PARTECIPAZIONE e CONFLITTO
The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies
ISSN: 1972-7623 (print)
ISSN: 2035-6609 (online)
Coordinamento SIBA - University of Salento

PArtecipazione e COnflitto
http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco
ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)
PACO, Issue 18(2) 2025: 301-330
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v18i2p301

Published 15 July, 2025

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Editorial Note

Academic freedom is not just a tick-box exercise for institutions and scholars; it is the ethical backbone of critical scholarship. It is with this conviction that *Partecipazione e Conflitto* has decided to publish the following article *"Youth Political Participation in Italy: The Case of the Student Movement for Palestine"* by Massimiliano Andretta and Paola Imperatore.

This piece of research was originally accepted for publication—following peer review—by the editors of Politica in Italia, a respected outlet within the Italian political science community. However, it was later rejected and withdrawn by the editorial board overseeing the production of the volume, after they introduced an additional and unexpected round of peer review shortly before the volume's publication.

As the authors argued in their final rebuttal letter (see the Appendix), the concerns raised—by reviewers who clearly lacked specific expertise in social movement studies—did not identify any substantive methodological or scientific flaws. Rather, it became increasingly evident that the decision was influenced by the political sensitivity of the article's empirical focus: the wave of pro-Palestinian mobilizations in Italy, and across Western countries, protesting against the Israeli annihilation of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

The tone of the editors' correspondence and the resignation of a key member of the editorial board further reinforce this interpretation.

As a journal committed to the study of collective action, social conflict, and democratic participation, *Partecipazione e Conflitto* views this exclusion not as an isolated editorial decision but as a manifestation of a broader climate of censorship and repression. In recent months, public expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people — whether in the streets, on university campuses, or within academic institutions — have been increasingly targeted by both overt repression and more subtle forms of silencing. This phenomenon is not confined to authoritarian regimes but is alarmingly widespread within liberal democracies, whose political elites and media systems frequently portray themselves as champions of freedom, human rights, and the right to dissent.

The work of Andretta and Imperatore offers a meticulous and empirically grounded reconstruction of a significant wave of student-led mobilisation in Italy. It examines how young people — a generation often described as politically apathetic — have reclaimed universities as spaces of contestation, forging connections between the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and broader critiques of war, colonialism, and global capitalism. The movement they analyse is not only a political response to the genocide taking place in Gaza and the escalating violence in the West Bank, but also a profound

reflection on the contradictions of our democracies, which invoke the language of human rights while criminalising dissent, delegitimising solidarity, and normalising state violence.

As an editorial board, we believe that producing and circulating knowledge about contentious politics — especially when it challenges dominant geopolitical narratives — is not only a scholarly duty but also an ethical imperative. Over the years, *Partecipazione e Conflitto* has consistently published research on protest movements, democratic backsliding, repression, and the shrinking of civic spaces. This editorial line reflects our conviction that critical social research cannot shy away from uncomfortable truths, nor can it remain neutral in the face of systemic injustice.

It is precisely in times of war, when words such as 'genocide', 'apartheid', or 'colonialism' become the object of discursive policing, that the social sciences must reclaim their role in naming reality. The silencing of this article elsewhere only reinforces this necessity.

We are therefore proud to offer a platform for this contribution. In doing so, we reaffirm our commitment to academic freedom, to the right of scholars to investigate and publish on politically sensitive topics, and — most fundamentally — to the principles of peace, justice, and the self-determination of all peoples

***Editorial Board of* Partecipazione e Conflitto**

Youth Political Participation in Italy: The Case of the Student Movement for Palestine

Massimiliano Andretta
University of Pisa

Paola Imperatore
University of Pisa

ABSTRACT:

In a context of deep crisis of democratic institutions — one that has increasingly alienated younger generations from both conventional and unconventional forms of participation — the wave of pro-Palestinian mobilization that has swept across the globe over the past year appears to have reversed a long-standing trend. In Italy, as elsewhere, a new generation of young people has taken the lead in global mobilization for the liberation of Palestine, often identifying the university as both a privileged site and a symbolic target of contestation. This article seeks to reconstruct the key features of this phase of student mobilization and politicization, to highlight the local and global factors that have shaped its development, and to explore the meanings and practices that define it.

KEYWORDS: young – social movements – participation - Italy

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR: massimiliano.andretta@unipi.it; imperatorepaola1@gmail.com

1. Introduction

On 7 October 2023, Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip that resulted in the capture of 240 hostages and the death of around 900 Israeli civilians[1]. The Israeli government responded swiftly with air raids on Gaza, kicking off a new phase of the war with the declared goals of destroying the Hamas organisation and freeing the hostages.

Since then, the conflict has escalated dramatically, mainly due to Israeli air raids and military operations that have caused significant civilian casualties among Palestinians: according to some sources, the number of casualties in Gaza has exceeded 40,000[2], and around 90,000 are injured[3]. This has resulted in a crisis that is at once political, humanitarian and health-related, and which has spread beyond the Gaza Strip in the last months of 2024.

Israel's disproportionate response[4] has shaken civil society worldwide. For the first time, war crimes of such intensity, documented by videos and photos, are brought to the attention of the public.

Mass demonstrations in solidarity with the Palestinian people are taking place all over the world and are intensifying over the months. As data from the Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security (INSS) show, while in the first six days of the war 69% of the protests were against Israel and 31% were in favour, the percentage of protests against Israel's policy has increased dramatically since then, now accounting for 95% of the total number of demonstrations in 92 countries[5]. It is clear from the conflict map that the United States and European countries are the epicentre of this mobilisation, albeit opposed by their respective governments[6].

Italy is no exception in this panorama. Despite timid calls for restraint, the Italian government has embraced US policy of unconditional support for the Israeli government, even when military operations have primarily targeted civilian infrastructure and populations. In part interpreting the views of a public that is increasingly unconvinced by the need for the country to align itself with US foreign policy strategies, and at least hesitant in the face of the military attack on the Gaza Strip, young people, especially students, have mobilised in solidarity with Palestine.

Through a first exploratory investigation of the Italian case, in this article we will try to reconstruct the modalities and dynamics of a renewed youth political protagonism specifically for students. proceeding in this way: in the next paragraph we will theoretically frame the relationship between young people and politics in general and in the Italian case in particular. We will then explain the way in which we operated from a methodological point of view to collect the data analysed for the case study. In the analysis section, we will reconstruct the salient features of mobilisation, its diffusion and youth protagonism, investigating forms, dynamics and motivations. Next, we will focus on the students' camps as a specific form of action of the mobilisation

[1] *Police say they've identified 859 civilian victims from October 7 massacre, up 16*, https://www.timesofisrael.com, 14 November 2023, accessed 11 October 2024.

[2] *The Question of Palestine: Document of the High Commissioner for Human Rights* https://unric.org/it, 12 February 2024, accessed 11 October 2024.

[3] Phillips, A., *Israeli strikes on Gaza mosque and school kill 26, health ministry says*, in "BBC", 6 October 2024

[4] One of the criticisms raised by Cattaneo regards the use of the term "disproportionate reaction," considered politically connoted. The authors highlight that this expression has been explicitly or implicitly recognized by relevant international institutions. For instance, the International Court of Justice declared the accusation of genocide plausible, and the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for the Israeli Prime Minister and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on charges of war crimes. Furthermore, the European Parliament officially condemned "the disproportionate response of the Israeli military" in Gaza, which caused an unprecedented number of civilian casualties.

[5] New Figures Reveal: The Number of Demonstrations Against Israel has Soared, www.inss.org.il, 9 November 2023, accessed 11 October 2024

[6] *Protests For and Against Israel Around the World*, www.inss.org.il, 19 August 2024, accessed 11 October 2024

and, therefore, on universities as the epicentre, but also the target, of the protest. Finally, we will delve into the role that intersectionality played in the pro-Palestinian mobilisation, both as a political perspective and as a method of relating. We will entrust the conclusions with some theoretical and political considerations.

2. Youth and politics: an overview

The academic literature on youth political participation covers various forms of engagement, from electoral behaviour to participation in voluntary associations and social movements [Dalton 2020]. The voting behaviour of young people in general is a major topic of research in political science, and studies have over time shown a lower propensity to electoral participation than older generations, especially in more established democracies [Giugni and Grasso 2021, Blais and Rubenson 2013, Cammaerts et al. 2014, Dalton 2020]. This gap has been attributed to several factors, including lower political efficacy, a lack of connection to political parties and dissatisfaction with available options [Blais and Rubenson 2013]. The younger generation in Italy also appears to have followed European trends [Revelli 2017].

Despite the electoral rise of protest parties in the previous decade — such as the M5S in Italy — which marked a slight turnaround in terms of politically disillusioned young people's involvement, as they capitalised on widespread dissatisfaction with traditional parties by presenting themselves as an anti-establishment alternative (Mosca and Quaranta, 2017), the erosion of traditional political structures and cultures resumed its significant impact on the relationship between young people and participation as this political interlude closed. This general trend is also confirmed by the latest ISTAT survey on political participation, which shows an extremely low level of trust in politics among young people and a decline of almost 10% in political engagement among people aged 14 to 35 between 2011 and 2023.

On the other hand, associationism represents an important area of youth political involvement as well as a 'school of democracy' through which young people acquire civic skills, build social capital and develop a sense of political efficacy [Putnam 2000]. Studies [Zukin et al. 2006] have shown that, in the face of a decline in institutional political engagement, young people are increasingly involved in community development-oriented activities at the local level or in the defence of human, social and environmental rights at the global level [Henn and Foard 2014]. Although in recent years there has been a certain decline in membership of associations among young people between 14 and 35, civic engagement in voluntary activities is higher than in older generations [Andretta and Bracciale 2021].

By contrast, the field that has attracted more youth participation in recent decades is that of social movements. From the Arab Springs to the climate strikes led by Greta Thunberg, young people have demonstrated their willingness to engage in collective protest actions. Social media have amplified this trend, providing platforms for young activists to mobilise and coordinate on a transnational scale [Loader et al. 2015]. Indeed, digital media have played a crucial role in facilitating young people's participation in social movements to the extent that platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook allow them to quickly organise, share information and raise attention to issues ignored by mainstream politics [Bennett and Segerberg 2013].

Italy has a long tradition of youth involvement in social movements, particularly in movements related to workers' rights, student protests and, more recently, environmental activism. From the student protests of the 1960s and 1970s to the anti-globalisation and No TAV movements of the early 2000s, young people have been central actors in promoting political and social change. Recent research has confirmed that young Italians are more prone to protest than adults and that exposure to new media far from isolating them in virtual bubbles facilitates their participation in movements [Paolillo and Gerbaudo 2022, Andretta and della Porta 2020, Andretta and Bracciale 2021, Chironi et al. 2024]. Indeed, youth participation has also gone through the recent disruptive 'critical junctures'. Young people and students have mobilised against the precarisation of the labour

market, university reform with substantial cuts in ordinary funding, and austerity policies in the period of the recent economic crisis (2007-2012) [Zamponi and Gonzalez 2019, Andretta and della Porta 2020, Andretta 2022]; they have subsequently responded vigorously to the global call to mobilise to place the urgency of effectively addressing climate change at the centre of public debate [Bertuzzi 2020, Tomnyuk et al. 2023]; and they made a relevant contribution during the pandemic in coordinating committees, solidarity brigades, purchasing groups and many other actors engaged in direct social actions aimed at addressing, through solidarity-based, self-managed and mutualistic forms, the daily needs that the institutions failed to listen to (e.g. solidarity shopping, psychological counters, etc.) [della Porta 2022]. Student organisations, youth associations, and self-managed social centres also crowded the squares of the recent general strikes called first by CGIL and UIL and then by the grassroots unions.

