

# The Stench of Canteen Culture: Cop Culture and the Case of Federico Aldrovandi

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**T**HIS ARTICLE PRESENTS AN ANALYSIS OF ABUSES COMMITTED BY THE Italian police over recent decades, focusing in particular on the case of Federico Aldrovandi, a teenager from Ferrara whose treatment at the hands of the police when he was stopped on his way home from a night out on September 25, 2005, led to his death.

The Aldrovandi case marked a watershed in public perception of police abuse, coming not long after the events of the 2001 G8 protests in Genoa, which had paved the way in terms of bringing the issue into the public eye. Thanks to the work of civil society actors, in particular organizations like Antigone, A Buon Diritto, and Abusi in Divisa,<sup>1</sup> more and more cases of police violations have been brought to light. Of these, 38 cases are well known, though there have been other cases that were never reported or were settled in private as the victim chose to remain anonymous. In all cases, the victims and their families have been supported by a network of legal professionals and activists, as well as at least a part of broader public opinion. The cases have sparked a movement aimed at bringing justice in each specific case but also at raising the level of awareness in society and within the police so that similar abuses can be prevented in the future.

Nevertheless, the question of how to move forward remains open, in terms of both preventing the proliferation of abuse and bringing perpetrators of past abuses to justice via legal means. This article will take the Aldrovandi case as a starting point for an analysis that establishes a nexus between internal police culture and the proliferation of abuse. Using the work of Robert Reiner (1985), the article will look at four dimensions of police culture, as identified by Reiner: isolation, cynicism, the policing mission,

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and political conservatism. These characteristics are formed in an informal context involving elaboration, negotiation, and a familiarization of police practices, something that P.A.J. Waddington (1999), though from a critical perspective, calls “canteen culture,” i.e., a culture existing outside of the contexts regulated by institutional rules and obligations.

Police training and submission to the law and to the institutions of the constitutional state are secondary to police practices, representations, and perceptions, elaborated through the daily interactions between colleagues. What follows from this is a discrepancy between the principles that should direct all police action, i.e., the principles of the rule of law, and a series of practices and representations. The latter, though carried out in the name of law and order, ultimately result in violations of citizens’ rights, the concrete outcome of which can be physical or verbal abuse or even, as in the Aldrovandi case, homicide. This discrepancy will be brought to light following an analysis of the main theories relating to police culture. It will then itself be analyzed. This analysis will in turn demonstrate how actions taken by the police in the critical moment represent the concrete manifestation of the production, through canteen culture and police powers of discretion, of an interpretation of events specific to the police. The conclusion will focus on an evaluation of possible correctives, such as the creation of independent commissions or the obligation for officers to display their officer number. The analytical approach used by Reiner (1985) mainly refers to British police. I deem it as a valid tool to analyze Italian police culture because, firstly, it relates to similar problems affecting an important actor of the judicial and penal system. Culture, brutality, and prejudices by police are common aspects across different contexts. The use of Reiner’s categories can provide a comparative approach to police culture. Secondly, police studies in Italy have only begun to develop in recent years. The analytical apparatus proposed by Reiner can become one of the tools that scholars who study both the culture and practices of Italian police can use.

Material relating to the case of Federico Aldrovandi has been obtained thanks to the help of lawyers Fabio Anselmo and Alessandra Pisa, to whom much gratitude is owed. The documentation consists of statements given by police agents, witness statements presented during court, and a documentary created by journalist Filippo Vendemmiati (2010), *E’ stato morto un ragazzo*. It includes recordings of the phone calls made between the police units involved and central command, as well as various interviews and other material relating to the trial.

### Methodology

This article is the product of content analysis (Roberts 1997). The analysis of the statements of police officers involved both in the beating and the eventual death of Federico Aldrovandi is the core of this article. I will focus on the declarations they made before the court, as well as what they said to each other during work via phone, so as to show how their approach to the case remains quite the same both privately and publicly, though they are more formal when making their statements before the court. P1 is the most cited police officer. This is because his interrogation was longer than that of his other colleagues, because it was this officer who started the intervention and directed it, and also oriented the approach of his other colleagues. Moreover, his declarations are more explicit than that of his colleagues.

