

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF
WOMEN'S AND GENDER ACTIVISM
AND SCHOLARSHIP**

SITE: ITALY

**Transcript of Lia Migale
Interviewer: Lauren Duncan**

**Location: Rome, Italy
Date: June 21, 2018**

**University of Michigan
Institute for Research on Women and Gender
1136 Lane Hall Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1290
Tel: (734) 764-9537**

**E-mail: um.gfp@umich.edu
Website: <http://www.umich.edu/~glblfem>**

© Regents of the University of Michigan, 2018

Lia Migale, writer and economist, was born in 1949 and lives in Rome, where she was a professor of Business Economics at the “La Sapienza” University in Rome until the 2014/2015 academic year. She was a consultant on issues of the economics of art and planning and business strategy for Italian and international organizations. She also worked as an economic editor in the national press for a long period and published various economic essays. Feminist since the 1970s, she was a member of the Board of Directors of the *Casa internazionale delle Donne di Roma* from 2014 to 2019. She has published several works on Italian feminism, including “*Piccola storia del femminismo in Italia*” (Empiria, Roma, 2016), and “*Imprenditoria femminile e sviluppo economico*”, (Nuova Italia Scientifica, Roma, 1996). She has also published novels, short stories, and other essays. With the novel *L'innumerabile uno* (Iacobelli Editore, Roma, 2018) she was the winner of the 2018 Capalbio Award. Her latest novel, “*Incontri all'angolo di un mattino*” was published in 2018 (La Lepre Edizioni Roma) and received one of the awards from L'IGUANA, Castello di Prata Sannita in 2019.

Lauren Duncan is the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Psychology at Smith College, in Northampton, MA. She obtained her Ph.D. in Personality Psychology and a Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She teaches courses in the Psychology of Women and Gender, Political Psychology, and the Psychology of Political Activism. Her research focuses on individual motivation for participation in collective action, particularly among women and LGBTQ+ individuals. While at Smith, she began studying the Italian language and culture (Dr. Grazioli was her first teacher, who became her friend and collaborator) and was able to extend her research on the psychology of activism to conduct oral histories with Italian feminist and feminist LGBTQ+ activists. She has recently written about “Better policy interventions through intersectionality” (Social Issues and Policy Review, 2022), the childhood origins of Gloria Steinem's feminist activism (Journal of Personality, 2022), “Psychology and political participation” for The Oxford Handbook of Political Participation (2022), and “Power, gender, and collective action” for The Palgrave Handbook of Psychology Power & Gender (2023).

Keywords: Intersectionality, Education, Politics and Law, Art/Writing as Activism

Lauren Duncan: Okay. Good morning.

Lia Migale: Good morning.

LD: I would like to begin with a conversation about your childhood, and first of all about your family. In particular, how did you learn about your family's political and social values? Can you give me an example?

LM: I was born in 1949, the war had happened earlier, and my father had been fighting in the last World War¹. My mother had made a small contribution to the Resistance², little but something. Anyway they were mobilized when there was the German occupation³. Thus politics in Italy were the order of the day in general. My father was a Christian Democrat⁴, that is he was part of the Christian Democrat party⁵ because he was thinking in terms of values and thus for him the most important value was the value of freedom, and therefore in our house there was this discourse about freedom. Also my uncle was socialist⁶, they skirmished, but in a very democratic manner. So at our house there was always talk of freedom, of politics, of De Gasperi⁷, of Moro⁸. My father then was tied very closely to Moro and he belonged to the party and so he followed things. He was for a time a journalist of the official paper of the Christian Democrat party. So from the time I was very little I saw him write pieces for *Il Popolo*.

LD: He wrote pieces for?

¹ World War II, or WWII, occurred from 1939 to 1945. "World War II." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II (accessed July 31, 2022).

² The Resistance, also referred to as The Underground, emerged as a socio-political movement in many conquered countries during World War II. "Resistance During World War II." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resistance_during_World_War_II (accessed July 31, 2022).

³ German occupation refers to an intense 9-month period in 1943 when the Germans attacked and took over Rome as part of their "Italian campaign." Baily, Virginia. "How the Nazi occupation of Rome has gripped Italy's cultural imagination." The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/25/liberation-of-rome-italian-imagination> (accessed July 31, 2022).

⁴ Christian Democracy is a political philosophy relied on contemporary democratic ideas and traditional values taught in Christianity. "Christian democracy." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_democracy (accessed July 31, 2022).

⁵ A Catholic-motivated, centrist political party in Italy, founded in the German occupation. "Christian Democracy (Italy)." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Democracy_\(Italy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Democracy_(Italy)) (accessed July 31, 2022).

⁶ Socialist refers to advocates of socialism, an economic ideology defined by the domination of public ownership. "Socialism." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialism> (accessed July 31, 2022).

⁷ Alcide De Gasperi was the founder of Christian Democracy Party and the prime minister of Italy from 1945 to 1953. "Alcide De Gasperi." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcide_De_Gasperi (accessed July 31, 2022).

