Chiara Bonifazi

Linda Bimbi

A Faith in Human Rights

Introduction by Luciana Castellina
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Afterword by
Sergio Poeta
Front cover: 1966, pupils from the Colégio Helena Guerra in front of the school

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When I first met LInda, I was totally unprepared. I mean that when I saw and heard her for the first time, I knew nothing about her, and we had never been introduced. And if I hadn’t happened to come across her again, and then got to know her properly, I wouldn’t even have remembered that fleeting encounter years before.

It was in 1974, during the Russell Tribunal II sessions on the dictatorship in Brazil, held in Rome in the lecture hall of the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, in what is now known as Piazzale Aldo Moro, although I can’t remember what it was called at the time. All I know is that it couldn’t yet have been Aldo Moro, because Moro hadn’t been assassinated and so a whole series of things that happened in the meantime also hadn’t happened either.

About the Tribunal itself, I knew little or nothing; or rather I knew about its immediate predecessor, which in reality was the same, although it was called Bertrand Russell Tribunal I and had been held to investigate American war crimes in Vietnam, in Hanoi itself. The incredible idea of establishing an international jury, authoritative but not official, relieved of any coercive measures and the right to deliver officially applicable sentences, but nevertheless endowed with great moral stature, had been in the meantime taken up and pursued by Lelio Basso, who had been both Russell’s friend and invaluable collaborator. The truth is that I also knew very little about Lelio Basso: he was a socialist, I was a communist, so our paths rarely crossed, although Lelio was an atypical socialist (or perhaps it would be better to say a true socialist among many aliens who nevertheless defined themselves as such). So, if I barely knew Lelio Basso at that time, just imagine
Linda Bimbi, who, moreover, had just returned to Italy after a long period in Brazil.

I am telling all of this to explain immediately that I am not one of Linda’s official and authorised biographers. I arrived on the scene too late, at the beginning of Eighties in fact. In the meantime, it’s true, I had also become something of an anomaly in the communist movement, and this undoubtedly made meeting with other anomalies, namely socialist, easier. Which led me to the discovery of Lelio Basso, of his journal Problemi del socialismo, which brought to our attention an international left of which we had no knowledge, and then, when he died, of the Foundation that bore his name.

In reality, it was Linda who looked for me. This was the era of the great peace movement, fighting against the installation of missiles in Europe, the period of a dramatic resurgence of the Cold War; I was the European co-ordinator of European Nuclear Disarmament (END), alongside Ken Coates, who was chairman of the Bertrand Russell Foundation. I suppose it must have been this connection that led Linda to seek me out. But also the fact that Linda felt herself part of that period of mobilisation against the threat of war that had once again resurfaced, with Reagan and Brezhnev at the helm of the two great nuclear powers. So much so that many years later, the Lelio Basso Foundation was to be directly involved in the fight against new conflicts, those in the Global South. In fact the International League for Human Rights was to conduct, with regard to the European peace movement, a persuasive campaign aimed at correcting the somewhat Euro-centric focus of its policy: in other words, seeking to persuade that the greatest threat no longer lay along the border between East and West, but North and South, a powerful argument that reached the Foundation through the particular sensitivity it had always demonstrated towards the problems of the Third World. Similar, in fact, to some of our other shared “companions along the way”: Father Balducci, Father Turoldo, the secular Catholics of the left, who Linda had met shortly after returning from Brazil, and before becoming involved full time with the Foundation.

So it must have been on account of all these concurrences that Linda phoned me, this must have been in 1984, and asked if
we could meet: she wanted to invite me, on behalf of the International Foundation, a branch subsequently established by Lelio Basso, to go to Brazil for four days, for an initiative by “Madre Terra” promoted by the local “Justitia et Pax”, also a sort of tribunal that denounced the harsh exploitation to which the country’s labourers were subjected.

Since then, we have been inseparable: thanks to that trip, through Linda I also discovered Brazil, still dear to my heart, as are Linda’s Brazilian friends, starting with Lula, trade unionist and then leader of the Workers’ Party, the PT, whose congresses I almost always attended from then onwards, until he became President. For years, the future leader of Brazil and I met in Via della Dogana Vecchia, because whenever Lula came to Europe, he never failed to pass through Rome to see Linda Bimbi. Not only out of affection, but also to navigate his way through the muddle of our Left, because it was Linda’s judgement he trusted. Indeed, Linda was considered de facto Lula’s spokesperson in Italy, a sort of shadow ambassador of a progressive Brazil. To such a degree that when the PT was elected to power, marking an historical turning point for the country, Massimo D’Alema, then Foreign Minister, held a solemn ceremony at Villa Madama, during which Linda Bimbi was honoured for the contribution she had made to a democratic Brazil.

In our highly politicised world, Linda immediately seemed unusual to me. Because she was politicised, but in a way completely different to one with which we were familiar. Of course, we shared the same passion and commitment (considerable at the time), but there was also a distinctive curiosity, as though she needed to learn in a hurry a lot of things she had not been able to experience as we had during her many years as a nun in Brazil. Perhaps for this very reason, she has always maintained a combination of ingenuousness – often, even amazement at the things she discovered – and also a wisdom that never ceases to surprise me. And my curiosity was immediately aroused by two people who in some way, while being two very different individuals, were (or rather are, because they continue to be so) entirely at one with Linda: Ruth and Monica. They are never away from her side, whether at work or in the privacy of their home. I was
only vaguely aware that they had been nuns and that they were Brazilian. I realised that they provided the key to a better understanding of Linda, but it took time for me to get to know them properly. Similarly, a close acquaintance with Linda, detailed information about her life, meeting her friends and companions in the Community, all came much later on. In the beginning, there was no time: after the trip to Brazil and my account of what I had seen and heard, I immediately threw myself into the work of the Foundation.

Immediately after Linda, the other people I first met in Via della Dogana Vecchia were Piero Basso and Gianni Tognoni. Piero because of his involvement with the League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples; Gianni, then as now, for his with the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal, the other two sections which, together with the Scientific Committee of the International Foundation, we jokingly referred to as the “Holy Trinity”. This came about because Linda chose to assign me to the League, the more strictly politico-militant section, grasping immediately that this was the role to which I was most suited; likewise with the Tribunal which had a more direct involvement with it, the Council instead being restricted to the intellectuals.

She allowed me to move quickly up the ranks. It was thanks to Linda’s undisputed authority that in a very short time, and barely known to the founding members of the Foundation, I became vice-president of the League, while the president was an exceptional figure: Adolfo Perez de Esquivel, with whom, despite the fact that he lived in Argentina, I enjoyed an excellent partnership, and a wonderful friendship even now. The last time he came to Rome, we dined together on the terrace at the home of common friends, directly opposite the windows of the residence of his compatriot Pope Francis, whom he also happened to be visiting the next day and about whom he told me many things. Even this combination – a bad communist like myself and a very Catholic Nobel laureate like Adolfo – was one of Linda’s brilliant inventions. Because, behind her reserved naivety, Linda conceals what I would describe as a “managerial” temperament: she knows how to use people, how to make them work, imposes her ideas on them, but with suasion, so that they believe they are theirs.
During those years – from the Eighties to the end of the Nineties – we did many things together. It was rather a special time because, in Italy, the Third World, affected by the drama of debt and by the deadly politics of adjustment imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, had found its way into public opinion and was no longer strictly political. It was the beginning of globalisation, and little by little we discovered anti-globalisation, in other words the connection with protest movements across the world, vital for collective mobilisation. We, the League, poorer in militants on the ground than other movements, nevertheless brought to the shared undertaking the Foundation's prestige, the theoretical contribution of its Scientific Committee, the still vital echo of the Charter of Algiers, the wealth of international contacts assembled over many years of activity.

The first significant event during my time was undoubtedly the counter-summit to the summit held in Berlin by the World Bank and the Monetary Fund in 1988, when for the first time the Tribunal put in the dock not an individual country, but two major international institutions. It was a great triumph in mass mobilisation, the result of a close collaboration that was established between League and Tribunal. The protagonists of the trial were the many witnesses for the prosecution, a lot of them still unknown at the time but who have since become very famous: for example Vandana Shiva, still unknown then but who had just left the World Bank where she was a functionary to dedicate herself to the so-called deadly “green revolution” imposed on the developing countries by this institution. But also, to give another example, Aloisio Mercadante, then a Brazilian trade unionist and later a distinguished minister. Or Katerina Focke, former minister in Willy Brandt’s government, and president of the Commission for Cooperation and Development in the European Parliament at that time. And even the celebrated economist Robert Triffin, who offered to represent the defence. The Berliners’ support was remarkable; we were offered assistance by hundreds of volunteers, even the city’s taxi drivers knew about the Tribunal. It was at this time that what would become a lasting connection with Elmar Altvater, an economist and ecologist who lectured at the Freie Universitét in Berlin, was established, and he later became presi-
dent of the International Section of the Lelio Basso Foundation and continues to collaborate closely with Linda on the courses held each year in Naples.

Berlin was the first counter-summit, a practice then taken up by the anti-global movement and which it still continues to employ; the most celebrated counter-summit, in Seattle in 1999 against the World Trade Organization, which – thanks to what Time Magazine referred to as the “first online guerrilla war” – succeeded in forcing a withdrawal of the first attempt at agreement on the liberalisation of exchange and investment – the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) – precursor of the present TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investments Partnership), the disastrous treaty currently in the process of negotiation between the European Union and The United States.

In the meantime, the Foundation had promoted two other significant counter-summits: in 1989, of the world’s seven poorest nations (whose representatives met on a barge on the Seine), to coincide with the summit of the world’s seven wealthiest nations convened in Paris by the French government to mark the two-hundredth anniversary of the French Revolution. I can still remember accompanying the delegation of the seven poorest nations to the Elysée so they could hand the indictment that had been drawn up collectively to Attali, Mitterand’s advisor. In 1994, this initiative was repeated in Naples. There, too, the League convened the seven poorest nations, making a careful selection, because while it is easy to identify the wealthiest, the poor, being more numerous, are difficult to choose. And in fact we summoned those who were representative of a particular issue: India, because of the Bhopal disaster; a native American, due to the dispossession suffered by his people; a South African, in order to denounce how the end of apartheid had as yet failed to bring economic inequality to an end; and then a peasant from Chapas, a region that was being talked about for the first time in Italy, who had travelled from Mexico firstly on foot through the rainforest, then by bus, train, and finally by plane. In addition there were a Brazilian woman, a Somali and a Bangladeshi. It was on this occasion that the G7 became G8, because Russia was also admitted into the circle of the great, welcomed with ostentatious ceremony.
by the newly elected prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi. Similarly, in a different ceremony, we also added an eighth member to our poorest seven: an unemployed steelworker from Pomigliano d’Arco. And, as we had done in Paris, we went to the Comune (City Hall) to hand the declaration of our summit to Bassolino, mayor at the time, asking him to deliver it to the «wealthy» (with lucid foresight, we preferred not to have to deal with Berlusconi directly). After also having obtained a motorcade and an expensive dinner at Ciro’s, in Santa Brigida, that might compensate at least in part for the one offered to the wealthy at the Reggia di Caserta (a rather theatrical way of affirming the status of poverty).

Linda rarely left Rome to accompany us on these expeditions. I don’t know why, since she prepared them enthusiastically right from the beginning of the project, following the programme in all its details and then, impatiently, phoning from Rome to find out how every moment had gone. The reason she didn’t come, I think, was because she was shy, she had never liked «public events», nor Tribunal sessions or counter-summits, and still doesn’t. Not out of timidity, because I wouldn’t say she is actually timid. Or perhaps her reserve conceals the custom of the convent to return home early, to conduct a nun’s life. I don’t know; perhaps this past has counted in her life, perhaps not.

In reality, the two residences of the Community have always had little of the convent, neither in Rome, nor the one originally in Assisi that moved to Bastiola following the earthquake. The first time I went to Assisi, I was surprised at the explanation I was given of their mode of being nuns: they said «we have told the Bishop we want to follow the Charisma that we have conferred on ourselves». In other words, to interpret Christianity as we understand it and to adopt the rules that seem most fitting for us.

Both in Umbria and in Rome, all the members of the Community work to support themselves; usually in fields relating to care. With the exception, of course, of Linda, Ruth and Monica, who work at the Foundation. And Maria Elena, refined elegant learned fragile and gentle, Linda’s closest friend, the nun she met immediately after she became a sister, in Lucca, after she left University. And who had then shared the experience of Brazil with her, before they were later reunited again in Rome. When
I met Maria Elena, now no longer with us, to everyone’s sadness including my own, she was already very old and sick and was cosseted by all her companions. The majority of them Brazilian, but also Arabs and Italians, content with their communal life, occupied with keeping their home and terrace beautiful. Almost no religious icons, the occasional photo of Lelio Basso, who taught them a more effective way of showing love for their fellow men.

And wonderful cooks: since I began to frequent them, outside Via della Dogana Vecchia too, they have prepared many outstanding meals for me, as well as for the occasional grandchild who happened to be with me, or some colleague from the Foundation, almost always Enrico Pugliese. Brazilian food and drink, of course.

Over the last few years, Linda has also invented other activities for herself. The League for the Rights of Peoples, the militant arm of the Basso trinity, has for a while made way for movements originating in several countries, which have taken up many of its ideas. The interlocutors of the former International Foundation – many in Central and South America in particular – are still there, but its most eminent members have been wiped out by age and it has perhaps proved impossible to renew them in time. The Tribunal continues to flourish, having conducted some forty or so trials over the years, in the most diverse countries on the most diverse topics; particularly interesting is the most recent, on Mexico, prepared by a thousand committee members who worked together for three years assembling the documentation and holding a series of preliminary hearings. And because, by putting the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), promulgated twenty years ago, at the centre of its concluding speech, it made a contribution that extended well beyond the borders of Mexico, given that both Europe and Asia are in the middle of negotiations to introduce similarly damaging agreements.

In the meantime, rightly, the unification of the two branches of the Foundation, the international branch, which has always been Linda’s concern, and what was once known as ISSOCÓ, which was involved with the workers’ movement in Italy and Europe, has gone ahead. A decision that was sacrosanct, given that the international dimension is now obligatory with regard to any-
thing it is involved in and keeping the resources and intelligence of the two branches separate did not make sense. Although the political and cultural sensibilities behind their origins were and remain different, the willingness to work together is aided by the generational change now under way.

Linda, however, has been involved over the last decade in working on many new projects, particularly in the field of education: primarily on what I consider the greatest success, the School of Journalism, a course for fifty or so students who, for one whole year, occupy the building in Via della Dogana Vecchia from early morning until evening, the lecturers being friends of the Foundation. It has been a huge success. Being a journalist myself, and always encountering many other journalists, I can safely say that the students at this school are the brightest, most highly educated and politicised young people. Although it is extremely tough for them to find work – as it is for anyone starting out in this profession nowadays – I have to say that they certainly use their ingenuity. And then there’s the school held every year in Naples, a veritable handing down of wisdom from the old to the young who gravitate to the Foundation.

Linda contributes enormously to these educational activities, perhaps rediscovering the didactic side of her early years in Brazil.

In speaking of Linda, I have mentioned the things we have done together, because it is those I can talk about. Yet I am aware that a decisive piece is missing from my account, related however by the book to which this is merely an introduction. I am well aware that the earlier part of her story is fundamental and also highly unusual. Although I’m not able to tell it, it is nevertheless the one that continues to intrigue me more than any other, and still raises questions I can’t answer: what occurred in the mind of a young woman from a privileged background in one of the wealthiest regions of Italy, Tuscany, and indeed from a city as pleasant to live in as Lucca, a student at the University of Pisa, sharing courses and exchanging ideas with a remarkable group of left-wing intellectuals, why at a certain moment she left her own country, became a nun, ended up in Brazil and in that country, in the grip of a dramatic and brutal dictatorship, she should have discovered, albeit in a convent, the path of direct political en-
gagement, to the extent of even placing her own life in danger? Returning to Italy after being forced to escape from Brazil, how was it that she was able to assume a role as significant as the one she carried out as the initiator of the great struggle for the Third World within the Lisli and Lelio Basso Foundation? How was she able to reconcile her existing religious vocation with a highly rigorous political commitment? How and with what equilibrium did she manage to choose her Christian path with so much courage and independence? How was she able to assemble around her a group of women, all convinced co-participants in her «heresy», like those in her community? All this makes Linda Bimbi an extraordinary and unique person. I feel privileged, for many years now, to have enjoyed a friendship and collaboration with her, never clouded for a single moment.

Even now, despite the aches and pains of old age suffered by many of us, despite the difficulties of this dark political moment and the many horrors of the modern world, it is possible to hear Linda’s voice, loud and optimistic, telling you that she has just «plucked another beautiful flower». A way of saying that she is still discovering good people, there is still hope in humanity.
Linda Bimbi
A Faith in Human Rights
5 June 2013

This morning I arrive early, as I always do when I have an appointment for work, not because I’m afraid of being late, but so that I’m sure there’ll be enough time for a good luck coffee at the bar. This habit goes back to the days of university exams and now it’s difficult to give it up. And then, basically, the Basso Foundation is a place still connecting me to my time at University, to those afternoon seminars recommended by the professor who would be delivering his lecture and which earned you points, literally and metaphorically.

So, after several years, I went once again into Via della Dogana Vecchia, number 5, but this time I took the stairs up to the second floor and was greeted by two women, clearly Brazilian, who led me into the penumbra typical of the buildings in the historical centre of Rome. I had never been into the offices of the international Section, but I had no time to dwell on the faces on the posters on the wall before I found myself standing in front of the door to Linda’s room. She was already in there, and my journey from the lobby had been quick, in the capable hands of Monica and Ruth and with a chorus of courteous welcome.

I had read a lot about her and the Foundation over the previous weeks, but I couldn’t imagine what she was like.

She was sitting in a small armchair at her desk and stood up to greet me. She was wearing a flowery dress, bright blue and cheerful, and as I greeted her, I simply had to tell her of the happiness she transmitted.

As soon as I sat down, I opened my notebook, which like any good anthropologist, didn’t contain a single prepared question as a starting point – because, as I had been taught, “it would ruin the natural flow of a story” – but they were clearly fixed in my mind anyway.
I was ready. We started to talk, face to face, and in no way did she fail to come up to my expectations: she looked like a woman from a different time, serious and composed, regal in her courteousness. We were sitting in her office, with books and documents on human rights and ethnic minorities, on the history of peoples and geopolitics, behind us. I'm definitely in the right place, I thought, and then my mind turned immediately to all the things I didn't know, which perhaps I should have studied harder at university and that now I wished I knew.

I was ready. I had hardly opened my mouth when Linda's curiosity overtook mine: she wanted to know who I was and so I found myself telling her all about myself, my life and my plans, going through all the reasons why I was sitting there in front of her and asking her to place her trust in me.

This was how our first meeting went, and I was astonished by her ability to listen almost as much as by the ease I had displayed in telling her about myself.

Linda Bimbi is in charge of the International Section of the Lelio and Lisli Basso Foundation Issoco and it is she who guarantees continuity and consistency to the project undertaken by Lelio Basso in the 1970s. Born and raised in Lucca, she now lives in Rome and is one of a Community of lay missionaries who, in Brazil, directly experienced the process of secularisation in the years following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), under the military dictatorship.

This book stems from the desire to recount the fullness and intensity of a life, and while this is already a daunting task for any life, it seems all the more so in the case of Linda Bimbi.

First and foremost, because her story is part of the Bigger Story. The events recounted in these pages, in which Linda is never a mere bit player, and the names that appear in them, are in fact part of all of our lives: the Brazilian dictatorship, the Second Vatican Council, the Russell Tribunal and the Charter of Algiers are all significant events that coincide with the various stages in her life in an unpredictable, but remarkably consistent way.

So her story – and this is the second reason that makes it so difficult to relate – is also a collective one, not only because of
the historical dimension just mentioned. Her experience in a religious Congregation and then in a lay Community left such a deep mark on her that, from a certain point onwards, Linda reveals her profoundly plural existence. In the book Lettere a un amico: cronache di liberazione al femminile plurale (Marietti, 1990), a collection of the letters Linda wrote to Lelio Basso, this becomes very apparent: Linda is part of a group that is part of the world.

There is yet a further element that makes this biographical account so insidious. In their decision to leave the religious Congregation and to distance themselves from the ecclesiastical Institution, Linda and her companions made a very specific choice: that of living in Anonymity\(^1\). In other words, they chose to mingle with the people, to be ordinary people without an institutional role, to mix with others in a structure that was indeterminate.

So how do you recount the life of someone who wishes to remain anonymous? Who, in the choice of not wishing to be visible, shies away from the role of protagonist?

The framework given to this narrative and the practical decisions chosen attempt, page by page, to answer this question and to account for this complexity: inevitably, Linda Bimbi’s story had to be the tale of a collective endeavour, which would unfold through the events of the Bigger Story.

Linda’s own words constituted the starting point for the reconstruction of this story and form the principal part\(^2\). They were mainly gathered by the present writer during interviews and informal discussions that took place in 2013, but they were also found in interviews given in the course of time to academics and journalists, in numerous speeches delivered at conferences and seminars, or in the publications that bear her name. We wanted to give space to Linda’s voice and adhere to the priorities dictated by her own memory, maintaining the simple and spontaneous nature of the interviews.

\(^1\) A concept forming part of the Community’s vocabulary, accompanying their journey towards secularisation and which will be better understood in the course of this book.

\(^2\) Excerpts from her interviews are reproduced in smaller print or in quotation marks.
To her voice was added that of the Community, recorded during interviews and informal discussions at their residence in Rome. These are the stories and recollections of Linda’s companions, who shared her years in Brazil and then everything else and they provide an essential contribution to the reconstruction of a collective memory. They resemble a choir, in which the different voices merge in unison, irrespective of where they come from: this is the Voice of the Community, and is mentioned as such whenever it appears in the footnotes. It is also the voice that relates, in one of the final sections of this book, the ways and significance of living in a community today, adding a different perspective to the account.

Finally, other voices also appear in the text, becoming important sources in relating Linda’s life. These are the words of people who have known her and shared experiences and parts of life. They have been collected, as far as possible, through interviews or else, especially from Brazil, they arrived in the form of written thoughts. The acknowledgements at the end of these pages are addressed to all of them, for their part in compiling this collective story, each contributing their own particular point of view, details and recollections.

The writing changes from chapter to chapter, reflecting the journey that Linda herself made towards her plural dimension. It was, in fact, a progressive process and can be seen as such: as the text unfolds, little by little Linda seems to join increasingly in the chorus of voices and her own story, intertwined with others, inevitably becomes part of it.

In the following pages, it is clear that Linda has known and met many people over the years, often public figures in their own right and who, in their turn, have a place in History, with a capital letter: Nobel prize winners, political figures, writers, priests and revolutionaries.

In order to relate all of this without interrupting the thread of the story, we have chosen to include these people’s biographical details in a final section, as well as information useful in providing the reader with an historical overview. Similarly, a chronological outline of the events in Linda’s life is included alongside the main historical events for comparison.
The aim of this book was to recount this richness, and to illustrate, through the names of those who frequented and still continue to frequent the Basso Foundation and the Community today, the extent to which Linda’s experiences were the result of these encounters.

In retracing the story of her life, the impression Linda leaves the listener with is one of a story founded on decisions that were significant, in a certain sense definitive – in the true definition of the term – of borders mapped out, of marked itineraries. Decisions, however, which were never the result of personal reflection in the privacy of a room or of cold deliberation at a table, but which instead resulted from a chance meeting and the depth of a relationship. Linda’s story consists of the people she met and the traces they left along her path.

The decisions she made seem to make her life a collection of many lives, as Linda states, «all connected by a thread, and lived to the full as though each of them were the most important». And indeed, because the encounters behind those decisions were casual, or perhaps providential, in the sense that they were gifts that arrived and were welcomed by Linda, events which, to use an expression she is fond of, «fall into life». Linda entrusts herself to History, as she does to Faith, but it is never a passive submission.

In that «falling into life» lies all the intensity of living to the full, but the most remarkable aspect, which provides the meaning of this book, is that Linda Bimbi has never kept all she has received and embraced for herself: she has always sought to share it, because it was this that enabled her to experience it to the full.

And this is still evident now, in the willingness and trust with which she has agreed to talk about herself and to dedicate this story to those who already know her and those who will do so.

In both cases, it will be presented to create a memory of her that is vivid and actual.

This book has been written and published thanks to Anna Basso and her desire to pay affectionate homage to Linda Bimbi. So, first and foremost, it is to her that my thanks go for having entrusted me with this account and for allowing me to become part of it.
Special thanks go to Sergio Poeta, Gianni Tognoni and Fausto Tortora, colleagues at the Basso Foundation, for the care and devotion they have shown in accompanying me on this journey; for their enthusiasm, advice and support in the writing of this book.

Lastly, in thanking once again all those who have contributed with their personal recollections to the richness of these pages, my thoughts turn above all to Linda’s Community and to Linda herself. Not only for welcoming me into their home and into their lives, but for giving me the opportunity and the privilege of becoming acquainted with part of my own story.

Rome, 9 March 2015
I. The long journey towards rights
In the following pages, Linda’s own words are reproduced in quotation marks or, in the case of longer passages, indicated in smaller print. Linda’s long journey has coincided with those of many others, lesser or better known, who have made their mark on the history of the twentieth century. Many of them are quoted in this account and, for the reader’s convenience, have been included in the second part of the book (Biographies. Linda’s encounters), together with brief biographies.
1. The background to the story

In January 1972, the presentation of a book entitled *Dai sotterranei della storia*\(^3\) took place at the Corsia dei Servi\(^4\) in Milan.

The book was a collection of the letters written from prison by Carlos Alberto Libânio Christo, better known as Frei Betto, «a young Brazilian who, from university, went over to the revolution», a student of theology, who had entered the Dominican Order and was arrested in November 1969 by the State of Brazil’s intelligence service\(^5\).

In the early years of his imprisonment at Tiradentes prison in São Paulo, Frei Betto had managed to maintain a close correspondence with his family, fellow brothers and friends, and the letters, assembled with the help of Maria Valeria Rezende and then cyclostyled, had come into Linda Bimbi’s possession. It was she who initially suggested and then oversaw their publication. Linda had only recently returned to Italy, having been forced to flee Brazil three years earlier. After a brief period spent in Belgium, once back in her own country, she was starting to rebuild a life again, disorientated by a freedom she was no longer accustomed to and by a climate of protest and political unrest so unlike the one she had left behind.

In Rome, she had found support and the opportunity of collaborating at a documentation centre on the dynamics of the post-conciliar Church\(^6\), particularly with regard to the experienc-

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\(^4\) A cultural centre, founded immediately after the war on the initiative of a group of people associated with the Milanese Resistance, including several laymen and Brothers David Maria Turoldo and Camillo de Piaz from the Order of the Servi di Maria [Servants of Mary]. At the time, it was a focus for the petitioning for social, political and religious change in the years before the Second Vatican Council.

\(^5\) Frei Betto was accused of having aided fleeing guerrilla fighters to cross Brazil’s southern border and was sentenced in 1971 to four years in prison, following twenty-two months of pre-trial detention.

\(^6\) IDOC: cfr. *infra*, p. 66.
es of Liberation Theology, which had its origins in Latin America. Linda was thus able to publish articles and analysis relating to the South American continent, «information that was unknown in Italy», writing of and recounting the dynamics of the Latin American Church, but principally about the political and social developments under the Brazilian dictatorship and in Allende’s Chile, which she knew well, given the length of time she had spent there. It was at this point that she suggested publishing Betto’s correspondence and that everything started up again.

«At a certain point I decided to publish some letters one of the young men had sent me from prison and so I published this book. Lelio Basso had also been invited to the presentation in Milan.

When the presentation of the book was over, this man with a goatee beard came up to me and handed me a note: «I very much liked what you said and what you have written, would you like to come and work with me?».

After taking part in the advisory Tribunal organised by Bertrand Russell on the Vietnam war7, Lelio Basso approached Linda that day in Milan at the Corsia dei Servi with the idea of repeating the same experience, but this time focusing on the case of Brazil: a Russell Tribunal II on the violation of human rights in that country.

«Basso had even been the final speaker at the Tribunal on war crimes in Vietnam, so he was a well-known figure, although I had never heard of him. […] I was frightened and tried to backpedal, thinking, so I’m now going to get involved here too?

I’d gone through some terrible times in Brazil, wanted by the police… I was terrified of having to go through it all again».

7 For Basso’s part in the Russell Tribunal on Vietnam in 1966, cfr. infra, p. 72.
2. The true meaning of life

Linda Bimbi was born one Saturday in mid-summer in Lucca, at a time in which the Fascist dictatorship was busy consolidating its power throughout Italy.

«My father owned stores that sold furniture and furnishing accessories, he was a businessman and had inherited the firm from his father. My mother, on the other hand, was a school teacher from the countryside […]. She was from Reggio Emilia, from a family that came from the mountains, but all the children had studied because my grandfather was a force to be reckoned with. As soon as she got her diploma, she began to teach in villages up in the mountains and stayed there all week; then at weekends, grandpa went to visit her, because she was a lodger in someone’s house. She told me many things about how those people lived and how they had to adapt; she was very happy. But at a certain point, she said: «I don’t want to stay here». She told me that one day when she was crossing a field, she saw a woman hoeing… «This isn’t the life I want, I want to move to a town». And so she did, and she found a job as a secretary in a large company belonging to my father, they then fell in love and got married. Then, when she became a mother, she took care of the business, running the house and some of the commercial side. They were well suited as a couple, but dad died young and mum lived for many years alone, happily».

They lived in Via Fillungo, in the historical centre of Lucca, near the church of San Frediano, in one of the buildings overlooking Piazza dell’Anfiteatro, in a «very pleasant» apartment.

Linda has no hesitation in attributing to her father a major role in the secular and politically orientated education that already formed part of her early childhood.

«My origins, let’s say, were enlightened, thanks to the family environment I grew up in. […] I had the huge advantage of
having a father who was well educated and antifascist, so when I came back home from school (at the time, schools were run along fascist lines) and told him what I’d learnt, he used to give me a counter-lesson. That’s how I grew up: my critical conscience comes from my father. […] I remember some meetings I took part in as a child and the phrases that dad sometimes came out with… my father and I were one and the same».

Her mother, who «was a Catholic, but not one of those blinkered Catholics», appears to be relegated to the background of this story, but her role is only seemingly humble and was, indeed, entirely complementary to that of her father. In fact Linda traces back both to her mother and father, and their complementariness, the beginning of that dual path which was to mature in her over the years: on the one hand, a critical awareness with regard to a political culture of the left and, on the other, a spiritual framework stemming from a Christian heritage.

«I never sensed a strong difference in outlook between my mother and my father. At home, when he spoke openly, she kept quiet, but she made me take first communion and those things that all children do and I grew up with these two different voices…»

These «two different voices» were to accompany Linda through the years to come, merging, superimposing themselves on each other and following the path of her encounters. Two voices which, in her youth, it was not difficult to reconcile: while in her early years, her politically orientated awareness had the upper hand, religious examples worthy of admiration in the church in Lucca were not lacking; figures courageously occupied in supporting a civilian population demoralised by the war and involved in more or less explicit forms of Resistance.

