

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

**SITE: ITALY**

**Transcript of Maddalena Vianello  
Interviewer: Lauren Duncan**

**Location: Rome, Italy  
Date: July 6, 2018**

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**Maddalena Vianello** was born in 1978 in Turin. She graduated from the La Sapienza University of Rome with a Modern History degree and holds a Masters degree in Media and Communications from the London School of Economics and Political Science. She is a professional in cultural planning and organization, an expert in gender policies and in the field of male violence against women. And she is a feminist activist. She currently works as an expert on gender policies for the Lazio region of Italy. With other women, she conceived and organized inQuiete(<https://www.inquietefestival.it/>), a festival of writers in Rome, to give voice to women's writing, in many ways still considered minor literature in Italy. With some partners, she keeps the blog "Femministerie" <https://femministerie.wordpress.com/>. She has collaborated with various periodicals and has published "Fra me e te" (Edizioni et al., 2013), co-written with her mother, Mariella Gramaglia, and "In fondo al desiderio" (Fandango, 2021), dedicated to the theme of medically assisted procreation.

**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: Reform of Domestic/Family Roles, Politics and the Law, Art/Writing as Activism*

**Lauren Duncan: I am talking with Maddalena Vianello, July 6, 2018. I would like to start with a conversation about your childhood and first of all about your family. I received your demographic sheet, I know what your parents do, but...You have a brother, right? What does he do?**

Maddalena Vianello: So, my brother is a town planner<sup>1</sup>, he's been living in London<sup>2</sup> for three years, he's younger than me by five years, he moved to London because initially he was collaborating with the university and then instead things didn't go exactly as he was hoping, he wasn't doing particularly well and so he found another job in which he works substantially for the English Institute of Urban Planning.

**LD: How was it growing up in your family? How would you describe your relationship with your parents when you were a child and now?**

MV: So, I am starting at the end. I have been an orphan now for four years because my father died around ten years ago and then my mother died four years ago more or less, and so--so to speak-- my relationship with my parents unfortunately in this moment doesn't exist any more--so to speak--as a matter of fact and despite this a very very strong bond with both continues. Mh, childhood. I think--so to speak--especially for the first years of having lived in a very nice family, very united and also very relaxed. So I believe relationships with parents are always complex and we carry them with us for all of our life and naturally there are also some difficult elements, some areas of conflict, some elements that are part of growing up and also separation in some way in the attainment of adulthood. I think I spent my childhood, I have to say very very relaxed with...We were, we were a nice family. Maybe the only complicated element for me was the birth of my brother, me being first, the arrival of my brother was surely very complicated and losing this relationship of uniqueness and of always being in some sense "only" and having to compete for attention at this point with my brother and so my brother and I in childhood had, above all, a very conflicted relationship, very complicated, or, better, I had a very conflicted relationship with my brother; he was, so to speak, like all much younger siblings very sweet, adoring, desirous of my attention. But I have to say that we then salvaged an excellent relationship when we were a little older, because anyway five years difference is a lot, and so we had some phases of development in which for me first I suffered badly his arrival and then he naturally was always the brother who was too small to be part of my life; then, however, growing up we found ourselves and we became very, very united.

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<sup>1</sup> A town or urban planner is responsible for regulating land use, conserving buildings, designing public areas, and more. ("Urban planner." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban\\_planner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urban_planner). Accessed 25 October 2023.)

<sup>2</sup> London is a city located in England. It is one of the largest and most populated cities in the country and is the capital as well. ("London." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London>. Accessed 25 October 2023.)

