, the images held by the police regarding their role and the challenges they confront, and the ways they define the nature of the problems faced and the solutions adopted in order to solve them (Della Porta 1998; Della Porta and Reiter 2003; Monjardet 1996; Palidda 2000). This comprises the *professional culture* of the police and their *environmental culture* – that is, the totality of assumptions they hold about external reality. Police knowledge, moreover, consists of ‘interpretative models on the social and political macrolevel as well as on the mesolevel of conflict that have a direct bearing on protest policing’ (Winter 1998, 188). On this last level, two categories may be distinguished: on the one hand, the ‘*protest diagnosis*, defined as the police assessment of protesters, their action patterns, and their action motives’, as well as ‘the police interpretation of conflicts involving the police themselves as actors and their political perspective on the conflict’, and on the other hand, the ‘*policing philosophies* favoured by high-ranking police officers, that is, the conceptual principles and guidelines underlying police operations during protest events’, (*ibid.*). The policing philosophy plays a key role as it determines the method of protest policing resorted to in the case of specific forms of protest (Della Porta and Reiter 1998). Furthermore, on the macrolevel of police knowledge we may find general patterns of interpretation, involving the *social diagnosis* of police officers, which includes ‘their reflections on or perceptions of society, the state, and the political system’, and the *police philosophy*, which takes in their definitions of the role of the police in the state and society’ (*ibid.*, 189).

The shift towards a democratic style of protest policing would therefore be characterised by a police philosophy inspired by the *Bürgerpolizei* model and a policing philosophy according to which the police must simply protect the democratic framework of opportunities for change. Moreover, it would be marked by a social diagnosis imbued with a pluralistic view of society and a quite permissive protest diagnosis, one able to recognise the protesters’ action patterns and motives as legitimate as well as to see police as parts of the conflict.

This shift in the style of protest policing would have been made possible by a change in the conception of *public order*. In the theory of law, this notion is thought to have two different and alternative meanings: an *ideal* and a *material* one (Corso 1979; Di Raimondo 2010). On the theoretical level, the first is typical of an ‘ethical’ state, namely, a political regime that becomes the bearer of particular values and principles to the detriment of other normative orientations, for example by imposing an official religion or certain behaviours in the sexual sphere. The second, on the other hand, characterises a ‘liberal’ state, that is, a system which is neutral and secular on the level of values and where the public authorities simply guarantee the protection of the personal sphere from concrete interferences; it is therefore a state in which exercising the freedom of expression is conditioned by the respect of other rights – in particular, private property and freedom of movement. In summary, the ideal public order concerns the management of the conflict between principles, while the material

public order concerns the repression of facts and actions that threaten the regular carrying out of daily life.

On the theoretical plane, only the material notion of public order is compatible with the changes in police knowledge and behaviours so far described. However, on the empirical plane, an ideal notion of public order is far from disappearing from the scene of Western states. This means that also an idea of *Staatspolizei* is anything but obsolete, and consequently, that the *Bürgerpolizei* model is more a rhetorical formula than something already achieved.

Italy is quite representative in this regard: in the post-World War II period, the legacy of the past has fostered continuity and not real change (Labanca 2015). According to the legal doctrine and jurisprudence of that time, the kind of public order the police had to maintain was so generic and vaguely defined that it could justify a huge range of interventions aimed at simply restricting freedom of expression and association (Della Porta and Reiter 2003, 30). Moreover, the turnover of police officials between fascism and the Republic was poor and basically failed, leaving wide room to former members of the fascist regime, even in senior positions (Tosatti 2003). The police furthermore focused its efforts in keeping public order and not in fighting organised crime, by employing a prevalently repressive approach to this end (Canosa 1976; Corso 1979). More generally, within the post-war reorganisation of police forces, which mainly hinged on militarism, discipline, loyalty to government and political compliance, an authoritarian model has prevailed (Di Giorgio 2019, 22; 2021). Protest policing is probably the main field in which continuity with the fascist regime appears most clearly (Della Porta and Reiter 2003). The introduction, between the end of World War II and the dawning of the Republican age, of special units of police aimed at managing demonstrations and public events in order to keep the public order, called *mobile units* (*'reparti celeri'* or *'mobili'* in Italian), does not solve this continuity (Fimiani 2018; 2021).

