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Palestinian Youth Take to the Streets in Italy

Navigating Identity, Belonging, and Political Engagement

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Abstract: This paper examines the role of Palestinian youth in Italy in organizing mobilization efforts against genocide during the 2023-2025 political movements. Hundreds of demonstrations, sit-ins, campaigns, and encampments have been organized across Italy to raise awareness about the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the multiple attacks in the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen. This mobilization has significantly departed from the way Palestinian solidarity movement has historically been organized in Italy, presenting new challenges for various political actors involved in the movement. Additionally, it has fostered a new protagonism among the so-called "second-generation" Italians of Palestinian descent. I emphasize the importance of this emerging protagonism, as it has introduced new buzzwords, analyses, and tools to the mobilization for Palestine, urging allies within the movement to decolonize their perspectives and question their positionality. Furthermore, it calls for an understanding of the Palestinian liberation struggle within the broader context of anti-colonial resistance. This paper argues that analyzing the mobilization for Palestine as a central political movement is crucial, as it highlights contradictions within Western societies concerning the agency of colonized peoples from the Global South, racialized subjectivities born and raised in Europe, and the lack of recognition of Italy's colonial legacy.

Keywords: Palestinian Italians, second generation, Palestinian diaspora, settler colonialism, Palestine Solidarity Movement

Introduction

Since October 7th, 2023, Palestine has once again become a central issue in the international political scenario (El-Kurd 2024a). As the genocide against the Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank continued, political mobilization in the West entered a new phase. In Italy, thousands of demonstrations have been organized to raise awareness about the situation in Palestine and the broader region through boycott campaigns, sit-ins, and student encampments.

This paper analyzes the role of Palestinian youth in Italy and their positionality within the broader movement for Palestine, with a focus on colonialism, agency, and the perspectives introduced by this new generation. As the Palestinian poet and journalist Mohammed El-Kurd (2023) poignantly asks, do we—Palestinians—have the right to speak for ourselves? The demonstrations organized in solidarity with Palestine, calling for an end to the bombings in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Yemen, have seen large-scale participation. This study specifically focuses on the Italian context, as it is the one I am most familiar with and where I have actively engaged alongside Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia (Young Palestinians of Italy). This

group has played a brokerage role (Salih, Zambelli, and Welchman 2021) and has been central in collecting demands from Palestine and translating them into mobilization efforts in Italy.

Moreover, the university setting and political activism within academia have been crucial in promoting boycott campaigns against Israeli institutions. Students, due to their access to resources such as time and economic positions (Fillieule and Neveu 2018), have demonstrated a strong capacity for mobilization. As pointed out by Qutami (2021), an essential element in analyzing the global movement for Palestine is the capacity for diffusion from one country to another.

This paper underscores the importance of Palestinian youth organizations as key actors driving mobilization for over a year. By examining the composition of these organizations, I explore how Palestinian youth in Italy are politically socialized and how intergenerational debates within the Palestinian community shape strategies and mobilization approaches.

The theoretical framework of this article draws from Indigenous Studies and Settler Colonial Studies to contextualize Palestinian agency and the power dynamics inherent in being both colonized and racialized in a country like Italy (Pilati 2016). One of the critical aspects of the Palestinian mobilization is the struggle to impose a particular interpretative framework—especially regarding the settler-colonial paradigm in Palestine—and the demand to decolonize existing structures as a prerequisite for justice (Said 2023).

I argue that key factors such as positionality, the understanding of the Palestinian context, the challenge to pre-existing forms of political mobilization in Italy, the rejection of Western support for Israel's military operations (Ziadah 2022), and the emerging awareness of contradictions within Western values, form the foundation of a revolutionary stance. This stance aims to subvert existing power relations within the mobilization space. My methodology includes content analysis of statements published by *Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia* on social media, within the context of the ongoing genocide against the Palestinian people (Huberman, 2024); I will expand more on the methodology in the next two paragraphs.

Theoretical Framework: Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Studies

Since the creation of the State of Israel (Pappé 2008), numerous Palestinian scholars—including Said, Sayegh, Khalidi, Nadera-Kevorkian, Masalha and Ma'alouf—have characterized the Israeli project as inherently colonial. They argue that its objectives extend beyond protecting the borders established after the 1948 Nakba (Khalidi, 2020) and instead reflect a continuous expansionist agenda, as evidenced by the shifting borders following political changes in the region.

