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## *Homicide and Knife Fighting in Rome, 1845–1914*

DANIELE BOSCHI

Our plebeian Romans have no more contempt for a murderer than Parisians have for a man who has loyally killed his adversary in a duel. And indeed, murder, as it is practiced here, is a veritable duel. If, in the heat of their discussion, two men have exchanged certain words, they know that blood has to flow among them; the war is implicitly declared; the whole city is the chosen terrain: the crowd is the witness accepted by each party and the two combatants know they have to be on their guard every hour of the day and the night. Thus, the people believe — and this is a prejudice not easily eradicated — that the murderer is a just person.<sup>1</sup>

**T**his is how Edmond About described popular attitudes toward homicide, on the basis of what he had learned during his stay in Rome in the late 1850s. Many other observers of social and cultural life regarded impulsiveness and an inclination toward violence as distinctive features of the common people of Rome during the

nineteenth century. Writers and poets who were well acquainted with popular customs and culture considered the use of knives natural in the course of quarrels and brawls among the lower classes. They also frequently implied that ability and courage in knife fighting were essential to a man's honor. A woman, it was said, would not have been very happy to marry a man who had never shown his bravery in a knife fight.<sup>2</sup>

The aggressive nature of the Romans and their predilection for knife fighting were sometimes regarded as psychological traits related to the peculiar environment and traditions of the city.<sup>3</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, however, criminologists and other experts had become aware that the abuse of weapons, especially of knives, was widespread in many provinces of central, southern, and insular Italy. They also suggested that the frequent abuse of weapons explained why the homicide rate in Italy was much higher than in the more "civilized" countries of central and northern Europe. Indeed, it was for this reason that in 1908 the Italian government requested and obtained from Parliament the approval of a bill hardening penalties for the unlawful carrying of weapons and for wounds inflicted with knives.<sup>4</sup> The introductory report to Parliament on this bill pointed out that, especially in some regions of Italy, the "savage" misuse of deadly weapons provided subject matter for newspaper reports almost daily, "making our country appear among the least civilized in Europe."<sup>5</sup>

As a matter of fact, official statistics provided enough data to show that the homicide rate in Italy was very high. In the 1880s and 1890s, criminologists and statisticians such as Luigi Bodio, Enrico Ferri, and Augusto Bosco had carefully analyzed homicide rates throughout Europe. Enrico Ferri's *Atlante antropologico-statistico dell' omicidio* had shown that around 1880 Italy had the highest rate of offenders condemned for homicide in Europe: 9 per 100,000 inhabitants every year. In the same period, France and Germany had rates lower than 2 per 100,000 inhabitants, and England and Scotland had rates lower than 1.<sup>6</sup> The situation had somewhat improved by the end of the nineteenth century, but the gap between Italy and the more "civilized" countries of central and northern Europe persisted.<sup>7</sup> Criminal statistics also showed that homicide rates throughout Italy were far from uniform. In the years 1880-84, the rate of prosecuted homicides varied from a minimum of 3.6 per 100,000 inhabitants in the district of Milan to a maximum of 45.1 in the district of Palermo. All eight districts of northern Italy had rates lower than 11, the

districts of central Italy had rates between 9 and 26, and almost all districts of the southern and insular regions had rates between 16 and 35.<sup>8</sup>

These data stimulate comparisons with the results of recent historical research on homicide. A growing number of studies show that several European countries experienced a gradual decline of the homicide rate between the late Middle Ages and the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> In England and Wales, a further decline took place in the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth.<sup>10</sup> Most scholars have connected this decline to the modernization of western societies. There is no agreement, however, on which aspects of the modernization processes were — or might have been — crucial in this respect. The transition from feudal to bourgeois society, the growth of the modern state, the "civilizing" effects of religion and education — all have been referred to as possible "causes" of the decline of the homicide rate.<sup>11</sup> The Italian case may add a new dimension to this picture. The evidence collected so far on homicide in Italy in the late Middle Ages and in the early modern period, combined with the data provided by official statistics for more recent times, strongly suggests that in Italy the decline of the homicide rate took place much later or much more slowly than in the countries of central and northern Europe.<sup>12</sup> Studies by Ferri and others indicate that toward the end of the nineteenth century the provinces of northern Italy, which were the most developed in the country, also had the lowest homicide rates, whereas the highest rates were registered in the more backward and traditional provinces of the south and of the two main islands. Furthermore, between the 1880s and the 1960s, the homicide rate in Italy underwent an almost steady decline, seemingly parallel to the modernization of the country.<sup>13</sup>

Although a general pattern linking homicide rates to different levels of modernization is apparent, a thorough sociological study of homicidal violence in Italy between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has not yet been attempted.<sup>14</sup> In order to accomplish this, we need more accurate statistical studies as well as in-depth and piecemeal analyses of the typology of homicide in different areas of the country. This essay presents some of the findings of a case study on homicide in Rome from the middle of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. I have chosen Rome as the focus of my research not only for its long-standing tradition of violence but also because, after 1870, the city underwent major social and political changes.

At the middle of the nineteenth century, Rome was the capital of the

Papal States. It was the most populous city in the pope's dominions and the fourth largest city in Italy after Naples, Palermo, and Milan. Its growth in the past three centuries had been linked to its role as capital of a theocratic state and as center of the Catholic world. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the rulers of the Papal States had proved unable to keep up with the changes that were transforming the western world. The economic and political structures of the pope's dominions had rapidly become obsolete, and Rome had been no exception to the general decay. The city's traditional economy, for instance, had been severely disrupted by the importation of cheaper goods from abroad. The standards of living of the popular classes had considerably worsened. Nonetheless, the population of Rome continued to grow, because the city still catalyzed immigrants from rural areas, where the situation was even worse than in the capital. In 1870, Rome—and the other provinces of the Papal States that had remained independent after 1861—were annexed to the recently founded Kingdom of Italy. As capital of the young national state, the city became the center of novel political, administrative, and economic activities, and it attracted a flood of immigrants from central and southern Italy. The city's population grew more than twofold between 1870 and 1914. Its inhabitants increased from 244,484 in 1871 to 542,123 in 1911. One of the aims of my research is to establish whether these developments, and other related changes, had any impact on the patterns of homicidal violence.<sup>16</sup>

This essay is divided into four parts: the first part deals with the homicide rate and its variations over time; the second illustrates the most recurrent features of homicidal violence; the third analyzes popular attitudes toward homicide; and, finally, the fourth briefly examines some of the possible causes of the "modernization" of homicide in Rome.

### *Homicide Rates*

The first problem one confronts when studying homicide in Rome during the nineteenth century is to establish how high the homicide rate actually was and whether it varied significantly over time. Despite all their talk about lower-class violence, contemporary observers usually did not bother to provide reliable data to back up their assertions. Before 1870, under papal rule, neither the central government nor the local authorities published regular statistics on crime. After 1870, official statistics on crime and criminal justice, published by the central government of the recently

founded Italian state, provide ample and relatively accurate data on all sorts of crimes perpetrated in the country; unfortunately, these data are usually disaggregated on a regional basis, so that no figures are available on crimes reported and prosecuted at a local level.<sup>16</sup>

Nonetheless, it is possible to get an approximate idea about the homicide rate in Rome during the nineteenth century from unpublished statistics for the period before 1870 and from statistics on the causes of death for the subsequent period. More accurate data can be collected by taking samples from the archival records of the main city courts, but these records become less and less complete as one nears the end of the period under examination.

In 1864 an investigation was made of all violent deaths reported to the judicial authorities in the southern provinces of the Papal States in the preceding decade. The data collected remained unpublished in the archives.<sup>17</sup> As shown in table 5.1, these data indicate that an average of 20 homicides a year (10.6 per 100,000 inhabitants) were perpetrated in Rome between 1854 and 1863. There is good reason, however, to believe that the homicide rate was unusually low in the mid-1850s and that the figures in the 1864 statistics, on the whole, underestimate the number of killings known to the judicial authorities. Research carried out directly on archival records for the years 1845-46 and 1865-66 shows, in fact, that

**TABLE 5.1.**  
**Homicides Perpetrated in Rome, 1854-1863**

	<i>Average Homicides per Year</i>		
	<i>N</i>	<i>N/100,000 pop.</i>	<i>Population</i>
1854	15	8.2	182,232
1855	18	9.9	181,661
1856	7	3.8	182,998
1857	21	11.4	184,252
1858	27	14.6	184,659
1859	25	13.4	186,895
1860	20	10.6	188,517
1861	26	13.8	188,841
1862	16	8.3	192,185
1863	24	12.2	195,986
Yearly average	20	10.6	186,833

*Source:* See n. 17.

no less than 62 homicides were perpetrated in the first two years and no less than 73 in the second two years, resulting in rates of about 18 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>18</sup> It is therefore unquestionable that the homicide rate in Rome was much higher than that recorded for other European cities and urban areas in the same period.

