Article | Surveillance under Mussolini's regime

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Abstract

This paper focuses on state surveillance under Mussolini's regime (1922–1943) in Italy. While the cultural approach to Italian fascism has been fertile (de Grazia 1981; 1992; Ghirardo 1996; Whitaker 2000), archival research on police state surveillance is very limited and, due to the language barrier, has remained unknown in the field of Surveillance Studies. This short contribution is both an attempt to reckon with a surveillance past that has been neglected until recent times and to engage with revealing studies specifically related to state surveillance and classification.

Surveillance under the *duce* was multifaceted and this paper aims at exploring the twenty years of the regime by focusing on different surveillance stages through a socio-historical perspective. Moreover, the concluding remarks briefly address some important issues which are related to political and cultural legacies of the fascist dictatorship that are essential to understanding some contemporary trends.

Introduction

This paper is focused on one of the many forms of the fascist society of surveillance, namely police state surveillance carried out in Italy under Mussolini's regime (1922–1943). New archival evidence (Canali 2004; 2009; Franzinelli 1999; 2000; 2001) has in fact shed light on a 'surveillance past' that has been neglected until recent times. If, on the one hand, a few Italian historians have attempted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the fascist society of surveillance, on the other, this topic—most likely due to the language barrier—has remained unknown to the cross-disciplinary field of Surveillance Studies.

Besides police state surveillance, which is the core topic of this short contribution, fascist surveillance was as chameleonic as its ideology (Togliatti quoted in Schnapp 1996, 238). Surveillance and social control comprised of many forms and had different colors and nuances under the regime. It was, for instance, strictly related to spectacle, especially within the public realm (Ghirardo 1996, 347–372; Falasca Zamponi 2000). The range of activities to maintain hegemony—in a Gramscian sense (1971)—social control and consensus entailed, for instance, the restoration of traditional horse races that had last been run during the 19th century. Urban masses were thus actively involved in the celebrations and as a consequence closely monitored: seduction, as Ghirardo puts it, was combined with coercion (1996, 365).

These mechanisms of fascination (Schnapp 1996) were embodied in celebrations that were either occasions to reinforce consensus or to foster external identification with the regime. Moreover, symbolic surveillance such as that employed for the 1934 plebiscite through urban propaganda when the 'oversized head of Mussolini loomed over and symbolically surveyed the streets, reminding Italians to vote yes [...]' (Ghirardo 1996, 347), represents the attempt to metaphorically control urban environments in a pre-

surveillance camera era. Mussolini was a constant presence and as Forgacs and Gundel claim, it was impossible to ignore his multiple images in public places (Forgacs and Gundel 2007, 237).

Masses (in particular young people and workers) were also involved in organized leisure activities which were a way to obtain consent, exercise and spectacularize power and to implement informal surveillance on civil society. Several organizations were set up to develop a wide range of activities, such as Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro (OND, an agency for after-work activities) and Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB, containing the various youth organizations) and social control over all areas of mass culture was tight (Forgacs and Gundel 2007). In their analysis focused on mass culture and Italian society, Forgacs and Gundel claim that culture and leisure were central for fascists because 'both offered scope for furthering their strategy of refounding the nation and molding the Italian people in new ways' (2007, 235). By the mid 1930s there were nearly 20,000 after-work recreational circles, thousands of veterans' organizations, fascist university groups and organizations for women. De Grazia states that these were 'truly mass organizations' that grouped people to prevent any autonomy of class identity (1981, 16).

Additionally, social control was expressed through interventions in areas, such as maternal care and sexuality, that had previously been considered the private domain of families and traditional authorities (de Grazia 1992; Whitaker 2000). In other words, the extension and the consolidation of state authority was strengthened by means of medical surveillance of maternal behavior and, according to Whitaker, the interest in domestic matters documented how fascism changed the nature of surveillance and social control over individual bodies (Whitaker 2000, 8). Fascist medical politics involved data gathering activities that ranged from health status to obligatory reporting (to the government or to the provincial medical officer) of deformities in newborns, sexually transmitted diseases and abortions (Whitaker 2000, 130–131).

These politics led to an unprecedented politicization and medicalization of maternity and child care. Surveillance was integral to national sexual politics which was implemented via, for instance, the imposition of regimented breast-feeding, and hygienic management of childhood (Whitaker 2000, 7), but also through the definition of what was or was not legitimate as far as sexuality was concerned. State controlled prostitution in the so called *case chiuse* (closed houses) segregated illicit sex from public view and submitted prostitutes to police surveillance and mandatory medical checkups to monitor venereal diseases which were recorded in special passports (de Grazia 1992, 44).