Classical political theory, as articulated by Weber (2005), maintains that a state exercises control over a defined and internationally recognized territory. However, in Israel's case, territorial recognition has remained a contentious issue. Scholars in Indigenous Studies have drawn parallels between Israel's policies and other settler-colonial projects in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Latin America (Mamdani 2023). These comparisons highlight a recurring pattern: the systematic displacement, erasure, and replacement of Indigenous populations with settler communities (Said 2000).

The erasure of native populations and the construction of a new historical narrative have served to obscure the colonial nature of Israel's project (Sayegh 1965). Recognizing Israel as a settler-colonial state is crucial to understanding the systemic subjugation of Palestinians, both within their homeland and in the diaspora. Over the past 77 years, Israel's exclusive citizenship policies have denied millions of Palestinians the right of return, making them one of the largest refugee populations in the world (Pappé 2008). This exclusion aligns with the broader patterns of settler-colonial governance, as analyzed by Bhambra (2015, 108) with reference to the history of the United States of America:

> "Alongside the enslavement of a people, there was another historical process central to the founding of the United States which could equally be considered as constituting 'this nation's original sin': the displacement and dispossession of the earlier inhabitants of the continent. Yet this narrative is similarly silenced within dominant accounts... Native Americans are discussed in the context of U.S. history only within a historiographical frame that regards their disappearance as natural and inevitable, linked to the progress of modernity itself."

European-American collective history has systematically neglected the recognition of its violent colonial past and present. This omission has created the conditions under which "the Other"—immigrants, foreigners, and second-generation citizens—struggle to assert their identity and contextualize their origins (Said 2011). As articulated by Said in *Orientalism*, Palestinians are perpetually cast as "the Other" within a rigid dichotomy between East and West. In this framework, the West fails to recognize the agency of the East, portraying its people as either primitive and barbaric, or as victims of their own culture and political representatives. The "Other" in this paradigm is denied the right to action, self-determination, anger, and sovereignty over their own agency (Spivak 2008).

A particularly productive perspective emerges from critical engagements with the dominant settler-colonial approach to Palestine, such as those developed by Barakat (2018) and Salaita (2016). These scholars insist on situating Palestine within the field of Indigenous studies in order to foreground an indigenous, specifically Palestinian, standpoint in opposition to settler narratives. They argue that indigeneity must be understood as a political category rather than as a supplement to, or derivative of, settler frameworks, and that centering Indigenous voices constitutes a key strategy of resistance to settler colonialism. In this sense, the parallels drawn with the histories of resistance of the original peoples of Turtle Island provide an important lens through which to grasp Palestinian aspirations to liberation (Barakat 2018; Salaita 2016).

Barakat's emphasis on privileging Palestinian voices is particularly relevant to the discussion of how Palestinians in Italy mobilize around questions of identity and belonging. What is at stake in an Indigenous studies approach is precisely the recovery and theorization of Palestinian perspectives at moments when settler-colonialism had not yet become a consolidated academic analytic tool. An illuminating example is Sayegh's work on Zionist colonialism in Palestine, which articulated a theorization of the settler-colonial project as early as the mid-1960s, well before settler-colonial studies achieved their current prominence (Sayegh 1965).

Furthermore, it is important to problematize the postcolonial framework when examining Palestine and other settler-colonial contexts. There is no "post" in the settler-colonial

project; rather, as Wolfe (2006) argues, settler colonialism must be understood as an ongoing formation. If, following Wolfe (2006, 388), settler colonialism is conceived as "a structure, not an event" and as fundamentally centered on the control of land, then Palestine and its project of liberation must be situated within a broader struggle against erasure and genocide. Post-colonial approaches have nonetheless been useful for exposing the double standards through which Western institutions systematically fail to recognize the aspirations of colonized peoples for liberation and freedom, including when these aspirations are articulated through violent means (Hassan 2025).

The works of Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire provided a step forward in understanding how the agency of the colonized subject can be analyzed to challenge power relations and cultural hegemony (Said 2023). As asserted by Said (2023) and Césaire (2000), Western knowledge production is fundamentally shaped by a colonial legacy that prevents an authentic understanding of the aspirations of the colonized. This epistemic limitation explains why Western societies frequently hesitate to support liberation movements emerging from the Global South (Fanon 2001).

The Palestinian struggle for liberation is often met with isolation, as Western narratives continue to deny their claims to self-determination and to the dismantling of the colonial regime (Khalidi, 2020). Since October 7th, 2023, many of the contradictions within European discourse have become increasingly evident in public debate (Traverso 2024). The solidarity movement for Palestine has become one of the largest social movements in recent years, successfully mobilizing diverse activist groups (Della Porta 2024). Palestine now occupies a central position in the agendas of multiple political movements in Italy, ranging from citizenship rights organizations (e.g., "Italiani senza Cittadinanza," lit. "Italians without citizenship") to grassroots trade unions (SiCobas, Cub, USB), environmental justice movements such as Fridays for Future (FFF), and feminist groups like *Non Una di Meno* (NUDM).

