

The Courage to Tell the Truth

Giovanna Landolfi (February 05, 2009)



Director Germano Maccioni presented at Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò "Lo Stato d'Eccezione", the first movie shot in Italy about the Nazi massacre at Monte Sole that cost the lives of 770 civilians. Some Italian politicians tried to erase it from national memory, but Maccioni resisted.

On January 28 at Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò in New York the young Bolognese director, Germano Maccioni, presented his documentary film *Lo Stato d'Eccezione* to the Italian American community. The film was received with great interest and enthusiasm by the audience, which included Consul General of Italy Francesco Maria Talò and the Director of the [Italian Cultural Institute](#) [2] Renato Miracco. Also present from the [Primo Levi Center](#) [3] were Director Natalia Indrimi, Board Member Stella Levi, and Chairman of the Board Andrea Fiano.



Lo Stato d'Eccezione depicts the legal trials in which several Nazi officers and soldiers were accused and found guilty of planning and carrying out the so-called "Monte Sole massacre" – the small town located in the province of Bologna where more than five hundred civilians were murdered over the course of a few days between September 29 and October 5, 1944.

Maccioni followed the entire series of court proceedings which took place between 2006 and 2007 in La Spezia's military tribunal, filming everything and highlighting the judicial difficulties that arose because of the statute of limitations. It objectively shows the elderly witnesses' immense pain and lucidity in recalling each detail as well as the entire town's longing for justice; sixty-four years later it is still difficult for them to forget the horrific violence.

The director was able to include the various points of view of all those who indirectly participated in the trial, from public officials to ordinary citizens, while creating an emotionally charged film. Everyone was included, except for those accused. The defense attorneys spoke on their behalf, a few of whom Maccioni interviewed. The reason for this choice is that our judicial system allows for the "presumption of innocence" until proven guilty beyond a doubt. It was therefore reasonable, in a case like this, to give them an opportunity to tell their side of the story.

Needless to say, the audience was shocked by the documentary. It is rare to find such a complete, evenhanded work about a tragedy of this kind. Maccioni uses the camera as a tool to report the truth -- the simple yet atrocious truth. He didn't leave any room for narrative or imagination. He filmed the pain in the witnesses' eyes, the silent screams of their memories, and the glass of water that was always nearby in case the events they recounted completely dried out their mouths. There was no need for a voice-over to guide the audience through the different phases of the trial. The witnesses' silence, tears, and their growing desperation help us understand what was really happening in that courtroom.

"What inspired you to film a documentary of this kind after so many years?" This is the first question the audience asked the director after the screening. "I thought it was profoundly necessary, primarily because I personally didn't know anything about it. I wanted to understand why, why it was so important for our government, for our schools, to hide such an important part of our country's history."

Another important reason to shoot the movie, he told us, was the determination of the witnesses, the people who were directly involved in the process. They helped him obtain permission to bring cameras into the courtroom. They wanted the world to know what had happened to their families, to their younger brothers and sisters, and to pregnant women when they decided to seek shelter in the town's church. They wanted history to record that they were all set on fire or shot in cold blood.

The survivors of Monte Sole, although they carry the most terrible memories, still feel a deep sense of

justice, as Andrea Fiano commented. Maccioni replied that "fortunately Italians are different from the politicians who represent them on a national and international level. We have Senators and Deputies who still maintain that some truths must remain hidden, that it is not necessary for people to know everything. They think that in this way we can live with our minds and consciences at peace. No, I don't think so. Ignorance and egoism is the mother of all wars and human tragedies. The witnesses I met are an example for me to follow. And they taught me to believe in justice."

When Stefano Albertini, the director of Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò, asked what moment in the trial shocked him the most, he answered that "there were many of them, but probably the most significant one for me was when the sentence was announced. I was so focused on filming, that at first I didn't realize that the 'end' had arrived. At first I felt deluded because some of the defendants were acquitted. But fortunately, my friends, the witnesses were courageous and appealed. The defendants were all condemned to a life sentence.

The experience of the trial has deeply affected Maccioni's life. He is now working as an actor on a film that tells the story of the Marzabotto massacre. He will play the role of a priest who opened the



doors of his church to innocent women and children before they were all murdered.

Edited & translated by Giulia Prestia and Marina Melchionda

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