**LD: How did you learn about the political and social values of your family? Can you give me an example?**

MV: Yes, my family was always...It always functioned--in my education and also my brother's, I believe--right through examples, in that my parents were always the people who had theorized very little and always looked--in my opinion--to guide us a lot through their example. They were, for example, two people who always took care of their own parents. Actually both my father and my mother lost their fathers very early and so there were these two mothers--my brother and I had these two grandmothers that were our mother and father's mothers, who, among other things, lived far away because my father was born in Bologna<sup>3</sup> and my mother was born in the province of Turin<sup>4</sup> and then they found themselves in Rome<sup>5</sup> and built their life in Rome, and these two mothers--one remained in the province of Turin and the other stayed in Bologna. Somehow both my mother and my father had some other brothers and sisters that continued to live in the same towns and so they were the people they depended on, something that in both (*of my parents*) had always aroused a sense of guilt; this distance and this--I mean--to entrust the most immediate care to their respective siblings. But I have to say that about this, for example, they were very good because, besides always going to visit their mothers despite the distance, we always spent half the month of August in the mountains bringing the grandmothers with us (and the same thing at Christmas<sup>6</sup>: the grandmothers came to us at Christmas and stayed two or three weeks; and then there was the summer break). My parents built, they also allowed my brother and me to have very strong relationships with these two women, especially my mother's mother was a very present and very loved grandmother, and this was, I believe, very important, but also very complicated for them because both experienced political breakups with their families. My mother was born in 1949, so she participated in the movements of '68<sup>7</sup>, all the feminist struggles, and her mother, on the other hand was a woman of the fifties, so anything but a revolutionary, a woman of the right, a woman who remained nostalgic for fascism until the end, she was a

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<sup>3</sup> Bologna is a city located in the northern area of Italy. It is one of the most populated cities in the world and is known its more liberal politics. ("Bologna." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bologna>. Accessed 26 October 2023.)

<sup>4</sup> The province of Turin was an area located in northeastern Italy. In December of 2014, the province was removed and replaced by the city of Turin. ("Province of Turin." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province\\_of\\_Turin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Province_of_Turin). Accessed 26 October 2023.)

<sup>5</sup> Rome is a city located in the country of Italy. It is the capital of the country and one of the most populated cities within the country. ("Rome." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rome>. Accessed 26 October 2023.)

<sup>6</sup> Christmas refers to the Christian religious holiday that signifies Jesus Christ being born. It is usually celebrated every year on December 25<sup>th</sup>. ("Christmas." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas>. Accessed 26 October 2023.)

<sup>7</sup> The protests of 1968 refers to a series of protests that took place across the world. The protests advocated for peace and civil rights. ("Protests of 1968." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protests\\_of\\_1968#:~:text=The%20protests%20of%201968%20comprised,rebelleions%20against%20state%20militaries%20and](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protests_of_1968#:~:text=The%20protests%20of%201968%20comprised,rebelleions%20against%20state%20militaries%20and). Accessed 27 October 2023.)

woman of the South, she was a Calabrian<sup>8</sup> woman, born in Reggio Calabria<sup>9</sup>, she grew up in Naples<sup>10</sup>, then married a Northern man<sup>11</sup> and was brought to the North. My grandmother was also, for the time, a very emancipated woman in the sense that she was the first woman to have studied, to have taught Latin<sup>12</sup> and Greek<sup>13</sup> at the high school, then she continued to teach until very late in life giving private lessons, so for the time she was a very emancipated woman; she found herself a widow very early and so she found herself in a very complicated situation because she was a Southern woman<sup>14</sup>, relocated to the North, remained a widow with two girls and moreover she was teaching, and so she raised these two daughters with very strong social control and also a very strong repression because she worried a lot about prejudice, the fact that they were the years in which in Italy-- there is still now unfortunately, but at the time even more there was the grand migration from the South to the North, and so a Calabrian woman, alone with two daughters, at the time...any woman like this would be seen as an easy woman, surely someone who would not be able to educate her daughters, even someone too emancipated because she was alone, she was teaching, she provided for them, she was supporting herself from her job... The sixties were approaching, so my grandmother tried to repress these two daughters in a really strong way and my mother broke with my grandmother, they never made up, ever; they stayed in open conflict for their whole lives. However, in spite of this she had the intelligence and also the capacity to let my grandmother build a relationship with us free from what had been their history. My father was much older, because he was ten years older, he was born in 1939 and with his mother he had a less openly conflictual relationship and that in time probably was very healed and was very tempered, but it was a very hard relationship because my father--by 1968 he had become too old to be in the midst of the battles, but he had already in some way participated in the revolutions because he was...He grew up in Bologna, he was a very

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<sup>8</sup> Calabrian refers to individuals from Calabria, an area specific to Southern Italy. It is surrounded by the Ionic Sea, Strait of Messina, and the Tyrrhenian Sea. ("Calabria." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calabria>. Accessed 27 October 2023.)

<sup>9</sup> Reggio Calabria is a city located in Calabria. It is one of the most populated cities in the country and largest cities in its region. ("Reggio Calabria." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reggio\\_Calabria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reggio_Calabria). Accessed 27 October 2023.)

