



Castel Volturno: massacre of camorra, racist massacre

by Grazia Naletto

Castel Volturno, 18 September 2008. Around 21, a Fiat Punto grigio car arrives near the Ob ob ob exotic fashion tailor's shop, which is located along the Domiziana state road, in Ischitella. A group of men armed with two Kalashnikovs, a machine gun and four 9 caliber rifles descend from it. They wear the Carabinieri bib and simulate a document check; therefore, the immigrants present in the area are not alarmed. Immediately afterwards, shots are fired in and out of the store and insults against the “dirty black bastards”.

It is a massacre. About 130 shots hit seven young immigrants. The Ghanaians Kwame Antwi Julius Francis (31 years old), Affun Yeboa Eric (25 years old), Christopher Adams (28 years old), the Togolese El Hadji Ababa and Samuel Kwako (26 years old), Jeemes Alex, 28 years old from Liberia are shot to death. Joseph Ayimbora, Ghanaian, shot in the legs and abdomen, pretends to be dead and manages to save himself. None of them will be involved in illegal activities. None of them are Nigerian¹. And yet, some press articles immediately advance the hypothesis of a “settling of scores” between rival mafias involved in the drug trade, referring precisely to the Nigerian mafia².

The next day, about two hundred immigrants organize a parade in solidarity with their companions and block the Domitian road for three hours. They are angry (how can we not be angry in front of a massacre like this one?), they overturn some dumpsters and damage the windows of some stores. To be identified with the local crime do not fit. Most of them work in the fields, 25 euros a day for 12 hours of work, black of course, and live, if it goes well, in overcrowded houses, if it goes badly, in crumbling shacks along the state highway.

¹ Who are really the young people who have met such an absurd and violent death? The Ex Canapificio Social Center tells it very well in a report published on the MeltingPot website and available here: <https://www.meltingpot.org/Chi-sono-le-vittime-della-strage-di-Castel-Volturno.html#.XsWZbpMzaMI>.

² See “Far West tra Napoli e Caserta, sette morti”, *Corriere.it*, 18 Settembre 2008, and B. Coscia, “La vendetta dei casalesi. Strage di extracomunitari”, *Corriere della Sera*, 19 Settembre 2008.



The State “responds” to the protest with the sending of 400 soldiers, Carabinieri and police officers, and with the announcement of measures to facilitate the rapid expulsion of immigrants. Mimma D’Amico, of the former social center Canapificio di Caserta, remembers eleven years later, that in the days following that September 18 “A sort of apartheid had been created. Black people were afraid of white people after that massacre. There was a climate of fear and terror”³.

A few kilometers from Castel Volturno, in Villa Literno, 19 years earlier, on August 24, 1989, Jerry Masslo, a South African refugee, never recognized as such by the Italian State, was killed. He was guilty of rebelling against the theft attempt made by a local gang in the shack where he lived with some comrades. Masslo played an active role in the organization of the first protests of laborers against the conditions of exploitation experienced in the countryside.

The massacre of Castel Volturno follows another murder committed on the same day a few kilometers away, in Baia Verde, twenty minutes before. The victim is Antonio Cilento, 53 years old, a suspected affiliate of the Camorra clan of Schiavone. And another raid follows, the one that struck a month earlier, on August 18, at his home, Egonmwan Nogienmwen, known as Teddy, president of the Association of Nigerians of Campania and committed against the exploitation of prostitution. At the time of the ambush, there were at least 14 people in the house, including 4 children. The massacre remained “unfinished” because the weapons jammed; five people were “only” wounded: Egonmwan himself, his companion and three friends⁴.

³ See, “Undici anni fa a Castel Volturno la strage dei ghanesi”, *la Repubblica*, 18 settembre 2019, here: <https://napoli.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/09/18/foto/undici-anni-fa-a-castel-volturno-la-strage-dei-ghanesi-236338447/1/#1>.

⁴ To note that before the massacre of Castel Volturno, the news about this first ambush remains relegated to the local chronicles.



Immediately the ballistic findings connect the three raids, the Camorra matrix appears more than evident: we are in the land of Camorra where the dreaded Casalesi clan reigns.

The investigation

The cameras installed near Egonwman's house and the tailor's shop in Via Domiziana, together with Joseph Ayimbora's statements, lead the investigators to focus their attention on a faction of the Casalesi clan headed by Giuseppe Setola.

On September 30, 2008 Oreste Spagnuolo (who will become a collaborator of justice), Giovanni Letizia and Alessandro Cirillo are arrested. On November 7th it is the turn of Davide Granato and Antonio Alluce. Finally, on January 14, 2009 Giuseppe Setola is arrested. The charges are of massacre for terrorist purposes aggravated "by racial hatred", murder and attempted murder. According to the magistrates, the objective of the massacre was to "ensnare an entire community and affirm by force the mafia dominance over the area with acts of terrorism such as to subject and terrorize the entire community, with specific reference to that of color"⁵.

No victims are involved in illegal activities, they are of different nationalities, the only thing that unites the seven young people affected in Castel Volturno is that they are immigrants and blacks.

No "settling of scores", therefore, but a "massacre of workers" as Enrico Pugliese defines it on the daily newspaper *the manifesto*⁶. A show of strength by a clan that "shoots in the pile" to send a message to that part of the Nigerian community involved in drug trafficking and prostitution, but according to some, it is also interested in making profitable new investments in the area where many foreign immigrants work, and for this reason it wants to kick them out.

⁵ See: C. Sannino The killers said, "The killers said: jammuncenne I save because I faked dead ", *La Repubblica*, 24 settembre 2008.