⁸ Aldo Moro was an essential figure in Christian Democracy Party. He also led Italy for more than 6 years in total as a prime minister. "Aldo Moro." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aldo_Moro (accessed July 31, 2022).

LM: *Il Popolo*, the newspaper, the daily newspaper of the Christian Democrat party.

LD: Oh, okay.

LM: My father was also a candidate in the elections at a certain point, so we talked about politics. But we talked in terms of values, essentially, not in terms of governments, of alliances⁹ or of things of this type, in terms of values. The major value which I grew up with was the value of freedom. This was the...also my sister had gone to the Party school¹⁰. And this is the family context.

LD: Yes, yes.

LM: My father was a professor of literature, of literature and of Italian; so it is clear that the concept of value, a concept tied to philosophy, a concept not tied to material questions but philosophical ones.

LD: Ah, yes, interesting. And after the war, yes, was there a strong question...

LM: Certainly, my father had been kept prisoner in Hungary¹¹. He was imprisoned on September 8 [1943], when the armistice¹² happened, he found himself on a troop transport¹³ that was going from Italy to Greece¹⁴, and afterward spent a long period in prison. He escaped from prison [in Hungary], then after the Liberation¹⁵, at the end of the war, he returned on foot from Hungary. So he talked about the war, he talked about the Germans, he talked about freedom.

⁹ Alliance refers to a relationship, in which people unite for required benefits or purposes. "Alliance." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alliance> (accessed July 31, 2022).

¹⁰ The Party school refers to politically extensive educational institutions. Shambaugh, David. "Training China's Political Elite: The Party School System." *The China Quarterly*. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/china-quarterly/article/abs/training-chinas-political-elite-the-party-school-system/> (accessed July 31, 2022).

¹¹ A noncoastal country in Central Europe. "Hungary." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungary> (accessed July 31, 2022).

¹² The Armistice in World War II is an agreement signed in June 1940 between Nazi and French Republic, following German triumph in the Battle of France. "Armistice of 22 June 1940." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armistice_of_22_June_1940 (accessed July 31, 2022).

¹³ A troopship is a particular ocean-going vehicle for soldiers. "Troopship." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Troopship> (accessed July 31, 2022).

¹⁴ Greece, or the Hellenic Republic, is a Southeast European nation. "Greece." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greece> (accessed August 4, 2022).

¹⁵ The Liberation of Europe refers to a closure of World War II after 6 years, when Europe was finally freed from Nazi Germany. "The Liberation Route Europe." Rough Guides. <https://www.roughguides.com/liberation-route-europe/> (accessed August 4, 2022).

LD: Interesting. Okay. In particular I am interested in what messages you received about gender, and the role of women and men in society and the family?

LM: Mah, we can't say that there was...One cannot talk in terms of gender, it was a different time and therefore this concept didn't exist, but I lived in a house where my mother worked and she was absolutely...There was an equality, in practice, in the family structure and my mother, my father was a very sentimental man, very Southern.¹⁶ My mother was a rather dynamic woman, not authoritarian, not in this sense, but she resented the double shift, because she worked a lot, she was the director of a nursery school, a preschool, therefore she was always surrounded by these shouting children and she was there for the morning and afternoon, and so she worked a lot. But then she would return home and cook, things like that.

LD: Okay...

LM: And then there was this other very interesting thing that the women got together. It was a lot, there was a social aspect to the women that was very important. Every afternoon they would go out together, they took walks, or they went to visit other ladies, or they all came to our house, where they worked together, knitting, doing needlework, embroidery, things of this type, and they were all women and therefore there was this visible form of de facto¹⁷ women's organization.

LD: Yes, and they would talk about their families and of work, etc.?

LM: You know, this, now I cannot even remember it, there was talk of everything.

LD: Yes.

LM: There was talk of everything, then there were times in which there were material difficulties in the sense that anyway life was expensive, the country needed to be reconstructed, the houses needed to be constructed, to pay for the houses, thus there was talk of material problems, but there was also gossip,¹⁸ there was talk of their work, there was talk of everything.

¹⁶ Southern people are thought to be more relaxed, easygoing, and artistic. Sanchez, Patricia. "Northern vs Southern Italy: Attitudes and culture." Miramonti Corteno.

<https://www.miramonticorteno.com/blog/2019/9/9/northern-vs-southern-italy-attitudes-and-culture> (accessed August 4, 2022).

¹⁷ De facto refers to informally declared practices that are yet accepted in reality. "De facto." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_facto (accessed August 4, 2022).

¹⁸ Gossip, also known as dishing or tattling, refers to casual conversations where people talk about others' rumors and personal lives. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gossip> (accessed August 4, 2022).

LD: How old were you when your father was in prison?

LM: Him? How old was he?

LD: No, you.

LM: I wasn't born yet. I was born in '49.

LD: Oh, okay. Thanks. Did you receive...

LM: My father wasn't even married when he was in prison. He married after the war.

LD: Okay, thanks. Did you receive messages about sexual identity? Not openly...more hidden or...