<sup>10</sup> Naples is a city located in Italy. It is one of the largest cities in the country. ("Naples." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naples>. Accessed 27 October 2023.)

<sup>11</sup> Northern refers to individuals from northern or Alpine areas of Italy. ("Northern Italy." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern\\_Italy#:~:text=Aosta%20Valley%2C%20Piedmont%2C%20Veneto%2C,Italy%20except%20for%20Emilia%2DRomagna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Italy#:~:text=Aosta%20Valley%2C%20Piedmont%2C%20Veneto%2C,Italy%20except%20for%20Emilia%2DRomagna). Accessed 27 October 2023.)

<sup>12</sup> Latin is a language that was spoken in ancient Rome. It is considered a 'dead language' as it is not spoken anymore. ("Latin." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin>. Accessed 27 October 2023.)

<sup>13</sup> Greek is a language that is spoken in areas located in Greece, Italy, and other Mediterranean countries. It is known for having a very well documented and long history. ("Greek language." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek\\_language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language). Accessed 27 October 2023.)

<sup>14</sup> Southern refers to regions of Italy located in the south of the country. This includes the island of Sardinia as well as other areas: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern\\_Italy#:~:text=Southern%20Italy%20is%20generally%20thought,Campania%2C%20Molise%2C%20and%20Sicily](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Italy#:~:text=Southern%20Italy%20is%20generally%20thought,Campania%2C%20Molise%2C%20and%20Sicily). Accessed 27 November 2023.)

brilliant student, he won a series of scholarships which enabled him to earn a Ph.D.<sup>15</sup> at Cambridge<sup>16</sup>, which brought him outside of Bologna and brought him to Cambridge for two years, then he went to Rome where he had won another scholarship; he was the first of three brothers and for the way his family was, he had already made a dramatic break, because my grandparents would have expected my father to remain in Bologna and that his life would have been near his family and that he didn't go explore the world... At the time among other things my father went with his first wife who wasn't exactly the woman my grandmother had imagined for him; she was a woman...My father came from a rather bourgeois<sup>17</sup> family, especially in form more than substance; it wasn't a particularly rich family but it was a very bourgeois family in its character, so to speak. This girl that my father fell in love with, and then was with for fifteen years, so she was his first wife in some sense (they never married) a woman who we then met, with whom we also had a very close relationship; it didn't correspond exactly to the family standards of my grandmother, she was a mountain girl, she was a poor girl, she was a girl who hadn't studied, she was a girl who had discovered politics and had started to work in the union and had started to fight in the big union battles, among others it was in the machinist sector and so she was participating in the union battles in the factories, of the laborers, of the men, of the workers, so none of this was part of the standards that my grandmother had foreseen for my father. Instead my father left for Cambridge, he won his scholarships, he left with her, he brought her with him and even he had a big moment of rejection of the restrictions that his family tried to put on him. The interesting thing is that actually in these two families my father and my mother were the only children that rebelled: my mother's sister, on the other hand, remained somewhat more placid and in some sense tied to what they had expected; my father's brothers also remained in the same city and in the less strident paths they took stayed in some way with what their parents expected of them.

**LD: At what age did you become aware of the differences between your parents' families and yours?**

MV: Well, I believe quickly. For example, I remember very well when I was a child and we often went to visit my grandmother in Bologna and it surprised me a lot that this woman

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<sup>15</sup> A PhD, or a Doctorate of Philosophy, is an educational degree that is given to individuals who have completed research and many years of education in their field of study. It is considered the highest degree that can be obtained. ("Doctor of Philosophy." Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctor\\_of\\_Philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doctor_of_Philosophy). Accessed 30 October 2023.)

<sup>16</sup> The University of Cambridge is a prestigious university located in Cambridge, England. It is known for being one of the oldest universities in the world and having produced many awarded alumni. ("University of Cambridge." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University\\_of\\_Cambridge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Cambridge). Accessed 30 October 2023.)

