NEL MONDO l'Unità 5 Venerdì 27 giugno 1997

Bertini ha confessato alla polizia di Palermo di aver inventato le notizie sul comportamento della Folgore

La strage in Somalia era una bufala Panorama ingannato dall'ex parà

L'uomo, tossicodipendente, ha ingannato il settimanale per avere i soldi (sette milioni) millantando di possedere foto inequivocabili. Ieri Bertini si è ferito da solo per inscenare il furto delle foto scoop ma gli agenti non ci sono cascati.

DALL'INVIATO

PALERMO. Tanto tuonò che piovve. Era una montatura bella e buona, e - obbiettivamente - neanche delle più sofisticate. Salta fuori il parà mitomane e visionario, assetato di danaro e con problemi di tossicodipendenza, pronto a inventarsi una ricostruzione di comodo dei fatti di Somalia pur di avere in cambio sette milioni, talmente «sbiellato» da essere convinto che la gallina gli avrebbe regalato tante altre uova d'oro. Un piano ben congegnato, il suo, che è scivolato però sulla buccia di banana di un lungo interrogatorio alla mobile di Palermo dove - per scuola e tradizione - normalmente sanno distinguere fra ciarlatani e gente che non ha tempo da perdere.

Fatta questa premessa, vorremmo aggiungere che forse adesso non è il caso di accanirsi contro Benedetto Bertini, palermitano, 23 anni, celibe, pasticcere disoccupato, che si ritrovò nella Folgore dal 20 agosto '93 al 24 marzo del '94, ovviamente in Somalia. Ha ammesso di «avere inventato tutto», la ricostruzione di quei somali dilaniati da una mina e invece, da lui, messi sul conto dei sarebbero comportati come gli «incappucciati» della via Lincoln.

Alle 22 e 30 l'interrogatorio alla presenza del sostituto procuratore Biagio Insacco e della dottoressa Pugneti, dell' istituto di medicina legale. E' il crollo. Il momento della sua totale ammissione di responsabilità.

Un paio di settimane fa - ha raccontato Bertini al giudice Insacco - dopo aver saputo della denuncia di un altro parà, pubblicizzata da *Panorama* -, ho preso contatto con il giornalista Giovanni Porzio al quale dissi di sapere fatti che riguardavano le violenze compiute in Somalia dai parà. E di essere in condizione di documentare questi fatti con foto che avevo io. Porzio è venuto a Palermo. Mi ha ascoltato e ne ha ricavato un articolo che è comparso sul settimanale quindici giorni fa. Come ricompensa ho ricevuto 6-7 milioni. I primi tre li ho avuti sabato scorso. Oggi avrei dovuto avere il resto. Aggiungo che questa mattina ho incontrato Gregoretti che mi ha dato un milione con la promessa che alle 14 mi avrebbe dato il resto in cambio delle foto. Gli dissi che le foto

Bertini ha agito da solo?

La storia dell' ex parà Benedetto Bertini - nella sua sconvolgente banalità - è semplicissima. Diventato tossicodipendente dopo la missione choc in Somalia, nei giorni in cui esplode sul settimanale «Panorama» la denuncia contro le presunte violenze dei nostri militari contro «i negri», decide di aguzzare l'ingegno e vende la sua «prima» foto. Che è anche l'ultima, visto che, come ha raccontato lui stesso al magistrato, non ne possiede altre. Incassa tre milioni e non intende rinunciare agli altri quattro, a suo tempo promessi. Ora si dice «pentito» e non chiama in causa corresponsabili in questa che resta una storiaccia. Qualche interrogativo, però, è

«Contiene solo voci»

Gallo: il rapporto Sismi poco importante

ROMA. «Capisco perchè il rapporto del Sismi non fosse mai arrivato nelle mani dell' allora ministro della Difesa, Fabio Fabbri. Non conteneva nulla di interessante». Lo ha detto ieri, in una pausa dei lavori della commissione nominata dal governo per indagare sulle presunte violenze avvenute in Somalia, il presidente Ettore Gallo. «Il rapporto - ha aggiunto Gallo - parla soltanto di voci, di "si dice", non si fanno nomi e non si citano episodi. Non c'è niente. È un rapporto che genericamente concerne qualche tensione che ci sarebbe stata tra la popolazione somala e il nostro contingente. Non contiene alcun riferimento specifico ai fatti emersi negli ultimi tempi». Del rapporto, o meglio di una serie di «appunti», redatti da agenti Sismi in Somalia tra il marzo '93 ed il febbraio '94, è stata data notizia ieri dal quotidiano *La Repubblica*. Secondo quanto riportato dal giornale, di queste informative, non sarebbe stato messo a conoscenza l'allora ministro della difesa Fabio Fabbri e solo una parte di queste sarebbe stata inviata al Cesis, dal quale non sarebbe comunque stata girata all'allora presidente del consiglio