### Debates on Police Culture

Italian academia has been somewhat slow to develop a police studies discipline and to approach the issue of police culture in particular. The greater reluctance of the Italian police to work with scholars is exacerbated by restrictive legal measures. This has stunted the development of a relevant sociological or criminological field able to engender greater understanding and, more importantly, to elaborate corrective policy. The main studies relating to the police that exist in the Italian literature are consequently focused on bureaucratic or procedural aspects (Canosa 1976), overlooking, as such, aspects relating to police knowledge and practices. The analysis of these latter aspects would need to be internal, as it requires looking at the significance police attach to their practices and at the collective identity that they develop in relation to their profession. Other more recent works (Palidda 2000) are framed within the social control perspective, yet such works still have little to say on police culture. The most important work on police culture, from which this article takes its theoretical basis, is Robert Reiner's (1985) *The Politics of the Police*. Reiner's analysis takes as its starting point the discretionary powers that guide police work, necessary both because the nature of police work requires that specific situations be evaluated on the spot, and because of the gap between law and police forces' values. Following the analysis of this particular nature of police work, Reiner goes on to identify four different aspects of police culture. The first of these is a sense of mission (ibid., 111), i.e., a justification of police practices that understands their function as being to protect both the victims of crime and a specific way of life more broadly, seen as being under threat from individuals

or social groups that are politically, socially, and culturally other. This vision would seem to coincide with the testimony given by a witness during one of the hearings of the Aldrovandi trial:

The police must also provide protection from them.... I mean that the police carry out their duties throughout the night ... sometimes they pay for it with their lives ... Sometimes, unfortunately, there are victims.<sup>2</sup>

This request for law and order on the part of some sections of the public is read by the police as a justification for the machismo that sometimes characterizes their operations, which will be analyzed in greater depth further on. This mission then forms the basis of the second aspect, cynicism, the term used to describe the police's detached attitude toward the use of violence against actors seen as representing a threat to public order, even where the consequences are tragic. This cynicism requires the police to make assumptions, classifications, and discriminations concerning events and people based on a readiness to suspect. Cynicism encourages the elaboration and circulation of stereotypes that guide the police in different ways according to the codification of the work being carried out (Reiner 1985, 114–15). In the case of Aldrovandi, for example, one of the agents involved in the arrest (quoted in Vendemmiati 2010, 64 min.) made the following comment to a colleague when Aldrovandi was asked to state his name: “as if that’s his real name.”

These first two elements give rise to informal professional rules and practices, as well as “presentation rules” (Reiner 1985, 105): the ways in which the police impart meaning to their actions when relating to the external world. All of this comes together to form the peculiar knowledge, practices, and culture of the police. The dimension of isolation/solidarity, which distinguishes law enforcement agencies from the rest of society and activates mechanisms of internal solidarity aimed at emphasizing and protecting their specificity, is thus generated. It is this isolation that would explain the statements made by one of the agents involved in the Aldrovandi case, agent S, who seeks to justify her actions by calling attention to the length of her career.<sup>3</sup> Agent S takes for granted that her lengthy service, with the consequent internalization of practices and knowledges, is a valid justification in a criminal court. Her attitude reveals a confusion between the police's *esprit de corps* and the general interest that often characterizes the police, the Aldrovandi trial being a case in point. The gap between cop culture and constitutional values of the rule of law are also evidenced in the police's political conservatism, the fourth dimension of cop culture which Reiner (1985, 123) associates

with two specific related fields. The first of these concerns the nature of law enforcement agencies that came into being and developed in response to the need to maintain public order within capitalist societies. The control of dangerous classes, i.e., the working classes, political activists, women, people who identify as LGBTQ, ethnic minorities, migrants, the homeless and other marginalized social groups, constitutes the principle purpose of the police. Public order coincides with the existing social and political order, and as such the forces of order have no choice but to comply with the reproduction of this existing order. The flexibility that would be necessary to respond to continued social transformations is thus foreclosed, generating a paradoxical situation: the protection of the constitutional state is entrusted to a social group that has a disciplinary understanding of social relations and as such is generally geared toward repression and the refusal of diversity for fear that it will cause disorder. Moreover, as Jacques Van Doorn (1965) points out, police officers also have to comply with pressures from their higher ranks. Hierarchies make up an important aspect of police organization. Chiefs set up the performance standards that lower-rank officers have to reach. This has resulted, in recent years, in higher productivity, that is, in more stop and searches and arrests. The need to be more productive can easily result in the constriction of constitutional rights and civil liberties, as contention and repression are seen as more important than the presumption of innocence.