LM: Mah...I don't know what to say to you about this. Really I don't know what to tell you. I received them more...When my sister was a teenager, she was older than me, she started to have boyfriends, so there was drama, things like that. But sexual messages, mah, I don't remember them.

LD: And messages about how to resolve political problems?

LM: Mah...it is difficult to say. We say that, indeed, being that my father was politically active, certainly he thought that they were resolved in the governmental setting. Then that was the period of great reform in Italy, agricultural reform¹⁹, La Cassa del Mezzogiorno [governmental effort to stimulate economic growth in the South of Italy], school reform, thus there are...It was an evolutionary period in the country and thus the family skirmishes involving my uncle were about what the government was doing; he wasn't against the reforms, it was that he wanted stronger ones. The message was clear enough, intrinsic to the type of politics that my father espoused and also the fact that the country was in an evolutionary phase from the point of view of reforms.

LD: I understand that the reformation process in Italy happens through the government. In the United States it is a little different--there are people that think that they can change society...

¹⁹ The agricultural reform in Italy, or the Agrarian Reform, aimed at bridging the economic disparity between the South and North. "The agrarian reform in Italy: Historical analysis and impact on access to land and social class composition." EuropeNow. <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2020/11/09/historical-analysis-of-the-agrarian-reform-in-italy-impact-on-access-to-land-and-social-class-composition> (accessed August 4, 2022).

LM: Certainly, there was the Communist Party, in those years they were in great conflict with the Christian Democrats, a big showdown²⁰ in the parliamentary context, always in a democratic context. The Italian Communist Party never said that they wanted to join the Soviet Block²¹ or that they wanted revolution. It was a conflict in the parliamentary environment, even stronger. In those years the so-called “legge truffa” didn’t pass. It was an electoral law that would have given a stronger majority to the Christian Democrats. I don’t remember now the exact arguments, but certainly, that is the climate in which we moved. I remember well one day my father returned from Rome, I don’t remember any more what year it was, it was the Tambroni government²² that lasted only a few days, but they charged toward the workers on horses, so it was a very violent thing. And my father returned from Rome, I remember this image of him, that he was very agitated, saying “what happened was serious”. In fact, the government fell quickly and Fanfani²³ took his place. That is to say that there was a constant reflection of what was happening, but we were little, therefore... I’m telling you about what was going on unconsciously, not my conscious awareness. I am only conscious of my awareness of the concept of freedom, it is deeply rooted in me, and I was conscious of it from when I was little.

LD: How do you think your childhood and your relationships with your family influenced the person you are today? In particular regarding your political activity?

LM: Mah, I think surely there was an influence, but also a great conflict, because from the moment I arrived in Rome and started to take part in the student movement, thus changing my perspective, it is clear that there was a great disagreement with my father that lasted for years, pretty strong; until, finally, he accepted how I had changed. But I want to tell you, even inside the student movements, in the uprising of... rather than the year 1968²⁴ itself, it’s more about the following years-- ‘69, and Seventies... It was very clear to me that it was a process of democracy and not a process of revolution in some sense, so much so, that

²⁰ Showdown refers to a final settlement of a long-term conflict among two or more entities. “Showdown.” Cambridge English Dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/showdown> (accessed August 4, 2022).

²¹ Soviet Bloc, also known as Eastern Bloc, was an association of socialist countries around the globe following Soviet Union ideology during Cold War (1945-1991). “Eastern Bloc.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Bloc (accessed August 5, 2022).

²² Tambroni Cabinet was a brief yet intense 15th cabinet of Italian Republic. “Tambroni Cabinet.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tambroni_Cabinet (accessed August 5, 2022).

²³ Amintore Fanfani was Italy’s 32nd prime minister, a reputational figure in Christian Democracy Party after World War II. He also jointly initiated modern Italian centre-left. “Amintore Fanfani.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amintore_Fanfani (accessed August 5, 2022).

²⁴ The student movement happened from 1960s to 1980s in Italy. Therein is the popular 1968 movement, also known as Sessantotto, a mass of protests motivated by worldwide socialist dominance in the Cold War and discontent with Italian capitalist economic transformation. “1968 Movement in Italy.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_movement_in_Italy (accessed August 10, 2022).

almost immediately inside the student movement, some comrades²⁵ and I began a discussion about feminism and thus began a discussion about the relationship between men and women, that in my opinion is the great discourse of democracy.

LD: Can you tell me more about your time at University and activism at University?

LM: I arrived in Rome at the end of '68, that is during the academic year 1968-1969; they are the years after the Valle Giulia conflicts²⁶, that is, after the student movement spread from the universities to the factories, it is the period of collaboration between the students' and workers' rights movements, '69. I arrived at University and I felt alien because I had internalized all of my family's values, that is I didn't really understand communism. But at a certain point the University was occupied [by students]. I liked it a lot, I liked the university classes very much, because I came from very narrow-minded type of schooling, very...I had felt like a prisoner at school, therefore at university one could go or not go to classes; there was a true sense of freedom. The fact that the university was occupied detracted a bit from this pleasure, but with one of my friends I started to attend some seminars run by the occupiers, but I began to attend more because one was the Political Economy assistant professor.. And I knew the students there that were taking part in the movement as members of the collective [governing body of the occupation] (I was studying Economics and Management, thus it was the collective of the Economics and Management department). And I began to get to know these people...