This scenario remained substantially unchanged until the Sixties, when a project of 'modernisation' of the police commenced under the guidance of a new police chief, Angelo Vicari (Di Giorgio 2019, 49). However, the growth of social and political conflict that took place between the second part of the same decade and all throughout the seventies triggered tough actions and interventions on the part of police forces. The protest policing style continued to be imbued with a repressive approach (Della Porta and Reiter 2003). Repression, here, means not only 'reaction' to the violence carried out by demonstrators, but also 'preventive' use of force against people who are not acting violently or illegally (Della Porta and Reiter 2003, 207). The Italian case, therefore, shows how a model of protest policing based on the idea of prevention is not necessarily more democratic and peaceful than a model imbued with a reactive attitude.

A more visible change in the managing of public order has occurred starting from the eighties, when the ebb of social and political conflict and some important transformations of police

organisation – especially, the de-militarisation and unionisation of the police (Di Giorgio 2019) – produced a loosening of repressive and authoritarian policing. But there were some relevant exceptions, especially represented by some radical political groups and football fans, which were the object of tougher actions and interventions (De Biasi 2002; Marchi 2005).

However, with the start of the new century, the management of public order during the G8 summit, held in Genova in July 2001, marked a divide in protest policing strategies and styles (Dal Lago and Palidda 2010; Della Porta and Reiter 2003; Palidda 2008). The extremely authoritarian and repressive approach adopted during the days of the summit shows how the transition from *Staatspolizei* to *Bürgerpolizei* has never been completed, and that an ideal notion of public order – inspiring and legitimising interventions towards people and groups for what they are and not for what they do – is still deeply rooted in police forces. In order to understand the persistence of such a view and practice of protest policing, it is useful to focus on police knowledge, specifically on how manuals frame and consider crowds.

Crowds and public order in police manuals

Historically, crowds are an intricate and problematic object for the police. Difficult to fully know and partially unpredictable in their behaviour, crowds, by their very existence, represent a threat to public order. In contrast to larger and more structured social groups, crowds are subjected to intense regulation by the public authorities. In attempting to govern them, the police forces first seek to know their characteristics. Consequently, over time, state security apparatuses have developed a specific set of knowledge about crowds.

This knowledge is part of a broader police knowledge, transmitted mainly through training, fieldwork, and informal socialisation (Fassin 2011) – which is also constructed through the so-called ‘canteen culture’ (Waddington 1999), taking shape in moments of break times and recreation – and is partly crystallised in the *manuals* used in the training of personnel, and in particular, in the texts that have as their object the strategies of protest policing.

Undoubtedly, these manuals do not exhaust the knowledge of police institutions on the subject, nor do they accurately describe the concrete behaviours of the operators. The ability to move in a realistic scenario of keeping public order is certainly learned more through practice than theory. Nevertheless, manuals constitute an interesting object of study for several reasons. First, in providing detailed ethical, behavioural and professional recommendations for police officers and operators, they give the researcher precious information about how police institutions *imagine* and *depict* their new members and how they want to *shape* their attitudes, beliefs and actions (Gargiulo 2015, 2016; Di Giorgio 2017). Moreover, manuals, in addition to teaching the operational methods for the field work and the suitable ways of employing force, contain articulated *classifications* and detailed *descriptions*

of crowds and accurate instructions about the *strategies* that should be followed in dealing with them.

Manuals have changed their setting and focus over the time. The text produced and employed in the aftermath of World War II and in the following decades are mainly focused on *educating* new recruits, who are perceived as coarse and bad-mannered (Gargiulo 2016; Di Giorgio 2017). At the same time, with regard to the issue of protest policing, they contain military more than police instructions, and in this way reflect an authoritarian approach. Basically, these texts seem more oriented toward teaching officers and operators how to face insurrections, than toward building professionals capable of managing public order in a democratic manner. More specifically, police institutions give much attention to the *bodies* of new recruits, which are the object of detailed instructions concerning the suitable degree of hygiene and order, so as to keep both within the space of the police quarters and in society at large. This attention is part of a broader view of police, which is imagined as a unitary *body* made of different but interrelated parts, each of which is hierarchically subordinated or superordinated to the others and has specific tasks. Within such a view, the education to develop an *esprit de corps* is a strategic issue, as shown by a 1947 manual (Gargiulo 2016). The conception of the police as a body within which the bodies of the policemen have to be disciplined and harmonised, moreover, is part of a broader view of society resting on an organicist assumption: the social environment in which the police as an institution is placed is imagined as a culturally homogeneous *body* whose survival is threatened by its weak and dysfunctional parts (Gargiulo 2016).