In the years 1851-70, the London homicide rate never exceeded 0.5 per 100,000 inhabitants, while the Liverpool rate was on average just under 2.<sup>19</sup> In the mainly urban department of the Seine, which included Paris, 2.6 persons per 100,000 inhabitants were tried for homicide in the period 1837-41, and this rate dropped to 1.3 in the years 1865-69. In the Bouches-du-Rhône department, which included Marseilles, a city with a long-standing reputation for violence, the offenders tried for homicide were 2.4 and 3.5 per 100,000 inhabitants in the periods 1837-41 and 1865-69, respectively.<sup>20</sup>

For the period 1871-1914, statistics on the causes of death, based on death certificates issued by the sanitary authorities, show that the homicides committed in Rome averaged about 33 each year in the period 1872-79, rose to about 40 in the first decade of the twentieth century, and then dropped to 27 in the period 1910-14 (see table 5.2). The homicide rate declined from about 12 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in the 1870s to about 8 in the decade 1900-1909, and dropped further in the years 1910-14. Again, it is quite possible that these data underestimate

TABLE 5.2.

## Homicides Perpetrated in Rome, 1872-1914

	Average Homicides per Year		Population
	N	N/100,000 pop.	
1872-79	33	12.3	270,242
1880-86	38	11.9	323,331
1895-99	35	7.8	439,542
1900-1904	41	8.5	480,771
1904-9	40	7.7	525,470
1910-14	27	4.8	576,368

Sources: Comune di Roma, Direzione Comunale di Statistica, *Annuario statistico di Roma, Anno II, 1886*, vol. 1 (Rome and Florence, 1890), 438; Ministero di Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio, *Cause di morte. Statistica dell'anno . . .*, years 1895-96 (Rome, 1897); idem, *Statistica delle cause di morte nell'anno . . .*, years 1897-1913 (Rome, 1899-1915); Ministero per l'Industria, il Commercio e il Lavoro, *Statistica delle cause di morte nell'anno 1914* (Rome, 1917).

the number of homicides known to the judicial authorities. As a matter of fact, the authors of the statistics themselves pointed out that homicides known to the sanitary authorities could not comprise *all* of the homicides known to the magistrates, because in some cases the physician writing the death certificate was only able to state the immediate cause of death—for example, an injury or asphyxia—whereas the magistrate might later establish that such a “cause” was actually the result of homicidal violence.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, even archival records do not enable us to calculate the precise number of homicides known to the judicial authorities for the period 1871–1914, because some of the relevant criminal registers are missing. A number of parallel indicators do confirm, however, that there was a marked decline in the homicide rate. Official statistics on crimes known to the public prosecutor show a marked drop in the rate of homicides prosecuted in the district of Rome—a regional area centered around the capital—over the period 1881–1914.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, samples taken from the sentences passed by the assizes and by the correctional court also point to a consistent decline (see table 4, below). It seems, therefore, very likely that homicidal violence actually did decline in Rome between 1871 and 1914. Yet, even after this decrease, the homicide rate registered in the capital of Italy was much higher than those of other European cities such as London, Paris, or Berlin; it was also considerably higher than those of northern Italian towns, such as Turin or Milan.<sup>23</sup> As we will see, the decline between 1871 and 1914 was only the beginning of a longer decline that continued until the end of the 1930s.

### *A Typology of Homicidal Violence*

The study of homicide rates must be supplemented with an analysis of the typology and of the social and cultural meanings of homicidal violence. Archival records are the first and most obvious source to use for a more detailed analysis of homicide in the context under examination. The only alternative source would be newspaper reports, but these are not equally reliable. Moreover, they are only available from 1871 onwards, because no free press was allowed under papal rule. Given the bulk of documents extant in the archives, I have chosen four sets of sample years: 1845–46, 1865–66, 1884 and 1888, and 1905–6.

Although I have been looking through all the available trial documents concerning homicides, the gaps found in the sources for the period

1870-1914 have made it impossible to collect complete data on homicides known to the judicial authorities. Thus, the data presented here refer only to the homicides that were judged by a criminal court. These data cannot, therefore, wholly reflect the patterns of the homicides known to the judicial authorities, because the probability that a homicide case could have resulted in an indictment before a court was not the same for all types of homicides and for all categories of offenders. Infanticides, for instance, were much less likely than adult homicides to reach the courtroom, and judges might find it harder to indict somebody for homicide if the victim had been killed by an unusual method or under rather peculiar circumstances. Nonetheless, when one considers that homicides judged by the courts generally comprised the majority of the cases known to the judicial authorities, and that some of the more unusual cases would be left out anyway—it being impossible to establish whether a homicide had occurred or not—one may be relatively confident that the data shown here are representative of at least the most typical cases of homicidal violence.<sup>24</sup>

Two major changes occurred in penal legislation in the period covered by my research. The first took place in 1870, when Rome was annexed to the recently founded Kingdom of Italy: the criminal laws of the Papal States, dating back to the early 1830s, were then abolished and the penal code of the Kingdom was extended to the newly acquired provinces. The second important change occurred in 1889, when a new penal code was introduced.<sup>25</sup> In order to avoid any serious distortion caused by varying legal definitions of homicide, I decided to include in my data all acts of willful violence that resulted in the death of the victim, no matter how they were defined in strictly legal terms. In tables 5.3 and 5.4, all cases of homicide, for which at least one defendant was indicted before a court, are classified according to the legal categories used by the magistrates of the time.<sup>26</sup>

The statistical distribution of homicides among different legal categories is partially a reflection of varying legal theories and criminal procedures, but it is also, to some extent, a reflection of the social reality of homicide in the context under examination. As shown in table 5.3, before 1870 most culprits would be indicted and sentenced under a charge of "voluntary homicide" (*omicidio volontario*): this meant that, in the eyes of the magistrates, the offender had acted with the precise intention of killing the victim. In some cases, the legal definition of the crime would be changed by the court to "malicious wounding" (*ferite, percosse*) on the



TABLE 5.3.

Homicides Perpetrated in Rome, 1845-1846, 1865-1866, by Type

	1845-46		1865-66	
	A	B	A	B
Premeditated homicide	4	1	3	1
Homicide in the course of robbery	1	1	0	0
Uxoricide	1	0	2	2
Infanticide	0	0	0	0
Voluntary homicide	46	36	39	35
Involuntary homicide	0	0	0	2
Malicious wounding followed by death	0	10	0	3
Total	52	47	44	43
Rate per 100,000 inhabitants	15.1	13.6	10.8	10.5

Sources: See n. 26.

Figures are based on the sentences passed by the Tribunale criminale del Governo di Roma, which was the main criminal court of the city under papal rule.

Note: A = homicides for which at least one culprit was indicted; B = homicides defined as such in a court sentence. The differences in the totals of columns A and B are due to the cases in which the sentence established that there was no proof that a homicide had been perpetrated.

grounds that some accidental factor, besides the perpetrated violence, had contributed to the fatal outcome of the aggression. In an even smaller number of cases, a charge of "voluntary homicide" (*omicidio colposo*) would be changed by the court to "involuntary homicide," indicating that the defendant had intended not to kill the victim but only to inflict bodily harm.<sup>27</sup>

After 1871, when the criminal codes of the Kingdom of Italy were extended to Rome, it was no longer possible to change an accusation of homicide into one of malicious wounding, even if it were proved that some other cause, besides the offender's behavior, had contributed to the victim's death. As shown in table 5.4, a great number of culprits would still be indicted under a charge of "voluntary homicide," but the courts would often lessen that charge to one of homicide committed "without intent to kill" (*ferimento seguito da morte; omicidio oltre l'intenzione*) meaning that the offender had acted with the aim of inflicting an injury rather than with the intention of killing.