Although the city of Lucca was spared the bombing of the Second World War due to its proximity to the Front (the Gothic Line), the surrounding area was the scene of numerous clashes and reprisals, particularly after the armistice on 8 September 1943, as the Germans sought to contain the Allied advance. One of the most notable priests at that time was undoubtedly Don
Aldo Mei, arrested by the Germans and shot beside Lucca’s city walls in August 1944, for having offered protection to a young fugitive and having administered the sacraments to some partisans, as well as Don Arturo Paoli, ordained as a priest in Lucca during the war. He was «a priest with a passion for helping young people», Linda recalls, speaking of Paoli. They met while she was still at school, their lives were to cross many times over the years and even now he has remained a great friend.

«When I was at high school, I began to wake up. Not in the sense that previously I had been asleep; this tendency was probably in my DNA, but at that time some criticism of the system started to circulate among my fellow students. When I started secondary school, the war had already begun and so it wasn’t difficult not to like Hitler…»

Linda’s time at the Liceo Machiavelli was rich and full of encounters, marked first and foremost by the forceful personality of Professor Giorgio Colli, a young philosophy teacher.

8 Lucca was declared an «open city», and thus spared from bombing by the Germans, thanks to the intervention of Monsignor Turrini, the city’s archbishop, who, while avoiding direct confrontation with the Fascist authorities, had no hesitation in offering shelter to those who were persecuted under the German occupation. After the armistice on 8 September, there were numerous episodes of brutality inflicted on the civilian population along the section of the Gothic Line, which included the area around Lucca and the Garfagnana: eighty-three massacres occurred, including the most notorious in Sant’Anna di Stazzema, and numerous round-ups. The commitment of parish priests and clergymen in these areas was decisive, for example in support for DELASEM (Delegation for the assistance of Jewish emigrants), an organisation operating at national level to help many foreign Jews who were refugees or interred in Italy, led in Tuscany by Giorgio Nissim. Between 1943 and 1944, when the association therefore had to operate in secret, Nissim, a Jew himself, brought numerous Jews, both Italian and foreign, to Lucca, in order to provide, thanks to the invaluable help of the Oblate clergy and the network of priests they involved, a safer solution for them. Arturo Poli, who became the local representative of DELASEM, was rewarded with the title of Righteous Among the Nations for his work in helping the Jews during the Second World War. The role of the Carthusian monks and the «Zitine» Sisters in a form of «unarmed resistance» is well documented in the historiography. Cfr. G. Preziosi, Resistenza non armata, in Osservatore Romano, 9 September 2012.
«The truth of the matter is that Professor Colli brought a breath of freedom and also humanity to the school environment. Thanks to him, I began to follow paths that even my parents didn’t like very much. […] He taught Philosophy and through him we learnt a different language, which seemed almost scandalous at the time: he stood for freedom. He was a high school teacher but he was more than just a teacher. We lived at his place, that’s the reality, he raised us as he wanted, we saw a lot of him, outside school too, and could go to his house whenever we wanted. […] He was a true master».

Colli had established «an inner circle of “elect” pupils» and Linda had become part of this group through the mediation of Mazzino Montinari, a school friend and one of the professor’s favourite students. «The experience amounted to a true initiation to life through philosophy and music», Linda recalls, «they read Nietzsche and the Presocratics listening to Beethoven and Chopin in lengthy sessions, held if possible in semi-darkness, preceded and followed by long silences».

«We read Plato’s Symposion passionately and many times we spent nights at Colli’s house, eating and discussing the forms of eros, just as Socrates’ followers did in Symposion. All to the great dismay of our families, or at least mine, which was conservative and found it hard to understand what we were up to all night, before returning home in the early hours of the morning»9.

Meanwhile, the war was drawing to a close and Lucca was eventually liberated too. During this period, Linda formed a close relationship with Mazzino, which intensified still further during their time at university, when the group of friends from Lucca began to attend the University of Pisa, in the case of some, and the Scuola Normale Superiore, in the case of others. Always an excellent and enthusiastic student, Linda’s decision to continue her studies came as no surprise: she enrolled in the Faculty of Humanities and Philosophy at the University of Pisa, where the

9 From the transcript of a speech delivered by Linda at a conference held in Lucca in 1997.
lecturers, in her words, «were all antifascists and ex-partisans» and many of her colleagues belonged to groups on the radical left. Here she met Professor Cantimori, thanks to whom Linda herself tells of having «embraced Marxism».

It was in this university climate of the immediate post-war years and culturally in ferment that Linda began to frequent youth groups allied to the Communist Party, while the young Mazzino became a true militant. All of this reinforced «the paternal voice» within her, encouraging her in her political commitment and in a critical confrontation with the reality of the time.

Meanwhile, she completed her studies in linguistics under Professor Bolelli and immediately started to work for him as a voluntary assistant.

Linda’s life seemed to be heading in a definite direction, and yet it was at this very point – straddling the late Forties and early Fifties – that another decisive encounter was to throw everything into question.

Shortly after graduating and bolstered by her education, she found work teaching Greek at the College of the “Oblate dello Santo Spirito”10 in Lucca, a well-known college in the city, and particularly respected in middle-class circles. Here she met its head, Maria Elena.

Although run by a religious Congregation, the atmosphere in this Institute was nevertheless permeated by a secular culture, open to the world and the changes of that time. This dual aspect, exemplified in the person of Sister Maria Elena, began to arouse something in Linda, already inclined thanks to her own family background to embrace the «two different voices». Initially, the encounter with Maria Elena was one that was «confrontational, because I couldn’t think of myself as a practising Catholic, while she came from a family in which she had had an extremely Catholic upbringing». But at the same time, «she wasn’t just any old

10 The Congregation of the «Oblate dello Spirito Santo» was founded in Lucca at the end of the nineteenth century. They are also known as «Zitine», after Saint Zita, the city’s patron saint, to whom the first school for girls opened in 1872 by the Congregation was also dedicated. In the 1950s, missionaries from the Congregation were present in several countries: Canada, Brazil, Lebanon, Iran and the Philippines.
nun». Memories of their discussions emerge in Linda’s account, and they began to raise in her questions, doubts and deep existential uncertainties. «I remember very clearly that it was Carnival and they asked me to help with the staging of some theatrical production», she tells, and it was during these moments of everyday life at the College that the discussions would become increasingly intense. What emerged, as Linda states with great simplicity, was «the problem of the meaning of life».

It was then that Linda recalls having what she refers to as a true «existential crisis», and to have begun to consider a way of life as unexpected to her friends as it was to her parents: a decision that was «painful and difficult to bear».

«At a certain point, I was faced with the serious issues that more or less all young people come across: the meaning of life, the goals you are working towards, what it all means. […] I had an existential crisis and during this existential crisis I suddenly wanted to be concerned with the whole world. I was struck by what could be described as a missionary vocation, although it no longer makes sense to adopt this word: I wanted to go to the end of the world to do who knows what, much to my parents’ dismay».

This «passage», as Linda describes it, which «is a little difficult to relate», seemed to many to be at odds with the secular education she had received and the political ideals she had strongly expressed at that time.

«I was torn between a Christian faith, albeit superficial, that I had received from my family, and mixing with young people on the radical left. I was drawn to both sides and was struggling.

It’s something that is difficult to explain. […] At a certain point, I looked at my life, the lives of my friends and I felt that it wasn’t for me. I suddenly saw myself as the wife of a teacher, a teacher myself… and I felt I was suffocating.

And these nuns, who were traditional nuns, had missions in various parts of the world and this began to interest me, to the extent that, once the preparations for the theatrical production were over, I had… I don’t know… something started to change in me, I don’t even know how to explain it, but I remember thinking that
the only person I could talk to was this Sister Maria Elena and I
told her that my life was changing but that I didn’t know where I
wanted to go, or what I wanted to do.

I was very attracted by the East, by Islam, I talked to her about
this and she said: «I think that for someone like you perhaps Bra-
zil would be the best place» and so I decided that I would go and
be a missionary in Brazil. Some things that happen aren’t easy to
explain. [...] I thought that being a missionary would give my life
a meaning».

Linda repeats again, «It’s not easy to explain, that’s the way it
went and it was just by chance, because I happened to be teach-
ing there and it was there that there was the opportunity to go to
other countries».

Linda’s decision to become a nun seemed so sudden and un-
expected that it was almost like a betrayal to those who knew
her. «Linda Bimbi, a nun, that’s impossible», was the reaction of
Arturo Poli when he heard the news.

While Linda sensed the enormous faith placed in her by Ma-
ria Elena, particularly the suggestion that she should go to Brazil
despite the fact that she had not yet taken her vows, her decision
left the young Montanari both astonished and hurt.

«My old friends almost leapt on me and I didn’t know how to
explain what a missionary vocation was. [...] I also greatly dis-
appointed my teachers: Professor Bolelli, with whom I had dis-
cussed my thesis, whose assistant I had become before I left, and
who had already organised his future plans counting on me».

Linda remembers the moment she had to tell her parents
about her decision to leave, «it was a disaster, because initially
they understood absolutely nothing». The most painful reaction
to the news of her departure was, undoubtedly, her father’s: Linda
tells of «getting a little letter for many years from mum at Christ-
mas, while dad didn’t write at all».

«When I left, I think I dealt him a mortal blow and that’s
something I still haven’t got over. Before I left, he came to see me
and I remember, this is what he said: «That’s what you’ve decided,
so be it». Of course he had tears in his eyes and then, extremely composed, he never showed his feelings very much, he said goodbye to me and left. When he went out, I went to the window and I watched him from behind crossing the square, slowly, but nevertheless it was him […]. I never saw him again.

He never wrote to me. […] But whenever I had to take a stance I knew that I agreed with him, I realised that he couldn’t accept the distance, that I had wanted to realise my ideals on another continent, somewhere so far away, but as far as my ideals were concerned, we were united. So much so that when I was teaching at the University in Brazil and I’d organised a trip to Europe with my students, I wrote to him and mum told me how happy he was… He said «I’ll do some of the trip with them, I hope they’ll accept me».

That was in July and it transpired that he had a tumour and when I arrived he was dying, but those preparations for the trip with me have been a precious gift in my life».

The relationship with her mother was more serene and over the years Linda was able to rebuild a rapport and share with her the events that were to follow, even when the «two voices», representing her Catholic faith and a political commitment to history, were to merge once again.

«While I was small, I was always a daddy’s girl, but gradually, as I grew up, I also re-examined the role of my mother, who was intransigent as far as the Catholic religion was concerned: when she began to see what was happening she couldn’t understand, but she respected me.

She has always supported me and has never criticised. She went to mass and I always went with her […]. She was a hundred when she died and in the end, I can say that she adhered to my viewpoints … as a practising Catholic, she was also becoming a little more secular!

I was with her until she drew her final breath, on her last day we talked and it was wonderful».

So in 1952, Linda embarked on a new life, setting out for Brazil alone.
«So, at a certain point, I left, I was in no doubt that what I was leaving behind wasn’t worth it and that what I was heading towards was a big question mark, but one I had faith in. […] It’s difficult to explain, but I made up my mind to try and no one believed that any of it could have a meaning, a continuity».

When she arrived in Brazil, she decided to follow the path of a novitiate within the Congregation, to «commit not only with my conscience, but formally», experiencing right from the start the difficulties of adapting to a highly structured ecclesiastical reality.

Throughout her novitiate, Maria Elena, who was to join Linda a few years later, made sure that she received a daily copy of L’Unità. As Linda remarks, «she, too, gradually began to approach my way of conceiving the world and history».

«I ended up in Brazil, and there, they took me seriously, they didn’t know me… I went to a town near São Paulo called Santo André, where I spent an awful time training because the people who were supposed to be taking care of us weren’t up to the task.

But there, I happened to get to know a very kind bishop, who was also bishop of a diocese in the interior. I finished my training and he invited me to work in a school in his diocese, in Cássia. […] It was a very happy time in my life, I met some wonderful young girls and the fact that my pupils were happy with the message of liberation and awareness that I was trying to convey, gave me encouragement. It was a continuous development, albeit in a structure I didn’t like, because the organisation of a traditional group of nuns where there were lots of rules to follow was in conflict with the education founded on freedom that I had received». 
3. The tale of the communist nuns

The town of Cássia is situated in the State of Minas Gerais, in an area of the interior between São Paulo and Belo Horizonte. Linda speaks nostalgically of the years she spent in this «still virgin» territory and of the many young girls she met, who were to become friends and, sixty years later, she continues to see.

She hadn't been in Brazil for long, had just completed her novitiate and found herself working for the first time, albeit in the field of education that she had chosen, in a cultural context very different to what she had known before. This was in 1954 and, after more than twenty years, Getúlio Vargas was preparing to leave the political scene in Brazil\(^\text{11}\).

«That marked the start of it all, because from the city of São Paulo we were thrown into the midst of Brazil's interior, with its dry and abandoned areas, inhabited by people who are either extremely poor and starving, or the great landowners. And the school that we opened there welcomed kids of all types, from the most poor and marginalised to the daughters of the fazendeiros».

«That marked the start», she repeats, referring to that awakening and examination of her own past that led her to ask: «What am I doing here?».

During her university years, Linda had participated in the international solidarity campaigns organised by the Italian Com-

\(^{11}\) In 1954, after more than twenty years, Getúlio Vargas left the political scene in Brazil. In power since 1930, although intermittently, Vargas intervened in political economics, stimulating the country's industrialisation. Under his rule, after the financial crisis of 1929, the economy based on agricultural exports that had guaranteed the power of the landowning oligarchies up until then, the so-called «caffelatte» politics, with the alternating governments of politicians from São Paulo (a coffee-producing State) and Minas Gerais (a State producing milk, as well as coffee) ceased. In the years following World War II, the country was changing: Vargas had boosted the development of the iron and steel industries and oil mining, creating the conditions for the arrival of foreign multinationals in the country.
Communist Party with the young, but, as she relates, «it was a solidarity that was Eurocentric and ideologised». It was solidarity of an intellectual kind, that didn’t «fall into life» and very different to the kind she began to experience in Brazil: «there I made the first real concrete discovery of poverty and I reacted with a Christian heart: an ethical revolt, not a political one».

She wrote to Maria Elena in Italy, telling of her struggle to accept the poverty and inequalities.

«I wrote to Maria Elena about the difficulties I was facing in Cássia, where I was practically alone, somewhat under fire, as happens when we are young and have very few defences and I thought it was appropriate to tell her everything. Maria Elena showed the letter to the Mother Superior, who said to her: «You must go too, immediately!»».

So Maria Elena soon joined her and together they decided to share the running of the school in Cássia, and then all that came after.

«There, we grew up together in the face of the challenges set for us by the context in which we found ourselves living. Our historical awareness increased and altered our view of reality. We began to feel constrained by an ecclesiastical set-up that coincided increasingly rarely with our own changed sensibilities».

The confrontation with a reality so marked by disparity and social inequalities evolved into a pedagogical decision that still required testing and which, a few years later, Linda and Maria Elena would rediscover in the educational methods of Paolo Freire. The school in Cássia became an innovative one in the area, as attested by various accounts, and many daughters of fazendeiros already attending schools in the towns nearby soon moved there. «There was an atmosphere of openness that drove us to look beyond our own reality. It was revolutionary», says one of the pupils who de-

cided to join the Congregation and to follow the novitiate after she had finished school.

Another speaks of the difference, also external, compared to buildings that normally housed other religious schools: there was a large courtyard set aside for play and the rooms were flooded with light. New subjects were introduced into the teaching programme, drama in particular. This consisted mainly of operettas and musical productions, preparations involving all the girls and culminating in a great performance held in the local cinema to which the whole town was invited.

Linda – who had in the meantime taken the name of Sister Raffaela – still recalls rehearsal days with a smile: «Someone would say: “What time is it now?” ‘Time for rehearsals!’ And everyone would rush downstairs…»

From some of the pupils’ accounts emerges a sense of the family atmosphere, of freedom and friendship, which did not exclude seriousness in study, but was manifest in the constant attention given to the pupils and a continual discussion on life. The sense of “being considered a person” is expressed many times in the words of those who were just children at the time.

The confrontation with reality and the social context formed the basis underlying the didactic decisions and evangelical reflections of the group of educators. Inevitably, the culture of the left in which Linda had grown up in Italy surfaced during her lessons and the girls responded, talking about their own family life: rights, the ownership of property and land were all discussed.

It was thus that the «tale of the communist nuns» was born and, from then on, it was to accompany Linda, Maria Elena and the whole group, particularly after they moved to Belo Horizonte a few years later.

In fact, in 1959, the community\(^\text{13}\) opened a school in the capital of the State of Minas Gerais and no one could have imagined

\(^{13}\) At the time of the events recounted here, the Congregation of the Oblate dello Santo Spirito ran various projects, mainly in the fields of health and education and was divided into communities: Cássia, Cabo Verde, Leopoldina, Belo Horizonte, Campos Gerais, Eldorado (Minas Gerais), Diadema (São Paulo), Vitória, Nova Almeida (Espírito Santo) and Macapá (Amazônia). In order to distinguish the communities of that period, which belonged within the congre-
that the *Colégio*\textsuperscript{14} named in memory of Helena Guerra would become the place where the ruling class chose to educate their own daughters. Within a few years, the fame of the school’s reputation for intellectual achievement and the serious nature of its didactic programme had spread and the community found itself accommodating over a thousand students, from kindergarten right through to high school, in increasingly large spaces.

«Initially, we were accommodated by the Catholic University and then little by little as it became better known, it resulted in the school. It wasn’t a building in a particular architectural style, but it was very big, with a large courtyard, young people coming and going. […] It was right in the centre of Belo Horizonte and attended by the daughters of the most affluent families. That’s where I took up my work again and word gradually spread that it was a communist Colégio, but my pupils always stood up for me».

An intense period followed, because just as the *Colégio Helena Guerra* was getting off the ground, as a result of «one of those donations that are made to religious organisations from time to time», the Congregation received an endowment in the form of a plot of land in Eldorado, a suburb only 18 kilometres away from Belo Horizonte, on the condition that they opened another school. In the aspirations of local politicians, in agreement with the Congregation’s Italian Superiors, the building, designed by the well-known architect José Vasconcelos in the shape of a large H\textsuperscript{15}, was intended to be the largest scholastic institution in Latin America.

But things were to go differently, since not only did the money run out before the school was finished, but the Brazilian group of nuns’ initial enthusiasm soon came up against the particular reality of the social context. The plans of Linda, Maria Elena and the others had envisaged the mixing of the various social classes gational framework, from those of the present day, which are not part of it, the present group will be referred to with a capital «C», hence Community.

\textsuperscript{14} In Brazil a *Colégio* is a school that includes all levels, from primary through to high school and it is non-residential.

\textsuperscript{15} In honour of Helena Guerra, the Congregation’s founder.
within the classroom, bringing them together in studies at high level, but they soon realised the naivety of their ideas. Eldorado, as Linda recounts, «was a leafy oasis surrounded by social housing and favelas». It led to a raising of awareness within the group, as they now relate, and comparing the experience with the one already under way in Belo Horizonte, they reached the conclusion that «a school of a high intellectual standard in an underdeveloped country inevitably becomes a school for the social elite».

In the end, they made a clear decision: they would open the gardens of the school in Eldorado and focus the educational programme on the children of the favelas. Inevitably there was some recrimination from local politicians, but the project went ahead and, in this sense, the next few years were to prove extremely intense for Linda and her companions. Within a brief space of time, they found themselves running two scholastic institutions in parallel but with didactic tools that were inevitably very different, due to the social contexts in which they were employed. Some, in fact, continued to work at the large girls’ school in the city centre adopting educational methods that were avant-garde; while others headed towards the confines of the industrial zone, namely Eldorado, bringing the same alternative didactic methods into force while at the same time confronting the poverty of the students and their working-class families.

This was at the beginning of the Sixties and, under João Goulart’s government, reform was in the air and many people were starting to mobilise: peasants, students and the population of the outlying urban areas. Even in the accounts of the Community, reminiscences of a period entirely in tune with this social and cultural upheaval continue to emerge: at the school in Eldorado, for example, whenever the workers went on strike, an assembly was held to explain to the children why their parents were protesting; the programme of lessons was drawn up in the school with the pupils themselves; a communal garden was created so that all the children could eat before going into class.

Linda was appointed head of the *Colégio Helena Guerra* in Belo Horizonte and its activities proceeded at a frenetic pace. It was an ambitious challenge, but she was driven by the conviction that it was possible «to change the young people from Belo Horizonte’s upper classes through new and alternative educational tools»\(^\text{17}\).

The community’s educational activity was founded on a very precise notion of what a school should be, not simply the depository of handed-down knowledge, but somewhere teachers and pupils explored this together and where the methods were aimed at releasing «the abilities to create, participate, assume responsibility, latent in every human being»\(^\text{18}\). This is apparent in the testimonies of the pupils, some of them still in touch with the Community, unanimous in their recognition of the guiding role Linda played in their lives and that their time at the *Colégio Helena Guerra* was decisive for their personal and political development.

At the same time, thousands of kilometres away, Paulo Freire was practising his own method with increasing success and he began to speak of education as the “practice of freedom”, backed by President Goulart himself and by the populist tendencies of his government’s policies. There was an ever growing «identification with his method», Linda recalls. As principal of the *Colégio*, Mother Raffaela was keen to contact experts in Freire’s pedagogical methods, so that teachers might learn the techniques and “adapt” them to that particular context. Thus the young nuns of the community were the first to become “literate”, to acquire new tools for interpreting the society in which they lived.

While at Eldorado the aim of the educators was to provide the children with dignity, «to give them what they didn’t know they were», as they still relate now, at the *Colégio* in Belo Horizonte, they worked towards enabling the girls to became aware of their privileges. The principal novelty lay in the relationship between discipline and freedom that, right from the start, characterised not only the method – «a permanent dialogue without obligations» – Linda explains, but also the choice of didactic content.

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\(^{17}\) Ivi, p. 46.

\(^{18}\) Ivi, p. 48.
Meetings were organised every month with the teaching staff, consisting mainly of secular teachers, to agree the monthly teaching programme together. On these occasions, a topic was generally chosen for discussion, so that every teacher could examine a particular aspect within their own subject. New disciplines were also introduced into the curriculum, including music and cinema, pioneering subjects at the time, which made the Colégio, in the words of pupils and teachers, like Professor Gagliardi, «a school different from the others». A cinema club was established, with evening sessions, accessible to all pupils who wished to go and showing films of a certain cultural resonance. Linda’s intention was that this would provoke in the young and affluent girls «a certain call to the realities of life, that it would show them that life isn’t simply about comfort and having fun».

The first period, the so-called “education hour”, was assigned to educators from the community. It was a moment of reflection on reality and life, taking concrete elements of daily life and comparing them with the scriptures. For example, when two or three months of studying human rights were planned, a different chapter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was hung in the entrance to the Colégio every day. The girls would thus read it and during first period everyone would share their thoughts. These reflections were sometimes followed by outings to the favelas, with the aim of increasingly involving or stimulating the girls, also through the construction of a small school together.

The other educational novelty in the Colégio was the “Gatherings” or “camps”, a replacement for what in traditional schools would have been known as retreats. Not a spiritual retreat, Linda says, but «meetings between groups that were not necessarily homogenous that didn’t happen in church or any other sacred place, but surrounded by nature, in fazendas or camp sites». They were meetings because everyone could meet, get to know each other, spend time together. They lasted several days and each time a different theme was chosen. Families were also involved and invited to participate in meetings «where everyone could say what they thought (too much sometimes…)»: a parent and teacher association was set up, ensuring common aims as far as the young girls’ education was concerned, to Linda’s great and continuing
astonishment, given the repressive climate that was to become so diffuse over the next few years.

The years up to 1964 were ones of great turmoil for the community. Consideration about which pedagogical method to adopt, at a time in which Brazil was experiencing great democratic vitality, led, particularly due to the experience in Eldorado and the confrontation with the poverty of lives in the urban peripheries, to a revision and renewal of pastoral activity.

«With current awareness, I know that pastoral ministry comes from the top, and doesn’t call into question the authoritarian structure of the Church; above all it is ambiguous, because depending on who is managing it, it can be a tool both for innovation as well as preservation. Nevertheless, we were aiming at a pastoral ministry of transformation».

The breath of freedom and the ferment introduced by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) found receptive and particularly fertile ground in the Latin American continent – especially in Brazil – and they offered fundamental theoretical support, as well as encouragement, to the practices that Christian groups and movements were beginning to experiment.

«There was a climate favouring reflection as though it were a new spring», one of the members of the Community now says, accompanied by a chorus of voices which, in referring to this important step, echo one another, recapturing the spirit in full:

«It was a period that was extremely fertile and creative: Dominicans, Franciscans, Jesuits… all had reflection groups and we participated in these groups in order to compare ourselves and we invited many people to speak at the Colégio, because we wanted the girls to develop a critical awareness. This was the time of the “theology of earthly reality” and it was also a ferment of reflection and development for us: we began to open up to the great issues of the world triggered by evangelical contemplation, by the documents of the Council that in the community we had started to break down into smaller pieces».

19 Ivi, p. 49.
And again:

«There was the transition from the Church as Institution to the Church as the People of God, as ferment and so it was necessary to choose… either faith in the Institution, in the Vatican or faith in this Church. [...] There was the concern to live this aspect of “God is in the midst of the people” and the reinterpretation of the exodus as a march of freedom for all, in which it was the people who were marching»20.

Within the group, the young religious women, led by Linda and Maria Elena, established groups for reflection and re-interpretation of the Bible. In the search for a «committed spirituality» the experiences of this renewed pastoral ministry took the form of organising activities for families. «Supported by a small but effective group of young priests», Linda recalls, «we celebrated the liturgy in the workplace, homes, on mountainsides, adapting it to the circumstances»21. In the evening, gathering in the big building in Eldorado, which contained not only the school, but also the novices’ accommodation, they would compare «the discoveries that were emerging every day» and carry out «the shared daily review of the facts».

Nevertheless, they soon realised that a revision of pastoral ministry was not enough, and that it would be necessary to go beyond the parishes «to provide the people with a voice and give people responsibility»22. The environment of the favelas at the edge of the industrial area, where in the meantime, with some of the Colégio’s affluent pupils, the group of teachers was already conducting courses in childcare, education on health and diet, proved the most fertile ground at this lively time. As Linda is keen to explain: «it was life that taught us. [...] We had many teachers, but you always have to start from what the people are saying and rebuild their lives from there».

20 Voice of the Community.
21 Ivi, p. 49.
After the military coup on 31 March 1964\textsuperscript{23}, the situation changed rapidly and the great ferment in the group was soon replaced by a more vigilant and cautious approach.

They never abandoned their educational activities or rather, as Linda puts it, they never took «a backwards step» and, indeed, the military dictatorship became an issue to be tackled and yet another reason to stimulate the girls’ «bourgeois» consciousness. Significant in this regard was the idea of organising a Festival of popular Brazilian political songs: taking the words of Bossa Nova songs\textsuperscript{24}, the girls were encouraged to talk about the dictatorship and the socio-political situation.

The activities of the Colégio and the entire teaching body were, however, under scrutiny, not only by the military police, but also by many of the girls’ families, «torn between hostility towards us and love for their daughters, who would not permit any censorship or repressive measures as far as their teachers were concerned»\textsuperscript{25}, Linda states.

«It was a period in which we lived somewhat dangerously continuing in our methods, but I think we were spared initially because we had “supporters” within the official Church: the celebrated Dom Helder Câmara, for example, or Dom Antônio Fragoso, bishop of Crateús: both were remarkable people and many times that was enough to protect us».

One day Linda was summoned to the army barracks as a witness and this episode has remained imprinted in the memory of

\textsuperscript{23} At the end of March 1964, great tensions had formed within President João Goulart’s government and in a public speech he announced measures that were expressly against the interests of the great landowners and national and international business groups. A few days later, on 1 April, a large section of the Armed Forces, led by Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco, carried out a coup d’état, resulting in the establishing of a military dictatorship that was to last until 1985.

\textsuperscript{24} A musical genre originating from samba which appeared in Brazil in the late 1950s. As the socio-political situation in the country deteriorated, the words of Bossa Nova songs were used to express critical opinions and the music became a means of political opposition. The most celebrated exponent of Bossa Nova is João Gilberto.

\textsuperscript{25} Ivi, p. 50.
her companions: «While she was crossing the corridor in the barracks, she saw Father Lage, a priest who had lived for a long time with the Liga Camponesa [Peasant League], a true revolutionary. […] He had been tortured and his hands were tied and Linda, who had to go into the room to give evidence, turned back to him and kissed his hands. At that point, she thought they would take her too, because he was considered a terrorist, but no». Referring to the incident, Linda adds, «It was an uncontrollable impulse» that had led her to make that gesture of kissing his hands, the kind of gesture, she admits, she had always avoided and rejected.

They had the strong sensation they were being watched continuously and, during this time of fear and suspicion, the Community tells of a curious twist of fate. Under cover, next to their Colégio, came to live Dan Mitrione, the American official who, it would later transpire, trained the Brazilian military police in methods of torture, and not only them. All they remember about him was how annoyed he was by the music they played in the morning as the girls came into school.

After the first few months, Linda and her companions now relate, the situation quietened down, but the years between 1964 and 1967 were only seemingly calm, and the signs of what was to come shortly after were already apparent.

Meanwhile, in Italy, while on one hand the Congregation’s Superiors seemed to ignore the alarming news arriving from Brazil, the interrogations and the vicissitudes the Brazilian community was facing, on the other, they did seem aware of the internal upheavals it was going through; at this point, they decided to remove Maria Elena from the role of Assistant General and to send her firstly to Canada and then Iran, not permitting her to return to Brazil until the end of 1966. Linda, therefore, found herself on her own leading the group and its activities, which, once they were no longer in the spotlight, started up again, if possible with even greater intensity than before.

In fact, it was at this very time that the Congregation embarked on a new venture at Macapà, in Amazonia.

26 Voice of the Community.
27 Ibidem.
Linda and Maria Elena had discovered this place on a trip during which they had met Dr Candia, who ran a small clinic there. It was situated on an island, reached by *casquinhos*, small boats in which «sometimes you arrived directly at the pier, others you had to climb up by ladder», depending on the tide.

As Linda recalls, the first attempt was to take some university students from Belo Horizonte there, to see the place and meet its inhabitants. Linda taught these students linguistics at the University – where she had been admitted to teach after a competitive exam – and together with them, she organised some interviews. The aim was also to apply Paulo Friere’s method and these young people were willing listen to a cultural world so different to their own.

«We were interested in that form of language that comes from the poor, to understand how people who had never studied and had always worked spoke and expressed themselves… understand how they said things, the words they used […]. We were recording it to create a language».

Over the next few years, the community launched a new venture in Macapá: from 1969, some of Linda's companions began to work as educators in public schools there, and this involvement lasted until 1973.