The mobilisations in solidarity with Palestine, however, mature in a totally different context. Whereas in previous mobilisations, youth social movements were able to rely on a mix of political and discursive opportunities [Andretta 2022, della Porta 2022, Bertuzzi et al. 2021], the mobilisation in solidarity with Palestine is succeeding in capturing public attention and in some cases achieving results of some significance, in a context characterised by the 'moral panic' [della Porta 2024a and 2024b] mobilised by mainstream media and political actors who attempt to associate any voice opposed to the massacre of Palestinians with anti-Semitic sentiment. Thus, while the data on anti-Semitic violence reveal the reactionary and fascist nature of the actors mobilising it, 'the most striking reaction to the war in Gaza has been the repression of public expressions of solidarity with the Palestinians' motivated by 'an attempt to attribute the threat of anti-Semitism to pro-Palestinian movements' [della Porta 2024a, 287] in order to justify particularly restrictive law and order control strategies.

If the conditions in which young people's solidarity with the Palestinians matures, in Italy as elsewhere, therefore appear particularly prohibitive, it seems all the more relevant to us to analyse and understand the mechanisms that have allowed the emergence of a coordinated protest according to the classic social movement mode of collective coordination, i.e. centred on the sharing of resources by groups and individuals through informal networks united by common values and objectives [Diani 2015].

3. Method

In order to provide an initial exploratory overview of the student movement for Palestine, which has been structured since the autumn of 2023 and developed further during 2024, a methodology based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative survey instruments was chosen. The empirical research was mainly based on semi-structured qualitative interviews with pro-Pal key activists in the universities and Protest Event Analysis (PEA).

On the one hand, the Protest Event Analysis (PEA), conducted from January to September 2024 through Google News with the keyword 'protesta Palestina', allowed us to collect and code information on 213 protest events and thus identify general trends in terms of participation, types of actors, action' repertoires and levels of repression. As we will see later, most of these protests turn out to have been coordinated by young people, especially students. This is why we decided to conduct the in-depth interviews with university activists.

To investigate the dynamics of what appears to be the most significant pro-Palestinian mobilization in Italy in the last year, we conducted six in-depth interviews involving a total of 13 activists (five male and eight female students), all identified—through direct contacts and activist networks—as key figures within university encampments. These individuals were selected for their central role in six local nodes of the *Studentə for Palestine* movement.

To capture a broad and diverse range of perspectives, we intentionally included both politically experienced activists and first-time participants. We also ensured diversity in terms of academic background and geographic

location, with interviewees drawn from universities in the North, Center, and South of Italy. Specifically, interviews were conducted in three regions: Sicily (Palermo and Catania), Tuscany (Pisa and Florence), and Veneto (Padua and Venice). The interviews were conducted in the period between July and October 2024, and were all held online, except for the interview at the Pisa node which was conducted in person. The choice of regions and cities within these regions was motivated both by the significant number of Palestine protests that took place there (see Figure 1) and by the access that our direct contacts with the organisations present gave us, which facilitated the identification of interviewees. Although this contribution does not aim to represent the entire pro-Pal movement, we believe that the attempt to explore in depth the student component of the movement, coupled with the analysis of the protest events, can give us a fairly realistic picture of the mechanisms and reasons that we want to reconstruct to understand youth participation in this cycle of global contestation.

4 Discussion

4.1 The spread of protest and youth leadership

Over the past year, civil society organisations committed to supporting the liberation of Palestine have intensified their efforts in parallel with the worsening political and humanitarian situation. Protest events spanned the entire country, from North to South, with varying intensities as Figure 1 shows.

What distinguished this cycle of mobilization, however, was its predominantly youth-driven composition, with most protests (90%) emerging from schools and universities. In the autumn of 2023, it was primarily left-wing student collectives and university-based organizations that initiated the mobilization in various cities. Their actions were driven by political visions and ideals cultivated within activist spaces, grounded in principles of self-determination of peoples, internationalism, transfeminism, and a rejection of war and colonial policies (Int. Venice2, Int. Palermo, Int. Padua1). Students began to mobilise through garrisons, demonstrations, and public meetings, and the first occupations inside universities or in symbolic places were born. In Pisa, for example, the students lowered the Palestinian flag from the tower, an image that would soon go around the world and fuel the imagination of an emerging global youth movement for Palestine:

> I think that was the beginning of a movement that marked a break with the political militancy I was already doing on my territory [...], seeing the Tower of Pisa with the Palestinian flag [...] had a really big media resonance. [...] (Int. Pisa1).

As Figure 2 shows, the types of organisations are predominantly informal, such as student collectives, political youth groups and social centres, but the role of formal associations is also important (20%), including associations belonging to Palestinian territorial communities. In rare cases, the presence of parties or trade unions was recorded.

Figure 1 The regional spread of pro-Palestine mobilisation in Italy (January-September 2024)

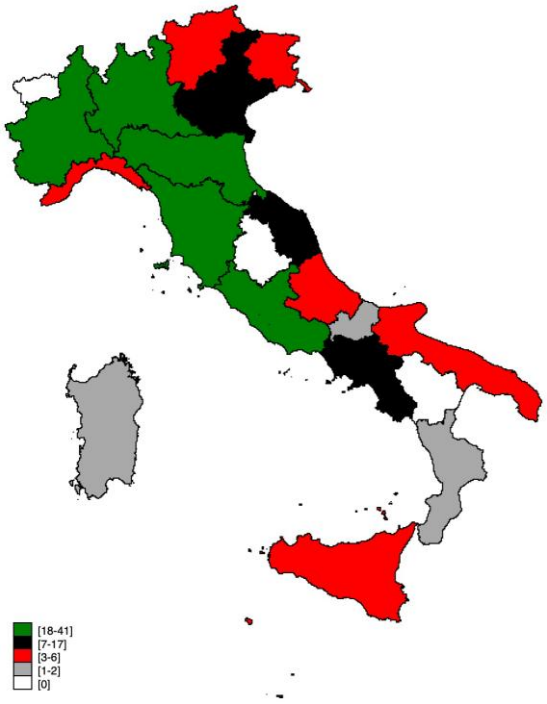
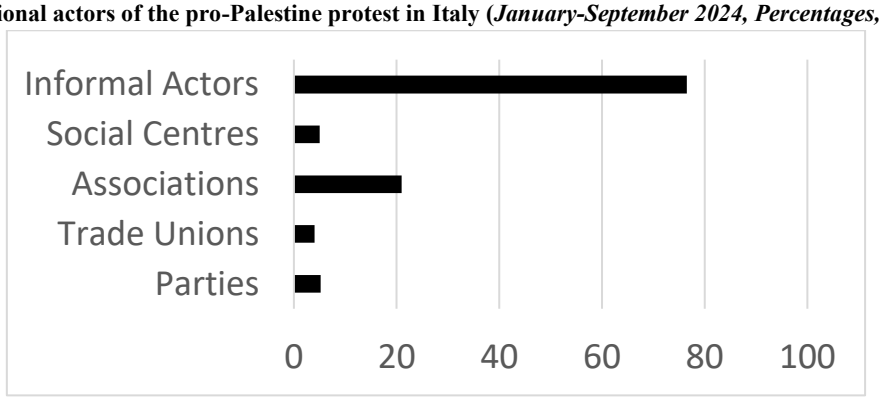


Figure 2. Organizational actors of the pro-Palestine protest in Italy (*January-September 2024, Percentages, N=213)*[7]



There are several factors that explain the wide youth involvement in the mobilisation for Palestine. First, there is the central role of social media: "social media were crucial because they gave you access to information that was completely distorted by the official media" (Int. Pisa1).

An activist who learned about the Palestinian cause through an influencer claims that "this was the first genocide directly reported and witnessed by the victims on social media and this made our generation the main spectator" (Int. Pisa2).

At the same time, interviewees highlighted the availability of organizational resources — such as meeting spaces and free time — as a key factor facilitating youth mobilization, especially when compared to older generations who often struggle to engage on these issues:

[7] Percentages sum to more than 100% because up to three types of actors were coded for each protest event.

> The current situation offers different meeting places than adults, who have to find a space to meet or, in many cases, fail to create that feeling of community." (Int. Padua3; see also Int. Florence4)

In addition to access to organizational resources, student activism around Palestine was also shaped by previous cycles of youth mobilization—particularly those related to climate justice—which had fostered new political visions and heightened awareness, making young people more inclined to engage in solidarity with Palestine (Int. Padua1, Int. Pisa1, Int. Catania, Int. Palermo). In Padua, particular emphasis was placed on the mobilization against gender-based violence, which intensified following the highly mediatized femicide of Giulia Cecchettin:

> In November we learned of Giulia Cecchettin's feminicide and this obviously changed the situation, in the sense that 20,000 people took to the streets, something not seen in decades. [...] The level of mobilisation that you could perceive around 7 October exploded, the University of Padua came out of it revolutionised because you could see people in every department coming out of class to make placards and hang them up all over the university. There was a giant feeling of indignation. (Int Padua1)

Parallel to the broadening of the protest and the increasing readiness of students to mobilise, a political attempt emerges to contract the space for action in support of Palestine by resorting to 'moral panic'. This process was evident in February, when, on the one hand, the presence of Ghali, who had called for a 'stop to genocide' from the Sanremo stage, was banned, and on the other, the students' protest met with police repressive strategies, as in the case of the demonstrations in Pisa, Florence and Catania on 23 February.

According to PEA data, police coercive intervention occurs in 17% of the identified incidents but, in the absence of young students, the percentage drops to 8%.