The Palestinian liberation struggle is widely recognized as being at the forefront of contemporary anti-colonial movements, symbolizing the broader fight for justice across struggles against racial capitalism, environmental crises, gender discrimination, and LGBTQ+ rights. This cross-movement solidarity has historical precedents, notably in the alliances formed between the African American civil rights movement and the Palestinian liberation struggle (Davis 2016). As highlighted in a social media post by Palestinian academic Refaat Alareer—who was killed in an Israeli airstrike in December 2023:

> "George Floyd was all over the walls in occupied Palestine, from Gaza to the West Bank. Palestinians have supported Black Lives Matter and sent virtual tips for the Ferguson protesters to deal with tear gas. Meanwhile, Israel trains American police to kill Black people. #blm" (Refaat in Gaza 2023)

The apartheid wall that separates the Occupied West Bank from historical Palestine features numerous murals depicting George Floyd. As noted by Salih, Zambelli, and Welchmann (2021), the Palestinian solidarity movement must be understood within a broader effort to challenge the colonial epistemologies that perpetuate the control and exploitation of marginalized communities worldwide. These structural parallels between colonial power systems have fostered strong alliances between movements advocating for global justice.

Methodology and positionality

In this paper I adopted a qualitative approach that critically engages with the ethical and positional challenges inherent in studying a community of which I am both a member and a researcher. My dual role—as a second-generation Palestinian in exile and participant in the *Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia* (GPI) movement—requires careful navigation of the risks of re-traumatization, both for the participants and for myself, while recognizing emotions as legitimate data in the study of political mobilization (Moralli 2024; Passerini 1989). Building on Passerini's work on memory, agency, and emotional lived experience, the methodology combines participant observation at demonstrations and assemblies (with ethical boundaries co-defined with participants) (Della Porta 2010) complemented by discourse analysis of political materials (communiqués, organizational charters) and digital activism (Lindekilde 2014; Kudaibergenova 2019).

The Italian context is considered through the historical trajectory of Palestinian migration (Falciola 2022) and the political opportunity structures shaping mobilization. Following Skinner's (2012) trauma-informed approaches, the research incorporates continuous reflexivity about power dynamics (Abu-Lughod 2016), emotional labor, and community accountability (Milan and Milan 2016), ensuring that findings remain grounded in participants' lived realities while contributing to diaspora studies scholarship.

In this framework, positionality is not a peripheral concern but the very core of research. For me, the task is to amplify the unseen and unheard memories erased by settler colonialism (Barakat 2018). These include both lived memory and post-memory (Hirsch, 2012), the intergenerational transmission of experiences not personally lived but deeply felt. I am fully aware that my position as a member of the diaspora—one who could visit the homeland with the privilege of entering as a foreigner, without a Palestinian ID or passport—creates the risk of romanticization, a tendency that is both common and problematic. As Solombrino (2018) observes, Palestinians who have lived outside their homeland for four generations are often distanced from lived realities, engaging instead with "the idea of Palestine."

In conclusion, I recognize that the methodological tools most frequently employed in research—particularly in anthropology, such as ethnography and participant observation—emerge from a Western tradition historically oriented toward the study of "the other" (Abu-Lughod 1991). Within this framework, I question how I might narrate the experiences of the Palestinian diaspora without reproducing judgmental perspectives or imposing interpretations shaped by my socialization in a Western context.

Mobilization in Italy

To understand and contextualize mobilization for Palestine in Italy, it is essential to situate it within the broader framework from which it emerged. Given Italy's relatively recent history as a country of immigration, the political engagement of diasporic communities is a comparatively new phenomenon, largely driven by those most directly affected by global conflicts and inequalities. As Berhe (2023) shows, international students who arrived in Italy during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were among the first political actors to organize around struggles that were

taking place in their respective homelands, with Palestinian and Eritrean–Ethiopian communities standing out for their strong traditions of political socialization within the family.