The framework proposed by Robert Reiner has been challenged by more recent research. P.A.J Waddington (1999) put forward the view that the “canteen culture” identified by Reiner should be interpreted in a ritualistic sense. Firstly, it has an expressive aspect intended to justify specific situations. Secondly, it implies a freedom to play as law enforcement agencies need to draw on machismo, racism, and conservatism in order to make sense of the critical situations that they find themselves confronted with. As a result, cop culture should be understood within a ritualistic framework, carrying no other value. Holly Campeau (2015) has also argued along the same lines, underlining the police’s capacity and need to elaborate their experiences by using narratives and reconstructions of their actions. Janet Chan (1996), on the other hand, has proposed a reading of cop culture inspired by Bourdieu. Her analysis sees a constant negotiation between the habitus, the incorporated categories that guide the police’s practices and representations, and the field in the broadest sense as both the setting within which actions take place and the wider social context. Based on this analysis, police knowledges and practices are evaluated according to their dynamic character, the fruit

of constant negotiation both with the external world and between internal forces, arranged in an internal hierarchy.

Though we should recognize the necessity of problematizing police culture and of highlighting its fluid and dynamic aspects, which Reiner (1985, 107) does indeed do himself, there are nevertheless elements that remain constant. We can argue that the events of the 2001 G8 protests and the 2014 case of Ferguson, Missouri, have demonstrated the continuing relevance of Reiner's analytical framework, which holds up across geographical space as well as time. Reiner's categories have, in other words, proved themselves to be applicable in varying sociopolitical contexts. As such, they can also be applied to the case of Federico Aldrovandi. This essay will analyze material relating to the case according to the categories Reiner identified. The two categories of isolation and political conservatism will be merged, as they both relate to the sphere of values within police culture. This aspect will be addressed in the first section. In the following section, the concepts of the policing mission and cynicism will be applied, i.e., those elements of police culture relating to the practical sphere.

### **The Hooligan: Isolation and Political Conservatism**

The category of isolation can be articulated in two ways: internally and externally. Toward the external world, it takes the form of othering, i.e., the codification of actors with which the police come into contact into different categories. Among these categories, Reiner (1985, 117–21) lists “good class villains”, i.e., white-collar workers who commit crimes, and “police property,” which includes political activists, ethnic/racial minorities, people with alternative lifestyles, prostitutes, LGBTQ people, and other marginalized and subaltern classes. Marginalized social groups are considered as “police property” to the extent that their otherness is understood as threatening to the social order. Law enforcement agencies, with their experience in the field, are then understood as the only actors capable of dealing with them. Other categories include “rubbish,” which refers to people from marginalized social groups that call the police to resolve domestic disputes; “challengers,” referring to lawyers, journalists, and social workers; “disarmers,” that is, women, children, and the elderly; “do-gooders,” activists who monitor the police; and “politicians,” whose reforms and public pressure place police efficiency under threat.

In terms of the internal domain, the police's isolation manifests itself in the creation of a solidarity network based on common belonging and

aimed at forming a protective barrier against outside interference. Reiner (1985, 116) defines this strategy as the actualization of a “powerful code” that transcends internal conflicts and hierarchical stratifications in the name of protecting all members. When faced with a critical situation that risks jeopardizing the group’s reputation or overburdening individual members with responsibility, the police can choose to abandon the code. Nevertheless, the most prevalent choice when faced with such situations is to maintain solidarity, serving not only to create an impermeable barrier against external infiltration, but also to reaffirm the police’s identity as a distinct sector, isolated from the rest of society.

In the Aldrovandi case, we see a dynamic of isolation from the external world coming into play when Federico is stopped and immediately identified as “police property.” We also see the same dynamic acting on the internal plane when the code of solidarity is activated against the public outrage incited by the case and against the actions taken by the judiciary to investigate and bring justice.