Although, in some cases, the repressive management of pro-Palestinian protests was justified by fears of an alleged resurgence of antisemitism [della Porta 2024a; 2024b], this narrative is strongly contested by the students themselves:

> The counterpart's narrative tried to divert attention from what was actually happening, claiming that we weren't going to the university but to the synagogue [...] there was a Jewish student with us, and this was important to show that we had nothing against the Jewish community, but we were against Zionism as represented by the Israeli government (Int. Florence1; cf. Int. Florence2)

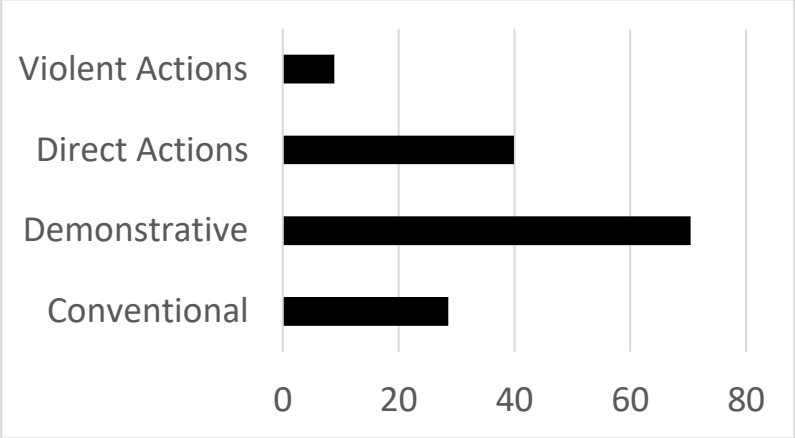
> the struggle for Palestine has been criminalised by the Western media, which brand any opposition to Zionist colonialism as anti-Semitism (Int. Pisa2)

However, the response and solidarity generated around the students played a crucial role in broadening the scope of the mobilization and mitigating the intensity of state repression, particularly as the encampments began to take shape and the protests expanded (Int. Pisa1; Int. Catania).

4.2 The season of encampments

From its inception, the movement for Palestine has been marked using a diverse and plural repertoire of action (see Figure 3). Alongside traditional and conventional forms of protest—such as meetings, petition drives, leafleting, and information booths—more demonstrative actions emerged over time, including marches, strikes, and symbolic initiatives. These were later complemented, particularly during the most intense phases of mobilization, by direct action tactics, such as sit-ins, road blockades, event disruptions, occupations, and university encampments. These forms of protest were explicitly intended to interrupt daily routines and draw attention to what has been described by UN reports as genocide.[8]

Figure 3. Action repertoire of the pro-Palestine protest in Italy (*January-September 2024, Percentages, N=213)*[9]



However, it is the tents pitched at universities that become the most evocative symbol of this movement. In April 2024, a wave of university occupations spread from universities in the United States, followed soon after by encampments in Europe (Paris, Lausanne, Amsterdam, Madrid, Geneva, Grenoble, Lyon, Lisbon, Barcelona, Brussels, Berlin, Krakow, Ljubljana are just some of the cities where there will be student encampments) but also in Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Japan.

The week of the 76th anniversary of the Nakba, commemorated on 15 May, becomes the occasion to give life also in Italy to the 'student intifada' (Int. Catania, Int. Pisa). On 8 May, students in Bologna set up the camp for Palestine, which quickly and capillary spread to many other universities in small and large cities, from Palermo to Turin, from Naples to Bari, passing through Rome, Milan, Pavia, Parma, Siena, Cosenza, and many others. A student from Catania explains that the idea of the camp matured "seeing above all the evolution of international events, seeing that the students were in the lead, that in the United States the students were making tents" (Int. Catania). According to another student from Pisa:

> it was very important to see a movement that was truly global [...] in slogans, aesthetics, imagery and buzzwords because it allowed you to feel part of something much bigger (Int. Pisa1).

[8] *Anatomy of a Genocide. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967*. www.un.org, 25 March 2024, accessed 30 October 2024.
[9] Percentages sum to more than 100% because up to three forms of actions were coded for each protest event.

The phase of the encampments marks a turning point in the physiognomy of the protest: the diffused and sporadic protest becomes a more structured and continuous movement, the composition changes, the repertoire of action widens and radicalises, the internal organisation of the movement changes, the timing of the struggle condenses and accelerates (Int. Palermo and Catania).

On the one hand, there was the "active involvement of the student base that began to mobilize" (Int. Venice1), with daily assemblies attended by over a hundred participants (Int. Padua2), and the inclusion of universities traditionally less inclined to mobilize, such as the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence (Int. Florence3) and the IUAV in Venice (Int. Venice1). On the other hand, a national coordination effort was established, with student encampments across Italy connecting through weekly online meetings (Int. Florence3).

The mobilization also extended beyond the student body, engaging other components of the university community—from precariously employed researchers and faculty members to administrative staff and doorkeepers (Int. Catania, Int. Palermo, Int. Padua3, Int. Florence4). This unusual alliance across university roles, as several activists pointed out, created the conditions for a broader and more sustained mobilization, enabling pressure to be exerted from multiple angles (Int. Venice) and prompting demands for universities to take responsibility for their "complicity with the war" (Int. Florence).

One of the clearest expressions of this politicization was the national opposition to the MAECI call for scientific and technological collaboration between Italy and Israel, which became a focal point of protest and ultimately led many universities to refrain from participating in the call.

The expansion of the movement for Palestine inevitably brought about transformations in the role of political organizations. On the one hand, there were instances of "more identity-driven dynamics," yet, as one activist noted, "the plurality of the movement managed to unite the different organizations as far as possible" (Int. Venice1). On the other hand, there emerged a shared recognition of the need to "make tools available without the ambition of having to be representative" (Int. Padua1) of such a broad and heterogeneous movement, thereby challenging long-standing organizing practices:

> We reflected on the fact that there are young people in their twenties who have never been involved in politics, who genuinely want to mobilize, and on the need not to impose predefined ways of occupying public space, but rather to construct them collectively. (Int. Padua1)

In this context, the experience of the encampments reshaped the forms of participation not only among first-time protesters, but also among long-time activists, who found themselves immersed in a mobilization that was radically different from their previous experiences (Int. Catania, Int. Venice3, Int. Venice4). As one participant noted, *"all the schemes collapsed [...] there was no rituality, and nothing could be taken for granted"* (Int. Palermo; see also Int. Catania).

Following a prolonged period in which mobilization had largely receded within the university and public support for more radical protest tactics had eroded, many activists now describe the university as a space that has been fundamentally transformed over the past few months (Int. Catania).

On the other hand, the encampment should be understood not only as a form of protest, but also as an expression of prefigurative politics — a space in which the rhythms of daily life and modes of collective organization are actively reimagined. It offered students an opportunity, as one interviewee put it, "to take

back the university space and create an alternative to the alienating environment we experience every day in our departments" (Int. Pisa3).

Collectively managing the day-to-day life of the encampment posed challenges both at the logistical-organizational level and in terms of cohabitation and mutual care (Int. Palermo, Int. Venice3, Int. Florence3). Preparing meals for hundreds of people, maintaining sanitary facilities, organizing political activities, and ensuring the safety of the camp — tasks initially carried out primarily by the most experienced militants — eventually required a broader redistribution of responsibilities. As one activist observed, *"step by step, everyone began to take responsibility"* (Int. Palermo).

Within some encampments, so-called "fuchsia spaces" were established to address potential instances of harassment and also served as decompression zones for those in need of emotional support (Int. Padua1). These spaces contributed to the emergence of community-building processes, in which attention to inclusive language, interpersonal behaviour, and mutual care developed — according to the activists — relatively spontaneously (Int. Venice2). This evolution was also attributed to the prior groundwork laid by transfeminist movements, which, as noted by one interviewee, had already produced irreversible cultural shifts (Int. Padua1).

4.3 The university as epicenter and target of the protest

Both nationally and globally, the mobilization for Palestine found its epicentre in the university, which, according to many activists, underwent a process of repoliticisation after nearly a decade of demobilization (Int. Palermo). The encampment phase was seen as having reclaimed occupation as a "dialectical form of engagement with the university" — a practice that, as one activist noted, "was not at all taken for granted until the previous year" (Int. Padua1). As another recalled, the encampments "broke that normality, giving people the perception that it was possible to collectively organize and manage a university space" (Int. Catania).

Unlike previous cycles of student protest — often triggered by specific university-related reforms — this mobilization was marked by the global nature of its cause. In this respect, it more closely resembles the 1968 movement than more recent waves such as the *Pantera* or *Onda* mobilizations. On this occasion, the university emerged as both the epicenter and the target of a protest with unprecedented characteristics, one that simultaneously challenged the institution's hierarchical structure and sparked a broader reflection on the role of academia in society and the supposed neutrality of knowledge.

It is precisely from this broader reflection that the university became central to this round of protest, particularly through the demand — taken up by the global movement — to sever academic ties and suspend scientific and technological cooperation agreements with Israeli universities. While boycott practices have historically targeted military corporations (e.g., Leonardo S.p.A.), major brands (e.g., HP, Puma), online platforms (e.g., Airbnb), and retail chains (e.g., Carrefour, McDonald's) that invest in Israel (as promoted by the BDS campaign), the university became the primary focus at this stage. This shift occurred due to its strategic role in "the social and ideological reproduction of state policy" (Int. Padua2), especially in a context marked by war escalation and the global militarization of knowledge and infrastructure (Int. Venice1; Int. Pisa1). Thus,

> we began to go beyond symbolic actions of solidarity to undertake work that began to question our position within the university in an ever-deeper way, to understand what our education system teaches us, the contradictions in which we are immersed and what we as students can do about it (Int. Pisa1).

In a context where students increasingly perceived the "total disconnection from reality [and] the alienation of a knowledge detached from the needs of society" (Int. Pisa1), the decision matured to join the academic boycott campaign, launched already in 2014 by the Palestinian National Committee arguing that "academic institutions are a key point in the ideological and institutional structure of Israel's regime of oppression, colonialism and apartheid against the Palestinian population" and denouncing the proximity between the Israeli academy and the Israeli political-military establishment "in the perpetuation of Israel's systematic denial of Palestinian rights".[10] At the same time, "there were reflections on scholasticide and the destruction of places of culture such as schools and universities as part of colonisation" (Int. Venice1).

The call for an academic boycott was taken up by the entire movement in Italian universities, which acted in unison by submitting motions to their respective Academic Senates containing common demands for the interruption of relations with Israeli universities and with two Italian industrial giants - Leonardo Spa and Eni - that maintain relations and exchanges with Israel linked to the development of *dual use* technologies (Int. Palermo, Int. Padua2, Int. Catania).

> We have brought various motions, but the motion to boycott Israeli universities has become the central one because [academic collaboration] is the instrument through which the university arms and expresses its complicity with every aspect of the occupation (Int. Palermo).

