

**CASE REPORT****PSYCHIATRY & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES**

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**The “Bestie di Satana” Murders\***

**ABSTRACT:** In recent years, satanic groups have been responsible for various types and degrees of crimes. We report the case of a number of murders committed in Italy by a group of young people calling themselves the “Bestie di Satana”. Forensic psychiatric assessment of the members of a satanic sect charged with the crime revealed that all the young people had a fragile, immature personality, a very low level of education and were socially disadvantaged. The trial of the members of the “Bestie di Satana” sect was concluded with the verdict of deliberate murder, and all the members were given long jail sentences. This report should lead us to explore social and cultural responses to juvenile satanism, statistically shown to be a relatively rare phenomenon but with a high criminal potential.

**KEYWORDS:** forensic science, satanic sects, Psychiatric Forensic Assessment, group violence, homicide, suicide

In his monumental work “*The golden bough*”, Frazer (1) claimed that the evolution of man passed through three phases: magic, religion, and science. In his view, in prehistoric times, when man first attempted to attribute a meaning to natural phenomena, he saw them as magic; then, in the course of evolution, they were explained by religious beliefs and finally, in the modern age, by science. Therefore, magic, religion, and science are bound by a common thread: human nature and the fragility of man’s life on earth.

Magic has accompanied man through all the different historical periods, practiced both by disadvantaged social classes as a symbolic compensation for frustrated primary needs and by more privileged classes to satisfy their ambitions to control and dominate (2). Indeed, the underlying motives may be the same: fear, a wish to control natural events or to solve the problems of everyday life (rituals for hunting, to invoke rain, safeguard the harvest, heal the ill, propitiate the gods, and ensure their intercession, to invoke prosperity, predict the future, and protect from sortilege or enemies) (3). Magic and religion have long gone hand-in-hand, mutually affecting rituals and practices. They are both focused on the mystery of creation and the existence of the divine, and attempt to supply adequate answers to the inscrutable. There is often a fine line between the two, and magic and religion are often fused to create common practices and rituals that have been widely adopted since ancient times. The term magic (Μαγεία in Greek) refers to exclusive knowledge available only to the elect – the “magi” (Μάγοι), ancient Zoroastrian

priests (4) – who could influence the natural phenomena that overwhelm mankind, control physical phenomena that are beyond normal human control, and dominate other human beings. In primitive societies, for example, the shaman, a term considered by some experts to have been adapted from the word *saman* or *samen* that indicated the medicine man of the Siberian Tungusi population who acted in a state of trance, while other scholars attribute it to an adaptation of the Sanskrit *sramana* or *pali samana*, meaning a man possessed by spirits, endowed with extraordinary energy, a wise man who sees in the dark (5), combined the functions of the priest, the doctor, the magician. He used potions to communicate with the other world, to divine the arcane secrets of life and death, to cure the sick, and to control events affecting not only the individual but also the entire community. To officiate at rites, holy men are needed, namely priests of a cult or wizards who can practice rituals and express magic formulas allowing them to communicate with the supernatural, the divine, or with occult powers. An essential part of such rites, that is, often necessary to commune with the power invoked, is the use of substances that can allow the officiant, and through him the participants, to communicate with the divinity (6): in Eurasia, mushrooms are used (*Psilocybe*, *Amanita*); in China, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and in Africa, the first sacred plants were largely grains, grapes, and palms, used to make alcoholic drinks inducing euphoria: beer and wine. In Latin America, *Peyotl*, a thorn-free cactus that grows in the arid desert, contains Mescaline (7). Hemp, coca, opium poppies, and tobacco are among the oldest plants ever cultivated by man.