Both before and after 1870, charges of aggravated homicide were rare, and it was even less common that a court actually condemned the

**TABLE 5.4.**  
**Homicides Perpetrated in Rome, 1884, 1888, 1905-1906, by Type**

	1884, 1888		1905-6	
	A	B	A	B
Premeditated homicide	9	4	7	5
Homicide in the furtherance of another crime (robbery or rape)	2	1	0	0
Uxoricide	2	2	2	1
Infanticide	2	1	1	0
Voluntary homicide	40	27	54	27
Homicide without intent to kill	28	35	8	26
Excusable homicide	0	2	0	9
Unspecified	0	4	1	1
Total	79	73	71	68
Rate per 100,000 inhabitants	10.9	10.1	6.9	6.6

*Sources:* See n. 26.

The figures for the years 1884 and 1888 refer to the homicides judged by the correctional court and by the assizes, whereas the figures for the years 1905-6 refer only to the cases judged by the assizes (the records for the correctional court are missing). The data for 1905-6 are nonetheless comparable to those for 1884 and 1888, because in the first decade of the twentieth century homicides were rarely judged by the correctional court.

*Note:* See table 5.3.

"Homicides in the furtherance of another crime" and "uxoricides" must be subtracted from the totals because they overlap with other categories. "Excusable" homicides include those committed in self-defense or under the compulsion of mental illness. (There were no such cases for the years 1845-46 and 1865-66, which are shown in table 5.3).

culprit under such a charge, which in most cases entailed the death penalty (until it was abolished in 1889). In particular, in all four sets of sample years, only a few homicides were classified in indictments as "premeditated," and even fewer were so defined in the sentences passed by the courts (see columns A and B in tables 5.3 and 5.4). This was to a great extent a reflection of the social reality of homicide in this context. As will be shown with more detail, most homicides perpetrated in Rome throughout this period were the result of brawls or fights, which took place shortly after verbal exchange between the parties involved. Only in extremely rare cases were homicides the outcome of cold-blooded, treacherous attacks, which could more easily be classified as "premeditated" homicides.

Killings perpetrated in the furtherance of another crime were also

very uncommon. Homicides connected with robbery or rape never made up more than 3 percent of the killings in each of the four samples (see tables 5.3 and 5.4). If it were possible to include *all* cases of homicidal violence known to the judicial authorities—which we can only do for the first two samples—the percentage of homicides committed in the furtherance of another crime would probably be slightly higher. In 1845–46, for instance, homicides occurring during robberies represented 4.8 percent of the killings reported to the authorities (3 cases out of 62, whereas there was only 1 case among the 52 homicides that were judged).

Turning to another category of aggravated homicide, the crimes defined as “uxoricides” in a court sentence never made up more than 5 percent of the total (see tables 5.3 and 5.4, column B). Given the ongoing debate about “family” or “domestic” homicide, it is convenient here to provide some data referring to these broader categories as well, although they do not correspond to any of the legal categories used in the period under scrutiny.<sup>28</sup> Homicides among spouses and lovers were totally absent from the cases judged in 1845–46 and amounted to 6.9, 2.7, and 5.8 percent in the subsequent three samples. Should we consider the even larger category of “homicides among intimates,” as defined by Pieter Spierenburg, we would find that killings falling into this category are again totally absent in the first sample and make up 9.3, 5.4, and 10.2 percent of the other three samples.<sup>29</sup> Thus, throughout the period under examination, the vast majority of homicides were perpetrated by people who were not tied to their victim by love affairs, marriage, or close bonds of kinship. The most typical victim-perpetrator relationship was that of two people who knew one another *before* the occasion that gave rise to the homicide but were not closely connected.

In an overwhelming majority of cases, both offenders and victims of homicide were males.<sup>30</sup> Males represented between 94 and 100 percent of the offenders in each of the four sets of sample years, and the percentage of male victims of homicide oscillated between 89 and 96 percent. Males therefore stood a much higher chance than women both of killing and of being killed. This hardly applied, however, to males belonging to the upper and medium layers of the urban population. With few scarcely relevant exceptions, the men who were involved in these deadly disputes belonged to the lower strata of the population. This is shown not only by the distribution of offenders by trade (see table 5.5) but also by several recurrent features, such as the use of knives and the fact that the disputes

TABLE 5.5.

Homicides Perpetrated in Rome, 1845-1846, 1905-1906, by Trade of Offender

	1845-46		1905-6	
	N	%	N	%
Artisans	22	43.1	28	38.9
Bricklayers	5	9.8	6	8.3
Carters, porters	4	7.8	14	19.5
Servants	2	3.9	1	1.4
Agricultural workers, shepherds	9	17.7	8	11.1
Hunters	3	5.9	0	0
Other manual workers	0	0	1	1.4
Shopkeepers, shop assistants	3	5.9	7	9.7
Others	3	5.9	7	9.7
Total	51	100	72	100

Sources: See n. 26.

Notes: The data include offenders who were acquitted because they were mentally ill or had acted in self-defense.

often broke out in taverns, where one could hardly expect to find people belonging to the upper or middle classes.

Data on the weapons used by the offenders show that between 67 and 79 percent of the homicides in each of the four samples were perpetrated by means of sharp instruments (almost invariably a knife). By contrast, killings committed with firearms never exceeded 12 percent of the total, and homicides perpetrated with blunt instruments decreased from 17 percent in 1845-46 to 6 percent in 1905-6, an indication, perhaps, that progress in surgery made it increasingly difficult to kill people with sticks, stones, and the like (see table 5.6).

The majority of homicides took place either in taverns or in the streets. In 1845-46, 25.5 percent of the killings were perpetrated shortly after a dispute had broken out in a tavern; the same dynamics appear in 30.1 percent of the homicides committed in 1905-6. In many cases, the homicide did not actually occur in the tavern, because the quarrellers would often challenge one another to go out into the street, or the barkeeper would try to push them out in order to avoid troubles with the police. Streets were also the theater of many homicides that had no apparent relationship with tavern quarrels. These latter episodes represented 42.5 percent of the killings in the years 1845-46 and 30.8 percent in 1905-6. Other homicides

TABLE 5.6.

Homicides Perpetrated in Rome, 1845-1846, 1865-1866, 1884, 1888, and 1905-1906,  
by Apparent Method

	1845-46		1865-66		1884, 1888		1905-6	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Fire weapon	3	6.4	2	4.7	5	6.9	8	11.8
Sharp instrument	35	74.5	29	67.4	50	68.5	54	79.4
Blunt instrument	8	17.0	12	27.9	12	16.4	4	5.9
Hitting or kicking	0	0	0	0	1	1.4	0	0
Other	1	2.1	0	0	2	2.7	2	2.9
Not known	0	0	0	0	3	4.1	0	0
Total	47	100.0	43	100.0	73	100.0	68	100.0

Sources: See n. 26.

Note: "Homicides" include all deaths defined as such in a court sentence.

took place in workshops, private dwellings, public prisons, farmhouses, or the open countryside. On the whole, throughout the period under scrutiny, homicides committed in public spaces were much more frequent than homicides perpetrated in private dwellings. The latter represent only 6.3 percent of the total in 1845-46, whereas their share of homicidal violence amounts to 19.1 percent in 1905-6. This increase is not necessarily a meaningful one, given the unusual absence of homicides "among intimates" in the first sample.

A variety of disputes could lead to violence and homicide. What was at stake is not always easy to detect. The event that gave rise to the clash was often rather trivial, but even in such cases there may have been underlying sources of tension that were totally, or partially, ignored by the magistrates. An attempted classification of the apparent motives of homicide is shown in table 5.7. Statistical data alone cannot, however, fully describe the nature of the tensions and disputes leading to homicidal violence. I shall, therefore, illustrate them with a number of examples, highlighting some of the most recurrent features of these deadly disputes.