On September 25, 2005, around 6:00 a.m., a few residents in an area on the outskirts of Ferrara notified police central command of the presence of “a young man in a state of over-excitement” who, in their words, was “rambling nonsensically” and “bashing his head against a post,” according to an internal police report.<sup>4</sup> A police vehicle was sent to the scene, though officers immediately called for backup. The interactions between 18-year-old Federico Aldrovandi and the four police agents present became violent, eventually resulting in Aldrovandi’s death. The recordings of conversations between the first two officers to arrive on the scene and police central command give us a very clear idea of how the events unfolding were being interpreted by the police. Central command (in *Vendemmiati* 2010, 55 min.) described Aldrovandi to the officers initially sent to intervene as follows: “...he is dressed like a social-center<sup>5</sup> type, drug addicted and tattooed.” One police officer on the scene noted:

We’re dealing with a pyscho who weighs about 100 kg ... he’s really crazy and he’s attacked our car... proper nutter, we beat him to a pulp... but now he’s fainted, I’m not sure really, he seems half-dead, he’s passed out.<sup>6</sup>

Right from the beginning of the encounter we can see an attempt to other Aldrovandi, who is described as having abnormal physical and mental attributes that would justify abusive treatment by the police. These sup-

posed abnormalities, as described by officer P1, are reiterated throughout his testimony to the court:

We began to hear shouting, loud nonsensical rambling.... suddenly someone appears and hits the car, kicking the bumper ... he was jumping up and down, with bulging eyes ... at the beginning he seemed like a foreigner<sup>7</sup> because he was dark-skinned ... he had a thick neck like a bull, with veins bulging almost to bursting point and he was shouting, growling even.... he was really something ... one of those social-center types, pumped full of drugs ... anyway, I said: ok why don't we attempt a dialogue... but (Stato di M) says ... that's not going to be enough.<sup>8</sup>

P1's witness statement fits with Reiner's concept of police isolation. The police, using their "dictionary knowledge" (Sackmann 1992), which lends them their capacity to label people and situations, labelled Aldrovandi as other, with respect to both the police and what is considered normal in society. The description of his physical appearance combines the abnormal ("bulging eyes," "thick neck like a bull") with a racial otherness ("he looked like a foreigner"), so that the physical difference coincides with an ethnic/racial difference, revealing the police's racism. P1's description places Aldrovandi within Reiner's category of police property: a violent and abnormal individual, requiring treatment outside of the parameters reserved for ordinary citizens. To complete the circle, categorizations of a political and cultural nature also played a part ("a social-center type," "pumped full of drugs"), placing Aldrovandi firmly outside the consensus of civil society, though in spite of this P1 claims he would have attempted dialogue. The extent of the police's isolation in the Aldrovandi case is constituted by two elements. The first one consists of the gap between reality (Federico was a student, he was Italian, and he was the son of local administration employees) and the police's representation of reality. The second one consists of the setting up of an us/them binary with respect to the young man from the outset. The approach displayed in the Aldrovandi case was driven by a conviction that the boy represented a threat, for them corroborated by the fact that he was attacking the car. It was this conviction that led them to then react with violence to this threat that was understood by them as both a threat to public order and, in that moment, a threat to their own personal safety as individuals, as described below by P1:

This psycho just attacked me.... he's really dangerous ... don't take your guns with you, he tried to get it off me ... he was set on attacking my



colleague S ... he was about to take a run up to get at her ... he kicked the baton out of P2's hand.<sup>9</sup>

Statements given in the hearing by three more agents, one from the first patrol to arrive on the scene and the others from the patrol that arrived later as backup, are along similar lines. The first, P2, stated, "there was someone on the ground who was wrestling to get free with great force ... it was necessary to contain this person's aggressivity."<sup>10</sup> The others, officers F and S, described Aldrovandi as "really angry, I mean, he was really wired, he had his mouth open and was gnashing his teeth, he had such a thick neck," and "clenched fists ... shouting and growling ... moving forward aggressively ... his eyes were staring ... he seemed like a robot with a guttural growl."<sup>11</sup>

Once the process of othering had been completed it was necessary to move on to the next stage. A dangerous person is then seen as posing a threat to the individual safety of the police officers dealing with that person, and the use of force becomes necessary and respect of due procedure becomes a secondary concern. P1 stated, for instance, "I didn't have time to explain, you can't while someone is attacking you, while they're trying to eat your head" and "even someone who has already been handcuffed is dangerous ... they can turn round, spit at you ... they can do all sorts."<sup>12</sup> P2 meanwhile noted:

Some of my colleagues have been attacked by people who hadn't been violent only moments before, so I didn't want to wait for his response, I took my baton and went to help my colleagues.... we had never seen so much unprovoked aggressivity directed at us before, the more we were the better we could immobilize him, so he wouldn't be able to hurt either himself or us.<sup>13</sup>

The danger Aldrovandi posed, however, is perceived rather than real. As the officers themselves stated, the violent acts he had committed consisted in a few kicks directed at the police car's bumper, a general "thuggish" demeanor, and some verbal abuse directed at the representatives of the state.<sup>14</sup> P1's claim that Aldrovandi was "trying to eat his head" was not corroborated by any of the medical reports. What the various accounts of events demonstrate is not so much that Aldrovandi was dangerous but rather that the officers read the situation to be dangerous, to the point where they requested backup and saw it necessary to use force. The excerpts reported here reveal the extent of the police's isolation as carriers of norms and knowledges that jar with the complexity of contemporary society and with the real nature of their relations with citizens. Certain social groups, in particular, once

identified and codified as other, are understood as actors that need to be contained and repressed, as we see in P2's claim that he was worried that Aldrovandi was a danger to himself. In the Aldrovandi case, we see, on a micro scale, the same process that Stanley Cohen (1973) termed "deviance amplification." According to this pattern, law enforcement agencies do not enjoy the trust of certain social categories, in particular those considered as outsiders, creating a situation that results in the excessive use of force by the police, taking the form of repression, violence, and abuse. In the case of the Italian police, we find a much greater tendency toward isolation than elsewhere. The Italian police forces are far from the preventive model of the US or UK police (McLaughlin 2008), which refers to a model of policing in which police forces are accountable to the public and their practices are oriented to meet the demand of the public. The adoption of a preventive model of policing does not keep police forces from committing class- and race-inspired brutalities. However, this model makes more room for public control of police forces. Things are different for Italian police forces. They are geared toward practices of containment/repression that discourage integration with the rest of society and that produce the selective incorporation, monitored over time, of those social groups considered to be outside mainstream categories within discourses of public order (Della Porta & Reiter 2003, Gargiulo 2016). The level of accountability is low and allows for better cover-up of abuses.

Secondly, the us against them dimension identified by Reiner (1985, 116) forms the basis of a group solidarity that justifies, from the police's point of view, violent practices when dealing with citizens they stop on the street or arrest. The perception of dangerous behavior, filtered through an understanding of the otherness of the subject of police intervention, legitimates the officers' sense of mission, i.e., to protect the existing social order using their social role and experience as leverage, as the following section will demonstrate.

### **Our Experience: Mission and Cynicism**

The articulation of professional specificity, the meaning that police professionals attribute to their practices and to the world in which these practices are constructed, represents a more problematic task for the police than for other professionals given the nature of their work. In the internal sphere, we can identify a routine/challenge dichotomy, as the nature of police work involves both intervening in extreme situations and day-to-day routine work

(Manning 2001; Reiner 1985, 116). Toward the outside world, however, the police must justify their practices to society and the institutions of the state, finding themselves in a contradictory situation. On the one hand, this situation contradicts formal rules and common sense; on the other hand, they must respond at the same time to a demand for increased productivity principally motivated by moral panic (Skolnick 1966). This gap between exterior and interior is usually bridged by a sense of mission, the narrative produced by the police with respect to its actions and the objectives that inspire them. In a condition of isolation from society, as described in the previous section, the signifying process takes place through informal channels, in particular, everyday interactions between colleagues, within which discussions relating to experiences of work produce a twofold outcome. In terms of police practice, such communication contributes to expanding the wealth of knowledge that forms the basis for collective and individual professional development. In symbolic terms, it generates narratives that help individual officers give meaning to their experiences and establish a level of detachment from their day-to-day actions. Both cases are part of Reiner's canteen culture. Canteen culture, more so even than formal training, serves to generate police practice. As agent P1 stated when questioned by the judge about his stigmatizing categorizations of Federico Aldrovandi during the course of his communication with central control:

You must understand me, the situation that we found ourselves in, the weight of experience I have on my shoulders ... I've been on the beat for 15 years.... they are standard expressions, and in our working environment, our jargon, our work, they are used very frequently.<sup>15</sup>