Reproduction and sexuality were in fact seen as political matters for at least two main reasons: firstly, the desire to reach women, especially those of the lowliest social status who were less likely to be influenced by institutions and thus by propaganda, who needed intermediaries (Gissi 2004, 126). In this context, for instance, the co-operation with midwives was vital both to prevent abortions which went against the regime's promotion of the population growth and to propaganda. The second reason relates to efforts to control what were considered manifestations of deviant male gender identity, such as homosexuality, as antithetical to the project of 'transforming Italians into a race of virile warriors who could lead the military expansion of the new Fascist empire' (Ebner 2004, 140). The state controlled not only prostitution but also the sexual behavior through police surveillance of public areas where homosexuals gathered (*ibid*).

Therefore, surveillance under the *duce*¹ was multifaceted and, as mentioned, the regime intervened in a series of areas, including the private sphere. This paper aims at exploring the twenty years of the regime focusing on different surveillance stages through a socio-historical perspective. The emphasis is mainly on police state surveillance because it was vital to the repressive apparatus and as such it seems crucial to explore the organization of the police apparatus in order to define the contours of the 'dossier society' fostered by the regime. This contribution looks at two different stages of surveillance: the first, from

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¹ An Italian word meaning the leader.

1926–1938, was primarily focused on the reorganization of the police, while the second from 1938 onwards was on the one hand more ‘specific’ as far as the target of surveillance is concerned, and on the other ubiquitous since surveillance became a feature of the regime. The multifaceted forms of the fascist surveillance are also briefly described in order to provide the broader socio and cultural coercive context. The concluding remarks address issues related to the success of surveillance under the regime.

Stages of surveillance

Paxton claims that Italy under the regime went through several cycles of radicalization (2004, 148–71), likewise one could argue that the country also went through at least two stages of surveillance. The latter, crucial to maintain control on all aspects of society, was implemented from 1926 and changed in nature and purpose throughout the dictatorship. While the first stage (approximately from 1926 until 1938) was characterized by the reorganization of the police under a new chief, the creation of official bodies and a specific focus on anti-fascist movements, the second was marked both by the anti-Semitic turn in 1938 and the Second World War that fostered categorical surveillance respectively on religious groups and on defeatists. These two stages are strictly interwoven as the first paved the way to the second.

In both stages, the growing numbers of ‘suspects’ seemed to justify the reliance on widespread networks of informers both inside and outside Italy. Besides, the orchestrated institutional measures to maintain control over the country were facilitated thanks to denunciatory practices made by common citizens who betrayed one another to the police. Each stage reveals unprecedented levels of surveillance and epitomizes the fascist vision of a totalitarian state. In two decades repression and control shifted from being anti-communist to an approach that encompassed all ranks and aspects of society through a powerful policing system.

While the following sections explore the overall fascist approach to orchestrate surveillance, it is important to consider that if, on one hand, both a uniform legal framework and a standardized approach to policing lessened the differences between the north and the south of the country, the practices entailed many different forms. This was mainly due to the increasing use of *confino* (internal exile) that under fascism was a consequence of a wide range of potential threats and crimes against the state or suspicion of the intention of engaging in subversive activities. Between 1926 and 1943 around 17,000 citizens were sentenced to *confino* (the most prominent anti-fascist thinkers and intellectuals were sent to *confino*, such as *inter alia* Antonio Gramsci, Pietro Nenni, Piero Gobetti and Carlo Levi) and 160,000 to *ammonizione* (imposing restriction on the activities and movements of individuals) or placed under special surveillance (Dunnage 2004, 266). Individuals sentenced to *confino* were sent to remote areas where they were closely monitored. Hence these rural areas became ‘surveillance enclaves’ where the movements and lives of the *confinati* were regularly controlled.

The first stage of surveillance

Repressive techniques were not new to the country since, as Canali argues, fascism retooled instruments of the Liberal State (2009, 221). The above mentioned *confino*, for instance, was inherited from previous governments. However, early fascist engagement with issues of policing society and surveillance practices is indeed indicative of a new era characterized by unprecedented levels of surveillance, social control and—as we shall see—interventions in the private realm. In 1926–27, just four years after Mussolini’s fascist party came into power, both the Political Police (PolPol) and the Ovla (Organization for Vigilance and Repression of Anti-Fascism) were founded. While the PolPol was considered the intelligence wing of the police, the Ovla functioned more as an operation branch that acted undisturbed in secrecy across national territory and beyond its borders (Canali 2009, 229).