The manuals of this historical phase clearly express an ideal notion of public order. Police are called upon not only to protect people's safety and their property, but also to guarantee that certain moral and political values are kept. Later, the scenario seems to change. In the manuals of the sixties, concerns over the social behaviour of the new recruits are less salient, while educational prescriptions give way to professional instructions on protest policing strategies and techniques (Gargiulo 2016), especially due to the reformatory project of Angelo Vicari (Di Giorgio 2017). In the following decades, the conception of public order contained in the manuals seems to subtly turn from ideal to material, as the organicist view of society tends to become less explicit or even to vanish and the issues regarding the education of the new recruits no longer play a role. Moreover, explicit analysis of crowds, their characteristics and behaviour appears in the manuals published at end of the nineties.

The knowledge of crowds contained in these texts is mainly derived from studies dating back to the late nineteenth century or, at latest, to the early twentieth century, and specifically the theories of Le Bon and Sighele. It is no accident that these books dedicate sections or entire chapters to illustrating these theoretical paradigms and, at the same time, completely neglect theories drawn from contemporary social psychology and sociology of deviance or sociological and political studies concerning social movements and collective action.

In connoting crowds, police manuals deploy two strategies, *de-rationalisation* and *criminalisation*,

both of which are aimed at emptying the demonstrators' behaviour of any genuinely *political* content. The depoliticisation of crowds works toward the delegitimisation of dissent, in that it favours the diffusion of a *pathological* vision of social protest: conflict, when it exceeds a certain threshold and is interpreted as a threat to public order, is reduced to instrumental or emotional causes and never to truly political reasons. Once crowds have been depoliticised and turned into agents conceived as pathogenic and harmful to society, *preventive yet repressive* intervention towards them acquires greater legitimacy.

Such a way of characterising crowds, moreover, is typical of a widespread view of these social aggregates. As can be seen from other studies, crowds are often depicted by media, political actors and police forces as having an irrational nature (Borch 2009, 2013; Brighenti 2010), and this is invoked as a pretext for depoliticising specific groups and movements – negatively labelled as ‘mobs’ – (Aradau 2015) and thus subjecting them to preventive surveillance (Nishiyama 2018).

Subversives and troublemakers

According to the authors of the texts analysed here, a crowd gives form to ‘a collective soul that reduces the conscious personality of individuals, so much so that they are unable to be guided by their own will’ (Gianni 2000: 52). The crowd is depicted as an entity whose behaviour is dictated by purely *emotional* and *irrational* factors: in other words, it is an organism guided by its own ‘moods’, and it is capable of changing suddenly (Girella and Girella 2008: 120). More specifically, ‘suggestibility’ seems to be its constitutive quality (Gianni 200: 52): a mass of individuals ‘cannot be influenced by reasoning, because it thinks through images and is affected only by images’ (Girella and Girella 2008: 45).

Therefore, being part of a crowd removes responsibility: within it, the individuals ‘feel free to abandon themselves to the most disparate behaviour. What they would never have accomplished alone now becomes possible because when the person is dispersed in the crowd, the individual is anonymous and therefore the degree of impunity of his/her actions is raised to the highest level’ (*ibid*); moreover, ‘feeling inserted into a reality that transcends them, they tend to transfer their aspirations onto the social level so that it can be said that it is the social organism that acts, chooses, and works for them’ (Gianni 2000: 49).

In essence, the individual seems to be a victim of the group, rather than a protagonist therein:

the lesser self-control, with the related predisposition to imitate others, facilitates the undertaking of actions that are not typical of our usual way of behaving. Such actions are not preceded by that minimum of meditation which is usually necessary to evaluate our actions, such as when we operate in normal situations. Everything occurs rapidly within a crowd: people act in such circumstances as if they wanted to escape the appeals of their own conscience (Gianni 2000: 51).

The knowledge about crowds contained in these passages is mainly derived from studies dating back to the late nineteenth century or, at most, to the early twentieth century, and specifically from the theories of Le Bon – whose intuitions and conclusions are considered an indispensable starting point in the study of collective behaviour (Girella and Girella 2008: 44) – and of Sighele. It is no accident that the manuals devote paragraphs or entire chapters to the illustration of these theories.²

The representation of crowds found in the manuals, beyond being focused on irrationality and non-accountability, concentrates as well on the homologation of different social subjectivities. From this perspective, the texts analysed here, with specific reference to the sphere of public order and its management, highlight the presence of a rather recurrent cognitive operation in the representations of society provided by the police: the *levelling* of the population. According to Van Maanen (1978), this operation can be traced back to the isolation felt by members of the public security forces, who, feeling themselves victims of misunderstanding or even hatred by the citizens, would consequently tend to perceive theirs as a compact group opposed to a hostile social environment.