This declaration contains the dimensions of cynicism and the policing mission identified by Reiner. On the one hand, the police officer appeals to the judge's understanding, considered by the officer as a colleague inasmuch as the judge is also an enforcer of the law, and bringing to the judge's attention the risk faced by the police in carrying out their work. The judge's mission and the police's mission are complementary and thus the judge "must understand." On the other hand, officer P1 appeals to the peculiarity of the context in which they work and to the complicity between colleagues, which encourages the creation of autonomous interpretive codes and vocabularies. The importance of these codes lies not in the value they carry but rather in the fact that they create the level of detachment needed to carry out professional duties. The police can easily define a vulnerable 18-year-old as a "thug," a "drug addict," or a "psycho," as for them such terms are part of

the routine; they have no value attached to them, except in relation to the conduct subsequently adopted by the police when dealing with the young man. The police officer seems to reason along the same lines identified by Waddington (1999, 290) in his theory of police culture as storytelling and role-playing, where discussions between colleagues are part of a strategy for elaborating and neutralizing experiences of police work. The outcome of the Aldrovandi case, however, seems to fit more with Reiner's model, where the police's mission and cynicism feed into each other within a circular discourse, as other declarations made by P1 demonstrate, namely: "In 15 years on the beat I've found myself so many times dealing with people who when you first arrive begin to calm down, only to then ramp up their aggression again" and "these days there are troublemakers who just have it in for the police and *carabinieri* [Italian military force charged with police duties], nowadays all we do is deal with these people."<sup>16</sup>

There is, then, a contradiction between the claims the agents make regarding their use of language and police jargon, and the negative description officer P1 gave of Federico Aldrovandi. Aldrovandi is understood as a troublemaker, a term with negative connotations, and as such he has been othered with respect to normal citizens. When dealing with Aldrovandi, as when dealing with others like him, the police's mission is to intervene in precisely the way they did, making use of the knowledge and experience gained on the job that provides officers with the right strategies for maintaining order and containing or repressing abnormalities. A police officer's length of service, according to the officer responsible for Aldrovandi's death, absolves them of responsibility for their actions, as it is evidence of both their professional ability when dealing with critical situations and their dedication to service. The length of service becomes proof of their commitment to acting in the interests of the general public, who must be defended from certain people. As P1 noted, "I've handled lots of people where you need to evaluate the situation," "I've received many commendations," and "They often call us from the hospital to come and calm someone down."<sup>17</sup> P2 reiterated this, stating, "As my colleague P1 explained, in our work it is often the case that disturbed or agitated people change, one minute they are dozy, but their intention is to change again completely" and "hitting someone in the head with a baton is not at all within the scope of our professional activity, I'm sorry."<sup>18</sup>

Professionalism and experience, in these declarations, are understood as prescriptive elements of police practice, becoming a guarantee for action aimed at respecting citizens. Citizens value their services positively enough to request them in a care setting, traditionally governed by a different opera-

tional rationality, and officer's actions invite commendations from superiors. Within this internally coherent framework, the mission is to guarantee public safety, and yet this protection of the public has a critical threshold which excludes certain individuals whose political and cultural otherness or even a physical appearance causing them to be racially othered, as we have seen in the previous section, justifies the use of force. Within this value-operational context molded by experience, death is considered as almost normal, when the connotations attributed to the victim are taken into consideration. A "thin blue line," as Reiner (1985, 112) terms it, exists between mission and cynicism, between the right level of professionalism and an attitude that is detached and even dismissive, as the following declarations reveal:

- "The episode had a tragic ending, but it was essentially a physical attack against us" (P1);
- "He was wired, he needed tranquilizing, sedating... He was definitely dangerous ... someone like this needs to be calmed, to be physically restrained ... I've found myself in many situations where it was necessary to act in this way" (P1);
- "Someone on the ground who was fighting to get free... we needed to deal with this person's aggressivity" (P2);
- "After everything that happened, to me, to check that someone is OK, you only need to know if they are breathing and have a heart-beat" (P2).<sup>19</sup>

The death of an 18-year old boy is understood as a tragic accident within a framework characterized by police practice. Professionalism and the management of dangerous situations become means to justify conduct that produced a horrific result. The presumed risk posed by the victim neutralizes police abuse and diminishes the gravity of the outcome. As before, we see a gap between the police officers' reading of the situation and its reality. The officers speak of danger, but the victim was an unarmed young man, pitted against four officers with years of experience. He kicked the police car and was struggling to break free when they restrained him, behavior that is interpreted by the police as signs of danger, as they were being exhibited by someone they classified as abnormal. In this context, dedication to service, service meaning the protection of public safety, coincides with the adoption of methods of containment that lie outside the realm of legality, and indeed the measures that lead to Aldrovandi's death were entirely illegal.

