

Feminist tide engulfs Italy on 25 November

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On 25 November, a massive wave of more than half a million people filled the streets of Rome, with many spontaneous gatherings in squares throughout the country - first and foremost in Messina, Sicily, to shout out all their anger and determination against patriarchal violence, against those who perpetrate it and those who reproduce it.

While it is true that for years the demonstrations called by Non Una Di Meno for the international day against male violence against women and gender violence have seen lively and significant participation, the numbers and determination seen in the streets this year seem to mark a change of pace, a possible new explosion of movement, a powerful and overbearing irruption on the public scene of the issues of feminism.

The reasons for this irruption are to be found in a context of structural violence against women, only formally and demagogically opposed by the Meloni government, instrumentalizing rapes and feminicides to toughen penalties and militarize the country.

Already last summer, two cases of gang rape of young girls had shaken public opinion, in Caivano and Palermo. Then on 11 November, a 22-year-old girl, Giulia Cecchettin, disappeared with her ex-boyfriend from her village in north-eastern Italy. For a week, the two were not found. And, while some journalists speculated in the press about unreal romantic escapades, the bitter awareness was growing that the story would end with yet another feminicide. Number 107 in 2023. The girl was found dead seven days later, near a lake, having bled to death after being stabbed 26 times. Her murderer, 22-year-old ex-boyfriend Filippo Turetta, was caught in Germany a few days later. [1]

Grief, frustration and anger spread, especially among the very young. A story whose ending was already written, in a society deeply marked by patriarchal violence. This was made crystal clear by Elena Cecchettin, Giulia's sister, in an explosive interview, in which she stated :

Turetta is often described as a monster, but he's not a monster. A monster is an exception, a person who's outside society, a person for whom society doesn't need to take responsibility.. Instead, there is responsibility. "Monsters" are not sick, they are healthy sons of the patriarchy and rape culture. Rape culture is what legitimizes all behaviour that harms women, starting with the things that are sometimes not even considered important, but which are very important, such as control, possessiveness, catcalling. Every man is privileged by this culture.

It is often said "not all men". All men are not, but they are still men. No man is good if he does nothing to dismantle the society that gives them so much privilege. It is the responsibility of men in this patriarchal society given their privilege and power to educate and call out friends and colleagues as soon as they hear the slightest hint of sexist violence. Tell that friend who checks out his girlfriend, tell that colleague who catcalls passers-by, make yourself hostile to such behaviour accepted by society, which is nothing but the prelude to feminicide.

Femicide is a state murder because the state does not protect us. Femicide is not a crime of passion, it is a crime of power. We need widespread sexual and emotional education, we need to teach that love is not possession. We need to fund anti-violence centres and we need to give those in need the opportunity to ask for help. For Giulia don't hold a moment of silence, for Giulia burn everything.

(Letter to *Corriere della Sera*, 20 November 2023)

“Don't hold a minute's silence, burn everything”, “He was your *good lad*”. The phrases resonate on the social networks of the very young and not only, on the walls of cities, underlining a rebellion against the narrative of the violent man as a sick monster. Instead, there are too many connections that every woman feels with this story of possession, jealousy, psychological blackmail.

Thus when the Minister of Education, Valditara, proposed a minute's silence in every school to remember Giulia and the other victims, in many schools there was instead a minute's noise : shouting, banging on doors, shaking keys to symbolize on the one hand that the femicide has the keys to the house too often, and on the other that we no longer want to have to make noise to make ourselves courageous as we walk home alone. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9quZBf1jfl>)

Crowded assemblies, spontaneous night marches, school occupations, initiatives outside of newspaper offices...The week that followed was a succession of mobilizations throughout the country.

On 25 November, hundreds of buses were on the move from the morning to go to the rallies in Rome and Messina, and the requests to participate were so large that in many cities other processions were called to give everyone the opportunity to demonstrate.

In Rome, anyone who left home to go to the Circo Massimo, found themselves on public transport full of people heading towards the same goal, there were practically parallel marches flowing towards the main march, and the sight for those arriving in the square was impressive.

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The largest demonstration in recent years flooded the streets of the city in a disorderly and determined manner, spontaneously encircling the Colosseum, leaving its mark on the shutters of the Pro Vita headquarters, bringing its solidarity to the Palestinian people, shouting loudly about the need to finance Anti-Violence Centres, to establish sexual and relationship education programmes in schools of all levels, making the voices of so many women and gender minorities who struggle daily against male violence resound.

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P.-S.

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Notes

[1] BBC News, 24 November 2023 [“Giulia Cecchetin’s killing sparks Italian reckoning over femicide”](#).