<sup>17</sup> Bourgeois is a term used to refer to families that are not middle class, but not necessarily upper class either. They have some social qualities of the upper class, relating to education, social circles, politics, and more; however, in terms of wealth, they are middle class. ("Bourgeoisie." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bourgeoisie>. Accessed 30 October 2023.)

was so different, for example, from my mother; a woman who had never worked in her life, a woman who wasn't interested in politics, a woman who didn't read the newspapers, who didn't read novels, had not studied, who was surrounded by servants to whom she gave orders, in this very big and very beautiful and very well-kept house where she lived alone. I remember really well, one of my first childhood memories from when I was little, every time she would say to me "to be a woman one needs to know how to arrange flowers" and it was something that really shocked me at first, in the sense that it was something completely foreign--at my house nobody bought flowers, nobody arranged flowers and nobody thought that it was particularly relevant to their lives. Through these little differences I think I immediately understood that they had completely different priorities and values.

**LD: Did you talk explicitly about these things with your parents or not?**

MV: Look, I don't know how to respond to you because actually I never really had the particular need to talk about it; the conflict between the respective families of origin, especially my mother (my father over time made peace, even if it was evident that there were huge differences) was very explicit, so I grew up with my grandmother, who when she came to Rome and brought me I think to kindergarten<sup>18</sup> or nursery school, brought me singing fascist<sup>19</sup> songs, so in fact I know them all (when I was little naturally I was not able to understand what was happening). This is one of many examples of the conflict between my mother and my grandmother that always happened in front of me, a little of the stories in daily life (because my grandmother, my mother's mother was very present in my life) and this conflict was always so strong, so explicit--the fact that they were two different worlds that clashed--that has always been very clear... I don't have memories of having needed to go to my mother to say "what's with these fascist songs?" because in the same moment in which my mother realized that her mother was teaching fascist songs, she went crazy and she made some colossal scenes inside the house and so I understood immediately that...And so it was for so many other things because it was evident that there was also provocation between them, that is I believe that I was--and my brother too--being used as elements of provocation between them, especially by my grandmother, who was actually a very good grandmother. I loved her very much, even though she lived a long time, and so I was big enough to understand that there were these real elements of conflict, but she was a woman that I loved a lot, even despite the differences. So I believe that there was never much need to make these differences explicit, because they were so striking that they were just part of our lives.

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<sup>18</sup> Kindergarten refers to a type of preschool that was created to help children acclimate to the transition of going to school. ("Kindergarten." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindergarten>. Accessed 30 October 2023.)

<sup>19</sup> Fascism refers to a political ideology that aligns with dictatorship, no free speech, authoritarianism, and more. ("Fascism." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fascism>. Accessed 30 October 2023.)

**LD: I am interested in particular in the type of messages that you received about gender and the role of women and men in society and the family.**

MV: Look, even here, I don't know if...I don't have memories of moments in which I was seated on the couch and was given...explanations or lessons, but I grew up in a family in which my mother always worked so much. My mother was a member of Parliament<sup>20</sup> until the late 1980s--early nineties and so I was 10 and my brother was 5, more or less. After this stint she was always busy with her journalism work and then she covered a series of positions for the Roman city government, so she was always a woman with a very strong public role and very...She was a very hard worker, who naturally for us, both for me and my brother, especially when we were little, she was a source of pain and feelings of abandonment, because she was really very, very, super-busy. I always had, on the other hand, a father who was an university professor--when I was really little he still taught at the University of Modena<sup>21</sup>, so I had a childhood in which I had such a mother and a father who wasn't there during the week because he taught in Modena and would return only on the weekends, so my brother and I in part grew up with our grandparents, babysitters, nannies, all took care of us. Then at a certain point my father moved to Rome and was the most present figure in the house, who took care of daily life, so it was my father who cooked, it was my father who often did the grocery shopping, it was my father who was in a way for us at home the point of reference; he tried to work more at home when he could, he closed himself up in his studio at times, but in some way he was always there and there was always a door on which to knock, behind which he was there. So I grew up in a family in which already the roles compared to what I am...

**LD: The role...**

MV: Exactly, the social roles which we were used to were already completely reversed. For a long time my mother earned much more money than my father and this wasn't a matter of the exercise of power between them but it was a thing that was clear and that happened inside my family and these are the things which I reflected on much later obviously, but it was...I really grew up in a family in which the roles were completely reversed with respect to those...To my classmates' parents, to what I was experiencing almost always outside home. I have to say that it wasn't easy; this was one of the things my mother and I discussed a lot. In 2013 my mother and I wrote a book together on feminism and on what feminism represented to us and, among the things we wrote, there also was this...At a certain point we also wrote a lot about this part because, of course, it is one thing to think this at 30 years old, another to live it at 5 years old...Meanwhile, you

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<sup>20</sup> The Italian Parliament is a governing body of the country of Italy. It is made up of 600 individuals who are elected by the people of their region, senators, and former presidents. ("Italian Parliament." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian\\_Parliament](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Parliament). Accessed 30 October 2023.)

