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This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:

Pitti Ilaria (2022). In the margins: young Italians' social participation between engagement and social inclusion. *POLITICHE SOCIALI*, 1, 15-30 [10.7389/104071].

Availability:

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/877793> since: 2024-09-03

Published:

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7389/104071>

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(Article begins on next page)

This is the final peer-reviewed accepted manuscript of:

Ilaria Pitti, In the Margins: Young Italians' Social Participation between Engagement and Inclusion, on "Politiche Sociali, Social Policies" 1/2022, pp. 15-30, doi: 10.7389/104071

The final published version is available online at:
<https://www.rivisteweb.it/doi/10.7389/104071>

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In the margins: young Italians' social participation between engagement and inclusion

Abstract: This article analyzes young Italians' social participation focusing on the relationship between social inclusion and civic and political engagement. Drawing on recent youth studies literature, it reflects on how young Italians' social status has changed over the course of the last decade as the prolonged socio-economic marginalization that young Italians have experienced has catalyzed a series of changes in their practices and contents of engagement. As young Italians express a more systemic and intersectional critique of society through non-institutionalized practices of engagement, the article depicts the potential implications that young people's claims and ideas for rethinking social inclusion. In so doing, the article seeks to recognize young Italians' marginal position as a site for "radical openness" (bell hooks, 1989).

Keywords: young people; social inclusion; civic and political engagement; youth activism; marginality

Abstract: Il presente contributo prende in analisi lo stato della partecipazione sociale dei giovani italiani focalizzandosi sul rapporto tra inclusione e impegno civico e politico. Ripercorrendo la letteratura recente sul tema, l'articolo analizza gli effetti che la prolungata emarginazione socioeconomica esperita dalle giovani generazioni in Italia nell'ultimo decennio ha prodotto sulle forme e sui contenuti del loro coinvolgimento civico e politico. Evidenziando la natura più marcatamente sistemica e intersezionale delle attuali espressioni politiche giovanili in ambito extra-istituzionale, l'articolo riflette sulle nuove prospettive di inclusione sociale che le pratiche politiche giovanili prefigurano. In tal senso l'articolo mira a riconoscere la posizione marginale dei giovani italiani come potenziale luogo di «apertura radicale» (bell hooks, 1989).

Parole chiave: giovani; inclusione sociale; impegno civico e politico; attivismo giovanile; marginalità

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In the margins: young Italians' social participation between engagement and inclusion

I am located in the margin.
I make a definite distinction between that marginality
which is imposed by oppressive structures and that
marginality one chooses as
site of resistance - as location of radical
openness and possibility.
- bell hooks (1989)

1. Introduction

In a well-known article that reconstructs the meaning of the concept of participation, Cotta (1979) argued that this umbrella term has two distinct, yet interconnected, meanings. On the one hand, participation means “being part,” that is, being included, being recognized as a legitimate member of a particular society, and being able to enjoy the full series of rights connected to this status. This meaning refers to aspects of social inclusion. On the other hand, the term participation also refers to “taking part,” that is, the choice to act as a member of a particular society, to engage in civic and political spheres, and to behave as an active citizen. From this point of view, participation coincides with civic and political engagement.

Research on civic and political engagement and social inequalities have extensively demonstrated the interconnected nature of the two meanings of the concept of participation. For example, studies on institutionalized practices of engagement have widely highlighted that increased participation in elections is commonly associated with higher levels of socio-economic inclusion and that experiences of exclusion, misrecognition, and non-belonging can trigger processes of disengagement from politics and apathy (Young 2010; Dalton 2017). At the same time, other studies underscore the steady relationship between social exclusion and participation in protests, riots, and other non-institutionalized practices of engagement in civic and political spheres (Tilly and Tarrow 2012). Experiences of marginalization, exclusion, and

non-recognition can, in this perspective, foster alternative forms of engagement distinguished by high levels of novelty and/or a confrontational approach (Norris 2002; Tilly and Tarrow 2012; Della Porta 2020). Research has also shown that differences in social inclusion are reflected in different engagement opportunities within the same forms of civic and political participation as individuals enjoying lower social statuses in terms of cultural recognition or socio-economic inclusion struggle to define the agendas of both political parties and social movements (Luhtakallio 2012).