Meanwhile, in Belo Horizonte, didactic activities went ahead in open confrontation with the social and political reality of the time: «the history courses were practically ones in counter-history»\(^{28}\) and various witnesses were invited to the *Colégio* to tell the pupils of their experiences. Of these, the Community recalls first and foremost José Pimenta Dazinho, a miner they had met a few years earlier while visiting a *favela* and who had become a great friend. In 1962, he had been elected to the Legislative Assembly of Minas Gerais as a member of the Christian Democrat party and, continuing to work in the mine several days a week, he shared his salary as a member with the other workers. Immediately following the coup in 1964, he had been arrested, tortured

\(^{28}\) Ivi, p. 52.
and sentenced to two years in prison. Upon his release, he began to visit the Colégio and to tell his story, remaining, as Linda says, a «great witness for our conscience».

In fact, it became a priority for Mother Raffaella and the entire teaching body to work on their pupils’ awareness: they realised that «the new pedagogical models created new outlooks, although still too fragile to identify themselves in a concrete manner in the face of the pressures of that environment»²⁹.

In this way, they attempted the process of «democratising the school» through scholarships for children from poorer backgrounds, the occasional deserving pupil from the school in Eldorado and a few young girls from Macapà, but «the experience was a disaster», as Linda recalls.

«At a certain point, I had so many questions, even about myself, and I wanted to try the experience of transferring a group of children from Amazonia to the splendid state capital, Belo Horizonte. I made them come, but they didn’t thrive in that environment. […] An experience that was extremely challenging, but very interesting, because contact between the girls, recently converted to a certain rather hazy form of socialism, and these kids was not useless. Historical awareness has always been my strength».

It was an experience that proved negative and «painful», Linda and the others now relate, because the cultural divide was too great and the suffering caused by the contrast was considerable.

Deliberation regarding didactic method became pressing and the Colégio’s entire “teaching community” came together in drafting a document that might represent a tool for internally verifying the method and content of the didactic curricula, but also a tool to be distributed to families and shared with other institutes. «The sophisticated cultural element left conservative parents perplexed and uncertain»³⁰, worried about the “revolutionary” procedures, but satisfied with the proposed intellectual content, which was probably the reason not a single pupil was withdrawn from the Colégio during this period.

²⁹ Ibidem.
³⁰ Ibidem.
The resulting document was entitled “To educate in an awareness of history” and not only did it denounce «the lack of practical experience and the excessive intellectualisation»31 of the pedagogical system, but it highlighted above all the importance of a confrontation with history, to arouse the pupils’ so-called historical awareness. The document stated «Our aim is to form Christians aware and present in the construction of the world».

«Historical awareness», Linda’s strong point, is a concept that defies technical explanation, since «it was invented through practice, in the doing».

What emerges is an experience, primarily emotional, Linda had undergone herself before transmitting it to others: «had I not witnessed the poverty in Brazil’s interior, I wouldn’t have been able to grow either», she says.

«My pupils included many daughters of people who were wealthy and so I wanted to spread the awareness of their privileges. […] In a certain sense, the experience of Brazil helped me. But I also happened to teach in regions that were rugged and poor and to get to know the poor and fall in love with them and this led me, not to become a Marxist, because I can’t say that I was one, but to want to nurture and get to know that culture. […]

Of course, some girls remained in their own world, but many pupils adhered to our method and today have made life choices for the other: it was a chorus, but perhaps I hear it now as a chorus because its echoes are still reaching me».

During that time, Linda also organised a group of head teachers from other institutes and was a reference point for other Catholic schools, but not only that. In 1967, she was invited to hold a conference at the Protestant Colégio Isabella Hendrix on the very subject of historical awareness.

«I can’t claim that I had a close relationship with the team at Isabella Hendrix, but officially ours was a Catholic Colégio that taught things the Protestants liked too and speaking for and with

31 Ibidem.
them, so as not to become embroiled in religious matters, my starting point was always the so-called historical awareness, how important it was for adolescents to confront reality».

As her companions in the Community recall, this conference marked a decisive moment in the process of internal reflection this group of women had embarked upon and was to lead to the decisive events of the following year. «Linda helped us enormously in changing our outlook», they acknowledge today. «We woke up to historical awareness and began to practice evangelical reflection as reflection on the facts of reality».

In the meantime, Linda’s commitment also continued in the lecture halls of universities, the scene of great political and cultural ferment at that time. Student associations gathered in assemblies and marched in the streets: in the face of increasing restrictions on civil and social liberties, as an educator, Linda began to follow the concerns of the young people who were protesting.

«And then what had to explode exploded, also because I was extremely close to the young people who were protesting, there’s no doubt about that, but I was never in agreement with the armed struggle they had already begun. In the end, I had become a point of reference for a troubled youth, I joined with the young who were fighting and deep down they were fighting for human rights and it all became dangerous». 
4. The transition

In Brazil, 1968 began with the resumption of the political protests: as was happening in many other parts of the world, students and workers also mobilised in mass demonstrations.

A socio-historical context in ferment that acted as a window on the events within the community’s Brazilian group: the proposed didactic innovations, the decision to open up to the different social classes, the new forms of pastoral ministry were all signs of a process of change that had begun several years earlier and that was now becoming a clear path, heading in one direction and, above all, with no possibility of turning back.

Albeit adopting a pluralist stance, the Brazilian Church pronounced itself against the dictatorship and the forms of violence employed by the government, which had by then become apparent from the denouncements of political prisoners. But above all, through the ideas of a Liberation Theology\(^3\) that were beginning to emerge, an increasing number of bishops and priests were en-

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\(^3\) A theology that evolved in Latin America and which interpreted the proclamation in the Gospels as a proclamation of the social and political emancipation of the poor and oppressed. It originated as a sign of the acceptance of the message of renewal heralded by the Second Vatican Council and – at the same time – as a condemnation of the support which, within the Catholic hierarchy, had been given by many of the high ranking clergy to the dictators and military juntas in power in many Latin American countries. The birth of the movement can be traced back to the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) held in 1968, in Medellín, Colombia, where many representatives of the ecclesiastical hierarchy assumed a stance in favour of the most marginalised groups in Latin American society and their struggle and declared themselves in favour of a Church that was socially active and of the people. The term became widespread following the publication of *A Theology of Liberation* (1971), a book written by the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutiérrez. Gutiérrez himself defined it as the “attempt to understand the faith from within the concrete historical, liberating, and subversive praxis of the poor of this world – the exploited classes, despised ethnic groups, and the marginalized cultures”. From then onwards the number of base communities (CEB), ecumenical nuclei intent on practising a faith engaged with the problems of society, multiplied. In Brazil, they had the support of the Cardinal of São Paulo, Paulo E. Arns, and of Bishop Helder P. Câmara.
gaged in the socio-political context of resistance. These same ideas continued to filter into the university lecture halls and to animate student debate.

«It was an extremely important moment because, inspired by Liberation Theology, we made “the transition”: it was an initial form of conversion to a true left. I have never belonged to any of their parties. […] These kids [the university students Linda taught], who had emerged from the break-up of the various political ideologies of the left, participated in revolutionary groups of different origins; I took part in their meetings, but I didn’t personally agree with their formulas. “Yes, but for us, it’s important that as our teacher, you are here”, they said.

It was a really tough time, because it was all about issues regarding the conscience».

From the accounts given by Linda and her companions, it emerges that during those years of internal as well as external changes in the group, at that moment in Brazil’s history, the friendship and support of Dom Hélder Câmara and other priests in agreement with the post-Conciliar petitions and pedagogical stance of Paulo Friere, including Dom Marcos Noronha, were fundamental. Support that proved decisive above all in facing the most difficult moments of the repression: many of Linda’s “dangerous” books, namely those echoing revolutionary beliefs, were moved opportunely to Dom Marcos’ house, where she herself remained hidden for a whole day when the military police were searching for her.

But more than anything, they offered moral support, since to the eyes of outsiders, the backing of figures such as Dom Câmara, probably provided additional “credit” to the positions assumed by the group shortly afterwards with regard to the dictatorship and the Church. The Community still remembers his words to this very day: «I see in you a sign of the Spirit».

«Dom Hélder was well known by everyone but not sufficiently by me. We met several times and had, let’s say, deep conversations on what still united us in the faith and trust in a God who loves His people, in a God who is creator and liberator, but he never
wished to repudiate the official practices of the Church. He was a bishop who travelled all over the country, holding conferences and denouncing the dictatorship. 

We only had to mention that we were friends of Dom Hêlder Câmara. [...] His name was very helpful to us at the beginning here in Europe. Having him as a friend was a great recommendation for all those who accepted us».

Meanwhile, at the beginning of the year, the idea of closing the Colégio Helena Guerra continued to gain ground within the community: an important decision, a radical transformation that in reality seemed a natural progression in the process of awareness already initiated.

«We felt as if we were guilty, supporters of the society that sent us its daughters but that criticised us too. In addition, it created a kind of schizophrenia in the girls, between what they understood and what they were unable to put into practice, because we were discussing conscience, historical responsibility and then they went home and discovered a whole different way of looking at reality».

So they began to prepare a document to recommend the closure of the Colégio: the majority of the teachers were already in agreement and discussion with the Motherhouse intensified by the day. Increasingly, confrontation became necessary and continuous in order to convey how the situation was evolving, even on the other side of the world, because the feeling was that in Italy, «while civil society was in ferment, ecclesiastical society was in a regressive phase with regard to the Council»34. So, in July, the Brazilian group met in permanent Assembly, also to prepare itself for the General Chapter35 of the entire Congregation, which was to be held in Rome in October.

33 «Two of our teachers were in prison and some, like Roberto, the geography teacher, had disappeared. [...] They were all politically active»: Voice of the Community.


35 In the Institutions founded on life dedicated to the Catholic Church, the General Chapter is a collective assembly representative of the entire institution,
“Initially, we wore our habits, but then we dressed as ordinary people […]. And we read the newspaper that came from Paris, with stories of the student uprisings and I have to say that there was a part of the clergy which was quite interested in what was happening in Europe, although it was far away. And this proved decisive for us».

1968 was a particularly significant year for the group of women because in August, at Medellín, in Colombia, the celebrated conference of Latin American bishops was held and, as members of the Community recall, «it was fundamental for Latin America, not only for the preferential option of the poor, but also for a review of religious life. Theology as a whole changed perspective»³⁶. The result was a new religious figure who was to «become incarnate» in reality and confront what Linda and her companions defined as «historical awareness».

«And when the awakening Latin American continent was swept by the prophetic cry of Medellin: “The misery of this continent, [which] as a collective fact, expresses itself as injustice which cries to the heavens: what shall we do?», we realised that the path needed to become increasingly radicalised, because it was no longer possible for us to imagine history other than starting with the defeated, or to direct our praxis beyond the preferential choice of the latter³⁷. At this stage we started to absorb the messages. We held assemblies and decisions were taken all together by a show of hands. It was the moment of change and everyone could have their say, the elderly woman and the latest arrival».

They gathered in assembly at the school in Eldorado, which in Linda’s memory still remains «the centre of reflection and a wonderful refuge». The meetings always began with the reading of excerpts from the documents of the Council and Medellín, aimed at shared reflection and at making decisions relating to the common religious life of the members of that Institution.

³⁶ Voice of the Community.
and would then continue with discussion as to how to implement them and the consequent life choices. Divided into small working groups, each group prepared presentations on specific themes before discussing them with the others. Not only did the entire “mission” in Brazil participate in these meetings, but also a representative of the bishop, Dom Arnaldo Ribeiro, «a figure who offered us great friendship at that time… He was present, but he listened while sitting right at the back»\(^38\).

The first proposal, discussed in Assembly and to be taken to the Chapter in Rome, was the request «for six years of autonomy in order to gain concrete experience of our projects […] It seemed a wonderful idea to us, and attainable»\(^39\). They decided to share it with the other “missions” before October and to travel to Canada, The Philippines, Iran and Lebanon, where similar upheavals were happening. Only in the case of the latter was there a positive reaction, while the alarming news reached the Motherhouse in Lucca from several sources and the formal order was sent to Brazil to recall the group of women, who, in addition, had set off without permission.

«At this point, I realised that the notions of sin and responsibility had done an about turn within us, and that we had truly crossed the Rubicon»\(^40\).

The journey Maria Elena and several companions made to Rome to prepare the ground for the Chapter in October was to little effect: they were received «in the waiting room, as outsiders usually were»\(^41\). The refusal to listen to their proposals was absolute, but during this trip, Father Pedro Arrupe, who they had met through a Brazilian Jesuit, left them a decisive message: «if you want to do something that is really new, you must free yourselves from the stranglehold of the official institution». Their disappointment at the Congregation’s rejection of their proposals

\(^38\) Voice of the Community.
\(^40\) *Ivi*, p. 57.
\(^41\) *Ivi*, p. 60.
found comfort in these words and, as Linda relates, not only «did the seed fall on fertile ground, but for them the risk of making a mistake became a virtue».

When the Brazilian representatives left to attend the General Chapter, they did not hold out much hope. As Provincial, Linda chose not to participate, leaving to the Assembly the task of electing who to send.

The proceedings of the Chapter General confirmed the impressions gained during the preparatory visit and their latest expectations once again failed to be met: «During the Chapter, we went to the bathroom to compare notes because it was forbidden to hold meetings. We had arrived with proposals, but nothing… and so we left». The alternative with which they returned to Brazil was now clear: to renounce their plans or to separate from the Congregation.

«It was clear to us that Catholic “doctrine”, particularly that concerning discipline in religious life, had been made by men seeking to safeguard their institution and authority. This doctrine was not reflected in the Gospel that we had learnt to read with the poor, but also with the Liberation Theologists».

The evening before the Assembly was to vote on separation from the Congregation, Linda and Maria Elena met in the wood of eucalyptus trees in Eldorado. «The wood was immense and we were sitting on makeshift benches», Linda remembers about that night, which was to remain almost legendary in the memory of the Community.

«What did we say to each other? Yes or no, and we weighed up the consequences of our actions, trying to understand what we were seeking in life. And we found ourselves in life. It was impossible to continue to practice a way of life that didn’t reflect our consciences, or the teaching we were giving to young people.

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42 Ivi, p. 61.
43 Voice of the Community.
44 Ivi, p. 65.
We verified that there were no other options: «But are you up for it?», Maria Elena asked me... I waited a little and then I said: «I am!» and that's where it all started...

We tried to explain to the whole group [the entire Brazilian group of the Congregation] our inner feelings and our intentions. It was wonderful because there were only a couple who were uncertain, two girls who then left, but the others were so happy. There were about ninety girls in all».

A decision by now fully shared by the group, after all the preparatory steps taken in a communal spirit. As a member of the Community recalls: «We were all young and Linda had the moral, religious responsibility for the group and gave freedom to all of us. Some got married, others left the community. There was no intervention on Linda’s part, or by Maria Elena, to make us stay, in fact, they insisted: «Go...». And so those who remained did so having made a profound choice, one going beyond blood ties and living together»45.

The separation was clear-cut, not only from the Congregation, but from the institution of the Church as a whole, which by now seemed to them devoid of any spiritual authority.

«When Linda, Maria Elena and Dom Marcos went to Rio to the meeting of bishops to tell them about this step we were taking, Dom Helder Câmara offered us the chance of remaining with him as a diocesan Congregation, but at that point Maria Elena was very clear with him: “We don’t want anything, we just want to do something different”. We have never sought someone to protect us, but at the time of the separation Dom Câmara was certainly of enormous support to us before the Curia and in the Vatican»46.

Linda recalls the discussion at that time very well: «“Why don’t you establish another Congregation?” - “Because we are not interested”. Simply that».

45 Voice of the Community.
46 Voice of the Community.
“We formed an independent group that had no ecclesiastical ties, but it was approved sincerely by that minority of believers who were against the terrible social inequalities that existed in Latin America. Over the years many things changed… today we are a Christian inspired lay group”.

As 1968 drew to a close and the permanent Assembly convened by Linda, Maria Elena and the others was also coming to an end, the political situation in Brazil deteriorated considerably with the coming into effect of the Ato Institucional Número Cinco – AI-5 (Institutional Act Number Five), a government decree resulting in the suspension of all constitutional guarantees and the recognition of habeus corpus47: the repression thus became increasingly violent and arbitrary.

The activities of the Colégio were once again under surveillance, despite the fact that the decision had been taken to close it down over the next few months.

“One day, at the Colégio, a General appeared at the door. I was reading Medellin and, as soon as I saw him, my hands started to shake so much that I spilt coffee all over the Document… “What are you doing?” he asked, “Why don’t you come to read Medellin at the police station?”, “I prefer to do it here…” That’s when the intimidation began”.

The situation was becoming increasingly dangerous, particularly as Linda and the others never failed, as far as they were able, to offer support to the student movements, particularly the UNE (União Nacional dos Estudantes).

“I remember the meetings I sometimes held with them, I was against the armed struggle, but they weren’t… When the Bra-
zilian Communist Party\textsuperscript{48} split, many left-wing groups with the most diverse names emerged... At a certain point these groups, together with others of different origin but also opposed to the dictatorship, called a meeting to prepare for the conclusive Assembly that was to be held shortly afterwards. We had hosted them in our novitiate in the countryside, then, during that Assembly, they were arrested and, under threat of torture, came up with names... our names».

This occurred in Eldorado on the evening of 21 September, and it was Linda herself, dusting down her nun’s habit, who drove some of the UNE’s leaders to safety the next morning. However, when they, too, were arrested a few months later during the clandestine National Congress held in Ibiúna, it was clear that the Community would suffer the consequences of that hospitality.

«In actual fact, I wasn’t siding against a government, but against a government whose violation of human rights I was tangibly acquainted with».

The closure of the Colégio in Belo Horizonte was followed by the interruption of all the Congregation’s institutional activities in other Brazilian cities too: the dispersal of the community had begun, and, with the official request for dispensation from its vows, it officially broke free from the Institution of the Church. The community divided into small groups, into small “integration” communities, as they called them, since the intention was to blend into society: they all had to find new jobs; Linda went to live in a rented house with some companions and continued to teach at the University. Others embarked on the task of teaching young people and adults in an outlying neighbourhood of Belo

\textsuperscript{48} During its Fifth Congress in 1960, a split occurred within the Brazilian Communist Party, leading to the creation of the PCB (Partido Comunista Brasileiro) and the PCDOB (Partido Comunista do Brasil). João Amazonas was the ideological and political leader of the revolutionary reorganisation of the PCDOB which, during the period of the dictatorship, conducted an armed struggle in Araguaia, in Mato Grosso. Officially the PCB did not back the armed struggle, supporting democratic forms of opposition instead, but hundreds of militant communists were arrested, tortured, murdered and exiled.
Horizonte, but the experience lasted only a few months because a policeman was living in the building next to the one they had moved to and their activities were soon being monitored again.

Within a few months, the situation deteriorated. As Linda recalls, «It was a terrible year, also because of the repression, until two of the parents of my pupils, one was a lawyer and the other a bank manager, came to our house. This happened one evening, about midnight, and they said to me: “For our daughters’ sakes, we’ve come to warn you. Leave, because tomorrow morning they’re coming to get you”. And they told me exactly who would be coming».

In the space of a few hours, Linda, who through her ties with the young university students had up until then been the most exposed member of the group, was forced to leave Belo Horizonte, drawing on the help and support of the group of women’s network of friends.

A companion in the Community recalls49, «We asked Maria Elena’s brother, who worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy, to send a telegram saying that Linda’s mother was very ill. And so they were able to find a ticket». Dom Marcos Noronha, together with Maria Elena, accompanied Linda to Rio de Janeiro, and a Benedictine Mother Superior lent them money: «we couldn’t withdraw the money from the bank and then, to pay the Abbey back, the Mother Superior began to do translation work at night… She didn’t want us to repay her anything»50.

«I got into the car with my friend and went to the Italian Embassy in Rio de Janeiro, and told them my story. They were great, they took me to the airport and waited until I had boarded the plane.

I remember that when the plane began to take off, I fell asleep».

This was on 13 May 1969.

49 Voice of the Community.
50 Voice of the Community.
5. Anonymity

Linda’s departure from Brazil marked the beginning of the group’s exodus and its transformation, its attempts to reconstitute itself in new forms, and to experiment with new roles and identities, released from the Church and from a known and familiar context.\(^51\)

Linda arrived in Rome with Maria Elena, a «joyful and vital» presence during those first months of “exile”.

«Landing at Fiumicino, we went into the toilets to take off our nun’s clothes. We came out dressed like any other women and the attendants thought we were adventurers. The chapter of a different kind of incomprehension, a more domestic one, was just beginning, in a land I no longer recognised as my own» \(^52\).

Confronted with the upheavals in society that characterised Italy in the late Sixties, Linda felt disorientated: «I felt myself an outsider, because in Rome at that time there were the great demonstrations of the left and I wondered: “How come here yes, and there, no?”».

The recent dealings with the Curia made her own country seem undesirable to Linda, so with Maria Elena she began to look for somewhere she could start again from scratch. Using, with some misgivings, the contacts she still had within the ec-

\(^{51}\) «Faith for us did not consist in the continuity of practices, but in discovering each day the direction of the wind that ‘blows how and where it wishes’. Driven by a different plan for the future, which wasn’t part of the clerical world, we set sail: congregation, works, belongings, homes, psychological certainties, heading out to sea, without baggage of any kind. The only desire was to be an evangelical ferment, a community without programmes, at the heart of the world, with nothing established forever, without teachers, without even really knowing where we were going»: Daniela and Letizia, *Un lungo cammino alla ricerca della liberazione*, in *Servitium. Quaderni di spiritualità*, anno 1986 n. 47, serie III, Marietti, p. 80.

clesiastical world, they arrived at Louvain in Belgium, after passing through Burgundy and Paris and having found no reasons to remain there. In Louvain, Linda had the opportunity of teaching Portuguese philology and Brazilian literature at the Catholic University, thanks also to the help of Professor Bolelli, with whom she had defended her thesis in Pisa.

As Maria Elena had to return to Brazil to devote herself to the continuity of the group and its relations with the «missions» in the other countries during this delicate transitional phase, three other companions joined Linda, offering to share the experience of exile with her. They enrolled at the same University where she was teaching.

At this time, in their need to readapt, find work and reinvent an identity for themselves, the entire Community in Brazil, but even more so in Europe, found itself occupied «in temporary, lowly, unskilled employment» 53, living in what they refer to as “Anonymity”.

As the Community now explains, separation from the ecclesiastical Institution and the path it had embarked on towards secularisation, resulted in this new state of “Anonymity”, «not in the sense of not existing, but in the sense of not wishing to stand out, of not occupying a particular position: in the sense of being ordinary people» 54. While in Brazil they were identified as “the nuns from Helena Guerra”, in Europe they were merely ordinary women. In addition to the language difficulties arising from being in a foreign country, their educational qualifications were not recognised and so they began to accept any work that was offered, «which were jobs no one wanted to do», some of Linda’s companions recall.

So, as a choice, Anonimity meant not having privileges, living and struggling like others, without the advantages the Colégio had offered, the security of a roof over their heads, food, and work. A choice that meant, then as now, «living a monastic life at the heart of the world» 55.

53 Ivi, p. 81.
54 Voice of the Community.
55 Voice of the Community.
«We want to live as human beings together with other human beings, we don’t want to be privileged people. [...] We can work in society without declaring ourselves; of course, then the objectives come out, because when you meet a person you realise what kind of person they are. When they ask us: “But who are you?”, we simply reply: “We are a community”».

During this period of seeking a new identity, Belgium did not seem to be the right place for the group to follow its new path. With Brazil still in her heart, Linda remembers the years she spent in Louvain as «the worst time in my life» and as «the only true year of exile I experienced».

«It was a very sad time. I had studied Linguistics and I tried to take up that teaching again, but the students were very different. I was used to the Brazilian universities, full of life, debate… I was used to spontaneity in relationships, to speaking openly. I found young recruits, very clever, well educated, but nothing to write home about. There was no passion… after a year in Louvain I went back to Italy to see what the atmosphere was like. And it was better than in Belgium».

Linda decided to return to Italy and her decision to move to Rome and, over the next few years, to transfer the entire Community there, was not a casual one. It was Mario Cuminetti, a theologian and a great friend to the group of women in the years to come, who suggested the Eternal City. «You want to be far away from the Vatican? Come and live in Rome!», as the Community remembers his words: «You will be one group in the midst of many others, no one will notice you».

56 «I remember that every day in Le Monde I looked for news from South America and discussed it in our circle, I mean among Latin Americans, because that’s what I considered myself to be», in L. Bimbi, Lettere a un amico, cit., p. 128.

57 Mario Cuminetti «was one of the first people in Italy to speak, also in a critical way, about Liberation Theology… A dear friend who shared with us the first moments of our integration in Italy and enriched us with our own home-grown theological science and communication, because he always placed himself on our level, never assuming the role of teacher» (Voice of the Community).
Linda had met Cuminetti through Veniero Marsan, who, thanks to his position at IRI [Institute for Industrial Reconstruction], had often managed to secure cheap passages on cargo ships for the women of the Community. The Marsans, who Linda had been introduced to several years earlier by Dr Candia, organised a dinner in their home to present her to their friends. On that occasion, Linda, who had just returned from Belgium, met not only Mario Cuminetti but also Ettore Masina and his wife Clotilde, and lasting friendships were formed among the guests that evening.

So Linda decided to move to Rome and, following Cuminetti’s advice, contacted the offices of IDOC\(^{58}\). At that time the office in Piazza Navona was a meeting place for many intellectuals and well-known figures in progressive Christian circles, in agreement on the policy of the post-Conciliar renewal of the Church and interested in exploring, at international level, the links between religious phenomena, socio-political dynamics and public opinion. Linda immediately felt at ease in this international and dynamic environment.

Meanwhile, her other three companions had left Louvain, with the intention of integrating into Italian society, and others gradually arrived from Brazil. In a similar way to what was happening on the other side of the Atlantic, the Community in Italy wished to try out new forms of community life in small “integration groups”: while Linda was beginning a new life in Rome, others found themselves in Sicily working in flower farming and a

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\(^{58}\) During the years of the Second Vatican Council, under the name «doc» (documentation centre) and initially «do-c» (simple cyclostyled pages) an information tool was set up by the «Dutch centre for documentation of the Council», circulated among bishops, theologians, specialists and observers to facilitate an informal analysis of the debates being held in the Council’s meeting rooms and in individual commissions. In 1965, once the Council had ended, the International Centre for Documentation and Communication (IDOC) was established in Rome with the aim of gathering international and inter-confessional documents on human and religious development. This gave rise to the periodical «IDOC-Internazionale» (International Documentation on the contemporary Church). This information tool, published in English, Italian and French (from 1969 until 1971) and in German (from 1971 to 1971), acquired increasing international and ecumenical recognition.
small group moved to Ponticelli, in Naples, to work with disabled young people, in contact with Tonino Drago’s nonviolence movement. «We wanted to live in small groups among the people», the women now recall, «but then we turned back, because we saw that the value of the Community, of a larger group, was a value for us, for the kind of life we had chosen»\textsuperscript{59}.

In the early 1970s, the Community also sought to maintain links with the other “missions”, particularly those in the East and in Iran, in order to share with them the experience of secularisation, but their realities and their plans proved to be very different. Only two companions from the community in Persia decided to join the group, which was gradually beginning to reform again in Italy\textsuperscript{60}.

Meanwhile, in Brazil, the political situation and the repression by the military government had worsened and the opportunities for Maria Elena and her companions to operate decreased by the day. Linda, or rather Ivone – the name she had chosen in order not to arouse the suspicions of the Brazilian police – was kept informed through regular correspondence.

«The encirclement was increasingly tangible, choosing secularism made us increasingly vulnerable. The community in Eldorado was severely tested. […] Maria Elena, now the military’s favourite target after my departure, being summoned repeatedly and asked to give explanations, «was seriously ill» and, with the collusion of a doctor friend, her illness never got better»\textsuperscript{61}.

During summers in Europe in the early Seventies, the two groups managed to meet, as Linda relates, «resorting to the use of cargo ships that made possible journeys within our financial

\textsuperscript{59} Voice of the Community.

\textsuperscript{60} «At that stage, we travelled a lot in the effort to maintain contact with the other communities… In Persia, too, for example, they had left the Congregation, but had followed a different path. We had also abandoned schools, believing that the transformation should be as global as possible and so not only had we abandoned the religious Institution, but also our way of life, of engaging with the world. Whereas in Persia, they wished to maintain the College, which there, too, was of the elite» (Voice of the Community).

\textsuperscript{61} Ivi, p. 134.
means”. During these Assemblies, they made the decision to reunite in a single country.

«The consensus was that a community nucleus could not be so reduced as to diminish the strength of its practice, its reflection, its relationships themselves. Essentially, we believed that the small communities spread all over the place required a central authority to connect them, but this went entirely against our anti-institutional beliefs».

Over a period of time, women, the majority of them young Brazilians, travelled in groups on the cargo ships, alongside the crew who had been away from their families for months. Some of them had never left Brazil before and Maria Elena – they now recall – had often spoken to them of Italy, its people and its landscapes, and had translated some of De Andrè’s songs for them into Brazilian.

It was not until 1973 that the entire Community was once more complete, in Italy.

Linda was working at IDOC and publishing articles on topics concerning Latin America, still relatively unknown in Italy: she wrote about struggles for freedom and the role of the churches; she offered analysis of the situation in Chile and the activities of Allende’s Unidad Popular and introduced the European world to remarkable Latin American religious figures, such as Hector Gallego.

Thanks to IDOC, Linda and, through her, the entire Community, were able to meet figures who were part of the Catholic world in Italy, fully integrated into the post-Conciliar cultural debate and directly experiencing the contradictions of the Church. In addition to Giorgio and Maria Girardet, Vittorino Joannes,

62 Ivi, p. 142.
63 Ibidem.
64 For further detail cfr. the chapter entitled “Community” in the second section of this book.
65 Jesús Héctor Gallego Herrera was a Colombian Catholic priest kidnapped and killed in Panama in June 1971, in the wake of his opposition to the Panamanian military dictator Omar Torrijos.
Arnaldo Nesti and Fausto Tortora, who were directly involved with IDOC’s Rome editorial office, and José Ramos Regidor, Charles Foubert and Leo Alting von Geusau, Linda also met people such as Franco Barbero, Adriana Zarri, Father Mongillo and David Turoldo, all of them figures the Community began to look to and through whom they learnt to comprehend the situation in Italy. Meeting Ernesto Balducci, theologian and great intellectual, who offered the Community his own testimony and new arguments on which to reflect, proved to be of particular significance in the lives of Linda and her companions.

Indeed, during this period, during which the group of women rejected direct contact with the ecclesiastical Institution, the relationship with religious and intellectual figures “on the margins” became fundamental. The experience and testimony of worker-priests such as Don Sirio Politi or Don Rolando Menesini provided them with encouragement and useful comparison. Some clearly recall the demonstrations and strikes at that time, in which they participated with Don Sirio, or days spent distributing leaflets at St Peter’s informing Italians about the situation in Brazil. It was only a few years previously that, on a trip to Paris, Dom Helder Câmara had openly denounced the systematic use of torture in his country.