<sup>21</sup> The University of Modena and Reggio Emilia is a university located in Modena, Italy and Reggio Emilia, Italy. It is one of the oldest universities in the country. ("University of Modena and Reggio Italia." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University\\_of\\_Modena\\_and\\_Reggio\\_Emilia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Modena_and_Reggio_Emilia). Accessed 30 October 2023.)



feel like an anomaly, in the sense that I was being brought to school by the housewife mothers of my classmates or their part-time working mothers picked me up and so then in the afternoons they were at home with their children. When you are 5 so many things are not clear to you and what you experience the most is the absence, and you wonder “how come the other boys’ and girls’ mothers are there and take care of them and yours doesn’t?” and if there is a theme that is linked to love or the desire to be with you and the fact that in some way your mother is always the anomaly of a very small world known to you; always the one (mother) who is different from the others, right? This was an element of suffering and it was also for my brother, but in a different way; this experience of absence. Then naturally times change and slowly you understand how complex life is, how this is also the fruit of a battle and a view of the world, that all this is then done for you and for all the women that come with you, that in this there is a political commitment that isn’t only and merely private and personal, but that has a collective perspective, and slowly growing you put together so many pieces and you realize that this, too is part of the education and of the teaching that you received. Certainly, when you are little it is all very different. I was also very angry with my mother.

**LD: Oh yes, it is normal for children because their world is small.**

MV: Yes, very small.

**LD: And the child is the center.**

MV: Certainly, so if it doesn’t happen [that the child is the center of the universe], it is incomprehensible, right?

**LD: Yes, at that age. Okay, a big question: how do you think that your childhood and your relationships with your family influenced the person that you are today, in particular with respect to your political activities?**

MV: So much, so very much. I think just of having absorbed it with mother’s milk. I think that actually I had two paths in front of me: one of refusal, of the nourishment of this anger of the betrayed little girl, of not recognizing and not seeing, and I have to say that on this my mother always left me very free, she never forced me in anything, she never looked to indoctrinate me, she never tried out her theories on me, she never did. I believe that there were some really great efforts on both their parts to give my brother and me an education as balanced as possible, that is to make us feel equal even though I was female and he was male, to set an example for us in which--indeed--wages can be in different balance according to the stages of life between a working father and working mother, to make my brother and both of us feel that we had the possibility and the freedom to choose in a completely free way what to study. They always pushed us strongly to go abroad and also to feel like citizens of the world. They didn’t raise me with terror or him

like a free man. We always had exactly the same rules about going out at night, to have keys to the house, curfew, rules for using the car, that is my brother and I were raised in an exactly equal way from all points of view. We always set and cleared the table, growing up we always cooked together. There was always, I believe, on their part also a reflex to make sure in some way to make up for whatever we were experiencing outside the house and that my brother grew up with a respect for and an awareness of women, and me myself, different from what we could observe outside of our house. My political engagement with feminism was like something inevitable, for which there was no alternative, as if “no” was inconceivable: it was always in some way an obvious thing and something natural and something spontaneous, even because sincerely I think that even to this day I cannot understand why we are not all feminist men and women in the sense that there is something for me just of... A conceptual problem in the sense that notwithstanding the ignorance that looks to consider feminism the opposite of male chauvinism<sup>22</sup>, actually here we are only talking of equality, without entering into the theories of difference, we are talking of equality among human beings and so it escapes me how this could be heritage of only of one part, of women, and not the heritage of men, too. There I realize that a dynamic of maintenance and defense of power enters, so it is obvious that they don't open their arms because this means taking a step back and so on this there is a battle--I understand the reasons in a very clear way; but, here it is, on women, it escapes me just how a thing that is so clear and so evident never manages to become collective heritage, fully collective.

**LD: Do you remember any “Aha” moments in which you were hit with the awareness of gender inequality?**

MV: Every day, continually.

**LD: Yes, but it is different from when you were little; when you become a teenager it is possible to think about the relationships between personal situations and more structural situations.**

MV: Are you more interested in when I was little or when I was a teenager or...?

