



Desirée Mariottini: Killed twice

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Rome, October 19th, 2018. The lifeless body of a young woman is found wrapped in a duvet and abandoned on a mattress in a crumbling building located in Via dei Lucani 22, in the university district of San Lorenzo.

The victim is Desirée Mariottini, a 16-year-old from Cisterna di Latina, a small town just a few kilometres from Rome. Last time her family has heard from her was on October 17th, when the girl informed that she would have spent the night at a friend's house in Rome. Two days later, the tragic discovery: Desirée is dead.

What happened to Desirée?

On the night between October 18th and 19th, around 4 a.m., Emergency numbers receive an anonymous call: "There is a girl who needs help. She's dying." ¹

But when the ambulance reaches the site, the entrance of the building was locked (with a padlock) and doctors had to wait for the intervention of the fire fighters. A delay that proved fatal for the young woman. The cause of death was due to a cardiorespiratory insufficiency caused by the intake of a lethal mix of drugs.

The autopsy performed on the girl's body showed that Desirée was also victim of sexual abuse. According to the reconstruction carried out by the investigators and based on the testimony provided by those who were in the building the night Desirée died, the abuse occurred when the girl had already lost conscious due to the drugs' effects and her death came after hours of agony during which none of those who were on the crime scene did anything to save her life².

¹ Please see "*Giallo a San Lorenzo: trovata ragazza morta in uno stabile abbandonato*", October, 19th 2018, <http://www.romatoday.it/cronaca/ragazza-morta-san-lorenzo-via-dei-lucani.html>

² "*Roma, sedicenne trovata morta a San Lorenzo: violentata da un gruppo*", 23 October 2018, https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/10/23/news/roma_sedicenne_trovata_morta_a_san_lorenzo_violentata_da_un_branco-209776238/



In the days that came right after the crime, the investigation led to the indictment and immediate arrest of four African men identified as responsible for Desi death: Mamadou Gara (26 years old) and Brian Minthe (43 year old) both Senegalese, Alinno Chima (40-year-old) Nigerian and Yussef Salia (32 years old), from Ghana.

All four, currently on trial, are accused, with different degrees of charge, of the crimes of: murder, (aggravated) gang sexual assault and deal drugs to minors. The finding of traces of DNA both on the body and on the victim's clothing helped frame them.³

Besides them, Marco Mancini and Antonella Fauntleroy are also accused. The latter allegedly took Desirée to the building in Via dei Lucani and together with Mancini sold the girl drugs. According to the Public Prosecutor's Office of Rome, a seventh man, Alexander Asumado, is guilty of dealing drugs, not directly to Desirée, but to other people in the building where her dead body was found⁴.

The context

Desirée's death understandably upset public opinion, both because of the violent fashion in which it happened and because of the young age of the victim. It immediately became the object of intense media and political attention, occupying the front pages of the most important national newspapers for several days.

Residents of the historically anti-fascist neighborhood of San Lorenzo where Desirée died, immediately demanded justice. A few days after Desirée was found dead, a mural appeared on the gate of the building where she died: "Justice for Desirée - San Lorenzo does not forget you". A group of residents told how adequate redevelopment works have never been

³ "Roma, morte Desirée Mariottini: quattro persone a processo per violenza e omicidio", 21 October 2019, https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2019/10/21/news/roma_morte_desire_e_mariottini_quattro_persone_a_processo-239112661/

⁴ "Un anno fa moriva Desirée Mariottini: la 16enne violentata, drogata e lasciata morire a San Lorenzo", 18 October 2019, <https://roma.fanpage.it/un-anno-fa-moriva-desiree-mariottini-la-16enne-violentata-drogata-e-lasciata-morire-a-san-lorenzo/>



carried out, and that the neighborhood has been left at the mercy of the nightlife where drugs circulate with ease.