However, before the PolPol and the Ovla, the murder of the reformist socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti in 1924 disclosed the existence of a sort of ‘secret fascist political police’ (Franzini 1999, 7), the so–

called 'Ceka' named after the soviet Cheka. The fascist Ceka not only developed a web of informants but it was also one of the first forms of political repression, namely the imminent precursor of the Ovra. It was Mussolini's informal parallel police that arose from squadristism, a crucial element of the Fascist movement, that fought 'against state institutions as against the pro-Bolshevik left, and defining themselves [the squadrists] as anti-bourgeois and subversive in defense of the symbols of sacrifice in war' (Franzinelli 2009, 92). Founded in Milan in 1918–19, the squadrists used violence against political enemies and from 1924 became the parallel police of the *duce*. The goals of the Ceka were mainly twofold: spy on political parties' important figures who were against fascism and violently repress the 'enemies'. It is crucial to understand the role played by this extra legal body both in relation to further developments as far as violent means to repress any forms of dissent, thus to authoritatively maintain social control, and in relation to the peculiar nature of either legitimate or illegal forms of state surveillance in Italy.

Through the *leggi fascistissime* (thoroughly fascist laws) in 1926 and the total reorganization of the police under a former prefect, Arturo Bocchini, the regime institutionalized surveillance and information gathering on the opponents. Bocchini was a key personality of the dictatorship until his death in 1940. In fourteen years he forged a new police apparatus, increased police powers to a substantial extent and developed an *ad hoc* policing system based on unparalleled levels of social control.

The shift occurred between 1926 and 1930 when the reorganization of the police entailed the increase of the Central Political Records (hereafter CPC which is housed at the Central State Archive in Rome). The latter, established long before fascism in 1894 to maintain files on certain categories of citizens (i.e. anarchists and socialists), by the end of 1927 saw an increase of 100,000 files over the number kept by previous governments (Franzinelli 1999, 63). It is worth noting that the CPC continued to operate until 1968 and was one of the most significant tools of the fascist dossier society of surveillance.

The details were collected in biographical notes constantly updated and kept at the Division of Political Police, that included information about education, skills, moods, moral tendencies (i.e. social attitudes, vices, sexual tendencies, weaknesses), psychological characteristics, criminal records, movements within the country and outside national borders. The notes were compiled and updated by specialized public servants who worked at the biographical service that, from the early 1930s, became a relevant wing of the criminal investigation police (Franzinelli 1999, 64). By 1927 the CPC was already organized by topics that ranged from political affiliation to province, from the most dangerous subversives to the internment of political prisoners in remote areas.

As Ebner argues, this biographical information 'fueled the very personal nature of fascist repression' (2006, 215) as agents and interrogators knew their adversaries and 'capitalized on the human dimension of clandestine militancy (*ibid*). This 'dossier society' went far beyond the files collected at the CPC. There were in fact at least another two categories that need to be taken into account: the files on the surveilled that from 1927 were stored at the Division of the Political Police and which were mainly focused on anti-fascists; and files on the informers identified by numbers and nicknames (Franzinelli 1999, xvi).

Despite 158,000 files at the CPC and 1,250 envelopes that contain files on the surveilled and a list of the informers, Franzinelli claims that crucial parts of the archives have been purposely removed and the most delicate information (i.e. people compromised with the regime) is not freely available to scholars and researchers yet (1999, XVII). Additionally, with the Italian Social Republic (RSI) in 1943 that exercised sovereignty in Northern Italy for two years under both the *duce* and German control, the archives were moved from Rome to the north and several important documents were removed. Many records of the regime were either destroyed or not made public, therefore only a residue of thousands of personal files is open to researchers.

By 1926 when organizations and non-fascist parties had become illegal, close monitoring of citizens' activities—including fascist party members—was regularly carried out. The Public Security Law of November 1926 increased police powers of arrest, control and censorship (Dunnage 2006, 10). In 1927 the Ovla arose from special inspectorates and covered the whole country through eleven zones. The first operational zone was set up in Milan—but included almost all the Northern regions—under the leadership of Francesco Nudi, a police inspector who was in charge until 1937. In Milan the anti-fascist organization *Giustizia e Libertà* (Justice and Freedom founded in Paris in 1929 by the refugees Emilio Lussu, Francesco Fausto Nitti and Carlo Rosselli) was particularly active and it was one of the most important non-communist movements which planned to put an end to the regime. Thanks to double dealers and informers, such as the well known spy Carlo del Re (Rossi 2000), the repressive action of the Ovla was successful and the organization was even publicly mentioned for the first time (Franzinelli 1999, 103). The strategy used against *Giustizia e Libertà* remained similar in following repressive actions: massive information gathering through spies, infiltrates and the employment of agents provocateurs seem to be the most common tactics of the repressive apparatus.