**LD: The strongest moments.**

MV: Eh, look, the strongest moments actually, paradoxically, I live them now, that is I live them in adulthood because when I was little my glimpse at inequality was a glimpse of resentment, in the sense that I would have wanted to have that mother that wasn't working and that considered her daughter to be the unique center of her life; I was very

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<sup>22</sup> Male chauvinism refers to the belief that men are more superior than women. (“Chauvinism.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chauvinism#>. 2 November 2023.)

envious and very aggrieved that the same thing didn't happen to me, so actually, more than understanding it like an inequality, instead I understood it just like a missing desire. Actually then growing up I was always... I think that this country is still very tied to social classes and very linked to the environment; there is always less communication between different environments. I grew up and I studied in a high school that was one of the best in Rome, that was a middle-class high school, that was a high school that my girlfriends attended, friends that I chose, and that then I continued to see over the years, they were in some way educated very similar to me, so they were girls from left-wing families, with emancipated mothers who were working...I never had, especially as a teenager, a culture shock with the external world because the external world, despite the fact that it was growing, it was getting bigger in a very slow way for me and continued to be very homogeneous in a way with the life that...for example I am trying to think if I had or still have a girlfriend from childhood that has a mother that didn't work and not one comes to mind. Actually for me the culture shock began later, when this world was getting bigger and bigger; when, in a way, I began university; when I went abroad; when I began to busy myself with the movement; when I began to get informed; when I began to be political; when I began to realize that my little golden world was very small and that women who think that there is something they are not allowed, who walk by my side in this city, like in the world. This was just part of the political activity, part of the awareness that what for me is normal is essentially a privilege, even though it should be normal.

**LD: When did you realize that there were women who didn't think like you?**

MV: Look, in my opinion, it happened more or less at the end of university, when...It is very easy, actually, if you don't force yourself and if you don't care to, to not come in contact with diversity. Certainly the university represented an opening because it was in a way meeting many people, many more people and very different from me. Actually I think that...it was a path to awareness in the sense that I always in some way knew that my family and my education were particular compared with the average, but I wasn't ever aware of how much, that is I thought that there were little differences; it wasn't clear to me that there were deep differences that were so profound. This is one thing that I really understood growing up, I understood, looking back at adulthood, and it was an awareness that was always growing, growing, growing, so much that now I am very pessimistic and perfectly aware that I am part of a miniscule minority, miniscule. I also know that by now with the passing of the years I slowly, but in a continuous manner, so much so opened my eyes so that by now I see nuances, attitudes, words that I realize for many other people could be seen as bordering on obsession. That is, if I am seated at a table at work in which I am the only woman (or one of two) out of 30 people, I observe particular dynamics, I am perfectly aware that it is quite likely that only I am noticing them, that my observations are the result of a trained and very critical eye and that when I try to discuss things with other people, with other colleagues, I understand that I am the only one to get it or only a few of us get it, and this worries me a lot.

**LD: Can you tell me about your first political action? What did you do and how did you decide to do it?**

MV: So, I believe that the first one that for me had proper value of a formal beginning... At the time I was living in Bologna, we are talking about more or less ten years ago (maybe a bit more); it was the time in which “Se non ora quando”<sup>23</sup> was exploding and it was the beginning of taking part in that movement, so the organization in Bologna of the protest, that then also spread to Rome in February 2013... Maybe it’s better not to remember it, too many years have passed... And the whole process that brought about the birth of the movement and also the whole path that tried to keep Italian feminism united in a movement that instead was opposed by some women. That was the moment that I, maybe for the first time, felt part of a collective feminist movement in which I profoundly believed; that was, in my opinion, really for me, particularly significant really for this: it was the first time that... I think that Italian feminism at least has one huge problem, a problem at the intersections between the generations and of an equal dialogue between the generations, that so there is not a *maternage*<sup>24</sup> between the historical feminists that, in some way with condescension, accept the younger ones, and this in my opinion is a huge problem that also makes the younger feminists have and continue to have some problems approaching the places of feminism in the world of feminism. That was the first time for me, in Italy<sup>25</sup>, in which I felt that it was breaking apart and that the voices of young women were beginning to have as much weight and strength and that themes, that in a way were also being treated with a bit of arrogance like “how the lack of employment security affects the lives of young women in this country,” that in a way within feminism it was always treated with a bit of condescension because it came in a way integrated with a complaint or a passive attitude, because naturally not experiencing it yourself it is very complicated to be able to understand how much employment uncertainty become existential uncertainty and so how much this affects your choices as a woman. That was, in my opinion, the exact moment, this was seen also as how the group leading the movement was formed, that is by older women and much younger women of the time, were able to speak a common language and were able in a way to raise up subjects that were completely cross-cutting but that were speaking to many generations, different generations. That was the first moment, in my opinion, where I didn’t feel like an anomaly