A great number of them apparently began over a joke, an arrogant reply, or other forms of sudden, gratuitous provocation. Disputes of this kind usually took place either in the streets or in drinking places, were related to the abuse of alcohol, and involved young men in their twenties or early thirties. A good example is provided by the brawl in which Sante Donati, a 22-year-old pasta maker, killed Enrico Totteri, a 45-year-old

TABLE 5.7.

Homicides Perpetrated in Rome, 1845-1846, 1905-1906, by Apparent Method

	1845-46		1905-6	
	N	%	N	%
Disputes over:				
Trivial matters	10	21.3	14	20.6
Game	8	17.0	9	13.2
Money or property	13	27.7	10	14.7
Relationships between men and women	5	10.6	8	11.8
Rules of conduct among family members, neighbors, or workmates	3	6.4	12	17.6
Other matters	3	6.4	8	11.8
Robbery	1	2.1	0	0
Rape	0	0	1	1.5
Not known	4	8.5	6	8.8
Total	47	100.0	68	100.0

Sources: See n. 26.

Note: "Homicides" include all deaths defined as such in a court sentence.

seller of aqua vitae. The two had probably never met, nor spoken to one another, before finding themselves in the same tavern on a Sunday evening at the end of September 1845. Donati had already spent several hours there, drinking with two acquaintances, when Toteri and his friends arrived and sat at another table. Donati approached them when he saw that Rosa Stocchi, his former lover, had joined their company. He spoke to Rosa and offered her a glass of wine, but she did not answer and retreated without even looking at him. Shortly afterwards, Toteri started making fun of Donati because he had been rebuffed by the girl; this caused a row, which a comrade of Toteri's unsuccessfully tried to stop; in the ensuing fight Donati managed to stab Toteri with his knife. Toteri died almost immediately.<sup>31</sup>

The disputes that arose in the course of games played either in taverns or in the streets were of a similar nature. Among the many cases of homicides stemming from quarrels of this kind, I will cite the one that led to the killing of Sante De Rossi, a 28-year-old carpenter. On January 1, 1845, De Rossi played several games on the bank of the river with Giovanni Quattrini, Marco Pichi and other young men. At the end of a game, an argument arose over a small sum of money that had to be paid by the losers.

For the moment the players continued their games, but shortly thereafter the argument resumed and the row soon turned into a violent confrontation, in which Quattrini managed to stab both De Rossi and Pichi with his knife. Pichi was only slightly wounded, but De Rossi died in hospital thirteen days later.<sup>32</sup> In this case, the game over which the argument had broken out was *garagbé*, a game of chance which was quite popular in Rome during the nineteenth century. But all sorts of games could give rise to heated quarrels: games of cards (e.g., *trezette*), *morra*, and, most of all, the notorious *passatella*, a game which, by its very structure and rules, was almost bound to lead to disputes.<sup>33</sup>

Quarrels arising over trivial matters and games were thus among the most common apparent causes of homicides. In many other cases, however, homicidal violence was related to disputes of a more serious nature, mostly concerning money or property, relationships between men and women, and rules of conduct among family members, neighbors, and workmates. I will first give two examples of homicides stemming from quarrels concerning money or property.

In September 1846, Giuseppe Polidori, a 24-year-old bricklayer, was mortally wounded by his workmate, Francesco Zannini. The latter, who was only sixteen years old, owed a small sum of money to Polidori's friend Giovan Battista Amici, from whom he had bought some food. On a Saturday evening, a row broke out in the street between Zannini and Polidori, caused by Zannini's refusal to discharge his debt with Amici. After Polidori had beaten Zannini with his bare hands, Zannini hit him on the head with a stone and seriously injured him. Polidori died five weeks later.<sup>34</sup> In this case, the apparent motive of the dispute was not so trivial, but the dynamics of the event were similar to those of the previous examples: here, too, homicide appears to be the result of aggressiveness suddenly roused by a quarrel between men who had previously been on good terms with one another.

In other cases, however, the aggressive drive clearly stemmed from long pent-up tensions finally erupting into homicidal violence. A prolonged conflict over small objects of personal property lay, for instance, at the root of the killing of Tommaso Moretti by his brother-in-law, Stefano Cecchi. The latter, a 61-year-old shoemaker, had married the widowed Caterina Moretti and had lived for some time under her roof, together with her mother and her younger brother, Tommaso. Cecchi and his wife frequently quarrelled with Tommaso, because the latter was in the habit

of embezzling his sister's personal belongings to make a living. The couple had eventually moved to another house, but the bad blood between the two men persisted. On August 24, 1845, a quarrel started among the three, and after Tommaso had wounded Caterina with a glass, Cecchi stabbed him to death with a kitchen knife.<sup>35</sup>

Relationships between men and women were also a fairly common cause of disputes leading to homicide. An example of this is the homicide perpetrated by Luigi Pala, a 19-year-old carpenter. Pala could not stand the illicit relationship that had developed, in the absence of his father, between his mother, Maria, and Nicola Palombelli, and he resented Palombelli's arrogant behavior toward him and his sister, Rosa. One evening a quarrel arose, and Luigi mortally wounded Palombelli with a kitchen knife.<sup>36</sup> An extramarital relationship was also apparently the source of tension between Giuseppe Proietti, a 32-year-old stonecutter, and Agostino Bellini, a 34-year-old carpenter. Although both were married, the two men had tried to win the favors of Chiara De Angelis, a woman who had a bad reputation. It is not clear whether either of the two had had any success, but it seems that Proietti could not stand the rivalry of Bellini. When, on a Sunday afternoon, he met Bellini in the street near Chiara De Angelis's home, he provoked him and then mortally wounded him with his knife.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, I will take the killing of Antonio Mariani as an example of a homicide caused by a dispute over the rules of conduct among workmates. In the afternoon of September 4, 1845, Gioacchino Grimaldi, a 42-year-old stevedore, was working under the supervision of Antonio Mariani. At some point, Grimaldi refused to comply with Mariani's orders concerning the procedure to follow in unloading a cargo of wood from a boat. The two men quarreled, and Grimaldi pushed Mariani off the river bank, causing him to hit his head on some rocks. Mariani died two days later. Grimaldi apparently had never quarreled with Mariani before, but one witness remarked that all stevedores resented Mariani for the strict surveillance he exercised over their work.<sup>38</sup>

### *The Social and Cultural Meaning of Homicide*

A clear pattern seems to emerge from the archival records concerning homicides perpetrated in Rome during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Homicide was a disproportionately male and lower-class



phenomenon, and it was usually the outcome of impulsive (as opposed to planned or premeditated) violence. It was typically the outcome of sudden outbursts of anger and it occurred much more often in the public than in the private sphere of human relations. In many respects, this pattern is very similar to the one that seems prevalent in several European countries in the early modern period.<sup>39</sup> The fact that this traditional pattern of homicidal violence was still dominant in Rome (and probably in the rest of central and southern Italy) in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries further supports the hypothesis of a late "modernization" of homicide in Italy.

But now that we have described the typology of homicidal violence, what can we say about its social and cultural meaning? Are we to trust those writers, such as Edmond About, who tell us that people in the lower classes usually considered killers were men who had rightly defended their honor? Was homicide the outcome of patterns of behavior common to most men in the lower ranks of the urban population, or was it linked to a code of honor mainly followed in the restricted milieu of the "tough" guys called *bulli*?<sup>40</sup>

In the first place, we must bear in mind that although the homicide rate in Rome appears very high in comparison with the rates calculated for other urban areas in the same period, most instances of interpersonal violence led neither to homicides nor to serious woundings. This is clearly shown by a series of statistical tables concerning crimes reported to the main city court in five years between 1851 and 1863.<sup>41</sup> In these tables, homicides and malicious woundings "endangering the victim's life" (*ferite con pericolo di vita, con qualche pericolo di vita*) represented only about one-tenth of all violent crimes reported to the court. In other words, people who were involved in fights and brawls did not, in most cases, hurt or wound one another so seriously as to put human life at risk. This indicates that men and women who resorted to violence did not usually act under a cultural or psychological imperative to kill their opponents, or at least such imperatives were not strong enough to prevent a peaceful settlement of the dispute. What did homicides then represent? Were they just the exceptional cases in which the situation unpredictably got out of hand? Or were they rather the result of crimes committed by individuals who had a special inclination toward violence? And, in any case, how was homicide looked upon by the lower strata of the population?

