

## THE ORDER OF THINGS AND PEOPLE: VERTICAL NON-STATE SURVEILLANCE

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# The Order of Things and People: Vertical Non-State Surveillance

## **\_Abstract**

Socially produced security concerns underlie the proliferation of urban surveillance practices through informal policing. Neighborhood watch and neighborhood patrol initiatives have recently mushroomed in several countries in Europe, spurred by a culture of insecurity that has continuously and globally grown since the seventies. Such practices signal the intensification of struggles for social control and order in the urban space, but also the capillarization of surveillance, devolved from waning state institutions onto the citizenry. Neighborhood patrols police the urban landscape, blame suspect Others for spoiling it, and enforce a particular aesthetic order which, in turn, legitimizes social hierarchies along nation, race, gender, and class lines. Through an empirically informed analysis of the security practices enacted by a neighborhood patrol in the peripheries of Rome, I trace the genealogies and cultural tenets of what I call vertical non-state surveillance as a form of informal policing of subaltern Others in the urban space. I explore the ways in which this form of surveillance meets neoliberal conceptions of citizenship, becoming productive of new subjectivities and socialities, and argue that such forms of surveillance need to be linked with the political economies and the materialities of the urban spaces in which they emerge.

## **1\_Introduction**

The rise of the security paradigm marks one of the most crucial shifts in Western cultures, if not globally, of the past decades.<sup>1,2</sup> In the course of this development, whose origins can be traced back to the economic crisis of the 1970s,<sup>3</sup> security has emerged as a key frame of intelligibility and organization of contemporary life, and has progressively become “a powerful diacritic of social relations, a key point of encounter between citizens, non-citizens, and states, and a framework within which many forms of political, economic, and cultural life are enacted.”<sup>4</sup> This global shift that has placed various forms of insecurities at the heart of numberless discourses and practices has produced what has been termed a ‘culture of fear,’<sup>5</sup> ‘cultures of insecurity,’<sup>6</sup> or a ‘culture of security.’<sup>7</sup> ‘Security,’ as a discursive notion, has become productive of new imaginaries and materialities, inflecting political ideologies and structuring social relations to a greater extent than before. Increasing concerns with security have extended the governance of insecurity from the state to various assemblages permeating social life in its multiple spaces, from schools to stadiums, from libraries to shops.<sup>8</sup> This obsessive attention to security and the sense that surveillance is becoming a central element of a whole way of life undergird the emergence of what David Lyon calls ‘surveillance culture’:

[Surveillance] is no longer merely something external that impinges on our lives. It is something that everyday citizens comply with — willingly and wittingly, or not — negotiate, resist, engage with, and, in novel ways, even initiate and desire. From being an institutional aspect of modernity or a technologically enhanced mode of social discipline or control, it is now internalized and forms part of everyday reflections on how things are and of the repertoire of everyday practices.<sup>9</sup>

This article is concerned with one such everyday practice in its recently (re)emergent form: neighborhood patrol initiatives in the urban space, which entail the mobilization of private citizens to protect neighborhoods against property-related crime. Such forms of informal policing are contemporaneously mushrooming in several countries in Europe: among others, the German *Bürgerwehren*, the Dutch *burgerwachten*, and the Italian *ronde* signal the intensification of struggles for social control and order in the urban space. They often intertwine with other technology-mediated surveillance practices, such as neighborhood watch groups using WhatsApp, Facebook, or other technologies purposely designed for urban surveillance. In so doing, they exhibit certain continuities with past forms of social control<sup>10</sup> at the same time that they introduce new forms of surveillance through the use of new technologies. The phenomenon of neighborhood patrolling is not new, and it has different histories in different settings. The United Kingdom and the United States have a longer history of forms of informal policing than continental Europe does, for example.<sup>11</sup> Also, prior to the establishment of the police as state institution, the task of maintaining public order was carried out by self-organized citizen militias, which have only abandoned this role in the wake of the consolidation of the state as unique provider for its citizens' security.<sup>12</sup> Yet, the reappearance of such forms of informal policing in times of the security paradigm deserves attention in ethnographic detail, for it can reveal a great deal about contemporary metamorphoses: the social and cultural shifts under the grip of securitization,<sup>13</sup> contemporary transformations of the urban space and of the socialities it buttresses, and, overarchingly, the reconfigurations of the state in securitarian neoliberalism — the form of actually existing neoliberalism aimed at managing increasingly precarious surplus populations by resorting to security discourses, practices, and policies.<sup>14</sup> Importantly, the reappearance of informal policing can also tell us how such practices and the discourses accompanying them contribute to normalizing surveillance culture, and in so doing, disguise the profound inequalities and exclusionary logics that underlie rationalities of surveillance.<sup>15</sup> This article is conversant with surveillance literature that links the urban

space and a political economy reading with capillary forms of surveillance as manifestations of a synoptic power that reproduces urban power relations through the circulation of particular imaginaries — here, imaginaries of insecurity, on the one hand, and of abjection, crime, and deviance of subaltern Roma, on the other.<sup>16</sup> Beyond a concern with synoptic viewing, discourses, and representations, the article's argument extends into exploring practices of surveillance increasingly enacted by citizens in Western Europe.

