

MUSSOLINI'S

POLICEMEN

Behaviour, ideology and
institutional culture in
representation and practice



JONATHAN DUNNAGE

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Preface and acknowledgements

This book is the fruit of a major research project which dates back to the 1990s, but which was predominantly undertaken between 2003 and 2010. The project was inspired by the relatively limited attention which historians of fascist Italy have given to the role of the regular police forces in running the dictatorship. Studies of fascist repression have more often focused on the activities and personnel of Mussolini's secret police organisations, such as the OVRA (*Opera Vigilanza e Repressione dell'Anti-fascismo*, tasked with uprooting clandestine anti-facism), or have tended to consider the regime's police measures from the perspective of the victims. The early phase of the project was, therefore, concerned with examining how the regular forces of the Interior Ministry Police and *Carabinieri* (military police) controlled and interacted with Italian society during the dictatorship. After a preliminary survey of documentation of the Interior Ministry held at the Central State Archive in Rome, I undertook a detailed case study of the policing of Siena. My choice of the Tuscan town and province was motivated by the fact that, unlike most provincial archives, the Siena State Archive holds a full collection of documents of the Prefecture and *Questura* (provincial police headquarters) dating back to the fascist period. These sources also revealed a wealth of information relating to the internal hierarchies of the police forces, allowing me to go some way towards reconstructing day-to-day work inside Siena's police headquarters, as well as the lives and careers of officials and officers who served there. This inspired the second phase of the project, which is the main focus of the present volume. While continuing my work on Siena, I also started to examine the notable quantity of police literature (journals, newspapers, manuals, regulations, etc.) kept at the National Library in Florence. This enabled me to analyse Italian police culture in the context of Mussolini's 'fascistisation' of the Italian state. I then proceeded to embark on a more thorough investigation of the recruitment, training and working lives of members of the Interior

Ministry Police during the fascist years. For this purpose, I returned to the Central State Archive. My work in Rome focused on analysing the contents of a sample of personal files of police officials and employees whose careers spanned or overlapped with the period of the dictatorship. I also made use of a wide range of other documents which illustrated how the hierarchy and internal organisation of the Interior Ministry Police were managed during the dictatorship.

A large amount of the material in this volume is previously unpublished. Parts of the volume incorporate content from earlier articles and book chapters arising from the project, though these texts have not been directly reproduced. A preliminary survey of Mussolini's police appeared in 'Social Control in Fascist Italy: The Role of the Police', in C. Emsley, E. Johnson and P. Spierenburg (eds), *Social Control in Europe*. Vol. 2, 1800–2000 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), pp. 261–80. I am grateful to Palgrave Macmillan for allowing me to re-use material originally published in an overview of police personnel, 'Mussolini's Policemen, 1926–43', in G. Blaney, Jr (ed.), *Policing Interwar Europe. Continuity, Change and Crisis, 1918–40* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 112–35. Some of the content of the book was briefly summarised in 'Italian Policemen and Fascist Ideology', *The Italianist*, 31:1 (2011), 99–111 (www.maney.co.uk/journals/ita; www.ingentaconnect.com/content/maney/ita). Parts of Chapter 3 regarding the case-study of Siena originate from my article, 'Surveillance and Denunciation in Fascist Siena, 1927–1943', *European History Quarterly*, 38:2 (2008), 244–65 (SAGE Publications Ltd: www.sagepublications.com), and a paper given at the international conference, 'Gli spazi della polizia. Un'indagine sul definirsi degli oggetti di interesse poliziesco', held at Messina, in November 2006, which will appear in a forthcoming volume edited by Livio Antonielli (published by Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, Italy). The inspections of the fascist police, analysed in Chapter 4, are the subject of a short essay, "A sufficienza, ma senza letizia": The Performance of the Fascist Police in the Reports of the Public Security Inspectors', in G. Talbot and P. Williams (eds), *Essays in Italian Literature and History in Honour of Doug Thompson* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), pp. 125–32. Chapters 3 and 4 also make use of material from an earlier summary of the findings of my research in 'Des fervents de "L'État totalitaire" aux tenants du "quieto vivere": le personnel policier dans l'Italie fasciste', in J.-M. Berlière, C. Denys, D. Kalifa and V. Milliot (eds), *Métiers de police. Être policier en Europe, XVIII^e–XX^e siècle* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008), pp. 509–21. Parts of my analysis of the recruitment and careers of fascist policemen originally appeared