To answer these questions I will first examine the previous criminal

records of the people who committed homicide in four sample years (1845-46, 1905-6). Second, I will consider how killers and their victims are described in trial documents. Third, I will question whether homicide may have been positively or negatively valued depending on the observance of rules of fairness in knife fighting.

Out of fifty-one individuals who committed homicide in the years 1845-46, seventeen (or 33.3%) had been previously convicted at least once. Ten had been convicted for other crimes against the person, four for crimes against property and three for both types of crime. The situation seems to have changed considerably in the following sixty years. Out of seventy-two persons who committed homicide in the years 1905-6, as many as forty-three (or 59.7%) had been previously jailed at least once. Twelve had been sentenced for offenses against the person, thirteen for property offenses, and seven for both types of offense. Apparently, therefore, there was not only an increase in the percentage of killers with previous criminal records but also a significant rise in the percentage of people who had been convicted of property crimes. It would be possible to argue from these data that at the end of the period under examination homicidal violence had become more closely connected with a milieu of poor and marginal people, who were inclined to thefts and even to more serious property crimes. However, I would be cautious in embracing such an explanation, especially because the criminal justice system was certainly much more efficient in the period 1871-1914 than it had been in the last decades of papal power (see the discussion below). This factor alone could explain the rise in the proportion of killers with previous criminal records. It could also perhaps explain the increase in the percentage of killers who had previously been convicted of crimes against property, for it is to be expected that a very lax penal system, such as that operating in Rome until 1870, was less successful in prosecuting property crimes than in pursuing those who committed crimes of violence.

Whatever changes may have occurred, it is clear that both before and after 1870 a significant percentage of killers had previous criminal records, and we may easily imagine that some of them were violent individuals who committed homicide after they had been involved in several episodes of violence. In this respect, descriptions found in trial documents are perhaps more eloquent than numbers. The men involved in these deadly disputes sometimes had a reputation as violent and dangerous individuals even before they killed or were killed. Their violent habits were

in many cases connected with the abuse of alcohol. Lorenzo Loffredi, a 27-year-old painter, had already been condemned for homicide and for several other crimes against the person before he was again convicted for taking part in the murder of Benedetto Morelli on April 3, 1845. According to some witnesses, he habitually became "nasty" and lost control after getting drunk.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Sante Quintavalli, a 25-year-old fisher, condemned for the homicide of Lorenzo Ciccoricco, was described as a man who was "addicted to wine and to brawls" and who became "nasty" whenever he drank.<sup>43</sup> Orazio D'Annunzio, a 51-year-old barber, who was found guilty of killing Natale De Angelis on July 18, 1905, was depicted by an acquaintance as follows: "I know D'Annunzio because he served with me in the papal army. He has always had a violent and overbearing character and he told me that in America he killed a mulatto. He also told me that many years ago he almost slaughtered a man with a piece of glass and the court condemned him to one month of jail for malicious wounding."<sup>44</sup>

Such testimonies do not always imply a clear-cut moral judgment on the part of the witness. Indeed, it is rare to find, in criminal sources, explicit and unambiguous moral evaluation of the human character of the perpetrators and victims of homicide. This indicates, perhaps, that most homicides were not perceived by the majority of people as something so bad as to require outright condemnation. It is interesting, however, to examine in greater detail those cases in which a clear moral judgment was made. I will take the killing of Olivo Compagnucci as an example. Compagnucci, a 22-year-old shoemaker, was mortally wounded on September 1, 1845, during a fight with his workmate, Giovanni Silla.<sup>45</sup> The two had been on bad terms for a long time. Giovanni Compagnucci, Olivo's brother and employer, owned a shoemaker's shop in the street of Tor de' Conti. When summoned before the magistrate, Giovanni gave a vivid portrait of his dead brother.<sup>46</sup> The latter, he testified, was a totally unreliable character, who loved to spend much of his time drinking in taverns, where he got involved in brawls with whoever had the misfortune of meeting him. Owing to his loose conduct, Olivo had proved incapable, or unwilling, to run the shop with him. Giovanni thought that he was "dishonored" by Olivo's behavior and had thus resolved to send him away from his home. In 1841, Olivo had killed a man and had been sentenced to three years of hard labor.<sup>47</sup> After being released in 1843, he had a row with another shoemaker, who stabbed him in the throat with his knife. He survived only to be killed by his workmate, Giovanni Silla.

To some extent, this portrait may be a reflection of the mentality of a rather well-off artisan, showing little sympathy for the habits and lifestyle of the lowest ranks of the popular classes, to whose level his younger brother, Olivo, had debased himself. But Giovanni was not alone in judging Olivo so sternly. Several of Olivo's workmates did not hesitate to utter their resentment toward him: "Olivo's death is not mourned by anybody," one of them said, "not even by his own brother, because he was a young rascal guilty of homicide, and he went about beating and threatening everyone, picking quarrels with whoever he came across." "Everybody feared him," said another witness, "and almost nobody chose him as his companion." Yet, we know from his brother's testimony that Olivo had "bad companies," so we may easily imagine that, at least within a restricted circle of comrades, Olivo's rowdy and violent behavior was valued in a positive manner. It is also worth noticing that Olivo's workmates, in condemning the young "rascal," were all, at least implicitly, justifying his killer's behavior: having been provoked and assailed by Olivo, Giovanni Silla had been forced to kill him in self-defense.<sup>48</sup> In fact, the judges themselves were lenient with Silla, because they only sentenced him to three years of hard labor.

What we learn from this and other similar cases is that the use of violence, especially when going beyond certain limits, did not necessarily enhance one's reputation; it might do so in a restricted milieu of restless and unruly young men, but their opinion might be in contrast with that of other members of the community, and especially with that of the elder and/or better-off individuals. On the other hand, when somebody was provoked to violence and subsequently killed his opponent — as had been the case with Giovanni Silla — people belonging to his community might be prepared to justify and pardon him, being all too conscious that they themselves might have done the same, had they been in his position.

The human character of the people involved in interpersonal violence and the circumstances of each episode were thus important factors in determining the level of violence that would be reached and the attitudes of third parties toward the perpetrators and the victims of violent crimes. But did moral judgment also depend on the observance of rules of fairness in fighting? Literary sources and direct testimonies of Roman "toughs" (*bulli*) tend to emphasize that in knife fights men had to be fair. A knife should not be used against someone who was not armed with a similar weapon; when somebody was challenged, he might refuse to fight, although by doing so he would lose his "honor." Indeed, many episodes of

violence are described in these sources as popular duels (*duelli rustici*) rather than as brawls.<sup>49</sup> On the contrary, popular duels appear very rarely in trial documents. This is partially due to the peculiar nature of these sources. In homicide trials, and more generally in trials for crimes against the person, each of the two parties involved had a strong interest in minimizing his own contribution to the criminal act and in exaggerating the other party's responsibility. No matter how the confrontation had actually occurred, the victim, if still alive, often claimed that he had done no harm to the offender, whereas the latter usually endeavored to show that he had acted in self-defense or under strong provocation. If we add that witnesses were not always impartial, it is no wonder that in criminal trials the dynamics of violent confrontations are often described in a blurred and contradictory manner.

