

The passion of Giuliana Sgrena

NEW YORK, MARCH 6, 2005 – Italian Journalist Giuliana Sgrena became an icon in Iraq, a role model of a caring journalist of conscience kidnapped by parties unknown. Her plight mobilized the people of Italy with virtually the whole country demanding her release.

In response, Italy dispatched an intelligence agent to find her and negotiate her release. Miraculously, he did, but as fate would have it, he was killed by US soldier suspicious of his car, which raced through, they say, a roadblock on its way to the airport. As bullets whizzed, he protected her but gave up his life.

This incident was originally described as an accident – but was it? Turkishpress.com is reporting: “The companion of Giuliana Sgrena on Saturday leveled serious accusations at US troops who fired at her convoy as it was nearing Baghdad airport, saying the shooting had been deliberate.

“The Americans and Italians knew about (her) car coming,” Pier Scolari said on leaving Rome’s Celio military hospital where Sgrena is to undergo surgery following her return home.

“They were 700 meters (yards) from the airport, which means that they had passed all checkpoints. Giuliana had information, and the US military did not want her to survive,” he added.

The chief editor of Sgrena’s newspaper *Il Manifesto* Gabriele Polo meanwhile branded Calipari’s death a “murder”.

As investigations into the circumstances continue, as indignation over the event swells, journalists in Italy, especially her colleagues at *il Manifesto*, try to make sense of what happened. While the western media reported the incident, accepting a US military version (which the NY Times called “murky”) the subtext and texture of her work and passion goes largely unremarked upon.

Like many stories from Iraq, it is the story behind the story that goes unreported.

“They have taught us to be cold, “writes editor Gabriel Pole, “to analyze the events, does not make us to be involved too much, for being able to

understand that that understood to us. And to try to change it. But the world is made of persons. The facts, and even the history, are our product: to the fine ones they are the outcome of bodies, of meat and blood. It depends all on we, from what we make.”

And who is Giuliana. Her bio on the il Manifesto site explains:

“A passionate expert of the Arab world she also dealt extensively with issues and stories concerning the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and the Maghreb. She covered for Il Manifesto the war in Afghanistan and the various stages of the Iraqi conflict; she was in Baghdad during the bombing of the city (and for this she was awarded by the President of Italy the title of merit, Cavaliere del Lavoro) and returned many times again in order to describe the daily life of the Iraqis, documenting in a professional manner the violence caused by the occupation of the country.

“Together with her journalistic endeavors, Giuliana also devotes her time to political issues. During the 1980's she was among the founders of the peace movement: she was one of the speakers during the first mass peace demonstration.”

And what of Nicola Calipari who gave his life so that she might live? Valentino Parlato writes about him for Giuliana's newspaper: “Nicola was a good person, loyal and generous. He was a person that inspired the maximum trust even to myself – consumed in so many experiences. If Nicola told me something, I believed him, I had no doubts nor suspects; Nicola would not say something to hide something else ...

“When at the checkpoint, before the Baghdad airport, from an American car the first shots were fired against the car which was bringing Giuliana towards the airplane which would have brought her back to Italy, Nicola reacted humanly, immediately, for a reflex unwritten in the rules of his service, he shielded Giuliana's body, and he was killed...

“The joy for Giuliana is big, but even bigger is our pain, of all of us of Il Manifesto, for the death of Nicola Calipari. He was not wounded in service, but because he has been extremely generous, which we of Il Manifesto cannot forget. To his two children and his wife a big hug from all, really all of us.”

THE APPEAL

Il Manifesto had issued an appeal to the kidnappers through Al Jazeera; It is worth rereading because of its intelligence and sense of compassion for Iraq:

“We ask of the men who have taken hostage our colleague, Giuliana Sgrena, that they release her, not just as an act of generosity and of mercy, but because Giuliana has always been a journalist who has struggled for peace, and an ally of the Iraqi people. Her articles for *Il Manifesto* have always expressed her opposition to the war and to the occupation of Iraq by the Americans and by the international coalition supporting them. Keeping her prisoner or harming her would further damage the cause of Iraq and of the Iraqis in the eyes of the world, fuelling the arguments of those who want to impose ‘democracy’ or ‘freedom; on the Arab-Moslem world through war and violence.

“*Il Manifesto* does not believe this and has never believed it. It is an independent newspaper, peace-loving by tradition, and it has always opposed the ‘preventive wars’ of George Bush. Through Giuliana’s eyes our readers have seen the suffering that is daily inflicted on the Iraqi people by the occupation, especially on the women and children, suffering that she was determined to give voice to. It is a hard task, amongst the proliferation of armaments that has the world in its grip, and a task that a negative outcome for Giuliana would render yet more difficult. Iraq would be still more alone.