LD: During your first year?

LM: Yes, during the occupation I began to meet the occupiers, those that were taking part in the student collective of the department, and in particular with one woman, a beautiful woman, who quickly became... (with a great ability to engage with people, although I always kept my distance, saying "but I am not with you all, I am here to listen" etc.) I began friendships with these people.

LD: What is her name?

LM: Her name was Gusmana, Gusmana Bizzarri. Summer came, I went back home, but at that point I felt distant from those who had been like me, thus I was in a transition phase. The second year, returning to university I felt, instead, engaged; I understood in a rather

²⁵ Comrade, in a political setting, specifically refers to a fellow soldier or communist/socialist. "Comrade." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comrade> (accessed August 10, 2022).

²⁶ The Valle Giulia battle is a riot in Valle Giulia, Rome, in March as part of the student movement 1968. The clash occurred between both sides of Italian politics (far and left) and the Italian police. "Battle of Valle Giulia." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Valle_Giulia (accessed August 10, 2022).

immediate way the issue of communism, not so much in an idealized way, principled, like Marxism²⁷, but really as a matter of justice. Then justice was a part of my values and so I adhered in this way to the student movement, and I became part of the collective in my second year of university and I started to study with these people. Given that we were Economics students, we began to study Marx, *Das Kapital*²⁸; we were reading the whole thing, so we began a study group - understanding the world, in another way. In this way my participation in the student movement began; in those years they simply took the form of classroom discussions, I don't know... I remember there was the year in which the law came out, an important law about employment protection, for workers' rights [Statuto dei lavoratori, 1970] and that year I was taking the Labor Law exam and I was going to class, I was constantly discussing with the professor, thus this participation manifested more on an intellectual plane. Then these study groups were making the point, we were participating in the general demonstrations, but in the context of this student group at a certain point I realized, no, this happened after the third year... I got a house with one of the collective members and with her at a certain point we met some women from Trento²⁹ who were taking part in the movement, and so started talking about feminism, you didn't talk about feminism yet, and then we decided to create a group, inside of our collective, only women, because we realized that we never talked, that is only the men talked, even though when the only woman who talked spoke she was always the most intelligent of everyone, and then [LD laughs] we understood that something wasn't working and so we created one of the very first feminist groups in Rome. Then we became aware of another group and so we merged with them, and so that is how our first feminist activism came to be, in 1971-72, the true dawning. In 1972 we organized the first March 8 demonstration in Rome [Women's Day], and as a matter of fact we planned it at home... And so began this parallelism between general politics and feminism.

LD: How did you discover feminism? Was there literature...?

LM: Yes, also.

LD: Was there a movement in the North?

²⁷ Marxism refers to econ-political ideology of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels that laid the background for theoretical and practical communism. "Marxism." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxism> (accessed August 10, 2022).

²⁸ *Das Kapital*, or *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, is a book by Karl Marx, unraveling the juxtaposition of the capitalist economy mechanisms, particularly regarding the mode of production, and other traditional political economy theories. "Das Kapital." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_Kapital (accessed August 10, 2022).

²⁹ Trento, or Trent, is the capital city of the self-governed area Trento in Italy. "Trento." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trento> (accessed August 10, 2022).

LM: We also made reference to...Initially we were simply consciousness-raising, thus this discourse of self-awareness began. From this then we started also to study the Americans, we read especially *Let's spit on Hegel*³⁰ by... God, the name isn't coming to me, excuse me but I am like this... She is one of the most important Italian personalities and so the fact that I can't remember her name, it bothers me... All right, then I will tell you. Wait perhaps I have it here... This is a little book that I am looking at, that I wrote two years ago, and it is a little history of feminism in Italy... I have no memory...Carla Lonzi!³¹

LD: Okay, thanks.

LM: Yes, certainly we were also becoming conscious of the intellectual point of view but the verbal aspect of the communication was much stronger, that is in the sense that we recounted to each other things, reading them completely isn't really necessary, self-awareness is much more important.

LD: I agree, but it is also important when we talk that we realize that they are common experiences.

LM: Yes and then, beyond the theories of women's liberation, there also was literature that one would start reading deliberately, such as Virginia Woolf³², *The Second Sex*³³ by...

LD: De Beauvoir?

LM: Yes, by Simone de Beauvoir³⁴. We read texts by women, so it became in some sense research into "the mothers" [of feminism].

LD: Interesting... This is my central question: there are other women that had experiences

³⁰ Let's spit on Hegel (1970) is an influential book on Italian feminism that emphasizes the critique of patriarchy in Hegel's ideology. Mehmet. "Lets spit on Hegel - Carla Lonzi (1970)." Disruption. <https://disruptnow.org/defining-the-enemy/lets-spit-on-hegel-carla-lonzi-1970> (accessed August 10, 2022).

