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Franca Viola (born in Alcamo, Sicily 1947)

The girl who refused a shotgun wedding and changed the history of Italy

What



- Franca Viola was kidnapped on Boxing Day 1965. Segregated in her house and raped for more than a week, once freed she refused to marry her tormentor and fought for the repeal of art. 544 of the penal code that granted rapists the possibility of escaping conviction simply by promising to marry the victim of the crime.

Why



St. Stephen's Day brings to mind an all-Italian story that shocked the society of the time, coming to irreparably change not only, later, the penal code but also and above all the mentality of the Belpaese. It was 1965 and the then 17 year old Franca Viola, a young Sicilian girl from Alcamo, was kidnapped together with her 8 year old brother, segregated in the house and repeatedly raped for eight consecutive days by Filippo Melodia, a local boy. On New Year's Day, Franca Viola's father was contacted by Melodia's relatives in order to force the girl's parents to accept the reparatory wedding between the two young people - the so-called "paciata" - at that time a very popular practice. Franca's parents pretended to accept, but in agreement with the police, on January 2, 1966 the agents intervened to free the girl, arresting Melodia and his accomplices.

Why did Franca Viola's story change Italy forever?

According to the moral values of the time, a girl no longer a virgin because of a rape would necessarily have to marry her abductor to save her honor and, above all, that of the family. Article 544 of the Penal Code, in fact, said: "For the crimes provided by the first chapter and Article 530, the marriage, which the offender contracts with the offended person, extinguishes the offense, even with regard to those who are concurrent in the same offense, and, if there has been conviction, cease the execution and the criminal effects. Translating, therefore, at that time the law allowed to extinguish the crime of kidnapping and rape against a woman simply by agreeing to marry her, hence the expression "reparative marriage", reparative for the criminal record of the offender who in this way was able to come out completely clean despite having committed an abhorrent action. At that time, however, rape was not considered a crime against the person as today, but a crime against public morals and the penalties, therefore, were much lower than today.

The story of Franca Viola, however, raised strong and unexpected controversies

- Melodia was tried and sentenced to 11 years in prison, the judges did not believe the accusations launched by the man to discredit the girl claiming that she had agreed to the "fuitina" to put the parents in front of a fait accompli and force them to grant permission for marriage. The case of Franca Viola, therefore, led to demonstrations and positions taken by feminists and civil society, which pressed for the repeal of Article 544 of the Penal Code that granted this loophole to rapists and rapists.

Final accomplishment



Thus, after years of debate, the article was subsequently repealed on August 5, 1981, while only 20 years ago, in 1996, rape was finally recognized in Italy as a crime against the person and no longer against public morals, with a consequent increase in the seriousness and penalties provided. Thanks to her battle, the young Franca Viola became - and still is - the symbol of women's emancipation in Italy, the woman who managed to change the mentality of a country forever.

Thank you for
your attention!