Acknowledging the fundamental relationship between “being part” and “taking part,” this article aims to present and discuss emerging and changing trends in young Italians’ relationships to social inclusion as well as civic and political engagement. It shows how young Italians’ contemporary practices of civic and political engagement both “express” and “resolve” their experiences of exclusion, non-belonging, and non-recognition. In so doing, this contribution focuses on young people’s “social participation” to analyze the configurations of civic and political engagement that young Italians have carved out—and are still carving out—from a condition of (protracted) cultural and socio-economic marginality. In this perspective, “social participation” represents the intersection(s) of the two main meanings of participation and is thus neither intended to be understood as a synonym for civic and political engagement nor as an alternative concept for social inclusion.

The article first presents the debate on the relationship between engagement and inclusion through an analysis of recent literature on youth participation and inequalities, situating the discussion in the broader (European) debate on young people’s participation (par. 2). Focusing more specifically on young Italians’ social participation (par. 3), the analysis looks at the specific configurations that young Italians have established for their forms of civic and political engagement in the last decade. Paying particular attention to changes that have occurred since the 2008 economic and financial crisis, the article explores the connections between young

Italians' processes of socio-economic and cultural marginalization and younger generations' practices of civic and political engagement. Based on this analysis, the contribution also reflects on the potential implication that current young Italians' practices of civic and political engagement have for our broader understanding of social inclusion. In line with the focus of the special issue, the conclusion reflects on young Italians' social conditions as more than a "site of deprivation" (bell hooks 1989, 21), highlighting possibilities for the "radical openness" (Ibid.) encapsulated in marginality.

2. Young people, engagement, and inclusion: readings in youth studies

In the last two decades, social science research on the relationship between young people's civic and political engagement has focused on the amount, form, and substance of youth engagement. Looking at how much and how young people participate in society, studies on youth participation across Europe and, more generally, across Western societies, have, first and foremost, highlighted that younger generations are steadily turning away from institutionalized practices of engagement (i.e., voting, running in elections, etc.) and opting instead for non-institutionalized practices in the spheres of volunteering, social movements, cultural citizenship, and everyday participation (Forbig 2005; Ekman and Amnå 2012). While observing this migration, the same studies have also suggested that contemporary young Europeans are not participating less in society than previous young generations did. By contrast, these studies depict that young people participate to an equal or higher level than previous generations but do so through forms that that adult world often misunderstands, stigmatizes, and criminalizes (Walther et al. 2020; Bessant et al. 2021). As such, these studies highlight how young Europeans' practices of civic and political activation have changed as they combine a deeply disenchanted view of politics with a solidaristic approach to

participation (Della Porta and Portos 2020; Giugni and Grasso 2021). In studying the reasons behind these transformations in young people's levels, forms, and contents of engagement, the literature has, albeit not always explicitly, positioned young people's (limited) social inclusion at the center of the analysis across three main trajectories.

The first research trajectory depicts how the same social inequalities that concern the larger population's levels and practices of engagement also influence young people's forms and levels of engagement (Sloam 2016). Based on this reading, the literature has extensively demonstrated that young people's social status and their related levels of social inclusion deeply influence how young people engage with the civic and political spheres (Bessant et al. 2017; Pickard and Bessant 2018). As a rule, a higher social status—determined by levels of education, occupational status, and income directly and indirectly influenced by socio-demographic characteristics—provides essential skills and resources that enable people to be civically and politically engaged. Indeed, findings highlight that people with a “higher status [...] are more likely to have the time, the money, the access to political information and the ability to become politically involved” (Dalton 2017, 7). This general rule, which is not youth-specific (Matt and Weinstein 2006), influences most forms of civic and political engagement, from voting to participating in a rally, despite the potential impact that social status changes have on the acquisition of skills and resources across different forms of active citizenship. Following this perspective, European research has suggested that contemporary young generations' civic and political engagement practices are particularly shaped by the growing mismatch between their education levels and their occupational and income status (Pickard and Bessant 2018). Younger generations' tendency to invest in non-institutionalized forms of engagement emerged, in this perspective, as young people's increasing level of education made them more interested and competent in civic and political matters. This coincided with a time when opportunities for economic and occupational inclusion (through education) decreased,

which led to increasing levels of institutional distrust and feelings of helplessness (Kelly et al. 2018). As many scholars highlight (Matt and Weinstein 2006; Farthing 2010; Sloam 2016), young people's anti-political attitude is indeed political as it stems from a prolonged experience of peripheralization and exclusion. That is, young peoples' feeling of not being part, in this light, is used to explain the decisions they make not to take part in institutionalized forms of participation or to participate mostly through non-institutionalized practices.