There are many other examples of magical–religious practices and cults that combine the use of narcotic drugs, possession by spirits or trancelike states. For example, after the funeral of a king, the Shiites of Central Asia performed a purification rite in which the people inhaled fumes of cannabis seeds thrown on red-hot stones placed in the center of small tents; traces of this practice have also been found in Siberia. *Candomblè* (a term of African origin that means “dance”, because singing and dancing

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could allow officiants to fall into a trance and be possessed by the divinities, the *Orixàs*) was an important rite in Brazil and in Latin America in general, celebrated by the slaves from Senegal and the Ivory Coast (3). They believed that although the divinities could no longer communicate directly with human beings, they could enter the body of the priestesses (*Mae de Santos*) and through them diffuse vital energy, *Axè*. In *Umbanda* (3), a spiritist movement of Brazilian origin with African roots, contact with the Gods was not direct but mediated by messenger spirits, the *Caboclos* or *Preto Velhos*. Santeria, also known as Regla de Ocha, is a religion that was brought to Cuba by the Yoruba African tribes (that originated in equatorial Nigeria) and then absorbed into the Catholic religion brought by the Spanish. In the rites, twigs, remains of animals, and human skulls are burned on braziers, as well as metal mercury, that can induce severe intoxication (8). One of the best known rites is Vodun (from *Vodu*, which in the ancient dialect of the Dahomey means a “spirit” or “divinity”), also called Voodoo, Hoodoo, or Vudù. This Afro-American religion has a syncretic, strongly esoteric character, and an ample corpus of moral and social doctrines and a complex. It originated from the religions of the Yoruba slaves, who were shipped from West Africa to Haiti (9), and then extended from Haiti throughout the Caribbean. In Voodoo, priests named *Bokor* also practice black magic, using potions, herbs, drugs, mushrooms that not only induce ecstasy and trancelike states but also control and subjugate the followers. In the course of the *Rites of Passage* (3), an “incision” is made, which will be a sign of recognition among adherents.

In the more recent past, a new form of witchcraft began to spread, also known as Wicca. It can be defined as a sort of magic, neopagan religion based on the cult of the horned goddess and god founded by Gardner in 1947. Gerald Brosseau Gardner, 1884–1964, was a British esoteric; he was fascinated by the occult and also dabbled in anthropology, and he wrote the key texts for modern Wicca (10). The cult includes various currents, including feminist groups that venerate only the goddess (actually almost all Wicca adepts are female) (11), present above all in North America: *Alexandrian*, founded by Alex Sanders; *British Traditional Wicca*; *Celtic*, focused on the druidic practices of the British Isles; *Diana*; *Eclectic*; *Gardnerian*, one of the most common in the USA.; *Georgian*, founded in 1971 in California by George Patterson; *hereditary Wicca*; *Traditional Mohsian*, founded in 1960 in America and based on Gardnerian and European shamanism; *traditional Witchcraft*, founded by Raven Grimassi.

Modern satanism is thought to have originated in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the first collective satanic rites were held (12). Satanism has been defined as the “adoration or veneration of the figure called Satan or the Devil in the Bible, by groups organized as movements, practising regular rites of cultural or liturgical type” (13). Satanism relies strongly on black magic and absorbs transcultural and ritual currents, such as African *yu-yu* (the *yu-yu* sect venerates the spirits of evil; it is very widespread in West Africa and involved in all kinds of illicit activities). Apart from the rites, it also acts as a true mafialike international organization combining Afro-Brazilian roots, *Candomblè*, voodoo, Santeria, and witchcraft.

According to the data supplied by the Italian CESNUR (Center of Studies on New Religions), there are about five thousand adepts belonging to the organized satanic groups worldwide (14). The most important organizations are located (apart from Italy) in the U.S.A., Spain, Scandinavia, Greece, Russia, Australia, and New Zealand, with a minor presence also in Germany and in France.