In his study on surveillance and denunciations in fascist Siena between 1927 and 1930, Dunnage shows that police surveillance was also used to contain rather than eradicate dissent when it was not considered a serious threat (Dunnage 2008, 249). Some left dissidents, for example, were subjected to more careful surveillance through different kind of monitoring activities. He also illustrates that the *questore* (provincial police chief) and the prefect relied on different sources to gather information, from police informers to the intelligent service of the Fascist party militia but also hotel staff and landlords who required licenses from the police and were thus obliged to collaborate with them. Those who rented out accommodation 'had to inform the police within 24 hours of the names of guests and tenants, as had been customary in Liberal Italy, but they also had to ensure that they possessed identity cards and to inform the police of the new destination of guests on their departure' (2008, 248). The movements of all foreigners were closely followed and there are large numbers of files initiated by the *questura* that contained information on the behavior of tourists during their stay in Siena. On occasion detailed surveillance was carried out on foreign university students for long periods of time (3–4 years) even though they were not engaged in political activities (2008, 251). It emerges thus, that even in relatively small cities such as Siena, surveillance was carefully orchestrated through specific monitoring activities that involved different social groups.

From 1932 the tentacles of the Ovla (Franzinelli 1999) gradually extended from the north to the south and relied on thousands of paid informers. Some particularly trusted informers had large sub-networks of spies, such as the famous informer number 35, the Florentine woman Bice Papeschi who had nearly 40 spies able to gather information inside and outside the country for more than 15 years (1999, 254). Significantly the Papeschi group was one of the few that succeeded in infiltrating the Holy See thanks to the help of important high members of the clergy.

The informative structures of the Ovla transcended national boundaries and fascist surveillance on Italian migrant communities and refugees, and was as extensive as that carried out at a national level on subversives. The land neighbors like France and Switzerland were monitored at an early stage (mid-1920s) of the regime due to the large number of exiles and anti-fascist organizations such as Justice and Freedom. In particular, France was the country where either exiles or spies were especially active. While the first attempted to discredit Mussolini through the publication of anti-fascist newspapers such as the *Corriere degli Italiani*, the second infiltrated Italian communities and provoked them to commit illegal acts or intensified surveillance and information gathering thanks to the collaboration of consulates and embassies. Italian emigrants were surveilled by secret agents, double-dealers and paid informers who were often ex anti-fascists. Mass political surveillance (mainly carried out in important cities such as Marseille) focused on the refugees and used means and techniques similar to national surveillance strategies: detailed biographical files and lists of subversives were written (usually by consular officials

posted in significant cities) and sent to the CPC. Interestingly enough, the subversives were sorted into categories based on physical features: 'humpback', 'lame', 'cross-eyed' and so forth (Franzinelli 1999, 149).

The politicization (from 1928) of the official representatives of the government in other European countries facilitated information gathering on all Italian citizens residing abroad (Franzinelli 1999, 169). The Ovla's operations in central and northern Europe were coordinated by zone n. 1 (Milan), while the actions in the Mediterranean area (from Portugal to the Balkans) were organized by zone n. 9 (Rome). The majority of the political, non-communist exiles and, as a consequence, of secret agents and informers were in France, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, Luxemburg, Spain and England (Missori 1982).

However, in the CPC there are records on Italian migrants who lived in non-European countries such as Australia, the USA and Canada, proving that the fascist espionage machine functioned all over the world. According to Iacovetta and Ventresca (1996), the CPC contains, for instance, at least 111 dossiers on Italians who resided in Canada in the interwar era. The information contained in the biographical files includes the year and reasons for leaving Italy as well as occupation, physical description, political affiliation, etc. As mentioned earlier, the role played by consular officials in implementing the surveillance apparatus outside the country was significant. It is worth noting that the prefects of the provinces, namely the direct agents and representatives of the Italian provinces, were also particularly important as the CPC officials turned to them in order to obtain information about the expatriates' political affiliations before leaving Italy (Iacovetta and Ventresca 1996).

In the CPC there are also several files on Italian migrants in Australia and as Cresciani observes, the fact that the regime kept a close watch on over one per cent of them betrayed both the dictatorship's sense of insecurity and its perseverance to track potential enemies in remote rural areas (2007, 12–13) in the aforementioned country. Furthermore the files reveal that not only were the exiles controlled, but also parents and relatives in Italy were visited by the *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* (Voluntary Militia for National Security) or by the *Carabinieri*, 'who confiscated letters, photos or other compromising literature sent by the subversive to his next-of-kin' (2007, 13). Migrants attracted the attention of the authorities for reasons that were not always related to anti-fascist activities (i.e. anarchist clubs, proselytism of communist ideas, activities as agitators, etc.). Whoever did not take part in the Consular's celebrations was classified as 'subversive' based on a generalized suspicion that led to mass political surveillance even in very remote regions. Cresciani claims that information gathered and reported to fascist diplomats was carefully cross-referenced and then recorded in the CPC with additional information on the sources who could be '*persona favorevolmente nota* (a well-regarded person), or *fonte attendibile* (a reliable source), or *è stato fiduciarmente segnalato* (it has confidentially been brought to our attention), or *dalle indagini esperite* (from enquiries made)' (2007, 18).