Folgore-Somalia Scandal: Acquitted by Courts, Condemned Forever by Public Opinion

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In June 1997, the Parachute Brigade "Folgore" suddenly found itself in the dock.

Not just some of its men, but the **entire Folgore.**

Newspaper headlines, photographs, testimonies, accounts of torture, rape and murder constructed within a few weeks the image of a unit in which violence and abuse would have been almost systematic.

There were even public calls for the **dissolution of the Folgore Brigade**. On June 13, 1997 *il manifesto* headlined without mincing words "Dissolve the Folgore". A few days later the Greens organized a press conference in the Senate dedicated to violence in the Armed Forces in which the same proposal was put forward.

Almost thirty years later, however, it is possible to do something that was much more difficult back then: to separate accusations from established facts, photographs from interpretations, individual responsibilities from the responsibility of an entire Brigade and, above all, **the media trial from judicial proceedings**.

And the picture that emerges is profoundly different from the one that remained in collective memory.

When an accusation becomes a collective conviction

The scandal erupted through a series of journalistic reports on alleged violence committed by Italian military personnel during the operation in Somalia.

The accusations were devastating.

There was talk of torture with electric shocks, rape, beatings, killings of civilians and gratuitous violence.

Some episodes were accompanied by photographs and necessarily deserved to be investigated. Others, however, depended exclusively on statements from witnesses and former military personnel.

But in the public representation this distinction quickly disappeared.

It was no longer about verifying who had done what. There was no longer a distinction between accusation and verdict.

People began to speak of the "Folgore" as a whole. **The Folgore had already been judged and condemned in public opinion**.

The difference is enormous.

Because one thing is to establish the criminal responsibility of a single soldier. Another is to transform the possibly criminal behavior of some individuals into a moral description of thousands of paratroopers and an entire large unit of the Italian Army.

Even the President of the Republic Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, intervening in June 1997, warned against this generalization, calling an indiscriminate condemnation of the entire Brigade unjust.

The Gallo Commission: no responsibility of the Folgore as an institution

The Government established a commission of inquiry chaired by former Constitutional Court president **Ettore Gallo**.

The Commission conducted over one hundred hearings and investigated numerous episodes.

The conclusions were far less spectacular than the headlines that had appeared in the preceding weeks.

The Commission ruled out the existence of generalized responsibility of the Folgore or the leadership of the contingent.

The report of the time summarized that overall the judgment on the behavior of Italian military personnel remained positive.

The Franco Carlini case: "accusations absolutely devoid of substance"

It is probably one of the most sensational cases.

A former Somali interpreter accused Lieutenant Colonel **Franco Carlini** of raping and killing a young Somali. Carlini was indeed investigated for voluntary manslaughter by the Milan Prosecutor's Office.

The proceeding was subsequently **dismissed**. Parliamentary Senate records from 2001 explicitly speak of accusations found to be "absolutely devoid of substance" and thus of a proceeding dismissed after approximately four years.

The Panorama-Bertini scoop: the only scandal is the hoax

In subsequent years, many other accounts that had fueled the Somalia-gate had the same judicial findings: false and completely unfounded accusations.

This is the emblematic case of the statements of **Benedetto Bertini**, a former soldier who became one of the sources for the press during the weeks of the scandal.

Bertini had also recounted very serious episodes, going so far as to claim that deliberate killings of Somali civilians had been committed: accusations that found no support and turned out to be the fruit of his imagination.

With drug addiction problems, he tried to take economic advantage by selling false information and non-existent photos to the newspaper, hoping to obtain up to seven million lire.

However, investigators from the Palermo police, thanks to the collaboration of Folgore military personnel and the inconsistencies that emerged during Bertini's interrogation, managed to expose the truth.