In the manuals, the levelling takes place where the demonstrators, through the use of the rhetorical device of *generalisation* (Van Dijk 2004), are placed on the same level as other categories commonly subject to attention from the police. More specifically, the language used within these manuals favours the cancellation of the differences between those who participate in protest events and other categories of individuals: the confusion between very different social subjectivities very often passes through the attribution of derogatory labels – ‘troublemakers’, ‘hotheads’ ‘agitators’ – and, therefore, through the use of this semantic macro-strategy of the *negative presentation of the other* and the rhetorical expedient of *dramatisation* (Van Dijk 2004). Examples of these discursive strategies are provided in the following passage: ‘the Italian operators jump into the fray, ending up under siege due to 1800s-style charges, cannon fodder in an asymmetric fight against vandals exalted by drugs or boredom and armed with bombs, smoke bombs, firecrackers, knives, tubes, and armour’³ (Girella and Girella 2008: 98) and by the frequent use of certain terms, such as ‘rampage’ (for example, in D'Ambrosi and Adornato 2006: 5), to negatively characterise the actions of the crowd in a psychological sense.

The use of ‘naturalistic’ and ‘scientific’ metaphors aimed at establishing a parallel between group dynamics and dangerous and potentially unmanageable natural phenomena also tends to dramatise the actions of the crowds. For example, in the case of disorder, the ‘preventive’ intervention modality

² Gianni's text contains a chapter entitled *The Crowd*, in which there is a paragraph dedicated to the study of the emotional coefficient of the different types of crowds, where the variables that determine this coefficient are specified (Gianni, 2000: 38-44).

³ However, in the chapter *The mediation and the knowledge of the other*, this manual explicitly invites avoiding generalisations (Girella and Girella, 2008: 55).

is described as useful in that it helps to ‘prevent small outbreaks from turning into, by culpable omission, a blaze of large proportions, which in some cases could barely be extinguished (editor's note: inability to control the masses)’ (Donnini 2001: 30), and must be “conducted by acting on the strength centres of the crowd, i.e. by neutralizing the leaders and the directive nuclei that operate as electrical conduits through which the crowd can release its tension” (Gianni 2000: 47).

In general, the manuals make extensive use of the linguistic *categorization* of the demonstrators, tracing lines through which groups of subjects poorly differentiated internally are identified and separated from the common people. The use of this discursive device is not surprising, since the construction of artificially homogeneous categories is a typical activity of the police force, which, very often uses detailed and dynamic classification systems, as the ‘assholes’ reported by Van Maanen (1978) or ‘the bastards’ discussed by Fassin (2011). Through categorizations such as these, relatively homogeneous categories are built around a friend/foe polarity resulting from complex and ambiguous distinctions.

In addition to an abundant use of categorisation, the manuals clearly show a significant expansion of the *enemy* category: if indeed the police continually make a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ protestors (Waddington 1994), nonetheless, within these, the latter form the majority. The texts analysed here specifically extend the set of non-friends disproportionately by resorting to a very precise discursive device: *extremism*. In other words, the rhetorical figure of hyperbole is used (Van Dijk 2004): those who take to the streets are indistinctly referred to as ‘subversive’, while their characteristics are described in chapters on *urban warfare* (Gianni 2000; Girella and Girella 2008).

The list of ‘subversives’ is very long and heterogeneous: it goes from ‘incendiary groups’ to *medical teams* and *legal teams* guilty of providing ‘cover ups’ and ‘external support’ – passing by way of the *white overalls* movement (whose use of tires to repel police charges is disputed), *the disobedient* (whose contribution to urban guerrilla tactics consisted in launching a series of workshops on the experiences of the G8 in Genoa)– and students (‘who have always shown a propensity for revolutionary violence, since they have time to use in the cause and are physically fit for fight-and-flight), to finish with certain professionals, such as chemists and metallurgical workers, particularly useful ‘for the preparation of explosive artifices or for burglary or the manufacture of weapons (usually organizing specific courses)’ (Girella and Girella 2008: 65).