The second research trajectory looks at how young people's experiences of and possibilities for civic and political engagement are determined by dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that specifically concern young people's opportunities of being part of a world that is largely conceived of by and for adults (Pitti and Tuorto 2021). This reading pays particular attention to the inequalities that young people experience because of their age. It reconstructs how young people's possibilities of taking part in society as being deeply shaped by dominant adult-centered ideas of participation that prevent younger individuals from being recognized as full citizens. Among others, Ekman and Amnå (2012) have used the concept of "latent political participation" to stress how—predominantly adult—institutions fail to consider many of the ways young people express their interest in civic and political matters as meaningful practices of engagement. Similarly, Walther et al. (2020) have suggested that young people's engagement is only recognized as "participation" when it addresses issues that are relevant for the community, whereby such relevance is determined based on an adult-centered political agenda and only if it complies with adult-centered ideas of participation.

According to this perspective, inequalities emerging from discourses on youth and adulthood impact understandings of young people's levels and forms of engagement as they enforce both visible and invisible barriers to their possibilities of being part of and taking part in society. In particular, the dominant conception of youth as a mere preparatory phase for adulthood fosters an understanding of young people as citizens "in the making" rather than citizens "in the

present” (Määttä and Altonen 2016). Therefore, policies and programs that seek to promote youth participation largely see young people’s civic and political engagement as “provisional” participation that is meant to give way to more institutionalized forms once young people successfully complete the transition to adulthood. Interpreting youth engagement as something that is meant to be replaced creates a hierarchy between “youth/immature” and “adult/mature” forms of participation which postpones the recognition of young people as legitimate political actors to an undefined future time when they adopt a “mature” (adult) way of engaging (James 2011). According to Kassimir (2006), both the attention devoted to and the “separation” of youth engagement from the broader analysis of participation, which effectively distinguishes youth policies and discourses of participation from “adult” participation, are not only motivated by the importance of acknowledging the potentiality of youth civic and political actions but are also guided by an idea that young people are “incomplete and not (yet) capable of fully responsible [political subjects]” (Kassimir 2006, 20). In this perspective, the same behaviors are described as being innovative and not (yet) fully developed, which implies a specific relation between young people and the coming-of-age life stage. The incorporation of these conceptions of young people’s civic and political engagement in policy and programs at local, national, and European levels, combined with the increased difficulties many young people in Europe experience in their attempts to achieve the traditional markers of adulthood, only allow for a partial recognition of young people as active citizens (Walther et al. 2020).

The third trajectory in research that connects reflections on young people’s social inclusion with the analysis of their practices of engagement primarily focuses on how young people’s participation has changed in response to a prolonged experience of social marginalization. This reading has gained particular traction in Europe as researchers attempt to situate how young people were affected by the 2008 economic and financial crisis and the austerity policies that many EU governments enacted to contain the crisis. As many of these policies have resulted

in public sector cuts and a reduction in social programs that are directly or indirectly connected to young people's social inclusion (i.e., education), many leading scholars have turned to analyzing how intergenerational inequalities influenced young people's reactions to an increasingly unwelcoming social scenario. With the 2008 economic and financial crisis it became clear that, in comparison to previous young generations and contemporary adult and older generations, young Europeans are currently facing increasing difficulties (Bessant et al. 2017). Focusing on Western Europe since 2008, and in comparison to previous young generations, scholars emphasize that young people have experienced a devaluation of their educational attainments in relation to the job market, and this has coincided with increasing difficulties in finding a steady job with a fair wage, problems leaving their parental home, and obstacles that keep them from accessing social safety nets such as unemployment insurance or public housing (Ayllón 2015; Bessant et al. 2017; Giugni et al. 2020). Similarly, in relation to contemporary adult and older generations, data (Eurostat 2020) show that in nearly all European countries young people are more likely to experience moderate levels of deprivation as well as higher risk of unemployment and job insecurity.