The Palestinian presence in Italy dates back to the late 1960s and involved people coming from multiple locations—primarily the West Bank, but also Jordan and Lebanon—often through bilateral agreements that allowed them to enter the country on student visas (Caruso 2014). As one male participant in this research, who arrived in Italy in 1966, recalled in a 2025 interview, Palestinians coming in that period were already politicized, frequently with specific party affiliations. Most were active within the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS), an organization linked to the PLO that provided a key arena for youth political engagement in exile, with a predominance of al-Fatah members and a significant presence of PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) activists (Caruso 2014; Abu Samra 2021). In spite of its small size and provincial standing, Perugia, thanks to the presence of the University for Foreigners, hosted the largest concentration of Palestinian students, who would often spend several months there studying Italian before moving on to other universities across the country (Caruso 2014). GUPS functioned as an important "home" for Palestinians in exile, offering both a structure for political mobilization and a social space in a context that was still largely unfamiliar to them; however, this experience gradually came to an end after the First Intifada and the political reconfiguration brought about by the Oslo Accords, which contributed to the weakening and eventual dissolution of many of these transnational student structures (Qutami 2021).

The transnational nature of the Palestinian diaspora must be emphasized. As previously mentioned, diasporic communities construct "homes" far from their ancestral homeland. The transnational experience implies a life that physically or metaphorically traverses borders. To live transnationally means residing in a host country while maintaining deep connections to the homeland. These relationships and bonds are dynamic rather than static. Many Palestinian families, for example, are geographically dispersed across the globe—what Shiblak (2005, 7), following Van Hear, defines as transnational communities.

This transnational existence fosters hybrid identities (Zaidan 2011). Palestinians born and raised in host countries often define themselves through a dual belonging: to their country of birth and to Palestine, understood in terms of cultural heritage and identity. Caruso's (2014) research on the Palestinian diaspora in Italy is one of the few studies exploring the presence of the Palestinian community in the country. Her work, supported by Hall's (2016) theorization of cultural identity, highlights how identity should be understood as a continuous process of negotiation between past and present. As Hall (2016) affirms, there is no singular identity; instead, identity is shaped by the context of belonging and positionality.

Applying Hall's analysis to the Palestinian diaspora in Italy, it is pertinent to consider the impact of the absence of the homeland on Palestinians with diverse life histories. Due to their displacement, Palestinians hold different legal statuses: some have acquired citizenship in their host countries, others possess residency permits or political asylum, while some remain undocumented. These varied legal conditions are the result of 77 years of colonization, which has subjected Palestinians to multiple legal regimes. As Mohammed El-Kurd describes, this reality constitutes a "mutilated geography" (El-Kurd 2024b) defined by a shared element—memory. This memory unites Palestinians across the diaspora and in historic Palestine (Darwish 2019).

The discourse surrounding diaspora studies and the Palestinian case is widely debated, particularly regarding adherence to the term "diaspora" as formulated by Schulz and Hammer (2003), which emphasizes transnational existence. This transnational experience is eloquently described by Palestinian writer Murīd al-Barġūṯī (al-Barghouti 1998, 60):

> "The occupation has created generations of Palestinians who are strangers to Palestine, generations who are familiar with every alleyway of their places of exile, but who are ignorant of their homeland. These generations have never seen their grandmothers squatting in front of the tabun (clay oven) baking bread for them to dip into olive oil. They never spied the village imam, with his turban and Azhar-style piety, lurking near the monastery spring hoping to glimpse the young women bathing. These generations are condemned to love an unseen lover, a distant, difficult lover separated from them by guards and fences and sleek terror. The occupation has transformed us from the sons of Palestine into the sons of the Idea of Palestine."

Palestine, in this context, becomes a metaphor—an entity that is fluid and subject to diverse interpretations. This characteristic makes the Palestinian case unique within diaspora studies, as it transcends traditional identity politics. Palestinian identity is not static but deeply linked to concepts of justice, liberation, and return. Given the settler-colonial context, the majority of Palestinians have lived outside their homeland since 1948, resulting in a community whose numbers remain indeterminate due to varying legal recognition. Observing how Palestinian youth in Italy express their identity through political mobilization, I propose an understanding of "Palestinian-ness" as encapsulating both belonging and action. This approach resonates with what Salih, Zambelli and Welchman (2000, 1141), following Edward Said, describe as "a move from Palestinian-ness as a shared identity, to Palestinian-ness as a 'condition' affecting communities in the diaspora, in exile and within historical Palestine":

> "The Palestinian condition", he uttered, "is for example the feeling of a lack of a homeland, of a place, a home. And that is a feeling that we found among many of us, in different ways."[1]

This shared experience has provided the foundation for second-generation Palestinians in Italy to mobilize politically, emphasizing their diasporic status while advocating for Palestine. Understanding the Palestinian presence in Italy necessitates engagement with recent academic contributions from racialized scholars and researchers. Historically, much of the literature on Italians with migrant backgrounds, refugees, and second-generation citizens has been produced by white Italian scholars. The issue of positionality is therefore highly relevant in contemporary academic discourse. As Haraway (1988) argues, a researcher's positionality affects knowledge production, particularly when research is conducted from within a given community. In recent years, racialized scholars have begun to enter academia and contribute new perspectives on the Italian context (Pesarini and Tintori, 2020).

