

Testimony - Rita Repetto, co-victim (IT)

My name is Rita Repetto, and first of all I'd like to thank you for inviting me to tell you what happened to my sister, starting with who she was.

Roberta was an intelligent, brilliant, and talented girl. She illustrated children's stories with her watercolours, worked in ceramics, sewed, cooked, had her own estate agency, and taught yoga. In short, a volcano of energy. Apparently very strong and courageous (she had parachuted!) but also fragile, as we all can be. Her misfortune was to have met those who took advantage of this fragility, namely Paolo Bendinelli, Guru of the Anidra centre, a holistic centre also known for agritourism in Liguria, Italy.

Roberta met Bendinelli and then his Centre in January 2008, at the invitation of a dear childhood friend, who later became a partner of the centre, active member, and psychologist of the Centre. He knew about this community because it had developed on land sold by his descendants.

Roberta attended her first seminar with her boyfriend Federico, who later became her husband in 2012 when Bendinelli himself performed the wedding ceremony, inspired by Celtic tradition. At first, Roberta seemed disturbed by Bendinelli, she even noted in a diary (she wrote many diaries and it was these, along with her telephone conversations and emails, that enabled us to lodge a complaint with the Italian public prosecutor in Genoa) that she had the clear perception that following this man would ruin her life; yet she followed him.

Why did she follow him? There were many reasons: her boyfriend thought that taking these courses would help them resolve their relationship problems. The location suited her, surrounded by beautiful nature, and she wanted to embark on a path of personal growth by taking part in these expensive seminars. What's more, she immediately felt welcomed by the other members of the group and appreciated for her talents. They made her responsible for the community's social media and turned her into a Yoga, Tai chi, and Qi gong teacher. They entrusted her with the construction of the multi-purpose straw house. The love bombing phase had begun.

Roberta was a regular visitor to the Centre, every day, every moment of her free time. She began to miss family celebrations, birthdays, family dinners. She never spent her birthday with us again; every 24 April she stayed with them.

She gave up the holidays she used to take. From 2008 onwards, she spent her 'holidays' at the Anidra Centre.

I saw these things, and I suffered. But my sister seemed happy, she had, in my eyes, found people who made her feel good and so, thinking she was satisfied, I didn't push too hard, she seemed to have found her way.

However, she began to change her habits, her diet, her medication and her behaviour. She broke off relations with her best friends, who were curious; they often asked her to meet them, they asked her questions about this reality, and she invited them to visit this place. Many of them didn't have a good impression of it, they knew Bendinelli and their reactions to him were not positive, but when they told Roberta... they were excluded from her life.

She stopped going to specialised medical appointments, believing that Paolo was capable of diagnosing any illness with his 'third eye'.

As I said, she changed her eating habits, alternating periods when she ate only meat, other periods when she ate only apples, other periods when she ate gluten-free foods, but she also fasted, even for 21 days, during which time she only drank apple juice. Her only aim was to follow Bendinelli's instructions (which were completely unfounded); it was he who imposed these diets.

She changed the way she dressed. She became scruffy, less refined. My sister had her own estate agency, so she worked in contact with third parties, in an office where a certain dress code was required. But day after day, she no longer cared.

I noticed these things over the years, I saw them and they made me suffer, from her absences from the family to her negligence, to her blind trust in Bendinelli. But I was always certain that if my sister ever had to face any problem, physical, health or material, she would turn to me or my parents. I was totally wrong.

Investigations by the Genoa Public Prosecutor's Office revealed that in October 2018 my sister had a mole removed on the kitchen table at the Anidra Centre by the medical director Paolo Oneda, without anaesthetic and without any subsequent histological examination, in the presence of the psychologist, a friend of Oneda's and vice-president of the Centre, and Paolo Bendinelli, he believed that the breathing technique used would have helped her to bear the pain.

The operation was terrifying, but the following two years were even worse because my sister, already in the first part of 2019, began to feel the first pains in her back, noticed the first lymph node changed in the groin, and warned both Oneda and Bendinelli who totally failed to direct her to specialist tests, instead they reassured her and invited her to practise meditation and drink sweet herbal teas. Later, a second, larger lymph node appeared, and Oneda and Bendinelli continued to reassure Roberta that healing was imminent because this second lymph node was the "sign of the resolution of the conflict" and the system was in the process of draining the toxic part. Even the psychologist reassured my sister about the terrible post-operative symptoms by recommending that salt lamps be placed near her.

She never spoke to us, the members of her family, about her pain, never even hinted at it. She knew we were going to intervene quickly, and she didn't want us to. We continued to see her, she worked in the same office as our father, she had lunch once a week with our mother, she and I had our own yoga centre ... but she was very elusive with me, she tried not to meet me because she knew that I was the one who wouldn't give her a break if I'd realised she wasn't happy or sick.

In September 2020, she told us about her back pain and said she was going to move to the centre to rest... reassuring us as it was somewhere we knew and close to home. And it was true, we knew this place... we went to the centre several times just to see where Roberta spent most of her time, my father stayed there for a week, I also took my children, my mother took part in various lunches. Of course, it seemed a bit strange to us, the professor with two women around him, particular eating habits, a lot of physical work, the seminars... but I could never have imagined what later emerged from the diaries, chats, emails, and surveys. So the signals were there, but I didn't have the tools to understand them.