in 'Ideology, Clientelism and the "Fascistisation" of the Italian State: Fascists in the Interior Ministry Police', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 14:3 (2009), 267–84 (tandfonline.com). Parts of Chapters 6 and 7 were first published in 'Surviving Fascism; Narrating Fascism; Transferring Fascism: A Preliminary Investigation of the Evolution of Italian Police Culture from the Dictatorship to the Republic', *The Italianist*, 29:3 (2009), 464–84 (www.maney.co.uk/journals/ita; www.ingentaconnect.com/content/maney/ita).

I am indebted to the British Academy whose two Small Research Grant awards financed several visits to Rome, Siena and Florence during the course of the project. I am grateful to the staff of the Central State Archive in Rome, the Siena State Archive and the National Library in Florence for the assistance they gave me during these visits. I owe a great deal to colleagues and fellow researchers for providing invaluable advice on the original fieldwork and for reading and commenting on drafts of the book. I cannot name them all, but I especially wish to thank Jean-Marc Berlière, Mauro Canali, Nick Carter, Rebecca Clifford, Philip Cooke, Michael Ebner, Clive Emsley, Joanne Klein, Luca Madrignani and Philip Morgan. I am also grateful to Daphne and Andrew for putting me up in their flat in EUR during several of my trips to Rome. My thanks are also due to the staff at Manchester University Press for their support and assistance while I worked on the manuscript and during the production process. Finally, I am indebted to my wife, Adriana, for the encouragement, patience and love she constantly showed me during the many years which the project took up.

Introduction

In May 1940, a few weeks before Italy entered the Second World War as an ally of Germany, the *Questore* (provincial police chief) of Turin provided the Director of the Personnel Division of the Interior Ministry Police with a list of complaints about his officials. This provides us with an illuminating picture of the state of Mussolini's Public Security forces in a major urban and industrial centre, fifteen years into the fascist dictatorship:

1. Commissioner Ianni is of a venerable old age and makes no contribution.
2. The same can be said of Cavalier Petti.
3. Cavalier Numis is a hypochondriac who does little and is in conflict with everyone, and whom I have many times asked to leave Turin and take up a post of his choice so that he does not continue to play the martyr in the face of my insistence on rigour.
4. Cavalier Vecchione could be a capable commissioner, but since his arrival in Turin he has been continually unwell and I do not believe that big sacrifices in the area of active policing can be asked of his physique.
5. Cavalier De Palma continually makes trouble and cannot undertake the direction of important services.
6. Cavalier Rossetti is a diligent official, but his health conditions prevent him from being entrusted with tasks which require physical energy.
7. Cav. Chiocca could be a capable official but his deafness has now reached such a point that his working ability has seriously diminished.
8. Cavalier Tornabene, owing to his age (sixty-five years), cannot be employed in public order services.
9. Cavalier Di Tommaso is an official of modest and limited potential, like Barsotti and several others.

The *Questore* concluded: 'There are a few low-ranking officials who have to undertake tiring evening and night shifts in turns. And, with

the exception of the odd heroic spirit, their fatigue manifests itself in forms of discontent (muttering, anonymous notes, etc.). This is the true state of things, without the slightest hint of pessimism.’¹ When considering the *Questore*’s words, allowances should be made for the likelihood that younger-age police officials were being drafted into the military during the period in question. Nevertheless, they are very much in contrast with propagandised images of a modern and powerful institution which had been projected to the Italian public since the early 1930s, suggesting that fascist calls since the birth of the dictatorship for a rejuvenation of police personnel, and their injection with the values of a new ideological era, had been largely ineffectual.