In the following section, I will further explore the notion of Palestinian agency and its significance within political mobilization. As Kopchick et al. (2022, 109) outline, diasporic communities mobilize for various reasons:

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[1] *Ibid.* I was unable to retrieve the bibliographical references to this quotation from Sa'id, which are not provided by Salih, Zambelli and Welchman.

> "(1) motives for the group to engage in identity preservation, (2) perceived or actual threats to the group's kin in the homeland state, and (3) the group's relative capacity for diaspora mobilization."

The preservation of identity is particularly relevant in the context of Palestinian mobilization in Italy, where activism is both an act of resistance and an assertion of belonging. Given the backdrop of genocide and epistemicide (Huberman 2024), mobilizing to claim a threatened identity becomes an essential political act. As stated in a public declaration by *Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia* on the occasion of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day (Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia 2025a):

> "On 25 January we will take to the streets not only to remember, but to affirm that memory is a collective responsibility. We remember the Shoah to prevent such tragedies from happening again [...] Our promise is clear: never again, never again in Palestine, never again in any corner of the world."[2]

Palestinian Youth and the Struggle for Agency in Italy

One of the defining characteristics of the 2023-2025 mobilization for Palestine is the prominent role played by Italians of Palestinian origins and, more broadly, by individuals from migratory backgrounds. This represents a unique development in the history of Palestinian activism in Italy. However, this emerging protagonism has faced multiple challenges. As argued by Cappiali (2017), the colonial and racist legacy of Western societies continues to shape and constrain the actions of solidarity groups. This "inner settler" dynamic creates conditions in which politically active migrants, refugees, and Palestinians are systematically marginalized, lacking adequate space for political representation (Abu Samra 2018).

While discussions on identity politics and representation have evolved in the U.S. context, in Italy engaging in political conversations about visibility and participation for racialized individuals remains difficult. The Palestine Solidarity Movement in Italy is often characterized by a predominantly white, humanitarian-driven approach to activism. In contrast, Palestinian activists—particularly those involved with *Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia* (GPI)—have sought to re-politicize the narrative and reframe the discourse surrounding Palestine (Della Porta et al. 2025). As Davis (2016) highlights, viewing the Palestinian struggle through an intersectional lens allows other oppressed communities in the Global South to identify with the broader call for justice.

Talking about the struggle for political agency in Italy among Palestinian youth, the experience of *Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia* (GPI) is particularly significant. GPI, of which I am a member, emerged around 2020–2021 with the aim of bringing together second-generation Palestinians born and raised in Italy, as well as young Palestinians who had moved to the country for university studies. The year 2021 marked a crucial turning point, as the group consolidated its organizational structure in the wake of the mobilizations against the bombing of Gaza

[2] Henceforward, all quotations from social media posts by "Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia" have been translated by the present writer from the original Italian.

in May 2021. At the beginning of that month, Israel attempted to ethnically cleanse the Palestinian neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem, an event that gained global visibility thanks to the efforts of Mohammed and Muna El-Kurd, two young residents who were highly active on social media during the attacks (Amnesty International 2022). In this context, the residents of Sheikh Jarrah issued a call for mobilization and GPI responded, marking the first moment in which young Palestinians in Italy collectively recognized the need for an organized space of political action.

From that point onward, GPI began to develop and coordinate political initiatives across Italy, seeking to articulate forms of activism embedded in, and responsive to, the Italian socio-political context. As noted earlier, the previous generation—the parents of many current members—had largely organized within the framework of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS), the only Palestinian organization active in Italy until the late 1980s; however, following the Oslo Accords, GUPS effectively disappeared, leaving subsequent generations without a political structure through which to organize. This rupture produced a visible generational gap, particularly in terms of widespread mistrust toward Palestinian political parties that had dominated the scene until the early 2000s. Drawing on participant observation in public assemblies and demonstrations, I argue that GPI is actively reshaping its political practice by constructing new forms of engagement in the Palestinian liberation struggle—forms less mediated by international and predominantly white organizations and more firmly grounded in the lived experiences and priorities of Palestinian youth in Italy. GPI has adopted a distinctive approach by anchoring its mobilization efforts and knowledge production within the broader tradition of Global South anti-colonial struggles. An example of this can be found in a statement issued on the anniversary of the deaths of Frantz Fanon and Refaat Alareer (Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia 2024b):