The tendency to understate the intentional character of violent acts makes it inevitable that popular duels are to some extent underrepresented in trial documents. One of the few homicides that clearly appears to have stemmed from a duel with knives was the killing of Pietro Del Proposto by Enrico Federici, an 18-year-old carpenter. It is worth noticing that we only know with certainty that a duel had taken place, thanks to the testimony of a single witness. This was a barber named Pasqualini, an acquaintance of Federici, to whom the latter had incidentally spoken a few hours before killing Del Proposto on December 8, 1888. Though Federici admitted he had killed his rival, he skillfully made this event seem the immediate result of a quarrel: while arguing with him, Del Proposto had suddenly attacked him with a knife, and he had wounded Del Proposto in self-defense. In fact, the authorities were able to establish that the row had occurred not a few minutes but several hours before the fight and that the two men had agreed to meet in the square of San Pietro in Montorio to fight a duel with knives. Before going there, Federici had told Pasqualini that, by the end of the day, he would be either in hospital or in jail, but everybody in Rome would know what a man from Ascoli — his native town — was worth. The duel was instantaneous: Federici stabbed Del Proposto in the heart but was himself badly wounded — in fact, almost killed — by his opponent.<sup>50</sup>

It is very likely that more homicides were the outcome of popular duels than is apparent from trial evidence. Yet, there is reason to think that popular duels were by no means the most typical pattern of male violence in the lower classes. In many cases, trial documents clearly show that no

formal and explicit rules were followed in violent confrontations. Verbal insults and challenges often provoked immediate physical retaliation, and in many cases the first physical contact was followed by a rapid escalation of violence, with no guarantees that the parties involved would be equally armed. This does not necessarily mean, however, that there was no fairness in fighting. In most cases, a clear pattern of behavior was almost automatically followed. When the verbal confrontation between two men had gone beyond certain limits, each of them knew that he could be assailed by the other and thus tried to anticipate his moves. If one of the men was unarmed, he would often rush to the nearest place where he could find a knife, or any other instrument that could be used as a weapon, and then quickly return to the place where the quarrel had broken out. Because insults so easily led to violence, acquaintances, friends, and even passers-by frequently intervened to calm down the angered men, so as to avoid at least the worst possible consequences of a fight.

This pattern is clearly visible in the brawl between Francesco Avvisati, a 42-year-old shoemaker, and Benedetto Melucci, a 32-year-old barber. Their shops faced the same street, the via del Teatro Marcello, in the very heart of the city. Melucci was angry because Avvisati was in the habit of taking Melucci's workers' attention off their job. One evening, after Avvisati had taken one of the barber's workmen away with him for the whole day, the two men had a row in the street, in front of their shops. Melucci insulted Avvisati and threatened him with his razor. They then entered their shops, where Melucci armed himself with a shovel and Avvisati picked up a shoemaker's knife. The two men were about to engage in a fight, but Melucci was checked by the people who were in his shop and could not go out into the street again. Two acquaintances of his, Giuseppe Vitali and Luigi Ermini, apparently succeeded in calming him down. A few minutes later, Ermini took Melucci out of the shop for a drink. But when Melucci saw Avvisati near the door of his shop, the verbal confrontation started anew. Melucci rid himself of Ermini, ran toward Avvisati, and wounded him in the head with his razor. Avvisati was quick to respond, hitting Melucci in the belly with his knife. Melucci died in hospital the following day.<sup>51</sup>

Though it is not possible to quantify the incidence of the various types of physical confrontation, it is reasonable to maintain that brawls were much more frequent than popular duels. It is also possible that precise rules were more regularly followed in the restricted circles of *bulli*, whereas

people who were less addicted to violence were also, perhaps, less able to control their aggressive drive and/or less sensitive to the blow that their public image might suffer from an unfair use of violence.<sup>62</sup>

My inquiry into the social and cultural meanings of homicide in Rome leads me to conclude that in the lower classes the degree of involvement in interpersonal violence varied considerably from one individual to another, and so did the attitudes toward homicidal violence. Some people were involved in episodes of violence much more often than others and therefore stood a much greater chance both of killing and of being killed. For these individuals, violence was often associated with a lifestyle in which the world of taverns and popular games played a prominent part. Some of these violent folks were also probably linked to an underworld of small thieves, a connection that set them apart from the wider working-class community. More peaceful men probably refrained from violence as a rule, but they might nonetheless be driven to violence, and even to homicide, by the force of circumstances: indeed, the widespread use of knives as weapons entailed that even men who were not particularly prone to violence could unpredictably commit homicide or seriously injure other people. Views and perceptions of physical violence were also far from uniform. Most violent offenders probably regarded their own violence as a rightful means of preserving their honor, but their violent acts were not necessarily approved by other people. For most people in the popular classes, moral judgment of violence, whether leading to homicide or not, depended on the circumstances that had given rise to the events and on the evaluation of the human character of the perpetrators and victims of violent acts. Gratuitous violence was generally criticized, but a violent reaction to a serious provocation was considered legitimate; if this resulted in homicide, most people would probably consider the killing either an accident — a fatal event for which the killer was not entirely responsible — or a well-deserved punishment for the victim's unjust behavior.

### *Possible Explanations of the Long-Term Trend*

The inclination toward violence and the knife-fighting culture that were so typical of the popular classes in Rome in the middle of the nineteenth century were gradually uprooted in the period that followed the annexation of the city to the Kingdom of Italy. As I have already shown, the

homicide rate declined steadily between 1870 and 1914.<sup>53</sup> Official statistics on crimes prosecuted in the district of Rome indicate that the decline of the homicide rate continued from 1915 until 1939.<sup>54</sup> More qualitative evidence suggests that by the middle of the twentieth century the knife-fighting culture and the gangs of *bulli* that were associated with it had almost disappeared.<sup>55</sup>

Such changes are no doubt connected to the "modernization" of Rome and its surrounding rural areas. Although the new capital of the Kingdom of Italy did not industrialize, it did undergo profound social, cultural, and institutional changes. At present, it is not possible to indicate which of these developments was crucial in determining the decline of the homicide rate. Only a comparative study of the patterns of homicide in different cities and areas of Italy toward the end of the nineteenth century could produce something more solid than a number of plausible hypotheses. Case studies, however, are equally important, because they enable us to select a limited number of hypotheses which may be tested later in more wide-ranging analyses. I will thus indicate two factors that seem prominent among those that may have had a "modernizing" influence on homicidal violence in Rome: the development of a working-class movement and the modernization of the criminal justice system.

Under papal rule, guilds and confraternities had been the only legitimate forms of association among artisans and other working-class people.<sup>56</sup> The scene changed radically after 1870, when freedom of speech and association was introduced in Rome and the city became one of the main centers of political life under the constitutional regime of the recently founded Italian state. Initially, working-class associations took the form of societies for mutual aid, but these paved the way for more advanced forms of social and political action.<sup>57</sup> Strikes for better pay and better working conditions became more frequent, and a growing number of working-class associations began to operate as modern trade unions.<sup>58</sup> Anarchist and socialist ideals slowly spread among the working people, and by the beginning of the twentieth century the Socialist Party had established its roots in the lower classes of Rome.<sup>59</sup> These developments may have helped to reduce the incidence of homicidal violence insofar as working-class solidarity restrained intraclass violence and diverted aggressiveness toward social and political targets. Yet, it is likely that between 1871 and 1914 the development of the working-class movement



had a marked and profound effect only on a minority of the popular classes of the capital, while its impact probably became stronger as the twentieth century progressed.

Thus, in the first decades after 1870, the second factor I have pointed to, the modernization of the criminal justice system, was probably more important. There had been, in the Papal States, a long-standing tradition of indulgence toward interpersonal violence. Throughout the early modern period, people accused of violent crimes, other than homicide, easily managed to avoid at least the most severe forms of punishment, thanks to a complex system of judicial pardons and private reconciliations. Even people who committed homicide were treated with leniency when they had killed in the heat of a quarrel.<sup>60</sup> Although by the early 1830s a series of reforms had swept away from criminal laws the remnants of the ancien régime, the reformed system of criminal justice failed to operate with efficiency. A recent study of the administration of criminal justice in Rome in the period 1849–59 has shown that the main criminal court of the city (the Tribunale criminale di Roma) received several thousand reports each year, concerning a wide variety of crimes allegedly committed in the capital, but effectively dealt with a very small portion of these offenses. This was also true of offenses against the person. Out of 1,133 malicious woundings reported to the court in 1849, only 52 (or 4.5%) were punished. Nor was this low percentage due to the particular situation of that year, which saw the rise and fall of the Roman Republic. In 1859, the cases of malicious wounding reported to the court were 630: only for 75 (or 12%) the court convicted and sentenced the offenders. To be sure, the percentage of offenders condemned was considerably higher for homicides. However, since assaults with knives only exceptionally resulted in the death of the victim, it is unlikely that frequent punishment of homicide may have had a strong deterrent effect, as long as potential offenders knew that less serious crimes would only occasionally be punished. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that before 1870 the judicial system only exerted a moderate deterrent power over potential killers.<sup>61</sup>

This situation changed considerably after 1870, as official statistics on criminal justice clearly indicate. The available data refer to the district of Rome rather than to the city itself, but it is very likely that the pattern of punishment in the capital was similar. To take just one sample, in the period 1896–1900, the cases of malicious wounding for which prosecution was undertaken were on average 4,824 every year; in the same period, an

average of 3,836 offenders were indicted each year for malicious wounding, out of which 1,903 (or 49.6%) were condemned. Moreover, the percentage of offenders condemned was much higher among those who were tried on more serious charges: out of 549 defendants indicted on average every year for aggravated crimes of violence (other than homicide), as many as 467 (or 85%) were condemned.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, a process of modernization of both society and institutions apparently lay at the root of the decline of the homicide rate in Rome in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A parallel decline of the homicide rate took place, over the same period, in many other districts of central, southern, and insular Italy.<sup>63</sup> It is plausible that a connection between modernization and decreasing homicide rates could be established for some of these areas as well. However, little work has been done so far on the nature and incidence of violent crimes in these regions.<sup>64</sup> We must, therefore, conduct further research before a more precise assessment can be made about the nature and timing of the modernization of homicidal violence in Italy.