This book examines the careers and lives of regular Italian police personnel against the background of Mussolini’s rise to power and his attempted construction of a new fascist civilisation. Based on an examination of official documents (circulars, memos, reports, etc.), unofficial correspondence, journals, regulations and handbooks, it considers how police officers and officials were recruited and trained, the daily tasks they faced and the manner in which they performed them, the punishments meted out to them, and, where possible, their lives outside the force. The book analyses how, and to what extent, the new regime transformed the existing structures and functions of the Italian police, paying special attention to the impact of fascist rule from the internal institutional perspective and from the point of view of individual policemen.

In the above context, the book widely explores the cultural environment in which Mussolini’s policeman acted. It examines both his formal training and the rituals and iconography which his institution adopted during the fascist period. It argues that under the leadership of Arturo Bocchini the Italian police were protected from direct interference from the Fascist Party and that any form of ‘fascistisation’ they were subjected to is hardly comparable with the more determined Nazification of Hitler’s police. Yet the presence of ‘first-hour’ fascists (members of the fascist movement before Mussolini came to power) and younger-generation fascists in the Italian police and the institution’s envelopment in the ‘aestheticisation’ of politics undertaken by the regime deserves more serious consideration. In this regard, the volume aims to assist a process of ‘catching-up’ with the more advanced historiography of Nazi repression. While there is little space for a detailed comparison of the Nazi and fascist police systems, my study aims to contribute to recent scholarship which questions the distance between the two regimes in terms of their capacity to employ coercion and intimidation and which challenges assertions, bolstered by the popular notion that

Italians are ‘good-natured’ (*Italiani brava gente*), that fascism was essentially ‘harmless’. The repressive aspects of fascism have, indeed, been neglected, partly as a consequence of revisionist interpretations underlining the allegedly high levels of consensus enjoyed by Mussolini’s regime.² Conversely, the recent historiography of Nazi repression has brought into doubt the desire or ability of the Nazi regime to ‘terrorise’ all sectors of German society.³

The evolution of Mussolini’s police is considered against broader issues regarding the ability of the fascist regime to bring about long-awaited modernisation of the administration of the Italian state. Guido Melis underlines, for example, the failure of fascism at the end of the 1920s to bring a ‘culture of efficiency’, characterised by technocratic innovation, into the traditional (ex-liberal) bureaucracy. In what amounted to the co-existence of two administrative cultures, campaigners for modernising reforms among both fascists and civil servants ‘emigrated’ into the growing ‘parallel’ administration of the Corporate State.⁴ In a study particularly focused on geographical and demographic distinctions delineating these opposed bureaucratic cultures, Mariuccia Salvati suggests that the ‘traditional’ state, mainly staffed by Italians from the poorer South, was, during the course of the *ventennio*, overlapped by a new, less formalistic, more modern and politically more reliable bureaucracy responsible for economic development, education and the administration of welfare, and made up principally of younger generations of Italians from the North and Centre, many of whom staffed the organs of the Corporate State and the Fascist Party.⁵

The Public Security institutions were undoubtedly tied to the ‘traditional’ state bureaucracy and culture, employing men mainly from southern Italy, many of whom had joined the police in the absence of ‘better’ career outlets. However, there is evidence of historic pressure from within the police ranks for what many considered overdue institutional reform in the face of professional malaise, poor structures and hierarchies, and an inefficient organisation of tasks. Such needs were manifest in the belief that modernisation and ‘fascistisation’ were synonymous, held by high-ranking police commissioners who had trained in liberal Italy but had later been converted to fascism. Similarly, several first-hour fascists who joined the force during the late 1920s, together with younger-generation fascists recruited during the decade which followed, campaigned for the ‘Revolution’ to penetrate the police more effectively in order to improve the professional qualities of the service.