“We therefore beg you to free Giuliana quickly, and in the name of the Iraqi people who you wish to defend. Liberate one of the few voices that are still free to describe the reality of Iraq for what it is, and to oppose all forms of tyranny.”

What of Giuliana the journalist? Here are snatches from three of her recent stories:

January 14: “The various embassies in Iraq, under American pressure, had already instructed the journalists based there before the bombing began on the 20th March 2003, to abandon camp. The injunction was without effect, however, and the war was covered, for better or worse, both by journalists having to submit to the control of the Iraqi Ministry of Information, and by the embedded journalists censored by the Pentagon. The further deterioration of the situation in Iraq has made it even more difficult to provide information. The journalists are hostages to all the perverse effects of the military occupation and the privatization of the war.

“The hostility of the Iraqis to the military occupation has extended to all foreigners present in the territory, contractors, journalists and workers in humanitarian organizations. It's no longer enough to be French, given the French opposition to the war and the occupation, to get special treatment. And when a military occupation is dressed up as a peace mission as the Italian

government has done, it is hardly surprising that subtle distinctions are not made.”

29 December 2004: “10,000 prisoners are still locked in American and British prisons in Iraq. Most are Iraqis but there are also 350 foreigners. The figures were supplied by the Iraqi Minister of Human Rights, Bakhtiar Amin. These numbers are in strong contrast with the claims made some time ago by the Americans that the number of prisoners had been considerably reduced after the releases following the scandal of Abu Ghraib. Apparently the number of prisoners has been swelled by numerous arrests of the survivors of the attacks on Samarra, Falluja and Mosul.”

26 November, 2004: “This month of November will be remembered as one of the bloodiest of the occupation. Since the beginning of the month, which is not yet finished, 109 Marines have been killed, a figure already greater than that of the earlier attack on Fallujah, last April. But it is above all the Iraqis who are paying the highest tribute: 2,085 killed in the attack according to the information given out by Iraqi Security Minister Quassim Daud, without specifying the number of civilians. The problem, says the Minister, is that of identification, as many of the victims were not carrying documents. But many observers say that the problem is that many of the bodies were unrecognizable because they were so carbonized that the use of napalm was suspected.

“At the same time as the victim count from Fallujah, more disturbing news is arriving from Oslo in the form of the report of an investigation conducted by the Iraqi Health Ministry, in conjunction with the Norwegian FAFO Institute for applied international studies and UNDP, into the health of Iraqi children. The report states that since the beginning of the war (March 2003) the number of Iraqi children under the age of 5 suffering from acute malnutrition has doubled, passing from 4 to 7.7%. Further, over 400,000 are suffering from chronic diarrhea and protein deficit.”

For more about Giuliana and her work:

http://216.239.37.104/translate_c?hl=en&u=http://www.ilmanifesto.it/pag/sgrena/&prev=/search%3Fq%3Dgiuliana%26hl%3Den%26lr%3D%26client%3Dsafari%26rls%3Den-us

JOURNALISTS STILL AT RISK

And now back to the issue of journalists in Iraq. Believe it or not, statistically, journalists were ten times more likely to die in Iraq than soldiers.

No TV networks to my knowledge have investigated the charges of the US targeting of journalists there made by Eason Jordan the CNN news executive who resigned when the mighty wrath of the right side of the blogosphere, in effect, silenced him.

Many reported on his demise, none on his concerns.

A journalist interviewed in my film WMD who worked with Eason writes: “I suppose when a corporation that owes its very existence to you refuses to stand up for you ... then its time to move on.”

“I never thought I would see the day when a news executive simply states that he knows of 10 (and well documented) incidents in which journalists have been targeted by US forces. He also had tried to bring attention to the four journos (three locals from Reuters and one from NBC) who were arrested and tortured by US forces in Fallujah. I was stunned when the faux journos aka as bloggers began to tear apart Eason instead of looking into his charges (they were sparked by Barney Frank’s comments that dead journos were just collateral damage).

“Anyone who knows him or has benefited by his absolute unshakeable dedication to journo safety is unshaken by the tiny tempest. CNN and the journalistic community is poorer for the experience.”

Guliana is free, recovering but alive. The media is still not free. The Iraq war continues in this month that marks its second anniversary.

News Dissector Danny Schechter is the “blogger in-chief of Mediachannel.org. His film WMD (Weapons of Mass Deception) on the media coverage of the war has just been released on DVD. For information, visit www.wmdthefilm.com Write; David@wmdthefilm.com