The motions presented by students were the outcome of an extensive process of study and collective research conducted during the weeks of the encampments. This effort was enriched by the involvement of supportive faculty and researchers, and further deepened through public discussions with experts, journalists, legal scholars, and representatives of various organizations—from UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese to psychiatrist and writer Samah Jabr, and from environmental NGOs such as ReCommon to journalists engaged with the issue. According to the activists, this path of training and self-education was empowered by the ongoing mobilization itself, which they believe “forced” the university to at least listen to the movement’s demands (Int. Venice1; Int. Pisa2; Int. Palermo):

> However well-constructed and objectively just the motions may be, in the end the university listens to you as long as it has to. It is a question of power, and 10,000 people in the square was a number [that could not be ignored] (Int. Pisa2)

> When they told us that they would discuss the motion not on the scheduled day but weeks later, we raised the level of mobilisation and carried out disruptive practices on campus, and this immediately activated their attention. This [readiness to mobilise] was crucial throughout this whole affair (Int. Palermo)

The outcome of the various motions was quite similar in all cities: the boycott was rejected on the grounds of academic freedom and the role of the university as a bridge between worlds and cultures. Students' demands were heard everywhere, given also the strength that the movement expressed, but the final decisions circumvented all the major points raised by the mobilisation, while others were received that were more formal than substantial, such as the call for a ceasefire (Int. Padua1). According to the activists, university governance

[10] *PACBI Guidelines for the International Academic Boycott of Israel,* www.bdsitalia.org, 31 July 2014, accessed 4 November 2024

handled the conflict by "receiving it and regulating it, dampening it and depowering it" (Int. Palermo). This approach, on the one hand, intensified the movement's confrontational stance, particularly during the encampment phase; on the other hand, it undermined the university's moral authority and intellectual integrity in the eyes of the students (Int. Pisa1):

> First, they teach you in courses like Political Science or Peace Studies that the most legitimate form of peaceful opposition is boycott—and then they turn around and deny it" (Int. Pisa1), "despite the fact that the exact same demands had been made just two years earlier in relation to Ukraine*"* (Int. Padua3).

4.4 Intersectionality as a perspective and method of relationship

The alliances built by the pro-Palestinian movement within universities extended far beyond the academic sphere. Local socio-political dynamics, along with activists' multiple affiliations, played a significant role in shaping relationships and fostering the interconnection of political issues and struggles.

In Florence, for example, the struggle for Palestine intersected with the mobilization of workers from the GKN Factory Collective and Sì Cobas (Int. Florence2), who have long emphasized the need for convergence among social, environmental, anti-militarist, and labor demands.

In Sicily, student mobilization aligned with the campaign against the Strait Bridge (*Ponte sullo Stretto*)—a project described by the government as a strategic infrastructure to support military logistics but seen by activists as a symbol of capitalist war-driven development (Int. Palermo).

It also connected with mobilizations against repression (Ibid.; Int. Catania). In Veneto, the links between the liberation of Palestine, anti-war activism, and climate justice were even more immediate, thanks to the multiple affiliations of many activists with social centers in the North-East and the Venice Climate Camp (Int. Padua1).

On the whole, through a convergence strategy, the youth movement for Palestine managed to gather "different instances and involve the city" (Int. Palermo) "intersecting already existing struggles and movements" (Int. Pisa1) such as, for example, the one for the right to housing, the transfeminist one and those against the militarisation of the territory such as the No Muos and the No Base movements.

In spite of contextual differences that have entangled different movements, common traits emerge in the reading of the situation in Palestine:

> for us, this battle for Palestine and against Zionism must be read within the battle of anti-fascism and in the contingency of the war that we currently recognise as one of the world's biggest cleavages (Int. Palermo).

> we have begun to read war as a total phenomenon, as the apex of a system that oppresses, that exploits land, bodies, entire populations, and as a phenomenon that needs an ideology. [...] what is the mentality that can allow total war? It is a mentality that prevaricates, it is a male chauvinist, colonising mentality (Int. Pisa1).

In this last excerpt, the intersectional approach taken by the movement in the universities for Palestine emerges: an intersectionality that is both a reading lens and a method of relating, embodying the legacy of feminist, anti-militarist, ecologist and decolonial struggles to analyse the situation in Palestine.

For the movement, it was immediate to "read the genocide in Palestine as a colonial project" (Int. Catania), while the "transfeminist lens and ecological and climate struggles allowed it to unhinge the discourse built around Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East, the happy island for women's and queer rights within the Middle Eastern context" (Int. Venice2) and denounce the "ecocide and oppression on the territories" that are perpetrated (*Ibid*.):

> one of the tools of colonialism is to ride the wave of prejudices of Western ideology: we in the rich part of the world are the perfect example of freedom of thought, of expression, of rights for women, of rights for the queer community, when of course this is not the case, while the global south and in this case the Arab community represents the opposite, and this colonial thinking finds in Israel its highest expression: "Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East", "Israel is the only city in the Middle East to live in, the only place where there is the pride" (Int. Pisa2).

According to activists, colonial thinking leads to identifying "Palestinians and Muslim people in general as inherently misogynistic and homophobic, justifying their domination in the name of Western liberal values" (Int. Venice2). Although in the Middle East as elsewhere there are groups and organisations that champion the feminist cause[11] , feminism is used instrumentally to justify Israel (Int. Catania). Furthermore, activists point out that there is no salvation for women and queer people under the bombing (Int. Venice2), highlighting the priority of ending the conflict so that there are conditions to talk about rights. As one activist recounts, the inappropriate and instrumental use of certain themes led the students to carry out "moments of in-depth study on the difference between colonial feminism and women's autonomy, on the critique of Orientalism" (Int. Catania):

> There is a need for a much more extensive and structured effort to understand the political landscape in Palestine. Otherwise, we risk reproducing the classic white mentality that assumes everything in Europe is complex, while everything outside is reduced to a binary of one side against the other, oversimplifying the analysis." (Int. Padua1)

> "We clearly support women's liberation everywhere—in Palestinian society, with all its specificities, as in Italy. But we must also remember that war is a patriarchal phenomenon; it requires a patriarchal society. It is necessarily a patriarchal society that wages war." (Int. Pisa1)

5. Conclusions

The evolution of the Pro-Pal movement, as it is often dubbed in the press, has marked a new cycle of participation and politicisation of a generation that grew up in the historical phase of greatest disaffection from

[11] For a reconstruction see: Jahshan E. [2024], *Arabə and queer. Storie lgbtq+ dal mondo arabo*. Naples: Tamu Edizioni and Moghadam V. M. [2023], *Varieties of feminisms in the Middle East and North Africa*. In Handbook of Middle East Politics, edited by S. Akbarzadeh. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing: 89-109.

politics as well as during a pandemic that has made education and socialisation paths intermittent. In a global context characterised by the escalation of war, the rise of the extreme right, and the increasing intolerance of institutions to forms of dissent, the indignation over the massacre of the Palestinian people has led a new generation to enter political participation. This political involvement in Italy was structured through mostly informal organisational forms and radical repertoires of action, reflecting the widespread disaffection and distrust towards traditional forms of political representation. Schools and universities have been the epicentre of this protest cycle.

This new phase of mobilisation of young people - unprecedented if one considers that the subject of protest does not directly concern the areas of education and the right to study - could not be understood without looking at the combination of local and global factors.

In fact, as we have seen in these pages, this cycle of protest also spread thanks to the work of political collectives and organisations rooted in the territory that provided a social infrastructure to the movement for Palestine by making available their dense network of social relations (what is commonly referred to as social capital) and their capital of reflections, analyses and paths sedimented over time (political capital) which, together, facilitated the building of alliances and the intersection of issues.

At the same time, global factors influenced the development of the pro-Pal protest in Italy, significantly broadening participation, particularly among young people. In this context, social networks were a key factor, both because they were an indispensable tool to show the world what was happening in Palestine and to broaden the media visibility of the first camps in the United States.

However, if the pro-Pal student movement managed to shorten the distance between youth and participation by triggering a process of political activation, the furrow between youth and institutions has instead widened. The coercive management of the Palestine protest, the university governance's unwillingness to question existing agreements with Israeli universities even if only to apply pressure at the most critical moments, the constant attempt to criminalise young people do not seem to us to be able to narrow this furrow.

References

Andretta, M. [2022], *La crisi economica e la protesta. L'Italia in prospettiva storico-comparata (2009-2014)*, Pisa, Pisa University Press.

Andretta M. and Bracciale, R. [2021], *Young Italians, NEETs and Political Engagement, Any Good News?*, in *Forms of Collective Engagement in Youth Transitions: A Global Perspective*, edited by V. Cuzzocrea, B. Gook and B. Schiermer, Leida, Brill, pp. 161-184.

Andretta, M. and della Porta, D. [2020], *When Millennials Protest: Youth Activism in Italy*, in *Italian Youth in International Context: Belonging, Constraints and Opportunities*, edited by V. Cuzzocrea, B.G. Bello and Y. Kazepov, London, Routledge, pp. 161-184.

Bennett, W.L. and Segerberg, A. [2013], *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Bertuzzi, N., Imperatore, P. and Leonardi, E. [2021]. *The Fridays for Future in Italy: Constituency, Networks and Frame*. In «CES-Contexto», 29, pp. 272-289.

Blais, A. and Rubenson, D. [2013], *The source of turnout decline: New values or new contexts?.* In «Comparative Political Studies», 46(1), pp. 95-117.

Cammaerts, B., Bruter, M., Banaji, S., Harrison, S. and Anstead, N. [2014], *The myth of youth apathy: Young Europeans' critical attitudes toward democratic life*. In «American Behavioral Scientist», 58(5), pp.645-664.

Chironi, D., della Porta, D. and Milan, C. [2024], *The Political Participation of Young People in Times of Crisis: A Framework for Analysis*, in *Handbook on Youth Activism*, edited by J. Conner, Cheltenham, Elgar, pp. 2-15.

Colombo, A.D., Dalla-Zuanna, G., Saracino, B., Quassoli, F. and Scioni, M. [2024], *Before and After October 7: Changes in Italian Undergraduates' Attitudes towards Jews and Muslims*, in «Contemporary Jewry», vol. 44, pp. 937-963.

Dalton, R. J. [2020], *The good citizen: How a younger generation is reshaping American politics*. CQ press.

della Porta, D. [2022], *Contentious Politics in Emergency Critical Junctures: Progressive Social Movements during the Pandemic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

— [2024a], *Moral Panic and Repression: The Contentious Politics of Anti-Semitism in Germany*, in «Partecipazione e Conflitto», vol. 17, n. 2, pp. 276-349.

— [2024b], *Guerra all'antisemitismo. Il panico morale come strumento di repressione politica*, Milano, Altreconomia.

Diani, M. [2015], *The Cement of Civil Society: Studying Networks in Localities*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Donnarumma, M.R. [2024], *L'ordinanza della C.I.G. nel caso Sud Africa v. Israele e l'accusa di genocidio*, in «Giurisprudenza Penale Web», n. 2, pp. 1-6.

Giugni, M. and Grasso, M. [2021], *Youth and politics in times of increasing inequalities*, Springer International Publishing.

Henn, M. and Foard, N. [2014], *Young People and Politics in Britain*, in «Sociology Review», vol. 23, n. 4, pp. 18-22.

Jahshan, E. [2024], *Arabə e queer. Storie lgbtq+ dal mondo arabo*, Napoli, Tamu edizioni.

Jamaluddine, Z., Abukmail, H., Aly, S., Campbell, O.M. e Checchi, F. [2025], *Traumatic Injury Mortality in the Gaza Strip from Oct 7, 2023, to June 30, 2024: A Capture-Recapture Analysis*, in «The Lancet», 9 gennaio.