Then there was the friendship with the many Piccoli Fratelli e Piccole Sorelle di Gesù [Little Brother and Little Sisters of Jesus], the Congregation to which Arturo Paoli, Linda’s old friend from her time in Lucca, belonged. On the days of reflection organised by the Community, which it still continues to do, they often invited the Little Brothers to offer them an account of their life. Some of them were carpenters, others bakers or undertakers and, as one of the Community recounts, they had the ability «to see the faith in the smallest things in life and to experience their spirituality in the most unthinkable ways»; abilities that helped the group on their journey of revision and exploration. Linda

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66 Religious Congregations founded by René Voillaume (1905-2003) and five other priests on the example of the life of Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916), whose ideal was to emulate the life of Jesus of Nazareth, a contemplative life not separate from the world, but shared with all levels of society, particularly those on the margins.
explains, «We have in common this way of living silently among the people».

Another decisive encounter during Linda’s early years in Rome, again through IDOC, was Gianni Tognoni, a great colleague and friend from then onwards. In the summer of 1971, they invited him to Agape, in the Piedmont valleys, to one of the first Assemblies held by the Community in Italy, in one of «those moments of debate we organised and to which we invited people to tell us of their own experience»67. Linda’s relationship with Tognoni was primarily spiritual and intellectual, later also becoming professional, situated, as was often the case with people she met, on the fine line between her private life in the Community and her working environment.

Towards the end of January 1972, it was again through some of the personalities who frequented the office in Piazza Navona during this period that Linda met Lelio Basso for the first time, at the presentation of Frei Betto’s book at the Corsia dei Servi in Milan.

67 Voice of the Community.
6. Two opposite shores

«Discovering and getting to know Basso and then agreeing to work with him marked a turning point in my life because here, in Italy, I was finding no answers, I felt as though I was in another world».

When Lelio Basso invited Linda to collaborate with him on setting up a Tribunal on the crimes of the Brazilian dictatorship, she «was terrified at having to go back over the recent past again» and was very tempted to refuse his offer. She didn’t know much about this «man with a goatee beard», but above all, up until then, the story of the Brazilian dictatorship had been her own difficult story.

«Eventually, I accepted [his offer] because I thought: “After all I have suffered in Latin America, if there is an official tribunal, with journalists present, that denounces and presents the statements of those who have been tortured or killed… I really cannot ignore it”.

This got rid of the lump I had in my throat for having left Brazil and I went to work with him: the Russell Tribunal II also released me psychologically from the questions I was asking myself […]. Italy was foreign to me, and yet I had rediscovered justice; the feeling of disorientation I had on returning to Europe evaporated during the first session of the Russell Tribunal II».

Linda decided to dedicate herself entirely to this new venture, reducing her work at IDOC to occasional collaborations. So she left the beautiful office overlooking Piazza Navona and in 1973, crossing the narrow streets surrounding the Parliament building usually filled with politicians and intellectuals, she began to frequent Via della Dogana Vecchia, number 5, at that time the seat of Basso’s legal practice and the nascent Istituto di Ricerca per lo Studio della Società Contemporanea [Research Institute for the Study of Contemporary Society] (ISSOCO).
During this period, Basso had already left the PSIUP (Partito Socialista di Unità Proletaria - Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity) and, while continuing his parliamentary activity, was devoting his time to establishing this research institute and library, the core of the future Foundation, presenting once more in his own choices the cultural-political combination he was so passionate about. Political action without a solid cultural support risked leading to blind pragmatism and it was this conviction that characterised the method with which Basso confronted and interpreted the political, economic and social dynamics on the international stage, in which he displayed an increasing interest and that became common ground with Linda.

In 1966, as a member of the jury, Lelio Basso had participated in the Russell Tribunal on the war in Vietnam. The Tribunal had caused outcry in Europe and across the world through the publication of documents that confirmed the use of banned weapons, the systematic bombing of civilian targets, acts of genocide and torture, bringing the still unrecognised American imperialism to public attention. On this occasion, too, Basso had not stopped at the verification of war crimes, but played a prominent part in urging an investigation into their causes: he supported Bertrand Russell, by then an old and sick man, in the handling of the proceedings and was entrusted with the final summing-up.

When Basso met a group of Brazilian exiles during a trip to Chile (1971), and the opportunity of repeating the experience of the Tribunal for crimes committed by the Brazilian dictatorship emerged, Russell had already died and it was necessary, initially, to ask his widow and the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation – founded by the philosopher himself in 1963 – for permission to adopt his name for the new Tribunal. This was Linda’s first task.

With Gianni Tognoni, who she had invited to collaborate, Linda travelled to England to meet the director of the Russell Foundation. He and Russell’s widow Edith seemed happy at the prospect of a Russell Tribunal II. A few days before the opening

session, however, they changed their minds: the ideological diversity of the jury, which included not only few British representatives, but above all several figures from the Catholic world, raised their concern. Although Bertrand Russell had opted to exclude both Communists and Christians from the jury on Vietnam, Basso was nevertheless convinced that, in the case of Latin America, to exclude them meant alienating themselves from a reality that instead viewed them as forces historically present and active during the dictatorship.

It was Tognoni himself, together with François Rigaux, celebrated jurist and professor of International Law at the Catholic University of Louvain, as well as one of Basso’s great collaborators, who met with the members of the Russell Foundation again, thus guaranteeing the opening of a Second Advisory Tribunal, which would bear the same name as the first, on the crimes of the dictatorships in Latin America.

In November 1973, it was officially established in Bruxelles, under the title “Russell Tribunal II on Repression in Brazil, in Chile and in Latin America”. In fact, only two months earlier, the golpe bringing General Pinochet to power in Chile had taken place, and it was Allende’s widow herself who had contacted Basso requesting that the Tribunal should also include Chile. And then there were coups in Uruguay and Bolivia; many elements added up to the belief that there was a connection between the governments of these countries and that they had all received support from the Brazilian government, whose dictatorship now seemed like a ‘model’ spread across the entire continent.

Linda, until then absorbed in her own personal experience of Brazil, was the first to begin to look at the wider picture, as though the camera lens were gradually zooming outwards, making it possible to see the resulting image, in which the details made up the whole. Her story began to coincide with the story of a people, many peoples.

69 “There was an interesting concurrence with the campaign for counter-information that Belgian democratic organisations were preparing against ‘Brazil-Expo’, the ambitious attempt by the Brazilian government to exhibit the miracles of the economic boom in the capital of the Common Market: L. Bimbi, Le scelte di metodo di Lelio Basso, cit., pp. 31-32.”
As in the case of the first Russell Tribunal, the issue of the Second Russell Tribunal’s own legitimacy also arose: as an advisory tribunal its legitimacy was destined to be acknowledged *a posteriori* and determined as much by the lacuna in international law it was to fill, as by the popular awareness in which its roots lay and to which it was directed.

«When the prospect of establishing a tribunal that was not recognised by law but was the expression of a popular initiative was discussed, the basis of Lelio’s socialist theory, dictating that everything should stem from the grassroots, came to the fore. He was a great intellectual and knew a lot of people, and was able to call on a group of remarkable personalities to make up the jury… They came from all over the world and, thanks to him, I met some extraordinary people. The first problem resolved together with them was how to give the sessions a formula, a method, that would take into account the entire community».

70 The first members of the Tribunal were invited by an appeal agreed and signed by Edith Russell; from 1974 to 1976, the Russell Tribunal II consisted of an Honorary Committee, with Jean-Paul Sartre as executive president, and the following members: Hortensia Bussi de Allende (wife of the Chilean president Salvador Allende), Marie Dominique Chenu (French Catholic theologian), Noam Chomsky (American linguist and philosopher), Salvatore Luria (Italian, Nobel prize for Medicine, 1969), Martin Niemöller (German theologian and Protestant pastor), Pablo Neruda (Chilean poet, Nobel prize for Literature in 1971, and Communist activist), Sebastian Matta (Chilean architect and painter): and by a Jury presided by Basso and composed of: Vlado Dedijer (Yugoslavian historian and Communist activist), Gabriel García Márquez (Colombian writer and journalist), François Rigaux (Belgian jurist), Albert Soubol (French historian) [vice presidents], Abu Omar (Palestinian intellectual, member of the Palestinian Resistance Movement), Juan Bosch (ex-president of the Dominican Republic), Luis Cabral (President of Guinea-Bissau), Georges Casalis (French theologian and Protestant pastor), Julio Cortazar (Argentinian poet and writer), Giulio Girardi (Italian Presbyterian and theologian), Alfred Kastler (French, Nobel prize for Physics in 1966), Emilio Maspero (Argentinian trade unionist), J.B. Metz (German Catholic theologian), John Mølgaard (Danish politician and trade unionist), Joë Nordmann (French lawyer and Communist activist), Andreas Papandreou (Greek economist and politician), James Petras (American sociologist), Pham Van Bach (Vietnamese, President of the Vietnamese war Crimes Commission), Laurent Schwartz (French mathematician), Benjamin Spock (American pediatrician), Jochen Steffen (German journalist and member of the Socialist Party), Bruno Trentin (Italian trade unionist and Communist activist), Armando
A network of support and mobilisation was quickly established in favour of the Tribunal and its cause. Basso, who hadn’t sought official funding, believed instead in the conscience of the individual citizen, “of the man in the street”, he said, and of social realities and so he attended dinners and meetings during which he recounted tirelessly the reasons for the initiative. There are those who still recall the five lire sent to Via della Dogana Vecchia by a Sardinian woman and then concerts given by Claudio Abbado and Maurizio Pollini, who, although still young, had been involved in promoting the Tribunal on Vietnam.

Supporting committees were created at international level and it was possible to support the Tribunal via a subscription. One of the most active committees was undoubtedly the one in Milan, led by Basso’s son Piero, promoter of numerous solidarity initiatives, which, in addition to the most obvious goal of fundraising, served to rally public opinion, in accordance with specific methods of approach.

“...The Tribunal was supported by public opinion. We didn’t receive any “official” donations: as soon as we got these young people to speak, the money came in, not much, but it was enough. With the constant worry of “who knows if we’ll make it” and Lelio who kept saying: “But what are you worrying about, it’s a just cause and we’ll manage”. If it hadn’t been for him…

And then there were numerous support groups in different countries… The French, for example, were remarkable, as were the Belgians, Swiss, Spanish, Swedes: all groups of young people who whipped up opinion surrounding the Tribunal”.

Uribe (Chilean writer and ambassador to China under the Allende government), George Wald (American scientist and Nobel for Medicine in 1967). Between 1974 and 1976, the Tribunal held three public sessions, backed by a considerable number of direct testimonies: the First Session was held in Rome (30 March - 5 April 1974), the Second in Bruxelles (11-18 January 1975) and the third again in Rome (10-18 January 1976). During the three sessions, as well as denouncing the repression carried out by the military governments, the Tribunal set out an analysis of the mechanisms and causes, highlighting the role of the big international interests.
Great support was forthcoming in particular from the journalist Ettore Masina and his solidarity network Rete Radiè Resch, illustrating the ability of a layman like Basso to involve the Catholic world in Italy in this venture. «What we socialists did once upon a time, you Catholics are doing now», Basso declared. Thanks to Masina, a cheque for 25,000 lire arrived from a group of nuns belonging to a closed order, who, in sacrificing their daily dessert for an entire month, touched almost everyone’s hearts.

Linda played a prominent role in the long preparatory phase for the Tribunal, primarily due to her extensive network of contacts in Latin America. She was a point of reference for Basso’s collaborators, including amongst others François Rigaux and Salvatore Senese, involved in the drafting of reports and files that would serve as the basis for the analysis of the politico-juridical contexts: legislative bills, regulations, documents, newspaper articles that reached them by plane.

«It was like a bomb going off in the heart of Europe», Linda says.

At that time, in Italy and in other European countries Latin America was very familiar, events happening there featured on the pages of the newspapers and many people had at least one relative who had emigrated: it thus figured prominently in many people’s imagination. In the imagination of those Catholics who admired its ability to exemplify the post-conciliar recommendations and who observed the birth of Liberation Theology with interest; of those on the left who had followed the fate of Che Guevara and his idea of popular revolution and who regarded Salvador Allende’s Unidad Popular government with hope; and of the young who thought of South America’s music and its uncontaminated spaces.

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71 Rete Radiè Resch is an international solidarity association founded in 1964 by the journalist Ettore Masina, inspired by the French worker-priest Paul Gauthier. Masina and Gauthier met in Palestine during Pope Paul VI’s visit. Radiè (Radià) Resch was the name of young Palestinian girl, who died of pneumonia while waiting for a proper home; she was living with her family in a cave in Bethlehem. The Rete’s first project was funding the construction of homes for several Palestinian families. This was followed by projects in many other locations, particularly South and Central America and, more recently, in Africa (see http://www.reterr.it).
as the ideal setting for adventure and the struggle for the freedom of peoples, an important reference during those years of protest.

Nevertheless, what emerged from the sessions of the Russell Tribunal II was to surprise and shock public opinion.

From 30 March until 6 April 1974, the first session was held at the headquarters of the CNR [Centro Nazionale delle Ricerche - National Research Council] in Rome, and was devoted to the violation of human rights in Brazil, Chile, Bolivia and Uruguay. In the face of the refusal of those governments to participate and to defend themselves, Linda clearly recalls Lelio’s words: «They ignore us and we'll cause even greater uproar».

«We had previously informed the governments of these countries of the initiative and had invited them to send a representative to the Tribunal in their defence. Only Pinochet, the leader of Chile’s military junta, responded, writing in the French daily Le Monde that he did not deign to take into consideration a Tribunal formed exclusively of people on the left, of “international Communists”. Lelio Basso responded by publishing, again in Le Monde, the names of the 35 members of the jury and the professional and ideological qualifications of each (ranging from Catholic and Protestant theologians to American liberals, Latin American writers, and to four, only four, Communist activists)»72.

Linda personally took charge of the preparations for this session, together with all her companions from the Community behind the scenes, first and foremost Ruth, who had recently joined Basso’s administrative team. Testimonies of the violation of rights were to be submitted before the jury and suddenly the pages of their Brazilian story were reopened in the search for contacts, old friends, documents and evidence that might ensure justice for a collective experience and provide an historical, political and religious meaning to the decisions taken a few years earlier.

«The first session was devoted to the denunciation of violations of human rights and so there were the testimonies of the

72 L. Bimbi, interview in Il Buratto, April-May 1976.
survivors of the dictatorships who I searched for in various European capitals. In fact, in Brazil, at a certain point the period of the exchanges began: guerrillas – many of them just kids who were still at university – kidnapped the American ambassador and then the Japanese consul, asking in exchange for the release of a certain number of prisoners who, once they were free, left for Europe.

I travelled around Europe and also Africa to find them. I knew many of them already, they were my friends, but for the most part, this bit of preparation for the Tribunal was a dead end: I knew that one was in Berlin, for example, I had a list of people, but then, who knows... I didn't have their phone numbers and I didn't manage to find some of them.

I found in them a combination of fear and welcome, but I must say that all those I contacted then came to the Tribunal: I told them about Basso’s project and what we intended to do on an international level and then I asked them if they wanted to take part. We asked them to tell their stories and many didn’t agree straightaway... They said they would think about it. Those who did come were well prepared and they arrived by all possible means. These meetings were very painful, because they were adrift in those European capitals with no contacts other than superficial ones and many were suffering because they were unable to envisage their future.

This trip around Europe was a huge undertaking, certainly the most difficult phase in organising the Tribunal; they were people who were often frustrated, who were attempting to remain hidden and we were concerned about getting them to come to the sessions... Without even thinking about the problem of travel documents. In addition, for me it meant reliving their story, which was also my own: I, too, had left because they wanted to catch me.

It was very moving for me, because often the last time I had seen the person addressing the Tribunal was during the years of the dictatorship».

In that hall in the CNR packed with journalists, there were many who recounted their experiences and Linda rediscovered many of the young people with whom she had shared, in her role as teacher, hopes of freedom and revolutionary ferment.
«Many witnesses were young activists: after the disintegration of the Brazilian Communist Party, many small groups opposing the dictatorship were formed and the young people who came to give evidence belonged to these groups with the most diverse names and origins. I remember, and I think I’ll never forget, that in Sweden there was a girl I had contacted when I made this famous trip round Europe. She had promised me that she would come and in the end this poor creature managed to get there however she could… She had no money and she arrived in a pitiful state, so that we even had to look after her a bit, but she was a remarkable witness. She had endured much brutality while she was a prisoner… She, like many of the others I had contacted, was one of a group that had been released in exchange for the American ambassador.

Among the many witnesses of torture there was, and still is, one, Tullo Vigevani, who taught at the University of São Paulo and who shared the students’ aspirations: he didn’t accept the authoritarian military regime and was arrested together with his wife. He was of Italian origin but had Brazilian citizenship. His wife was pregnant and was tortured in his presence. It was an extremely tough experience and his evidence was too, even though it was very serene. After the amnesty, they returned to Brazil and I met him again during one of the trips I later made… Tullo hadn’t remained an angry man, he had remained serene and even when I met him again, he had no desire for revenge.

The jury listened to the stories, then it assembled and together discussed what the witnesses had said, whether further proof was necessary or not, if these facts could be used or not. The jury listened, asked many questions and we arrived at the final drafting of the first sentence reasonably certain of what was being affirmed».

The session in Rome concluded with the condemnation of the governments of Chile, Brazil, Bolivia and Uruguay, guilty of having systematically violated human rights, and with the reasonable assumption that behind the Latin American dictatorships lay a much bigger plan. In the two successive sessions held in 1975 and 1976, it was therefore decided to investigate the underlying dynamics and to examine the causes of what appeared to be

73 What History was to reveal in the coming years as Operation Condor.
a system of government spread across an entire continent: from torture to the system producing it, in accordance with the working method favoured by Basso.

«When we began to examine the reasons for what had happened, the multinationals surfaced: it was they who were financing and protecting the dictatorships.

At that point, we decided to focus the second session on the conduct of the multinationals, a valuable and terrible discovery for that time. It was then that Lelio began to worry about me… Through someone belonging to the Brazilian Communist Party who was working at the Brazilian Embassy in Rome, we had learnt that in fact news of this Tribunal had reached Brazil and they knew that I was involved in it, that I had escaped from their clutches at the very last minute. This session was held in Bruxelles and Allende’s entire family took part: in fact, after Pinochet’s coup, we received many denunciations from Chile.

This time, many academics participated with their research… Lelio said: “We can’t afford to make even the slightest mistake, because the charges we are making are terrible”. This session was extremely interesting because the causes of the violations emerged. While during the first session, victims had testified: “They tortured me”; this time, they stated: “They tortured me because…” and so studies on the multinationals, their allegiances and their projects were analysed. There were some very powerful testimonies and this was undoubtedly the most important session. The whole of Europe participated and in the end the responsibilities of the multinationals clearly emerged… at that time!».

Against the background of the testimonies of violations, a picture began to emerge of the connections between the political powers and the centres of economic power74 (the multinationals, the banks, the big insurance companies). There are those who still smile when they recall the arrival in Bruxelles of a young Sergio

74 On the role of the multinationals cfr. the special issue of Problemi di socialismo dedicated to Imperialism, published before the Symposium held in Santiago de Cile from 17 to 23 October 1971 on “Transición al socialismo y experiencia chilena”.
Poeta, Linda’s colleague from then onwards, out of breath and weighed down by an enormous suitcase full of documents and photos taken during the previous month in Amazonia, testifying to the destruction carried out, with the complicity of the government, to open up the Trans-Amazonia Highway through the middle of the rainforest. In this sense, the theme that was to be tackled the following year in the final session held in Rome was introduced: the new type of colonisation that American, but also European, imperialism wished to impose on the entire continent, of which torture and systematic brutality were only some manifestations.

«The third session, which was held once again in Rome in 1976, was aimed at gathering… if I were to say the word ‘imperialism’ it would be laughable now, but this session was indeed conducted against the attempt to transform Europe into a series of free-trade states in which the multinationals reigned supreme. It was for this reason that we decided to adopt the term “imperialism”. Some of the best European writers took part in this session and gave powerful and true testimonies. The number of people I met during the Tribunal…

Lèo Matarasso, for example, was a French lawyer, very well known because when there was the fight for freedom in Algeria, he devoted himself to defending the Algerian people. He had a good brain and when Lelio came out with his intentions, Matarasso would appear, saying: “Careful, here, it would be better to do this…” He was very clever and also delightful as a person… And then Louis Joinet, who in the years that followed went on to become President Mitterand’s private secretary. He was a very cultured man, had access to a lot of information, and delivered us some very valuable witnesses».

From the final session, held at the Hotel Parco dei Principi, as Linda states, «it transpired that the concentration of capital, which had gone hand in hand with the interdependency between political and economic power, had resulted in the subjugation of an entire continent, an example and warning of what might happen to others»75.

75 L. Bimbi, interview in Il Buratto, cit.
This was the sentence delivered to the public at the conclusion of the Tribunal’s work, while writers, jurists, Nobel prize winners and intellectuals returned home. The Tribunal’s appeal to Brazil, Chile, Bolivia and Uruguay for the release of prisoners and to other countries for the suspension of all military or economic support to the military juntas was taken up by the UN, which undertook to pass the sentences on to the respective governments. It caused a considerable stir in Europe, but even more so in the Latin American countries directly concerned.

The Russell Tribunal II was an undertaking that lasted for three long years, and had succeeded in involving eminent figures, who were world famous, as well as many ordinary people. Many remember the ferment of those days, with everyone doing their best to translate the missing piece of a report, make photocopies and prepare the documentation or to arrange meeting the guests. Meanwhile, in the corridors it was possible to bump into writers such as Gabriel García Márquez and Julio Cortazar, or the Nobel prize winner for Medicine, George Wald. The euphoric atmosphere was similar to standing in the wings on a first night at the theatre, and many are convinced that Linda and her companions from the Community were responsible for the spirit of collaboration and celebration that made all the hard work worthwhile and united everyone in their efforts.

In fact, Linda had involved her companions right from the beginning, and they had spent many late nights sending letters and preparing documents, in the same way as she had immediately decided to manage her association with Basso communally, sensing the burden it would place on her life and that of the entire Community.

«I knew nothing about Basso, and before we met, I had never heard of him.

He was a highly cultured man and knew all the great intellectuals of Europe: travelling with him was a wonderful experience.

We knew that we were on opposite shores: the very fact that Lelio and I should be working together seemed outrageous, to the extent that they asked my mother: “Who on earth is your daughter working for?” My mum told me and so I spoke well of Lelio to her and she calmed down.
I was Catholic in my own way and I discovered in him a deep affinity in ideals: he passed on to me many elements of his humanist Marxism that I also recognised as my own.

None of his friends was anticlerical, they all knew my story and they all showed great respect. I have never preached about my faith, but Lelio knew about it and he also used to say: “Did you know that she was a missionary?” and I used to think: “Oh no, how can I explain it to them now?!”

My life had also been difficult from an intellectual point of view until I managed to reconcile the two aspects: meeting Lelio and frequenting his friends has certainly influenced my secularism, in the sense that I have distanced myself from traditional ways and I have felt free. Of course I had long and interesting discussions about this with Lelio. He was a great influence in my life.

So once again, the two voices that had accompanied Linda throughout her life until then overlapped: the commitment to social and political reality and the dimension of her spirituality. When she was young, these two voices seemed contradictory to the extent of leading her to her decision to become a missionary, as a radical choice and in opposition to active involvement in the politics of the immediate post-war years; in Brazil, on the other hand, at the very time in which the brutality of the military dictatorship called for a conscious response to reality, her way of living her faith united with a political commitment to the poorest in a collective path of liberation.

On this path, Linda and her companions discovered a way of acting in a secular manner that, independent of any structure or ecclesiastical hierarchy, arose from a profound awareness with regard to history to become the sharing of daily life.

Linda and Basso met on this common ground: the selection of the very poorest, the losers. The Marxist intellectual and the missionary who had rejected hierarchies had in common a moral obligation towards the weakest and the point of view of the oppressed was for both the perspective through which to observe history. Linda grasped this immediately and was struck by Basso’s multifaceted knowledge, who, as she likes to recount, «was the only layman who knew the difference between a don and a
Dialogue between the two was thus made possible by this deep cultural affinity, but also by the exceptional nature of the experience of faith practiced by the Community. The absence of proselytism, as the lack of ambition to create a following of the chosen, is one of the characteristics that most surprises those who meet Linda and her companions, but it is also what made the relationship with Basso so authentic. Even now, some say, you can speak freely to Linda about politics and current affairs, without ever feeling she is trying to impose on you a message of a spiritual kind.

On the other hand, Linda herself says of Basso that «the choice of interlocutor, to him, meant the willingness to listen to cultures that differed from his own, in a relationship established in such a way that no one had the last word and no one became the subject. This was his way of investigating the facts and understanding history».

«In 1972, when I started to work with him, I had just been through a long and dramatic experience in Latin America and I was a terzomondista [my sympathies lay with the Third World], I mean I believed that it was only in the Third World that humanity’s fate was at stake. […] Lelio Basso taught me to broaden my analyses and my horizons, to understand the articulated network of the oppression of peoples that links the HERE to the THERE, to involve myself at a wider, I would even say global, level in the struggle for the liberation of peoples, which has now assumed these dimensions. In other words, the inseparable nature of the centro-peripheral network is not a theory I have learnt, but an awareness that was born in me from the practice of a co-existence».

The friendship with Basso and the experience of the Russell Tribunal II transformed into a new challenge the relationship between faith and history experienced until then by Linda and her

76 Both terms derive from the Latin «dominus», but while «don» refers to the title given to diocesan Catholic clergymen, «dom» is reserved for Benedictine monks.
78 From the speech Linda delivered at the Conference «Per ricordare Lelio Basso», held in San Marino, February 1981, in unpublished writings.
Community, who were gradually becoming increasingly secular and aware of the world. This openness to international dynamics, this sense of “totality”\(^79\), forced them all, through Linda, to reconsider the process of liberation initiated during their time in Brazil, motivating them to act increasingly within a global perspective.

And this is what happened in the coming years, when she found herself carrying on Basso’s legacy: his ability to perceive existing and potential connections between events, however, was also transformed into the need to provide continuity to her own work, in always seeing in it further developments. Even before the Russell Tribunal sessions were over, Lelio Basso was already considering how to continue the process in favour of the rights of peoples.

«Lelio was never satisfied with the present and for this reason sometimes he could be difficult. His tendency to project himself into the future anticipated the next steps in an almost anxious way, often, as his collaborators, to our annoyance; while he was absorbed in an initiative, he was also striving to discover whether it might contain the seed of a new idea. This could sometimes result in impatience; while we were perhaps feeling overwhelmed by a particular task, he would point out to us its limitations; but with him there was no danger of resting on our laurels after a victory; he would complain about it being overdue and encourage it to be overcome. I sensed this particularly from 1974 to 1976, during the Russell Tribunal II, when I saw him tormented by the incompleteness of the nevertheless gigantic venture that had been set in motion; but had it not been for his constant intellectual restlessness, the Rights of Peoples would never have been born»\(^80\).

\(^79\) On Lelio Basso’s concept of ‘Totality’: «In reality, this kind of ‘totality’ runs through Lelio Basso’s entire philosophy. The most typical example is his approach to the themes of the Third World, which is the field I worked in with him. He was convinced of the inseparable nature of the struggle carried out by the European Workers Movement and by the Movements for Liberation in the Third World. This centro-peripheral relationship is essential to the understanding of his thought and his acts» (ivi).

\(^80\) From Linda’s speech at the presentation of the book Scritti sul cristianesimo in Rome, February 1985, in unpublished writings.
7. The dawn of a new age

On 4 July 1976, the Declaration of the Rights of Peoples was proclaimed in Algiers.

«It was a small, pseudo attack on the United States», Linda recounts, smiling. Symbolically, Basso’s intention was that the Charter of Algiers should inaugurate the era of equal dignity among peoples, just as the American Declaration of Independence had marked the beginning of the era of democracy and human rights, precisely two hundred years earlier81.

After the Russell Tribunal II’s work was over, a new topic regarding rights had appeared on the scene: the people. The cases, recently examined, of governments that were clearly not legitimately representative either on a political or historical level, demonstrated the need to guarantee the rights “of the real people” who lived in those places, the rights of peoples82.

Linda remembers the dinner in a restaurant in Rome in January 1976, when, at the end of the third session, the table toasted the creation of a permanent body that would assume the task of monitoring the violation of these rights in a continuous manner, each person present committing to seeking support for this endeavour in his own country. Linda recalls: «Basso was undecided between a Tribunal, a Foundation, a League… However, before

81 The first part of the American Declaration of Independence reads: «We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,— That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness».

deciding in concrete terms what it was to do, he thought that the organism that was to represent this continuity should have a statute, a point of reference. In the months that followed, two separate institutions were established: an international League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples and an international Foundation, bearing the same name; the former as a mass organisation capable of engaging and sensitising public opinion, while the latter was more committed to scientific research. The first act of these permanent bodies was the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Peoples; convinced that “the effective respect for human rights necessarily implies respect for the rights of the peoples” and so that “may all those who, throughout the world, are fighting the great battle, at times through armed struggle, for the freedom of all peoples, find in this Declaration the assurance of the legitimacy of their struggle.”

«During the sessions of the Russell Tribunal II, particularly the second and third, work had already begun on developing the concept of the Rights of Peoples, but a legitimate occasion was needed for the compiling of what we referred to as the Charter of Algiers, or the Declaration of the Rights of Peoples. The Algerian government of the time was extremely welcoming and hospitable, they were great: they invited the representatives of all the movements of liberation that were in ferment at that time to Algiers. During the Tribunal, we had met Amar Bentoumi, who had been Minister of Justice in the Algerian government; in addition, Lelio had supported many Algerians in their struggle for freedom through speeches and conferences and was on friendly terms with the government, so as soon as he said: “We would like to make the Declaration in Algeria…”, my goodness, how happy

83 Dal nostro inviato speciale nella periferia del mondo, Interview with Linda Bimbi, Secretary of the Fondazione Internazionale per il Diritto e la Liberazione dei Popoli, in unpublished writings.
84 The Fondazione internazionale per il Diritto e la Liberazione dei Popoli, of which Linda immediately became Secretary General, subsequently formed what was then to become the International Section of the Lelio and Lisli Basso Foundation.
85 From the preamble of the Declaration of Algiers.
they were! They organised everything: travel, accommodation… we were almost embarrassed by their generosity.

The authors were several members of the Tribunal’s jury and our own small group… There were Gianni and François and then the young Algerians: the group was international.86

The Declaration was made in the magnificent setting of the Palais des Nations: it was 4 July, my birthday, and it was incredibly hot. Lelio read the Declaration and then commented on it. It was a very important event for the Algerians too, and for all the Africans who took part».

Linda speaks of it in a simple and natural way, then she pauses, and reconsiders: «when something like this happens and someone experiences it from within, they don’t really comprehend the importance of what is happening».