The consolidation of the regime radically changed surveillance on migrants, especially in the aforementioned countries. The dictatorship thus transformed the nature of police state surveillance both in Italy and in other states. Means and strategies were similar to the ones used in the past but the goals, the numbers of the informers and the 'quality' of surveillance techniques were unparalleled. The fascist society of surveillance was so sophisticated that in the 1930s some Ovla specialists went to Portugal, Bolivia and Peru to share their skills (1999, 362–363).

Several successful operations, above all against communist groups and organizations, made the Ovla appealing to police officers who, from the 1930s, were increasingly politicized. In the 1930s the implementation of surveillance techniques, along with an overall systematization of the archives, occurred. The CPC sorted the subversives into 14 categories: 'alphabetical', 'numerical', 'geographical', 'warned', 'political internees', 'distrusted', 'foreign/classified by nations', 'exiles/classified by nations', 'untraceable', 'in hiding', 'dead', 'offenders against the head of government', 'dangerous' and 'expelled'

(1999, 235). The mail was progressively more censored and the Special Reserve Service tapped the telephones thanks to 400 skilled stenographers who worked in the main Italian cities but also in the basement of Palazzo Chigi in Rome 'to refer matters directly to the *Duce*' (Canali 2009, 233; Franzinelli 1999, 237).

The second stage

The second stage of surveillance began at the end of 1930s due to the anti-Semitic turn of the dictatorship and the Second World War. While the race issue had been sporadic until the mid 1930s, the Lateran Pacts with the Catholic Church in 1929 relegated *de facto* other religions to a secondary position in the Italian society (Gordon 2009, 302). Furthermore, colonial possessions in Libya and Eritrea were administered along lines of division which were, rooted in assumptions of European biological racial superiority (Gordon 2009, 302–303). The anti-Semitic turn did not happen in a vacuum: the socio-cultural environment had been already permeated with ideologies and narratives focused on the 'health of race', for instance race propaganda in the Italian press between 1936 and 1938.

As stated above, this second cycle was characterized by categorical surveillance both on Jews and on defeatists. If it is true that surveillance targeted more specific groups, it is also true that it became a common feature of the dictatorial regime to the extent that all ranks of society were under surveillance. The latter was, thus, tailored to 'new' enemies of the regime (i.e. Jews) but it was also, especially during the 1930s, ubiquitous as it was used by the *duce* to consolidate his power, repress any form of dissent, and shape both identities and mass culture. Police state surveillance was in fact only one form of state intervention in order to tighten social control. For instance, the centralization and the extension of propaganda and censorship in the 1930s typifies a particular coercive context where mass culture was closely monitored. Moreover, as mentioned in the introduction, fascist social organization (through several agencies) was central to the regime: parades and rallies served both as means to foster identification with the regime and as ways to reinforce surveillance. If adults did not wear uniforms at rallies, for instance, they were *segnalati*, that is their names were recorded by the police (Forgacs and Gundle 2007, 235).

Fascist biological politics (i.e. medical intervention in maternity, Whitaker 2000) represent an unparalleled intervention in the domestic realm which was carried out with surveillance practices, such as surveillance of infancy and youth or 'hygienic surveillance' of pregnant women (*ibid*) through specific organizations such as the ONMI (National Bureau for the Protection of Maternity and Infancy) which provided many services, *inter alia* public assistance to working mothers, the creation of day-care centers, prenatal medical care, training to midwives and physicians etc. While ONMI was one of the first fascist institutions, it was expanded in the 1930s. In fact, the annual participation of mothers in ONMI increased in the early 1930s (from 400 in 1926 to over 245,000 in 1930) and peaked at around 540,000 in 1937 and 1938 (Whitaker 2000, 199).

It was within this all-seeing state that the racial laws in 1938 ('Laws for the Defense of Race') strengthened surveillance on some groups of citizens, namely Jews. The measures (laws and decrees) known as racial laws, aimed at reducing both the status and the rights of Italian Jews initially through the implementation of control and surveillance, in particular the identification of the Jews through a census followed by a formal exclusion from the life of the nation (Gordon 2009; Morgan 2003). Jews had been included in the latest population census in 1931, however from 1933 the Jewish population in Italy had increased due to migration flows from Germany. More importantly Jews had been included in the 1931 census as a non-Catholic group without any reference to the race: the main difference between the two surveys is that the 1938 census was racial (Collotti 2003, 66).

