Criticizing ideas is legitimate, erasing history is another matter. Respect for Gianfranco Paglia

Published on 23/08/2026

“COWARD”. “CRAVEN”. “YELLOW-BELLIED”.

These are heavy words. Words that have a precise meaning and that, before being hurled at someone, would at least require knowing their history.

And today these words cannot be read outside the climate that has been created around Gianfranco Paglia. In recent hours, the Lieutenant Colonel, Gold Medal for Military Valor and advisor to Defense Minister Guido Crosetto, has indeed filed a formal complaint after receiving explicit death threats on social media, accompanied by insults and a reference to the use of a firearm.

According to what Paglia himself made known, the threats arrived after his recent statements about Roberto Vannacci. Minister Crosetto publicly expressed his solidarity, defining what happened as a limit that should never be crossed: dissent is legitimate, threats are not.

Gianfranco Paglia can be criticized. His ideas, his statements, his positions and what he sustains today can be contested, and this is the normal exchange between different opinions and no one should be exempt from criticism.

But there is a line that, in my view, should not be crossed: the one that leads to transforming dissent into personal delegitimization, insult and, in the worst case, intimidation. Questioning the personal courage of a man while completely ignoring what that man has done means already crossing the terrain of debate. When death threats are added to insults, we are no longer facing a political or social controversy, but something completely different.

And precisely for this reason it is worth recalling who is the man to whom someone today calls a “coward” or a “craven”.

Mogadishu, July 2, 1993

To understand why certain terms are particularly out of place when directed at Gianfranco Paglia, one must go back to **July 2, 1993**, in Mogadishu.

That day the Italian military engaged in Somalia found themselves involved in what would go down in history as the **Battle of the Pasta Factory**, or **Checkpoint Pasta**.

Paglia was there.

Not behind a keyboard. Not at a safe distance. He was on the ground, together with the men he was operating with, in the midst of one of the toughest clashes faced by Italian military since the end of World War II.

What happened during those hours belongs to history and, above all, to the memory of those who lived that battle directly.

I do not want to be the one to tell you who Gianfranco Paglia was that day, **although I was also present in Mogadishu that day as a raider of the 9th Regiment of Paratroop Assault “Col Moschin”**.

In the video that accompanies this article, I have instead chosen to rely on the words of General Paolo Ricò, who on July 2, 1993 was Captain and Commander of the XV Company “Diavoli Neri”. I read some passages from the book **“The Black Devils. The True Story of the Battle of Mogadishu”**, in which Ricò reconstructs those moments experienced on the ground.

It is the direct testimony of those who lived that battle firsthand, in close contact with Gianfranco Paglia, and which helps to understand what meaning words like courage, fear, sacrifice and sense of duty take on when measured in the field.

Criticizing ideas is legitimate. Erasing history is another matter

No decoration and no episode from the past makes a person immune from criticism.

That's not the point.

The point is to distinguish between political or personal criticism and insults directed at the history and conduct of a man.

One can be profoundly in disagreement with Gianfranco Paglia today and, at the same time, recognize what he did as an officer of the Italian Army in Mogadishu.

The two things are not incompatible.

In fact, this should be precisely the difference between debate and personal delegitimization.

What has happened in recent hours demonstrates how easily that difference can be erased. It starts with insults, with caricature of the opponent, with labels thrown on social media. And it can lead to messages that openly evoke death and the use of a weapon.

It does not mean automatically attributing to anyone who criticizes Paglia responsibility for the threats received: that would be incorrect. However, it does mean remembering that **words contribute to building the climate in which the debate takes place** and that each person should take responsibility for the language they choose to use.

Because using terms like **“coward” or “craven”** means making a very precise judgment about a person's courage.

And when that person was a protagonist of a battle like the one on July 2, 1993, it might perhaps be appropriate to know the facts before pronouncing certain words.

The threats received by Gianfranco Paglia have been reported to the competent authorities and it will be up to them to establish any responsibilities. On the human and civil level, however, one thing should be simple: you can contest everything, even harshly, but **threatening someone with death is not freedom of expression**.

I am not asking you to share his ideas.

I am not even asking you to change your opinion about what Gianfranco Paglia says today.

I am only asking you to listen.

Listen especially to those who were beside him that day.

Then, as always, **you judge**.

Danilo Amelotti

1st Marshal raider, retired