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<sup>23</sup> “Se Non Ora Quando” refers to the novel by Primo Levi called “If Not Now When.” This novel is about the people who fought against Nazis. In 2011, a movement named after Levi’s novel was started by Italian women to fight for more rights. (“[en] The Women’s Movement ‘Se non ora quando.’” Struggles in Italy. <https://strugglesinitaly.wordpress.com/equality/the-womens-movement-se-non-ora-quando/>. Accessed 2 November 2023.)

<sup>24</sup> Maternage is an Italian word that means mothering or attachment in English. (“Maternage.” Bab.la. <https://en.bab.la/dictionary/italian-english/maternage>. Accessed 2 November 2023.)

<sup>25</sup> Italy is a country located in Europe. It is bordered by the Mediterranean sea and many other smaller islands. It is one of the largest countries in Europe. (“Italy.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy>. Accessed 2 November 2023.)

and lonely within the spaces of feminism, where I felt for the first time part of a movement that was truly collective, also because then there were years in which Italian feminism, even though what I'm saying could make many women angry, was in my opinion, the first moment in which feminism returned to its vogue in this country and began again to make its voice heard more broadly, occupying the front pages of the newspapers and influencing the mainstream debate: like it or not, whether you are represented or not, the mainstream debate is what we have to engage with because that's what everybody talks about every day; being able to go in there and bring the arguments and the battles, to bring our voices and our bodies is the battle. This "Se non ora quando" was able to do it, even though it might have had many limits, then things went badly as time passed because the movement burned out and then got lost, also because I think that we are the Olympic<sup>26</sup> champions of being able to break the force that we are in other moments able to put together and nurture, so in the name of differences, of purity, of theory, the movement then was under attack; maybe it also grew in a way that nobody was expecting, so this very strong impact was very difficult to bear, so under the weight of the internal conflicts it disintegrated, unfortunately.

**LD: We have the same problem in the United States<sup>27</sup>; it is a problem of all the movements...This is my central question and you have responded...There are other women that have had experiences similar to you, but they didn't become activists: in your opinion, what are the factors (personality, experiences, etc.) that distinguish you from them?**

MV: What a great question! Also because, if we understand what they're missing, we could try to understand how to bring them in. Look, I...mh. I don't know. The first thing that comes to me is to say that I believe I am more angry.

**LD: Why?**

MV: Because I find the situation intolerable, I conceive it as a violation of human rights, so I really have a fire that doesn't give me peace and it is very complicated to understand how this fire is born and how this fire is fueled because obviously it is an exhausting fire: a fire that takes you to the protests, takes you to the meetings, leads you to not sleep, motivates you to start a blog, to organize a festival, to sacrifice your weekends to organize the things that you do for activism and certainly not for personal gain or for some other reason; so I realize that it is an exhausting choice, compared to going shopping, going to

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<sup>26</sup> The Olympics are a national competition in which countries from across the world send individuals to compete against other countries in a variety of games/sports. This competition occurs once every 4 years. ("Olympic Games." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic\\_Games](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_Games). Accessed 2 November 2023.)

<sup>27</sup> The United States of America is a country located in North America. It is made up of 50 states and other territories. It is considered one of the largest countries in the world. ("United States." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States). Accessed 2 November 2023.)

the sea, going out with a girlfriend you love and talking about life. For example, I know that I sacrifice so many things for activism that I miss and care about: I sacrifice my life with my partner, I sacrifice my time with him, I sacrifice my time with the people that I love; I'm not going to see my brother in London because I can't find a weekend where I can do it and I also know that all the people around me are very important to me, with whom I have very strong emotional relationships and who are not activists, because with my activist girlfriends this problem doesn't arise (they have the same fire, so they know and I don't have to explain it to them) but for me it is very important that the other people understand that it isn't a question of lack of attention or affection, like how I probably understood it about my mother, and that they understand that for me this thing, activism, is very important and it is very important not only for myself: for me it is the way to improve a small corner of the world for everyone. The first thing that comes to me to tell you is this, that is I notice... For example, if I talk with my girlfriends who aren't activists, there is a difference that causes them to stay on the couch to talk about how much injustice there is and I go out and try to do something. The true difference between private awareness and awareness, that then is expressed in so many things obviously... You show it in your political choices, in the relationships that you choose, in your children's education, it shows in so many important things, but it isn't transformed into activism... I don't know what to tell you happens in this case, I can tell you that I feel that I have an anger that they don't have.