### Notes

This essay is based on my doctoral thesis, "L'omicidio a Roma fra la metà dell' Ottocento e la prima guerra mondiale, 1841-1914" (University of Rome, 1996).

1. About 1861, 132 (editor's translation).
2. See Bresciani 1862, 61-62, 64-65, 97-99, and *passim*; Gabelli 1881, xxx-xlii; Picca 1907; Zanazzo 1908, 201-3, 212-15. Many rhymes by poets writing in dialect, such as Giocchino Belli, Cesare Pascarella, and Giggi Zanazzo, touching on the violent habits of the lower classes of Rome, are quoted in Rossetti 1978. Among more recent publications on the topic of violence in Rome in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see esp. Mariani 1983. For a broader interpretation of lower-class violence in the past centuries, especially of knife fighting, see Baronti 1986.
3. See Picca 1907, 260; Rossetti 1978, 115-24.
4. The text of the law can be found in the *Raccolta ufficiale delle leggi e dei decreti del Regno d'Italia, Parte principale* (Rome, 1908), 4:2779-81.
5. See the *Raccolta degli atti stampati per ordine della Camera, Legislatura XXII, Sessione 1904-1909*, vol. 6 (Rome, 1909), n. 106A, p. 1.
6. E. Ferri, *Atlante antropologico-statistico dell'omicidio*, published as an appendix to Ferri 1895 (246-49, 281). Ferri's statistics referred to seventeen European countries. The figures for Italy include individuals convicted for attempted homicides. It seems that the same

criterion was used for all other countries except Spain, England, Ireland, and Scotland; for the latter four countries, offenders guilty of shooting and similar crimes, which were roughly the equivalent of the Italian category of attempted homicide, were not included. Comparisons among crime rates recorded in different countries are a very complex matter, and Ferri's attempt was not without flaws; in the case of homicide, however, it seems unlikely that differences so sharp as those discovered by Ferri and other criminologists of his time could be explained simply as the result of differences in legislation and penal policies. This argument is all the more cogent for the differences in homicide rates throughout Italy, where a uniform legislation and judicial system were in force after 1870 (only the region of Tuscany was allowed to preserve its own criminal code, until 1889).

7. See Negri 1908, 555-57.

8. Rates are calculated on the basis of the data provided by Ferri in his *Atlante*, 1895, 252-53. Again, Ferri's figures comprise both completed and attempted homicides. They cannot, therefore, be directly compared with the figures on homicides in Rome, which will be given below, because the latter always refer to completed homicides only. See also Bodio 1885; Bosco 1898.

9. For a general overview see Rousseaux 1994. A review of historical studies of homicide in medieval and early modern England is found in Gurr 1981. For the early modern period, more recent studies dealing with homicide in particular towns or areas include Beattie 1986; Cockburn 1991; Spierenburg 1994.

10. See Cockburn 1991, 78; Gatrell 1980, 286-87.

11. See esp. Gatrell 1980, 300; Gurr 1981, 341-44; Spierenburg 1994, 702-3; Stone 1983, 29-30.

12. On homicide in Italy from the late Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, see Becker 1976; Fiume 1990; Folini 1990-91; Fosi 1992; Padovan 1988; Ruggiero 1980.

13. The national homicide rate declined from an average of 13.9 per 100,000 inhabitants in the 1880s to 4.2 in the 1930s and further dropped to 2.6 in the 1960s. Thereafter, the rate has tended to increase but has stayed well below the level of the late nineteenth century. In the years 1990-94, it oscillated between 5 and 7 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. All these figures include attempted homicides. See Istituto Centrale di Statistica (hereafter ISTAT), *Sommario di statistiche storiche dell'Italia, 1861-1975* (Rome, 1976), 68-69; ISTAT, *Statistiche giudiziarie penali, Anno 1994* (Rome, 1995), 437.

14. Studies by criminologists and statisticians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contain detailed analyses of the serial data published in official statistics, but they hardly make any serious attempt at explaining the incidence and evolution of homicide in sociological terms. Beside the works already quoted, see Spallanzani 1917.

15. On the general history of Rome in the nineteenth century, see Bartocchini 1985; Caracciolo 1984; Friz 1974 and 1980; Seronde-Babonax 1983.

16. On the Italian statistics on crime and criminal justice see Saraceno 1984.

17. See State Archive of Rome (hereafter ASR), *Miscellanea statistica*, 42, *Morti violente verificate nel decennio 1854 a 1863, Tavola IV. Numero degli Omicidj avvenuti, denunciati e giudicati dai Tribunali di Civitavecchia, Frosinone, Roma, Velletri, Viterbo nel decennio 1854 a 1863*.

18. Details may be found in my doctoral thesis: Boschi 1996, 100-104, 287-88. The figures on population I have used are the following: 1845, 170,988 inhabitants; 1846, 174,058; 1865, 202,457; 1866, 205,435. Since the average population was 172,523 in the

first couple of years and 203,946 in the second, the exact rates per 100,000 inhabitants were 17.96 in 1845-46 and 17.89 in 1865-66.

19. Monkkonen 1989, 86.

20. Zehr 1976, 118.

21. See Ministero di Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio, *Statistica delle cause di morte: Morti avvenute nei comuni capoluoghi di provincia e di circondario. Anno 1882* (Rome, 1883), xxvi n. 1.

22. The rate of successful homicides known to the public prosecutor in this area declined from 13 per 100,000 inhabitants in the period 1881-86 to 7.0 per 100,000 in 1912-14. For the absolute figures on homicides, see Ministero di Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio, *Statistica giudiziaria penale* for the years 1881-86 (Rome, 1884-88); Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia e dei Culti, *Statistica giudiziaria penale* for the years 1912-14 (Rome, 1916-18). Data on population were drawn from the national censuses of 1881, 1901, 1911, and 1921 and interpolated.

23. On homicide rates in Italian cities in the years 1907-11, see Spallanzani 1917, 614; on London, see Monkkonen 1989, 86; on Berlin and Paris, see Zehr 1976, 118; see also, however, on Berlin, McHale and Bergner 1981, showing that the homicide rate in the capital of the German Reich, which was fairly low in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, underwent a dramatic upswing in the years 1905-12. More generally, on homicide rates in Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Gurr 1981, 310-12, 334-40.

24. In the years 1845-46 and 1865-66, the homicides on which sentence was passed made up 83.9 and 60.2 percent of the total number of homicides known to the judicial authorities: Boschi 1996, 288-89. For the period 1870-1914, archival records do not enable us to calculate the percentage of prosecuted homicides over the total number of killings perpetrated in the city of Rome. In the district of Rome, however, prosecuted homicides (excluding attempted homicides) amounted to 81.8 percent of the total number of killings known to the examining magistrates for the period 1880-86. This percentage dropped slightly to 77.6 percent in the years 1890-95. These calculations are based on the data provided in Ministero di Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio, *Statistica giudiziaria degli affari penali per l'anno 1880* (Rome, 1883); *ibid.*, *Statistica giudiziaria penale* for the years 1881-86, 1890-95 (Rome, 1884-88, 1892-97).