The party held looking out over the African Mediterranean, «filled with men and women all with such different faces, but united in the quest for an historic dignity for individuals», seemed to Linda to herald «the dawn of a new age».

During those torrid summer days, the committees of academics and jurists discussed the rights of minorities, access to natural resources, economic rights, cultural identity and the self-determination of peoples. The experts worked in separate groups and then compared the results with the representatives of the liberation movements who were present. They succeeded in drafting thirty articles, in choosing the sanctions to be applied in the case of violations and concluded that «the re-establishment of the fundamental rights of peoples, when they are seriously disregarded, is a duty incumbent upon all members of the international community» (article 30). The sisters of two protagonists who had sacrificed their lives in the struggle for freedom in Latin America signed the Charter as representatives of their respective countries: Laura Allende and Ana Maria Guevara.

86 Other members of the group included: Giorgio Gaja and Miguel Arraes de Alencar.
«It was the time when the world was divided into domi-

tors and dominated and in which colonised peoples nevertheless

began to rebel. This was an enormous support we were giving

them… first and foremost the right to exist».

Linda recounts: «Of course there was some disagreement

about which words to use: it wasn’t easy to choose the right ex-

pressions». The formulation of Article 6 in particular («Every peo-

ple has the right to break free from any colonial or foreign domi-

nation, whether direct or indirect, and from any racist regime»)

aroused heated debate.

«There was a lot of discussion surrounding that “direct or in-

direct”. One person on the jury who raised difficulties on this

occasion was the ex-President of Santo Domingo, Juan Bosch,

who did not agree with “direct or indirect”. He didn’t want us to

include “indirect”, because in actual fact they were conditioned

by American policy and it would therefore have meant a condem-

nation of his own government. We discussed it for a while, but in

the end we put it in».

The indirect intervention of imperialism, through the back-

ing of totalitarian regimes, had in fact been at the core of the

denunciation by the Russell Tribunal II and it was vital that it

should be included in the Charter of Algiers. Some of the thorni-
est questions tackled in the Declaration’s articles indeed included

the different forms imperialism assumed: cultural, economic and

technological.

«The need to highlight the right of every people to its own

wealth and natural resources arose when we were dealing with

Chile during the Tribunal. Chile had copper mines over which

the Americans had control and the profits, let’s say, from these

materials did not remain in Chile: this was how the battle for the

economic rights of peoples began. The African, and also to a cer-
tain extent the Asian countries, are extremely rich as far as the land

is concerned and even they do not know what they are custodians

of. In this way, the Declaration aimed to attack the multinationals.
On the other hand, international trade is what it is: some eat and others go hungry and Lelio always repeated to me that it was necessary to be on the side of the hungry […]..

Even the subject of scientific and technological progress was a delicate one, because it was a privilege restricted to the advanced western societies. Those peoples who were emerging with, alas, their questionable independence, wanted to participate in the benefits enjoyed by the colonial nations… that was the problem. It meant supporting the efforts of those countries so that they could acquire the means and thus backing the preferably, whenever possible, nonviolent movements for economic freedom. And if we don’t succeed in this… it’s the great torment inside all of us».

The right to culture, to which Section IV of the Declaration was dedicated, was one of Basso’s main objectives. Linda recalls that he «wanted that the right of every people to cultural autonomy should be very explicit and, similarly, the duty of peoples to share their cultural heritage for the common good of humanity»88.

«He cared very much about this, that’s why, once he had established the Foundation, he told me, repeating it to me often and telling me once again shortly before he died, that it was a Foundation of a cultural nature and that we shouldn’t allow ourselves to be overtaken by secondary issues. The cultural aspect should always be present and he recommended the thorough examination of history, geography, ancient cultures. He always said: «If we don’t have an awareness of our own origins… new freedoms, new revolutions are born of an awareness of identity». That’s why I have my own personal mission within the Foundation».

Linda had always remained an educator, and her «mission» during those years did not differ greatly from what had forced her to flee from Brazil: the dissemination of culture and awareness of rights. This has always been her priority, the territory in which she recognises her role best, in addition to the economic and legal skills she has had to learn over the years.

I. The long journey towards rights

It was for this reason that she decided to devote her efforts to organising the International Conference on Cultural Imperialism, which Basso had planned for the autumn of the following year, again in Algiers. She sought to enrol academics and experts, including Dorfman and Mattelart, who would explore the theme and highlight the dangers to which the cultures of the subjugated peoples were exposed by Western capital and the multinationals.

The Foundation’s cultural activities and its raising of awareness, to which Linda continues to devote her time today, originated at this time.

Linda recalls Basso as «a prophet of the future» and, in the two years between the Declaration of Algiers and his death, he pursued his politico-cultural activity to the full. With the overall view typical of his approach to reality, he was keen to build bridges with the Arab world, as well as with Africa and Asia. At that time, he was writing articles for the principal Italian newspapers, commenting on events in the countries of Africa or Eastern Europe; he was interested in the fate of Korea and didn’t neglect the Arab world, the focal point of international dynamics that are still bitter now. He tried to organise a conference on technological imperialism involving Iraq, wealthy in oil deposits, and the then Minister for Internal Affairs, Saddam Hussein, but as Giorgio Tognoni, who was responsible for the negotiations, recalls, the terrain proved difficult to penetrate and his interlocutors had «little freedom to express themselves».

He never ceased in his support for the struggle of the Palestinian people and his idea of creating within the Foundation a Palestinian Committee only materialised after his death, at Linda’s initiative. «Don’t forget the Palestinians», Basso said to her and she rang Vera Pegna, who had worked with Basso since the time of the Russell Tribunal on Vietnam and had been involved in the Palestinian issue for years. It was she who set up the Palestinian Section of the Basso Foundation89, reuniting all those who had worked on it over the years.

89 Previously, in 1973 to be precise, Basso had set up, within the International Foundation Lelio Basso for the rights and liberation of peoples, a section devoted to the Palestinian question: the Arab Study Centre, with the aim of promoting
Meanwhile, in Latin America resistance groups were preparing for a legislative resolution that might coincide with the return of democracy and, as Linda recalls, «in 1978 to 1979, the fight for the Amnesty for Brazilians was also our fight». Consideration of events in Latin America, and particularly in Brazil, had not come to a halt with the Tribunal: in 1978, the National Congress for Amnesty was established in Brazil and Basso began to receive requests for support. In October, the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples promoted the constitution of the Italian Amnesty Committee, with Basso as its president and the aim of supporting the demand for a general and unrestricted amnesty for all Brazilian prisoners and victims of political persecution. The Italian committee, consisting of exponents from political parties and parliamentary groups, trade unionists, youth movements and organisations, contributed to the organisation of the National Congress for Amnesty held in São Paulo the following month. Basso, who as president of the Italian Committee also participated, promised the support of the Foundation and the League in this struggle.

Following his sudden death on 16 December 1978, Linda, François Rigaux and Basso’s principal collaborators honoured his commitment and in June the following year, organised in Rome the “International Conference for the broad and unrestricted Amnesty and for democratic freedom in Brazil”. Many of the members of the Russell Tribunale II jury took part, as did all the Brazilian Committees active in Europe.

«Lelio had foreseen it, cultivated it, imagined it, but he passed away before it was proclaimed officially. The Amnesty law enabled the release of those sentenced for political motives. When we the Palestinian people, through its manifestations and culture, beyond the stereotypes and the humanitarian crisis. After Basso’s death, the Palestinian Section continued to operate until the early 1990s, drawing on an extensive network of contacts and collaborations (human rights organisations, national and international institutions, intellectuals, political parties and movements across the eastern Mediterranean, embassies, cultural institutes and universities). Linda and Vera Pegna’s most assiduous collaborators during the very early stages included Abdul Karim Wasim Dahmash and Biancamaria Scarcia.»
celebrated in Rome, everyone took part, people who had played an important part in my life and some almost historical figures of the resistance. Gregório Bezerra, for example, whose biography I finished reading only a few days ago: he was among the prisoners released in exchange for the American ambassador and eventually he even became a member of the Chamber of deputies»90.

Linda and her companions organised a big party to celebrate at their home in Via Trenta Aprile, «a Brazilian party» Linda stresses, where, in the warm and colourful atmosphere, old friends from the Latin American years and new friends from the time of the Tribunal were all reunited. Among the guests was her friend Marcito, Márcio Moreira Alves, the deputy who in 1979, when Institutional Act number 5 came into force, delivered a speech in parliament that, Linda recalls, «was considered an insult to the armed forces; we found it prophetic and made it the topic of reflection»91. With the Amnesty, which was approved on 31 October of the same year, this Act was revoked, as was the banishment of those political prisoners released in exchange for kidnapped ambassadors and who had attended the Tribunal in Rome in 1974.

The Brazilian Amnesty, however, did not only mark the success of the experience of the Russell Tribunal II and of the for-

90 Gregório Bezerra (1900-1983). Born to a poor family in Pernambuco, he was orphaned when only nine years old. Illiterate until the age of 25, he began to work when very young, first in a sugarcane plantation, then in a factory. In 1917, he was arrested for taking part in a demonstration in support of the Bolshevik Revolution, remaining in prison for five years and enrolling in the army upon his release. In 1930, he enrolled in the Brazilian Communist Party and in 1935 participated in the revolutionary group «Intentona Comunista». In 1946, with the fall of Getúlio Vargas' regime, he was released and participated in democratic elections in Pernambuco, obtaining many votes for the Brazilian Communist Party. Following the coup d’état in 1964, he was arrested, tortured, and sentenced to 19 years in prison; he was one of the prisoners released in exchange for the American ambassador. He lived in Mexico and the Soviet Union, not returning to his own country until after the Amnesty in 1979. In 1982, he became member of the Chamber of deputies for the Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB).

mula that had proved capable of galvanising awareness in ordinary people, but it also represented a further ‘liberating’ step on the path, both individual and collective, taken by Linda, Maria Elena and the others. In June 1978, Basso’s death was still a recent event and for Linda and her companions, the process of coming to terms with this loss had barely begun. That masculine figure – one of the very few – who had played such a profound role in the community life of the group, had also succeeded, unlike anyone else, in opening it up to the outside world. Linda does not like to talk about it, but the importance of Basso in her life and that of the entire group is indisputable and what made it so is the sense that they shared with him not only the same perspective on life, but also the objective that made it worth living.

«He said to me: “Don’t give up, continue” and so I have tried to continue. For me, Lelio is an inspiration: I can’t refer solely to him because he is now the past, but he was a prophet of the future and so… onwards! You only have to think of Article 3 of the Italian Constitution which he formulated and in which it declares that the State has the duty to provide a dignified and decent life for all its citizens: it is this notion of equality that is present in him right from the start.

I don’t speak of Lelio much because it is painful, I find it painful that he is no longer here and that we live in this indecipherable world. He would certainly have a lot to say now, just as he did at the time. Being his friend, even sharing a certain degree of confidence, wasn’t just any old thing, it was something to be proud of and to think that now, at the Foundation, I have the last word isn’t easy. But… long may it last!».

The configuration of the so-called «Basso system» was almost complete: ISSOCO\(^\text{92}\) had merged, together with Basso’s own extensive library, to form the Lelio and Lisli Basso Foundation, while the League and the International Foundation for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples constituted the tools for its international activities. The only thing missing in the trinity conceived

\(^{92}\) Istituto di ricerca per lo Studio della Società Contemporanea [Institute for the Study of Contemporary Society].
by Basso to provide continuity after the Russell Tribunal II was a permanent body dedicated to the Rights of Peoples.

In Bologna, on 24 June 1979, the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal (PPT) was established: François Rigaux was nominated president and Gianni Tognoni, General Secretary. Even before Basso’s death, it had been agreed not to proceed with the numeration of the Russell Tribunal: they opted for «the path of greater autonomy» which would make organisation easier and avoid any obstacles arising from eventual changes of a political nature in the leadership of the Russell Foundation.

The words of the inaugural speech were entrusted to one of Latin America’s most celebrated writers, Julio Cortázar, formerly a jury member of the Russell Tribunal II. In this speech which, Linda recalls, lay «on the boundary between the realism of history and the poetics of utopia», Cortázar spoke of the need to be both bridge and channel, «along the paths of beauty», so that the great formal declarations might reach the ears of the people concerned, until then unaware of their existence.

The aim was to avoid the paradox that instead had a tendency to arise, namely the very distance between the group of intellectuals aware of those fundamental rights it was necessary to protect and «the awareness of the peoples who were their natural beneficiaries». For this reason, as provided for by the Statute, the Tribunal responds to requests to intervene on the part of plaintiffs who, having formed a group, might denounce the violation of rights, pertaining to the collectivity to which they belong and which for-
mal justice has failed to address\textsuperscript{96}. In November 1979, the session on the Sahrawi people marked the beginning of an undertaking still in progress today, thirty years later, and it continues to represent an initiative that is avant-garde in International Law.

For Linda, a particularly intense and frenetic time began, and she remembers «years of travelling, meetings, decisions to be taken, always, everywhere». In the early 1980s, while she was working together with Gianni Tognoni and Sergio Poeta on setting up the Permanent Tribunal, Linda had the opportunity to meet some remarkable people, who made a lasting impression on her. The stories of peoples in conflict and of figures involved in processes of liberation arrived on the desk in Via della Dogana

\textsuperscript{96} «The Tribunal responds to an application for intervention, that is to say a network of plaintiffs […] write to us declaring they are applicants and setting out the reasons for their application for intervention. The common denominator for all applications […] is that mechanisms of impunity must be proven, in other words the Tribunal can only intervene once all the victims have exhausted all possible paths to formal justice, and are therefore not represented either by national or international petitions: once impunity is proven, which might be of a structural or regulatory nature (because maybe there are laws preventing them from appealing to formal justice), it is then that the Tribunal intervenes. These applications are always evaluated by the Tribunal’s president and most active members and then the jury is selected, consisting mainly of experts and prominent figures in various fields: juridical, financial, sociological… depending on the theme, we select the necessary expertise […].

Each session can be structured in a different way: it can be structured as a single event, where the jury convenes and delivers the sentence, or the sessions might be organised into trials that last for years with intermediate and thematic phases. […] The focus is always global… the PPT’s endeavour, which was also Lelio Basso’s endeavour in itself, is to highlight the level of complementarity that exists between human rights and the rights of peoples, and when the two cannot be separated. The sentence establishes, In the social sectors involved, the capacity to interpret and analyse the complexities of the cases being denounced and which, instead, are generally evaluated in isolation: the very concept of an advisory Tribunal leads to the belief that it is primarily a means for raising external awareness, whereas it has proved useful first and foremost within the country where the application has originated, as well as in putting pressure on local administrations. The Permanent Tribunal’s sentences are often used to present the case to formal justice. […] In other cases, they serve to form historical memory»(Simona Fraudatario).

I. The long journey towards rights

Vecchia to be examined and evaluated by the Tribunal’s secretariat. Linda recalls late nights spent searching for information and studying documents and the discussions that arose concerning the legitimacy of the applications received.

During this period, Linda met Rigoberta Menchú, before she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (1992), and Ernesto Cardenal, who has remained in her memory as «that wonderful person who urged young people to rebel while nevertheless staying within the Church». She became passionate about the plight of the Eritrean and Afghan people and indignant about the case of the Armenian people; in selecting the members of the jury, she had the chance to meet people who had led remarkable lives, such as Ruth First or Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, and intellectuals such as Eduardo Galeano, the lawyer Eduardo Umaña Mendoza or Father Javier Giraldo, all engaged in different ways and countries in favour of human rights and the rights of peoples, and many of them experiencing their systematic violation personally.

During this same period, Linda also met Marianella García Villas and decided, together with Raniero La Valle, to write about her life, but only as the testimony and voice of the Salvadoran people, «because mine is a case common to all», Marianella had once told her.

«In the spring of 1981, I asked Marianella if she was willing to record the story of her life on tape. I remember the idea came to me one evening, while we were waiting for the bus to go to a meeting for work. The unsettled weather so typical of Rome in March presented us with a moment of clear light, and in that transparency I saw Marianella through different eyes; I thought that she would die soon, taking with her memories too fiery to be buried. […] She had come to Europe to recount what was happening in her tiny and virtually unknown country and I was one of the links in the chain transmitting her message»97.

97 Marianella in Salvador: chi era e perché venne uccisa [Marianella in El Salvador: who she was and why she was killed]. For Panorama mese, 30 April 1984, in this Author’s unpublished private collection, p. 273. Cfr. also R. La Valle and L. Bimbi, Marianella e i suoi fratelli: una storia latinoamericana, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1983; reprinted by Edizioni ICONE-Strumenti di Pace/CIPAX in 2007, and A.
Marianella, president of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador [CDHES], had travelled to Europe in 1980 to seek solidarity for her people and had come to the Basso Foundation to ask the Tribunal to intervene. In February of the following year, the session of the Permanent Tribunal to judge the violation of the rights of the Salvadoran people at the hands of the governing military junta was held in Mexico City; in March 1983, Marianella Garcia Villas was captured, tortured and killed.

The friendship with “the lawyer of the poor”, as Marianella was known, proved to be another of those decisive encounters in Linda’s life, capable of diverting her path or, at least, halting it for as long as was necessary for it to be enriched. Linda devoted herself with enthusiasm to writing the story of Marianella’s life and, reading today the articles and comments she wrote at the time, it is impossible not to discover in the words of humble admiration, characteristics and experiences the two women shared.

In the setting of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal sessions, stories and events that were unfolding all over the world were thus intertwined, discovering in the Basso Foundation, as in Linda’s Community, a welcoming environment in which to recount them. Because Linda, as her companions relate, «had this tendency to bring to the Community people that she had met at the Foundation, all of them admirable, to open in us a window on the world». The meetings that were usually held in the Community at weekends and which served to reflect on what had happened over the past few days and to plan for the following ones were enriched during this time by new testimonies. But following Basso’s death, the relationship between Foundation and Community became so close and so totally reciprocal, that it was often people close to the Community who became part of the world in Via della Dogana Vecchia, number 5. As in the case of all the personalities Linda had met while at IDOC, the same happened with Lula, later President of Brazil, who initially became a

friend of the Community through Frei Betto\textsuperscript{98} and subsequently involved in the Foundation’s projects.

The perfect equivalence that had been created between Linda’s world and that of Lelio Basso, which had freed Linda from the discomfiture of hovering precariously between a Christian faith and a commitment towards history, was manifest in the complementary relationship that was increasingly being established between the Basso Foundation’s international activities and her Community. Not only in those who frequented them, but above all in the atmosphere, aims and methods which, at home as well as at work, saw Linda creatively and enthusiastically engaged in the spreading of a culture of rights, of that historical awareness so dear to her heart. An engagement, however, which inevitably was always a collective and multiple one, shared with her companions in life.

«In the morning I always listen to Radio Tre Mondo and every evening at eleven, the news broadcast on Vatican Radio. They talk about all these peoples, they speak freely about what is happening, and you hear about a lot of things, situations you don’t know anything about because an Italian or French radio station can’t mention them... That’s perhaps why I don’t fall asleep immediately... At home, they’re always telling me it’s not a good idea».

\textsuperscript{98} Cfr., infra, p. 6.
8. The thrill of the future

More than a decade after Lelio Basso’s death, the Foundation pursued its multiple activities in accordance with two directives: the national Foundation – engaged in the Italian political and cultural context through seminars, publications and research – and the International Foundation, led by Linda, and housed on the second floor of Via della Dogana Vecchia, number 5. A separation that might also seem logistical and formal, but as Linda recalls, in Basso’s intentions, the creation of two Foundations wasn’t due to «the caprice of the case and of encounters, but to a plan based on complementarity between the European Workers Movement and the liberation movements of the Third World». It was a complementarity that highlighted the connections and, as Linda was increasingly to realise, indissolubly linked the processes of liberation in all countries, in the Southern and the Northern hemispheres. It was this sense of totality, this international outlook opening «like a window onto the world» that Linda acquired as a legacy in the day-to-day running of the Foundation.

«Lelio was dead, but I tried to carry on his intuitions», Linda says and so the commitment of the International Foundation and of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal continued in the years straddling the Eighties and Nineties, attempting through lucid analysis to keep pace with the ever changing events on the global stage.

The fight for the liberation of peoples began to change too and the session of the PPT, organised with the contribution of Luciana Castellina and Elmar Altvater, in opposition to the policies of the International Monetary Fund (1988) marked the beginning of this transformation. Basso had already intuited the role of the so-called “economic crimes” at the time of the Russell

99 The president of the International Foundation was François Rigaux, while Linda has always carried out the role of General Secretary. In 2005, the two institutions merged to form the Fondazione Lelio e Lisli Basso Issoco.

100 From a speech Linda delivered at the Conference Per ricordare Lelio Basso [In remembrance of Lelio Basso], San Marino, February 1981, in L. Bimbi, unpublished writings.
Tribunal II, but now, in an explicit way, in the dock were the banks, multinationals and major industries, guilty, with the connivance or indifference of governments, of violating the rights of entire populations. A violation that was undoubtedly a more silent one, but which, nevertheless, revealed complex scenarios in which physical and direct violence often paved the way for a violence of an indirect and symbolic nature.\footnote{In the acceptation elaborated in the 1970s by Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic violence refers to that form of violence which is not exercised through direct physical action, but through the imposing of a vision of the world, of social roles, cognitive categories, mental frameworks through which the world is perceived and understood, by those dominating on those dominated. For further analysis, cfr. \textit{La Violenza simbolica}, in Pierre Bourdieu, \textit{Risposte. Per un\'antropologia riflessiva}, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin, 1992, pp. 106-135.}

At that time Linda, also busy with other activities, started to follow the procedures of the Tribunal in a more marginal way, participating and collaborating only in the realisation of a few sessions, devoting herself personally to seeking out the documentation and contacts. This occurred for example in the case of the session regarding the indigenous peoples of Amazonia in Brazil (1990).

«The Tribunal I still remember with emotion when I think about it today was the one held in Paris concerning the indigenous peoples of Amazonia. I\'ll never forget it… Delegations from all the indigenous groups operating in Europe and three representatives who came directly from Amazonia took part. It was very difficult for them to adapt and to face situations that were for us simply part of our everyday lives… It was an extremely valuable experience for me too».

Or the sessions on the fundamental rights of children that were held in Trento, Macerata and Naples in 1995, and the one on children in Brazil (1999) organised together with Luiza Erundina de Sousa and Dalmo de Abreu Dallari, great friends of Linda and the Community.

The activities of the International Foundation, to which Linda devoted the majority of her time during that period, were instead of a more cultural and scientific nature: research, publications,
study days and seminars. At the centre of the debate lay the concepts of democracy, solidarity, models of development, topics that emerged during the sessions of the Permanent Tribunal and for which the Foundation proposed investigation in-depth and critical analysis. The study days, in which historians, legal experts and economists were invited to take part, served principally to enable Linda and her colleagues to interpret reality as it evolved. As had occurred at the Colégio Helena Guerra in Belo Horizonte, Linda’s pedagogical leanings were transformed into cognitive ones and into a path of personal learning.

In 1995, an advanced training course on the Rights of Peoples was set up and continues to operate, followed shortly afterwards by the Neapolitan School of Studies on the Rights of Peoples: «“Here they are again!”», Linda says, referring to the students, «it’s slightly different to Brazil, but I have never lost this intimate need of wanting to explain why». The themes discussed by the Permanent Tribunal were decanted into these two great receptacles: the experience of the Neapolitan school was particularly significant and lasted for about fifteen years.

«The Neapolitan school stemmed from the friendship that both our president102 and I had with the lawyer Gerardo Marotta, president of the Italian Institute of Philosophical Studies in Naples. Marotta had heard about the course we were organising in Rome and suggested doing the same in Naples. So, when the holidays came, we moved our work there and it was really interesting because the school was international. […] We sent the programme and students from various universities enrolled. We never regretted embarking on this experience».

It was a residential course and every year a topic was chosen for discussion during the two weeks in September. Through a series of scholarships, students from all over the world were able to take part and so, as a former pupil recalls, «suddenly anything from fifteen to thirty kids arrived in Naples: Spanish, Argentinian, African. And for the Neapolitans among us following the

102 She is referring to François Rigaux.
debates, it was a breath of fresh air». Palazzo Serra di Cassano provided the setting during these weeks, hosting world famous intellectuals and professors who had frequented the Foundation for years and the lectures, mostly in English, were transformed into debates and learning experiences, favoured by the residential aspect of the course and its international atmosphere.

Linda’s relationship with the young intensified still further during this period, also because the Foundation’s links with various Universities led to the building in Via della Dogana Vecchia, being filled, then more than now, with interns, trainees and young people doing community service. On the second floor, in the International Foundation, there were always, therefore, young people actively involved in the organisation’s initiatives and in promoting cultural events. Linda’s attentiveness, and that of her colleagues, was constantly evident in the way the young people were helped and supported. One of them recalls «On their part, there was the aim of introducing us into that world, of sowing in us a certain culture of rights through a continual exchange». Another still remembers that the initial interview with Linda was «a very unusual experience, atypical: I was expecting something more along the lines of «what can you do» but instead she asked me «how do you see the world? What do you think about this?»».

So after many years, Linda once more returned to teaching young people, or perhaps she had never ceased. «I never left them», she repeats and, as in the Colégio in Belo Horizonte or the university lecture hall, the methods and causes of a liberating pedagogy were present in the atmosphere that was breathed and in the way relationships were conducted. Indeed, the friendship with Paulo Freire, «a friend as well as an intellectual advisor», had become more intense since both had arrived in Europe: Linda had immediately translated some of Freire’s books into Italian and he was often a guest of the Community during his trips to Rome.

Some of the young people still maintain that talking to her meant «not only discovering abilities and skills, but revealing dreams and aspirations, states of mind and hopes. And, often, also commenting on and interpreting reality together».

It was this desire to be in touch with the young that encouraged Linda, between 2004 and 2005, to embark on the venture
of the School of Journalism, still operative today, with the aim of establishing a link between the topics discussed by the Foundation and the world of communication and information.

«In one of the many initiatives we organised, someone suggested to me inviting Dr Maurizio Torrealta... “You look like a person who never gives in, am I right?”, he asked me and said that he would like to set up a school of journalism together with the Foundation. It took me several months to make up my mind, but in the end, also on the advice of my great friend Maria Elena, I agreed. She told me: “You have always been involved with young people and have always achieved great things with them”. So that’s how the Basso Foundation’s School of Journalism was born. [...] There are some remarkable teachers and thanks also to Lelio’s friendships and other contacts in the world of journalism and at RAI [Italy’s national public broadcasting company], I was able to meet people who are still working with us at the School».

One Sunday morning in the same year, after having supported her in the decision to pursue a new direction, Maria Elena died at breakfast time. A lifelong friend, a companion in thought and in celebration, with whom she had always travelled in tandem, as some remember her today and of whom, she says, «I prefer not to speak, in order to avoid any glorification».

These were the years in which Linda embraced the world of communication and the media, but, she explains, «the journalism is aimed at the defence of human rights, investigative journalism». In fact, it was she who insisted that the teaching of the techniques of communication should be accompanied by didactic modules capable of helping the students to observe the world, to interpret events: it became known as «the training ground for ideas», and consisted of lessons in modern history, political geography, international law.

As one of the teachers\textsuperscript{103} explains: «It is very important that not only communication is discussed in a school of journalism, but also the essence of things». This is the distinctive feature of this

\textsuperscript{103} Marina Forti.
experience, fully integrated into the spirit of the “Basso system”, in its international atmosphere and in the priority given to the historical interpretation of events; in addition to being entirely in line with Linda’s «mission», as she jokingly defines it, to transmit to young people that awareness of reality that encourages action. «Officially, I am supposed to be the deputy director of the School of Journalism, but in reality I follow the students in their learning, let’s say rather that I follow their psycho-pedagogical development». And even though the relationship between them is not formalised in any way, sooner or later, many of the young people attending the School climb the stairs to the second floor and wait to be able to see Linda.

The School of Journalism, now on its tenth session, is one of the many activities that continue to fill Linda’s day, with their inevitable problems and hidden challenges: «sometimes I find myself involved in some venture that is bigger than me and I wonder… “Why on earth am I doing this?”» , but then something good always comes out of it».

Alongside the sessions of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal, which continues to offer “the opportunity to interpret history from the losing side»104, the cultural initiatives organised by the International section also continue, as do the research projects. Along the lines mapped out by Lelio Basso and followed creatively by the group of collaborators that he assembled, Linda now maintains the ties in the relationships established over time, primarily those with Latin America.

In collaboration with the Brazilian Ministry of Justice105, for example, the historical archive of the Russell Tribunal II has recently been digitalised and transferred to the Amnesty Memorial in Belo Horizonte. The same is being done for the archive on El Salvador: the bond that Linda established with Marianella García Villas is in fact enabling an archive for material relating to the period of the civil war (1980-1992) to be created and thus

104 From Linda’s speech on the study days devoted to Pace e Diritto dei Popoli, Perugia, December 1986.
105 In the person of Paulo Abrão Pires Junior, National Secretary of Justice and President of the Amnesty Commission of the Ministry of Justice.
the reconstruction of an historical memory for the country. The focus on the Arab world also continues, and on the Palestinian question in particular, as well as on Africa: one of the most recent projects is the one undertaken in Capo Verde on sustainable tourism, through Linda’s ties with Pedro Pires\textsuperscript{106}, President of the African archipelago until 2011.

Examination of current events, international and otherwise, is always present.

Many themes lie at the centre of the Basso Foundation’s unfolding reflection, from democracy to immigration, the mafia or common goods; a Foundation which, as Linda wrote in 1986, began as “a great research project”, whose originality lay in the fact “that peoples are not its subject but it was conceived on the basis of the history of peoples” and it therefore “shies away from the academic objectives which are in the final instance the accumulation of knowledge and is directed towards the struggles of peoples and human groups to liberate themselves, to be well, to be happy”\textsuperscript{107}.

At home, as in Via della Dogana Vecchia, number 5, Linda, together with her companions in the Community, continue to invite people who bring testimonies of their own work and lives, old friends and new who might help in the understanding of those dynamics that today, and in ways different to before, tend to oppress peoples and individuals. “They are all battles that can be fought, even in our modest way, but that cannot however be ignored”.

Her “ability to become angry”, as someone put it, goes hand in hand with the hope in change that Linda displays on a daily basis, because hers is not an anger that paralyses action, but one that mounts in passion and creativity, becoming a stimulus to act. After all, it is her faith, in history and in social justice, as in “a world that exists through love”; a faith that “lies in discovering the direction of the wind each day”.

\textsuperscript{106} In the 1970s, Pedro Pires (1934) was one of Amilcar Cabral’s collaborators in the struggle for the country’s freedom.

\textsuperscript{107} From Linda’s speech to mark the tenth anniversary of the Declaration of Algiers on 	extit{Prospettive della Fondazione} in Athens, November 1986.
And then there are the young people who, now as then and in a way that Linda doesn’t really know how to explain, continually help her to recompose her synthesis, to find a balance between the two voices for which it no longer makes sense to understand which prevails or why.