Building on an ethnography carried out between 2014 and 2017, this article investigates the surveillance practices of a neighborhood patrol group in the peripheries of Rome as an embodiment of contemporary surveillance culture. It explores the historical roots of this practice, the cultural tenets and the imaginaries that undergird it, as well as the ways in which it (re)produces subjectivities and socialities. Finally, it connects such forms of surveillance with the particular materialities and political economies of the urban spaces in which they emerge.<sup>17</sup>

## **2\_Informal Policing: Cultural Roots, Historical Lineages**

In Italy, forms of citizen mobilization for purposes of policing are rooted in the country's fascist past. The first such manifestations in the past century were groups mobilized voluntarily under what came to be known as *squadrismo*, a far-right inspired paramilitary movement composed of former combatants from World War I. They organized voluntary patrols which sought to hunt down and violently repress ideological adversaries and trade union leaders under the pretense of pushing back the Bolshevik menace and redressing the geopolitical wrongs that Italy had suffered, which were encapsulated in the imaginary of the *patria offesa* (offended fatherland).<sup>18</sup> In 1919, the squads were absorbed into Mussolini's *Fasci Italiani di combattimento*, regarded as the first fascist form of political organization, and were instrumental in Mussolini's ascent to power in 1922. After the demise of the fascist regime in the wake of World War II, such forms of vigilantism receded, but violent acts surged periodically throughout the 1960s as youth from the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* perpetrated acts of political terrorism. As political animosities dwindled, this kind of violence waned progressively throughout the seventies.<sup>19</sup>

However, voluntary patrols have survived the demise of fascism as a political regime and went through a considerable metamorphosis, particularly in the Northern Po Valley,

or *Pianura Padana* area, where regional ethnonationalism surged with strength in the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> In those regions where the Lega Padana — which subsequently became the Lega Nord — was popular, citizens organized what is known as *ronde padane*, patrolling neighborhoods and small cities or villages to maintain order and prevent crime. Such initiatives, mobilizing some of the fascist paraphernalia of paramilitarism but less intent on using violence, flourished in particular during the mid-1990s, amidst fierce societal and political debates on the perceived necessity to control migration fluxes. In less than twenty years, from the 1970s to the 1990s, Italy turned from an emigration country — one of the most important in southern Europe — to an immigration country.<sup>21</sup> Growing numbers of African and Asian immigrants in the streets of Italian cities generated a wave of social alarm framed as a protracted ‘social emergency,’<sup>22</sup> which sometimes materialized in violent attacks against non-white immigrants. The *ronde padane* kept immigrants under surveillance and sought to oust them from spaces that the patrols controlled. Sex workers and transsexuals were also on the list of suspects subjected to surveillance,<sup>23</sup> revealing that the concerns of the *ronde* were not primarily grounded in widely felt insecurities and a benign citizen animus of collective self-protection, but in a wider conservative ideological complex. While, for a long time, such initiatives remained informal, local, relatively sporadic, and confined to the north of the country, the security provisions of 2009 inscribed citizen patrols into the law, albeit under particular conditions.<sup>24</sup> The legal inscription of *ronde* largely prescribed surveillance as something that ‘voluntary observers’ (*osservatori volontari*<sup>25</sup>) among the population could and should undertake in support of the municipalities’ efforts to ensure security, as a form of what was later coined ‘participatory security.’ Such rendition by the media, political actors, and security professionals alike echoed the positive connotations of notions of ‘participatory democracy.’ As such, it effectively sought to purge a phenomenon historically tainted by the ghost of fascism, and to transpose it into a democratic ethos of active citizenship. Yet the law also imposed limitations on such initiatives. Those who wished to undertake this form of ‘participatory security’ had to register with the local municipalities to inform the authorities of their intent and had to wear special vests that marked them as ‘voluntary observers.’ Additionally, they were barred from patrolling with vehicles or using animals in their endeavor. In the event that they might witness crime, they were expected to alert the forces of order, but were disallowed from intervening directly.

Throughout 2010 and in the following years, many Italian newspaper articles called the decree regulating citizen surveillance a ‘flop’: very few groups had indeed mobilized in such forms of informal policing. However, in 2016, and with major impetus in 2017, Italy has been the stage of a fast and furious multiplication of neighborhood patrols, as ‘exasperated citizens’ and ‘*gente per bene*’ (decent people) increasingly mobilize for the ‘defense’ of their neighborhoods. The legitimizing narratives for these patrols revolve around two main themes: pervasive urban insecurity caused by a perceived unprecedented rise in crime, and the incapacity or unwillingness of the state to protect its own citizens. In the following section, I will describe the practices of one such neighborhood patrol, embedding them in the discourses which they propagate: through social but also traditional media, from the peripheries of Rome.<sup>26</sup>

### **3\_ ‘*Ronde pontenonine*’**

“People are afraid,” stated the local newspaper of Ponte di Nona in March 2013:

... afraid to return home late at night and in danger of being assaulted by criminals, hiding in wait for their victim, people are afraid to return home and to find their own house violated and robbed, people are afraid to have persons walking behind them on the streets, people are increasingly afraid, at a certain time at night starts the curfew, there are ever more people who do not get out at night, even for a simple walk.<sup>27</sup>

The ‘forces of order’ are overwhelmed, the author adds, and are thus unable to control neighborhood territories using the limited means at their disposal. This has led him to take the initiative, he explains, to set up a group of devoted citizens to reconnoiter the territory by organizing night patrols:

Thus, in the night of 7 March 2013, I have initiated, together with other citizens, my first *ronda* for the security of the area. We are a group of people aware that we need to do something concrete ... aware that it is unbearable to see our District<sup>28</sup> being continuously violated. It has been great for me to initiate together with other people this adventure which will surely cultivate in us the maturity of doing something useful for all, and which certainly gratified us by making us feel more like citizens, while also being a response towards ourselves, who strongly believe in healthy and constructive life values.<sup>29</sup>

This is the description of the beginning of a neighborhood patrolling initiative brought to fruition in 2013 by a middle-class man in his early sixties in the periphery of Rome. Despite initial opposition from the neighborhood committee, the group kept patrolling the neighborhood, intensified its media appearances, set up a social media profile on Facebook, and started recruiting volunteers throughout the neighborhoods around Ponte di Nona. By the end of 2014, the group counted about eight members and used

three cars; by the middle of 2015, the number of cars and patrol members had multiplied threefold, with inhabitants of the neighboring Corcolle and Colle degli Abeti setting up their own patrols and working closely with the leader of the Ponte di Nona group.