In Italy, recent data published by the Public Security Department of the Italian Ministry of Home Affairs (15) seem to show that <200 people are actually members of organized groups (the groups currently active in Italy are the two Chiese di Satana di Torino – one occultist and the other rationalist – the Bambini di Satana and some minor groups, Elettì di Satana, Loggia Nera, 666 Realtà Satanica, although some of these groups, after a brief notoriety, seemed to have closed down, such as the “Temple of Pan” – originally called “Satanic Empire of the Light of Hell”, then “Church of the Great Order of Satan” – a “Luciferian” group whose founder, who liked to be called Maestro Loitan, operated in central Italy, but disbanded the organization in 1998 when he converted to Catholicism. The CEDG – Confraternity of Efrem del Gatto – also known as the “Black Church of Lucifer” or “Luciferian”, active in Rome after 1980, seems to have closed down after the death, in 1996, of the founder Efrem Del Gatto – pseudonym of Sergio Gatti, 1945–1996). The magazine *Black Star*, mouthpiece of a group named the Satanael-Universal Brotherhood of Black Light, active in Santeramo in Colle, Bari, also seems to have stopped publishing issues.

In 2004, Moroni published some figures derived from Telefono Antiplagio, a voluntary association that defends the victims of charlatans and gurus, founded in 1994 by Giovanni Panunzio. Followers of satanic sects in Italy were estimated to range between two and three thousand people. In 10 years of activity, the association had received more than a thousand calls, mostly anonymous, reporting contacts with satanism. It was noted that the regions most affected by the phenomenon were Lombardy, followed by Lazio, Veneto and Piedmont.

But the numbers of young people’s satanic groups, known as “wild” or “acid” (because of their virtually constant association with drugs), are much more difficult to estimate. These tend to be small groups of teenagers, adolescents, and young people that lack any continuous organization or rituals or contacts with “historical” satanic groups. They are also more dangerous, not so much because they are intrinsically more violent but because it is difficult for the authorities to identify them. Apart from the U.S.A., other nations affected by this phenomenon include Great Britain, Germany, Scandinavia, Russia, and France (where they aroused scandal by profaning cemeteries – especially Jewish ones since some of these groups of young people associate satanism and Nazism). These small groups of adolescents act out “homemade” satanic rites, “copied” from comic strips, films, or inspired by a particular music and have contacts through particular Internet sites, some pubs, and a musical subculture. They are looked down on by adult groups, being ignorant of traditional rites and usually practicing animal sacrifice, as well as sexual practices accompanied by the profanation of Christian symbols, churches, and (more often) cemeteries.

Although organized satanism obviously has a very bad effect on young people, mostly from difficult social backgrounds, who come in contact with “wild” satanism, usually attracted by the mythical figure of the satanist as a powerful lord of the darkness, it is this other, impromptu form of juvenile satanism that is most often dangerous to society. It is notable that an FBI special agent, Kenneth Lanning, investigated every case of alleged murder associated with satanic ritual activities in the U.S.A., and he said he never identified a case in which an actual murder occurred. Apparently true satanists do not commit murder; but adolescent dabblers in satanism occasionally do. In recent years, such groups have been responsible for various types and degrees of crimes. In such aggregations, there is a great risk of loss of the border between metaphor and reality and so, often under the

influence of drugs, the violence escalates to rape, and in very rare cases, even human sacrifice (16). Indeed, almost all the serious crimes, including murder, attributed to satanism were committed by juvenile groups. Between 1975 and 1995, about 15 satanic murders were committed, almost all by bands of young people (17). Most of the acid satanism groups identified and reported are of similar type: 10 to 15 young people aged between 14 and 25, sometimes guided by an adult, get together to take drugs, read texts about satanism, listen to satanic rock music, and practice garbled satanic rites. "Acid" satanists, often under the influence of hallucinatory drugs, are convinced they can invoke and summon the devil. The cult of the "Lord of Evil" can also be used as a pretext for acting out secret perversions: drugs, orgies, extreme sexual practices, sadism or pedophilia, vandalism against religious buildings, violation of tombs, obscenity, and physical violence. The cocktail of drugs, alcohol, and satanism can produce very powerful, dangerous effects (18).

Various studies have shown that this type of satanism is a form of rebellion for these young people, who are often very solitary characters with a low sense of self-worth and power, deprived of affection. It gives them a feeling of belonging to a group and a sense of power (19,20). The juvenile satanism phenomenon is inspired more by deviation than by true or pseudoreligion. Due to its sociological characteristics, statistics about the phenomenon are purely hypothetical, and many groups are discovered only after a crime has been committed. According to the CESNUR data, in Italy, about a thousand young people are involved in such practices, while a larger circle (two or three thousand or, according to some sources, as many as five thousand) adopt styles derived from a satanic subculture (dress, symbols, rites) but do not take any active part in the activities of juvenile satanic groups.