Yet, while the development of the repressive machinery of the

dictatorship saw a partial modernisation of the Italian police, this volume argues that there was some divergence in the quality of performance between specialist policing units and less privileged regular forces. In the scenario of limited availability of funding, modernising incentives for the regular police forces were inhibited by the survival of old-fashioned working practices and recruitment criteria. If 'bad' habits inherent in the 'traditional' state partly accounted for these failings, they may also be attributed to the fact that those new political forces calling for reform of the bureaucracy embraced the system of clientelistic relationships which had underpinned public office in the 'old' Italy. It is no coincidence that among police personnel there were plenty of genuine or self-proclaiming fascists (though often mediocre professionals) supported by the *raccomandazioni* of Party hacks or members of the Government.

The main focus of this study is on the regular forces of the Interior Ministry and the military police (*Carabinieri*). This reflects my intention to help overcome a notable gap in the historiography of fascist repression, which until now has paid more thorough attention to Mussolini's secret police.⁶ By comparison, scholars of Nazism have paid considerably more attention to the evolution and roles of the regular German police forces under the Third Reich. If the fascist regime privileged the activities of the OVRA secret police and the spy networks of the POLPOL (the *Divisione Polizia Politica* – Political Police Division – of the Interior Ministry Police) over the regular forces of the *Carabinieri* and the Interior Ministry Police, entrusting the former organisations with the most delicate tasks in the struggle against underground dissent, the latter forces, making up the majority of policemen, played a key role in controlling Italian communities and enforcing fascist policy. It should be stressed that between these two regular forces, the volume gives greater focus to the Interior Ministry Police, especially where individual careers and profiles are concerned. This is explained by the more limited availability of papers relating to the internal workings of the *Carabinieri* and the absence of readily consultable files for their personnel. Nevertheless, the volume provides a detailed picture of the activities of the *Carabinieri* as a key organ of the fascist police state and their relations with the communities under their jurisdiction and other law enforcement bodies, as well as offering some insight into the evolution of their internal culture during the dictatorship.

My opening chapter examines the relationship between the Italian police forces and fascism during the early–mid 1920s against the background of professional strains widely experienced under the liberal

state, which came to a head during large-scale social and political unrest in Italy after the First World War. The chapter illustrates how, in spite of notable levels of support for fascism among policemen, Mussolini's movement was hesitant in its relations with the police, particularly the institutions of the Interior Ministry. This was also reflected in the early fascist Government's wavering attitude concerning the role which different police forces should play in the new political order, before Mussolini finally invested the Interior Ministry Police as the leading organ responsible for defending his dictatorship.

[Chapter 2](#) analyses how effectively a fascist culture penetrated the police. It contrasts the regime's official and much propagandised integration of the Public Security forces into the new political order with the ideological and professional shortcomings behind recruitment and training procedures, demonstrating that while processes of 'fascistisation' took place, they were highly ambiguous or conducted on an ad hoc basis, rather than being centrally co-ordinated. Turning to an analysis of the daily practices of law enforcement in fascist Italy, [Chapter 3](#) examines the professional tasks entrusted to the regular organs of the Interior Ministry Police and the *Carabinieri* at the level of the community and the type of relationships with the public which arose out of this. It assesses the ability of the regular Italian police to determine the orientation of fascism at the local level, in view of the extension of their political responsibilities, which now included monitoring the activities of the Fascist Party. [Chapter 4](#) assesses the quality of performance of the regular police and the effectiveness of internal hierarchical structures governing them during the fascist years, before taking a look at issues regarding the welfare and livelihood of personnel and their families. Both [Chapters 3](#) and [4](#) question how enduring any attraction towards fascism was for regular policemen, given that, beyond new powers and career prospects, the advent of the dictatorship brought greater responsibilities and an intensification of work, which were not always supported by adequate resources.