> "6 December symbolically unites two giants of the anti-colonial struggle: Frantz Ibrahim Omar Fanon, who died in 1961, and Refaat Alareer, who died last year during the Gaza genocide, whose loss weighs heavily on the Palestinian cause. Both represent the intellectual as an indispensable figure in the resistance to colonialism, Zionism, and imperialism, turning thought into strategy and speech into a weapon for the emancipation of oppressed peoples.
>
> Fanon, a theorist and militant of the Algerian revolution, revealed how colonialism is not only economic and political exploitation but also a mechanism that destroys the cultural and psychological identity of the colonized. In his masterpiece, *The Wretched of the Earth*, he mapped out a path to liberation: an armed rebellion led by an intellectual and spiritual rebirth of the colonized who, by reclaiming their identity, can reinvent the future."

The significance of the anti-colonial legacy is evident in GPI's activism. This section underscores the importance of Palestinian agency in shaping the political mobilization for Palestine and the broader challenges it poses within the movement. GPI has played a brokerage role in the mobilization (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005), offering a critical perspective on the predominantly white, mainstream Italian activism for Palestine. Their mediating role emerges clearly from their efforts over the past two years to bring together different Palestinian organizations and to push them toward adopting a more explicitly radical language in analyzing the Zionist project. In parallel, GPI has encouraged the Palestinian movement in Italy to engage more systematically with grassroots trade unions and logistics-sector workers, recog-

nizing these actors as central to struggles against Italian complicity in the ongoing genocide (Giovani Palestinesi Milano 2025).

As affirmed previously, this generational shift can be traced back to 2021, in conjunction with the onset of the Unity Intifada. During the May 2021 mobilizations against the attempted ethnic cleansing of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem, pro-Palestine activism in Italy underwent a qualitative transformation. One important catalyst was the *Manifesto of Dignity and Hope*, issued in May 2021 (Unity Intifada 2021), which framed "Unity Intifada" as a transnational struggle and coincided with a wave of demonstrations that swept the country over a two-week period. This new cycle of political participation was particularly visible among GPI activists and a broader layer of second-generation citizens, who became central protagonists in protests across major Italian cities. It is worth noting that this politicization took place in a context already shaped by the recent resonance of the Black Lives Matter movement in Italy following the murder of George Floyd, which had opened new spaces for anti-racist and anti-colonial mobilization. As noted by the document Unity Intifada (2021):

> "In these days, we write a new chapter—a chapter of a united Intifada that seeks our one and only goal: reuniting Palestinian society in all of its different parts; reuniting our political will and our means of struggle to confront Zionism throughout Palestine. [...] This Intifada will be a long one, spanning the streets of Palestine and cities around the world—an Intifada that resists injustice wherever it emerges, that challenges the batons of oppressive regimes. This is an Intifada of bared chests and foreheads held high, armed with revolutionary goals, deep knowledge and understanding, and the organizational toil and commitment in the face of the bullets of the Israeli occupation wherever they are fired."

Since May 2021, tensions have surfaced between GPI and other Italian groups mobilizing for Palestine. In a statement published on their social media in February 2024, GPI addressed these tensions (Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia 2024a):

> "Most of the organizations working on the Palestine issue are predominantly composed of white Italians, who often arrogantly and presumptuously decide on behalf of Palestinians how to address crucial aspects of our cause. This Orientalist and neo-colonial approach not only marginalizes Palestinian voices but actively dictates which political claims are acceptable and which should be dismissed. One such example is the persistent advocacy of the two-state solution, despite its evident failure after 30 years from the Oslo Accords. Time and again, we are excluded from discussions about whether this framework is viable under current circumstances or whether it truly reflects the will of our people. Since the 1990s, Palestinian civil society has been increasingly structured around NGOs that rely on funding from the European Union and the West for survival."

The fragmentation of approaches among various groups advocating for Palestine highlights the importance of reflecting on political agency within protest spaces (Jasper, 1997). The growing depoliticization of activism in Italy can be attributed, in part, to the limited presence of Palestinians and migrant descendants in leadership positions within the movement. The increasing NGOization of the Palestinian cause (Qutami 2021) and the declining influence of the radical left in analyzing post-9/11 colonialism have further contributed to this phenomenon (Della Porta 1995).