With the racial laws, Jews were banned from the fascist party, state employment, the army, from owning large business, from state schools and all academies (texts written by Jewish authors were removed from Italian schools). The purge from cultural institutions for example, was carried out through the census of

academy members and required the completion of a survey that institutions had to forward to their members. The form to fill out contained personal details such as whether their parents and next of kin were Jews, if they were registered within the Jewish community, whether they professed Judaism or had converted to Catholicism (Capristo 2005, 84). The institutions had to send the forms to the ministry with the results of the census. There were at least 140 institutions involved in the racial survey (*ibid*: 85) and the institutions were very active in gathering personal data on their members (*ibid*: 86).

According to Ebner (2004), the anti-Semitic legislation and the repression of homosexuals were 'congruous products of the same set of ideological and programmatic priorities' (2004, 152) of the *duce* in order to achieve one of his most important goals, namely the strengthening of the real Italian stock. Several thousand homosexuals were victims of the regime and the repression of what was considered gender deviance was carried out on a regular basis by the police through surveillance and political confinement. While it is true that the phenomena in question are not identical, it is worth noting the link between police state surveillance and forms of social control which go far beyond the repression of 'political enemies'.

Following the racial laws, the *Ovra* specifically focused on spiritual matters. Surveillance through personal biographical files on Jews, but also on Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses, became common practice and special inspectorates carried out 'religious persecutions' (Franzinelli 1999, 370). Pentecostals were considered anti-fascists and rebels and thus 'subversives' like the communists (1999, 366). The prefects solicited the *Carabinieri* to record all the Jews who either lived or passed through their provinces. In particular they collected detailed information on jobs, incomes, behaviors and attitudes towards the regime (Franzinelli 2001, 141).

Institutional top-down surveillance was greatly facilitated by ordinary citizens who denounced Jews thanks also to a harsh campaign of propaganda in the press which, however, is not enough to explain why Italians informed the State about Jews who violated the law. Even before racial laws came into force, in cities like Trieste, where the Jewish community was vast, the political police received several anonymous denunciations against Jews (Franzinelli 2001, 142). Sometimes police officers only needed to put together different pieces of information to achieve a comprehensive overview of Jewish families and their Italian non-Jewish friends who were considered the regime's traitors. Usually the root causes of denunciations were ideological hate, competition in business or mere personal dislike (2001, 2). Between 1940 and 1943 nearly 400 Italian Jews and 6,000 foreign Jews who lived in Italy were either confined in internment camps or moved to locations where they could be easily surveilled. The situation degenerated after 1943 when denunciations and surveillance could lead to persecution and eventually death.

The practice of civilian denunciations is strictly related to organized state surveillance and information gathering. Accusations by thousands of anonymous informers show that surveillance had become part of society; it was a sort of cultural feature encouraged—but not caused—by years of propaganda within an environment characterized by fear and general suspicion. It should be noted that police state surveillance went along with delation; the first prepared the ground for the second and delation 'improved' the fascist apparatus of control and repression. This crucial and disturbing aspect epitomized by a considerable number of Italians who voluntarily denounced their fellow citizens, had been almost unknown until recent times. There is only one work about this kind of aspect written by the independent scholar Mimmo Franzinelli (2001) which is in fact the only bibliographical reference upon which I can rely.² Franzinelli attempts to describe and analyze the phenomenology of civilian denunciations in Italy draws on many archival and unpublished sources, such as the letters sent to the Police, to Mussolini or to the Prefects, the notes sent to the Ministry of the Interior or copies of anonymous denouncements sent to the CPC.

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² The bibliographical references as far as the overall organization of the surveillance apparatus (not of fascism in general) during the twenty years of the dictatorship are very limited, even in Italian. This is the main reason why only a few authors such as Canali and Franzinelli are repeatedly quoted in this paper.

Franzinelli suggests a six stage distinction: a) the second half of the 1920s, when anonymous denunciations became an increasing phenomenon; b) the 1930s, characterized by delation as a common feature of the society; c) the racial laws that represented a dramatic shift, as aforementioned, in this practice; d) from the Second World War to the fall of Mussolini, when informers played a major role in the identification of the defeatists; e) the civil war and the German occupation from 1943 to 1945 that fostered delation against partisans (the Italian resistance movement) and Jews; f) after the liberation of the country, when counter-delation against fascists became frequent (2001, 7–8). This complex aspect had been interrelated to police state surveillance from the very beginning of the fascist's regime, however it was amplified both by the racial laws and the war, in particular during the second cycle of surveillance.