The patrol, which was institutionalized as a non-governmental association, is called an ‘operative actions coordination unit,’ a name with militaristic overtones that employs equally militaristic symbols in its branding. The patrol’s logo, a target on a green background, is displayed on their website and on their Facebook page, as well as on their private patrol cars. The group polices the borders of the neighborhood by regularly making stops (they call such a stop *presidio*, translatable to ‘garrison’ or ‘defense’) in strategic places at various entrance points, looking out for intruders. Sometimes, they follow at low speed and photograph men walking alone or in pairs on the streets. Particularly in this post-pedestrian neighborhood where human presence on the sidewalks is rather scarce, the practice of walking appears as out of place and hence suspicious. Yet, it is never white people, but brown and black men who are racially profiled as not belonging to the neighborhood. If someone’s presence raises enough suspicion, as in the case of those presumed to be Roma, the patrol orders them to leave the neighborhood, makes sure they do so, and then boasts about such events on social media.<sup>30</sup>

After harsh criticism of the initiative, which was deemed dangerously close to historical fascist patrols, the group denied any parallel between their practices and the tradition of the *ronde*. They claimed vociferously that this is not what they do, reframing their initiative instead as ‘voluntary surveillance’ (*vigilanza volontaria*). However, the article through which the leader announced the initiative in the local newspaper referred to the group as *ronde pontenonine*, echoing, without the shadow of a doubt, the earlier *ronde padane*. But with the reference to ‘voluntary surveillance,’ the group sought to legitimize a still-criticized practice by inscribing it as an act undertaken under the provisions of the 2009 security law. Their claims to protect and defend ‘legality’ notwithstanding, the group, in fact, does not meet the legal requirements stipulated by the 2009 decree: they patrol with vehicles, are not registered in a special register of the municipality, and do not wear vests designating them as such. Thereby, they flagrantly break the law, under the averted eyes of the local police and *Carabinieri*, with whom they network and whom they grandiloquently praise on their Facebook page.<sup>31</sup>

The group justifies their initiative by framing the neighborhood as crime-ridden, which they allege is due to the proximity of the camp of Salone, one of the largest *campi nomadi* in Italy, which hosts a Roma population who have been migrating from Eastern Europe since the 1960s. Despite the group's claims, this neighborhood is not particularly prominent in crime statistics. On the contrary, data shows that Rome is a safer city compared to others in Italy, and that in particular its peripheries are less prone to crime. A staggering majority of property-related crimes registered in the metropolitan area of Rome happen in the city (82%), while only 18% occur in the outer peripheries.<sup>32</sup> Yet, the perception of insecurity is more prominent in the peripheries than the center of Italy's capital: while only 41% of the inhabitants of the center believe that Rome is rather unsafe or not safe at all, the percentage of those in the peripheries who feel similarly rises to 55%.<sup>33</sup> Ponte di Nona is, by all standards, a safe, middle-class neighborhood. In fact, the neighborhood committee recurrently criticizes the idea that Ponte di Nona is crime-ridden, claiming that 'this is not the Bronx.'

The group publicizes its activities in online media outlets and in the far-right newspaper *Il Tempo*, in which the leader publishes articles and opinion pieces related to security. They also regularly post photographs and videos from their nocturnal patrols, and various political commentaries addressing topics such as Islam, immigration, *campi nomadi*, as well as local, national, and EU politics on a network of Facebook pages. Openly racist views and incitement to violence are common on their own Facebook page — and often follow a punitive rhetoric stating that criminals must be taught a lesson, and that Italians must take matters into their own hands in order to defend themselves. One such typical comment, posted on the group's page in August 2017 about a man arrested for abduction and attempted blackmail, stated: "Death for him would be too little, these kinds of ordure (*letame*) should be handed over to the people for a just lynching; such should be his death, slow and atrocious." Such discourses extend beyond the online realm: I have personally witnessed discussions about lynching among group members, with the leader asserting that lynching could happen at any time given the 'exasperation of people around here.'<sup>34</sup> On September 29, 2018, the leader warned on Facebook that in the following days, they would prepare an action 'for the good of our entire territory' with regards to the camp of Salone, advising residents to avoid certain areas where there would be 'public order issues.' In another note, he added that camp inhabitants 'have no idea what is awaiting them.'

The initiator of the patrol openly states his regret that Italy lacks a leader like Mussolini, who would certainly have known how to restore order and dignity to the country. The ‘forces of order’ — the police, the *Carabinieri*, and especially the military — are often publicly praised; the leader also intimated to me privately that he thinks a military coup is the only viable option to restore order and ‘healthy moral values’ in the country. Like other actors in Rome — such as members of various neighborhood committees — they call for military intervention in *campi nomadi*, which they epitomize as territories of lawlessness, and they advocate, in more or less clear terms, for various ‘final solutions’ with regards to populations they see as problematic, like the so-called *nomadi*, or Muslims.

To advocate for closures of the *campi nomadi*, they organize yearly protests, whether downtown or in their neighborhood, which invariably involve members of CasaPound — the main openly neo-fascist political party in Italy — leading the protests by megaphone with nationalistic, anti-immigrant slogans. In 2015, during their yearly protest, they mobilized the far-right Alleanza Nazionale-Fratelli d’Italia party to gather signatures for a petition against the *campi nomadi*. The leader has personal ties to Gianni Alemanno, a former member of the far-right *Movimento Sociale Italiano* who became mayor of Rome in 2008, and who in 2014 visited the neighborhood and met with the group leader; photographs of the two side by side appeared in the media. He praises the recent appointment of ‘our friend’ Matteo Salvini as minister of internal affairs, presaging a return to order and the dismantlement of the *campi nomadi*, a cause on which the leader of the Lega Nord has long been capitalizing upon to garner votes. Notwithstanding these clear political links with the far right, which, again, makes their surveillance activities illegal, the group still claims that they are apolitical. This is, partly, what allows them to cooperate with other neighborhood committees according to the principle of segmentary politics,<sup>35</sup> amounting to alliances that contextually form around particular issues such as *campi nomadi*, but whose actors remain antithetical on other topics and may have opposing political views altogether.

