

Paola Monzini or the sociology that wants to heal

Paola Monzini, o la sociología che vuole guarire

By Paula Adam

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I first met Paola Monzini in September 1989 at the Badia Fiesolana, in the English course run by Colette for Latin-language speakers. We were the new arrivals at the European University Institute, most of us in our early 20s, a fresh generation of doctoral students from different European countries, excited and expectant, eager for new experiences, fascinated by the internationality of the context and also quite naïve –at least a few of us including myself. We knew in anticipation a new lifetime journey was starting, and the landscape views from the terrace of the *mensa* in the Badia promised unique moments on all personal fronts. Starting a PhD at the EUI was a big challenge, with an unknown future ahead, beyond the academic reward itself.

Paola enrolled in the Political Science Department with Professor Pizzorno: her research topic was mafia and criminal groups in Naples and Marseille. I was in Economics and I appreciated that her topic was much more challenging (as a personal project) than mine, and so I was genuinely interested in her research. This was 29 years ago.

It was easy to appreciate that Paola was a very special person, with a unique personality, and that her academic skills were just one of her many creative dimensions. She soon showed herself to be a unique free spirit, being more

intimidated to speak with an academic professor than to interview members of criminal bands, for example. But this did not stop her from making it through the academic world and realising important achievements, including several books published in English and Italian to which I will refer in these lines, and more importantly, that many have used to combat crime, human trafficking and violence over the last several years.

Once her doctoral thesis was completed, Paola oriented her professional carrier as a sociologist outside of academia, to contribute to the transformation of the world where we live. She was a researcher who never hesitated to engage, to understand all types of violence from social and humanitarian perspectives. She was a sociologist interested in working first-hand with people, and she had the capacity to combat, heal and repair, especially later in her life, the suffering herself.

Paola Monzini died last June 2017 and many of us have missed her, every single day, since then. There have been two memorials in Italian universities in which many beautiful things were said about her work as a sociologist. Monica Massari organized in Largo San Marcellino at the University of Naples Federico II in November 2017 a seminar dedicated to Paola Monzini. The setting was astonishing for its beauty. The *Chiesa dei SS Marcellino e Festo*, bright and open to hold the memories and melancholies of academics, professionals and friends. The event was impressively chaired by Monica Massari who led the proceedings with great sensitivity, allowing the different speakers to express, in different ways, how Paola was unique for her deep generosity on every level, her specialness, and for her free mind. A free mind that decided to work on the darkest sides of our societies, such as crime and human

trafficking. Her work as a sociologist was genuinely generous, oriented to combat and transform rather than to pursue academic gratification. This is why she framed her sociological studies to be used by those who could combat crime and human trafficking, such as the United Nations, the "*Procuratore della Repubblica*" or the *Carabinieri* of Sicily among others. I was impressed to hear the *Procuratore della Repubblica di Napoli* explaining in a round table at the *Università di Napoli Federico II* how Paola Monzini's book was influential in his work. I found it notable that *Procuratore* Giovanni Melillo mentioned that he had many copies of Paola's book *Gruppi Criminali a Napoli e Marsiglia* (by the way, based on her doctoral thesis) on a bookshelf in his office, which he presented as a gift to his colleagues. As a person that works in and for the world of academia, I know how unusual it is that a potential 'user' of a body of research, that is, somebody that can take decisions based on a piece of evidence, collects a number of copies of a researcher to distribute to other potential users. For *Procuratore Melillo* this was anecdotal, for many of us having studied at the EUI this is a dream. Sometimes researchers seek prestige, and having published a book is certainly an accomplishment. But I am certain that for Paola the most precious achievement was to have many copies of her book on the shelf of the *Procuratore di Napoli*, and that he gifted them to his colleagues. And this is because Paola tried to use sociology to fix problems in many different ways. An example of this is another of her books, *Il mio nome non è Wendy*. In this book she writes in first person the experience of a woman from Nigeria who was betrayed and ended up in the hands of the sex traffic mafia in Italy. Using a narrative approach, Paola Monzini tried to repair the trauma of one of the very many innocent women that have been enslaved at the hands of *Human Traffic*, the title of another of her books.

Going back to the memorial in Naples, the words of Professor Nando dalla Chiesa on Paola were somewhat comforting (if the loss of Paola could ever be easily abided) for those who loved and admired her in many ways. He described the trajectory of Paola as a student and as a sociologist from the Liceo to present days. I could not put it better than he did afterwards in an article in *Il Fatto Quotidiano* entitled "*Il grande cuore di una sociologa gentile*". Those of you interested can find on the internet. Some passages of the book were beautifully read by Giovanna Giuliani.

The memorial in Naples was extraordinary in many ways. Students at the university witnessed the profound strength of pursuing research careers not for academic prestige but for the aim of changing the world, if only a little bit, for the better. In addition, this was illustrated by the influence of her research and her books, but more importantly, by how researchers, professionals and friends talked about Paola.

As a close friend not in her field of work, I followed her career as a sociologist with close admiration and read some of her books. Thanks to the memorials that her colleagues organised, I too realise the extent to which she was a generous sociologist, with a free spirit. I therefore thank Monica Massini from University of Naples Federico II for giving the opportunity to many students (and also myself and others) to learn from an exceptional sociologist and person that made her own way through. I am also grateful to all the speakers in this event, for having shared their journey with Paola.

Paola Monzini will remain in the memories of the Badia Fiesolana, and in hearts of many of us.