Loader, B.D., Vromen, A., Xenos, M.A., Steel, H. and Burgum, S. [2015], *Campus Politics, Student Societies and Social Media*, in «The Sociological Review», vol. 63, n. 4, pp. 820-839.

Moghadam, V.M. [2023], *Varieties of Feminisms in the Middle East and North Africa*, in *Handbook of Middle East Politic*s, edited by S. Akbarzadeh, Cheltenham, Elgar, pp. 89-109

Mosca, L. and Quaranta, M. [2017], *Voting for Movement Parties in Southern Europe: The Role of Protest and Digital Information*, in «South European Society and Politics», vol. 22, n. 4, pp. 427-446.

Paolillo, M. and Gerbaudo, P. [2022], *Mobilised yet Unaffiliated: Italian Youth and the Uneven Return to Political Participation*, in «Journal of Youth Studies», vol. 26, n. 8, pp. 963-979.

Putnam, R.D. [2000], *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, Simon & Schuster.

Revelli, F. [2017], *Voter Turnout in Italian Municipal Elections, 2002-2013*, in «Italian Economic Journal», vol. 3, n. 2, pp. 151-165.

Tomnyuk, V., Varavallo, G., Parisi, T. and Barbera, F. [2023], *All Shades of Green: The Anatomy of the Fridays for Future Movement in Italy*, in «Sustainability», vol. 15, n. 18, pp. 1-16.

Zamponi, L. and Gonzalez, J.F. [2019], *Dissenting Youth: How Student and Youth Struggles Helped Shape Anti-Austerity Mobilisations in Southern Europe*, in *Resisting Austerity Collective Action in Europe in the Wake of the Global Financial Crisis*, edited by C.F. Fominaya e G. Hayes, London, Routledge, pp. 69-86.

Zukin, C., Keeter, S., Andolina, M., Jenkins, K. and Delli Carpini, M.X. [2006], *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Interviews

Int. Pisa 1, student and activist of Collettivo Universitario Autonomo, Pisa, 3/10/24

Int. Pisa 2, student, Pisa, 3/10/24

Int. Pisa 3, student, Pisa, 3/10/24
Int. Catania, student and activist of Collettivo Spine nel fianco, online, 2/07/24
Int. Palermo, student and activist of Collettivo Scirocco, online, 3/07/24
Int. Florence 1, student and activist of Studenti di Sinistra, online, 12/07/24
Int. Florence 2, student and activist of Studenti di Sinistra, online, 12/07/24
Int. Florence 3, student and activist of Studenti di Sinistra, online, 12/07/24
Int. Florence 4, student and activist of Studenti di Sinistra, online, 12/07/24
Int. Venice 1, student and activist of Collettivo Lisc, online, 05/07/24
Int. Venice 2, student and activist of Collettivo Lisc, online, 05/07/24
Int. Venice 3, student, online, 05/07/24
Int. Venice 4, student, online, 05/07/24
Int. Padua 1, student and activist of Collettivo Spina, online, 22/07/24
Int. Padua 2, student and activist of Collettivo Spina, online, 22/07/24
Int. Padua 3, student and activist of Collettivo Spina, online, 22/07/24

APPENDIX

Response by the Authors to the Editorial Board of *Italian Politics* and to the Executive Committee of the Istituto Cattaneo

Dear members of the editorial board of *Politica in Italia* and of the executive committee of the Istituto Cattaneo, and, for your information, to the editors of this year's volume and the editorial staff of *Contemporary Italian Politics*,

We thank you for offering us the opportunity to contribute to the *Politica in Italia 2025* volume with a chapter devoted to what we—together with the editors of the volume—considered one of the most significant youth mobilizations of the year: the solidarity expressed by students, in Italy as in many other countries, with the Palestinian people.

However, we must point out that the evaluation process to which our contribution was subjected took, in our view, an "exceptional" turn compared to the standard procedures usually followed in this series. We also regard the nature and purpose of the reviews received as equally exceptional, insofar as they appeared to be directed less at improving the scholarly quality of the work than at delegitimizing the subject of the research, the type of analysis adopted, and ultimately the work of the authors themselves.

Following the usual collective workshop for the volume, we received feedback from the editors, which also included comments from the discussant assigned to us, Ilaria Pitti—the only reviewer with recognized expertise in non-institutional political participation, particularly from a generational perspective—and from Salvatore Vassallo (in a brief form). On the basis of this feedback (Document 1 – Feedback), we were asked to submit a revised version by December 31, 2024.

We submitted the new draft (Document 2) on December 30, having thoroughly incorporated all the requested changes. The first anomaly occurred with the receipt, on December 27—just three days before the deadline, but communicated to us only after submission—of an additional review from the Istituto Cattaneo. This timing was described as "surprising" by the editors themselves in their email of January 2 (Document 3). Although they acknowledged that the revised version had already addressed many of the points raised in the Cattaneo review—and although they did not agree with all the reviewer's suggestions—the editors still invited us to consider the comments for possible further changes:

"Although we believe that some of the comments have already been addressed and do not agree with all of the suggestions, we would be very grateful if you could consider the comments we are forwarding and make

a final effort to: (a) incorporate what you deem useful and (b), for anything you decide not to include, write a brief note (as you would in any rebuttal letter to external referees)." (Document 3)

A new deadline for revision was set for January 24, 2025.

Despite the irregularity of the procedure, we decided to proceed with another revision—both out of scholarly commitment and to avoid wasting months of work. We therefore carefully reviewed the Cattaneo opinion (Document 4)—a review that, in terms of length (about 4,000 words), was nearly as long as the chapter itself. Precisely for this reason, we took it very seriously and prepared a new version of the chapter (Document 6), submitted within the established deadline, accompanied by a rebuttal letter (Document 5) in which we responded point by point to the comments received, also indicating those we found to be unsubstantiated or questionable.

On January 28, we received a new communication from the editors (Document 7), who wrote that they had read and appreciated the revised version and agreed with our rebuttal letter. In the same email, they stated that the chapter was to be considered "entirely valid" and concluded with the sentence:

"We are forwarding the two files to our colleagues at the Istituto Cattaneo for typesetting and translation."

Everything thus suggested that the review process had been positively concluded and that the chapter was on track for publication—indeed, we received the typeset version of the chapter shortly thereafter.

The third anomaly occurred on March 17, when we received a new communication from the editorial board (Document 9), at a time when the volume was already available for pre-order with a valid ISBN and EAN (link) (Document 8). In that email, we were asked to consider three new reviews, reportedly coordinated with the editorial staff of *Contemporary Italian Politics* (ibid.), totaling 13 pages, and to submit yet another revised version by March 31, with the following caveat:

"In the absence of a response or of a new version of the paper by that date, we will assume you have decided to withdraw it."

The email specified that the decision had been taken unanimously with two-thirds of the series members present (i.e., 10 out of 15).

Naturally, we take full responsibility for having chosen not to submit another version.

However, in our view, the three new reviews can reasonably be considered a single review, as they are highly convergent and essentially mirror the earlier Cattaneo review. In our entire careers—especially for the more senior author—it has never happened that we received such coordinated and overlapping evaluations, to the point of making the entire package seem the work of a single author. It is sufficient to compare the December 27 review (Document 4) with the three new reviews (Documents 10, 11, 12). One of them (Document 10), moreover, is written in English but reproduces almost identically the arguments already presented in Italian, with no consideration of the revised version of the paper, nor of the points raised in the rebuttal letter.

Before turning to the substance of the reviews, we feel compelled to express our solidarity with the two editors of the volume, whose role seems to have been effectively overruled by the decisions of the editorial board, as well as with the discussant, who dedicated time and effort to reviewing our work only to be entirely disregarded in the overall evaluation of the chapter.

1. Methodological Observations and the Legitimacy of the Approach

A substantial part of the comments found in both the December 27 review and the three reviews received on March 17 concerns the methodological framework of the chapter. From the outset, it appeared clear to us that none of the reviewers involved in this second round had specific expertise in the field of social movement studies—a fact that emerges particularly clearly in the nature of the critiques raised, which seem to call into question methods that are widely consolidated in the relevant scholarly literature, such as the integrated use of in-depth interviews and protest event analysis.

We believe it is important to clarify from the outset that, while we always welcome critical engagement, some of the methodological criticisms we received do not concern refinable aspects of the research design—such as sample selection or source transparency—but rather question the entire methodological approach adopted, without offering realistic or coherent alternatives in light of the study's objectives and scope.

In the December 27 review (Document 4), we read:

"Turning to methodological aspects, the paper appears to be based on six interviews with thirteen activists (possibly these were focus groups in some instances). Given the limited scope of the study, it seems a bit naïve to describe this material as the result of 'research' based on a mixed methodology, or to claim that six interviews could provide a sufficient dataset to account for both the territorial variability of the phenomenon and the heterogeneity of the participants' political experience. [...]"

And further:

"As for the methodology used, the chapter mentions the adoption of Protest Event Analysis for 213 events. However, the chapter fails to provide details on the selection criteria for journalistic sources, on the possible use of reliability indicators among the coders of the article corpus, and finally on the reasons for excluding the period from October 7 to December 31, 2023 [...]"

These criticisms were then almost literally repeated in the English-language review received on March 17 (Document 10), without any acknowledgment of the changes already made in the revised version of the paper, and without addressing the responses provided in the rebuttal letter.

The same applies to the second observation, concerning the exclusion of the October–December 2023 period from the Protest Event Analysis, which was clearly justified by the temporal framework adopted by *Politica in Italia*, which focuses on events occurring in the calendar year 2024.

In addition, in the revised version we specified that:

- The in-depth interviews were selected using a geographic criterion, privileging regions with a high number of protest events;
- Interviewees were selected among those who played a key role in organizing the university encampments—an element that makes the focus on organizational "nodes" coherent and methodologically justified;
- The use of the Google News aggregator and the criteria adopted for coding events were clearly described, along with the methodological limitations of the approach itself.

It is therefore surprising to read, in the March 17 review (Document 10), statements such as:

"It seems a bit naïve to describe the research as having a 'mixed methodology' or to claim that six interviews can serve as a sufficient dataset to account for both geographic variability in the phenomenon and the political heterogeneity among participants [...]"

Even more surprising is the claim that:

"The sample of interviewees seems highly selective, as they were identified via organizations whose characteristics are not discussed in the paper."

When in fact, these characteristics were extensively illustrated in the methodological section, and the selection criterion was explicitly tied to the centrality of those actors in coordinating the mobilizations.

Furthermore, the reviewers consistently conflate the meso level of analysis (i.e., that of the organizational "nodes") adopted in the chapter with the micro level (i.e., individual participants), thereby demanding methodologies geared toward statistical representativeness—methods that were neither among the paper's objectives nor commonly adopted in qualitative research on social movements. This confusion between levels of analysis—as also demonstrated by the following passage:

"Achieving these two objectives would typically require representative samples of activists or, at least, much larger numbers of interviews." (Document 10)

—would hardly have emerged from scholars with expertise in the field.