#### **4\_ Things and People Out of Place**

On the first patrol that I witnessed in November 2014, the leader took me on a ‘tour’ of the neighborhood in order to explain the reasons for their mobilization. He showed me heaps of waste on the sidewalks and run-down streets with potholes and grass growing

uncontrollably in the urban space, which he took to be signs of blight and of the abandonment of Roman peripheries by the authorities, but also, importantly, as clear manifestations of urban insecurity.<sup>36</sup> It was not only ‘matter out of place’<sup>37</sup> that was the concern of the group, but also people out of place, whom the leader then went on to show me, driving me to an area outside the neighborhood where sex workers, including transsexuals, were waiting for their clients on the roadways. Immigrants and *nomadi*, as Roma are erroneously referred to in Italy, were also seen as out of place. The spectacle of disorder that the leader of the group showed me on this first patrol betrays notions of order related to a particular urban aesthetic of cleanliness and orderliness embedded in the materiality of the neighborhood. Broken or out-of-place objects are a sign of blight — *degrado* — which metonymically stands for urban insecurity. Through their insistence on *degrado*, the discourses of the patrol naturalize the articulation of urban insecurity with blight, a widespread and pervasive concern in Rome that mobilizes people both left and right of the political spectrum. Material blight is also linked to the notion of the moral decay of the country, the loss of values and of discipline signified by the ubiquity of matter, people, and morals out of place. The culprits for this decay, the group claims, are corrupt politicians, leftist ‘*buonisti*,’ the undeserving poor, and the culturally barbaric and uncivilizable immigrants and *nomadi*, which they portray in stark contrast to what the leader of the group calls “the culture of civility which is ours.”<sup>38</sup> He deplores the decadence of Rome, once a grandiose empire out on a civilizing mission, while he regularly commends his group’s members, similar neighborhood patrols, and far-right activists, for being brave and selfless defenders of healthy moral standards, civility, the nation, and ‘true’ Italianness. The genealogy of such conceptions — abundant in the discourse of the group — can be traced back to the ideology that fascist intellectuals promoted in the thirties around “valour, justice, law, order, dedication to collective interests, and high moral standards. In short, *virtus romana*.”<sup>39</sup>

The remedy that the group prescribes to counter the moral and material decadence of Rome is a citizen mobilization to combat *degrado*, crime, and illegality. But under this pretense, by policing the presence of Others in this predominantly middle-class white neighborhood, the group mobilizes for the defense of particular social aesthetics of urban order. They do not actively combat *degrado* by, for instance, removing waste from inappropriate places themselves; instead, they assert that *degrado* is the result of

the presence of *nomadi* and immigrants in the neighborhood, reproducing and circulating imaginaries that intimately link migration and racialized representations of the Roma with blight, crime, danger, and decadence. The images that they share on the social media construct immigrants, and in particular the Roma, as abject Others devoid of humanity. Black men and Roma women and children searching in dumpsters for reusable objects are not framed as people in need, but as uncivilized and barbaric inferior beings producing disorder and provoking repulsion.<sup>40</sup> Through the repeated circulation of such images on social media and the selective visibilization of some of their economic practices as abject, the workings of synoptic viewing are made visible. They render certain categories of people hypervisible under particular angles, reducing their knowability to stereotypical and prejudicial depictions that then circulate and multiply.<sup>41</sup> Such surveillance practices have a threefold effect: first, they lead to a classification of subjects according to their supposed ‘dangerousness’; second, they attempt to expel the undesirables on grounds of the threat they represent; and third, they generate a discourse that aestheticizes the social order thus produced. These three effects amount to what I have unpacked elsewhere, building on Nicholas Mirzoeff’s work, as a ‘complex of securitarian visuality.’<sup>42</sup> Neighborhood patrols and the discourses and imaginaries that they circulate are a practice of maintaining social order along nation, class, and race lines, driving home the point that:

[M]ore than simply watching, surveillance practices exert influence and reproduce power relations through technological and non-technological means alike. Through the imposition of categories, processes, and differential forms of exposure, surveillance becomes a project of social ordering and world-making, even if its efficacy at achieving its primary intended goals (e.g. crime control) is limited or inconsistent.<sup>43</sup>

The surveillance practices of the neighborhood patrol provide a depoliticizing script for othering, grounded in notions of an ontological insecurity that preclude any desire and ability to understand social hierarchies as results of longstanding and unjust power relations. They fixate and legitimize the social order and existing hierarchies by processes through which those at the bottom are constructed as dangerous Others to be expelled, and ultimately exterminated.