Groups of this type, lacking any formal organization, hit the headlines in Italy every so often. A great furor was aroused in 2000 by the tragedy in Chiavenna, a small town in northern Italy where three young girls (all under the age of 18) brutally killed a nun, Suor Laura Mainetti, animated by incoherent satanic and anti-Catholic slogans and inspired by a vague intention to found their own satanic group and attract followers through the terrible sacrificial rite.

Equal incredulity was aroused some few years later by the story of the activities of a group of young people, again in northern Italy in the rich, strong work-ethic region of Lombardy, who called themselves the "Bestie di Satana". Their crimes hit national and international headlines, inspiring horror and fear, as well as a certain social alarm, or "moral panic", as reported by the American sociologist and criminologist Jenkins (21). We report this case, which came to our attention when an expert forensic psychiatry opinion was commissioned by the Court.

### Case Report: The "Bestie di Satana"

The "Bestie di Satana" sect (the members chose the name during a night-time meeting in an abandoned villa, while they were reading verses from Revelations – the Apocalypse – chapter 13: "...and unto – the beast – was given a mouth to blaspheme against God, to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven) was founded in 1997 by about a dozen teenagers, mostly underage, who spent all their time together. A list of the members of the "Bestie di Satana" sect is shown in Table 1. Some of these young people were students and others workers, all came from families with no apparent problems and were resident in the Milanese hinterland and the

TABLE 1—The members of the "Bestie di Satana" sect.

| Member              | Sex | Age | Pseudonym   | Described Personality Traits  |
|---------------------|-----|-----|-------------|---|
| P.L. (group leader) | M   | 21  | Ozzy, Evol  | A domineering, violent but charismatic character, exhibitionist, narcissistic, and a liar   |
| A.V.                | M   | 22  | Isidon      | Violent, cunning and determined, the most intelligent and informed member of the group, an opportunistic, possessive and arrogant character |
| M.M.                | M   | 17  | Uproar      |   |
| C.M.                | F   | 19  | Whore       | A convinced satanist  |
| M.P.                | F   | 21  |             | A fragile personality   |
| A.Bo.               | M   | 20  |             | The "weak link"   |
| N.S.                | M   | 22  | Onissen     | An angry, resentful character with a strong personality   |
| E.M.                | M   | 20  | Chaos       | The perfect executor of the group's decisions   |
| M.Z.                | M   |     | Kill        |   |
| P.G.                | M   | 23  | Wedra, Lioz |   |
| F.T.                | M   | 16  | Demon       | Ingenuous, altruistic, in good faith, mad about heavy metal music and horror novels   |
| Ma.M.               | M   | 17  | Ferocity    | A self-mutilator, with an ambiguous, "evil" character   |

province of Varese. Later, while in prison, one of the group members wrote a book about the "Bestie di Satana", in collaboration with a journalist (22). He describes the group as an aggregation of young people united by their passion for heavy metal music and the occult, all drug addicts (LSD, mescaline, amphetamines, cocaine, hashish, heroin) and mad about violence, both physical (bites, knife-cuts, cigarettes put out against the skin) and psychological (bullying and threats) inflicted on themselves and others. All this was practiced during their so-called initiation rites, as punishments of those seen as weak or "guilty" of an infringement of the rules, cheeking a leader or simply wishing to back out; their slogan was "chi sbaglia paga, chi tradisce muore" (*he who makes a mistake must pay the price, he who betrays us must die*).