³¹ Carla Lonzi co-founded an Italian feminist collective named Rivolta Femminile in 1970. She was also a writer and art critic. "Carla Lonzi." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carla_Lonzi (accessed August 10, 2022).

³² Virginia Woolf was an English writer that influenced modernist 20th century literature and initiated the narrative technique using stream of consciousness. "Virginia Woolf." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Woolf (accessed August 11, 2022).

³³ The Second Sex, by Simone de Beauvoir, is an influential feminist text that untangles the historical nature subordinating women and motivated the second-wave feminism. "The Second Sex." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Second_Sex (accessed August 11, 2022).

³⁴ Simone de Beauvoir is a French existentialist philosopher who wrote and contributed to the social and feminist theories. "Simone de Beauvoir." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simone_de_Beauvoir (accessed August 11, 2022).

similar to you, but they didn't become activists. In your opinion, what are the factors (personality, experiences, etc.) that distinguish you from them?

LM: Mah, I think that in life... among other things, I am an economist but I am also a writer, the next book that I will release will talk about this... That is the encounters that one has in their life are also very important. I believe that I have been fortunate, alternatively perhaps I would have had who knows what other wonderful career, perhaps I would have been rich, I don't know [laughs] I don't know what to say, but certainly the encounters that I had in my life, I am a go-getter³⁵ by nature... I have to solve problems... But also with an intellectual background, so also... all of these things put together made it so that I stayed within the... I became an activist to the core. Then there were also some periods, more or less intense, in the sense that for example the Seventies had been distinguished very greatly by the birth of the feminist movement, and thus our collectives... Then I was also participating in the *Lotta Continua* [a far-left radical group that arose out of the student movements of '69], and all the collective joined the *Lotta Continua*, and so my double militancy³⁶ began... until the two things clashed, so I left the *Lotta Continua* because I didn't understand anymore some ways of being, of operating, that was exactly what I called... In feminism the concept of democracy is contained within, while it is not an adherence to something, it is the necessity to go toward democracy. And so I left these organizations, but I continued my relationship, also because my dearest girlfriends had really strong personalities, perhaps I do do, but they certainly do: at the beginning of this interview I was telling you, Gusmana³⁷ was part of my entry into politics; then with my friend and roommate Cosetta we embraced feminism, then when you emerged... feminism and double militancy. Then when we left double militancy behind we founded the first *Casa delle Donne*³⁸ and there met another formidable woman named Michi Staderini³⁹; there's a photo of her outside that I will take you to see... Michi is truly a go-getter, she continually "does" in organizational terms, and anyway became... It isn't just a political friendship, it is a personal friendship; we spend the weekends together, because of this I say that

³⁵ Go-getter refers to an ambitious and initiative person. "Go-getter." Cambridge English Dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/go-getter> (accessed August 11, 2022).

³⁶ Double militancy refers to an activist strategy where the rights movements for the oppressed sex (women) and the oppressed class (workers) are collaborated. "Double militancy: OWS & Redstockings feminism." us1.campaign. <https://us1.campaign-archive.com/?u=b1f0c9bc023c88b54c15446b1&id=a4c66dd811> (accessed August 11, 2022).

³⁷ Her friend.

³⁸ Casa delle Donne is a nonprofit organization (NPO) active in Italy, focusing on gender-based violence issue and its prevention. "Casa Delle Donne Onlus." End Slavery Now. <https://www.endslaverynow.org/casa-delle-donne-onlus> (accessed August 11, 2022).

³⁹ Michi Staderini was an Italian writer whose work highlighted the differences within political feminism and identified the central problem as the relationship between individual and collective. Bassnett, Susan. "Feminist Experiences: The Women's Movement in Four Cultures." Google Books. <https://books.google.com/books?id=Wzsz1o0jzpMC&pg=PA127&lpg=PA127&dq=> (accessed August 11, 2022).

encounters in one's life are important. Then I don't know, I also became friends with Mario Mieli⁴⁰, who was this mythological personality from the gay⁴¹ rights movement, and certainly I concerned myself with political relationships...That is there are the encounters that make a lot, that determine for you your choices in a certain way, when the encounters are also encounters of friendship and not only political encounters.

LD: Relationships are very important for sustaining activism.

LM: Yes, exactly. And in fact Michi Staderini was the one who started with the University of Virginia Woolf, a university for women, she established it; then when she left, in the meantime the Italian political situation had changed, the Communist Party had changed its skin, it had become the Party for democracy...what was it called? [*Alessandro: Partito Democratico della Sinistra.*] The PDS⁴², yes, with Occhetto⁴³. Michi understood at that time that the party had gone beyond the ruling traditions [men ruling], but it opened a democratic route, she put herself forward as a candidate and joined the Central Committee [ruling body of the Communist Party], that is she was a supporter of a new dialogue concerning general politics; then she founded a group called "Onda," ["Wave,"] that really concerned itself with general politics, and we took actions for world peace, we wrote a telegram⁴⁴ to the United Nations⁴⁵, we did things like this...Then would I have done this if I hadn't met these people? Maybe yes, but I don't know, that is it didn't all come from me.