## **5\_ The Productivity of Surveillance Culture**

Practices of urban ‘voluntary surveillance’ are predicated upon processes of classification, categorization, and legitimization of exclusion that are continuously reproduced,

and thus reproduce social hierarchies. But this is only the first layer of the productive capacities of surveillance culture. Behind the ‘mythologies of surveillance’<sup>44</sup> that underpin and shape such practices lies a tremendous productive capacity that is yet to be fully uncovered. In what follows, I will sketch a few lines along which such capacities may be fruitfully read, and which, I believe, go some way in explaining the multiplication of surveillance practices in our contemporary world. The productive capacities of surveillance practices are connected to, and fertilized by, powerful narratives that play a role in structuring the world and ordering people’s actions. We have seen, for instance, how the leader of the patrol casts their endeavor as a source of subjective citizenship through which they acquire symbolic value. In so doing, he taps into the neoliberal narrative of ‘active citizenship’ and into the vocabularies of ‘participatory security’ that it has recently begotten. Elsewhere in Europe, like in Austria,<sup>45</sup> the emergence of the category of a ‘security citizen’ as helper of the police in all matters related to maintaining urban order attests to the imbrication of security and citizenship. This nexus proves productive of novel forms of subjectivation cementing social hierarchies in which the lower classes are constructed as ontologically dangerous, in opposition to those, like the middle class, who do not represent a threat. Still others, like the neighborhood patrol, become singularly able to impart security, thus claiming a position at the top of social hierarchies. In a world perceived and constructed as unsafe, the fact that the patrol purports to grant security to others produces symbolic capital. When people thank the patrol on the streets, for instance, the value thus produced is reinvested in a strengthened motivation to carry on ‘voluntary surveillance’ under the pretense of a sacrificial and selfless service to the ‘community.’

These surveillance practices are also complicit in producing abject Others: in the process of abjection, the subject comes to constitute itself through the border it casts between the self and the abject Other and through the very expulsion that abjection entails.<sup>46</sup> The numerous references, on the Facebook page of the patrol, to people as ‘manure,’ ‘ordure,’ ‘dung,’ and ‘muck’ (*letame*) and the repetition of images of toilet paper and caricatured vomiting that accompany political statements not to the leader’s liking, attest to the production of the abject Other, and, simultaneously, to the constitution of the surveillant subject as profoundly repulsed. Repeating the trope of ‘exasperated people’ expands the range of action that may be envisaged well past the point of legitimacy and normalizes the imaginaries of vigilantism with which the

Facebook page is replete. Inciting people to ‘take matters into their own hands’ when it comes to the expulsion of abject Others adds, then, a layer of violence to the constitution of the surveillant subject, revealing the productivity of surveillance practices in engendering violence, be it symbolic or physical.

Discourses that praise vigilante practices (re)produce the idea of the state being incapable of ensuring its citizens’ security. Such discourses reveal the complex and ambiguous metamorphoses of the state in securitarian neoliberalism. On the one hand, if a certain trope claims the retrenchment of the state in neoliberal times, practices of informal policing instead reveal how deeply the capillarization of the state’s control function can run, giving way to what Gilles Deleuze called ‘societies of control.’<sup>47</sup> These replace Michel Foucault’s societies of discipline and their traditional institutions by generalizing a form of ‘free-floating control.’<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, practices of informal policing make apparent the phenomenal extent to which the ‘right hand of the state,’ tasked with repression, has outgrown the left hand, responsible for social policies, equality, and support of the most destitute. I have already hinted at this shift, rendered visible through the ubiquitous critique to *buonismo* and *assistenzialismo* recounted earlier. Such critiques reflect the emergence of the ‘neoliberal Centaur state’ punishing those at the bottom of social hierarchies while bestowing privileges at the top. This, in turn, has accompanied the shift from a model of inclusive community illustrated by the concern for social policies, to that of the exclusive state predicated upon control of criminality and the punishment of the most destitute groups.<sup>49</sup> Though contradicted by all data, the trope that criminality is vertiginously on the rise obfuscates the disproportionate use of repression and mobilizes increasing numbers of people concerned with illusory insecurities. While citizens labor to keep those insecurities under control, the obsession with security precludes a substantial political debate on issues of justice and social policies. It is incontestable that the idea of the state is changing under the pressure of neoliberal discourses on ‘participatory security,’ but with vigilante-like discourses it undergoes a further shift towards the capillarization of surveillance, confirming what other scholars have pointed out: that we are in the middle of a shift in which surveillance is being devolved from state institutions to the citizenry.<sup>50</sup>

## **6\_Vertical Non-state Surveillance and Its Political Economies**

The concepts of ‘peer’ or ‘lateral surveillance’ have been used to refer to practices in which people monitor one another.<sup>51</sup> However, neither ‘peer,’ nor ‘lateral surveillance’ are appropriate analytical terms for the practices of informal policing that I have described here: on the one hand, the people who regularly come under the scrutiny of the patrol are not ‘peers,’ but socially subaltern groups, which is crucial analytically; rather than lateral, this is, then, a case of *vertical* surveillance, but one not enacted by the state, as the concept is usually understood, but by middle-class citizens *on behalf* of the state. On the other hand, the patrol does not target specific individuals, but looks out for suspicious Others in a given space, constructing them as dangerous in the very act of surveillance. It is not people, but the territory of the neighborhood that is the primary object of surveillance, and subaltern Others become surveilled subjects once they penetrate the space of the neighborhood.

Vertical non-state surveillance is inextricable from the spatial dimension in which it takes place, not only because its object is the space of the neighborhood, but also in virtue of the identities and subjectivities which are produced by the act of categorizing people into ‘belonging’ and ‘not belonging’ to the neighborhood. Such forms of surveillance alter sociality, and simultaneously the relationship that people have with their inhabited space that needs to be perpetually protected from suspicious Others. Surveillance enacts ‘a way of seeing, a way of being.’<sup>52</sup> Sight becomes a stencil of black and white categorizations of the world, as people are endowed with a purported dangerousness that fixates them as abjects to be watched — and ultimately expelled — or with the recognition of their ontology as belonging, and hence safe, subjects. Sight superposes what one sees with what one already ‘knows’ about the world, and reaffirms uncritically the categories upon which social hierarchies are predicated, fixating the social in petrified structures in which the ones at the bottom of hierarchies are recast as ontologically dangerous, and relegated to expulsions and exterminations. Surveillance culture institutes, circulates, and ultimately normalizes a way of being through which ‘vigilant visualities’<sup>53</sup>, or, what Daniel Goldstein calls ‘governmentalities of watchfulness’<sup>54</sup> unfold: a mode of being watchful in the world which forecloses socialities across class and race boundaries.