So, in bringing the story up to the present, the events of the last twenty years rush by more quickly, lacking the temporal distance that aids narration and creates memory. That distance that has enabled us, in the preceding pages, to re-invoke significant moments in Linda’s life through crucial encounters and which now seems instead to give less narrative substance to the space of two decades. The significance of events seems, in fact, to make way for an aspiration, a pull forwards leading Linda into an indeterminate time in which the present, populated by the young, becomes the future.

And so, the present writer’s thoughts inevitably return to the first page of this book, to the encounter and narrative exchange that took place and to the pedagogical relationship underlying it and which only now, in these final words, seems to manifest itself in her implicit request.

“If I were to go back? I’m ashamed to say it, but I’d be a teacher… I like being with young people… people who are learning, looking to the future. It’s the future that I love even at this age, I am always thinking what comes after… It’s the thrill of the future».
II. References
1. Community

It is always necessary to start from the beginning, not doing new things, but making everything new.
(Maria Elena)

According to Linda, the Community is the sort of family that should exist everywhere:

«Everyone works and the result of everybody’s work is put together… We divide the tasks, domestic ones as well as work, and we pay a lot of attention to the kind of reading we do: when there is something particularly interesting, we discuss it together. And then we attribute great importance to the relationship with the people we work with, where of course the most important aim isn’t what we earn, although obviously we live on the earnings of each one of us, but let’s say that we are generous, as far as possible, in supporting and sharing with friends. Life is based on a working week and at dinner in the evening we tell each other about what has happened during the day, who we have met, what are the problems to be tackled, what difficulties exist… At home we have some outside terraces allowing us to enjoy a little cool air and to discuss some of the things that are less important. We are very careful about sharing and transparency. This is how it has been ever since we established ourselves as a community in Brazil […]

On Saturdays and Sundays, friends usually come to visit us. Saturday is dedicated entirely to relaxation, walks, while on Sunday we reflect on what has happened over the last few days and plan what we will do the following week. These might seem like rules, but it’s just a way of doing things».

Since they arrived in Italy in 1973, they have moved house and neighbourhoods in Rome several times, because it isn’t easy to find buildings big enough and with at least one large commu-
nal room and a room dedicated to prayer, in which they celebrate the Eucharistic Assembly without the intervention of a priest.

And this is how it has been since the beginning of their journey towards secularisation, when, as someone recalls, «we also abandoned any religious framework [...] the Mass, the rosary and began to celebrate Agape amongst ourselves». «This», Linda admits, «was the most difficult thing to explain, particularly in Catholic circles». It was when some of the women moved for work to Assisi, a small town in comparison to Rome, that they attracted a lot of attention.¹⁰⁸

«It was difficult to conceive of a group of Christian women living in a community without categorising them as nuns... at the beginning, there was a lot of curiosity and mistrust.

When we arrived in Assisi, the Bishop sent a priest to see who we were, because a group of women who arrived there without going to seek the blessing of the bishop... who could they be? And he wanted to know what our Charisma was and Betta replied: «One of us types, another prepares the meal, another cleans the house... that's what we do», and he left.¹⁰⁹

«Nuns no, but sisters, yes!», one of them interrupts, «it's like a beautiful mosaic in which everyone gradually finds their own place without it being decided by anyone».

Nevertheless, Linda and Lelena, as Maria Elena was affectionately known, have always maintained an important role in coordinating the Community, according to the companions and friends who have known the group of women over the years. And while there are those who might see in this the legacy of former institutional roles, to the companions it is an inevitable and spontaneous process of leadership, based on previous experience, and on age. In any event, what is clear is the complementarity of the two personalities:

¹⁰⁸ Reunited in Italy in 1973, right from the start the Community divided into two groups (with about fifteen women in each): one in Rome and one in Umbria. For a long time, they lived in Assisi but, after the earthquake in 1997, moved to Bastia Umbra.

¹⁰⁹ Voice of the Community.
«Every group has its leadership and we have always acknowledged theirs: a spiritual, cultural leadership… Had it not been for those two, I don’t know if we would have come so far along this path, principally because Maria Elena embodied age, experience, deep spirituality, strong personality… I think that this leadership has always been recognised by us, without either of them ever wishing to be the typical Mother Superior. We have never had any doubts about it and it was something that occurred spontaneously”110.

«There is feeling among us that enables us to identify each other’s characteristics, the things that particular person can offer to the Community… We saw in them, and still do, those capabilities. Two deeply spiritual people, each with very different characteristics: Linda was always open to the world, while Lelena inspired great faith… she possessed spiritual insight and so, after a long time, you might happen to read things she had already told you previously. But they never forced these capabilities on you or used them to impose things. Their greatness lay in knitting the group together and being in its midst, without ever being above it»111.

Some mention Maria Elena and Linda as working in tandem: many recall the former as «more practical and good at organising», while the latter was «more reflective» and how the two friends, with their very different personalities, «complemented each other to perfection».

«The Community is a world you have to enter», many maintain and, once you do, what you are always struck by is, «mainly the international atmosphere… there was an Austrian, a Lebanese, an Iranian and, of course, the Brazilians… but there were the white Brazilians, the black Brazilians and only very few Italians». The Community is also a world which has a rhythm of life entirely its own, «a rhythm consisting of days, of Sundays, holy days and is a collective ritual», explains someone who has frequented it for many years, «for a long time, you are a guest, in the most celebratory sense of the word». For many, the Sunday invitation is still the one most appreciated:

110 Voice of the Community.
111 Voice of the Community.
«[...] there was this very unusual kind of celebration particularly because it echoed practices that were entirely Latin American in their gestures and rituals. [...] The Eucharist was never celebrated with wafers but with fantastic loaves of bread they baked themselves and with a drink, that might be wine sometimes, and others not».

The sense of festivity has always been very important to them and at each celebration, from the weekly Agape to the principal festivals, there are always prayers and gestures that are highly personalised and original, rich in symbolism: in this, Maria Elena displayed great creativity and, as some still recall, «she did things that were unexpected and for us it was great fun»:

«The liturgical prayer is created by the community day-by-day, so that it might stem from life, it is elaborated with the addition of texts from the Bible and those belonging to other religions, secular texts, testimonies of martyrs, of the men and women of faith in our own time. It is expressed through songs, chanting, poetry, symbols and gestures, which change according to the theme chosen»112.

The continual confrontation with reality, in its changeable dimension, forms part of their the way of living and being, and testifies to the commitment of «wanting to be in the world», of wanting to practice shared paths of freedom in everyday life.

It is for this reason that impermanence is one of the main characteristics of the style of community life selected and the forms it assumes, from its rituals, to its symbols and its rules. «We don't have things that are defined, rules that will last in time: community life changes on the basis of the group's situation», and besides, as another adds, «the world has changed too... we take on the world, we are keen to be on the inside of these changes and to be heading towards something». The confrontation with reality has always occurred through the testimonies they seek, in moments of reflection on experiences both past and future in which

they invite friends and acquaintances to tell their own stories and in which they, as someone who has often been a guest of the Community recalls, «sit and listen, rather than speak, as is the norm». Another person invited to «testify» recounts: «They asked me about my travels, about my work, and I talked at length, then at lunch I started to discover their story and I thought… how is my story interesting in comparison?».

In the course of time, in order to face the transformations within the Community too, the women recount: «we have modified the procedures of our annual meetings… before, we used to spend a week somewhere beautiful, but now some can no longer manage that and so we invite people throughout the year with whom to confront ourselves»\(^{113}\).

The symbols chosen for their celebrations and for the prayers marking the rhythm of their communal life also stem from in this continuous confrontation, as does the choice of the jobs to which they have always given priority.

«All of us work. To live, to testify, to participate with our commitment in the common liberation […]. Wherever there may be dialectic tendencies for liberation, we try to be there. We believe that it is important to be aware of the things that originate with the poor, where history is truly formed»\(^{114}\).

Linda adds, «In the choice of work, we have established a priority to give to those less fortunate, let's say: many of us work in cooperatives with quite modest salaries, but we manage by pooling our efforts. I am an exception in this lovely office, but I am still involved in rights that haven't been respected. In all our jobs, there is always the concern to ensure human dignity prevails, from our work with children, with the disabled, the elderly, in the participation in everything to do with being human».

\(^{113}\) Voice of the Community.

\(^{114}\) Ibidem.
2. Chronologie

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Linda’s Story</th>
<th>Historical Events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>1925 Linda Bimbi born in Lucca, on 4 July.</td>
<td>On 3 January, in a speech delivered to the Italian parliament, Benito Mussolini assumes political responsibility for the death of Matteotti. The Fascist regime is established in Italy.</td>
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<td>11 August 1944: massacre at Sant’Anna di Stazzema, in the province of Lucca, carried out by the Nazis.</td>
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<td>5 September 1944, Lucca liberated by the Allies.</td>
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<td>1940s</td>
<td>1945 – 1950 She enrols in the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy at the University of Pisa and graduates in Linguistics.</td>
<td>1946: in the first democratic elections held in Lucca, the Christian Democrats (DC) win 54.8% of the votes. The DC was to dominate the political scene in the city until the 1980s.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>1950 – 1951 Linda begins to teach Latin and Greek at a prestigious high school in Lucca run by the Congregation of the Oblate dello Spirito Santo.</td>
<td>Getúlio Vargas departs from the Brazilian political scene, after leading the country, albeit discontinuously, since 1930. In 1955, Juscelino Kubitschek is elected President and the era of the so-called “desenvolvimentismo” begins: technical-industrial progress is placed at the heart of the country’s development. Paraguay: establishment of Alfred Stroessner’s dictatorial regime, backed by the United States and lasting until 1987.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1952 Linda decides to depart for Brazil and begins the period of her novitiate in Santo André (State of São Paulo): she takes her vows and assumes the name Sister Raffaela.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1954 She moves to Càssia, running and teaching in a girls’ school.</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>Linda moves to Belo Horizonte: she begins to run the <em>Colégio Helena Guerra</em>, attended by the daughters of the city’s elite.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>The Congregation opens a new school in Eldorado, in Belo Horizonte's industrial zone, for less well-off families. Linda and Maria Elena lead the Congregation's Brazilian group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>In 1961, João Goulart comes to power.</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>11 October 1962, beginning of the Second Vatican Council convened by Pope John XXIII to re-examine the mission and identity of the Church. The Council's sessions continue until 1965, under the pontificate of Paul VI.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>1964: military coup in Brazil. Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco is the first general to become President. Until 1984, he was succeeded by four other generals (Artur da Costa e Silva, Emilio Garrastazu Médici, Ernesto Geisel, João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>1964: the military coup in Bolivia marks the beginning of a series of coup d'états, which were to continue until democratic elections were held in 1982.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Following a competitive exam, Linda begins to teach at the <em>Universidad Federal de Minas Gerais</em> in Belo Horizonte.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966–1967</td>
<td>Linda and Maria Elena travel for the first time to Macapá, in Amazonia, Later, until 1973, part of the group moves there to work in the state schools. During a conference at the Protestant <em>Colégio Isabela Hendrix</em>, Linda speaks of historical awareness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>1966: the Russell Tribunal on Vietnam is held at the initiative of Lord Bertrand Russell. Lelio Basso is one of the members of the jury.</td>
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</table>
Linda and her companions propose a reform of the Colégio. The teaching staff meet and draw up a document: *To educate in an awareness of history*. The aim is to democratise the school through scholarships for poorer students. The experiment fails.

| 1968 | Within the Congregation’s Brazilian “mission”, reflections of a liturgical and spiritual kind are added to the pedagogical reforms, throwing into question the nature of their work.  

In July, Linda, Maria Elena and their companions go into permanent Assembly to prepare themselves for the General Chapter in October: they intend to present proposals for reform to the Congregation.  

In October, their proposals are rejected. The group reaches the decision to separate from the Congregation and to renounce their vows.  

Exponents of the União Nacional dos Estudentes (UNE), offered hospitality in Eldorado a few months earlier during a preparatory meeting for the great Congress in Ibiúna, are arrested and, under torture, denounce the complicity of the Congregation. |

| In Brazil, the political demonstrations spread, while the dictatorial regime becomes harsher: in December, the proclamation of Institutional Act Number 5 results in citizens being deprived of civil and individual, as well as political liberties. |

| 26 August - 7 September: the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) is held in Medellin, Colombia. Liberation Theology is traditionally considered to have originated at the Medellin Conference.  

On 13 October, the Congress of the União Nacional dos Estudentes (UNEis held in Ibiúna (São Paulo). |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>On 13 May, Linda is forced to flee: the police seek to arrest her for the support given to student groups. She arrives in Rome with Maria Elena. Linda moves to Louvain, in Belgium, where she is offered the opportunity to teach Portuguese Linguistics and Brazilian Literature at the University. She is joined by some of her companions from Brazil.</td>
<td>4 September 1969, the US Ambassador to Brazil, Charles Burke Elbrick, is kidnapped, eventually being freed in exchange for the release of fifteen political prisoners. In Italy, the student and trade unionist protests continue. On 12 December, the Piazza Fontana bombing takes place in Milan. In Italy, the “strategy of tension” starts to gain ground.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>Linda decides to return to Rome and finds employment at IDOC. The exodus of the entire community (approximately 40 girls) begins: they make the decision to move to Europe. Linda publishes <em>Dai sotteranei della storia</em> (Mondadori).</td>
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<td>1972</td>
<td>The book is launched in January, at the Corsia dei Servi in Milan, where Linda meets Lelio Basso, who has been invited to the event. Basso asks Linda to work with him on the realisation of a Russell Tribunal on the crimes of the dictatorships in Latin America.</td>
<td>Ecuador: following a coup d’etat, General Rodriguez Lara establishes a military dictatorship that will continue until 1979.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Linda leaves her job at IDOC and starts working with Basso in Via della Dogana Vecchia, n. 5. In November, the Russell Tribunal II on Repression in Brazil, in Chile and in Latin America is established in Bruxelles.</td>
<td>27 June: coup d’état in Uruguay. 11 September: coup in Chile. Salvador Allende’s socialist government is overthrown by the military junta led by Augusto Pinochet.</td>
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<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>Bruxelles 11-18 January: second session.</td>
<td>30 April, the fall of Saigon, marking the end of the Vietnam War.</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>Conference on cultural Imperialism held in Algiers.</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>National Committees for Amnesty established in Brazil. Basso promotes the creation of the Italian Committee, of which he will become president.</td>
<td>In November, the National Congress for Amnesty takes place in São Paulo.</td>
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<td>16 December, Lelio Basso dies unexpectedly.</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>Rome, June: the Basso Foundation organises the <em>International Conference for the ample and unrestricted Amnesty for democratic freedom in Brazil</em>.</td>
<td>31 October: the Amnesty Law is passed in Brazil.</td>
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<td>24 June in Bologna, the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal (PPT) established. François Rigaux named as its president.</td>
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<td>10-11 November: first session of the PPT (on the Western Sahara) held in Bruxelles.</td>
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<td>1980s</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>In February, the PPT session on El Salvador is held in Mexico: Linda meets Marianella Garcia Villas. That spring, she asks her to record her life story.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Publication of <em>Marianella e i suoi fratelli: una storia latinoamericana</em>, written by Linda with Raniero La Valle. Marianella had been murdered only a few months before.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>The first PPT session on economic issues held in Berlin: <em>the policies of the IMF and the WB</em>.</td>
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<td>1990s</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Inauguration of Specialisation Course in the Rights of Peoples.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Inauguration of the Neapolitan School on the Rights of Peoples, lasting for approximately fifteen years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Inauguration of the School of Journalism.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>The Foundation’s two institutes, the International Foundation and the National Foundation, formerly combined at ISSOCO, merge into a single entity.</td>
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3. Historical background

Lucca during the Second World War

The war was part of daily life for Lucca’s inhabitants until 5 September 1944, the date of the Liberation. As in analogous situations throughout Tuscany, the first sign of the conflict was the presence of evacuees and the shortage of food, which began in 1941. The crisis deteriorated in 1943 into one that was institutional, social and economic. Following the bombing of Grosseto, Livorno and Pisa by the Allies (31 August), tens of thousands of people were displaced, on the hills above the plain of Lucca, in Mediavalle and Garfagnana, in Versilia. The Resistance established itself in the mountainous regions, but for a long time it struggled to make even limited progress. Emblematic of this was the fate of the group of students assembled under the high school teacher Carlo del Bianco, near Pania di Corfino, which he then disbanded for fear of armed clashes with the Germans. At the crux lay violence, and whether or not it was legitimate to kill, even when confronted with an enemy such as the Nazis-Fascists. During the winter of 1943-1944, the city’s schools witnessed demonstrations and disobedience on the part of the students, suppressed by the Italian Social Republic (RSI), which maintained constant pressure on the students, resorting also to “mortuary pedagogy”, namely showing the executions of those who refused to sign up and wear a Fascist uniform again. In late spring, the RSI was in crisis. There was much anger, particularly with regard to the clergy. The economic and social care and civil resistance carried out by a substantial group of representatives of the diocesan clergy and the religious orders characterised the situation in Lucca, within the broader context of Tuscany and perhaps the entire nation. The massacre carried out by the Nazis on the night between 1 and

115 I am grateful to the following for their contribution in compiling these historical contexts: Gianluca Fulvetti, Giancarlo Monina, Angelo Trento, Luigi Sandri, Soana Tortora and Gianni Tognoni.
2 September 1944 at charterhouse of Farneta is a significant example: the monks had sheltered in the monastery refugees, Jews, and partisans, and when the Nazis burst in that night, they killed thirty-two civilians, six priests and six lay brothers. A commitment many paid for with their lives, considering that from July onwards, it coincided with the Nazi assault on civilians, resulting in civilian massacres (first and foremost, S. Anna di Stazzema), and which witnessed in the Lucca area a “special” division, the 16th SS division, that also showed persistent anticlerical tendencies, manifest in a sort of “hunt the priest”. The clergy operated in conjunction with the National Liberation Committee and underground anti-Fascist networks, sustained by a call up of school teachers, professionals – mainly lawyers and doctors – in accordance with the social configuration typical of a democratic Lucca, since the beginning of the twentieth century.

*Intellectuals and the Italian Communist Party [PCI] in the immediate post-war years*

The Liberation on 25 April 1945, gave rise to a period of rich political and intellectual ferment in Italy, marking the difficult transition to Republic and democracy. Its protagonists were primarily the cultures of the Left, long suppressed by the Fascist dictatorship, which encouraged fresh initiatives in every field: from literature to cinema, theatre, the arts, and academic research. The distinguishing feature was the discovery of social commitment and the desire to de-provincialise the country. The immediate post-war period appears to have acted as a stimulus in raising awareness among intellectuals who had, in various ways and with varying degrees of conviction, adhered in their youth to Fascism, attracted by its myths and its promises of breaking with the previous establishment.

This phenomenon was already evident in the pre-war years, when many members of Fascist youth organisations, disillusioned with the regime, had joined the clandestine Communist ranks, following a generational path that the writer Ruggero Zangrandi clearly described in his *Lungo viaggio attraverso il fascismo* [Long journey through Fascism]. Figures such as Pietro Ingrao and
Mario Alicata, who were later to hold senior positions in the PCI, indeed chose their battlefield at the very time of their experience in the University Fascist Group.

This progressive gravitation by many intellectuals towards the Italian Communist Party included, among others, the circle of Torinese intellectuals (connected in various ways to the Einaudi publishing house), as well as Milanese (Felice Balbo, Ceriani Sebregondi), Romans (Franco Rodano, Luciano Barca, Antonio Tatò, Gabriele De Rosa), or Neapolitans (Giorgio Amendola above all), a phenomenon widely documented by Luca La Rovere and, prior to him, Norberto Bobbio and Nicola Gallerano.

At this time, the PCI, on the strength of its experience in the Resistance and in advocating radical change in society, exercised a strong attraction for the youth of the time, born and raised under Fascism, who saw in it the opportunity of providing a new moral and political meaning to their lives. The PCI became the “new party” that represented the weaker classes in society and seemed capable of realising the great projects for change called for by the Resistance movement. It was the party of the workers, but also of many intellectuals who chose the path of political commitment and accepted the confrontation with social reality. The culture of the Left thus penetrated the academic world, among university lecturers and students, for whom it was often their first political experience.

The circle of intellectuals from Lucca (Giorgio Colli and his followers), who had congregated prior to 1950 at the “Normale” in Pisa, thus constituted a phenomenon common to other Italian cities in the decade between 1940 and 1950. In Lucca, it stood out as a minority group in a city that was “white”, in which the Christian Democrat Party and the system of ideology and power that sustained it received consensus in political elections that exceeded the absolute majority. Many of these intellectuals then spent the “cold war’ years in uncritical defence of the USSR and participating in the initiatives of mobilisation promoted by the PCI, such as that against Italy’s adhesion first to the North Atlantic Treaty, and then to NATO. It was only the events of 1956, and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, that determined a significant onset of awareness in these groups of intellectuals.
Born in Lucca in 1835, Elena Guerra dedicated herself to the education of young girls and, at the same time, was keen to re-awaken in the faithful prayer to the Holy Spirit, the “Great Unknown” of Christian piety. She would say: “Love is not known, Love is not loved”. In 1882, to put her aims into effect, with the approval of the Bishop of Lucca, Nicola Ghilardi, she founded the institute of the Oblate Sisters of the Holy Spirit (OSS), delegating to the sisters the education of young girls. She placed her work under the protection of Saint Zita (to whom a church in Lucca was dedicated), thus Elena’s followers became known as “Zitine”. She died in 1914 and was beatified by Pope John XXIII in 1959. From a congregation that was purely diocesan, namely local, as it expanded, in accordance with a practice common to all religious Orders, it became “of pontifical right”, in other words directly dependent on the Vatican in Rome.

After the Second Vatican Council which, in 1965, with the decree *Perfectae caritatis*, recommended the adaptation and renewal of religious congregations, the Oblates followed suit, albeit in a relatively superficial manner: they modified some of the internal rules governing their life, and simplified their attire.

But the expectations aroused by the Council were of a different nature, in reference for example to the theme of obedience. In countries, such as those in Latin America, in which the presence of the poor, or rather “impoverished” was central to the work of the religious institutions, the Second Vatican Council brought the awareness that it was indeed to this very People of God that obedience should be directed and who should be served, no longer the Father or Mother Superior of the day. Acceptance of this, however, would have thrown into discussion the institution of the Church as a whole and the pyramidal organisation at the head of a religious Order remained unchallenged, creating inevitable tensions, upheavals and suffering in those members of religious orders who observed with awareness the social context in which they operated. The system of nominations remained unchanged: the Father General of a religious Order nominated and still nominates a “provincial”, or person responsible for that Order in a
particular territory (Brazil or central-northern Italy, for example, depending on the distribution of the various communities) as well as a sort of “adjunct” who, *in pectore*, will be his successor. The same process occurred for the nomination by the provincial of the Superior (male or female) of every monastic or religious community. There was no election from below, at most a consultation, neither compulsory nor binding.

This system which, save for small and insignificant variations, concerned all the religious orders, both male and female, was still more restrictive in the case of the latter, given the overall circumstances of greater isolation experienced by women who, fulfilling no priestly role, have fewer opportunities for contact and confrontation with the outside world and, objectively, are more imprisoned by the institution in which they live: *perinde ac cadaver* (in the manner of a corpse) according to the canonical formula introduced by the Jesuits, signifying a total meekness/obedience. Objectively, this makes full integration more difficult for them: work, education, accommodation, pension, etc, once they have made the decision to leave the Order that welcomed them in their youth.

Currently, the Oblate dello Spirito Santo have approximately fifteen schools in Italy, and are involved in educational work in Canada, the Philippines, Cameroon and Rwanda (but no longer in Brazil, where they were active during the Sixties). In total, there are now about 220 Oblate dello Spirito Santo nuns.

*Italy and Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s*

At the end of the Second World War, blighted by Anglo-American bombing and Nazi reprisals, Italy was a nation in need of reconstruction; not only in economic and political terms, but above all civic ones. A divided country needed to be re-unified, and faith and meaning in a national unity re-established. By the early 1950s, however, recovery was already evident and, thanks to the gradual reduction of the agricultural sector in favour of the industrial sector and the service industries, transformations in the labour market and integration into the dynamic international economies (Marshall Plan), the ground was prepared for the so-called “economic
miracle” of the 1960s. Between 1958 and 1963, the growth rate of the Italian GDP reached the record level of 6.3% per annum and the negative effects of rapid urbanisation were outweighed by an overall improvement in the population’s living standards. The increase in individual consumption, in new sectors such as transport and communication (from 4.7% to 8.4% in only a few years) was facilitated by the continued growth in employment and, therefore, in salaries which, between 1950 and 1960, had increased by 142%.

The situation in Brazil during the same period was entirely different.

As far as economics was concerned, in the post-war years Brazilian policy oscillated between the initial laissez-faire policy of the late 1940s and the strongly nationalist characteristics of the first half of the subsequent decade under Getúlio Vargas, with strong public investment in the productive sector, transport and oil – in an attempt to strengthen the country’s freedom from dependency on external forces – and the developmentalism (desenvolvimentismo in Portuguese) supported at that time by ECLAC (United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America) whose greatest advocate was President Kubitscek.

Kubitscek’s administration (1956-1961), was in fact characterised by the encouragement of optimism, summarised by the slogan «50 years in 5»; nevertheless, despite GDP increasing at a rate of almost 7% per annum, the positive trend was neutralised by inflation and the need to increase public debt to finance such policy, also due to a deterioration in Brazil’s terms of trade, but above all to the lack of effects being distributed on a social level. The mobilisation of social sectors and the trade unions gave way, during this period, to a blind faith in the automatic expansion of collective wealth in the wake of modernisation and development.

The two decades between 1945 and 1964 were, more generally, marked by the collapse of the policies of conciliation of various interests typical of the populism of the Thirties. All this led to the re-emergence of old contradictions and the rise of fresh disputes, while the signs indicating critical conditions deteriorated considerably: unemployment and under-employment (in 1959, the number of people employed in the industrial sector was approximately 141 million, which had fallen to 12 million by
marginality, *favelas* (in 1975, there were two million children living on the streets), appalling inequalities in the distribution of wealth between the social classes and between states in the Federation, low wages (the minimum wage, received by over half the workforce fell from 100 in 1960, to 72 in 1967, sinking to 52 in 1974), lack of medical care, malnutrition, poverty (in 1970, the rate of illiteracy in males over 15 years old was 29.8%)\(^{116}\).

At the beginning of the Sixties, the financial crisis deteriorated and was soon accompanied by a political one.

*The military coup and dictatorship In Brazil*

The *golpe* of 1 April 1964 marked the beginning a new type of military intervention in the political life of Brazil, and was to produce many epigones across Latin America: no longer the rise of an official or group of officials to the head of government, essentially with the objective of becoming rich and wielding power, but the collective action of the Armed Forces as an organ of the State, with a comprehensive plan for society.

It was a “model” that soon spread to the rest of the South American continent (Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay) and which, only later, was revealed to have formed part of a much broader plan led by the United States to prevent, during this period in the Cold War, the consolidation of a Communist influenced front (Operation Condor).

Parties and social classes – even those who were favourable – were excluded from any decision-making process, which remained firmly in the hands of the highest ranks and a privileged bureaucracy, often referred to as bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes. Unlike other subsequent experiences, in Brazil the coup leaders maintained parliament (except for closing it down when necessary for varying lengths of time) and established an artificial two-party regime, while, as elsewhere, they resorted to the issuing of special laws and, in order to justify the coup, circulated the image of a sick society on which it was necessary to operate in order to save the healthy resources of the nation.

\(^{116}\) Source: IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics).
The regime’s axe came down heavily particularly on the parties, unions and combative organisations such as the Union of Students and the Peasant Leagues. This period was characterised by increasing restrictions on the mass-media, control over education and culture, the occupation and direct administration of many universities.

The basis of the military’s theoretical support was the doctrine of national security, replacing territorial boundaries with ideological ones and placing the external enemy alongside the internal one, represented by the broad and undefined category of “subversives”, among whom, together with political opponents, students and the workers, the Church also began to appear.

From the years immediately following the coup, as was later verified, the military government adopted methods of torture in an indiscriminate and systematic manner, administered by people trained for the purpose. Among the methods most commonly used, and later proven, were undoubtedly the pau de arara (a pole to which the prisoner was tied, head down and with wrists and ankles bound), electric shocks or the use of the ferule (a systematic beating resulting in the removal of the skin); or else all forms of water torture, sexual violence or that of a psychological nature, often resorting to the use of snakes, spiders or rats.

Although according to the report presented in December 2014 by the Comissão Nacional da Verdade at the behest of President Rousseff to throw light on the crimes committed during the dictatorship, the number of people killed or who disappeared in those years amounted to “only” 434 (while roughly 10,000 were exiled), in reality the numbers were much greater. In fact, as the report states, only the cases for which documentation was available were mentioned: documents belonging to the Brazilian army now appear to have been destroyed and therefore impossible to examine.

**Liberation Theology**

In 1968 the second Latin American Episcopal Conference was held in Medellín, Colombia: the moment had come to “translate”, adapting it to the specific reality of the continent, the Second Vatican Council, which had ended three years previously. In this
context, it highlighted the “structures of sin” in society, namely an economy that inevitably made the rich always richer, and the poor always poorer. Elaborating this line of thought, in 1971 Gustavo Gutierrez, a socially committed Peruvian theologian, published *A Theology of Liberation*, a work that placed the axis of the Church on the path ‘for’ and ‘with’ the poor, namely with all those to whom the beatitudes of evangelical preaching were addressed.

It was this very text that became the inspirational heart of an extraordinarily rich moment of intellectual output and experiences deeply rooted and differentiated, in urban and rural contexts, not only in Latin America, but across the globe. A reaction to this line of thought-action was inevitable, both on the part of the various dictatorial-military governments, and the summit of the Roman Catholic Church.

Among the principal exponents of Liberation Theology, mention should be made of figures such as the theologians Leonardo and Clodovi Boff, Hugo Assmann, Juan Luis Segundo, Jon Sobrino and above all the sacrifice of Oscar Arnulfo Romero and other martyrs murdered by the Salvadorian military juntas in the 1980s. Perhaps it is only under the present Pope, after pontificates, such as that of John Paul II, characterised by their reticence or clear opposition, that Liberation Theology and its exponents’ “prophetic” role in the history of the Church and society will be acknowledged.

*Education as the practice of freedom*

Education as the practice of freedom, or rather educating oneself to the practice of freedom. This lies at the heart of Paulo Freire’s pedagogical beliefs. An educational and pedagogical proposal that extends well beyond the method of literacy adopted by Freire himself, but which forms its basis.

