

Esa RN23 Sexuality Mid-Term Conference (Palermo, Italy, 11-12 September 2025). Talk of the Editor in Chief of AG-AboutGender at the opening ceremony

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Dear friends, dear colleagues,

as I began drafting this brief inaugural address, I found myself recalling that only a few years ago I would have approached such an intervention quite differently, adhering far more closely to the stylistic and epistemic expectations of mainstream academia, with its attachment to specialized, exclusionary languages and its implicit demand that we display our supposedly refined intellectual capital.

But those days are over. And it is precisely for this reason that I welcomed - indeed, with genuine relief - the organizers' invitation to take a clear, unambiguous stance against the inhuman genocide unfolding in what remains of Palestine, a genocide perpetrated with the complicity of the so-called "West", a term whose ideological weight we must no longer pretend is neutral.

Those days are over, because this is not an ordinary historical juncture. Alongside the ongoing genocide, the recurring economic crises, and the climate emergency that many still seek to obscure, Europe is in the process of transforming its once-celebrated ideals of peace into new ideologies of war, while fascism has re-emerged with disquieting force across multiple national contexts. Italy now stands as the first Western democracy to be governed - again, after the twentieth-century ventennio - by a party of explicit fascist lineage; in Germany, the rise of the AfD has destabilized the long-held taboo surrounding Nazi-fascism; and in "civilized" England, peaceful elderly pro-Palestine demonstrators are being forcibly removed by police.

Those days are over, because, as Tomaso Montanari - Rector of the University for Foreigners of Siena - writes:

In this dramatic historical moment, students across the world are protesting, and in Italy these fully legitimate protests are being harshly repressed by the police, while a political and media campaign depicts the university as a dangerous refuge of extremists. At the same time, the far-right government is defunding the university

system and preparing reforms that undermine fundamental freedoms. And this is not occurring solely in Italy: from Trump's United States to Orban's Hungary, the objective is to crush dissent and critical thought.

Those days are over. And indeed, I no longer recognize myself in this academic system. More than ever, I feel confined within a neoliberal university structure that has trained us to comply passively with the dictatorship of "publish or perish", to revere the Metropole, suppressing the intellectual curiosity that technological access should have empowered: the curiosity to explore whether there exist other epistemologies, generated in the so-called "Periphery", better suited to our own situated research contexts.

This is an academy that has allowed generations to forget - by failing to tell them - that twentieth-century academic sociology was born with the ambition "not only to interpret the world, but to change it", to paraphrase Marx. Instead, younger scholars have been trained to write in opaque, exclusionary prose; to prioritize North American journals over national ones; to privilege speed over reflection; and, above all, to avoid explicit political positioning, sustained by the fiction that neutral knowledge is possible.

And yet, even this fragile academic institution must be defended, because - as Montanari reminds us - "if the university is free, society is free".

Those days are over, because the anti-gender crusade deploys violent strategies—often institutional, often explicitly punitive—to demonize and delegitimize those who advance critical thought through gender studies, queer studies, and sexuality studies. Yet this violence is itself evidence of the transformative and unsettling power of scholarship that interrogates the supposed naturalness of the cis-hetero-patriarchal order.

Our knowledge, our theoretical tools, our capacity for critique—they frighten the guardians of traditional hierarchies. This is why they want us at the margin.

But if they want us marginal, then we will make the margin our site of action. We will inhabit the margin as a position of strength. Because, as the great and much-missed bell hooks taught us, the margin is not a space of deprivation or exclusion, but a "location of radical possibility, a space of resistance".

Those days are over. And so the moment has come to disrupt once again, to make our voices heard, to embrace discomfort, to reclaim the imaginative power of utopia, and to resist the many dystopias saturating our societies. Our critical knowledge — rigorous, situated, and unapologetically political — will be our strength.

Now and always, Resistance.

Now and always, #FreePalestine.