25. On the history of criminal legislation in the Papal States after the Restoration of 1814, see La Mantia 1884, 608-18; Castracane Mombelli 1979. On the criminal codes of the Kingdom of Italy, see Pessina 1906, 638-70, 685-708, 733-64.

26. For the sake of clarity and consistency, not all subspecies of homicide have been considered in disaggregating the data but only those that appeared to be the most relevant and the least affected by changes in penal legislation. Data in tables 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, and 5.7 are drawn from the following sources: ASR, *Tribunale criminale del Governo di Roma, 1814-1871* (from 1847 onwards *Tribunale criminale di Roma*); *Registri delle sentenze*, 20-21, 36-38; ASR, *Tribunale penale di Roma*, 5585-88, 5890-91, 5634; ASR, *Corte di appello di Roma (1871-99)*, 651-56, 668-73; ASR, *Corte di appello di Roma (1894-1921)*, 371-76; ASR, *Corte di assise di Roma, Sentenze penali (1871-1920)*, 305-7, 309-11, 326-28. When the information provided by the sentence was not satisfactory, the data were taken from other trial documents.

27. After 1870 the expression "involuntary homicide" was only used, in legal language,

to indicate homicides caused by a reckless or negligent, rather than malicious, action. In the Papal States, however, the expression could also refer to homicides that would have been classified as "homicides without intent to kill" (*ferimenti volontari seguiti da morte, omicidi oltre l'intenzione*) after 1870. On the latter category of homicides, see below in the text.

28. On family homicides, see esp. Cockburn 1991, 93–98; Spierenburg 1994, 705–6, 709–12.

29. Both in Spierenburg's data and in my own, "intimates" include spouses, lovers, and immediate family. See Spierenburg 1994, 710, 716n. 41.

30. All the data on "offenders" presented in this essay refer not only to the culprits who were convicted but also to those who were acquitted for having killed in self-defense or under the compulsion of mental illness.

31. ASR, *Tribunale criminale del Governo di Roma (1814–71), Processi*, vol. 227 (old numeration), file 29154.

32. *Ibid.*, vol. 206, file 27599.

33. On popular games in Rome during the past centuries, see Rossetti 1978, 200–210, 228–30. The rules of *passatella* are explained in Zanazzo 1908, 375–83; see also J. Davis 1964.

34. ASR, *Tribunale criminale del Governo di Roma (1814–71), Processi*, vol. 278, file 31183.

35. *Ibid.*, vol. 216, file 28550.

36. *Ibid.*, vol. 200, file 27105. The homicide was committed on September 19, 1845.

37. *Ibid.*, vol. 218, file 28670. The homicide occurred on August 3, 1845.

38. *Ibid.*, vol. 243, file 29631.

39. Contextual evidence on homicidal violence in Italy in the early modern period can be found in Baronti 1986. On France, see esp. Muchembled 1989. On the Netherlands, and for more general considerations, see Spierenburg 1994.

40. The word *bulli* began to be used only after 1870. It indicated men who were known for their bold and sometimes overbearing manners. *Bulli* regarded themselves as "men of honor" and usually had a reputation for knife fighting. See Mariani 1983.

41. See the *Quadri numerici delle cause introdotte e decise dal Tribunale Criminale di Roma* for the years 1850–51, 1852, 1854, 1856, and 1863. ASR, Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia, 407; ASR, *Miscellanea statistica*, 40, 43.

42. ASR, *Tribunale criminale del Governo di Roma (1814–71), Processi*, vol. 221, file 28869.

43. *Ibid.*, vol. 289, file 31515.

44. ASR, *Corte di assise di Roma, Processi (1897–1931)*, vol. 137, file 34.

45. ASR, *Tribunale criminale del Governo di Roma (1814–71), Processi*, vol. 222, file 28915.

46. *Ibid.*, fols. 18–22.

47. According to Giovanni Compagnucci, the punishment inflicted on his brother had been so mild because the homicide charge had been changed at court stage into one of malicious wounding followed by death (*ibid.*, fol. 21). It was not uncommon, however, that people guilty of homicide were sentenced by the papal courts to what appear to us nowadays very mild penalties.

48. *Ibid.*, fols. 49–50, 35.

49. See Rossetti 1978, 190, 221–23, 231, 249; Mariani 1983, 42–44, 50–51, 65–67, 123–25.

50. ASR, *Corte d'appello di Roma (1871–1899)*, vol. 673, sentence no. 475.

51. ASR, *Corte di assise di Roma, Processi (1897-1931)*, vol. 125, file 61.

52. See Mariani 1983, 42-44, 50-51.

53. It is not possible to explain this decline as a consequence of progress in medicine and surgery. The period under examination is indeed the one that saw the birth and the development of modern surgery (see Maconi 1991). However, while it seems beyond doubt that over the very long run progress in medicine and surgery has helped to push—or at least to keep—the homicide rates down, it is not at all certain that the improvements made in the second half of the nineteenth century had any significant effects on homicide rates. As a matter of fact, in the case of Rome, the available data show that the mortality rate for serious injuries did not decline but increased, in contrast with our expectations. In the years 1871-76, out of 468 patients who received treatment for serious injuries caused by sharp instruments in the hospital of Santa Maria della Consolazione, 12 percent (56) died. The mortality rate for the same kind of injuries rose to 14.4 percent in the period 1892-97 and to 19.3 percent in the years 1902-4 and 1909. The figures cited are calculated on the basis of the data provided in *Saggio di statistica illustrata eseguito nell'Ospedale di S. Maria della Consolazione di Roma* (Rome, 1878), and in *Regio Commissariato degli Ospedali Riuniti di Roma, Statistica sanitaria degli ospedali per gli anni 1892, 1893, 1894 e 1895 compilata a cura del Dott. Achille Ballori medico direttore dell'arcispedale di S. Spirito* (Rome, 1896) (and similar volumes for the following years).

54. In the 1920s and 1930s the district of Rome no longer coincided with any of the areas whose population is known thanks to census data. Therefore, it is no longer possible to calculate the homicide rate for this district on the basis of aggregate census data. It is known, however, that the homicides known to the public prosecutors of the district (excluding attempted homicides) decreased from an annual average of 94 in the period 1920-24 to an annual average of 61 in the years 1936-39. Over the same period, the inhabitants of Rome—who were the core of the population of the district—increased from 691,661 inhabitants in 1921 to 1,179,037 in 1936. We may thus deduce that a consistent decline of the homicide rate took place in the period 1920-39. For the data on homicides, see Ministero di Grazia e Giustizia, *Statistica giudiziaria penale* for the years 1920-35 (Rome, 1925-39); ISTAT, *Statistica giudiziaria penale* for the years 1936-39 (Rome, 1939-41). For the data on the population of Rome, see Comune di Roma, Ufficio di Statistica e Censimento, *Annuario statistico della città di Roma: Anno 1864 con dati retrospettivi per il decennio 1955-1964 e serie storiche secolari* (Rome, 1969), 27.

55. See Rossetti 1978, 258-75; Mariani 1983, 4-6 and *passim*.

56. Guilds had been abolished in 1801 by Pope Pius VII. Pope Pius IX tried to reintroduce them in 1852, but only a few were reestablished. See Scacchi 1981, 63.

57. *Ibid.*, 63-78, 113-25; Basevi 1954, 10-11. Societies for mutual aid grew rapidly from 50, numbering about 8,500 members in 1873, to 274, numbering more than 40,000 members in 1894, when their expansion reached its peak.

58. Scacchi 1981, 85-87, 95-100, 115-17.

59. Basevi 1954, 12-15; Cafagna 1952; Della Peruta 1952.

60. See Cajani 1991, 526-27.

61. Cerroni 1995, 56-182; see also n. 24 above.

62. The data on malicious woundings known to the public prosecutor are drawn from Ministero di Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio, *Statistica giudiziaria penale* for the years

1896-1900 (Rome, 1897-1901). The data on offenders indicted and condemned are taken from Ministero di Agricoltura, *Notizie complementari alle statistiche giudiziarie penali degli anni 1896-1900* (Rome, 1909), 107, 235, 377, 515, 653.

63. See Spallanzani 1917, 623-76.

64. See, however, Baronti 1986, esp. 76-89; Da Passano 1984; Pompejano, Fazio, and Raffaele 1985; Rosoni 1988.