The investigators obtained various descriptions of the so-called initiation rites, also called "humiliation rites", in which new adepts had to carry out various violent actions (cut themselves and drink their own blood) and humiliations (drink liters of beer or wine and try to stay awake, insult strangers or shout obscenities in public) to make these new "recruits" submissive to their elders, and to define rigid hierarchies. Despite this background subculture, some of the members later showed extreme emotional perturbation as they described the rites, demonstrating that ultimately the glue that held the group together was mainly fear and terror, with abundant drug use, although other members dismissed their activities as "simple kid's games" or a sort of "lifestyle adopted by the group members to feel invincible".

Other members described a state of trance in which Ma.M., the author of the book, succeeded in communing with the demon protector of the group, named Noctumonium, "the god of cold". These "contacts" were "mediated" by a "spirit guide" indicated as the spirit of Allan Kardec (Allan Kardec, pseudonym of Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, 1804–1869: French educator and philosopher, regarded as the founder of spiritism, who wrote the code of this doctrine and started its spread worldwide).

This group of young people with their “homemade” rites and fantasy nicknames committed a series of atrocious crimes against members of their own group, which started right from the year of foundation of the group, in 1997, with the attempted murder of F.T. (16) and C.M. (19), both members of the group, then murdered in January 1998. However, investigations of the group activities were only begun in January 2004, after the murder of M.P., who had broken away. During the investigations, the bodies of the first two victims were discovered, and the group was also suspected of being directly responsible for various suicides of other group members or young people with contacts with some of the members.

The most shocking aspect, but also that of greatest criminological interest, is that for more than six years, the remaining members of the group had succeeded in hiding their crimes behind a front of solid silence, continuing to live an apparently blameless life in a climate of “omertà” that bound them all closely together.

### The Facts

In the morning of the 24th of January 2004, in a small town in the province of Varese, the carabinieri (Italian police force) were called out to assist A.V., a 28-year-old man, unemployed, living in the area. He was obviously under the influence of alcohol and drugs and said that he had been attacked the night before while he was with his girlfriend, E.B., who was found semi-conscious inside a car belonging to a friend of theirs, M.P. Closely questioned by the police, 18-year-old E.B. declared that the evening before, in a small house in the nearby woods belonging to her family, during a quarrel, she and her boyfriend A.V. had killed their friend M.P. This girl, an ex-girlfriend of A.V., had been lured into the house on the pretext that they wanted to give her back a videocassette.

The investigators rapidly found the body of M.P. that had been summarily buried in the garden. At autopsy, it was established that she had been buried alive, after having been shot in the face by A.V. and then her skull had been broken by blows with a spade. Further enquiry revealed that another friend (N.S.) – later identified as another member of the “Bestie di Satana” – had also been present and that it was he and E.B. who had hit her with a spade and then hidden the body in the hole. It was discovered that the murder had been decided and planned some months before, because the victim had broken away from the group and they were afraid she could be a danger to them.

The news of the crime and identities of the murderers immediately hit the headlines. In this way, the name A.V. attracted the attention of the father of the young F.T. (one of the two young people killed in 1998), and after reading about the crime in the newspapers, he went to the Police investigating the murder of M.P. and informed them that since the night of the 17th of January 1998, he had had no further contact with his son, then 17 years old. That night the boy had gone out with friends, including A.V. and never came back. With his son was another teenager, C.M., and she had never been heard of since either.

The man said he had been searching for his son ever since, continually enquiring about him from the group of friends, who showed themselves very collaborative and claimed that his son had been seen in Genoa and on another occasion in a German city. The father went to all these places to look for him and also asked about him in a bar in Milan they were all known to frequent. He had discovered that his son and the other friends shared a passion for heavy metal music, a certain style of dress

all in black, body tattoos with satanic symbols and above all, that they drank and took drugs.

At that stage, the investigators linked the murder of M.P. to the disappearance in 1998 of the two young people. In May 2004, after wide searches, and thanks to the collaboration of A.V., the Police found the bodies of the two young people in a deep hole in the woods near the airport of Milan Malpensa. The murders (C.M. had to die because, according to the leader P.L., “the demon inside her had seen the Madonna” and F.T., because “probably he wouldn’t be able to keep quiet about the murder of C.M.”) had been committed on the 17th of January 1998; they had been killed by many blows with a hammer, as well as by knife-cuts and stab wounds all over the body.