Delation, as aforementioned, consisted of anonymous letters sent directly to the *duce* or his relatives, the police chief, a minister or to party officials. A way of dealing with this information was to use internal exile for the victims of delation as it would have been difficult to use anonymous letters in a trial (Franzinelli 2001, 10). More than half of denounced citizens lost their jobs, were sentenced to *confino* or *ammonizione* or were arrested. This mundane form of surveillance transcended social classes, occupational status and age and was a common practice in all social contexts, from schools (teachers reported on students or vice versa), to workplaces, from the private milieu (i.e. delation against relatives or neighbors) to the church such as 'ecclesiastic delation' that involved cardinals and priests. At times citizens were denounced for trivial matters like discrediting jokes about the *duce* (2001, 97). Thanks to this practice, not only could the regime strengthen repression and maintain social control but it also had a better understanding of public opinion on a wide range of topics. The 'life of others', especially the ideas of ordinary Italians, became utterly important to constantly monitor and explore public attitudes.

Under the German occupation, the Italian resistance movement was spied on through both German and Italian informers, delators and special 'branches' or services of the police such as the well known *banda Koch* ('Koch gang'), named after the leader Pietro Koch. The *banda Koch*, consisted of more than 40 people (some of them former anti-fascists), who reported nearly 630 anti-fascists to the police (Franzinelli 2001, 232). The intensification of denunciations exemplified the 'political, civil and social breakup of the 1943 fall' (2001, 199). As they did in France and the USSR, the Germans used delation—fostered through posters and awards—as a strategy to repress and maintain control during the occupation (2001, 248). This strategy reflects an important shift. Delation was increasingly used as a top-down surveillance and repressive means which differed from the mundane and anonymous kind described in the previous pages. The majority of the letters sent to the Germans were not anonymous as the authors expected an economic reward. It should also be noted that the cooperation between the German forces and the Italian police was paramount to gather and share information on rebels, Jews, communists and anti-fascists. The 'hunt' for the enemies through paid informers converted into a hunt for spies after the fall of the regime. Some regional Liberation Committees (CLN) issued decrees on 'justice and purge' specifically focused on informers (2001, 268). Franzinelli claims that three categories played a major role in the 'hunt for spies', namely the victims of denunciations, partisans whose relatives had been tortured or killed and anti-fascists who were involved in persecutory actions (2001, 268). Several spies and informers were lynched or brutally killed without trial.

Delation usually flourishes under authoritarian regimes: the Italian case is not unique. This phenomenon characterized Nazi Germany, the USSR under Stalin and Vichy France (Franzinelli 2001, 16). There are many similarities as well as important differences among the forms of delation that emerged in Italy, Germany, the USSR and France. Franzinelli, following Hannah Arendt's interpretation of the phenomenon in Germany and the USSR as inherently similar, claims that Mussolini's Italy was not dissimilar from these two countries (2001, 16). On the contrary, Tim Mason suggests that denunciations in Italy were less frequent than in Germany because of different socio-cultural background and practices such as *omertà*, that is a conspiracy of silence towards official authorities (cited in Dunnage 2008, 58).

Potentially, every citizen could be an informer but the repressive apparatus and the cultural practices varied widely. Therefore, comparisons have to be carefully evaluated.

Before he passed away in November 1940, Bocchini reorganized the Ovla in order to expand existing surveillance and monitoring systems on society and public opinion on the whole (Franzinelli 1999, 364). After the fall of the *duce*, under the short Badoglio government (1943–1944), former fascists were not purged from political life and very few were found guilty. However the net of spies and informers was different from the past as several had passed away or refused to cooperate with the police.

While the third article of the July 1944 decree promised punishment for those ‘who, after 3 January 1925, had seriously contributed to keep the regime going’ (Canali 2009, 237) this was not always the case as far as many Ovla officers were concerned. As Canali argues, until the 1960s brutal ex-Ovla functionaries were at the head of security services and armed forces (Canali 2009, 238). The commission established to identify the Ovla informers put together a list of 900 people but before the list was printed in the official gazette of records of the Italian Government many names were removed. The final list contained the names of 622 informers (Franzinelli 1999, 437).

The transition to democracy was marked by a substantial continuity of men and institutions (Della Porta and Reiter 2004, 60) epitomized by either a summary purge or by the lack of a radical reform of police forces. The regime had paved the path with an approach to surveillance and social control that has played a crucial role for many years in Italy.

Concluding remarks

As shown, surveillance was integral to the twenty-year-long dictatorship and it was carefully planned at a very early stage. State surveillance through legal and illegal bodies was not, however, the only strategy used to monitor Italian citizens. The consolidation of power had been obtained through specific politics (i.e. mass organization of leisure) and intrusive state interventions in the private realm (i.e. child care). The relationship between fascism and culture is thus paramount to comprehend more subtle practices which either increased tight social control on the masses in order to repress dissent or attempted to obtain consent through non-coercive activities (Nelis 2005).