[Chapter 5](#) presents profiles of the careers and lives of a selection of members of the Interior Ministry Police, with a view to consolidating understanding of issues raised in previous chapters. It questions in particular how far successful careers depended on ideological 'status' and whether fascist personnel distinguished themselves from colleagues in their professional conduct. It situates the behaviour of a considerable number of fascists in their previous experiences of participation in the fascist movement, or, for younger generations, in the Fascist Party youth organisations. The chapter reveals how many policemen, whatever their ideological persuasion, were egocentric and opportunistic in their

pursuit of career advancement, suggesting that fascism's endeavours to instil in state personnel selfless dedication to the profession, inspired by love of the fatherland, were largely unsuccessful.

Chapter 6 considers how the Italian police forces reacted to the gradual demise of fascism, underlining how their growing dissociation from the regime reflected its failure to engender lasting loyalty among personnel. It starts by analysing their enforcement of anti-Jewish policies (commencing with the 1938 Race Laws), before going on to consider their conduct in the face of growing popular dissent and military defeat arising from Italy's fateful entry to the Second World War in June 1940. The chapter then examines how police personnel handled the institutional and ideological dilemmas surrounding the Nazi occupation of Italy and the creation of the Italian Social Republic (September 1943 to April 1945). The final part of the chapter analyses the purge procedures which police personnel faced following the Liberation. It illustrates how the great majority of policemen, fascists included, emerged from the defeat of fascism relatively unscathed.

Against the background of this failed purge, the final chapter examines the consequences of limited institutional reform in the immediate post-war period for the culture and practice of policing in the Italian Republic. The majority of policemen may have repudiated Italy's fascist past formally, but their embrace of democracy was highly ambivalent. Although most had not been full-fledged fascists, the experience of fascism reinforced their authoritarian tendencies and their prejudices against particular human 'types' or groups. If fascism in any way succeeded in enhancing the self-esteem of the Interior Ministry Police, which before 1922 had considered themselves the 'Cinderella' of the Italian state, this only encouraged a high-handed attitude to public order maintenance during the early years of the Republic.

Notes

- 1 Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell'Interno, Direzione Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Personale di Pubblica Sicurezza (1890–1973), Fascicoli Personale Fuori Servizio (1890–1966), versamento 1957 (hereafter ACS, FPFS, year), b. 195 bis, f. Santini Andrea, 2266 Questore Torino to Commendatore Schiavi, 22 May 1940.
- 2 On this, see P. Corner, 'Italian Fascism: Whatever Happened to Dictatorship?', *Journal of Modern History*, 74:2 (2002), 325–51.
- 3 See, for example, E. Johnson, *The Nazi Terror. The Gestapo, Jews and Ordinary Germans* (London: John Murray, 2000), pp. 14–15, 484–5.
- 4 G. Melis, *Due modelli di amministrazione tra liberalismo e fascismo* (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1988), esp. pp. 233–4.

- 5 M. Salvati, *Il regime e gli impiegati. La nazionalizzazione piccolo-borghese nel ventennio fascista* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1992), esp. pp. 219–21.
- 6 See especially M. Canali, *Le spie del regime* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004); M. Franzinelli, *I tentacoli dell'OVRA. Agenti, collaboratori e vittime della polizia politica fascista* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999).



'Cinderella status': the liberal police and the lure of fascism

In December 1925 an article published in the police journal, *Il magistrato dell'ordine*, reflected upon the broader implications of a failed attempt on the life of the fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini. The article carried the signature of the Editor-in-Chief, a retired police commissioner, Emilio Saracini. Entitled 'Long live the Italian police!', it proclaimed that the ability of the forces of law and order to prevent the outrage and by implication to safeguard the future of the nation had resulted in widespread public praise for their institution. The article referred to a crowd chanting 'Long live the Italian police!' in front of the Prefecture in Turin. But it was thanks to the ability of the fascist Government and Mussolini to reform the police, Saracini argued, that the assassination attempt had been foiled.¹