Ensuring that adults living in conditions of poverty or oppression may learn to read and write, means breaking that culture of silence, «consisting of mutism and non participation», as Linda Bimbi recalls in her introduction to the first Italian edition of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, «which is the weighty legacy bequeathed by Portuguese colonialism to the Brazilian masses». 
In *Education, the Practice of Freedom*, Freire presents the new methodological tool of the Pedagogy of the oppressed: the culture Circle or thematic research Circle. «Ninguém educa ninguém, ninguém educa a si mesmo, os homens se educam entre si, mediatizados pelo mundo», Freire tells us. No one educates anyone else nor do we educate ourselves, we educate one another in communion in the context of living in this world. In communion. «… The liberation of the oppressed is a liberation of women and men, not things. Accordingly, while no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone, neither is he liberated by others. Liberation, a human phenomenon, cannot be achieved by semihumans. Any attempt to treat people as semihumans only dehumanises them. When people are already dehumanised, due to the oppression they suffer, the process of their liberation must not employ the methods of dehumanisation» (*The Pedagogy of Hope*).

The educator thus merely assumes the role of co-ordinator and, adopting a dialogical, active and critical method, those participating explore, in conjunction with others, the most significant words and themes in each of their lives, within their own semantic world and that of the community in which they live. The participant learns to know and recognise sounds, signs and words, generative of other new words but also of an historical awareness that becomes the beginning of a “painful labour”, as Freire defined the process of liberation: «[…] the labour which brings into the world this new being: no longer oppressor, no longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom» (*The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*).

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The “Basso System”

In 1974, Lelio Basso had established a Foundation in Rome at premises in Via della Dogana Vecchia, number 5. But firstly his participation in the Russell Tribunal, followed by the decision to launch a further session devoted to Latin America, led him to conceive the idea of a second foundation, the International Foun-

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117 This paragraph aims to present an overall view of the context in which Linda’s story took place from the early Seventies.
dation for the Liberation of Peoples, which was then established. This story is not as easy to summarise as other “official” stories. It accounts, albeit succinctly, for how it happened that the group of people who for many years considered Linda a motivational and institutional point of reference, observed, experienced and interacted with the world, beginning with Linda’s own office in the building in Via Dogana Vecchia, 5.

The events that occurred during that brief time (1974-1976) and the institutions founded on Lelio Basso’s initiative, with Linda’s close participation, are the result of a highly articulated and intense process not only to provide continuity to the results of the three sessions of the Russell Tribunal II on the Latin American dictatorships, but above all to transform the theoretical and political results of the work of research and denunciation into permanent and innovative tools.

The international Right of States, ascribable to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, no longer seemed capable, beyond its results on decolonisation, settled formally but not significantly with the demise of the Portuguese colonies, of tackling the new demands of law that had to view peoples as protagonists. Protagonists capable of self-determination, not only as far as external powers were concerned, but with regard to the models of life and policies to be selected internally and in international relations.

In addition, it was necessary to initiate a period of political, social and cultural exploration, to involve peoples, beyond the State, in a long-term movement of liberation.

In this context, the Declaration of Algiers, the product of an intense process of re-examination by representatives of peoples and international legal experts, became the platform of reference.

Later, the establishing of the League for the Rights and Freedom of Peoples acted as a tool for reflection-action capable of encouraging a raising of awareness, at international level, of the new functions of political affairs, in keeping with and extending beyond “solidarity”, which had enabled the Russell Tribunal II to become an instrument of awareness shared by right, for the many fragmented peoples in the dictatorships of Latin America.

For its part, the Lelio Basso International Foundation immediately became a meeting place and one of theoretical research on
the implications and developments necessary to make the Declaration of Algiers, in strict continuity with the militant commitment of the League, a platform of reference for a society facing the new challenges of a different and pervasive imperialism/colonialism of global dimensions.

To document the inevitable dramatic violations of the rights of peoples, which would follow on from each other in an unpunished and unpunishable manner, the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal was established so that the inviolable right of peoples to have a voice might be respected in a tangible way, thus substituting the lacuna-absence of the right of States in order to restore to the victims the dignity of truth and memory.

Thus, as we can see, a complex, extremely rich history, full of experiences, successes and failures: a network of institutions that has witnessed, over many years, the participation of people and movements that have experimented many paths, in a changing world.

The “Basso system”, as it was known for the sake of brevity, has in its turn changed too: the wonderful story of the League, which, particularly during the first fifteen years, was tied up with that of the Tribunal, has come to an end. The International Foundation continues to exist as an institutional and operational arm in collaboration with the original Lelio and Lisli Basso Foundation.

The challenges remain open, and increasingly topical in a world in which many of the “concerns”, highlighted together with the aspirations in the preamble of the Declaration of Algiers, have become serious obstacles in a more explicitly globalised world, increasingly established on positions that deny peoples the right to self-determination.

**The Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal**

The story of the theoretical development, experience and results of the Tribunal, officially inaugurated in Bologna in 1979, a few months after the death of Lelio Basso, who had drawn up its guidelines, has already been told in many publications that are easily accessible.

Nevertheless, to look back over an activity that has now been going for 35 years and numbers over forty sessions, and to place
it in the “narration” of this book, we only have to recall the development of its outline: from an organism for listening and responding, to an amplification system for the requests arising from the circumstances of peoples whose rights are being violated and which have remained unpunished as far as the international right of States is concerned.

This development can be traced through the Sessions devoted to:

- dictatorships, in their ever-changing forms, which are still the mainstay of the Tribunal’s work: from Argentina (1980), to Zaire (1982), Guatemala (1983) and, lastly, Algeria (2004);
- unrecognised peoples: from the Saharawi (1979), to Tibet (1992); children in the Session on the violation of the rights of childhood and minors (1995); and those of the Session on children and adolescents in Brazil (1999);
- the illegitimacy of International Law, in the Session on the Conquest of Latin America (1992), or in those dedicated to the malpractices of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (1988; 1994), and to the impunity of crimes against humanity in Latin America (1991) and the reintroduction of the “legitimacy” of war (2002);
- the “new” genocides, such as those in the former Yugoslavia (1995) and of the Eelam Tamil (2010-2013);
- the global criminality of free commerce, with the realisation of numerous sessions, on Colombia (2006-2008), on European transnational companies in Latin America (2006-2010), and, most recently, on Mexico (2011-2014).
4. Biographies. Linda’s encounters

**Altung von Geuseu, Leo G.M.** (1925-2002). Dutch theologian and anthropologist, he followed the procedures of the Second Vatican Council and was founder and secretary general of IDOC (International documentation on the contemporary Church). Played a key role in the development of the journal *Concilium*, which, since the Seventies, represents theological trends doctrinally, socially and culturally more open in their interreligious dialogue. In the 1980s, his anthropological research on the Akha people in Thailand led him to devote himself full time to the battle for their rights and to adopt their way of life (in 1981, he married an Akha woman); until his death in 2002, he worked with several NGOs to guarantee them access to education and citizenship.

**Altvater, Elmar** (1938). One of the most prominent intellectuals of the German Left. Until September 2004, Professor of Political Sciences at the Otto-Suhr Institute of the Free University of Berlin (*Freie Universität*). Currently Professor Emeritus in the same faculty, he continues to collaborate, publishing books and articles, and is author of numerous works on globalisation and critiques of capitalism. In addition to issues on development theory, the debt crisis and regulation of the markets, he continues to work on the effects of the capitalist economies on the environment. He was a member of the Bundestag Commission of Inquiry, The World Economy (1999–2002). He is currently a supporter of ATTAC (he is a member of its Scientific Advisory Board) and the World Social Forum. A member of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal since its creation, he has been promoter and protagonist of several key sessions, particularly those on the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (1988; 1994), and those on transnational companies (2005-2014). He was president of the Lelio Basso International Foundation.

**Arraes de Alencar, Miguel** (1916-2005). Governor of the State of Pernambuco from 1962 to 1964, prior to the military coup.


*Balducci, Ernesto* (1922-1992). Born near Monte Amiata, the eldest of four children, as a child he was sent to study at Scolopi (a religious foundation dedicated to the education of the poor). He was ordained as a priest in 1944 and immediately sent to Florence after its liberation, where he taught in the Scuole Pie Fiorentine and graduated in Letters in 1950 with a thesis on Antonio Fogazzaro. He was one of the most prominent figures in Italian Catholic cultural circles in the period during and after the Second Vatican Council. In 1958, he founded the magazine *Testimonianze*, with a group of friends and young people associated with “Cenacolo” and began an intense programme promoting debate on ecclesiological issues. The title of the magazine referred to a faith founded on the value of testimony, in accordance with the spiritual model of Charles de Foucauld’s *Little Brothers*. The hostility of the diocesan Curia, the consequence of censure towards the innovative upheavals in the Catholic Church that characterised the latter stages of the pontificate of Pope Pius XII, led to his removal from Florence. “Exile” in Frascati and then in Rome, where he followed events relating to the pontificate of Pope John XXIII, gave him the opportunity of examining at first hand the changes stemming from Vatican II, of which he was a staunch supporter, engaged in the study and dissemination of the conciliar debate. In the 1970s, he was one of the architects of the dialogue with circles linked to the Italian Communist Party, with the aim of demolishing many cultural and political barriers. During the 1980s, he was an eminent voice in the campaign for disarmament. In 1986, he founded the publishing house Edizioni
Cultura della Pace (ECP). Balducci’s thought comprised the great “global issues” of human rights, respect for the environment, cooperation, solidarity and peace, on a cultural frontline between believers and non-believers. Of great significance was an article he published in 1983 in the magazine *Testimonianze*, in which he denounced the Eurocentric view of the world, paying homage to Islam and defining it as medieval Europe’s “vital link” with Hellenic civilisation. He died in 1992, following a serious car accident, just before the publication of the first of a series of books in the Le Caravelle collection, which he had promoted to mark the five hundredth anniversary of the “conquest” of America.

*Barbero, Franco* (1939). Ordained as a priest in 1963, from the early 1970s he was involved in the basic Christian communities movement. In 1983, with others, he founded the basic Christian community of Pinerolo, whose path he continued to follow until March 2014, when, again in Pinerolo, he established a new basic community, the “Casa dell’ascolto e della preghiera” [House of Listening and of Prayer]. Since 1975, he has assumed positions that are in contrast to the teachings of the Catholic Church with regard to social issues: in 2003, he was dismissed from the priesthood and relieved from obligations of celibacy.

*Bolelli, Tristano* (1913-2001), attended the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa, and after teaching Linguistics in Rome (from 1942 to 1944), he moved to the University of Pisa, where he was to spend his entire academic career. He became Head of the Institute of Linguistics in 1948, succeeding his teacher Clemente Merlo, until 1983. From 1950 to 1958, he was also deputy director of the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa.

*Câmara Hélder Pessoa* (1909-1999), Catholic archbishop and Brazilian theologian, from a humble background, the eleventh of thirteen children. Ordained as a priest in 1931 in Rio de Janeiro, where he was appointed bishop in 1952. There, he founded the *Banco de Providência* in order to help the poor. He took part in the Second Vatican Council, and was one of the advocates of the “preferential option for the poor” which formed the basis of the
‘pact’ signed in 1965 in the catacombs of Domitilla, in which a substantial number of bishops agreed to live lives of poverty. On 12 March 1964, he was appointed Archbishop of Olinda and Recife by Paul VI. Entering the city, he chose not to be welcomed in the Cathedral, but in the square, among the people and began his address by saying: “In north-east Brazil, Jesus Christ is called Zè, Maria and Severino. He has dark skin and lives in poverty”. His views on the causes of poverty produced by systems of injustice (“It’s not enough to say that the poor don’t have bread: you have to say ‘why’ they don’t have bread”) brought him to the attention of the leaders of the Brazilian dictatorship and the “death squadrons”, who christened him o bispo vermelho, the red bishop, and although he had supported conservative views at the beginning of his priesthood, he did not hesitate to denounce the excesses of the military. He left his diocese in 1985, when he was forced to retire due to his age.

_Candia, Marcello_ (1916-1983), entrepreneur and lay missionary. After gaining three degrees (in Chemistry, Pharmacy and Biology), followed by a twenty-five year career as an industrialist, he decided to leave his father’s firm in Milan and become a missionary in Brazil. He invited doctors from the Italian Medical School for missionaries, founded in 1948, and the Italian Medical Missionary Union (UMMI) to travel to missions to work with the missionaries. He decided to go in person to Amazonia, where he would earn the title “the kindest man in Brazil” and devoted himself entirely to this task. Turning his back on a comfortable life, he arrived in Macapá, where he began to build a hospital, and to establish a leper colony and a school for nurses. There are currently 33 institutions in Brazil that owe their existence to the Dr Marcello Candia Foundation.

_Cantimori, Delio_ (1904-1966), studied at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa, graduating in 1928 in Letters and Philosophy. In 1929, he was appointed to the chair of History and Philosophy for High Schools and became a teacher in Cagliari. In 1931, he gained a second degree in German Literature at the University of Pisa and moved to Pavia. After a series of posts in various universities in Italy and abroad, he returned to Rome as editor
of the journal of the Italian Institute of Germanic Studies and director of the library, and then moved to Messina. In 1940, he was recalled to the Scuola Normale by Gentile, interrupting his teaching during the period of the Republic of Salò, and taking up his post at the Normale again in 1944, with the appointment of Luigi Russo as the Scuola's director.

Cardenal, Ernesto (1925). Nicaraguan monk, presbyter and poet. He participated in the 1954 April Revolution, a failed attempt to overthrow the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua. After spending time in the Trappist community founded by Thomas Merton in Kentucky, he became the founder of the Solentiname Community, based on the principles of non-violence. Exiled from his own country, in 1976 in this role he was witness and judge in the final session of the Russell Tribunal II on Latin America.

He was a member of the Sandinista National Liberation Front, which overthrew the Somoza regime in 1979, and for his part in the revolution, he was suspended a divinis by John Paul II during his visit to Nicaragua in 1983. As Minister of Culture in the new government led by Daniel Ortega, he was protagonist and promoter (also through his poetry Laboratories) of the literacy campaign, acknowledged by UNESCO as a model of participation and creativity. His poetical works have earned him recognition as one of the major poets in the Spanish language during the past decades. Of note is the recent publication Cosmic Canticle, which can be considered the formal and visionary synthesis of his entire poetic.

Castellina, Luciana (1929). Journalist and writer, born in Rome. In 1947, she took part in the First World Festival of Youth in Prague, after which she enrolled in the Italian Communist Youth Federation (FGCI), where she became editor of the journal Nuova generazione, and then in the Italian Communist Party (PCI). In 1969, she was one of the founders of the daily newspaper Il Manifesto, and then, in 1974, of PDUP (Partito di Unità Proletaria per il Commnunismo). In 1984, with PDUP, she returned to the PCI until 1991, when it was transformed into the PDS (Democratic Party of the Left). During this period, her commitment to peace and human rights led her to become one of
the principal voices of the journal Guerra e pace. In 1995, with the Movimento dei comunisti unitari, Luciana Castellina became director of the weekly Liberazione. Since 1976, she has been elected four times as a member of parliament but completed her mandate only in the first legislature. Elected as a member of the European Parliament in 1979 (PDUP), in 1984 (PCI), in 1989 (PCI) and in 1994 (PRC) until 1999, she has been president of the Commission for culture, youth, education and means of information (1994-1997) and the Commission for External Economic Affairs (1997-1998). Her own introduction to this book best describes the essence of her relationship with the Basso system and the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal.

Colli, Giorgio (1917-1979) was an Italian philosopher, philologist and historian of philosophy. He taught History of Ancient Philosophy at the University of Pisa for thirty years. From 1942 until 1949, he was professor of philosophy at the “Machiavelli” High School in Lucca, with a break from the spring of 1944 until the summer of 1945 when he sought refuge in Lugano, Switzerland, fleeing from the Republic of Salò and where he taught Latin and Greek in a study camp for political exiles. During the years spent in Lucca he formed the group of friends – including Mazzino Montinari and Angelo Pasquinelli – with whom he would subsequently share his life, plans and work; it was with them that he wrote his first book, Physis kryptesthai philei. Studi di filosofia greca (1948), earning him the lecturing post that enabled him to become lecturer in History of Ancient Philosophy at the University of Pisa, remaining there for the rest of his career. Other members of this same group included Fausto Codino, Piero Giorgetti, Gigliola Gianfrancesco Pasquinelli, Nino Cappelletti, Clara Valenziano, Linda Bimbi, Enrico Ramundo, Olga Tulini and Valentino Parlato. Colli was also responsible for the first critical edition of the works and correspondence of Friedrich Nietzsche, in collaboration with his principal pupil, Mazzino Montinari.

Cuminetti, Mario (1934-1995). «He was one of the first in Italy to speak, also in a critical way, about Liberation Theology... a very dear friend who shared with us the very first moments of our as-
similation in Italy and who has enriched us with our own theological science and communication, because he always placed himself on the same level as us, never acting as a teacher» (voice of the Community). After studying at the seminary in Bergamo, he obtained his doctorate in Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. He carried out pastoral duties in parishes in Comacchio, Florence, Bibbiena (Arezzo) and then, until 1967, at the Catholic University in Milan. His association with Father Ernesto Balducci and the group linked to the journal Testimonianze also began in the same year. After Vatican II, he actively participated in various “critical movements” within the Catholic Church, highlighting his disagreement with the ecclesiastical authorities. Stripped of his university teaching, he intensified his campaigning and his contacts with the world of the basic Christian communities and social movements, which led him in the 1970s, prior to his untimely death, to become one of the cultural protagonists in Milanese circles (starting with his collaboration with the “Corsia dei Servi” and its founders David Maria Turoldo and Camillo De Piaz, and then the Tadino bookshop, after his estrangement from the Corsia due to his opposition to the repeal of the divorce law). His fields of interest embraced the most topical issues of the time, from terrorism to prisons, characterised by a highly original approach.

De Abreu Dallari, Dalmo (1931). Brazilian jurist educated at the Faculty of Law, University of São Paulo. In 1996, he became UNESCO Professor in the chair of Education for Peace, Human Rights, Democracy and Tolerance, established in the University of São Paulo. In 2001, he published a work entitled The Future of the State, based on the concept of world State, of a state-less world, the so-called Super States, the various affluent States. In the capacity of judge, he collaborates with the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal.

De Sousa, Luiza Erundina (1934), born in Uiraúna, in the Northeast Region of Brazil. Brazilian politician and the first woman, on the left, to be elected mayor of São Paulo (1989-1993); she is currently Federal deputy of the State of São Paulo for the Partito Socialista Brasiliano. After a degree in Social Sciences, she moved to São Paulo (1971) to work as a social worker
with migrants originating from the north-east of the country and living in the city’s favelas. In 1980, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, leader of the unions at the time, invited her to become one of the founding members of the Partidos dos Trabalhadores (PT - the Workers’ Party). It was through Lula that Luiza Erundina met Linda Bimbi and the Community. In 1996, Linda wrote a book about her: *Sono Emigrante - Luiza Erundina si racconta a Linda Bimbi*, published in Brazil by Editoria Brasiliense SA under the title *Uma Veia de Utopia - A trajetória de Luiza Erundina de Sousa*. Since the 1990s, she has been a member of the jury of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal, of which she is currently vice-president.

*De Souza Martins, José* (1938), Brazilian writer and sociologist, Head of the Department of Sociology (now retired) and Professor Emeritus (2008) of the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences at the University of São Paulo. In 2002, he was appointed representative “pro-bono” (“for the good of the people”), for free, in charge of the Provision of Services to the Community, the University of São Paulo of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso at the inter-ministerial commission preparing the National Program for the Eradication of Child and Forced Labour. He worked in the Commission and coordinated its activity from November 2001 until December 2002, appointed by the Minister of Justice, within the Department of Human Rights. He collaborates with the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal.

*Della Morte, Gabriele* (1974). Born in Naples, he graduated in Law. He is Associate Professor of International Law and European Union Law and researcher in International Law in the Faculty of Jurisprudence at the Catholic University of Milan. He got to know Linda and consequently the Basso Foundation in 1998-1999 when, on leaving university, he decided to enrol in the Neapolitan School for the Rights of Peoples. He currently collaborates as a juror with the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal.

*Dorfman, Vladimiro Ariel* (1942), Argentine-Chilean novelist, playwright, essayist, academic and human rights activist. From 1970-1973, he was cultural advisor to Salvador Allende and, after
the military coup that overthrew him, was forced to leave Chile. He is now professor of Latin American Studies in the United States.

Drago, Tonino (1938). Since the late 1950s, he has lived for many years in Naples, contributing to the non-violence movement, to the spontaneous groups of the latter half of the Sixties and the Movement of local schools of the people which, following the example of the School of Barbiana established by Don Lorenzo Milani, had spread throughout poor neighbourhoods in the city centre and its outskirts. Lecturer in Physics and Laboratory Science in Industrial Technical Colleges in Naples, he has subsequently taught History of Philosophy at the Federico II University in Naples. Founder and collaborator of the magazine Il Tetto, he has always been involved in the dissemination of education on peace and non-violence, he is part-time lecturer on Strategies of popular non-violent defence in Pisa.

First, Ruth (1925-1982), sociologist and anti-apartheid activist, as a “white”, she was part of the defence team in the trial against 156 activists accused of treason against the State, including Nelson Mandela. Forced into exile, she continued her intensive activity in trials for freedom, also collaborating, as vice-president, with the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal, contributing in particular to one of its fundamental sessions on East Timor held in Lisbon. She was killed at the University of Maputo in Mozambique, where she was teaching, by a parcel bomb sent by a senior officer in the South African Police.

Forti, Marina, born in Milan. Journalist, from 1983 she worked for many years for the newspaper Il Manifesto, where she covered international events, immigration and the environment. Formerly chief editor for foreign affairs, as a correspondent she travelled extensively in Iran, the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. In 1999, she received the “Journalist of the Month” award for her column terraterra. Marina Forti recounted some of these reportages in her book La signora di Narmada, le lotte degli sfollati ambientali nel sud del mondo (2004), and in Il cuore di tenebre dell’India. Inferno sotto il miracolo (2012), a reportage on the
insidious social conflict in India. Lecturer at the Basso Foundation's School of Journalism.

_Foubert, Henri-Charles_ (1943-1987). A missionary in the Philippines from the late Sixties to early Seventies, he worked with IDOC and was one of the founders of INTERDOC, a telecommunications network to interconnect the documentation centres of the developing world. He died in a car accident in Sierra Leone while on a mission for FAO.

_Fragoso, Antônio_ (1920-2006), Brazilian bishop and theologian, who identified himself with the policies of Vatican II and ideas of Liberation Theology. Linda described him thus: «he was a bishop who identified with his people, he stated its case and increased its awareness and represented the first true rift in the sociological compactness of the Latin American episcopate». In Bimbi L., _I cristiani rivoluzionari in America Latina_, in AA.VV, _Marxismo, democrazia e diritto dei popoli_, Franco Angeli, Milan, 1979.

_Fraudatario, Simona_ (1980). After graduating in Foreign Languages and Literature in 2004, she joined the Basso Foundation as an intern following national community service. She works as a researcher in the Basso Foundation's International Section and since 2004, together with Gianni Tognoni, has coordinated the work of the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal.

_Frei Betto_ (1944), Carlos Alberto Libânio Christo. Born in Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais, Brazil), as a Dominican friar, he studied anthropology, philosophy and theology. He met Linda in the early Sixties, at a time when political activism was spreading in the universities and among Catholic youth groups: in fact, at the time, Betto was an activist in the JEC (Catholic Student Movement) and became one of the youngest and most innovative followers of Liberation Theology. Under the Brazilian dictatorship, he was imprisoned on two occasions, in 1964 and then from 1969 until 1973. A journalist and writer, author of more than 50 books, he continues his intense involvement with popular movements, basic church communities and the Church's so-
cial care. In 2003-2004, he was special advisor to the Brazilian President Lula and coordinator of the mass mobilisation for the Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) programme. In 2013, he was awarded the International José Marti Prize by UNESCO in recognition of his work as educator, writer and theologian; for his opposition to every form of discrimination, injustice and exclusion and for his work in promoting a culture of peace and human rights in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Freire, Paulo (1921-1997). Brazilian educator and innovative theoretician of education “as practice of freedom”, member of theology movements and of the philosophy of liberation. In 1946, he was appointed head of the Department of Education and Culture of the Social Services in the State of Pernambuco, and in 1961 head of the Department for Cultural Extension at the University of Recife. In 1962, he was given the first opportunity to apply his theories extensively, when three hundred sugarcane workers in the town of Angicos (Rio Grande do Norte) learnt to read and write in forty-five days. In response to this experiment, as literacy was a requirement for voting in presidential elections, the Brazilian government approved the creation of thousands of cultural circles all over the country. In 1964, the military coup brought this initiative to an end: Freire was imprisoned as a traitor for seventy days. After a brief period of exile in Bolivia, he worked for five years in Chile for the Christian Democratic Agrarian Reform Movement and, in 1967, published his first book, Education as the Practice of Freedom. In 1968, he published Pedagogy of the Oppressed and in 1969 was offered the post of visiting professor at Harvard University. A year later, Freire moved to Geneva, Switzerland, to work as a special educational advisor to the World Council of Churches.

Following both of their escapes from the brutality of the Brazilian military regime, it was there that he met Linda Bimbi, who was to invite him regularly to her Community in Rome and was to oversee the translation into Italian of three of his fundamental works: Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Mondadori, Milan, 1971); Education as the Practice of Freedom (Mondadori, Milan, 1977); Pedagogy in Process. Letters to Guinea Bissau (Mondadori, Milan, 1979).
Gagliardi, Hélio Márcio (1939) is a retired high school teacher. He taught at the Colégio Helena Guerra in Belo Horizonte from 1963 to 1966. He was hired as professor of Cinema and this was his first professional job. With Linda’s approval, he set up a cinema club in the evening for some of the Colégio’s pupils, showing films that were socially and politically engaged, with the aim of confronting the girls with reality.


Galeano, Eduardo Hughes (1940-2015). Born in Montevideo, Uruguay, a journalist, writer and novelist. He became the point of reference for the historiography (and the politics of resistance) of Latin America with his book *Open Veins of Latin America*, reprinted more than thirty times. When the military came to power in Uruguay in 1973 in the wake of a coup, Galeano was imprisoned and then forced to escape. He settled in Argentina, where he founded the cultural magazine *Crisis*. In 1976, following the bloody coup d’état and the beginning of the Videla regime in Argentina, his name was added to the list of those condemned by the “death squads”; once again, he was forced to flee, this time to Spain, where he wrote the famous *Memory of Fire* trilogy. At the beginning of 1985, Galeano returned to Montevideo, where he continued to live, writing prolifically (all of his works have now been translated) and attending international conferences. A member of the jury of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal since its foundation, he composed for the activities of the International League for the Rights and Freedom of Peoples and for various sentences delivered by the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal summings-up that, in addition to their didactic and doctrinal content, are veritable models of literary style and synthesis.

Giraldo, Moreno Javier (1944). Colombian Jesuit priest. As a priest in a poor neighbourhood of Bogotà, he took an interest in the defence of human rights right from the start. Since its foun-
dation, he has played an active role in the International League for the Rights and Freedom of Peoples and the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, of which he is currently vice-president. In 1988, he founded the “Justice and Peace” Commission, consisting of forty-five Catholic religious congregations. From 1989 to 1991, he coordinated the highly significant session of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal on impunity and crimes against humanity in Latin America. In 1997, he received the John Humphrey Freedom Award in recognition of his work in the fight for human rights.

Girardet, Giorgio (1919-2011). Born into a Protestant family of French origin, he graduated in Letters and Theology at the Waldensian Faculty in Rome. During the war, he was held prisoner in Germany until 1945, when he recommenced his theological studies in Zurich and at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, near Geneva. Ordained as a priest in 1947, director of the Agape Ecumenical Centre from 1960 to 1966, in Rome in 1966 he founded the evangelical current affairs weekly Nuovi Tempi, which merged in 1973 with Com, a magazine of Catholic dissent, creating the historical ecumenical magazine Com Nuovi Tempi, now entitled Confronti.

Girardet, Maria Sbaffi (1927-2011). She held numerous positions in the Union of Methodist and Waldensian Churches and in the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy (FCEI). From 1985 to 1991, she directed the NEV News Agency and until the end of the 1980s was Secretary General of the IDOC Documentation Centre.

Ippolito, Franco (1946). Magistrate, president of Section and Secretary General of the Italian Court of Cassation. He was national Secretary of Democratic Judiciary, President of the National Association of Magistrates, director General of the Judicial Organisation of the Ministry of Justice. On behalf of the United Nations, governments, supreme courts of justice and associations of magistrates and jurists, he has conducted numerous international missions in Europe and Latin America. Since 2014, he has been president of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal.
Joannes, Vittorino (1931-2012). Friar minor (Franciscan) ordained as a priest in 1956. After participating in the Second Vatican Council as a consultant, he worked for twenty years at IDOC (International and inter-confessional documentation Centre), with specific responsibility for relations with the Universities and Protestant and Orthodox bodies. During the same period, he also contributed to the international theology magazine *Concilium*, and thanks to his knowledge of ancient and modern languages, became actively involved in the translation, presentation and publication of books on theology in Italian, English, German, Dutch, French, Portuguese, Spanish and Polish for major publishing houses. Of particular note was the part he played in the life of Italian “civil society” in the form of the series of publications *Nuovo Documento* (Mondadori) dealing with the most significant struggles of the Seventies. He also produced critical audiovisual documentation on the Holy Land; the comparative history of religions; the times of San Carlo (Borromeo??); highly original contributions to medieval history, his “public readings” on Bach, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Mahler, using their historical and personal contexts as a starting point, in extremely popular weekly courses held over ten years.

Joinet, Louis (1934). One of the most original and prolific French jurists, independent expert at the UN Human Rights Council. Advisor to François Mitterand (1981-1993), in 1997 he formulated the principles against impunity of the UN High Commission for Human Rights, known as “Joinet principles”. His memoirs were published in 2013.

La Valle, Raniero (Rome, 1931). After graduating in Law, towards the end of the Fifties he became director of the newspaper *Il Popolo*, before being appointed to direct *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, a Bologna-based Catholic daily that became one of the most respected sources of information on proceedings during the Second Vatican Council. He resigned from the paper in 1967, but continues to work as a journalist, producing for the Italian broadcasting company RAI documentaries and investigative reports on current issues, particularly those concerning peace and interna-
tional justice. In 1976, he became a member of parliament for the independent Left, and worked in the Foreign and Defence Commissions of both Houses until 1992, in particular on the reform of the law on conscientious objection. Much of his energy is devoted to oppressed peoples, whether through international civil institutions (he is a member of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal), or through his numerous works.

*Marsan, Veniero Ajmone* (1918-2007). Economist, born in Turin. In 1946, he was hired by IRI (institute for Industrial reconstruction) and worked in research. He was a member of the advisory board of ILO (International Labour Organisation), a UN specialised agency promoting the respect of rights in the workplace.

