

IL FORTETO: THE HISTORY

The agricultural cooperative *Il Forteto* was founded in 1977 by Rodolfo Fiesoli, alias “Il Profeta”, Luigi Goffredi and a group of 33 people, mostly young people who attended a parish church in Prato willing to engage in a path of community growth, collective social life and in the reception of children with physical and mental handicaps, with a past of family discomfort or sexually abused. Agriculture was the most suitable environment for realizing their ideal of living together.

The agricultural cooperative *Il Forteto* over the years has become a reality of undeniable entrepreneurial importance. In addition to livestock and organic farming, the co-operative has a riding school, a cheese factory that exports products to many foreign countries, a bakery, a supermarket, and a direct sale plant nursery.

It has been the same members of the community that created this "empire", it is them who restructured the buildings, who created cattle breeding, who dealt with the cultivation, the store. They worked 82 hours a week to realize what has become a company with a turnover of 15 million Euro per year (2011); it is them, adults and children, that worked uninterruptedly.

In the 1980s, the judiciary began to be interested in *Il Forteto*, on January 3, 1985, the Florence Court of Appeal condemned Rodolfo Fiesoli and Luigi Goffredi for various charges including "minor bribery", "consensual abduction of minors", "title usurpation". All this perpetrated by “inciting in individuals with immature personality, due to age or other cause, the fear of the reproach of the "group" of the community led by Fiesoli and Goffredi, and having disrupted, using obsessive, aggressive, marginalized and humiliating forms of conviction, any pre-existing value and parental figures, in order to make them completely dependent on them, forced to accept and practice the regime they imposed in the cooperative that was characterized by absolute promiscuity among people of the same sex; practice of homosexuality; prohibition of contacts with the families of origin and hostility, even with physical violence, towards these same ones to show up”.

Despite the conviction, the Minor Court still went on to entrust minors to the community without stopping. In 1998, a Foundation was established, obtaining the recognition of legal personality from the Tuscany Region, to spread the educational and social values of the Community.

IL FORTETO: LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY AND THE ENTRUSTS OF MINORS.

At *Forteto*, men and women lived divided: they slept, ate, worked separately, even if married. This was the fundamental rule of the community life. Heterosexual relationships were strongly opposed, because good and love were, according to the Prophet, those of homosexual type, because there is no substance there. The inevitable effect was that at *Forteto* no children were born. No children were

generated except for what was considered a mistake, and if it happened the baby was torn to the mother and raised by others.

But the children were at Forteto, they were the children entrusted to the community by the Juvenile Court. This occurred since the beginning of the community and continued after 1985, the year of Fiesoli and Goffredi's condemnation.

The children welcomed at Forteto were nominally entrusted by the Minor Court to a couple who was such only on paper, because often the foster parents had no connection between them; they were a "functional couple". According to Fiesoli, the couple and the family, as commonly understood, represented a place of selfishness and hypocrisy inadequate to educating young people to the values of equality, altruism and solidarity, it's only disaggregating the unity of family that these values could be achieved. That is why the children that arrived at Forteto were followed, as per Fiesoli's will, by functional parents or by a man and woman not connected by any affective bond, united only by the intent of educating the child assigned them.

Whenever the entrusted children were brothers and sisters, they were separated and their relationships were discouraged, but then they mimed common spaces and stable relationships during social services controls, of which arrival Forteto was warned one week in advance.

There was another rule at Forteto, that was of totally interrupt any relations with the family of origin, any external link was immediately terminated. Some children were told that their parents were dead, others were told they had not been looking for them and would not want them back: "I really believed my family did not wanted me anymore, and I was angry because I was saying, but how is it possible?... and instead when I came out I discovered that they kept coming to the community and every time they've been told that I did not want to see them and they sent them away...". Others have been forced to report - with success or not - their own parents for abuses that they never suffered: "I had problems because I was abused by an uncle and Rodolfo used this fact for a long time... putting on a castle of lies were practically it was all of my family that abused me, even insinuating that my father might have had sexual attentions towards me and that my mother hated me... honestly at that time I believed it".

What essentially seemed to be pursued at Forteto was the subtraction of stable relationships, so that the only relational continuity would settle with the leaders; children were of all and of no one, abused or ignored by their foster parents, they were deprived of individual play spaces, as well as housing that ensured family intimacy. In addition, children were denied the circuit of relationships normally provided by school or sports-related activities that had to be carried out collectively within Forteto.

For those who lived at Forteto, nothing existed outside if not a hostile world.

For the purpose of training and consolidating the "collective personality", Forteto implemented practices such as resetting all kinds of privacy, systematic discouraging to study, public humiliations, repeated clarifications, practices that triggered a psychological subjection similar to plagiarism.