This cocktail of radically different social subjects complements an equally heterogeneous list of typical guerilla activities, ranging from armed clashes to forms of civil disobedience that are absolutely not characterised by violent behaviour (such as sit-ins, chaining oneself, and human chains) passing through squat occupations and activations, concentrations of people, and information activities – described as a kind of hyper-sophisticated and detailed intelligence (ibid: 70).

Leaders and guerrillas

When the manuals resort to the device of extremism, the character of the crowd is no longer irrational and emotional but tends to become absolutely rational and planned. For example, preparations for offensive actions are described in this way:

planning regarding the weapons, ammunition, protections etc., is prepared in advance of the confrontation, giving the utmost importance to the methods for carrying out an action, so as to avoid errors and achieve the intended purpose. Military tactics and the enemy's techniques are studied in-depth, one prepares to eliminate the evidence against oneself and to amplify and highlight those of the adversary (Girella and Girella 2008: 68).

The protections used by the demonstrators are also considered part of the 'guerrilla' strategy, and their defensive purpose is denied: 'helmets' (construction or motorcycle) for the passive defence of the head', 'bandanas and balaclavas', 'masks' (anti-gas, underwater, agricultural, antismog) are aimed exclusively at hiding their faces to make recognition impossible (in film footage or other means of recording events) and to avoid being charged with unlawful conduct (Girella and Girella 2008: 65).

Therefore, in the passages in which the device of extremism is operating, a vision of social protesters characterized by greater *rationality* emerges. In this regard, the pages dedicated to illustrating the figure of the 'leader' and to making the distinction – which almost takes on an ontological dimension – between those who command and those who obey are exemplary:

the whole fabric of social life is governed by a fundamental principle that is universally acquired and considered as a condition of the social order, so much so that those who do not accept this principle are called rebellious, in a derogatory tone: there are individuals who excel, who are given the power to give instructions, undertake initiatives, make choices, and who have expectations concerning the behaviour of other individuals based on respect for their decisions and their indications, on the acceptance of their choices, generally on the recognition of a state of prominence manifesting itself in many different ways. The former are called 'leaders' and the others 'followers'. The leader-follower relationship supports the structure of every type of society, from the most modern ones, of the mass type, to ones that are closed, of the archaic-tribal type (Girella and Girella 2008: 39-40).

[...] it is well known that the individual identifies with the leader: this identification process has been defined as a psychological surrogate, since it satisfies the individuals' need to somehow compensate for the lack of security, the weakness they feel when faced with the excessive power of the groups, or even of the mass (Girella and Girella 2008: 42).

In particular, an extremely detailed and analytical representation of leaders is provided:

[...] there are differences between the formal leader and the non-formal leader. In the crowd situation, the leader has nothing to do with the commonly understood leader; the leader in the crowd is the individual who, during a demonstration, shouts: 'Let's go to ...', in the already definable situations of tumult he goes ahead and is the first to throw a stone at the Police or who directs a group of madmen who are trying to erect a barricade. It refers to the impromptu speakers who harangue the people, the individual who incites violence, the trade unionist who directs a demonstration of strikers, etc. (Girella and Girella 2008: 40-41).

Informal leaders are described as people endowed with adequate 'technical' crowd management tools:

Some of these non-formal leaders who have considerable importance in determining the conduct of the crowd, have undergone a process of technification, in short, of becoming true professionals. We are referring to those people who, through long experience also gained through courses of study, have acquired and perfected concepts and refined intuitions that can certainly make them be considered the real technicians of the crowd (Girella and Girella 2008: 41).

Once more, next to irrational images of the crowd are placed hyper-rational descriptions of some subjects that are part of it. This double representation, which in some ways is compatible with the theory of crowds proposed by Le Bon – the masses in the throes of emotionality find guidance in the cold capability of the leaders' planning – in other ways highlights the purely instrumental value which is attached to these ideas: in fact, the accentuation of the rationality of some individuals is useful for their *criminalisation* and, more in general, to the *delegitimisation* of the demonstrators as such.