We may appreciate why Saracini's article uses the incident to stress the 'redemption' of his institution, if we go back twenty-five years to July 1900, when the assassination of King Umberto I by an anarchist in the Lombard town of Monza confirmed in the public mind the deep-rooted defects of the Italian police. In his volume, *I crepuscoli della polizia* (The Decline of the Police), published on the eve of Mussolini's appointment as Prime Minister, Saracini underlines the indignation provoked by the crime, which, it was suggested, could have been prevented if security measures had intensified following an unsuccessful assassination attempt in Rome in April 1897. In line with the general tone of his volume, one senses bitterness in Saracini's words over the institutional humiliation which the regicide provoked. Such feeling was reinforced by his belief that Italy's governments time and time again failed to carry out long-awaited reforms to the police.²

Saracini's open support for the fascist Government lay in his purported belief that fascism would resolve historic deficiencies in the organisation of Public Security which, he argued, had been neglected over decades of liberal rule. Unsurprisingly, much police literature of the fascist period portrayed liberal Italy as having turned

its back on the needs of the forces of law and order. This chapter analyses the relationship which developed between the Italian police and fascism, first as a movement, later as a government, against the background of decades of collective professional difficulties which are widely documented in the initial section. Though experienced subjectively on many counts, such difficulties reflected genuine institutional weaknesses. In the scenario of widespread social and political unrest following the end of the First World War police officers and officials were attracted by and often benefited from the blackshirt movement's violent initiatives against socialism. Police identification with the politics of Mussolini in the longer term would also depend on how able fascism was to address their professional aspirations. Yet, until the establishment of the dictatorship in 1925, the young fascist Government was largely mistrusting of Italy's Public Security forces and hesitant about the future awaiting them.

A miserable fate: being a policeman in liberal Italy

The rise of Italian fascism was largely the consequence of a major crisis in public order which followed the First World War. Such a crisis was the culmination of decades of considerable affliction in matters of policing. From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, Italian politicians, social observers and members of the profession had regularly expressed concern about the sad state of their country's police forces. Outdated structures and methods, poorly qualified and inadequately trained personnel, and limited resources, they argued, made it hard to maintain order and control criminal activity. In his detailed work on the organisation of the Italian police, published in 1898, a high-ranking police commissioner, Giuseppe Alongi, indicated the consequences of such deficiencies in the sad fact that 31% of crimes went unpunished, whilst 37% of individuals arrested for criminal acts were acquitted owing to lack of evidence.³ This state of affairs accounted for the limited prestige enjoyed by the police, which in turn only enhanced the sense of professional malaise among their personnel.

From the perspective of individuals like Alongi and Saracini, this situation reflected the low esteem in which governments held the police in comparison with other institutions of the state. Saracini claimed, for example, that pay levels and promotion opportunities in the Interior Ministry Police were disadvantageous in comparison to professions in other sectors of the same Ministry, thus discouraging ideal candidates from applying to join the force. He argued that the highest office of Director General of Public Security (*Direttore Generale della*

Pubblica Sicurezza) was rarely entrusted to a policeman. This suggested that governments considered practical expertise in law enforcement irrelevant for the task of running the police. In a similar vein, Saracini argued that representatives from the profession were hardly ever allowed to sit on police appointments committees.⁴

Professional hardships which policemen faced were apparent in their strained and sometimes violent encounters with the public, too. This ensued in part from the development of trade unionism and left-wing political militancy during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. This led to episodes of physical confrontation during strikes and public protests, reaching a point of severe crisis during the late 1890s, which not infrequently witnessed the killing of considerable numbers of demonstrators by the forces of law and order. The risks of casualties increased when the army had to be called to assist police forces which were unsure of their ability to handle large crowds.⁵ Coercive government policies to deal with mass protest and social disorder, though reflecting 'a frightened reaction to social upheaval and the perceived danger of national disintegration', were further encouraged by awareness of the inadequate resources at the disposal of the police.⁶