While purporting to defend a territory invaded by criminal Others, these forms of surveillance also bring into being communities to be protected, reshaping urban and

peri-urban neighborhoods spatially and politically.<sup>55</sup> They (re)produce ‘economies of fear and hate’<sup>56</sup> and restructure socialities in the community of patrol members and Facebook followers, who congregate, subsequently, for the defense of an imagined community of ‘true Italians’ and ‘decent people.’ Vertical non-state surveillance, thus, produces both concrete communities ‘seeking safety in an insecure world’<sup>57</sup>, and imagined ones, grounded in notions of purity, decency, and righteousness, and perceived as always in danger and thus in need to be defended. Surveillance culture has, thus, the power to reproduce and multiply itself, reliant as it is on vocabularies of intimacy, togetherness, and belonging. It (re)produces domopolitical rationalities in which the territory, be it national or urban, is infused with the warm connotations of home, a home that needs protection from undesirable outsiders, reconfiguring this relationship in the Schmittian terms of ‘us’ versus ‘them.’<sup>58</sup> The scissions that such rationalities produce between outsiders and insiders also produce fusions, because the community of ‘we’ — those in need of defending — is imagined, against much evidence, as homogeneous in terms of class, race, nationality, political vision, and moral values. The surveillance practices analyzed here thus operate a simplified reordering of the social along the multiple, intersecting lines of inside/outside, safe/unsafe, us/them, ‘true’ citizens/abject ones, and across the identity categories produced by class, race, gender, and other markers.

Practices of vertical non-state surveillance, through the centrality of their embeddedness in a given space, are also deeply connected to particular urban materialities and their political economies, suggesting that a culturalist approach to the phenomenon is insufficient, as it cannot account for all its complexities. Vertical non-state surveillance cannot be extricated from the wider political economy defining the space in which it finds fertile ground. Discourses of pervasive urban insecurity, neoliberal narratives of active citizenship and ‘participatory security,’ the sense that ‘the fatherland’ is in danger due to uncontrollable amounts of undesirable immigrants and corrupt politicians, and a stark desire for order, authority, and the defense of ‘healthy’ life values are the mythologies underlying such practices. But these discourses are underpinned by the effects of the financial crisis of 2007–2008, which precipitated many of the Roman peripheries in a process of incipient degentrification. In this process, the propertied suburbanites have seen the prices of their houses decrease and urban infrastructure decay. In the subtext of the vertical non-state surveillance mobilization lies the project of

defending the interests of homeowners in the neighborhood against the devaluation of their houses. The middle-class owners of suburban housing come to constitute what Neil Smith called ‘the revanchist city’:

... a reaction against the supposed ‘theft’ of the city, a desperate defense of a challenged phalanx of privileges, cloaked in the populist language of civic morality, family values and neighborhood security. More than anything the revanchist city expresses a race/class/gender terror felt by middle- and ruling-class whites who are suddenly stuck in place by a ravaged property market, the threat and reality of unemployment, the decimation of social services, and the emergence of minority and immigrant groups, as well as women, as powerful urban actors.<sup>59</sup>

Neighborhood patrolling practices become thus a reactionary project of the middle-class to defend their (somewhat) waning privileges increasingly viciously against various scapegoats identified as internal enemies. Vertical non-state surveillance is ultimately aimed at expelling from the space of the neighborhood those who jeopardize housing values and the sense of intimacy that middle-class domopolitics entails. Concerns to protect one’s class belonging deploy according to the script that surveillance culture produces: categorizing people as either dangerous or safe, casting watchfulness on the former, and mobilizing those who are seen to belong to be ever more vocal about ousting undesirables from the neighborhood, thus preventing it from ‘turning bad.’ As a follower of the neighborhood patrol’s Facebook page stressed, under a photograph of a ‘Gypsy van’ with a foreign license plate and the comment of the patrol leader urging *pontenonini* to be vigilant about such presence, “This neighborhood is turning bad and we’re the only ones who must avoid its total decay!”<sup>60</sup> Thus, the materiality of ‘decay’ cannot be disentangled from those who are blamed for bringing it into the neighborhood. Within the same logic, the order of things becomes inextricable from the order of people that the patrol upholds. It is with the unpacking of neighborhood patrols as surveillance practices that it becomes apparent how an analysis of surveillance culture must always dialectically move between the material and the non-material, giving analytical attention to the political economies and urban materialities underlining practices of vertical non-state surveillance.

## **7 Conclusion**

The mushrooming of informal policing in the form of neighborhood patrols is illustrative of the securitarian turn that has gathered momentum since the 1990s. The article has explored one such manifestation as vertical non-state surveillance, tracing its historical roots back to the fascist ideology of citizen mobilization, with which it shares

remarkably — and worryingly — many features. Practices of vertical non-state surveillance unravel according to particular visions and aesthetics of social and political order. Such practices are statements articulating authoritative worldviews, circulating categorizations and legitimating social hierarchies along national, racial, gender, and class lines.