This reading of reality filtered through subjective categories can be clearly seen in the following statements regarding the case made by a representative

of a police trade union (quoted in Vendemmiati 2010, 33 min.): “There’s too much profiteering ... if it hadn’t been for the good will of the women who called us he would still be bashing his head against that pole.... sometimes I think this society doesn’t deserve us.” This statement, though intended to provoke, appears to be symptomatic of the culture that pervades the police. According to police culture, police interventions are aimed at protecting society and their actions cannot ever invite doubts over their professionalism and dedication to service. This assumption is stretched to the point where they can cry “profiteering” in response to the deep feeling of indignation a case like this provokes in the general public, flying in the face of the public’s demand for truth. The police’s sense of mission again overlaps with a cynical attitude when the police’s intervention, which in fact resulted in the death of a young man, is viewed as a successful response to the behavior Aldrovandi was exhibiting in that moment. The devastating result is removed or obscured, as the police’s action, responding to a local resident’s request for intervention, takes precedence. As such, the police are understood to have simply carried out their duty to the public good.

This framing is used by the chief of police in Ferrara, not only in his claim during the trial that his men had carried out their duty and were on the scene to rescue Aldrovandi from himself (Vendemmiati 2010, 20 min.), but also in his attitude toward the victim’s parents. According to Aldrovandi’s parents, “The chief of police told me: it happens to even the best of families.... the officers don’t want to sue me” (Aldrovandi’s father, quoted in Vendemmiati 2010, 23 min.) and “The police told me that he was on drugs” (Aldrovandi’s mother, quoted in Vendemmiati, 25 min.).

The collective line of police professionalism and dedication to service is kept to at all costs, even with the victim’s parents and to the point where the real dynamics of the situation are turned on their head. The officers are presented as victims with the just authority to make a legal claim against a family that has lost a child in the most horrific and shocking way. The pain felt by the family, in this framing, becomes secondary, as the tragic event is seen as part of the broader dynamics of public order, something even the family must accept. The family, therefore, must be content with a payout from the police. The chief of police’s declarations would seem to provide weight to Reiner’s model rather than to the proposals of other authors (Chan 1996, Manning 2001, Sackmann 1992) who see an internal cultural conflict produced by an internal hierarchy. In reality, at least in this case, what we see is a vertical unity that cuts across all levels of the internal hierarchy and is both public and private, the manifestation of the cynicism produced

by isolation from the rest of society. This isolation is also the basis for the police's conservative classifications of reality, translating in turn into the policing mission to maintain public order, obscuring thus the complexity and plurality of contemporary society. The Aldrovandi case provides us with an image of the police as a truly "order enforcing" agency (Fassin 2013), which takes an idiosyncratic attitude toward diversity and drags its heels in the face of civil society's demands for democratic accountability. The police's conception of itself is self-legitimizing, as it is based on a homogenous and self-referential conception of conflict management in contemporary society. The communal effort to obscure evidence is part of a defensive mechanism that is eventually broken down during trial, prompting judges to define this mechanism in their ruling as "a perfect defense prevailing over consistency" (Vendemmiati 2010, 60 min.), a defensive mechanism that serves as a seal on the practices and values that guide police action.

### **Conclusions**

The Aldrovandi case is one of many instances of police abuse in Italy. The case has brought to light the existence of a discrepancy between the values of individual rights and the democratic accountability of state institutions on the one hand, and police culture on the other. Police values, knowledges, and practices are ultimately always geared toward repressive action, with the aim of maintaining existing social relations. The roots of this resistance to change, which is evident even in countries like the United Kingdom whose governments have worked hard to welcome diversity (McLaughlin 2008, Rowe 2002), lie in different causal factors. Firstly, there is what Stanley Cohen (1985) terms the "deposits of power": the apparatuses of power that, though subjected to demands for innovation, in the long run conserve domination and the powers of control that have been accumulated over time. If law enforcement agencies operate in conditions of isolation, and if repression is one of their objectives, the risk of reproducing a culture of containment-repression is far higher than in other state apparatuses. The effect of this, as noted by Waddington (1999, 300), is that even police officers that are LGBTQ, women, or who come from ethnic-religious minority backgrounds adopt sexist, racist, or homophobic attitudes in order to integrate into the group. The second hypothesis concerns the "democratic continuum" proposed by Haberfeld and Cerrah (2008). The theory of the democratic continuum holds that for a democratic regime to be consolidated there needs to be an opening-up of the police force toward society. In this