The dual murder was reconstructed by comparing the accounts of the different suspects with the results of the medicolegal investigations of the skeletal remains. This also unveiled both the two attempted murders of C.M. and F.T. in November and December 1997, and the final accurate preparation of the successful murders on the evening of the 17th of January 1998. A deep hole had been dug a few days before, then the different tasks were assigned to the various members of the group, and finally the version they should recount at home if they were asked what had happened to their young friends was carefully gone over with each, to ensure they all told the same tale.

This evidence caused cases previously put down as suicide to be reopened and reconsidered as suicides induced by other members of the group to eliminate any of their number thought to be unable to keep the secret of the murders in January 1998, or to be trying to break away from the group. Many different cases were therefore reopened, including those of S.L. (a 20 year old who had run under the wheels of a lorry on his bicycle), A.Bo. (a 20 year old who ran his car against a wall and died on 21 September 1998), A.Ba (a 21 year old who was found hanged in the schoolyard on 6 May 2000), A.L. (a 28 year old, burned to death inside a hut, in November 2003), L.C. (a 19 year old found hanged in April 2004), A.S. (a 20 year old found burned to death in his car on 23 May 2004), and yet others.

In fact, it was discovered that only A.Bo. (who, on the evening of the 17th of January 1998, had been assigned the task of “look-out” but at the last minute didn’t turn up because he didn’t want to be involved in the crimes), had actually committed suicide, on 21 September 1998, after strong, continual psychological pressure by the “Bestie di Satana” who made him take LSD and alcohol and then “convinced” him to choose suicide (by driving flat out against a wall), rather than waiting for them to “execute” him for betrayal.

So, at the end of the enquiries, the magistrate formulated 14 charges ranging from attempted murder to serial killing, inducement to commit suicide, organized crime, concealment of bodies, etc., against eight founder members of the group, as well as E.B., who had become a member a short time before the last murder.

### The Forensic Psychiatry Assessment

All the members of the group were arrested. The extreme cruelty, as well as the apparent incomprehensibility of the crimes, was sufficient cause for mental illness to be invoked by nearly all the counsels for the defense (23,24). A forensic psychiatry assessment was therefore commissioned to verify to what extent the various members were responsible for their actions. The forensic psychiatry experts were also asked to widen their investigations to include the dynamics among the group members and the psychological background.

In Italy, the penal code specifies abolished or diminished liability for crimes if a correlation between the mental disease and the crime can be demonstrated, if the disease was in course at the time of the crime, and if the motives behind the crime and the disease can be shown to be linked. In short, if the crime can be shown to be a symptom of the disease.

The judges therefore decided that a forensic psychiatry assessment was justified only in the cases of Ma.M. (25), a minor at the time – judged at the assessment to be fully aware and responsible (in the Juvenile Criminal Court in Italy, minors under the age of 14 years are not judged responsible for crimes committed; between 14 and 18 years of age penal liability is decided case by case, but the sentence is always reduced) – and P.G., who had a documented history of hospitalization in psychiatric wards (26,27), that began one year after the dual murder in 1998. He was diagnosed with “psychosis induced by substance abuse; a NAS personality disorder”. To check that he was in full possession of his mental capacities at the time of the crime, apart from undergoing various clinical interviews, P.G. was assessed with semi-structured forensic psychiatric interviews, including the Structured Clinical Interview for the DSM-IV (28), or SCID – II (29,30) as well as a number of clinical and personality scales, inventories, and projective tests, such as the WAIS-R, Beck Depression Inventory (31), Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, or MMPI (32), Rorschach (33), Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (34), and the Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (35), or PCL-R.