On October 24th, Matteo Salvini, Minister of the Interior at the time of the murder, visited the neighborhood and using the tragic episode to carrying out his propaganda against migrants, he declared: "I am afraid that this time too they are all foreign citizens and I will do everything that is in my power to send them back to their countries immediately"⁵". He then invoked the "bulldozer" as the final solution, confusing an abandoned building, like the one where the episode happened, with an illegal occupation and stating that the squats are "in almost all cases occupied by migrants and left-wing antagonists".⁶

Two opposing factions waited for the arrival of the leader of Lega Nord (Northern League) in San Lorenzo. On one hand, a large group of activists, including students, neighborhood residents and representatives of the feminist movement "Non una di meno" (Not one less) (who displayed a banner that read "Salvini speculates on tragedies. San Lorenzo is not your electoral catwalk"), who prevented Salvini from entering the building where Desirée's body was found, accusing him of looting⁷.

On the other hand, there was a small number of supporters of the Minister, who self-proclaimed "security guards" in the aftermath of the murder had started patrolling the neighborhood to monitor "undocumented and regular immigrant who have now declared war on us" to "stop the genocide of the Italian people"⁸.

The murder of Desirée provided with the opportunity to bring back racist themes, such as that of the "uncontrolled immigration" and the existence of an alleged relationship between

⁵ "Desirée, il blitz di Salvini in via dei Lucani scatena la bagarre. E parte il duello su Roma con il M5S", 24 October 2018, https://www.corriere.it/politica/18_ottobre_24/blitz-salvini-scatena-bagarre-parte-duello-roma-il-m5s-9f152760-d7cf-11e8-9629-6aae524f65ea.shtml

⁶ "Matteo Salvini e CasaPound, un rapporto lungo cinque anni", 2 May 2019, <https://www.open.online/2019/05/02/matteo-salvini-e-casapound-un-rapporto-lungo-cinque-anni/>

⁷ "Matteo Salvini e la speculazione sulla morte di una ragazza a Roma", 25 October 2018, <https://www.internazionale.it/reportage/annalisa-camilli/2018/10/25/salvini-san-lorenzo-desiree-mariottini>

⁸ These are the words used in the public note with which the extreme right party "Forza Nuova" announced the "surveillance" patrols". Please see "Omicidio Desirée, Raggi: No alle ronde, la forza non è una soluzione", 26 October 2018, <https://roma.fanpage.it/omicidio-desiree-raggi-no-alle-ronde-la-forza-non-e-una-soluzione/>



criminality and foreign citizens. The titles of some of the articles published in the aftermath of the murder are an example: "Rape, degradation and illegal immigrants: the ghetto bomb of the beast", *Il Giornale*, 26 October 2018⁹; "Desirée Mariottini, Laura Boldrini: her "resources" rape and kill, but she attacks Salvini", *Libero*, October 28, 2018¹⁰; "Desirée Mariottini, the dreadful details: "Raped even when she was dead", the slaughter of the beasts", *Libero*, October 31, 2018¹¹.

As we have already pointed out in an article published on the website *Cronache di ordinario razzismo* (Chronicles of ordinary racism) on November 2nd, 2018¹², it is interesting noting that terms such as "beast" or "gang" are used by many newspapers exclusively when referring to those crimes that are not "white" or that in general are allegedly perpetrated by foreigners. Every day we hear of episodes of violence committed by "Italians", to whom is reserved a different treatment, perhaps because it is easier to find a scapegoat - the one who is not Italian in this case - rather than digging deep and reconstruct what happened correctly.

On October 27, 2018, the well-known journalist Gad Lerner tweeted the following: "After #PamelaMastropietro we look at the life and death of #DesiréeMariottini: addicted to heroin, daughter of Italian drug dealer and 15-year-old mother, victim of immigrant pusher. Tragic events that should suggest us something more and different from racial hatred". With this twitter, Lerner invited to reflect on the family context in which Desirée lived: the girl came from a disadvantaged family and had been fighting against her drug addiction for some time. The journalist's tweet was followed by many racist comments. The Minister of Interior

⁹ See: <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/borgo-mezzanone-ghetto-bomba-dove-si-rifugiano-i-criminali-1593231.html>