Commented [TH1]: do I need to cite any source for this, since I just merely referred to the previous sentence?

LD: What do your family and your friends think of your activism? Your family in particular.

LM: Look, my father died young, he died when he was 63, but before he died he had completely accepted me. With my mother, with whom I had a conflictual relationship since I was a teenager (from a young age I was much closer to my father), then when it was just her we began a new relationship: first out of obligation, out of a little concern for her, etc.;

⁴⁰ Mario Mieli was an Italian screenwriter and author whose work discusses feminist and queer topics. "Mario Mieli." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mario_Mieli (accessed August 11, 2022).

⁴¹ Gay, as a generic discourse, refers to LGBTQIA+ community. "Gay." LGBTQIA+ Wiki. <https://lgbtqia.fandom.com/wiki/Gay> (accessed August 11, 2022).

⁴² PDS stands for Partito Democratico della Sinistra, the Democratic Party of the Left in Italy that succeeded the Italian Communist Party as its post-communist evolution. "Democratic Party of the Left." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Party_of_the_Left (accessed August 11, 2022).

⁴³ Achille Occhetto was the secretary-general during both the last phase of Italian Communist Party (PCI) and its transformation to Democratic Party of the Left (PDS). "Achille Occhetto." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achille_Occhetto (accessed August 11, 2022).

⁴⁴ Telegram is a piece of communication produced by a wire, or a telegraph. "Telegram." Vocabulary.com. <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/telegram> (accessed August 11, 2022).

⁴⁵ The United Nations, as an intergovernmental organization, works to guarantee global peace and security and handle various issues worldwide. "United Nations." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations (accessed August 11, 2022).

and then it became a friendship with her, and so my mother accepted me too...Even because then, indeed, hers was a world of women, then all of them had found themselves widows, and so I became friends with her friends, when I came to visit they wanted to know things, what was happening in Rome, etc. Now my mother is dead. I have a brother and a sister who are absolutely... Even though they think differently about some things, even though we vote politically differently, etc.; however we share a great affection for each other, actually they follow me a lot... I believe that the emotional dimension is very important, that is when relationships are loving they also create structured situations.

LD: Yes, yes. And what do your siblings believe that is different from you?

LM: No... my sister, for example, lives in Calabria⁴⁶, she lives in a very different situation, a really impoverished area. She is a volunteer, she's the best person in the world, she volunteers in a hospital...That is she is a person that I respect a lot, in certain ways, but then when she has to vote she does things...Now I don't even remember who she voted for in the last elections, but it is secondary with respect to how she really is. My brother and I agree enough politically, we think about things in the same way, so...But my brother is a male and so...but he's a different male, in the sense that he grew up always in the midst of women, he has two daughters, he has always been in the midst of women, so [laughs].

LD: [laughs] Okay, tell me what you think about the relationship between the women's rights movement and other contemporary movements.

LM: Well, it is rather...I believe that for some the feminist movement causes the woman to become aware of herself as an autonomous and independent being, so self aware of her autonomy and independence, so that one relates to the world in relationship, so the relationship is the fundamental element; this being a fundamental element, clearly it cannot be of the [political] right, that is it cannot be something that is against relationships or in favor of authoritarian relationships. Feminism cannot be like this...but not because it is ideological, because it starts from the fact that by recognizing yourself and the other you have an equal relationship, so obviously we are part of...For example the Casa Internazionale delle Donne is part of the Rete dei Numeri Pari [an umbrella organization of groups working for social equality], it is part of all of the organized groups that support immigrants, that are in favor...The gay movement is very strong so they don't need...But there has always been a very close relationship. In this moment, certainly, the issue of immigration is the most important issue. We have been against the war that has brought all

⁴⁶ Calabria Region lies to the South of Italy. "Calabria." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calabria> (accessed August 13, 2022).

the disasters, when the Gulf War⁴⁷ broke out, the first Gulf War, we were obviously against it, taking part in the peace movement, but of course because it is a different way...I believe this is the element...that can save the world [laughs] either this happens or...

LD: It's true.

LM: But there are always ups and downs...I told you before that anyway my activism has had highs and lows, I've not always been part of organizations because...But it has always been in connection with women. At a certain point my friend Michi turned her focus more to politics in general, I instead was part of a group of writers that got together to disrupt the solitude of the writer, through relationships with each other, so I wasn't always part of organizations. Then I spent years just working, because I had to work a lot. Now I am here at the Casa Internazionale delle Donne because I was asked to join the board, because indeed I am one of the founders, I was on the committee that did all of this, but it is not like I have my own group of activists. I have worked here at the Casa Internazionale delle Donne for four years now, it's almost a full-time job, because it means to bring to the forefront both an organizational aspect of this structure, it is a complex organization, and a political aspect, indeed of relationships, of going to meetings, of networking with the others...

