

Oriana Fallaci, the story of a war correspondent

Starting from the nineties of last century, with the war of the Gulf, the war of the Kosovo, the local conflicts in Africa and Asia, the invasion of Afghanistan and that of Iraq, the figure of war correspondent, profession that has to the shoulders one hundred and fifty years of history, the incarnation more appreciated of the romantic journalism in which the reporter is projected in the dramatic and tumultuous sceneries, has returned to the footlights of the chronicles.

The aim of my thesis is to give an historical reconstruction of the evolution of the profession of war reporter taking as point of reference our country, Italy and, especially, the first Italian woman journalist gone down on a field burned by the battle, Oriana Fallaci that, with her keenness, tenacity, hulling and writing ability has succeeded in imposing herself in a world until then purely masculine.

The journalism of war, understood in its deeper and true sense, consists in the harvest and diffusion of news effected in objective, impartial way and with full intellectual honesty, from professionals of the information that place themselves in a "third" position and that operate in the interest of a public of citizens to which they feel bound by a fiduciary pact.

The job of the envoy is that of a globetrotter able to tell thick backstage unpublished of the things that happen. He follows the wars and he directly arrives on the place interested by an event to tell it and to introduce it in all of its details. To be a correspondent of war, it takes courage and determination, but also and above all professionalism. He operates in the full conscience of the risk that must be faced not to be unprepared in situations of danger.

It deals with a complex professional figure, in whose construction a lot of cultural and psychological components are involved: the knowledge of the international dossiers, a sensibility that knows how to win the horror or the disgust and the inevitable availability to relate with situations and characters always unpredictable.

The fundamental moral obligation of the true professional is to know how to give space and voice to every actor of the conflict or the crisis with a strong critical sense and observation and a wise emotional control. But the correspondent of war also has to be a reporter, the best, the most careful and awake of the reporters. He must look for the facts and tell them, also when nobody speaks, or when the bombs rain on you, or when they threaten to not write certain things or they will expel you from the front.

The first correspondent from the front has been William H. Russell, sent by the “Times” of London to follow the war of Crimea: he wandered for the front as a loose dog, observing the events and trying to understand what in reality a war was. His articles broke for the first time the wall that divided the unaware citizen from the truth of what it happened on a battleground.

But it is only in the period after the Second World War, named the Cold War period, that the work of the envoy to the front has suffered a rapid upsetting. Two are the crucial moments that must be valued: the war in Vietnam during which for the first time the journalists were left free to roam without impediments on the battleground, having the possibility to disseminate informations taking advantage of a powerful new media like television. The second crucial moment was in the nineties, during the war in Iraq. The use of satellites technology and the spread of the television networks has allowed, in fact, the transformation of war in a spectacularized media event “to see” live on tv.

As the world has changed since the glorious times of William H. Russell, and as the journalism has changed, the correspondence of war, when it develops the specific function that the same liberty of press assigns it, maintains an exemplary stop point: it continues to be, or at least strives to be, an information against. That is an information that makes its way with courage and with difficulty in the jungle of events and factors that a war always implicates.

Luigi Barzini, Indro Montanelli, Ettore Mo and Titian Terzani are without doubt the more representative Italian figures. Their story speaks of courage and professional devotion, cleverness and integrity, occasions seized upon and missed opportunities; their job, their words and their images faithfully testify the horrible reality of the war, the black face and without rest to the darkest and deep base of the human mind.

The journalism of war knows its maximum fortune during the war of Vietnam. The war of Vietnam records a turn of boa, concrete but also symbolic, with the emergence of a new and ambitious generation of correspondents of war, equipped with innovative techniques of the journalistic language and in possession of a mean, the television camera, from the unpublished consequences.

Particularly, ex Indochina becomes the war theater in which correspondents of war, special envoys, free-lances, cameraman and press-photographer experiment new models of information, in a shut competition whose idealistic objective is to discover and to tell the truths (uncomfortable) of a ever declared war. The journalism succeeds in deciding the fates of a war, to unmask the lies of the White House and to tell some American atrocious war crimes.

It was a political story that overflowed the national confinements and divided the international public opinion: the journalistic coverage of that war turned into a gigantic referendum for and against the American nation, for and against its rulers.

That war showed a generation of correspondents that told the course and the episodes of it with the same strength of representation with which the great cases of black chronicle were told and, perhaps for the first time in the history of the correspondents of war, the journalist felt free to vindicate his own role of watchdog in front of the moral questions that the conflict introduced.