Against this backdrop, Palestinian youth in Italy have mobilized with a renewed determination, challenging existing power dynamics not only within Palestinian contexts but also within Italian activism, where white Italian activists and racialized activists navigate complex relationships. To better understand this process, I employ Arendt's (1998) theory of political action as a *space of appearance*. Arendt asserts that action and visibility are essential for individuals to engage in political life. This concept is critically expanded upon by Butler (2015), who explores the structural power differentials that determine who is allowed to appear within these spaces.

GPI's positionality within this landscape is crucial to understanding the conflicts between Italian political actors mobilizing for Palestine. An important element of reflection that emerges from their analysis is the critique towards the Italian solidarity movement's inability to recognize the relation of power between the colonized and the colonizer. As articulated in their statement *Reflections on Solidarity* (Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia 2024a):

> "Italian organizations must have the ability to put themselves in a listening posture and try to decolonize their language and action, helping Palestinians to enter the public discourse and gain space. Instead, we often see the opposite attitude: organizations focused on the goal of continuing to return to Palestine and therefore unable to pursue radical claims on the ground here in Europe. Our criticism concerns the way in which these organizations evaluate their actions in the Italian context; in fact, thanks to the experience gained on the Palestinian territory – a privilege that is often denied to many Palestinians, who cannot even travel for tourism in their own country – these organizations should promote political campaigns and be an active part in the process of denouncing the Palestinian situation. Instead, they often remain silent precisely in order to continue promoting their own initiatives on Palestinian territory."

Moreover, the statement continues:

> "The constant focus on a 'peace'-oriented view of Palestine, the solidarity trips to 'Israel' and Palestine, the constant attempt to put the colonized and the colonizers on the same level as if we were endowed with the same tools and space, produce damage that has often undermined our positions"

The Post-Oslo era: how it affected the political socialization of the youth

To understand the sociopolitical features of the current mobilization for Palestine in Italy and its leadership, it is necessary to examine the factors that have characterized the political socialization of this generation of Palestinian youth. I will rely on Habashi's (2017) conceptualization of political socialization in the Palestinian context. Habashi suggests avoiding the top-down approach, which focuses on the influence of institutions such as schools and families, and instead applying the "social interaction approach." This approach views youth as active agents in their political socialization, emphasizing their role in political debates within their immediate environment (Habashi 2017). It posits that children and youth can trigger changes both in themselves and in adults through interactive processes. I argue that this approach is relevant for analyzing Palestinian youth political socialization, though I contend that the

context of the diaspora can influence this process in both directions. On one hand, Palestinian youth are socialized through social interactions, but on the other, they also experience top-down influences due to the institutional, political, and cultural context in which they live.

Furthermore, it is important to frame Palestinian youth activism in Italy within the transnational nature of the movement itself. Indeed, GPI members are politically socialized with a strong connection to Palestine, maintaining social interactions with their country of origin (Zaidan 2011). This transnational socialization can be understood by examining how the GPI group framed the Palestinian context in the post-October 7th scenario. Given my internality to the movement and my positionality as a member of the group, I can affirm that GPI membership spans an age range of 18 to 33 years. This age range corresponds to what is defined as the "post-Oslo generation," individuals who have been politically socialized after the "Peace Accords" between the PLO and Israel in 1993.

It is important to consider both the Oslo Accords and the events of October 7th as pivotal moments that produced significant changes in the political imagination, narrative, and language. As Bosi and Zamponi (2020) argue, events should be analyzed using a process-tracing approach, moving backward from the event in question to understand how people mobilize and engage in response to a specific situation. In fact, it is impossible to fully comprehend the tactics, language, and strategies of the current Palestinian mobilization in Italy without considering how previous generations of Palestinians mobilized for Palestine (Caruso, 2014).

The Oslo Accords represent a critical turning point in the history of Palestine, both within the homeland and in the exile, as noted by Abu Samra and Qutami (2020):

> "The consequences of the Oslo Accords left a new generation in dire need of overthrowing the Oslo framework, with limited means to achieve this. They were burdened with inherited traumas and the grim reality of their contemporary political subjectivity, without many of the forms of political-cultural capital or the revolutionary climate and grassroots liberation strategies of previous generations."

As further pointed out by Abu Samra and Qutami (2020), the political socialization of this post-Oslo generation can be understood by analyzing the social and political context that emerged from the Oslo Accords:

> "The Oslo Accords, the so-called peace agreements reached between the PLO and Israeli leaders from 1991 to 1995, crystallized the decline of Palestinian transnational institutions. In many ways, the effects of the Accords—the abandonment of anti-colonial strategies and principles in favor of a shift toward state-building on a small fraction of historical Palestine, and the marginalization of the right of return throughout protracted negotiations—dismembered the PLO, hollowing it out of its historic mandate and function. This, in turn, annihilated its organized armed resistance and popular engagement with grassroots politics both inside and outside the homeland. This shaped the conditions for the new generation, who came to political consciousness by witnessing the calamities befalling their homeland and people, yet without the same kind of political infrastructure as previous generations."