For example, the manuals explicitly establish a link between the rationality of the leaders and their criminal nature: from the perspective of their authors, the 'criminal' is logically led to play the role of *leader* in that he is an individual who 'has already crossed the boundary that divides the licit from the illicit and in tumultuous occasions finds the possibility of giving vent to hatred against his eternal antagonists – the guardians of the established order – thus discharging his individual tension'; moreover, he 'often has experience as a leader, having directed the action of gangs, and in any case is a subject in whom cunning and courage cannot be lacking'; for this reason, 'in the event of a tumult [...] he hopes to find advantage in it by participating in probable looting' (Girella and Girella 2008: 42-43).

But the strategy of criminalisation is also visible in the passages which give depth to the figure of the 'guerrilla', whose planning ability is exalted and at the same time, whose overall image is taken to grotesque extremes, to such a point that it becomes ridiculous. The 'guerrilla' is described as an individual who is convinced that

a new world order exists that is to be obtained only through disorder, permanent and continuous violence; he/she is, using language borrowed from the anti-imperialist or Marxist-Leninist terminology, [...] considered morally authorised to: expropriate, as a presumed and anticipated form of defence of the common good (though of others!); create and nurture social disorder; damage or destroy; to demand solidarity for his/her own cause, judged as the only one worthy of attention and sacrifices; to clash with the 'government forces' (always defined however by means of derogatory expressions: cops, agents of dictatorship or imperialism, criminals in uniform, militia) for an alleged right to express the manifestation of his/her thinking (even in the form of violent protest) and affirmation of his/her own living space *because nothing is illegal for the cause* (Girella and Girella 2008: 62).

Therefore the motivations of the guerrilla are considered fundamentally spurious: he/she is portrayed as a sort of predator ready to use weapons, to enter into armed struggle, to trigger a type of conflict that is represented as political but which, in reality, is only 'an expression of deviance' (Girella and Girella 2008: 63).

This criminalisation, both with reference to the figure of the guerrilla and with reference to the figure of the leader, is thus understood as a twin strategy compared to that of de-rationalisation: in fact, both are aimed at de-legitimizing the behaviour of the demonstrators, emptying them of a genuinely *political* content. In other words, the actions of the crowd are described as criminal or irrational, never as political, and for this reason, are deprived of any legitimacy.

More precisely, the delegitimisation of demonstrators hinges on a *pathological* conception of social protest: whoever claims rights or criticizes the choices made by the government (or other political-economic actors), if he/she is not an equivocal individual, an intrinsically dangerous subject or an extremist eager for violence acting under purely instrumental ideological reasons, is most likely a mentally unstable person. The possibility that such actions descend from an aware and well-structured political conscience is therefore denied: beyond a certain threshold, conflict always has instrumental or emotional causes and never truly political reasons. So it is not surprising that the studies to which the manuals make reference in delineating a pathological conception of the demonstrators have as their object – as we have seen previously – crowd psychology and deviance, and not social movements or socio-political aspects of collective mobilisations.

Police confronting 'the other': Friend vs enemy

Police manuals resort to discursive mechanisms aimed at creating an 'enemy'. Those who take to the streets are represented as a homogeneous and internally compact non-political masses even though they actually constitute an aggregate characterised by extremely variable boundaries and formed by groups that are decidedly heterogeneous.

Such a representation of the demonstrators can be better understood if framed within the changes that have occurred in knowledge and in police practices since the 1980s. At that time, law enforcement

agencies, according to Della Porta and Reiter (2003), have been increasingly oriented towards *soft policing*, reserving the use of *hard policing* modalities only to very specific fringes of the population. In the opinion of the two scholars, this orientation pivoted on the clear distinction between political crowds and non-political crowds: the latter, desiring exclusively to create confusion and to exercise violence, deserved a differentiated and more severe treatment.

The de-legitimisation carried out by the manuals is fully attributable to this selective logic – the denial of the status of ‘political’ to a given group is functional to justify a repressive intervention against it – but tends to exaggerate it: the border that separates the two types of crowds is pushed much farther, to the point that very few groups of demonstrators are considered to be genuinely ‘political’. As we have seen, through the discursive devices of generalisation and extremism, radically different social subjectivities are reduced to unity through their subsumption into derogatory and depoliticising categories.

While on the one hand the manuals tend to systematically deny the status of ‘political’ to crowds with the clear intention of delegitimising them, on the other hand they make some exceptions. Social subjectivities are considered legitimate, provided they have certain characteristics. Specifically, the presence of a leader is an element to which a strategic function is recognised, under certain conditions: that of guaranteeing the group a clearly identifiable hierarchical structure, capable of rendering its behaviour more predictable and less irrational. Consequently, the absence of a figure in command is considered a threat to the stability of a crowd. In this regard, the Ultras (soccer fans) are considered an emblematic case: the loss of authority by those groups that previously exercised a clear and shared *leadership*, contributing to giving homogeneity to the supporters, supposedly produced the ‘splitting of the curve (a section of the stadium) into different subgroups often in conflict with each other’ (Gianni 2000: 116).