With a separated nation, the presidency on the defensive, waves of confrontation in the allied countries, the propagandist machine of the American army didn't succeed in getting the adhesion of the journalists to a national spirit: to demonstration that more the dissent is tall anymore the journalism is done well, Vietnam is remembered as the war covered better by the means of information. For the military commands it has been instead a stain from which to draw an exemplary lesson. Anymore the journalists would have had to enjoy of a similar liberty.

In our country the greatest fortune smiles surely on Oriana Fallaci, the first Italian woman journalist become correspondent of war, sent in Vietnam by the "Europeo" with the photographer Gianfranco Moroldo. In the 1967 Oriana Fallaci is already famous to international level but will be her reports from Vietnam to make her a myth and a legendary figure.

Arrived in the Asian Country at the end of the year 1967, she will return for longer periods until the fall of Saigon in the 1975. Able to stir as protagonist on that war scenery, Oriana is one of the first women to approach on a front of war: to testify in person the atrocities, she follows the American soldiers in the most dangerous actions, she meets the local population and the soldiers of the two line up, she describes the suffering of the more weak and the victims condemning the conflict without hesitations.

The people that were around her had rarely seen anyone work with so much passion and move that feeling to his own writings and succeed in engraving on every sentence so many sequences of meaningful images. Her reports damage the measure not only of the courage and acuteness of a journalist from the front line but also of her immense greatness of writer. Her correspondences, with the doubts on the legitimacy of the American intervention, but also those on the violence perpetrated by vietcongs, made her a figure of cult and an icon of the international pacifism, of the young radicals and of the student movements.

Since the first wisecracks of the book she speaks to us the absurd horror of war, the scandalous paradox that happens when humans in a part of the world invest endless efforts and millionaire sums to save a life while in another part they massacre and destroy without limits. It is without any doubt a moral conviction to a conflict that, according to Oriana, was already lost in departure by the Americans. She never failed describing the latest episode of cruelty but, in reality, she was so attracted, spellbound, almost in love with war.

The France Press agency directed by François Pelou seems the only link with the rest of the country and it is from that base that Oriana stirs for testifying the foolishness of the war: from the battle of Dak To to the offensive of the Tet and the siege of Saigon, the horrors of the conflict are annotated day after day in her diary.

Passionate, always searching for a criteria to distinguish the good from the evil, unrepentant laic but also ready to call for God's judgment, Oriana tells the heroes and she knows that the beautiful journalistic history always has a central character and that in war they are easier to be found than elsewhere. It is in the extreme situations that you discover humanity.

It is her way to tell to people what the war is, through an incisive and winning language that has a fascinating, disruptive effect. She is able with art and style to communicate the essence of the conflict, to gather the heroic one of any situation, completely absorbed by a totalizing story which is the war.

Fast writing, colloquial style, pressing in the succession of situations and wisecracks. It is not difficult to gather how much the love for the facts and their contradictory will triumph over the ideology. She is critical towards the American army and the South Vietnamese forces, but with the same liberty of judgment she describes the cruelty and the despotism of the Vietcongs when in the following years she goes to Vietnam of the North.

Published in 1969, "*Niente e così sia*" is considered a novel of war that is a hymn to the life. But in it we also find a fascinating, personalized and universal description of the war envoy's job.

"*Saigon e così sia*" is the ideal continuation of "*Niente e così sia*", it contains the reports from Vietnam of the North and from Cambodia, some famous interviews to the protagonists of that conflict and the extraordinary account of the fall of Saigon.

Oriana Fallaci is always in the front line and her judgment is brave and clean. Direct, sincere, sharp and impolite, she said to Americans what she thought of their politics in the Asian Southeast and, with the same frank and brutal sincerity, described without indulgences the blind fanaticism of

North Vietnamese and Vietcong, that revealed them to her eyes nothing more than appearances, shades, grey beings, frightened, subdued to the official ideology, servile towards the new communist master.

When she was to the front she tried only to understand and to tell, careful not to lose a word or to skip a detail. In a world divided by the seventeenth parallel, Oriana had her ideas, her strong convictions, that she defended with vehemence, but without prejudices.

It is difficult to fully understand her violent positions, her temperament and the battles that have marked her life putting aside from her biographical story.