Against this background, analyses of young people's participation during the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis have demonstrated that the exacerbation of young people's social marginality increased young people's feelings of distrust of and disenchantment with institutional politics (Sloam 2016). Research nonetheless suggested that young people's experiences of inequalities and social exclusion transformed their understanding of participation, which created a new horizon of civic and political action rather than preventing or limiting their participation (Della Porta and Portos, 2020; Giugni and Grasso 2021). Pickard and Bessant (2018), for example, contended that the crisis raised young people's awareness of their marginalized condition, boosted their activism, and inspired attempts to re-generate politics, especially in Western democracies. In line with this perspective, scholars have also

maintained that disenchantment and disillusionment are not obstacles to youth participation; instead, they have influenced the emergence of a “conditional” approach to engagement among young people whereby they participate in political life despite being fully aware that their attempts to participate might risk failure and further disillusionment (Martuccelli 2015; Reinecke 2018). Accordingly, disenchantment and disillusion are seen as transversal characteristics of young people’s current relationship with the civic and political spheres.

From different angles, these trajectories illuminate the intersections between participation as “being part” and participation as “taking part,” and suggest that young people’s ways of engaging in the civic and political spheres cannot be fully understood without considering their levels of and opportunities for social inclusion. At the same time, these readings also underscore that youth engagement can also be understood as an attempt to express and resolve issues of social inclusion that young people experience in their daily lives. In this perspective, the following analysis focuses its attention on the Italian context, looking at how young Italians’ social conditions have shaped their practices of civic and political engagement in the last decade and how young Italians are currently trying to rethink social inclusion.

3. Engaging from the margins: Italian young people’s social participation in the last decade

For decades, scholars have emphasized the difficulties that young Italians face in their attempts to achieve full social inclusion. At the same time, this has been a recurring topic in Italian public and political debates since the early 1980s. Such discussions combine a preoccupation for youth conditions with limited and often shortsighted interventions in terms of youth policies and programs (Cavalli and Leccardi 2013). According to several perspectives (Schizzerotto et al. 2011; Cuzzocrea et al. 2020; Rosina 2021), as a demographically old and familistic country,

Italy has never really managed to recognize young people as a resource and thus fails to pay attention to the social inclusion of its younger generations. As the social system provides young people with decreased levels of protection, they are becoming less relevant in the political sphere and less visible in the social domain. Italy has too often failed to guarantee—or adopt achievable strategies that create opportunities for—young Italians’ social inclusion, which has left parts of its young population with no other solutions but a life-long dependency on their family of origins or migration (Leone 2019).

Young people in Italy have thus found themselves dealing with the challenges associated with the uncomfortable condition of being “denizens”: formally included and substantially excluded, young Italians have been morally blamed for being spoiled and lacking the commitment to find their place in society, while they confront the problems of an increasingly unwelcoming social scenario (Bichi and Migliavacca 2020). Rather than seeing this as a systemic issue, discussions about current “youth dysfunction” days hinge on individualized issues that young people themselves need to solve through self-sacrifice and adaptability.

Growing up in a country that has systematically let them down, young Italians have progressively distanced themselves from the institutional sphere. They have accordingly developed distrust in state institutions and disenchantment with institutional politics (Gobbi and Gorgolini 2020). Eurobarometer data on average young Italians’ participation in formal politics and organizational membership shows a steady decline in engagement since 2009, while Italy exhibits one of the lowest average rates of youth engagement in formal politics among the EU’s advanced democracies (Kitanova 2020). Similarly, data on young people’s relationships with institutions capture a decline in trust from 2009 onward (OECD 2020) amongst Italian young people who also express a high level of political alienation and apathy in comparison to their European peers (Stefanini and Cicognani, 2018). Finally, the relationship between young Italians and institutional politics looks particularly strained in data on young

people's participation in political parties. Although there are no formal barriers to young people's involvement, studies show that young Italians see parties as obsolete and inadequate organizations (Dahl et al. 2017). In their analysis of this data, scholars largely agree that low youth engagement levels and interest in institutional politics in Italy are rational reactions to Italian institutions' lack of attention to youth-related policies (Genova 2018; Lello 2020).