Other observations, such as:

"Second, the chapter never really tries to describe the demographic makeup of the protesters. It never asks, 'Who are they?' [...] Referring to the pro-Palestine movement as a 'youth movement' effectively extends to an entire age bracket what might be the mobilization of a small fraction of a distinct youth subgroup [...]" (Document 10)

and:

"The chapter does not document to what extent the movement is representative of university students or of the corresponding generational cohort [...]" (Document 12)

seem to stem from the assumption that every study of youth political engagement must be transformed into a quantitative sociodemographic analysis—a type of investigation that is entirely foreign to the design and aims of our work.

This intent was clearly stated in the methodological section:

"Although this contribution does not aim to offer a comprehensive representation of the entire pro-Palestinian movement, we believe that the attempt to explore in depth the student component of the movement—combined with the analysis of protest events—can provide a reasonably accurate picture of the mechanisms and motivations that should be reconstructed in order to understand youth participation in this cycle of global contestation."

Lastly, what stands out in some passages is an inquisitorial tone, where the adequacy of the methods themselves is questioned, and the researchers are implicitly expected to "defend" every single choice as if under cross-examination. We will return to this aspect in more detail later on.

2. Alleged Partiality of the Authors and Use of "Activist" Language

A further line of criticism, consistently present in all the more recent reviews—as already in the Cattaneo report—concerns the accusation that the authors are overly sympathetic toward the subject of their research, and that they have partially adopted the language, categories, and interpretive frameworks of the activists themselves.

In the December 27 review, for instance, we read:

"In addressing the issue of student mobilizations, the chapter struggles to distance itself from the positions expressed by the protagonists of the mobilization it analyzes. From the very first lines, it is evident that the vocabulary, themes, interpretations, and even the analytical concepts used in the analysis are drawn from those positions, which are supported by the authors." (doc. 4)

A similar formulation appears in the English-language review:

"From the outset, it is clear that the authors have adopted and largely support the perspectives of these activists, relying on their vocabulary, key themes, interpretations, and even their analytical concepts." (doc. 10)

Other reviews go further:

"It seems to me a strongly partisan article (something that may have happened before as well), and one that relies mostly on emotional mobilization strategies: there are the good guys on one side and the bad guys on the other." (doc. 11)

"It seems, therefore, that the authors not only report the narratives of the protagonists but fully adopt the point of view of the activists interviewed, while the way these same actions have been interpreted by other actors is not considered at all." (doc. 12)

2.1 The Level of Analysis and the Role of the Researcher

We believe it is helpful to distinguish between two levels of this critique:

1. If the accusation is that the authors share some of the criticisms voiced by the activists toward the Israeli government, and that this emerges clearly in some sections of the text, we do not deny this possibility—on the contrary, we explicitly acknowledge it and take full responsibility for it, by signing our names to the chapter. If condemning the systematic violations of international law—as documented in Gaza and the West Bank—is to be regarded as a "partisan" position, we believe it is necessary to emphasize that this is not merely the position of the students, but rather the legitimate and well-founded position of international law itself.
2. If, on the other hand, the implication is that the authors' position compromised the quality and reliability of the analysis, this is a far more serious allegation—and frankly offensive—if not backed by substantive evidence.

It is worth recalling that a broad and well-established tradition in social movement studies encourages researchers to make explicit their relationship to the object of research, recognizing that the pretense of absolute neutrality is often a form of implicit alignment with the status quo. That said, this is not the approach we used

in this chapter, nor in our other academic work. Our analysis is grounded in analytical tools and methodological approaches fully consolidated within political science and social movement sociology, drawing on the work of, among others, della Porta, Diani, Tarrow, Tilly, and McAdam.

2.2 The Use of the Expression "Disproportionate Response"

One of the most frequently cited "pieces of evidence" used to support the accusation of our alleged partiality is our use, in the first part of the chapter, of the expression "disproportionate response" to describe Israel's military reaction to the October 7 attacks.

"From the very first lines of the chapter, terms widely used by activists appear. It refers to Israel's 'disproportionate response,' to 'violations of international law,' to 'genocide,' and to a 'regime of oppression, colonialism and apartheid by Israel,' and so on. [...] The status assigned to these terms by the authors is that of explanatory devices of collective action, i.e., established facts that are assumed to naturally justify a legitimate reaction and therefore do not require further explanation." (doc. 4)

It is worth noting that the reviewer conflates—perhaps deliberately—expressions attributable to the authors (such as "disproportionate response" and "violations of international law") with those that emerge from our frame analysis of the activists' discourse, based on interview excerpts.

A similar critique appears in the March 17 review:

"The article takes for granted certain causal connections that are far from obvious. For example, it clearly presents the high number of demonstrations as a direct reaction to the 'disproportionate' (p.1) Israeli response to the 'large-scale attack' (same page) by Hamas." (doc. 11)

Here too, the reviewer attributes the word "horror" to the authors—a term we never used—with the evident aim of delegitimizing our position.

Clearly, there is a misunderstanding—or a strategic distortion—of this "evidence." The authors are well aware of the international debate surrounding the legitimacy of what constitutes a disproportionate response under international law. However, reconstructing that legal debate falls outside the scope of this chapter (and of this reply). For a concise overview, we refer to: Osservatorio – Il principio di proporzionalità nei conflitti armati.

The chapter does not take a position on the legal legitimacy of Israel's response. To be clear: the authors unequivocally condemn Israel's disproportionate use of force—but the objective of the chapter was not to intervene in the legal debate, but to analyze how the concept of disproportionality functions within the discursive framing of the protest.

The term "disproportionate response" is used neutrally and analytically, referring to the imbalance between the harm suffered and the damage inflicted, and/or the gap between military objectives and civilian costs. In essence, a proportionality ratio.

It is telling that both the December 27 review and the near-identical March 17 version include the following passage:

"In the introduction, the number of victims is reported as 'verified' in the case of Israeli casualties (which are reduced from 1,200 to 900), while for Palestinian casualties the figures are taken from the press. In Western countries, these numbers have relied solely on data provided—without citing sources or criteria—by the terrorists themselves. [...]" (doc. 4 and 10)

The reviewer refers here to widely circulated claims that the Gaza Ministry of Health deliberately inflates the number of casualties. While these claims have been echoed by ideologically aligned think tanks (e.g., Fox, Wyner, The Henry Jackson Society), they are highly politicized and do not reflect consensus within the scientific community.

By contrast, in our revised version of the chapter, we cited a peer-reviewed scientific source published in *The Lancet* (Jamaluddine et al., 2025), which estimates that the death toll in Gaza was actually underreported by 41%. This estimate is significantly more rigorous than any of the sources cited in the reviews.

As already stated in our rebuttal letter (doc. 5):

"The disproportionate reaction of the Israeli government has been explicitly or implicitly recognized by all relevant international institutions. The International Court of Justice has declared the accusation of genocide as plausible. Additionally, the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for the Israeli Prime Minister and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on charges of war crimes. Furthermore, the European Parliament has condemned 'the disproportionate response of the Israeli military' in the Gaza Strip, which 'has caused an unprecedented number of civilian casualties,' and called for 'a permanent ceasefire to allow aid to be delivered to civilians in the Strip.'"

To this list, we can add the advisory opinion issued by the International Court of Justice on July 19, 2024, concerning the legal implications of Israel's policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

These institutional positions are complemented by a large number of reports produced by independent international organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, which have documented grave and systematic violations of international law—such as indiscriminate bombings of civilian targets (hospitals, schools, homes), the killing of civilians, and the obstruction of humanitarian aid access for the population of Gaza. All of these actions have been attributed to the State of Israel.

We believe these sources are more than sufficient—indeed, self-evident—in justifying our use of the term "disproportionate" in a chapter focused on reconstructing the protest's framing and discursive conditions. Denying the existence of a disproportionate reaction by Israel, while claiming to maintain neutrality, seems to us a contradictory position.

Finally, to illustrate what appears to be an effort to delegitimize both the authors and the movement under study, we cite the following passage from one review:

"The issue is not merely the term 'disproportionate' (I agree with it, but I wouldn't present it in such an apodictic way, and without even asking what the alternatives might be). The point is that equally or more horrific events (Congo? Bucha? Russian bombings of Syrian hospitals? Chechnya? the bombing of Kyiv's children's hospital? what is happening, right now, in South Sudan?) do not necessarily provoke comparable reactions. Sociologically—and unfortunately—the severity of atrocities alone never fully explains protest mobilizations."

We invite the reviewer to be patient. When we or others study protests related to those other crises—and some scholars already are—we will of course underscore the gravity of those situations. As for the explanation of protest behavior, we are well aware of the relevant sociological literature, and we believe we have demonstrated our familiarity with it throughout the chapter by analyzing the specific political and discursive conditions that have shaped this particular cycle of mobilization.

Notably, this sentence also contains: (1) an expectation that researchers treat subjects as if they were defendants, and (2) an implicit accusation of antisemitism, aligned with the widely contested IHRA definition. We will return to both issues later.

2.3 The Treatment of the "Genocide" Frame and Colonial Language

Several of the contested points raised in the reviews concern terms such as "genocide," "colonialism," and "apartheid." These expressions were not used by the authors as their own analytical categories, but rather as discursive elements employed by activists, which we analyzed in the empirical section of the chapter. For example:

"This process became evident in February, when Ghali's presence was banned after he had called from the Sanremo stage for a 'stop to the genocide' [...]" (p. 6)

"An activist who discovered the Palestinian cause through an influencer stated: 'This was the first genocide directly reported and testified to by the victims themselves on social media, and this made our generation the main witness.'" (Int. Pisa2, p. 6)

"The accusation of genocide by South Africa, deemed 'plausible' by the International Court of Justice (Donnaruma 2024), [...] certainly created discursive opportunities for the pro-Palestinian movement [...]" (p. 7)

In the context of movement frame analysis, reporting such expressions does not imply endorsement, but rather reflects an attempt to document their centrality within the activists' discourse.

We have, in previous work on far-right politics, quoted xenophobic statements from party manifestos without ever endorsing a single one of them. The confusion—intentional or not—between the language of the social actor and the voice of the analyst is, in our view, one of the most problematic aspects of the critiques received.

3. Antisemitism and Critical Distance from the Positions of the Actors

A significant portion of the criticism we received centers on the accusation that the authors failed to sufficiently question the positions expressed by the activists involved in the pro-Palestinian mobilization, particularly with regard to the risk of antisemitism.

This accusation is articulated along two main lines:

- the absence of any counterpoint to the interviewees' statements;
- the lack of problematization of the potential link between anti-Zionism and antisemitism.

As stated in the December 27 review:

"The chapter avoids considering an alternative hypothesis, which is central to an ongoing debate both in public discourse and academic literature, namely, the idea of a new resurgence of antisemitism that would challenge the moral panic framework." (doc. 4)

A similar point is reiterated in the March 17 review:

"The chapter never questions the participants' narrative, nor does it explore the potential antisemitic implications of certain slogans, positions, or alliances. This omission weakens the chapter's academic rigor and leaves it vulnerable to the same criticisms that the protesters themselves have faced." (doc. 10)

3.1 The "Lack of Counterpoint" Accusation and the Misunderstanding of the Researcher's Role

We consider this criticism deeply unfounded and indicative of a fundamentally distorted view of the role of researchers in qualitative inquiry.