LD: Yes, yes. What do you think of the relationship between la Casa and the City?
[laughs]

LM: The City of Rome is experiencing a phase, a period of tragedy. Now I believe that Rome is certainly a difficult city to run, I don't think that before it was peaches and cream⁴⁸, but the disaster that exists presently in Rome is something dramatic, that we call "Roma ci ferisce" ["Rome is hurting us,"]; you only have to take a walk around the streets to see piles of trash, the broken streets... In spite of this, this city government is concerned with evicting us because we have unpaid rent, even though we provide free services, even though we have...We do the maintenance on this building...It is a rather absurd thing, I wouldn't know how to describe it...That it is based on a false concept of legality that they have, where "legal" means that you pay rent, without thinking that perhaps the rent is calibrated on the possibility of payment because, if this is a center that is so important for women, it does things that you don't know how to do...Because we are the organization that

⁴⁷ Gulf War (1990-1991) refers to a military response involving a 35-nation alliance led by the United States to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, a country located at the Persian Gulf. "Gulf War." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_War (accessed August 13, 2022).

⁴⁸ It is a slang used to describe something trouble-free or unproblematic. "Peaches and cream." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/peachesandcream> (accessed August 12, 2022).

ensures the guarantees of the Istanbul Convention⁴⁹, because we are like a stronghold, inside here there are all of these associations that have also the domestic violence centers in all of Italy. How can one say that this place must be closed because it paid half of the rent? Not because it didn't pay; it paid half, that is it paid as much as it could, but at the same time it made this building an essential place.

LD: Yes, terrible.

LM: We had made a very clear proposal, a proposal in which we intended to pay, but we also had to give the time and way to pay. They are not capable of negotiating, that is there is an inability...They are tough times for Italy like for America, because we see...

LD: Yes, yes.

LM: Like for Europe, they are very ugly times that are coming and it is not understandable, that I personally I am not able to understand how this happened.

LD: It is difficult...In the United States it is terrible.

LM: It is terrible!

LD: What does the word feminism mean to you?

LM: As I told you a little while ago, feminism is the recognition of oneself as...Not to be the representation of someone else, but it is to search for yourself, who you are deep down, to search for your own subjectivity. In the Seventies it was said...the most commonly discussed word was "identity" because our identity was not just the mirror of the masculine, the other leg of the masculine. Today one doesn't say this any more, one talks instead of subjectivity, but anyway it is essentially to search for one's own essence, autonomy. Feminism for me is this, feminism is great friendships among women, recognizing each other, but also recognizing each others' differences, so recognizing all the differences that we are made up of and not to be just others' imaginary ideal or a hypothesis or a definition. Each one is different, it contains so much diversity, this diversity changes all the time, so we are not even fixed entities but in continuous evolution...the problem is to let them out and accept them, recognize them [the differences].

⁴⁹ Istanbul Convention is a legal human rights instrument of Council of Europe to fight against gender-based and domestic violence. "Istanbul Convention." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istanbul_Convention (accessed August 13, 2022).

LD: If you had to choose one important point from your history from which other women could learn, what would that be? Is there a message that you want other women to understand from your story?

LM: This is a very difficult question.

LD: [laughs]

LM: This is a very difficult question. I don't know, I think that the effort with which I have faced life, it is the effort of someone who has thought that she could only count on her own strengths and this might be an element that could be taken as an example, in the sense that I funded my studies practically alone, I had a grant; I also worked during the period that I was writing my thesis to support myself, I always supported myself. I worked a lot, I never said no to a job, because I think that in any case work is always honorable...That is, the capacity to construct oneself...I think one thing they absolutely shouldn't learn from me is the fact that in all of this I forgot a bit about my emotional life, so I don't consider myself a complete example, rather I think that the fact that I am alone means that there is a shortcoming in my capacity to love effectively, to recognize the other... We could say that I would need to live another life to be able to say that one can learn from me because [laugh] I still have so much to learn.

LD: It is a part of the stories of many American activists--they say the same thing.

LM: Ah!

LD: Yes, yes.

LM: So I am not alone [laughs].

LD: No, no.

LM: I am sorry that I never had a child, I regret so many things in my life because indeed I was always busy doing other things, not having the time...

LD: It is difficult to do it all.

LM: Yes, it is difficult...But this thing that in the difficulty of life, of work, etcetera, I was able to keep some of my passions open; for example, even if it took me fifteen years, I wrote a novel, I was able to publish it, that is anyway there is a stubbornness to bring forth that which you love profoundly, to do it even if it is difficult for you to do it.

LD: Yes, you have your passions and also your friendships.

LM: Ah yes.

LD: It is very important. Other people with children don't have these things.

LM: This is true, but so when one becomes... I told you my age, therefore, when I was born... This summer I will be 69 years old, I cannot believe it because I still live like a young girl, but anyway, one feels...And the solitude becomes heavier, even because then so many...an unlucky generation, it was a generation that suffered many losses from illness... These tumors have become rampant, I believe that in my life I have had so many sorrows, many more that my mother had had, despite the war, at her age--at my age, I mean to say.