Oriana Fallaci was born in Florence on June 26, 1929. At the age of ten years her father involves her in the Resistance, an experience that made her deserve a medal of honor from the Italian army and that shapes her character of strong and combative woman. After the war, at the age of seventeen years, she started her activity of writer with report for prestigious headings as the "Europeo". This is also the period for the releasing of her first books: "*I sette peccati di Hollywood*" (1957), "*Il sesso inutile, viaggio intorno alla donna*" (1961), "*Penelope alla Guerra*" (1962) and "*Gli antipatici*" (1963). Memorable are the interviews of Oriana Fallaci to the great powerful persons - Henry Kissinger, Nguyen Van Giap, Golda Meir, Gheddafi, Deng Xiao Ping and Khomeini – collected in the volume "*Intervista con la storia*" (1974): an example of great journalism and extraordinary ability to keep up with her own interlocutors. Among all, the interview to the ayatollah Khomeini is remembered for the courage of the woman that dared to get away the chador in front of the Iranian leader apostrophizing him as "tyrant". Her consecration to writer of world fame goes up again to 1975 with the novel "*Lettera a un bambino mai nato*" written following her own experience of loss that arouses great sensation and it immediately is best seller. In 1979 the death of the companion Alekos Panagulis inspires "*Un uomo*", other novel that sells million of copies and it is translated in thirty countries. Great success of public also receives "*Insciallah*" (1990) that narrates the history of the Italian troops lined up in Lebanon in the 1983. After eleven years of silence, the writer returns to write for her greatest battle: that against the radical Islam, followed to the tragic attacks of September 11, that has beginning with an intervention published on the Corriere della Sera then elaborated again in the volume "*La rabbia e l'orgoglio*", a pamphlet against the dictatorships, the religious fanaticism, the weakness of the governments that breaks the public opinion. The invective continues in "*La forza della ragione*" (2004) and it is confirmed in an article appeared on the "New Yorker" in May 2006 entitled "*The Agitator*". Suffering from an incurable disease, that she defined the "Alien" attributed to the exhalations of the wells detonated by Saddam Hussein that she had

breathed in Kuwait, Oriana Fallaci dies September 15, 2006 in Florence in the nursing home “Santa Chiara” at the age of seventy-seven years.

Implacable critical spirit, Oriana orientates her own maturity to an impassioned defense of the West against the Moslem threat, becoming protagonist of a vivacious cultural battle. The opposition to Islam raises her to paladin of the defense of the West against the advance of the Islamic ones. Her judgment is clean, it doesn't admit replicas, it is a real crusade against the Arabic world, at least partly in contrast with the professional principles that until then Oriana had made hers: she has never married any cause that was not that of the truth.

But nowadays the spectacularization of the reality and the advance of new forms of communication are changing the job of reporter: the mean often wins on the content, the television manufactures and manipulates the news according to its own demands and the myth of the journalist to the front catalyzes the attention of the public and it becomes preponderant in comparison to ethical value of the profession. If Churchill said that in time of war truth is too much precious and for this reason it must be hidden from a curtain of lies, today manipulations and misinformations have become a science.

Telling a war in the XXI century is radically different from the past: new technologies facilitate the job and make the space-storms confinements less rigid than once. While the cellular phones transforms everybody in predators of images, Internet allows to arrive online two seconds after a fact has been recorded. The online newspapers are always “hungry” of updatings, this why the figure of the journalist risks to fade: technology turns everybody into potential journalists and, at the same time, suppliers and consumers of the news.

In the narration of these new war sceneries, blog and social network are a true revelation. The net, raking up censorships and manipulations, has in fact shown to be a so free and fast channel able to subtract its self to codifications that a conflict always try to impose. The online world is surely the key to annihilate the centralized controls of every war, especially in the report of war where the slaughters, the victims, the mistakes and the truths should not be hidden in the name of the line-up. Unfortunately however, this boundless liberty to tell reduces the possibility to enjoy of an information of quality, often tied up to less transitory times and to more static supports.

Therefore the media landscape is destined to change in a radical way. So the world of the printed paper is crossed by gloomy news: sales in decline, advertising invoiced to peak, dismissals, sales, restructurings. The consequence is that today there is the risk to tell the great events of the world in

front of the screen of a computer because correspondents and envoys are categories in danger of extinction. It weighs the crisis of the journalistic headings and the advent of social medias.

And, if in general blog, social network and user-generated contributions are a great opportunity for the reduction of the costs, for the rapidity of diffusion and for the plurality of the points of view expressed, on the other side the principal problems that are set for the new social media concern with their reliability and the ability of close examination and reflection on the events. We will always need journalists able to filter, to deepen, to verify and contextualize the facts.

It is in this sense that the net can hardly replace ours modern William Russell. The work of the reporter of war is old of almost two centuries and if from the heroic times of Russell a lot of things, especially in technology, have changed, one nearly stays unchangeable: the complexity of the figure of the envoy of war. Being reporter is an hard choice, it is a full renouncement to oneself, often also to his existence.