More generally, the absence of a recognised leader is considered an element that introduces additional risks, thereby hindering mediation (Girella and Girella 2008: 117). In this regard, some passages on trade unions are interesting: this social subject, upon which it is considered possible to exercise ‘a valid action of moderation’ (Gianni 2000: 97), receives recognition for its ability to establish a collaboration (Girella and Girella 2008: 116), also by virtue of a solid and legitimate hierarchical structure, to the point that any failure in mediation can be attributed to ‘infiltrators among strikers’ who cause ‘accidents or disturbances of another kind, [giving] the strike a purpose not intended by the demonstrators’ (Gianni 2000: 98).

Thus, the hierarchy and the verticality of the structure, together with the ability to moderate emotional impulses and create a shared sense of belonging are the traits that make a group legitimate in the eyes of the police. These traits are pleasing to law enforcement from a dual point of view: the pragmatic – since they guarantee the predictability of the crowd's behaviour – and the symbolic –

since they refer to something familiar, that is to say, a ‘team spirit’. In other words, their respect for hierarchy, which goes hand in hand with loyalty-based cohesion, is an element whose presence, in the view of law enforcement, renders these crowds capable of giving themselves a *leadership*, of submitting to a leader, and therefore, of appearing to be similar to the police.

In addition to understandable considerations of a practical nature, related to the fact that the possibilities of mediation are all the greater the more the groups with which we are interacting are structured, a kind of mechanism of *similarity* and *mirroring* is at work here: what is acceptable is what is perceived as analogous or isomorphic. In this sense, ‘sympathy’ seems to be attributed to a given crowd, regardless of its political nature, if it has a hierarchical structure and a sense of belonging that acts as a regulator of emotions. Therefore, politicalness is a condition of acceptability that is neither necessary nor sufficient: a group of Ultras who are obedient to a leader – and who, as such, are predictable – can be considered an acceptable crowd; vice versa, a group of trade unionists who do not respect the hierarchy – thus disturbing the balance on which their predictability is based – is esteemed to be illegitimate.

Furthermore, the mechanism of similarity and mirroring also acts when the actual politicalness of a crowd is subject to evaluation. As has already emerged from the works of Della Porta and Reiter (1998, 2003), attention towards specific and concrete issues – such as work – with respect to which law enforcement agencies can show a certain sensitivity is a factor that undoubtedly favours the perception of a commonality of views. In this sense, the trade union is a subject that tends to be considered close and similar, also by virtue of its active and strategic role in the process of demilitarisation and democratisation of the police and its function of containment and channeling of social conflict, which has made it an institutional alternative to the most radical forms of conflict. The orientation towards more general and abstract themes, on the contrary, can produce an increase in perceived distance. For example, social subjectivities such as no-global ones (which are often cited in the manuals) are not recognized as truly political but as ‘spurious’, seeing as they are interested in issues that are considered to be too broad.

The appreciation shown towards concreteness, hierarchy, and a well-regulated ‘spirit of the herd’, therefore, reveals the criteria on the basis of which a crowd is considered legitimate and acceptable and contributes to the emergence of the vision of public order contained in the manuals. As we have seen, within these texts, attention tends to focus not so much on *acts* of violence towards people or things, but rather on their *authors*: the subversives, the troublemakers, and the guerrillas are located in well-defined categories *regardless* of their concrete actions. The construction of the enemy that takes place through the continuous use of specific discursive devices – categorisation, homogenisation, generalisation, and extremism – favours an interpretation of the behaviour and practices of the demonstrators centred on the personal qualification attributed to the subjects more

than on the acts these subjects actually perform.

Therefore, once the enemy has been constructed and the categories of enemies identified, the police feel entitled to intervene independently of the actions concretely carried out by demonstrators, based on an *a priori* judgment regarding the ‘constitution’ of the individuals facing them. In this sense, the manuals legitimise a shift from a reactive logic to a preventive yet repressive logic. In other words, the threshold beyond which it is possible and correct to intervene tends to be lowered more and more: if those who take to the streets are potential criminals, then it is appropriate and legitimate to act in a coercive way long before acts of violence or disagreements have materially occurred.