The tenseness of encounters between the Italian police and the public stemmed from the historic lack of trust characterising the relationship between Italian government and society. In this context the particular concept of public order which the liberal rulers of the new state of Italy adopted in 1859 was partly inherited from the earlier absolutist states making up the geographical area of Italy. Periods of civil unrest and opposition to the unification process during the 1860s, marked by brigandage in the South, helped to reinforce the idea of an unruly populace which needed to be handled through 'preventive' policing in anticipation of crimes being committed. Consequently, the Italian Public Security Law of 1865 gave the police the power to impose limits on the rights of free speech, association and public assembly granted by the liberal constitution of 1848. Of greater concern to its critics, the law provided the police with powers of cautioning (*ammonizione*), which authorised the imposition of restrictions on the movements of individuals, and enforced domicile (*domicilio coatto*), usually in a remote part of the country or on one of Italy's many islands housing penal colonies. These instruments allowed the police to control the unemployed, vagrants, idlers, habitual or suspected criminals and, increasingly, political 'offenders', without the need to go through time-consuming judicial procedures.⁷

Though they were operationally responsible to their superiors in the Public Security hierarchy, police forces in the provinces ultimately

depended on the Prefect (*Prefetto*), the administrative arm of the Government who was also responsible for maintaining public order. Denoting the partisan nature of his office, he often used his powers to dissolve municipal councils holding anti-government majorities. He was also required to help pro-government parties and factions at election time, employing underhand measures for this purpose if necessary.⁸ In such a scenario, the police, as well as enforcing the law, were easily drawn into politically inspired intrigues. These were reinforced by the politics of *trasformismo*, through which governments ensured parliamentary majorities by granting favours to their supporters. Blurring the distinctions between state administration and politics, *trasformismo* strengthened the clientelistic foundations of public life, as parliamentary deputies in turn passed down favours to their electors.⁹

It is not difficult to appreciate why the liberal police forces were largely unpopular and often branded as an instrument of those in power. Policemen who were prepared to be critical of the deficiencies of their own institutions were usually reluctant to question the broader political framework in which they operated. Alongi argued that historic public mistrust of the forces of law and order reflected prejudices which had their origins in the despotic practices of the past. The police had since been reformed into a disciplined and law-abiding institution.¹⁰ However, training methods clearly betrayed police prejudices against the peasant and working classes. This is evident in a handbook written in 1875 for members of the military police (*Carabinieri*). The publication emphasised to each cadet the glorious history of the corps to which he belonged. It presented the *Carabinieri* as bringing justice and social equality to the people. However, the manual betrays the corps' underlying mistrust of the people it was entrusted to police. It stressed to the *carabiniere* how important it was not to become over-familiar with citizens in order to avoid creating a situation in which he would not be able to maintain authority. Equally significant is the manual's advice to the representative of law and order to be firm, rather than polite, with those uneducated citizens he encountered, on the grounds that such people were governed by instinct rather than by reason.¹¹

If the relationship between the police and the lower social classes was characterised by suspicion and mistrust, the efforts of the former were not always appreciated by the more prosperous classes either. In the years leading up to the First World War, the Bologna city police were on occasion demoralised by criticism from the 'law-abiding' public on account of their apparent inability to handle an increase in the number of crimes. From the point of view of the police, such criticism neglected to take into account the growth in the urban population of

13% between 1901 and 1911. Such growth had not been matched by an increase in the number of policemen, in turn reflecting state budget restrictions.¹²