This detail is essential for understanding the climate of summer 1997.

Accusations, facts to be verified and completely false stories ended up in the same media container.

And above that container only one name was written: **Folgore.**

The case of the illuminating flare

The photograph of the Somali woman and the illuminating flare led to an investigation by the **Public Prosecutor's Office of Livorno** for acts of violent indecency/sexual violence.

The woman identified as Dahira Salad Osman **provided indications about the location of the episode incompatible with those of the author of the photographs** and was unable to identify the alleged perpetrators. Expert assessments were also ordered to verify that she was indeed the woman depicted.

In January 1998, a further element emerged: Dahira Salad Osman came to declare **that she was not the woman in the photographs and had not suffered violence**.

In this case too, **the investigation did not lead to any conviction of the military personnel involved**.

The three Somalis of July 2, 1993

Another file concerned three Somalis detained during the Battle of the Pasta Factory and subsequently admitted to the United Arab Emirates hospital with signs of abuse.

The Public Prosecutor's Office of Turin investigated both **torture**, and the alleged **falsification of documents** relating to their handover to the Somali police.

The Parliamentary Commission considered the episode «**devoid of criminal implications**».

This episode too, **produced no conviction nor criminal liability** against the military personnel involved.

The case of the electrodes

The judicially most well-known episode is the one shown in the famous photographic sequence of a Somali citizen immobilized while some military personnel used the wires of a field telephone.

On this fact there are precise judicial documents and it is these that allow us to distinguish what was told in the newspapers from what actually became final before the courts.

Valerio Ercole was tried before the Tribunal of Livorno and on April 13, 2000 was sentenced at first instance to **one year and six months**.

But that sentence **never became final**.

On February 22, 2001, the Court of Appeal of Florence, in partial modification of the first instance judgment, declared that **proceedings should not continue because the crime was barred by the statute of limitations**.

Therefore, a final conviction was not reached. And this, from a legal standpoint, is an essential point: Article 27 of the Constitution establishes that **the defendant is not considered guilty until a final conviction**. Ercole, therefore, cannot be presented as a military officer definitively found guilty of the contested acts.

Also involved in the same proceeding was **Antonello Migneco**, who had instead chosen the path of plea bargaining and whose position was separated from that of Ercole.

And this is precisely the difference that often disappears in reconstructions of the Somalia-gate: for the symbol of the scandal, **Ercole does not have a final criminal conviction; Migneco instead settled his position with a plea bargain**.

The photographs existed and the episode had to be investigated. But a photograph, however striking, does not replace the judicial process nor authorizes transforming an individual responsibility to be determined into the collective guilt of an entire Brigade.

The mud-slinging machine works in only one direction

The Somalia-gate remains also a textbook case on how information operates.

The accusation conquers the front page. When the fact does not hold up in court, the news almost disappears.

An anonymous testimony can immediately transform into a national headline. When that same testimony is denied, retracted, or finds no judicial confirmation, the correction rarely receives the same space.

In the case of the Folgore this mechanism had enormous consequences.

An entire generation of paratroopers, returning from one of the most difficult missions Italy faced in the postwar period, found itself associated for years with images, accounts, and accusations for which the vast majority of those men bore no responsibility.

Naturally this cannot erase possible individual responsibilities. But these responsibilities **must be determined through the three levels of judgment provided for by Italian law, not in public squares nor on the front pages of newspapers.**

There was talk of rape, torture, murder, and a culture of violence that allegedly permeated the entire Folgore Brigade. In 1997, there were even calls for the Folgore to be dissolved.

Then the investigations arrived.

The commissions arrived. The magistrates arrived. The trials arrived.

And that picture was drastically scaled back.

This does not mean absolving those who actually committed an abuse, where judicial responsibility has been established.

The Folgore needs, however, the same fundamental principle of any rule of law to be applied to it: **responsibilities are personal.**

And above all, that an accusation not be passed down for thirty years as if it were a sentence.

Because at the end of the Somalia-gate there remains a disproportion that is hardly ignorable: on one side **one of the most violent media trials ever suffered by a unit of the Italian Armed Forces**.

On the other, **the actual results of the investigations and justice**.

And perhaps this is precisely the true anatomy of Somalia-gate.