The ethnographic material discussed has allowed for a conceptualization of vertical non-state surveillance as a form of informal policing directed towards subaltern Others in a given urban space. The article has analyzed the ways in which this kind of surveillance is productive of novel forms of subjectivation predicated upon neoliberal narratives of participatory security and active citizenship. Vertical non-state surveillance (re)produces ‘dangerous’ Others as abject. In so doing, it also constitutes the subject itself as violent and repulsed by the abjection it produces, but with the illusory credence of its own moral superiority behind which hide the desire to lynch, to ‘teach a lesson,’ to exterminate. Such practices simplify, stereotype, and petrify the social along antagonistic lines, productive of domopolitical rationalities in which the neighborhood is casted as a home to be protected — from outsiders. Simultaneously, they produce communities that, by offering the veneer of togetherness and the semblance of a just cause, reconfigure socialities in the security register. In the process, while tropes of ‘just lynchings’ and ‘exasperated citizens’ multiply, the socialities normalized by the patrol are increasingly grounded in violence against subaltern Others.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The research conducive to this article was carried out within the Collaborative Research Center SFB/TRR 138: Dynamics of Security: Types of Securitization in Historical Perspective, funded by the German Research Foundation and implemented by the Justus Liebig University Giessen, the Philipps University Marburg, and the Herder Institute. I am indebted to Wibke Schniedermann and to the two anonymous reviewers of the journal for their constructive comments, as well as to Anne Wheeler for her careful language editing.
- <sup>2</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *The Truth about Crime: Sovereignty, Knowledge, Social Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
- <sup>3</sup> Eckart Conze, “Securitization: Gegenwartsdiagnose oder historischer Analyseansatz?,” in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 38 (2012), 453–467, here: 454.
- <sup>4</sup> Daniel Goldstein, “Some Thoughts on the Critical Anthropology of Security,” in *Etnofoor* 28.1 (2016), 147–152, here: 148.

- 5 Brian Massumi, "Preface," in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), vii–x; Frank Furedi, *Culture of Fear Revisited: Risk Taking and the Morality of Low Expectation* (London/New York: Continuum Books, 2006).
- 6 Jutta Weldes et al., *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
- 7 Christopher Daase, "Sicherheitskultur – Ein Konzept zur interdisziplinären Erforschung politischen und sozialen Wandels," in *Sicherheit und Frieden/Security and Peace* 29.2 (2011), 59–65.
- 8 Marc Schuilenburg, *The Securitization of Society: Crime, Risk, and Social Order*, translated by George Hall (New York: New York University Press, 2015).
- 9 David Lyon, "Surveillance Culture: Engagement, Exposure, and Ethics in Digital Modernity," in *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017), 824–842, here: 825 (hereafter abbreviated as 'Lyon 2017'). See also David Lyon, *The Culture of Surveillance: Watching as a Way of Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).
- 10 On the continuities between new and old forms of surveillance and social control, see Roy Coleman, *Reclaiming the Streets: Surveillance, Social Control and the City* (Cullompton: Willan Publishing, 2004) and Roy Coleman and Michael McCahill, *Surveillance & Crime* (London: Sage, 2011).
- 11 Ray Abrahams, *Vigilant Citizens: Vigilantism and the State* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- 12 Les Johnston, *The Return of Private Policing* (London/New York: Routledge, 1992).
- 13 By securitization I mean the process of fabricating insecurities.
- 14 Matthieu Bietlot, "Le camp, révélateur d'une politique inquiétante de l'étranger," in *Cultures & Conflits* 57 (2005), accessed November 14, 2018, <<http://conflits.revues.org/1763>>.
- 15 Torin Monahan, "Regulating Belonging: Surveillance, Inequality, and the Cultural Production of Abjection," in *Journal of Cultural Economy* 10.2 (2017), 191–206, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2016.1273843>> (hereafter abbreviated as 'Monahan 2017').
- 16 Thomas Mathiesen, "The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault's 'Panopticon' Revisited," in *Theoretical Criminology* 2 (1997), 215–234; Roy Coleman, "The Imagined City: Power, Mystification, and Synoptic Surveillance," in *The Surveillance-Industrial Complex: A Political Economy of Surveillance*, eds. Kirstie Ball and Lauren Snider (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 141–157; Roy Coleman, "The Synoptic City: State, 'Place' and Power," in *Space and Culture* 2018, 1–15, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331217751780>>; Christian Fuchs, "Political Economy and Surveillance Theory," in *Critical Sociology* 39.5 (2012), 671–687.
- 17 Echoing the methodological and epistemological concerns expressed by Green and Zurawski, I wish to underline that the practices of the patrol were not *a priori* defined as surveillance, and only emerged as such during my ethnographic engagement with the field. In my research project, I had set out to explore the ways in which the Roma are securitized, that is, constructed and managed as threats, and the prevalence of anti-Roma securitizing discourses uttered by this group on the social media has arrested my attention on their everyday practices. See Nicola Green and Nils Zurawski, "Surveillance and Ethnography: Researching Surveillance as Everyday Life," in *Surveillance & Society* 13.1 (2015), 27–43.
- 18 These defeats were the definitive loss of Dalmatian territories and of the city of Fiume through the Treaty of Versailles. For the imaginary of the 'fatherland in danger', see Martin Clark, "Italian Squadrismo and Contemporary Vigilantism," in *European History Quarterly* 18 (1988), 33–49, here: 44, <<https://doi.org/10.1177/026569148801800102>> (hereafter abbreviated as 'Clark 1988').