First of all, we addressed the issue at several points in the chapter and by drawing on multiple sources. For instance:

In footnote 10 of section 2, we wrote:

"While acknowledging antisemitism as a real threat that must be addressed with utmost seriousness, the research we conducted— as will be further demonstrated—did not find evidence of such sentiments within the student movement for the liberation of Palestine. On the contrary, despite the symbolic and material support provided in recent months by the Italian government to Netanyahu's administration, recent journalistic investigations have brought to light the persistent antisemitic culture within the youth branches of Fratelli d'Italia." (see *Gioventù meloniana*, https://www.fanpage.it/backstair/story/gioventu-meloniana-inchiesta-su-giovani-di-fdi, 26 June 2024)

At the end of section 4, we also wrote:

"Indeed, a concerning level of antisemitic sentiment among university students was documented in a recent study; however, the same study reports that these attitudes are far more common among right-wing students and significantly less prevalent among those on the left [Colombo et al., 2024, p. 947]."

Moreover, we explicitly invited the activists to respond to these accusations. Their statements—reported in full and contextualized—demonstrate a critical awareness of the risk of being labeled antisemitic, and a conscious effort to distinguish their political positions from any form of hostility toward the Jewish community. Two significant examples include:

"The counter-narrative sought to divert attention from what was happening, saying we weren't going to university, but to the synagogue […] there was a Jewish student with us, and that was important in making it clear that we had nothing against the Jewish community, but were opposing Zionism as represented by the Israeli government." (Int. Firenze1; see also Int. Firenze2)

"The struggle for Palestine has been criminalized by Western media, which labels any opposition to Zionist colonialism as antisemitism." (Int. Pisa2, p. 7)

These statements are not presented uncritically: their function is empirical and analytical, not ideological. The aim of the chapter is not to validate or endorse such positions, but rather to reconstruct how activists respond to public stigmatization, including through the lens of the moral panic framework.

The implicit—and at times explicit—expectation is that the researcher should adopt the role of a "prosecutor" toward the observed subjects, engaging them in constant rebuttal. However, as is evident from our theoretical framing and methodological approach, our objective was not to judge the legitimacy of the positions expressed, but rather to analyze how activists address accusations of antisemitism, and with which discursive tools they position themselves within the Italian political and media context.

The passage that best illustrates this expectation is found in one of the reviews:

"As an example, the Rector of the University of Padua, commenting on these actions in mid-May 2024, declared:

'The student occupation that began in recent days has unequivocally revealed its coercive nature' […]
'I want to thank the faculty and administrative staff for their enormous support, which made it possible to guarantee, thanks to dual-mode teaching, the regular continuation of classes.'
'I express full solidarity with the students who suffered any kind of discomfort due to the violence of the occupiers: I thank them for their patience and remind everyone that the university is represented solely and exclusively by them.'
'We will not allow the coercion by a small group of students, accompanied by individuals unrelated to academia, to impede the inviolable right to education within our student community.'
'Tomorrow, Tuesday, May 14, in the Academic Senate—the highest and only legitimate decision-making body of the university—a resolution will be presented, which has been scheduled for weeks, addressing the situation in Gaza, but without yielding to any form of boycott of relations with Israeli universities.'
'The history of the University of Padua teaches us, and reminds us, that this institution possesses the antibodies to resist any form of violence.'" (doc. 12)

According to the author of this review, then, for every statement reported from the interviewed activists, the authors should have inserted counter-arguments—perhaps even during the interviews themselves.

3.2 Empirical Evidence and Literature Review

In the final version of the chapter, we included an explicit reference to a study published in *Contemporary Jewry* (Colombo et al., 2024), which provides quantitative data useful for contextualizing the debate:

"Students who place themselves on the right (9–10) or center-right (6–8) tend to consider the [anti-Semitic] statements on the list to be true to an extent up to six times higher than their counterparts who rate themselves on the left (1–2) or center-left (3–5)." (Colombo et al., 2024, p. 947)

This study clearly shows that antisemitic attitudes are not concentrated among the youth on the political left, as some reviewers seem to suggest, but rather are predominantly found on the political right. Only when considering the more controversial items within the IHRA definition—especially those relating to the possibility of criticizing the State of Israel (see Pisanty 2025)—does the distribution of opinions appear more balanced.

This data, far from exonerating or generalizing, allows us to empirically contextualize an accusation that is both serious and, all too often, strategically instrumentalized.

3.3 The Debate on the Definition of Antisemitism: IHRA and Pisanty

Several reviews reveal a broad and ideologically charged interpretation of the concept of antisemitism, in which any criticism of Israel or Zionism is at risk of being automatically labeled antisemitic. It is important, in this regard, to recall the ongoing debate over the definition proposed by the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance).

This definition is now widely contested in academic circles, precisely because, as Valentina Pisanty notes in her book *Antisemitismo. Una parola in ostaggio* (2025), it risks becoming a tool for censoring dissent, especially when used to delegitimize movements that adopt an anti-colonial perspective.

Pisanty demonstrates how many of the items proposed for "measuring" antisemitism—including those used in the Cattaneo study—are epistemologically ambiguous or problematic, as they fail to distinguish between actual antisemitism and legitimate political criticism, even when expressed in radical terms, of the Israeli government's policies. Her analysis is crucial for understanding the dangers associated with indiscriminate use of the term "antisemitism" as a rhetorical weapon, even within academia.

3.4 A Paradoxical Inversion: Who Is Reinforcing Stereotypes?

Finally, it is particularly striking that one of the reviews contains the following statement:

"None of the horror in Gaza falls under the current definition of genocide. The term has become so popular only because the crimes are believed to have been committed by Jews." (doc. 11)

Here, the popularity of the word "genocide" is not attributed to the gravity of the crimes committed, nor to the judgment of the International Court of Justice, but to the presumed ethnic or religious identity of the perpetrators. This is an extremely serious statement, made without any empirical basis, and it ultimately serves to reproduce the very antisemitic stereotype it claims to denounce.

Ironically, the IHRA definition itself considers the following to be antisemitic attitudes:

- "Holding Jews collectively responsible for the actions of Israel";
- "Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation."

Yet here, the reviewer claims that criticism of the Israeli government's crimes is popular precisely because it is committed by Jews—a claim that contradicts the very principles the definition is supposed to protect. Furthermore, many of the statements quoted above implicitly argue that Israel should not be judged by the same standards applied to other democratic nations—and, we would add, to all nations in general.

It is also worth noting that this line of argument is presented as an unsubstantiated assertion, despite the fact that, as our research shows, it is empirically unfounded. Neither the Jewish religion nor Jewish identity has ever been mentioned by the activists or by the authors as collectively responsible for any action. On the contrary, the activists explicitly attempt to distance themselves from such a harmful and insidious accusation of antisemitism.

In our view, this kind of rhetorical inversion is one of the clearest indicators of the dangerous politicization that has shaped the evaluation of our chapter, and it compels us to reaffirm the need to bring the debate back onto a scientific, transparent, and empirically grounded level.

4. Moral Panic, Public Order, and Discursive Opportunities

Among the more developed criticisms found in the December 27 review and reiterated in the March reviews, one of the most prominent concerns our use of the concept of moral panic, which is deemed excessive, inappropriate, or insufficiently demonstrated.

The original review (doc. 4) states:

"The chapter avoids considering an alternative hypothesis, one that is central to a broad debate in both public discourse and academic literature—namely, the possibility of a new resurgence of antisemitism, which would challenge the moral panic framework."

This observation was explicitly addressed in our rebuttal letter (doc. 5), where we clarified:

"The concept is by no means central to the analysis. Rather, it serves as a starting point, previously explored by other authors, to highlight the closure of discursive spaces for pro-Palestinian mobilizations. These closures, however, are counterbalanced by new discursive opportunities offered by international actors and institutions, which are discussed in the empirical section."

In other words, we never claimed that moral panic is the central theoretical framework of the chapter. It is one of several interpretive tools used to examine the dynamics of discursive delegitimization experienced by the movement. Its analytical function is to explain how certain actors—media, institutions, universities—have

contributed to shaping a public climate in which any dissent is immediately suspected of antisemitism or terrorism.

As we argued in the rebuttal letter, the moral panic hypothesis is not incompatible with the recognition of a resurgence of antisemitism. The two interpretive lenses are, in fact, complementary, not mutually exclusive:

"The first [moral panic] does not focus on citizen behavior or beliefs, but on how media and institutions construct a moral alarm around certain issues. The second [resurgence of antisemitism] may actually reinforce the effectiveness of the moral panic mechanism, making it more 'credible' and contributing to the delegitimization of any critical position toward the Israeli government. Whether or not one agrees with this hypothesis, we believe that readers can clearly grasp the argument proposed and further explore it through the cited references." (doc. 5)

Yet none of the three subsequent reviews addressed this argument, nor offered any alternative interpretation. Instead, the objection was repeated mechanically, with increasing levels of hostility and discredit, eventually amounting to a complete denial of the repressive and discursive conditions faced by the movement.

4.1 Public Order: An Empirical Finding That Has Been Downplayed

In the same line of reasoning, a similarly significant critique concerns our analysis of police repression. One reviewer writes:

"Another assumption taken for granted is that pro-Palestinian demonstrations were subject to particularly repressive and restrictive policing. From what little I've seen, that doesn't appear to be the case—or at least, not more so than in other recent mobilizations. [...] The authors themselves report having catalogued 213 protest events, with police intervention (of unknown intensity—it's not the same to baton-charge, contain, prohibit, etc.) in 17% of cases. This means that in 83% of cases, activists were free to demonstrate as they pleased." (doc. 11)

This passage produces a double form of minimization:

- It replaces a systematic analysis of protest events with a personal impression ("from what little I've seen");
- It interprets the 17% rate of active police interventions as evidence of guaranteed freedom, rather than as a troubling indicator—particularly in the context of a student-led, peaceful, and symbolic mobilization.

It is important to recall that in the literature on social movements, what matters is not only the intensity of repression, but also its frequency and the way it is perceived by activists. Classic works by McAdam and Gamson (1996) have shown that the perceived closure of political opportunities and the threat of repression play a crucial role in shaping the strategic and discursive choices of activists.

Therefore, the key issue is not whether 17% is "a lot" or "a little" in absolute terms, but how this presence is perceived and incorporated into the construction of collective identities and the movement's narrative strategies. None of the reviewers engaged with this analytical level.