case, the problem with the Italian police force is that it suffers from a lack of internal democracy and that its political framework is less advanced, the consequence of which is that a greater disposition toward interaction and negotiation with the rest of society has yet to appear. The fact that police abuse exists even in countries considered more democratic, or that have a police force that is more attuned to public opinion and in particular to diversity and differences of class and race, would suggest that the first interpretation better reflects reality.

Many other cases of police abuse in Italy have been documented in recent times, and police abuse continues to be a reality. Some cases, such as those of Riccardo Magherini, Stefano Cucchi, and Narducci, have been widely reported. Others remain unknown to the public. Not all the victims and their families have the material or symbolic resources to mobilize public opinion. It would be difficult to know, for example, how many cases of abuse against migrants or refugees have taken place. In addition, the fear of reporting police officers due to their role as protectors of the law often poses an obstacle for civil society organizations seeking to pursue action. There are, though, organizations that have had significant success in recent years in exposing abuse and bringing to the fore a topic that is of vital importance to promoting a tolerant and democratic society.

Police isolation from society, discussed here in relation to police culture, translates at the institutional level into an opacity of practice when viewed from outside, making it difficult to verify cases of abuse against members of the public. The ideological and instrumental support that this approach receives at a political level means there is little room for change. The resistance of political forces from across most of the spectrum to proposals to open an inquiry into the events of the G8 protests in Genoa, and the difficulty with which torture was made a criminal offence in Italy, are clear examples of this.

If police forces, especially in the Italian case, exist outside and above society, reproducing their isolation by means of the production and reproduction of a specific set of values and practices, then it is necessary to introduce counterweights capable of limiting abuse and of holding the police accountable to public opinion and the institutions of the state. The first step would be the introduction of visible identification numbers for police officers, which would make it possible to identify agents who commit abuse. Secondly and more importantly, an independent commission should be charged with the task of looking into cases of abuse reported by members of the public and providing the groundwork for a full investigation. In the United Kingdom, there is the Independent Office for Police Conduct, composed of profession-



als and representatives of civil society, nominated by the Home Office but acting independently, which investigates around 10,000 complaints against the police every year. It will, of course, be necessary to defeat resistance at a political level, but the case of Federico Aldrovandi, as well as many others, is proof of the urgency of the matter.

## NOTES

1. See [www.antigone.it/](http://www.antigone.it/), [www.abuondiritto.it/](http://www.abuondiritto.it/), and [www.acaditalia.it/](http://www.acaditalia.it/).
2. Court of Ferrara, June 26, 2008 (It.).
3. Court of Ferrara, 260.
4. Service Report by the City of Ferrara Police Agents Pontani, Pollastri, Forlani, and Segato, September 26, 2005.
5. The term “social-centre” here is being used as a stand-in for a stereotype of young people from radical left political milieus. Many social centres were set up in Italy from the 1990s onwards by groups of far-left communist or anarchist political tendencies (though there are also far-right and neofascist social centres), usually in squatted buildings. Social centres vary in terms of the types of activities that take place inside; many are also used to hold social events, concerts and parties. The stereotype of the social centre in broader public conception is of places where young people commit crimes.
6. Court of Ferrara, 87.
7. The term the officer used in Italian was *extracomunitario*, which literally means “someone from outside the European Union.”
8. Court of Ferrara, 55–56.
9. Court of Ferrara, 71–74.
10. Court of Ferrara, 168.
11. Court of Ferrara, 213, 259–262.
12. Court of Ferrara, 118, 148.
13. Court of Ferrara, 168–171.
14. Court of Ferrara, 24.
15. Court of Ferrara, 87.
16. Court of Ferrara, 81, 88.
17. Court of Ferrara, 133, 136, 149.
18. Court of Ferrara, 226.
19. Court of Ferrara, 105, 181, 168, 194.

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