- 19 Clark 1988.
- 20 Margarita Gómez and Reino Cachafeiro, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Italian Politics* (London: Routledge, 2016[2002]).
- 21 Jeffrey Cole, *The New Racism in Europe: A Sicilian Ethnography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 22 Giovanna Campani, “Immigration and Racism in Southern Europe: The Italian Case,” in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16.3 (1993), 507–535, here: 511.
- 23 Vincenzo Scalia, “The Context of Decentralised Policing or Local Squads? The Case of the Italian ‘Ronde,’” in *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 4.2 (2012), 38–47, <<https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA11.032>>.
- 24 The practice of informal policing was first inscribed in the Law 94/15.07.2009 and the conditions for citizens to partake in such initiatives were outlined in a subsequent ministerial Decree issued on 8 August 2009.
- 25 This is the term used in the Minister of Interior’s Decree of 8 August 2009, “Determinazione degli ambiti operativi delle associazioni di osservatori volontari, requisiti per l’iscrizione nell’elenco prefettizio e modalità di tenuta dei relativi elenchi, di cui ai commi da 40 a 44 dell’articolo 3 della legge 15 luglio 2009, n. 94”, available at <[http://www1.interno.gov.it/mininterno/site/it/sezioni/servizi/old\\_servizi/legislazione/sicurezza/0978\\_2009\\_08\\_08\\_Decreto\\_Maroni\\_Osservatori\\_Volontari.html?pageIndex=3](http://www1.interno.gov.it/mininterno/site/it/sezioni/servizi/old_servizi/legislazione/sicurezza/0978_2009_08_08_Decreto_Maroni_Osservatori_Volontari.html?pageIndex=3)>.
- 26 I have met the leader of the group and various members in 2014 and 2015; I have accompanied them on patrols and conducted participant observation on their practices, and digital ethnography on the content they share on the social media.
- 27 Franco Pirina, “Ronde pontenonine,” in *Via Ponte di Nona* VIII.2 (Marcg 4, 2013) (hereafter abbreviated as Pirina 2013).
- 28 *Comprensorio*, capitalized in original. I have left in the translation the inconsistencies of the original text and the messy articulation of clauses in the sentence. Perhaps more than the original Italian text, the translation makes apparent the large extent to which the statements rely on a *langue de bois* that rehashes notions of citizenship and value in self-praising overtones.
- 29 Pirina 2013, here: 4.
- 30 Ana Ivasiuc, “Sharing the Insecure Sensible: The Circulation of Images of Roma in the Social Media,” in *The Securitization of the Roma in Europe*, eds. Huub van Baar, Ana Ivasiuc, and Regina Kreide (London/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) (hereafter abbreviated as ‘Ivasiuc 2019’).
- 31 *Carabinieri* are the national gendarmerie of Italy, who carry out local policing roles,
- 32 Regione Lazio, *Criminalità e sicurezza nei territori del Lazio* [Criminality and Security in the Latium Territories] (Rome: Regione Lazio, 2014).
- 33 Fabrizio Battistelli et al., *Periferie insicure?* [Unsafe Peripheries?] (Rome: University of Sapienza & Regione Lazio, 2009).
- 34 Interview, May 2015.
- 35 Michael Herzfeld, *Evicted from Eternity: The Restructuring of Modern Rome* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), here: 91.
- 36 I describe in more detail this first encounter in Ana Ivasiuc, “Watching over the Neighbourhood: Vigilante Discourses and Practices in the Suburbs of Rome,” in *Etnofoor* 27.2 (2015), 53–72.
- 37 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991 [1966]).

- 38 *Buonismo* — from *buono*, meaning good — is a label extended to those who believe in humanist values, and that individuals are fundamentally good, and is part and parcel of the right and far-right imaginary of what is currently ‘ruining’ Italy. Implicitly, behind the condemnation of *buonismo* sits the idea that harsh measures should be undertaken towards those committing illegalities, in particular if they are immigrants. *Buonismo* is also often associated with *assistenzialismo*, a critique of the leftist concern with social equality that puts state assistance at the core of social interventions.
- 39 Romke Visser, “Fascist Doctrine and the Cult of the Romanità,” in *Journal of Contemporary History* 27.1 (1992), 5–22, here: 13.
- 40 Ivasiuc 2019.
- 41 Lyon 2017.
- 42 Ivasiuc 2019; I build here on the concept of ‘complex of visibility’ put forth by Nicholas Mirzoeff in *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
- 43 Monahan 2017, here: 192.
- 44 Monahan 2017, here: 192.
- 45 Katharina Miko-Schefzig, “Loitering forbidden: Subjektive Sicherheit als macht-politischer Auftrag der Versicherheitlichung von Gefühlen,” paper presented at the D-A-CH conference Versicherheitlichung der Gesellschaft: Queer-Feministische und Rassismuskritische Perspektiven, 13–14 July 2017, Technische Universität Berlin.
- 46 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992). See also Monahan 2017.
- 47 Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” in *October* 59 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 3–7 (hereafter abbreviated as Deleuze 1992).
- 48 Deleuze 1992, here: 4.
- 49 Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), here: 43.
- 50 David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Stanley Cohen, *Visions of Social Control: Crime, Punishment, and Classification* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1985).
- 51 Mark Andrejevic, “The Work of Watching One Another: Lateral Surveillance, Risk, and Governance,” in *Surveillance & Society* 2.4 (2005), 479–97; Janet Chan, “The New Lateral Surveillance and a Culture of Suspicion,” in *Surveillance and Governance: Crime Control and Beyond*, eds. Mathieu Deflem and Jeffrey T. Ulmer (Emerald Group Publishing, 2008), 223–239.
- 52 Jonathan Finn, “Seeing Surveillantly: Surveillance as Social Practice,” in *Eyes Everywhere: The Global Growth of Camera Surveillance*, eds. Aaron Doyle, Randy Lippert, and David Lyon (London: Routledge, 2012), 67–80.
- 53 Louise Amoore, “Vigilant Visualities: The Watchful Politics of the War on Terror,” in *Security Dialogue* 38.2 (2007), 215–232.
- 54 Daniel Goldstein, “Security and the Culture Expert,” in *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 33.S1 (2010), 126–142, here: 131.
- 55 Ivasiuc 2019.
- 56 Sara Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” in *Social Text* 22.2 (2004), 117–139.
- 57 Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Malden: Polity, 2001).
- 58 William Walters, “Secure Borders, Safe Haven, Domopolitics,” in *Citizenship Studies* 8.3 (2004), 237–260.

- <sup>59</sup> Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996).
- <sup>60</sup> Facebook comment, November 2013.