4.2 The Role of Political and Discursive Opportunities: Closures and Openings

As already clarified in the rebuttal letter and in the revised version of the chapter, we did not simply highlight the closure of discursive spaces, but also showed how new openings have emerged, particularly in response to statements made by international institutional actors. For example:

"The accusation of genocide by South Africa, deemed 'plausible' by the International Court of Justice (Donnaruma 2024), along with the arrest warrants issued by the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes, have undoubtedly created discursive opportunities for the pro-Palestinian movement, in some ways reducing the difficulties in expressing criticism of the Israeli government due to the effects of moral panic." (p. 7)

This dynamic—known in social movement literature as the interaction between discursive closure and opportunity—is a central theme in the study of framing and political opportunities. Yet it was never addressed in any of the reviews. On the contrary, we were accused of promoting an ideological or one-sided perspective, while the empirical and theoretical foundation of our analysis was completely ignored.

5. The Relevance of the Mobilization: A Contested Fact

One of the most surprising aspects of the evaluation of our contribution was the tendency—explicit in several reviews—to deny or minimize the relevance of the pro-Palestinian youth mobilization within the Italian context of 2024. This approach diverges radically from the editorial logic of previous editions of *Politica in Italia*, where—whenever the decision was made to include chapters on forms of non-institutional participation—the focus has always been on mobilizations that clearly marked the year.

By way of example:

- In 2021, the chapter by Loris Caruso and Emiliana De Blasio was dedicated to the "Sardine Movement";
- In 2020, Elena Pavan wrote about feminist movements.

In both cases, the editors deemed those mobilizations to be among the most significant socio-political phenomena of the year—without requiring any statistical demonstration of their relevance. One of the authors of this chapter had also contributed previously with a piece on the no-global movement, using the same editorial logic.

In our case, however, the very choice of research topic—the pro-Palestinian mobilization—became a point of contention, despite the fact that it was proposed by the authors and accepted by the volume's editors.

5.1 A Visible, Widespread, and Youth-Led Movement

As documented in the chapter, pro-Palestinian mobilizations in Italy were primarily youth-led, with a predominantly university-based composition (over 90% of the protests analyzed). They gave rise to highly visible forms of collective action, such as encampments, symbolic boycotts, flash mobs, and public assemblies. This was supported by:

- A Protest Event Analysis covering 213 events;
- 6 in-depth interviews with 13 activists involved in the organizational nodes of university encampments;
- An analysis of public statements, discursive frames, and protest demands.

Taken together, these elements led us to conclude that the movement analyzed was not only relevant, but also emblematic of ongoing transformations in youth political participation in Italy.

5.2 The Specious Argument of the "Silent Majority"

Some reviewers nonetheless questioned the validity of the topic on the basis of what we would call a specious logic: if not all young people mobilized, then the mobilization is not representative—and thus not relevant. One reviewer writes:

"Here again, it is clear that not all young people mobilized (judging by the university where I teach, I'd say we're talking about 60–70 students out of a student population of over 12,000), and not all students. Can a rigorous analysis of a protest cycle really be conducted without better qualifying its actors? Perhaps it would also be worth explaining why so many young people and students did not participate—perhaps not even support it." (doc. 11)

This argument is based on a logical fallacy: a mobilization need not involve a majority of a given population in order to be analytically relevant. Otherwise, we would have to absurdly conclude that:

- 1968 was not a significant event, since most young people did not participate;
- The French Revolution was not representative, since it involved only a portion of the population;
- Movements such as Occupy or Fridays for Future are not worthy of scholarly study, since they were numerically marginal.

The relevance of a mobilization is not determined by the absolute number of participants, but by its public visibility, innovation in practice, symbolic impact, and capacity to articulate new claims and political languages. On this level, the pro-Palestinian mobilization clearly played a central role in 2024.

In another passage, a reviewer states:

"Referring to the pro-Palestine movement as a 'youth movement' effectively extends to an entire age bracket what might be the mobilization of a small fraction of a distinct youth subgroup with well-defined traits." (doc. 10)

This implies that labeling the mobilization as "youth-driven" is misleading, since it largely involved left-wing university students from the humanities and social sciences. But even in this case, we must recall that the vast majority of twentieth-century youth movements had a 'partial' composition, often linked to specific social or ideological segments.

To question the legitimacy of the "youth" label on these grounds means applying a criterion of representativeness that is never demanded of other collective actors, whether in movements or in political parties.

5.3 A Problem with the Topic, Not the Data

Finally, we believe that the real issue at stake is not the composition or numerical reach of the mobilization, but the topic of the protest itself: solidarity with Palestine and criticism of the Israeli government's conduct. This is where resistance appears to be strongest, and this is where some reviews—despite their formal tone—clearly reveal an ideological bias.

This is further evidenced by information we received informally: the editorial board reportedly decided to remove all references to the pro-Palestinian mobilization from the introduction to the volume. A gesture that seems aimed at affirming—symbolically and discursively—that "the fact does not exist."

Against this erasure, we assert the value of empirical evidence, documented analysis, and the conviction that it is the task of research to make visible what is socially relevant, even—especially—when it is politically uncomfortable.

6. Conclusions: A Political Removal, Not a Scientific Evaluation

We believe that the evaluation process of our contribution, as it unfolded over time, did not follow a standard scholarly trajectory. Rather, it was marked by a series of exceptional, incoherent, and politically driven interventions, which ultimately led to an outcome that was not based on a genuine assessment of the scientific merit of the work.

As we have shown:

- the chapter was first discussed and revised according to the feedback received;
- subsequently approved by the editors;
- and finally subjected to a new round of reviews which, while formally multiple, were highly convergent in content, and never genuinely engaged with the revisions or the arguments laid out in the rebuttal letter.

This process resulted in a shift in the center of gravity of the evaluation—from scholarly quality to political content—through a progressive delegitimization that targeted:

- the subject of the research (the pro-Palestinian mobilization, deemed irrelevant or marginal);
- the language adopted (accused of being activist);
- the epistemological stance of the authors (accused of not maintaining sufficient distance, of being "biased").

All of these elements were read and judged through the lens of a **specific ideological orientation**, as clearly evidenced by the discomfort expressed in multiple reviews toward the use of terms such as "genocide," "apartheid," "colonialism," or even the mere attention given to the Palestinian issue.

Contrary to the view expressed by some reviewers—that this was a marginal phenomenon with no impact and confined to an ideological niche—it is important to note that the pro-Palestinian movement had visible effects within the Italian political system.

Precisely while its relevance was being questioned, Italy's main opposition parties adopted much clearer public positions on the Palestinian issue, issuing statements and documents that echoed the demands and framings emerging from the student mobilizations: calls for a permanent ceasefire, an arms embargo, and the suspension of military cooperation with Israel.

These shifts would be incomprehensible without acknowledging the movement's role in generating pressure, visibility, and discursive articulation. To ignore this is not only politically shortsighted but also analytically inaccurate.

We also find it essential to highlight the paradox that runs through much of the criticism we received: while the validity of the concept of moral panic is rejected, its mechanisms are fully activated.

As described in the literature on moral panic, the pattern is well known:

- a "deviant" group is identified (in this case, pro-Palestinian youth);
- it is accused of crossing the boundaries of legitimate discourse;
- it is charged with antisemitism;
- and finally, a demand is made for self-censorship and for the reformulation of the analysis according to codes deemed acceptable within the "dominant discursive order."

In short, moral panic is not only the object of our analysis—it became the very context in which the analysis itself was received.

In light of the above—and despite having engaged with the revision process in good faith and with scholarly rigor—we found it impossible to proceed with yet another rewriting of the chapter. The most recent requests were not aimed at improving the text, but rather at radically transforming it, more politically than methodologically, ultimately denying the value of the work we had carried out.

We have been through numerous rounds of revision throughout our careers—some with positive outcomes, others not—but from each we have learned and improved our work. What happened in this case, however, is unprecedented, and clearly falls outside the scope of an ordinary and constructive peer review process.

We therefore decided not to accept a rewriting that would have required us to endorse a distorted reading of the phenomenon studied, and to conform to an academic culture that legitimizes research topics only insofar as they align with prevailing political sensitivities.

We share the regret of the volume's editors, who found themselves in a difficult position and supported our work with intellectual honesty. They have our respect and solidarity.

We will continue our work to make visible and analyze, using the tools of political science and social movement theory, the new forms of youth participation, even—and especially—when they disrupt dominant narratives.

References

Colombo, A. D., Dalla-Zuanna, G., Saracino, B., Quassoli, F., & Scioni, M. (2024). *Before and after October 7: Changes in Italian Undergraduates' Attitudes towards Jews and Muslims*. *Contemporary Jewry*, 937–963.

Diani, M. (2015). *The Cement of Civil Society: Studying Networks in Localities*. Cambridge University Press.

Donnaruma, F. (2024). *La guerra a Gaza: diritto internazionale e crimini di guerra*. In *ISPI Report sulle crisi globali*, Milano.

Gamson, W. A., & Meyer, D. S. (1996). *Framing Political Opportunity*. In D. McAdam, J. D. McCarthy, & M. N. Zald (Eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (pp. 275–290). Cambridge University Press.

Jamaluddine, Z., Abukmail, H., Aly, S., Campbell, O. M., & Checchi, F. (2025). *Traumatic injury mortality in the Gaza Strip from Oct 7, 2023, to June 30, 2024: a capture–recapture analysis*. *The Lancet*. https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(24)02678-3/fulltext

McAdam, D. (1982). *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970*. University of Chicago Press.

Pisanty, V. (2020). *Antisemitismo. Una parola in ostaggio*. Milano: Feltrinelli.

Tarrow, S. (2011). *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Tilly, C. (2004). *Social Movements, 1768–2004*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Institutional, News and NGOs sources

Amnesty International (2024). *Amnesty International concludes Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza*. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/12/amnesty-international-concludes-israel-is-committing-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza/

Atlantic Council (2024). *UN Commission finds war crimes and crimes against humanity in Israeli attacks*. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/coi-war-crimes-hamas-israel-october-7-gaza-hostages/

BBC, The Guardian, Reuters, The New York Times, CNN, The Washington Post, ABC Australia (citati nei commenti alla review come fonti di riferimento contestate per il conteggio delle vittime).

European Parliament (2024). *EU defence and security policy – resolution on the war in Gaza and humanitarian consequences*. https://europa.today.it/unione-europea/parlamento-europeo-condanna-risposta-sproporzionata-israele-gaza-cessate-fuoco.html

Fox, A. (2024). *Questionable Counting: Analysing the Death Toll from the Hamas-run Ministry of Health in Gaza*. *The Henry Jackson Society*.

Human Rights Watch (2024). *Israel's Crimes Against Humanity in Gaza*. https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/11/14/israels-crimes-against-humanity-gaza

International Court of Justice (ICJ). (2024). *South Africa v. Israel – Order indicating provisional measures*. https://www.icj-cij.org/

International Criminal Court (ICC). (2024). *Pre-Trial Chamber issues arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister and Defence Minister*. https://www.icc-cpi.int/

Tablet Magazine (2024). *Wyner, A. – How the Gaza Ministry of Health Fakes Casualty Numbers*. March 7. https://www.tabletmag.com/