¹⁰ See: <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/politica/13393504/desiree-mariottini-immigrati-risorse-laura-boldrini-stuprano-e-uccidono-lei-se-la-prende-con-matteo-salvini.html>

¹¹ See: <https://www.liberoquotidiano.it/news/italia/13394344/desiree-mariottini-stuprata-morta-quattro-clandestini-ultimo-scempio-bestie-branco-spacciatori.html>

¹²See: <http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/roma-la-doppia-violenza-sul-corpo-di-desiree/>



Salvini even tweeted that he should "be ashamed" of what he said triggering a controversy on social media¹³.

The murder of Desirée occurred in an already hostile climate towards immigrants, exacerbated by the murder of Pamela Mastropietro, a 18-year-old Roman girl killed in Macerata by a Nigerian citizen a few months earlier.

Given a context of strongly polarized public debate, the words used by Salvini and some newspapers have poured gas on the fire.

For example, on November 3, 2018 a banner that read: "Desirée like Pamela - Immigration kills" was hung on the facade of a hostel in Cremona, Lombardy.¹⁴

Only a few days earlier, on the Facebook page of a private club called "Salottino del Ponte", in Susa (Piedmont), the following post had appeared: "In the name of solidarity with Desirée's family, entry is forbidden to Nigerians and Senegalese and fake refugees in general. This is the only way we can protest. Share so that others do the same. Goodbye, little star".

Due to numerous criticisms received, the club then apologized stating that "honesty and fairness have nothing to do with skin colour"¹⁵.

A few months later, in the same neighborhood where Desirée was found dead, a young man from The Gambia was beaten-up and heavily insulted by two Italian men, 45 and 50 years old respectively, affiliated to the Roman extreme right-wing and already known to the police. The "reason" for this aggression was the colour of his skin.

¹³ "Desirée, tra Gad Lerner e Matteo Salvini è scontro social: <<Vergognati>>", October 28, 2018, https://www.corriere.it/politica/18_ottobre_28/desiree-scontro-social-salvini-lerner-colpi-vergogna-99232bae-da86-11e8-aca4-abf222acb144.shtml

¹⁴ " <<Desirée e Pamela: l'immigrazione uccide>>: a Cremona striscione razzista davanti al centro d'accoglienza", 3 November, 2018, https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/11/03/news/omicidio_desire_e_cremona_striscione_contro_immigrati_davanti_al_centro_di_accoglienza-210677606/

¹⁵ "Susa, <<Ingresso vietato a nigeriani e senegalesi dopo il delitto di Desirée>>: annuncio choc di un circolo privato, aperta inchiesta", 28 October 2018, https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2018/10/28/news/susa_ingresso_vietato_a_nigeriani_e_senegalesi_dopo_il_delitto_desire_e_annuncio_choc_di_un_circolo_privato-210242925/



The Gambian man had entered into a pub to ask for a beer when the two of Italian men started hitting him violently and shouting at him xenophobic phrases such as "Monkey nigger (BLEEP), you have to go away we don't want you here". The culprits were investigated for incitement to racial hatred.¹⁶ It was later discovered that one of the two, Andrea Chilelli, was part of the group of supporters of the former minister Salvini, when he visited to San Lorenzo neighborhood after Desirée's death, the same group that, as reported on Fanpage.it, "praised the Duce and hoped for the return of Benito Mussolini against foreigners living in the neighborhood."¹⁷

¹⁶ Please see: "Aggressione razzista a Roma, due arresti", 9 July 2019,

http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2019/07/09/aggressione-razzista-a-roma-due-arresti_cd6ad473-9231-4e11-a592-ae3b7a88a1b8.html

¹⁷ Please see "Uno degli aggressori razzisti di San Lorenzo accoglieva Salvini dopo la morte di Desirée", 10 July 2019, <https://roma.fanpage.it/uno-degli-aggressori-razzisti-del-32-accoglieva-salvini-a-san-lorenzo-dopo-la-morte-di-desiree/>