Therefore, the manuals promote a crowd management model that is defined in the literature as authoritarian policing (Reiner 2000, Waddington 1999), seeing that they represent the police as an institution charged with ‘ontologically’ managing and governing non-consenting crowds and potential enemies who, by their simple presence, endanger security and social peace.

Concluding remarks

The analysis carried out in this article has provided important information on how specific representations of the crowd are constructed in the manuals: radically different social subjectivities are united by being considered equally crazy or criminal, while the figure of the “enemy” tends to expand excessively. In constructing these representations, the texts under examination put into practice rather rigid categorisation processes, tracing the boundaries of a ‘moral community’ (Fassin 2011) which is extremely exclusive, in that it is denied to a rather large number of social groups.

The fact that these manuals are based on a selective logic is not surprising: the distinction between deserving and undeserving subjects is central to police knowledge and the concrete work of law enforcement. In fact, this distinction serves to legitimise the limits placed on certain modes of action and specific social subjectivities, and is based on a precise mechanism: to deny the status of ‘political’ to such actions and groups. As we have tried to show in this article, the systematic ‘depoliticisation’ of the movement actors is a strategic discursive device in de-legitimising less welcome social subjects and in justifying an ‘energetic’ intervention towards them. The rigid processes of categorisation and selection implemented by the manuals therefore not only have a symbolic scope, but can also have strong practical consequences, serving the legitimisation of a certain formulation – preventive yet repressive rather than merely reactive – of public order.

Thus, these manuals, which represent as appropriate a use of force aimed at affecting large categories of people on the basis not of their actions but of their attitudes and, above all, their views of the world, legitimise the invasion of the police into the sphere of ethical choices: it is ideas and values, not facts, that are to be censored. In other words, these texts implement a sort of ‘moral surgery’ – legitimising the repression of ways of being and thinking rather than actions – and thus

express, albeit indirectly, an ethical vision of the state which conform, at least in part, to an ideal conception of public order.

More specifically, the categorisation of individuals seems to be aimed not at maintaining public order, but rather at reproducing a hierarchical social order based on deep stratifications: each individual present in public squares or stadiums is reminded what his/her place in society is. From the texts analysed here, therefore, an organicist view of society emerges: those parts that constitute a kind of pathology must be removed in order to preserve the healthy part. Moreover, although the manuals do not explicitly address gender issues, they do show, albeit indirectly, a male chauvinist approach. The images they contain and spread are basically masculine as they are imbued with a paternalistic, hierarchical and coercive representation of social relations.

In broader terms, the analysis of the Italian police manuals shows how certain conceptions of social subjectivity are the prerequisite for legitimising given conducts of action. As argued by Borch (2013: 598-599), both the irrational and the rational conceptions of crowds can give rise to tactics of completely opposed management of the city squares. On this point, the Italian case shows how a simultaneously de-rationalising and hyper-rationalising vision of crowds clearly justifies preventive yet repressive action.

The analysis of these manuals also shows how a certain reading of crowds reinforces their pathological labelling, which works toward their depoliticisation (Aradau 2015): the leaders and the guerrillas described in these texts are represented as subjects detached from the 'healthy social body', who therefore must be removed or, in any case, rendered harmless so as not to damage and 'contaminate' the rest of society. In this sense, the manuals are part of a preventive logic based on a certain type of codification of collective behaviour (Nishiyama 2018): once having attributed a certain behavioural code to a crowd and to the individuals who are part of it, summed up through an effective and evocative verbal label – 'troublemakers', 'subversives', 'thugs', 'no-global' – 'repressive prevention' is fully legitimised.

The Italian manuals for the training of mobile units, in conclusion, express an ideal rather than a material notion of public order. If we therefore consider the views they convey as proof of an accomplished democratic change in the passage from the fascist regime to the Republic, we have to conclude that the transition towards an actual Republican police is far from being completed in Italy. Even in a post-bipolar political scenario, in which the bugbear of communism and communist parties, movements and social forces is no longer credible and, consequently, a mode of government based on the fear of these phenomena is absolutely not sustainable, the categorisation of people by means of political and ethical principles continues to be central within police knowledge. Those who express certain ideas and show certain visions of social and political conflict must *ipso facto* be considered as a threat to public order. Regardless of the specific acts they carry out.

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