But let's get back to the story. On 30 September 2020, Roberta called my parents to ask them to come up to the Centre, she had something important to communicate. My mother immediately went up to her and found her lying on a bed in a wooden hut, speechless, her stomach swollen and pale. Roberta told our mum that she wasn't feeling well and that she intended to have hospital tests the following week in Brescia, at the hospital where Oneda and Dora worked. My mother immediately informed my father and me of the situation, especially of the tragic conditions in which she had found

her daughter, stressing that she wanted to go to Brescia a week later and not to a hospital in the region immediately.

The following day, 1 October 2020, my father, and I went to the centre with the clear intention of taking her immediately to the nearest emergency hospital. We found her in the same state as my mother had seen her the day before, with Tobias, her partner, a follower of the guru and a long-standing member of the Anidra Centre, Paolo Bendinelli the Guru, Oneda the doctor and his girlfriend Dora. She was vomiting black blood and was in a pitiful state.

We managed to get her to the hospital in Lavagna, making her believe that she could easily return to the centre after the hospital examination, because she wanted to stay there. But before getting out of bed, she turned to the Guru and asked: "What are you saying, I'm leaving? Even at the point of death, the Guru had to have the last word.

When she arrived at the hospital, she initially refused a transfusion, on Oneda's advice.

Roberta wrote to Oneda, "I'm sorry Paolo, but what was that thing you removed from me? Because here they say that anything can start from a mole".

Oneda replies, "It was a bloody, warty mole that was removed because you were scratching yourself and didn't want to have a histological examination. Do your parents know that I removed it? You don't have to say if you don't want to."

Her condition worsened and on 9 October Roberta died at the San Martino hospital in Genoa. After her death, I read the discussions on her phone, her emails and her 23 diaries, hidden in her house. It is this terrible material that enables us to lodge a complaint with the public prosecutor's office.

The diaries are a precise account of what my sister experienced, felt and perceived at the Anidra Centre: detailed accounts of her difficulties, her pain, her constant feelings of guilt, her reverence and constant gratitude for Bendinelli, whom she always thanked, even when he made her suffer with his words, treated her badly or didn't consider her at all. For my sister, this lack of attention on the part of the guru were seen as a form of love towards her, a help in freeing herself from earthly and human needs to be listened to and loved... so although she was suffering, she was grateful to Bendinelli, this bad treatment was necessary for her evolution.

In the emails we found detailed accounts of the various sexual activities proposed by Bendinelli. For him, in fact, another way of achieving enlightenment was the energy of tantric sex, where there were code words such as the button room, going to the mine (from what we understand relating to oral sex) and penetrations in the third and fourth springs.

According to Bendinelli's method, these 'practices', for which he then asked followers for a detailed written report by e-mail, were necessary to help followers overcome jealousy and possession. He would mix couples and, for example, force my sister to attend a meeting between her husband with another woman to help her overcome jealousy.

What's more, from what I understood (emails, diaries written by my sister, stories told by my sister), the method consists precisely in exacerbating our weaknesses because we have 'mechanisms' that lead us to do what we like and not what we need, for example if we like to eat we have to fast, if we suffer from sleep we have to stay awake as much as possible.

To be able to make the 'quantum leap', i.e. to get closer to enlightenment (achieved by Bendinelli by a blow to the head), we also need to eliminate the bad co-properties (it is said that everyone is made up of different co-properties) that we have created within ourselves.

The theories of the 7 Essene mirrors and the 'frequencies' that vibrate the subtle bodies are also

often present. Many of the rituals were obviously strange to us, such as people standing in a circle, naked outside, Roberta, and Federico's wedding rite celebrated by the Guru, stories about the existence of gnomes, the presence of evil spirits, the danger of photos that held back energy, different from the ones we had seen before.

Many of the rituals were obviously strange to us, such as people standing in a circle, naked in the open air, and Roberta's wedding rite, which harked back to Celtic tradition.

My sister was therefore under the influence of subtle techniques of mental manipulation and she defended her Master to the death; right up to the end she was certain that she would be cured because Bendinelli had predicted it.

For her death, the Public Prosecutor had requested 16 years for Bendinelli, accusing him of voluntary manslaughter, sexual assault, ill-treatment and circumvention of an incapacitated person, 14 years for the doctor Oneda (voluntary manslaughter) and 10 years for the psychologist. The recent judgment on 23 September sentenced Bend and Oneda to 3 years and 4 months in prison for voluntary manslaughter and acquitted the psychologist.

Five months later, at the end of February, the judge revealed the reasons for this sentence. I'm still working on it with my lawyers because it seems to me that there are contradictory points and that the psychiatric report requested by the Genoa court and the phenomenon of mental manipulation have been underestimated, despite the abundant scientific literature on the subject. If my sister wasn't under the influence, would she really agree to have an operation without anaesthetic on a kitchen table in a non-clinical setting? I keep asking myself this question and I hope I'm not the only one.

Now I'm trying with my page https://www.instagram.com/la_pulcenellorecchio/ and with my recently created association to help anyone recognise the typical behaviour of those who get caught into a destructive cult so that what happened to my sister never happens again. I receive so many reports that I hasten to pass on to Dr Lorita Tinelli. I have no expertise, so I refer to the experts, who are a precious and fundamental help.

I'm only giving my testimony, in the hope that it will help people understand that anyone can really find themselves in such destructive cults.