*Masina, Ettore* (1928), born in Breno, in Val Camonica (BS). In 1952, he began his career as a journalist working for the newspaper *Il Giorno*, for which he became Vatican correspondent. Moving to Rome in 1964, in this role he covered the Second Vatican Council, publishing articles that were to become celebrated in media circles. Paul VI, with whom Masina enjoyed a close friendship, invited him to accompany him on his trip to Israel. On that occasion, Masina met Paul Gauthier, a French worker-priest who was living in Palestine, where, as a carpenter, he had embarked on a remarkable experience of solidarity with the poor. Together they founded an association of international solidarity “Rete Radié Resch”, named after a young Palestinian girl who was living in a cave in Bethlehem and had died of pneumonia while awaiting a proper home. It was thus that Masina responded to Gauthier’s appeal, inviting him to change his outlook on life and his commitment as a believer. Again as a journalist specialising in religious issues, from 1969 he worked for RAI and in 1976 began to direct the news broadcast TG2. In 1983, he abandoned journalism for politics. He was a member of parliament for the independent Left in the list of the Italian Communist Party, for several terms of office until 1992 and, as a member of parliament, was involved with the Commission for Foreign Affairs and the Permanent Committee for Human Rights. After the disbanding of the PCI, he was
a member of the directorate of the PDS. Having terminated his political career, he continues to work as a journalist and writer, an attentive observer of political and ecclesiastical affairs and the animator of cultural debates throughout Italy.

**Matarasso, Leo** (1911-1998). Lawyer. Since his participation in the Nuremburg trials, he was one of the most consistent and authoritative protagonists, both on a doctrinal and a militant level, in the fight for human rights and the rights of peoples. He played a decisive role, as legal representative for the Algerian National Liberation Front, and lawyer for the journalist Henri Alleg who denounced the use of torture in Algeria, North Africa. He participated in the Russell Tribunal on Vietnam, and worked closely with Lelio Basso on the Russell Tribunal II on Latin America, in the formulation of the Algiers Declaration, on the constitution of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal (being an extremely active member in many key sessions right up to the Nineties), and in the organisation of the International League for the Rights and the Freedom of Peoples, of which he was the first (and for many decisive years) president and activist.

**Mattelart, Armand** (1936). Belgian sociologist and theoretician of the media and communication. Contributes to Catholic youth movements on the problems of the poorest nations. In 1962, he moved to Chile, where he taught Sociology at the Catholic University and was involved in the establishing of the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Nacional (Centre for the Study of the National Reality) by Jacques Chonchol, who was to become Minister for Agriculture under Salvatore Allende. After General Pinochet’s military coup, he left Chile and went to France, where he still lives. Between 1971 and 1972, Dorfman and Mattelart together published the book *Para leer el pato Donald* (*How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*), which became a critical best-seller, banned in the United States, on the trans-national power of the multinationals and mass culture.

**Menchú, Rigoberta** (1959), indigenous Guatemalan. A pacifist, through her testimonial biography (translated as *I, Roberta*...
Menchú), in 1983 she was a key witness in the Session of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal on Guatemala. In 1992, she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of her fight for social justice and the rights of indigenous peoples.

Menesini, Rolando (1926-2011). Born in Lucca, he was ordained a priest in 1950. After several positions, he was appointed to the parish of Bicchio, a neighbourhood of Viaraggio. There, together with Don Sirio Politi, he carried out his priestly duties as part of a group of “worker-priests”.

Mongillo Dalmazio, Antonio (1928-2005). Dominican priest and theologian, he taught Moral Theology at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas in Rome. He wrote numerous books and articles on the relationship between faith and politics and between faith and morals. He spent the last five years of his life in Bari, living the Convent of San Nicola, where he occupied the position of Head of the Ecumenical-Patristic, Greek-Byzantine Institute of Theology.

Montinari, Mazzino (1928-1986). Studied at the “Machiavelli” high school and with Professor Giorgio Colli, and was a member of the “group from Lucca”. Immediately after the war, he obtained a place at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa, from where he graduated in 1949. Following the defeat of Fascism, he became an activist in the Italian Communist Party, where he was responsible for translating texts from German. In the late 1950s, with Giorgio Colli, he embarked on the Italian translation of the works of Nietzsche. After examining the collection of his works and manuscripts in Weimar, Colli and Montinari decided to begin a new, critical version. It became a standard text for scholars, and was published in Italy by Adelphi, as well as in French, German and Dutch.

Nesti. Arnaldo (1932). Took his vows and found himself involved in the upheavals of 1968 and the aftermath of Vatican II. Deputy Assistant of ACLI (Catholic Association of Italian Workers) and Professor of Sociology at the Pontifical University in
Rome, in 1967 he defended his doctoral thesis on Gramsci’s religious thought. He then oversaw the publication of *L’altra Chiesa in Italia* (The other Church in Italy), a book that was strongly attacked by the ecclesiastical authorities. Nesti found himself in the position of having to decide whether to remain a priest or embark on a new phase in his life. The invitation to work at the international IDOC magazine in Rome and the opportunity of teaching Sociology at the University of Florence led him to choose the latter.

**Noronha, Marcos Antonio** (1924-1998). Seminarian in Belo Horizonte, priest in Guaxupé and bishop in Itabira. At the end of 1970, after becoming the victim of unfounded slander, Noronha officially resigned from the episcopacy and, continuing his educational mission, became Professor and director of the Faculty of Science and Letters in Guaxupé. Six years later, he moved to Belo Horizonte, where he married and assumed a prominent role in the Ministry for Education, and also of Planning, in Minas Gerais State.

**Paoli, Arturo** (1912-2015). Born in Lucca, he was a priest and member of the Congregation of the Little Brothers of the Gospel; he was “Righteous among nations” for having saved the lives of many Jews persecuted under the Nazi and Fascist regimes, risking his own life in the process. Ordained in 1940, in 1949 he became national deputy assistant of Gioventú cattolica, but in 1954, due to disagreements with the Church hierarchy, he was dismissed and sent to be chaplain on a ship carrying migrants to Argentina. He met a member of the Little Brothers and decided to join the Congregation. In 1960, disillusioned with the Vatican, he decided to leave Italy and move to Argentina, where he spent thirteen years, before ending up on the list of those condemned to death by the dictatorial regime: he spent twelve years in Venezuela and then twenty in Brazil, working as a preacher and pastoral carer with young people and in the community. He was one of the promoters of the movements born in Latin America from Liberation Theology. In 2006, he returned to Italy, and to Lucca, where he lived at the Church of San Martino in Vignole, continuing his mission of testimony.
Pegna, Vera (1934). Born in Alexandria, Egypt, she was descended from an old Jewish family that had fled from Spain to Livorno. In the early nineteenth century, her ancestors had moved from Livorno to Alexandria. She graduated in Foreign Languages in Geneva, and is president of the Religions Free Foundation and representative of the Humanist Federation. Her political and social activism led her to Sicily, collaborating initially with Danilo Dolce, and then the Communist party. During the Russell Tribunal on Vietnam, she offered her services as interpreter, marking the beginning of her association with Lelio Basso on issues affecting the Far (Vietnam Committee), Middle and Near East (rights of the Palestinian people).

Pérez Esquivel, Adolfo (1931). Argentine Catholic activist and sculptor, from the end of the Sixties he devoted himself entirely to non-violent activism in support of human and civil rights, wherever these were violated. In 1971, he was instrumental in founding the Servicio paz y justicia en América Latina, for which he was co-ordinator general from 1974 until 1986. He has campaigned in all the Latin American countries subjected to military regimes, but from 1976, particularly in Argentina, following General Videla’s takeover of the country, with a continuous campaign for clarity with regard to the disappearance of thousands of opponents to the regime, for which he was tortured and imprisoned by the junta (1977-1978). For his campaigning, in 1977 he was awarded the Pope John XXIII Peace Memorial and in 1980, the Nobel Peace Prize. President of the International League for the Rights and Freedom of Peoples (1987-2000), he is the author of Caminando junto a los Pueblos [Walking with the People] (1995), a reflection on the experiences of non-violent protest on the Latin American continent. He is currently a member of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal.

Poeta, Sergio (1952). Brought up in some of the Iron Curtain countries, he moved to Italy with his family at the age of 12. He lives in Rome, where he works as a travel agent. He first met Lelio Basso and Linda in 1973, at the time of the Russell Tribunal II. Barely twenty, and recently returned from a solo trip
around Latin America after high school lasting roughly two years, he became interested in the proceedings of the Russell Tribunal II and decided to go and talk to Basso, offering to collaborate. It was Linda who asked Poeta to go to Brazil and to carry out a photographic reportage of the work being done at the time on the Trans-Amazonian Highway. This marked the beginning of Poeta’s association with the Basso Foundation and until 1982, he attended on a daily basis: Poeta also collaborated on the preparation of the initial sessions of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal. He is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Lelio and Lisli Basso Foundation ISSOCO.

Politi, Sirio (1920-1988). Ordained in Lucca in 1943, he became parish priest in Bargecchia, a small town in the hills behind Viareggio. During the ten years he spent working in the parish, he set out on a path of a development due primarily to the contacts he had started to cultivate with the movement of the French worker-priests and the Little Brothers and Little Sisters of Jesus. In February 1956, he descended the hill, heading towards the sea and following his desire to liberate himself from everything, to reduce his ministry to the essential and to immerse himself in the reality of Viareggio’s docks, among the fishermen and labourers. There, he found shelter in a makeshift shed at the mouth of the Toscana dock, given to him by the harbourmaster on the condition that he should turn it into a chapel and a home for himself. It was thus that the “Chiesetta del Porto” originated, small, white and surrounded by vegetation, the home of a worker-priest, the first in Italy, who was to bind his destiny to the struggle of the workers and spiritual exploration with equal passion.

Regidor, José Ramos (1930). Spanish theologian and Salesian, who has lived in Italy since the 1970s. He belonged to the same group of Salesian teachers as Giulio Girardi and Gerardo Lutte; together, they came to radical decisions on ways to live and the practice of faith outside the order. In 1973, he started to work for IDOC and to collaborate with the journal Com-Nuovi Tempi. He is considered one of the principal advocates of Liberation Theology in Italy. His best-known works include Il sacramento della

Rezende, Maria Valeria (1942), Brazilian educator and writer, who has always been committed to popular education, initially within the Congregation of Our Lady - Cônegas Sant’Agostino, and then in her secular life. A friend of Frei Betto, it was through her that his letters arrived in Europe and came into Linda Bimbi’s hands.

Rigaux, François (1926-2013), professor of International Law at Louvain University, he became a key figure in the story of Basso, Linda and the Foundation, playing an active role in the three Russell Tribunal II sessions on Latin America. He was among those who formulated the final draft of the Algiers Declaration and was actively involved with the League for the Rights of Peoples at international level; he became president of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal from the time of its foundation and president of the International Section of the Basso Foundation. His expertise and juridical innovation, combined with a strong interest in the concrete and complex history of peoples, cultures, ideas, proved decisive in providing the PPT, through his own intensive participation, with absolute doctrinal and methodological consistency and, at the same time, with maximum flexibility in analysis and outlook. Two key sentences in the history of the PPT, such as La Conquista dell’America e il diritto nazionale (1992) and Le politiche del Fondo Monetario Internazionale e sulla Banca Mondiale (1988-1994) summarise his intelligence and personality to the full. He published numerous academic works. His final book, in its innovation and the relevancy of the issues discussed (Ordonnancements juridiques et conversion numérique, Éditions Larcier, Bruxelles, 2014), illustrates better than any other his ability to combine competence with the most liberal and far-reaching interest in anything raising questions and demanding answers.

Scarcia Amoretti, Biancamaria (1938). Born in Aosta, Italian Orientalist and writer; Professor Emeritus in Islamic Studies at
the Sapienza University in Rome, and one of the most eminent scholars of the Muslim religion, particularly of political Islam. Since 2012, she has been a member of the advisory committee of the magazine *Geopolitica*.

**Senese, Salvatore** (1935). Born in Tarsia (Cosenza), judge, occupying, among others, the position of president of the Chamber of the Court of Cassation. He was member of parliament in the 11th legislature and senator in the 12th and 13th legislatures. Member of various parliamentary commissions. Towards the end of the 1960s, as a young magistrate, he met Lelio Basso, while attending the Association of magistrates’ congresses, marking the beginning of a fruitful relationship. Basso invited Senese to work on the preparation of a seminar he was organising in Chile with the Chilean Ministry of Justice. During this seminar, which took place in January 1973, Basso asked Senese to take part in the planned project of the Russell Tribunal II on the crimes of the Latin American dictatorships. He subsequently participated in the formulation of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Peoples, proclaimed in Algiers on 4 July 1976. He was president of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal from 2001 until 2013.

**Tognoni, Gianni** (1941). Following studies in Philosophy and Theology, he graduated in Medicine and Surgery. He has carried out research in the pharmacological, clinical and epidemiological fields and that of public health at the Laboratory of Clinical Pharmacology of the Mario Negri Pharmacological Research Institute in Milan. Since 2001, he has been director of the Mario Negri Sud Foundation. It was through Linda that he came into contact with Lelio Basso and his Foundation, at the time of the preparations for the Russell Tribunal II on Latin America. In 1979, the year in which it was founded, he became General Secretary of the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal.

**Tortora, Fausto** (1939). Architect, urban planner and researcher, born in Rome. He was a director of ACLI (Catholic Association of Italian Workers), advisor to the Ministry of Public Works on matters of spatial planning and, from 1973 to 1977, director of
ISSOCO, at the Basso Foundation. From 1978 he was researcher and instructor at FIM-CISL, subsequently becoming its national Secretary. From 1988 until 2003, he was chief executive of a company involved in the promotion of culture and the preservation of the national heritage. He is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Lelio and Lisli Basso Foundation ISSOCO. Tortora met Linda at IDOC in 1971. With others, he had recently been dismissed from the ACLI following the Congress held in Vallombrosa in 1970 and Paul VI’s “disapproval” of the direction taken by the associations and he decided to provide the press with an alternative version of what had happened to the one offered by official channels. Through the newspapers and magazines contacted for the publication of these articles written by several authors, he eventually joined the editorial staff at IDOC.

Turoldo, David Maria (1916-1992). Italian poet and member of the Order of the Servi di Maria. Ordained in 1940, he moved to Milan, to the Convent of Santa Maria dei Servi in San Carlo al Corso. During the Nazi occupation of Milan (8 September 1943 - 25 April 1945), he worked closely with the anti-Fascist Resistance. His commitment led to the foundation, with Fra Camillo De Piaz, of the Corsia dei Servi cultural centre (which took its title from the former name of the street leading from the Convent to the Duomo), dedicated to the examination of current issues, both national and international, and the dynamics that were transforming the city. He was one of the principal supporters of the Nomadelfia project, a village created to accommodate children orphaned by the war “with fraternity as its only law”, founded by Don Zeno Saltini in the former concentration camp at Fossoli near Carpi. For this reason, at the order of the Holy Office, he was forced to leave Italy for three years. Only officially reinstated in 1964, he was initially sent to Florence, where he formed a friendship with La Pira, then to Udine, then Sotto il Monte and, finally, to Milan. From 1973, when he was invited by Lelio Basso to become part of the support committee for the Russell Tribunal II, his relationship with the Basso Foundation, the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal, and particularly with Linda and her Community, was continual and extremely close.
Umaña Mendoza, Eduardo (1946-1998), lawyer, intellectual, teacher, humanist and indefatigable defender of the poor in Colombia, playing a fundamental role in the Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal session on impunity in Latin America. He received death threats on several occasions, but would always repeat: “It’s better to die for someone than to live for nothing”. His intense activity in raising awareness and of denunciation, which extended beyond the confines of his own country, led to his murder by paramilitary groups.

Wasim Dahmash, Abdul Karim, representative of the PLO in Italy and since 2006, Professor of Arabic Language and Literature in the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature at the University of Cagliari. A friend and follower of Abdel Wael Zuaiter, assassinated by Mossad in Rome on 16 September 1972.

Zarri, Adriana (1919-2010), Italian theologian, journalist and writer. She collaborated with numerous Catholic publications (L’Osservatore Romano, Rocca, Studium, Politica Oggi, SetteGiorni, Il Regno, Concilium, Servitium and Adista) as well as secular ones: Avvenimenti (with the column Diario inutile), MicroMega, Il manifesto (with the Sunday column Parabole). She lived for many years in Rome, and in 1975 chose to retire from the world.
5. Linda’s writings


Bimbi L., address given at a conference in Lucca in October 1997.


Anyone who has worked with Linda or has spent time with her only intermittently, will have recognised in the account on the previous pages two fundamental characteristics: her steadfast determination to pursue ethical and political convictions, and the reluctance, bordering on reticence, to draw paradigms from the experiences, major and minor, she has been through. She tells her story lightly, treading with care, almost as though she doesn’t wish to burden those she is addressing.

Telling one’s story sotto voce is a trait common to many of the biographical accounts published in recent years by the surviving protagonists of that generation of Italians who, then aged between fifteen and twenty, lived through the Second World War, developing an awareness of the value of individual freedom and political participation.

A kaleidoscope of testimonies, ablaze with vibrant colours, particularly in the incidents and episodes that, for one reason or another, each protagonist is keen to highlight. They speak to younger generations. But, again, with lightness, without burdening the story with significance. Without imposing interpretations, with no compulsion. As if to say, judge for yourselves, decide for yourselves its value.

Legitimate, without a doubt, but also compelling. But perhaps for those of us who wish to continue, not sufficient. To understand whether, woven into the narrative, there are messages to be decrypted that might be useful, we need to read between the lines. Perhaps we, ourselves, can attempt to identify the paradigms that have guided Linda, assuming responsibility for the interpretation. So I will endeavour to make a few observations.
Firstly, I shall dwell on those months in 1968 during which Linda and her companions decided to leave the congregation. It was not only a rejection of the hierarchy, a refusal to conform to a power incapable of listening and which didn’t even want to hear what they had to say. What they pursued was, as Linda defines it, the desire to “be invisible”, to “mix with the people”, to “be human beings together with other human beings”. From that moment onwards, she would no longer take part in pastoral activities, she would no longer be supported, and would no longer support a priest while he carried out his own, codified role (Can. 519) in giving spiritual guidance. Linda and her fellow sisters, from then on her companions, took a step downwards and placed themselves on the same level as those who up till then the Church had asked them to help to guide. From that time onwards, they were to be simply souls among souls, as they would say. Nothing else.

It is not clear from her account if this occurred principally because of the shockwave caused by the message from Medellin, the consolidation of Liberation Theology, or if Linda, Lelena and their fellow sisters were irreversibly changed by working on a daily basis for almost fifteen years with young people and basic Christian communities in Minas Gerais. It was probably a combination of both, so univocal and coincident were they.

The result was nevertheless phenomenal, and was a phenomenon that was rare. It was a collective descent from the pulpit, the renunciation of the praeceptum, of the transmission of truth. In essence, it was the renunciation of proselytism, in its entirety, even as far as her own new lay community’s future was concerned. Linda’s community, in fact, was one destined not to last and, at the very moment in which it was formed, decided that it would also die out. Almost mortal among mortals. Thus the renunciation of the very proselytism that in many of its acceptations had constituted the core not so much of the doctrine as of the history of Christianity, and which has often represented a perverse interpretation of the evanghelion, tainting a great part of Western culture, and not only that.

The renunciation by Linda and her companions was the sublimation of a free and frank testimony, the interpretation of the evanghelion as a spiritual tool of testimony, and not as a tool of
spiritual testimony. It was the spirituality of the tool that counted, otherwise the message jarred. A tool that was internal, the opposite of that divine weapon to be brandished for a misinterpreted good, and which had so often made its appearance in the course of history.

Dialectic, co-existence, the interpenetration of ideas – between non-believers, like Lelio Basso, or myself, and believers, like Linda – true dialogue and tolerance, are possible only between men and women who do not view others as potential or dormant proselytisers, but as equals. Between people capable of communicating on two different levels: the spiritual, with those who possess the *radar*, as I jokingly put it to Linda, and the exclusively intellectual, with those who have never wished to acquire the *radar*…

Of the believers in the array of people quoted in these pages, not all are equally open to this practice. Nor, must it be said, are some of the non-believers. Rossana Rossanda once wrote of the “religious passion” of certain atheists, a passion often leading to an unconscious reticence with regard to those with the *radar*, to an incommunicability, if I may say so. Undoubtedly to a certain degree of cultural deafness. Linda, on her part, has never possessed this reticence, and has no awareness of what it might be. A considerable achievement.

Linda and I (and I know for certain, Lelio Basso many times before me) have often had interminable conversations, in every situation imaginable, including at night, during long car journeys, sitting waiting for a plane that was delayed, or sunk for hours in the sofas of the lobby of some small hotel, while a photocopier or cyclostyle machine rumbled away in the background, or shut in her office at the Foundation, separated from the world by the cushioned emptiness of a deserted meeting room. Conversations about everything, on the most disparate topics, including on one occasion sex. My experiences, obviously, not hers. Never, not even for a single moment, have I witnessed the slightest, even subliminal, intention of slipping me a spiritual, ideological or political truth. Because, and it is worth noting, Linda then decanted the practice of dialectic, forged and consolidated as a missionary, as a nun, into politics.
A titan in other words, a monument to tolerance, dialogue and respect. A courageous innovator. A theorist, possibly unwittingly, of the two levels of communication mentioned above.

If only one of the hundreds of boy-scouts, or young members of the public associations into which the Church organises the faithful (Can. 312) and who pass noisily by my house every Wednesday and Sunday on their triumphal march towards St Peter’s possessed this awareness…

Similarly, less relevant as far as I am concerned, but not perhaps for those more familiar with the world of missionaries and religious congregations, especially in what was once termed the Third World, is the significance of Linda and her companions’ unique approach to community life governed by spiritual rules.

Motivated not only by faith, but also by the instinct to help others, the decision she made almost twenty five years ago, to withdraw into a community, into a religious congregation, was a choice she was never to repudiate. The community would change, swept along by events and personalities, and would become something entirely different, but it would remain a community.

To withdraw, withdraw from others, is not something that happens today. Nor is it an original characteristic of Christianity. To retire in order to find inspiration, to transcend, but also to reflect, develop, create, is a life choice that has evolved over the centuries, at least from Orphism or Pythagoreanism onwards.

Oriental anchoritism, as interpreted by the earliest Christian monks, by Saint Paul of Thebes or Saint Anthony Abbot, was for many centuries almost the only form of monasticism, namely single individuals, isolated from the world. Then, in the sixth century, Saint Benedict brought this practice to an end, revolutionising this approach, extending it to the withdrawal into a community (cenobitism, the gathering of a group of monks, until then a more minor tradition), and imposing a rule with a dehors, as I like to call it, the labora, the innovatory propensity to interact with the outside world, with the world of others. It was thus that community life on a large scale began, marked by a spiritual order, a milestone in Western civilisation, which would subsequently evolve and adapt with the times, changing over the centuries, without ever again disentangling itself from history.
Now that monasticism is in decline, at least in numerical terms, many communities have been created on the initiative of former members of religious orders. Among those I have happened to encounter over the years, almost all originating in the Sixties and Seventies with the relaxing of the pre-conciliar grip, in the long term not a single one has maintained a rule. Those I do know have by definition *deregulated* themselves, so to speak. Linda’s hasn’t.

The rules of her lay community are obviously no longer those of the Oblate dello Santo Spirito, but its spiritual cadence has remained. As though dialectic, the matrix of that tolerance mentioned earlier, were tempered by living in a community and with a spiritual practice, albeit one that is not codified. A practice that has allowed for example the continuation of the custom initiated in Brazil in the Fifties of discussing the events of the day, of systematically sharing experiences, of opening up to third parties as a group, not only as individuals.

The method adopted by Linda and her companions’ community is a distinctive way of cultivating the intellect. I don’t believe that any of them would describe themselves as intellectual. Nevertheless, now that they are all getting on in years, they show that they have very much kept alive that ethical awareness and that tendency towards the *polis* tempered over the years. Tools of virtue, which a housewife or pensioner, often abandoned as they are to solitude, to the isolation to which the lack of social relationships now relegates them, struggle to maintain and that, with the passage of time, also fade in the repetitive habits of the majority of the religious still living within enclosed orders.

In its own small way, might Linda and her companions’ community be a contemporary innovation? One connotation of living in a community in our own times? Perhaps not exactly a new milestone, simply a shoot, but significant nevertheless. Worthy of emulation. I wonder: to a believer, is there a connection between tolerance, the ability to interact on different levels, and refuge in the rule? Are those in a community who are able to rhythmically scan a civic conscience and a shared spirituality perhaps more tolerant? This question is not secondary, in this contemporaneity of integralism. Muslims, Jews, Christians… and passionate atheists.
In a strictly political context, however, Linda’s experiences in some ways mirror those of several generations of Europeans who, between the Fifties and Sixties, suddenly came face to face with the poverty of non-Europeans, the deprivations of the Third World. During the post-war years, access to means of transport and the expansion of mass communication made possible contacts and relationships that were previously inconceivable. A portion of the world almost entirely overlooked by Marx suddenly became overwhelming.

The poverty of the rest of the world emerged in the broader European consciousness at a time in which the rise to affluence, the rapid improvement in the material conditions of thousands of citizens and universal education were creating a blinding ontological and conceptual optimism. Not that poverty didn’t thrive at home too. Just as Don Milani, surrounded by his barefooted children in a region as civilised as Tuscany, had realised during the very same period. In the Fifties, the anthropologist Ernesto De Martino had drawn up a vast inventory of our popular culture shaped by poverty. In the so-called Second world, that of real Socialism, poverty and deprivation were part of daily life. I can confirm this, recalling that in 1959, when I was in China, and in 1963, in Prague, I dreamt of steaks and bananas as though they were the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

But in 1954, Latin America was an entirely different story. I can vouch for this, having eventually gone there myself in 1971. Poverty seemed to be pumped at high pressure, into material life and even into thoughts, feelings and desires. And it was a poverty that was alive, emitting anger or resignation. The difference compared to the poverty we were familiar with in Europe was the same as between a downpour and a full-blown flood. It was no coincidence that during his long motorbike journey across the continent, among the lepers of Amazonia and the miners of Chile, Guevara developed an ideal, indeed an obsession.

The extent of the inequalities Linda was struck by was not only limitless but, above all, it was comprehensible, intelligible and thus all the more penetrating. It was expressed in Portuguese, a language easily assimilated, not in Hindi, Mandarin or Swahili, as in the case of missionaries arriving on other continents. And
it was suffered and borne by girls who came from a similar cultural background to her own, at least as far as religious faith was concerned, and perhaps not only that. From Lucca to Càssia, to Minas Gerais, and then to Macapà, on the northern shores of the Amazon delta: it must have felt like leaping off a diving board, headfirst and eyes open, into an empty swimming pool. An impact that affected the senses and the mind, and which, if it didn't kill you, fired your determination, awakening the natural political instinct in all of us.

Politics is that process of participation that stems from the needs of civil society. Not, as it is too often understood nowadays, the administration of those needs by a ruling class, however democratically elected. In order to be politically involved, you have to look around you, read and understand the ferment of the citizenry, of those who are active as well as those lying face downwards, immobilised by history. Linda looked around, read and understood.

Half a century later, what is the incentive that can still push us to side politically with the most vulnerable? As citizens of the European Union, is extreme poverty in the world not now too alien to us? Do we no longer read the inequalities, even those on our own doorstep, more marked now than twenty years ago, do we no longer perceive them as trenchant?

Does a lack of communication with the strata of our society that are becoming increasingly poor, not leave us deaf? Does cultural syntax divide us from Burmese, Afghans, Palestinians, Chinese in the infernal factories of Chongqing, or Indians in Bhopal, and make it more difficult to share a political battle that is just? And so perhaps today, to express solidarity with the world’s most vulnerable, to be politically involved on a broad, universal level, we need to push ourselves further, equip ourselves with more sophisticated means of comprehension, in order to decipher the more complex political cultures of others, if we don’t want to run the risk of remaining trapped in the centrality of the West, or, worse still, of exporting democracy with drones.

Finally, in a passage at the beginning of her story, Linda refers to her “illuminist” background. I’m not sure what she means. Nowadays, there is undoubtedly a fair amount of debate on the
values of Illuminism, particularly in contrast to nationalism, to
the prevalently German localism typical of the nineteenth cen-
tury. I quote Sergio Luzzatto: «the [illuminist] idea […] was
founded precisely on the rejection of what is now variously de-
•

defined “identity”, and/or “community”, the glue of the Nation.
[The Illuminists] upheld not the cause of communitarianism, but
universalism. Not a society understood as a body, a living organ-
ism, but a society understood as an arithmetic whole, summation
of citizens. Not an authority founded on God, namely on the
sacred, but an authority founded on democracy, in other words,
the profane. Not an individual defined by what separates him
(linguistic, geographic, cultural boundaries, Ed.), but an individ-
ual defined by what unites him with other human beings [rights,
Ed.]. [In Illuminism] lie the foundations of a modern ideology
of the rights of man: the deep-lying origins of the wager… of an
autonomous and mature individual, free from any confessional
dependency, the creator of his own (however complicated) pro-
gressive destiny». Setting aside for a moment Marx and the Marx-
ist influence that her close relationship with Lelio Basso might
have had on Linda, perhaps her Illuminist background sufficed,
let’s say, to explain her universalistic afflatus, confessional inde-
pendence, her commitment to the autonomy of human beings. Is
this what Linda wishes to pass on to us?

In conclusion: spirituality without proselytes; community
life as the driving force of tolerance and for confrontation with
others; commitment to the comprehension of the language and
culture of the weakest as the basis of political solidarity for the
emancipation from inequalities; and social universalism as a value
still older than those of the battles we fought for in the twentieth
century. Four messages I read between the lines of Linda’s story
and which, although they only surface sporadically, seem to me to
invigorate her nevertheless riveting account.
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A story in images
1938: Linda with her parents

1966: pupils of the Colégio Helena Guerra in front of the school
1966: pupils of the Colégio in the chapel

1967: the Master. Linda interviews an old man in Macapá
Eldorado, 5 April 1969: souvenir of a new beginning. The decision no longer to maintain any juridical ties with the Church

1970: Linda and Maria Elena at Ephesus
1971: Linda with her colleagues at IDOC in Piazza Navona, Rome

1971: lesson in the open air at Eldorado
1974: Linda and Lelio Basso at Val Masino (Valtellina)

1976: Gianni Tognoni (standing) and Paulo Freire at the Community’s home in Assisi
Summer 1977: meeting of the Community in the countryside near Assisi

Pentecost 1977: celebration in the Community (Assisi)
1976: Third Session of the Russell Tribunal II. From right: Lelio Basso, Vladimir Dedjier and Gabriel García Márquez

1980s: Linda with Hélder Câmara at the Community’s home in Assisi

February 1983: Linda and Marianella Garcia Villas in the garden of the Community’s home in Rome
Belo Horizonte, 1986: Linda with some former pupils of the Colégio Helena Guerra

1987: Linda and Mario Cuminetti at San Fortunato (Assisi)
2004: Linda and Maria Elena (on the left) during a celebration in the Community in Rome.

2005: Linda with the President of Brazil, Lula. Also pictured are Lula’s wife Marisa (right) and the Brazilian ambassador Adhemar Bahadian and his wife.
2011: Linda and François Rigaux with two students from the Neapolitan School on the Rights of Peoples.