However, it is important to note that such tendencies mirror a generalized negative trend that is not new; it intersects with older cohorts' relationships with civic and political spheres more generally in Italy and beyond. There is, nonetheless, a much more relevant generational difference in how young people approach non-institutionalized channels of participation. Although it is difficult to quantify how many young Italians take part in non-institutionalized forms of engagement due to the undefined and volatile nature of these practices, different studies have suggested that young people's interest in unconventional forms of civic and political engagement has grown since 2008 in tandem with declining interest in and trust of institutions (Alteri and Raffini 2014; Zamponi 2019; Della Porta 2020).

Research has long suggested that young people across the globe prefer non-institutionalized civic and political participation as a high-impact alternative to institutionalized channels (Sloam 2016). However, studies conducted in the Italian (and Southern European) context during the last decade show that young people's preference for non-institutionalized civic and political engagement does not represent a mere strategy to have a voice in government or other state institutions. Young Italians' engagement in non-institutionalized forms of action seems to be characterized by an ambition to "bypass" institutions altogether (Della Porta 2020). Numerous scholars (e.g., Alteri and Raffini 2014; Rebughini et al. 2017; Giugni et al. 2020) have identified that the key to understanding the changing meanings of unconventional forms of involvement can be found in accumulating feelings of disenchantment with and skepticism of institutionalized politics. According to this perspective, young Italians' disaffection towards

institutional politics is not connected to one specific problem or event but is instead the result of a long and slow process of disenfranchisement that began in the 1970s and continued throughout the following decades only to be exacerbated by the 2008 economic crisis and the government's subsequent austerity measures. Many young people connected this progressive path of disenfranchisement to their experiences of marginalization from structural challenges and collective solutions, and this led them to develop forms of political resistance that deeply questioned the State and its institutions. According to this perspective, young Italians have been confronted with the same problems for long enough that it transformed a generational position into a generational consciousness that is expressed through informal participatory practices (Zamponi 2019). In this light, non-institutionalized instruments of action have taken on a more radical role in the last decade: young people's disillusionment now appears to have reached such a depth that the non-institutionalized practices have been transformed into instruments for the re-generation and re-appropriation of politics (Alteri and Raffini 2014). Non-institutional involvement is therefore no longer viewed as being complementary to institutional participation but is instead seen as a tool for circumnavigating institutions. Beyond protests and petitions, a new wave of "direct social actions" seeks to directly transform certain areas of society through action itself rather than asking the State or other institutions for a solution to the problem (Bosi, Zamponi, 2015). Alternative food networks, political volunteering, self-managed services, and other emerging forms of youth engagement can be interpreted as attempts to express and resolve dissatisfaction with institutions by starting and engaging in projects that do not require "external" intervention.

In this light, a series of attempts to identify and experiment with new solutions to longstanding problems of social inclusion concerning younger generations in Italy are the focal points of young Italians' contemporary practices of engagement. However, looking closer at these practices it is possible to notice that the ideas of social inclusion expressed in young Italians'

contemporary forms of engagement are not only relevant only for young people but also have the potential to catalyze a rethinking of what social inclusion means and can be achieved.

In the last decade, young Italians' practices of non-institutionalized civic and political engagement have been mainly concerned with issues of economic inclusion, minority rights, gender equality, and environmental justice. Young Italians have been at the forefront of different social movements developing around these topics¹. Although these movements deal with "traditional" questions of social justice, their novelty can be seen in the implications for how social inclusion ought to be rethought to recognize how young people approach these problems.