⁶ See: E. Pugliese, "Una strage di lavoratori", *il manifesto*, 21 settembre 2008.



The trial

The trial for the massacre of Castel Volturno begins on November 12, 2009 at the Court of Santa Maria Capua Vetere and sees six defendants: Giuseppe Setola, Davide Granato, Antonio Alluce, Alessandro Cirillo, Giovanni Letizia e Oreste Spagnuolo⁷.

The judgment of first instance is issued on April 14, 2011. Sentence to life imprisonment (with daytime isolation for 18 months) Giuseppe Setola, Davide Granato, Giovanni Letizia and Alessandro Cirillo and to 23 years in prison Antonio Alluce. The men are recognized as responsible (with the exception of Cyril) also for the attempted massacre operated on August 18 at the home of Teddy Egonwman. The judges award compensation to the civil parties: in addition to the only surviving witness, the relatives of the victims and the former Capanificio di Caserta social center.

The sentence of appeal is issued by the Court of Appeal of Naples on May 21, 2013 and confirms that of first instance, except for Antonio Alluce, for which he raises the penalty of imprisonment from 23 to 28 years and 6 months. The Court confirms the aggravating circumstance of "racial hatred", but excludes that of terrorist purposes.

The sentence of the Supreme Court is issued on January 30, 2014: it declares inadmissible the appeals presented by Alluce, Granato and Letizia, while it rejects those presented by Setola and Cirillo. The Court recognizes the aggravating circumstance of racism, while it excludes that of terrorism.⁸ It is a historical sentence: for the first time, in our country, a final sentence for a massacre of Camorra is reached, recognizing the aggravating circumstance of racism. It is therefore useful to examine the motivations with which the judges of the Supreme Court have rejected the appeals of Setola and Cyril on this point.

A racist massacre

⁷ The statements of Spagnuolo, who became a collaborator of justice, judged separately for the same facts, offer an essential contribution to the reconstruction of what happened.

⁸ See: Court of Cassation, Section I, Decision n. 20445, 30 January 2014.



The aggravating circumstance for reasons of racism was introduced into our system by Article 3 of Law no. 205/93, known as the Mancino Law, and has recently been implemented in our Penal Code.

According to art. 604 ter of the Penal Code, the penalty for crimes not punishable by life imprisonment committed for “purposes of discrimination or ethnic, national, racial or religious hatred, or in order to facilitate the activities of organizations, associations, movements or groups that have among their purposes the same purposes” can be increased by up to half.

According to what reported in the Judgment of the Court of Cassation, Setola tries to argue in his appeal that “the Court of Appeal did not explain the emulative potential of the conduct carried out by the appellant and made use of expressions also reported by witnesses who were not considered reliable”⁹.

Cyril argues, instead, that the configurability of the aggravating circumstance has been traced only to expressions used by Bristle in his conversations with Garnet, while “it is necessary that racial hatred is the purpose of the action, and not a simple motive of the same”. The objective is to demonstrate that the raid of 18 September had the sole purpose of “imposing a bribe on drug dealers and that the expressions used to indicate the objectives of the action are justified by the fact that 90% of black people in the area were involved in the drug trade and do not reveal any feeling of racial hatred”¹⁰.

In order to motivate the rejection of the remarks made by the plaintiffs, the judges of the Supreme Court recall first of all that according to the judges of merit “from the manner of the action and the circumstances of fact ascertained emerges a clear aversion and contempt towards black people”. The “pizzini” of Setola, seized in the course of the investigation, also contain explicit expressions such as “money” to be given “by force” by the “dirty niggers”; “are they all dead? yes they are all dead nigger bastards shit”.

⁹ *Ibidem*, pag. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*. It is interesting to note how in an appeal to the Supreme Court of Cassation you dare to propose such a significant “estimate” on the involvement of “black people” in illegal activities.



According to the Court, “the aggravating circumstance in question requires that the action, due to its intrinsic characteristics and the context in which it takes place, should present itself as direct and at least potentially suitable to make the above mentioned feeling of hatred perceptible to the outside world and to arouse in others or, in any case, to give rise to the concrete danger of discriminatory behaviour; such, however, must also be considered the conduct that engenders, even if only potentially, the aggressive effect of the protected good, i.e. the equal human and social dignity of the offended person”.

In essence, the Court of Cassation emphasizes that to configure the aggravating circumstance it is not necessary that there are concrete emulative effects on third parties, but it is sufficient that the behaviour adopted is discriminatory on a symbolic level. And indeed it continues: “What becomes relevant is not so much the effect that a conduct can produce on third parties, but the cultural value that it expresses and that determines in the agent aggressive behaviour of others 'diversity', which discriminates and denies human dignity on the basis of a supposed inferiority for its belonging to a different race”.

The motivations with which the Court rejects the objections to the crime of massacre made by Setola deserve attention because, in our opinion, they contribute to strengthen the recognition of the racist motive of the raid of August 18 and the massacre of September 18. The judges of the Supreme Court recall that the Court of First Instance “has shown that it was ascertained, in fact, the manifest intention to hit anyone who happened to shoot, without sparing even women and children and, however, unarmed and unsuspecting people who were numerous at the home of Teddy (which was also home to an association of Nigerians), as well as in the second episode the intent of the group of fire was to kill all those who had been present in the tailoring avoiding that there were survivors. That all, referring to the events of August 18 and September 18, 2008 and the places where they took place, can in fact be legitimately understood as “all the blacks present”.

And to think that, on the day of the second anniversary of the massacre, the Mayor of Castel Volturno refused to install a simple memorial plaque commemorating the six



young immigrants killed in such a brutal way. According to the Mayor, this gesture was in danger of “celebrating a gang of criminals”.