LD: Is there anything else that you would like to say about your activism, your work?

LM: I find it hard to consider it activism.

LD: Really?

LM: In the sense that it is more an American than Italian word, we...

LD: What is the difference?

LM: Well, because to be an activist, it seems to me...I don't know how to define the difference. I do some things, that is they are separate: I work with the Casa Internazionale delle Donne and it is political work but it also relates to my profession because I also do management here [at the Casa]. Then I experience the relationships that give me pleasure, I take trips or things of this nature, so that it seems to me that "activism" give a more total sense.

LD: Mh.

LM: I don't know, eh.

LD: Perhaps, I don't know, it is interesting.

LM: There is a separatism in activism, I am not separate from the rest of the world. I am a feminist.

LD: Yes, it seems to me that activism is more integrated with life for activists.

LM: Exactly. There are also some activists in this country, it's not that there are not... I don't feel like an activist, I feel like a feminist who dedicates every so often some of her time or even totally her time to political work, but it is not my entire being. Whereas when I was young, think of when I was part of Lotta Continua, it was also my entire being, so in that case I was a "militant,"⁵⁰ that is the same thing as "activist".

LD: Ah!

LM: Now I am less like this, I am more...Only the fact is that in my background feminism is a fundamental issue.

LD: Yes, it is interesting. I spoke with ten American feminists for a course that I taught online; it is interesting because all have been activists for all of their lives and they don't have a problem with the word "activist".

LM: However in Italy one doesn't use this word, one possibly uses "militant"... now one uses it little. Now we define ourselves more by the concept.

LD: Does your writing, your novels, etc., have feminist themes?

LM: Eh, look...Yes and no, that is in the sense that I am...obviously the author pours herself into whatever she writes, so it is clear that yes [laughs]. Yes, for example in the novel, I wrote a novel entitled *La donna del diavolo* [The Devil's Woman], there is the disappearance of a woman, then there is the mystery of this disappearance, the investigation, but in reality the investigation has very little importance, it's not a *giallo* [mysteries]; rather it is that thing that happened to a generation, because it ends for example...there isn't any more this concept of intimacy, thus it is more psychological in some way.

LD: Ah, interesting.

LM: And then as a psychological...Now I published a novel that has a young woman feminist as a character together with another young man inspired by Mario Mieli--that was this

⁵⁰ Militant feminism refers to the aggressive, and justifiably violent act in fighting for the feminist socio-political change. Rocha, Mona Cristina. "Militant feminism and the women of The Weather Underground Organization." LSU Digital Commons. https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/940/ (accessed August 13, 2022).

multi-faceted character⁵¹-- and so there is the relationship between those who search for their identity and those who have so many [identities], so yes...But the theme isn't feminist, even if I cannot help putting myself inside these things. Now, what I will publish in October is again about the Seventies generation, so there is also feminism, but there is also the reasons behind the armed struggle, there are other things, because there was also this in our generation.

LD: Is there anything else you would like to say?

LM: Mh... We have talked of so many of those things...I could tell you a little about what is happening here, so what this activism consists of [laughs].

LD: Yes, yes.

LM: Now then, I am part of the board. The board is formed from six people plus the president. The president has a very important role because she has an active and much larger role, but this board is very busy; it is renewed every three years, really we are in our fourth year, just because this trouble with the local government broke out and so we have to move forward. Our task is to manage it together. Together it was given from around thirty associations that make up part of the consortium Casa Internazionale delle Donne together with other associations that participate, that have seats here even without being part of the consortium; we have to support...Three levels: the level of services offered by the associations, so to make sure that these services take place, that they are partly free, that they are, in fact, for women, etc.; on the other hand we have to make sure we have...in this place there is also a hostel and a restaurant, so we have to make sure that the management of these two places works; then there is the level of maintenance, of building management, meaning looking for the financial means to pay all of the expenses, because this is a building that costs, now after having made many cuts, around 550-600,000 euro⁵² a year, so we have to find these sums every year here. We have dealt with many heavy losses; we have had to undergo a process of internal restructuring, and so now we are breaking even, but we inherited this huge debt, so... There is the financial level, the level of the building altogether, and then there is the political level of relationships; then we have some conference rooms that in part are rented partly for financial reasons, partly to maintain these relationships, political as well as with women, and there are large political women's events that develop here. So there are all three levels to maintain. This house is a

⁵¹ Multifaceted character refers to a fictional figure with multiple sides, skillsets, or even personalities. "How to write multifaceted characters." Read to Write Stories. <https://readtowritestories.com/2015/07/28/how-to-write-multifaceted-characters/> (accessed August 13, 2022).

⁵² Euro is the official currency of the majority of European nations. "Euro." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euro> (accessed August 13, 2022).

very lively house...We had sought contact with American feminists, and not just American feminists, we would appreciate help from extremely wealthy American women to underwrite, but we haven't been able to do it [laughs].

LD: It is a good idea...

LM: Can I offer you all a coffee?

LD: Yes, thanks.