While the cultural approach to Italian fascism has been fertile (de Grazia 1981; 1992; Ghirardo 1996; Whitaker 2000) archival research on police state surveillance is very limited and, due to the language barrier, has remained unknown in the field of Surveillance Studies. This short contribution is both an attempt to reckon with a surveillance past that has been neglected until recent times and to engage with revealing studies specifically related to state surveillance and classification.

I investigated this issue by using a socio-historical analysis focused on two stages of surveillance. While the first (1926–1938) is characterized by a total reorganization and modernization of the police that led to an *ad hoc* system mainly based on a widespread network of spies inside and outside the country, the second (from 1938) is exemplified by the Racial Laws which fostered categorical surveillance on minorities. The top down approach has been strongly facilitated by a more mundane kind of surveillance, that is, anonymous denunciations to the police. This phenomenon, illustrated only by one independent scholar (Franzinelli 2001), is crucial to gain a comprehensive insight into how surveillance had become part of the society.

As Haggerty and Samatas note (2010, 5), the most repressive forms of state surveillance did not necessitate cutting-edge technologies in order to orchestrate control. In this respect Italy under Fascism was not dissimilar from other southern European Mediterranean countries such as Greece under anti-communist surveillance (Samatas 2004), Franco's Spain and Portugal under Salazar. Despite substantial

differences as to the type of regime and consequently the forms of surveillance, the aforementioned countries share a common feature: they are all post-authoritarian societies in which the transition to democracy was—to a certain extent—shaped by the past. Therefore, surveillance legacies might have impacted on modern and contemporary dynamics of surveillance, resistance (or lack of) and notions of privacy. An understanding of the surveillance past is thus vital to explore the relationship between surveillance and democracy. A focus on the capabilities of surveillance technologies seems too reductive in these contexts as historical, social and cultural legacies need to be taken into account to achieve a comprehensive picture.

The complexity of the state's role in relation to surveillance requires one to address at least two questions. First, how exceptional the state's role was in Italy as compared to other European countries in the same period of time. Second, how far surveillance succeeded. The forms of repression, surveillance and social control in Italy, as aforementioned, do not diverge inherently from other countries despite significant cultural differences and the extent to which repression was organized. As far as the successes of surveillance are concerned, these should be evaluated in relation to the areas of intervention. For instance, in the view of Forgacs and Gundle (2007) there were limits 'to the Fascist state's colonization of the country' (2007, 198) as there were areas of social residue that did not fully integrate but this statement (drawn from Acquarone 1965) does not shed light on the extent to which surveillance penetrated in such areas. The fact that some social groups (i.e. some intellectuals) did not integrate is perhaps significant as far as the ideological success of Fascism but it does not convey relevant information on the extent to which these groups were subjected to surveillance. According to Gissi (2004), domestic surveillance (i.e. in the areas reproduction and sexuality) was often thwarted (2004, 134) due to resistance. For instance, the relationship between midwives and birth control was actually never broken and the attempt to weaken traditional social networks through the intervention of the State in the private domain such as childbirth was not entirely successful. An explanation can be found in the tension between tradition and modernity in which Italy was caught. While, on the one hand, rigid gender roles went, in part, against new attitudes, such as women's self-determination despite high social costs (De Grazia 1992), on the other hand traditional social networks were difficult to undermine, even in the name of the *duce*. As shown, police state surveillance was carried out systematically through different means, in particular paid informers. However, the fact that Mussolini considered civilian denunciations of particular importance (Franzinelli 2001) raises questions concerning the resources of the police. Nonetheless, the archives testify to the widespread tentacles of the Ovra and bottom-up surveillance practices, seeming to confirm the high level of penetration of fear and suspicion in Italian society at that time. In this sense, the culture of suspicion fostered by the regime and articulated through surveillance, was successful.

Much remains to be learned about this topic. The lack of a reform of the police and the fact the fascists were not purged from political life had severe implications. The dossier-fascist society went far beyond the fall of Mussolini and the Central Political Register continued to maintain files on citizens until 1968 and the CPC was later replaced by the central service for the state security. Information gathering on ordinary citizens persisted for decades after the dictatorship. In 1970, for instance, there were more than twenty million personal files (Della Porta and Reiter 2004, 218). Legitimate surveillance carried out—especially in the 1970s due to internal terrorism—through the Division of General Investigation and Special Operations (DIGOS) seems to reflect an old policing approach. Additionally, the existence of parallel structures within institutional branches (i.e. the Armed Forces Intelligence Services) that has used illegal means of surveillance seems to suggest socio-cultural legacies of the regime. However, path-dependency explanations should be carefully evaluated. Issues of continuity and of discontinuity with the regime in relation to men, institutions and surveillance practices deserve a systematic evaluation that is yet to be achieved both in the national and international literature focused on fascism and surveillance.

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