First, many have noticed that contemporary young people's non-institutionalized engagement have acquired a more "systemic" character in the last decade (Della Porta 2020). The narratives and solutions that young Italians engaged in forms of non-institutionalized activities elaborate explicitly connect individual and local issues to a systemic critique and a deeper awareness of multifaceted and interconnected issues of injustice and inequality. Such connections define contemporary young Italians' civic and political engagement. This is especially clear in actions focused on environmental justice and, more specifically, in the discussions fostered by youth movements such as Fridays for Future or Extinction Rebellion (Bertuzzi 2019; Sorge and Dumitrica 2021). While environmental justice has always been a key topic of youth activism, previous forms of mobilization mirrored a fragmented discourse that limited direct engagement. Environmental issues have long been framed as a problem concerning a distant and inaccessible oil company that ought to be boycotted or a change in individual consumption that needed to be made. While not dismissing the idea that it is possible to change the world through small, concrete, and daily choices, Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion and other

¹ In consideration of the low participation of young people in protest actions against the measures enacted by national and local government to contain the pandemic (Della Porta 2020), this contribution does not consider movements developing around this issue central for this analysis.

non-institutionalized engagement among young people (such as self-managed farms and self-organized organic markets) have managed to reframe the environmental question in a broader discourse that, deploying concepts of intergenerational equality, collective rights, and social justice, has developed into a critique of neoliberal politics, capitalism and Western-centrism (Bertuzzi 2019). Similarly, youth movements and civic initiatives dealing with issues of minorities' rights, multiculturalism and migrants' rights (such as Black Lives Matter Italia, Rete 2G or Mediterranea Saving Humans) have framed their actions against racism in a broader discourse that reveals and questions the connection between neoliberal capitalism, colonialism, and the current difficulties associated with recognizing racial minorities' rights (Riniolo 2019; Muvumbi 2021).

A second element of novelty is evident in contemporary young Italians' attempt to create, through their forms of civic and political activation outside of institutions, alliances with other subjectivities and social groups. Current forms of young people's civic and political engagement are distinguished by an intersectional approach and active attempts to create "bridges" between the different issues and groups affected by those issues. According to Della Porta (2020), for example, mobilizations around the economic and financial crisis in Italy can be interpreted above all as political expressions that originate at the intersection of generational and class variables. Young people, although not exclusively, promoted non-institutionalized engagement with these issues. The latter, in fact, actively sought to foster connections with other subjectivities of the new social class of the precariat. Experiences of mobilizations of riders and Amazon couriers in different Italian cities are an example of these alliances as they have seen young people at the forefront of a struggle that also involves migrant and adult workers, among others (Zamponi 2019). Currently, this attempt at constructing bridges with other social groups is visible also in the youth-led protests against the rising costs of living as well as in students' demonstrations following the death of two students during their "dual

traineeship” stages that have been framed in broader discourses on resource redistribution and workplace safety, respectively².

The intersectional perspective of youth mobilizations is particularly visible in the sphere of youth engagement with gender rights (Leccardi 2015). In the last decade, gender and sexuality have returned to the center of many young Italians’ civic and political initiatives outside the institutional sphere with Non Una di Meno, a trans-feminist social movement with different branches across the country, being probably the most visible and known example of mobilization in this field. Although in terms of demographics the movement is mainly composed of young women, the issues the group chooses to engage with (i.e., gender violence, health rights, labor³) testify to an ambition to create connections across generations and genders. Beyond being inclusive of LBGTQIA+ individuals, men are increasingly express interest and participate in their activities as well (Chironi 2019).

Being distinguished by elements of novelty in terms of a clearer systemic approach and an efforts towards the building of broader coalitions, contemporary young Italians’ practices of civic and political activation invite a radical rethinking of social inclusion. By adopting an intersectional and systemic gaze in their engagement, young Italians rewrite social demands that institutions tend to conceive as separate. They, accordingly, connect questions about young people’s social inclusion to other questions that are of interest to all people living in Italy. In so doing, young Italians are rethinking social inclusion as a problem that cannot be tackled by sectors, issues, or groups, but only by recognizing and addressing the interconnections *between* sectors, issues, and groups. In this perspective, considering young Italian’s voice in rethinking (youth) social inclusion would not imply simply promoting a (much-needed) redistribution of

² These protests have developed in many Italian cities during the first months of 2022 and their developments are still unclear. Protests against the rising costs of living are connected to an increase of utilities (electricity and gas) prices.