The Oslo generation, which had been at the forefront of mobilization in the 1970s and 1990s in Italy, believed in the political agenda that emerged from the peace process, mobilizing toward the goal of a "possible peace." This generation today represents the parents of

most GPI members. As Habashi (2017) observes, the discussions taking place within the family context produced a new, negotiated discourse around political collective identity. Similar to the *Manifesto of Dignity and Hope* in 2021 (Unity Intifada 2021), the language of Palestinian activism shifted from depoliticized positions to more politicized and radical claims. This shift is evident in GPI's Instagram posts and public statements, which criticize the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) (Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia 2025b; 2025c) — the administrative body that formally governs the West Bank and East Jerusalem and is internationally recognized by Europe and the U.S. as the sole legitimate Palestinian interlocutor. The lack of trust in Palestinian institutions, the call for an end to the Zionist agenda, and the dismantling of the settler-colonial project are central themes in the mobilization of Palestinian youth in Italy. For instance, in a statement issued at the end of 2024 and published on Instagram shortly thereafter (Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia 2025c) they declare:

> "The Palestinian National Authority does nothing but repress the Palestinian people in the West Bank, kill and torture resistance fighters in Palestine, and demonize Palestinian activists and supporters even outside Palestine.
>
> Our Palestinian Youth Movement in Italy has always opposed the Zionist colonization of our land, and we have always called for an end to the genocide in Gaza and throughout Palestine. Now that the PNA has begun to carry out the occupation's orders to oppress, kill, and displace the Palestinian people—who reject normalization and betrayal and support the idea of resistance in all its forms—we cannot remain neutral in the face of your crimes and injustices."

To conclude, in the words of Qutami and Abu Samra (2020):

> "Palestinian youth in the post-Oslo period have attempted to re-appropriate a space that was already occupied by political movements and groups that had become paralyzed by Oslo."

Palestinian youth today face significant challenges in terms of maintaining connections with the homeland, accessing their language of origin, and reflecting on their identity after 77 years of disconnection from the land of Palestine. On the other hand, the hybridity of their identity, negotiated between Italy, Palestine and the Arab region at large, shapes their understanding of the Italian context, culture, and language. These elements are important as they help Palestinian descendants understand how to navigate and modulate political action. Moreover, GPI occupies a unique position in that it is not affiliated with any Palestinian political party, a choice that echoes the post-'67 organization GUPS (General Union of Palestinian Students), which had emerged in the 1960s as a political umbrella for Palestinian youth in the diaspora (Abu Samra and Qutami, 2020). It is interesting to observe how this generation is moving beyond Oslo, attempting to reframe the Palestinian cause as an anti-colonial struggle and revitalizing the language of the post-Nakba period in opposition to the surrendering discourse that characterized the Oslo era.

Conclusions

The analysis of Palestinian youth mobilization in Italy demonstrates how this new generation is redefining the landscape of solidarity for Palestine, introducing innovative perspectives

that challenge established narratives. Through political action, the rejection of the depoliticization of the Palestinian struggle, and the reclamation of a radical anti-colonial discourse, these activists are transforming solidarity into a space for confrontation and for the redefinition of roles within the movement. The emergence of diasporic subjectivities aware of their dual positioning—both in relation to Italy and Palestine—has enabled a more structured critique of traditional forms of activism, often characterized by a humanitarian and Orientalist approach. The demand for recognition of their own agency, the questioning of Italian society's role in perpetuating colonial structures of dominance, and the connection between the Palestinian struggle and other global anti-oppression movements are central elements of this new mobilization. Moreover, the analysis of intergenerational dynamics reveals how the shift from the Oslo paradigm to a renewed anti-colonial vision is reshaping how the Palestinian diaspora in Italy interprets and engages with its cause. The rejection of the negotiation-based perspective and the growing awareness of the failure of institutional solutions have led to the search for alternative forms of resistance, strongly rooted in the intellectual and militant traditions of anti-colonial liberation movements.

Finally, the central role of *Giovani Palestinesi d'Italia* in constructing a new political language, challenging exclusionary mechanisms within the solidarity movement, and demanding a more radical stance from Italian activists signals a paradigm shift. This new generation is not merely participating in mobilization but is actively redefining its strategies and perspectives, reaffirming the centrality of the Palestinian struggle as a battle for global justice.

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