The creation of a positive institutional image went some way towards determining both the extent to which the public 'understood' the police and the level of self-esteem enjoyed by the police themselves. In this respect, the *Carabinieri* benefited from the role they had played in the Italian wars of independence. After unification, they 'became a symbol of the state on the ground, enforcing the state's laws and regulations, protecting the inhabitants on the state's behalf, and sometimes even taking the complaints of the disenfranchised to a higher authority'.¹³ The image in the public mind of the *carabiniere* as defender of society from brigands, floods and earthquakes was established to a certain degree of success, at least among the propertied classes, with the help of illustrated magazines and newspaper stories. Such publications avoided references to action which could be interpreted as oppressive.¹⁴ There is little evidence to suggest that the Interior Ministry Police enjoyed a similar level of national prestige or were as successful in creating an internal culture around their corporate history. However, the mythology created around the *Carabinieri* did not always correspond to the often harsh realities of policing. Clive Emsley notes that the *Carabinieri* were probably more feared but also in some ways more respected than the Interior Ministry guards, yet they were still popularly perceived above all as an instrument of repression.¹⁵

In an article of 1897 published in the periodical of science, letters and the arts, *Nuova antologia*, Alongi pointed out the hard lot of those belonging to his profession, 'present everywhere in order to watch over public and private celebrations without participating in them, to share in public and private tragedies and to face the dangers of the elements, the deception of men, and, worse still, undeserved accusations and insults'.¹⁶ Yet how much internal solidarity there existed in the face of public hostility and how able or willing most police commanders were to address the hardships of the men under their command is questionable. Since members of both the *Carabinieri* and the Interior Ministry Police were prohibited from joining trade unions or forming their own associations, newspaper and journal publications became a useful forum for expressing and discussing professional difficulties, particularly among members of the mid-lower ranks, who often directed the blame for their hardships at their own institutions and superiors. *La tutela pubblica*, a weekly journal for policemen founded in 1909, regularly featured articles and anonymous letters, several of which had originally appeared in the mainstream press. These

denounced the inadequate salaries and pensions, excessively long hours of service, and poor living quarters which police personnel had to suffer. They also lamented the regular employment of lower-ranking policemen as orderlies in the households of prefects and high-ranking police officials, as well as widespread corruption which, it was claimed, stifled professional initiative and ensured that career advancement depended on connections rather than merit.¹⁷

Beyond issues relating to public status, many of the historic tensions characterising the relationship between the *Carabinieri* and the Interior Ministry Police may be attributed to hierarchical ambivalence and territorial rivalry. Though dependent on the War Ministry for matters of military policing, discipline, training and their careers, the *Carabinieri* were answerable to the Interior Ministry Police and the Prefect for matters relating to law and order maintenance, and were expected to provide reinforcements during public order emergencies.¹⁸ Inevitably, members of the *Carabinieri* remained loyal, first and foremost, to superiors within the hierarchy of their corps, allowing the Interior Ministry Police limited control over their activities.¹⁹ This was compounded by the fact that, while the latter had headquarters in the cities and towns only, the *Carabinieri* were present in both urban and rural areas.

Rivalry between the *Carabinieri* and the Interior Ministry Police also revolved around the long-standing question of whether policing should be entrusted to civilian or military forces. At the start of the twentieth century, the Interior Ministry Town Guard (*Guardie di Città*) became the principle police force in urban areas, denoting an attempt to limit the jurisdiction of the *Carabinieri* to the countryside and to distinguish the functions of the two corps.²⁰ If such a measure reflected the consideration that the *Carabinieri* as a military police force were ill-suited to the investigation of crimes,²¹ the military-style hierarchy and procedures characterising the Town Guard were equally cause for concern. Such military attributes were preserved if not enhanced from the turn of the century, if only to increase the prestige and attractiveness of the corps; recruits largely came from the *Carabinieri* and the army.²²

A survey of town guards serving in Bologna between 1880 and 1910 reveals that 60% originated from the regions of southern Italy (21% alone from Sicily), with high percentages having been previously employed in agriculture (29%) and as industrial workers or in artisan professions (36%).²³ Recruitment of police officers from among the poorly educated and unemployed of the South was the source of public criticism which was often dosed with cultural prejudices. Southern policemen, it was alleged, were more impulsive and prone