To strengthen this homologation and limitation to the natural evolutionary process of minors is the phenomenon of systematic school discouraging. At Forteto the incidence of school dropout after

compulsory schools was massive, only very few cases attended high school. Obviously, the effect of such a practice is multiple: acquire workforce for the cooperative, level down the autonomy of thinking of boys and girls and avoid consolidating relationships with the outside. This is demonstrated by the denunciation of people who grew up in the community who today claim to have big difficulties in emancipating themselves and organizing an independent life.

In fact, the first thing the newcomer first experienced was the abatement of his/her intimacy and of his/her individuality, the homologation of each of them with each other and of everyone with the homosexual ideal preached by Fiesoli and pursued by the community was constant. As a girl testifies: "The foster mother was with me from morning till night, she never left me a second, and I could not have a moment of freedom... She cut my hair, throw away all my clothes and she said to me that I needed to be a bit more anonymous.

All this was added with the deprivation of confidentiality, for all except than for Fiesoli. At Forteto they all ate together, with different tables for men and women; men slept with men and women with women in large dormitories.

Even phone calls were all at the mercy of all, a single phone with a loudspeaker: "Anyone answering the phone for business or for personal reasons was heard by everyone in the room...".

In this place, where there were only spaces to share together, there was no intimacy and reservedness, everyone participated and also assisted to inflicted punishments: "There were really showy punishments... A Forteto woman was obliged to walk on the table back and forth while saying "I'm a bitch, I'm a bitch"... While another one was put in front of the buffet with a black bag on the head...".

At evening, every evening after dinner, the so-called *clarifications* took place. It was compulsory for all, except for young children, to attend the "fixing" meetings, during which were decided the work assignments of each one for the next day and some of them ended up being the target of "clarifications", a sort of public confessions, not necessarily of actual events, during which individuals were kept in a chair until they admitted what Fiesoli and the other "elders" of the community wanted to hear. Witnesses report that they have been relieved to sleep, emotional pressures, fatigue, and the weight of everyone's gaze, telling sexual fantasies, abuses or mistreatment by the families of origin that they have never experienced. "It all lasted according to the individual's resistance. You explain to some of the people who then were given the change, because they alternated in order to rest. Then there were public humiliations... All this could go on until 4:00 AM, 4:30 AM, until you had said what they wanted".

The numerous testimonies give a unique and consistent picture of the abusive practice of Forteto. Abuse, in all its forms, seems to be the practice.

Beating and punishments are everyday and go hand in hand with work rhythms that escape from any western bargaining model.

Violence affects both kids and teenagers, and each one is the protagonist of an ongoing osmosis between being a victim and becoming tormentor of the unlucky. So the same person who first suffers, the next moment acts violence against others. "Spit, slap, pull of hair... I was once so much beaten that I did not go to school".

Not even younger children or people with disabilities were spared: "There was a child who was always peeing on him, so his foster mother dropped him out of the room and he had to stay out in the cold, all wet, all night or she sent him to sleep in the chapel where there were the dead...".

All this brings together the physical abuses associated with abusive practice of medical-nursing, with the community leaders who, when needed, improvised dental surgeries, physiotherapists and orthopaedists "one could not go to either the doctor or the emergency room".

In addition to physical violence, neglect, psychological violence, sexual abuse is also a practice in Forteto. In a community that hates heterosexual relationships, however, sex is present in every aspect of life and thought. Whatever true or supposed behaviour, any gesture or insignificant look is brought back to sex, to sexual fantasies, to real memories or induced abuses. At Forteto, sex permeates existence and seems to be the goal of so-called clarifications. At all ages.

The minors often became or continue to be prey. This happened with the consent not only of the collective but also of the foster parents. The testimonies reveal practices and abuses by foster parents, men and women, and a compliant attitude towards the "strange attentions" of Fiesoli on the children entrusted to them: "You went to make the room where Fiesoli slept and he started a sexual approach, put your hands on you, kissed you... all this in front of the foster mother, she was the one who brought you there".

Reportedly, it was not just Fiesoli to commit such monstrosity. There are many stories that report sexual abuse of other people. The boys are subject of attention by the Forteto's leaders and were routed to homosexual practice, girls are directed by other women. Yes because homosexuality, at Forteto, was stimulated, a path obliged to what Fiesoli called "liberation from materiality." Administered some medicine to overcome oedipal conflict or past trauma, homosexuality became the main path for a successful individual evolution, and as a consequence, a tool for obtaining social consensus within the community: "The only relationships allowed were those homosexuals, I have nothing against homosexuality, only that there they were just forcing. Anyone who was in the tendency towards the other sex was subjected to checks and clarifications, because good and love are those of homosexual type, because there is no substance there".