The SCID showed no psychotic disorders according to the DSM-IV but some subclinical symptoms of general anxiety, social phobia, and depression as well as dependent (immaturity, suggestibility), borderline (i.e., unstable self-image and impulsivity), narcissistic (i.e., grandiose sense of self-importance, lack of empathy, and fantasies of unlimited success (36) and power) personality traits. Both the MMPI and the Beck Depression Inventory (score: 37) confirmed the presence of anxiety and depression. The Barratt Impulsiveness Scale (score: 78) showed impulsivity. The Rorschach confirmed the presence of narcissistic personality traits and impulsivity. The Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (score: 25) demonstrated the presence of psychopathy.

At the conclusion of the assessment, although habitual use of narcotic drugs (37) was recognized as a factor (in the Italian Penal Code, the habitual use of substances that do not induce chronic psychic disturbances does not warrant diminished responsibility but on the contrary, a stiffer sentence), P.G. was judged liable for the crimes. The other eight accused were all considered liable for their actions and stiff sentences were passed, although different degrees of responsibility were attributed to the various members.

## Conclusions

As already pointed out, the forensic psychiatry experts were commissioned not only to examine P.G. but also to widen the field to include the dynamics operating within the “Bestie di Satana” group, by collecting testimonies, documents and all else that might be considered useful, to see whether the dynamics could have a role in the murders, and to endeavor to understand the motives underlying the shocking crimes committed over the years. In fact, the expert assessment did contribute to clarify the relations among the members of the group and the underlying motives.

The emerging data revealed that the historical-cultural phenomenon of satanism, as also of spiritism and the other esoteric

beliefs, did not coincide at all with the criminal acts of this group of “impromptu” satanists that stemmed rather from their life on the cultural margins of society, unsuspected, and all apparently well inserted in their small town cultural milieu. In fact, all the members of the group were students or workers, with normal family backgrounds. For years, they managed to keep their habits, meetings and rough and ready rites concealed, as well as their crimes. They were all bound together by their logic of aggression, psychological, and physical violence, subservience to their leader and his closest followers, terror, silence and “omertà”, sex and drug addiction. At the same time, the lives of the “Bestie di Satana” murderers consisted of frequenting borderline criminal hangouts, drugs, boredom, and a fixation about “extreme” themes like death, sex, desperation. These were the subject of interminable correspondence among them, and notes in their personal diaries, played out against dangerous theme songs of *hard, black, or death rock*.

The group lived a parallel life to their apparently blameless routine of school, work and family, acting out banal, invented rites, involving also the inaccurate use of vocabulary and traditions they did not really know much about. They had a strict hierarchy determined by the personalities of each member. For this reason, one journalist even described them as those “poor devils devoted to Satan”.

As the shocking details of the multiple crimes emerged, the incredulity among the general public led journalists writing for the national newspapers to suggest the probable existence of a “third level”, in other words of a single character or group beyond suspicion who could be the brains behind the organization. In this scenario, the members of the group would be just the handmen, as in the case of the infamous “monster of Florence”, another story of serial killing in which the participation of unknown personages with an interest in black magic was long hypothesized but never demonstrated.

On the contrary, the tragic story can be explained by a model that experts of black magic and modern witchcraft have long since validated. Essentially, this is a disquieting phenomenon that does not need to be analyzed within the framework of the sociological and psychological categories of religious and magic movements, even in their most extreme manifestations, but is rather an expression of juvenile deviation and rebellion. In fact, the American psychologist Joyce Mercer (38), who is one of the best informed and most balanced commenters of the phenomenon of juvenile satanism, interprets it as a “mask” hiding deviation and rebellion. Hiding behind the “mask” of the “Bestie di Satana” was a group of young people who did not suffer from mental disease but from a feeling of boredom, intolerance of rules, a desire to emerge as powerful, important and invincible, “omnipotent” thanks to the use of drugs and the “power of Satan”. For this reason, they were willing to commit extreme violence even against their own kind. After all, as Massimo Introvigne had pointed out already in 1994 (39), for some young people “[...] in a world where sex and obscenities no longer really arouse scandal [...] perhaps only Satan is still a way to rebel”. This should induce us to search for social and cultural responses to juvenile satanism, statistically shown to be a relatively rare phenomenon but with a high criminal potential, as demonstrated by the present report.

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