³ These topics correspond to the streams of the latest Non Una di Meno’s national conference held in October 2021 in Bologna.

resources between young and older generations, but would also require the recognition that the redefinition of the social system affects young people as well as other social categories and that programs of social inclusion need to be developed that are favorable to all (Vitale 2018; Rosina 2021; Pitti and Tuorto 2021). The main lesson that comes from contemporary forms of youth civic and political engagement is that real social inclusion is more easily found in processes in which young people meet with other subjects (Fraser et al. 2019), envisaging alliances with all those who see crises as an opportunity to build more supportive societies and forms of social protection that are horizontal and inclusive.

4. Conclusions

From the analysis of recent literature on young Italians' configuration of social inclusion and civic and political engagement during the last decade, a series of conclusions can be drawn on the state of younger generations' contemporary social participation in Italy. Young Italians seem to be slowly emerging as a political generation able to clearly articulate ideas for social change and to concretely experiment with solutions for bettering the world around them. Although young Italians' engagement in civic and political spheres has been undoubtedly motivated by an initial need to express (and resolve) personal frustrations and individual difficulties connected to a condition of socio-economic exclusion, the experience of prolonged marginalization has also helped them develop a deeper awareness of their common condition as a generation and identify problems and solutions *beyond* the generational level (Leccardi 2014). Central non-youth-specific issues are evident in young Italians' practices of civic and political engagement, which testifies to their ambitions to speak about and for more than just themselves. What young people do and how they do it captures an intention to elaborate an agenda of change that matters for everyone.

All this seems to prove bell hooks' ideas of margins as "much more than a site of deprivation" (bell hooks 1989, 21). According to the feminist scholar, "to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" and living in a marginal position can be acknowledged as having the possibility to catalyze the capacity to "[look] both from the outside in and from the inside out," that is, to focus on the center as well as on the margins and to recognize the center's dependency from the margins and vice versa. In this light, marginality "offers to one the possibility of a radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds." Young Italians' marginality emerges, in line with this perspective, as "a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance," which, when it is translated into civic and political engagement, has proved to be a strategic way to develop a counterhegemonic discourse that "is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives" (Ibid). From a similar perspective, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) also recognize margins as spaces of radical democracy. The authors suggest that individuals and groups at the margins of society are continuously asked to negotiate between their marginal position and the requests of the center. They are thus somewhat better positioned to recognize contradictions, unsolved questions, and patterns of inequality in dominant discourses and structures. This conceptualization resonates with Bhabha's (1994, 72) ideas of borders as "third spaces" where an "overlap and displacement of domains of difference" occurs and where new solutions can develop.

In line with these perspectives, this analysis has sought to show how observing young people's practices at the margins have the potential to recognize or imagine "new centers" developing around unsolved and unheard needs and new ways to address these needs. As an oppressed category in a society made by and for adults, young people have an "epistemological advantage [as] their experience of repression can be [...] a catalyst for organizing" and rethinking society (Alexander and Mohanty 1994, 48-9). This, however, also implies a need to recognize that experiencing a certain structural positioning does not immediately guarantee political

activation as “it is only when the experience of oppression is organized in terms of the interpretative framework [...] that subversive [...] practices are produced” (Sohatan and Stam 1994). In this perspective, while focusing on young Italians’ practices and their potential to radically rethink social inclusion, it is also necessary to acknowledge that “the transformation from perceived contradictions and material disenfranchisement to participation” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 182) is not an immediate concern for all young people and that the interpretative framework through which conditions of marginality are understood can also nourish anti-political, populist, and anti-democratic feelings.

Despite such limits, contemporary forms of youth engagement can nonetheless be understood as experiments with “new cultures of democracy” (Kelly et al. 2018: 80), which, although distinguished by a strong shared generational experience, go beyond generational issues. Drawing on Butler and Athanasiou (2013), it seems possible to refer to the concept of “dispossession” to indicate that, behind many forms of contemporary youth participation, there is the feeling of having been deprived of the possibility of being part of a community, of being able to benefit from its social protection and to develop a sense of belonging. Between “outrage” and “hope” (Castells 2015), current youth mobilizations reflect a sense of injustice that is derived from an awareness of having been dispossessed of a community as well as the desire to rediscover and recreate “passionate attachments” (Butler and Athanasiou 2013) and try to change the world.

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