**LD: Okay, but when you were little were you passionate or not, calm...?**

MV: No, "calm" is a word that has never applied to me, I have always been a restless girl and a restless teenager always, always.

**LD: Maybe it's a personality characteristic, yes?**

MV: Yes, it's likely.

**LD: Was your mother similar?**

MV: Yes, my mother had a deep well of restlessness, but, in my opinion, it was maybe more resolved with age... I have no idea. I have the impression of always having been especially anxious as a teenager and always in need of being in motion, very troubled, hardly ever at peace; my mother was also a woman hardly ever at peace, yes (even if I have the impression that the way it was expressed was very different, maybe it was a question linked to her age or life stage...); my mother wasn't a woman who was particularly serene, and I'm not either.

**LD: However, maybe there are also some personality traits that are linked to the development of a politicized identity and also to activism...When your mind is open, there is the ability and the necessity required to find other ideas...**

MV: Surely one thing that greatly influenced my growth, and in this my father was very important...My father was a very idealistic man with a great sense of justice and injustice and he always taught me, both me and my brother--and always with an example of what had happened to him--that it wasn't enough to notice and to observe injustice, but you had to fight it: he taught us this not specifically about gender, but it was surely a value on which he had very much focused his education, both with me and my brother, you see?; in fact, I have to say that on these things, my brother and I are very similar, that is we have indignant reactions to political information and very very similar actions. I believe this certainly was one thing that had a very important impact. Another thing that had an important impact on me, another of the things that my mother never taught me in an explicit way, giving me lessons, but that I found a lot in the things that she wrote and also by observing her, is this enormous gift of the community of women. Two things: one is just this community of activist women within feminism, despite the clashes (that are there) and despite the difficulties, becomes like a second family, becomes a community in which you recognize yourself and that recognizes you and that is really a community; the other thing that exists is a passing of the baton, a history that began when women slowly...In fact, we wrote this in the book together: it is as if there was a forest where women with machetes began to uncover a road; this street has become ever wider, longer and longer and, even though today there are so many things that are completely unacceptable, if we look back even one century, our life has completely changed. So there is this awareness of the fact that there is a passing of the baton in the course of the years, in the course of decades, in the course of centuries; that this is a collective journey in which each person who decides takes hold of the machete and cuts a small bit of the tropical forest we're squeezing through and making our way. It is a very beautiful thing that also has a lot to do with the community, because you look back and you know that there are so many women who came before you and thanks to their commitment you can be the woman that you are today; you look ahead and think that you are creating a widening piece of this path, because then there will be many other women who will walk there and who will continue to do this work of breaking through.

**LD: In your life how important are your relationships with other feminists?**

MV: For me, so much, for me so much and they are on different levels: they are on the level of politics, that is the most obvious thing because you do politics together, you are a community and you are a network of activists (not only who do politics together, who organize the protests, who write the documents, who take to the streets, who are perceived as sentinels when something is happening in the city) and this is the easier part; in addition, not just for me, deeply profound and very beautiful individual friendships are born. I believe that choosing to be a feminist activist also often leads you

to have similar difficulties on the personal level. This community also becomes a reference point in dealing with any issues that come up in everyone's life and that become difficult issues in the lives of many, at least. To give one example, there always comes a moment in the lives of heterosexual feminists who are with a man and they have a stable relationship with a man, when it is very complicated to keep an balance between your commitment to activism and the relationship because, let's start from the obvious, you are inevitably with a man who supports you, who knows, who understands, who is your ally; but there is also a moment in which the life of activism tends to intrude upon your life so much so that your relationship becomes residual and inevitably the moment comes when, if your partner doesn't leave you, he makes you sit up and take notice. This, in my opinion, is one of the many cases in our closest relationships among feminists that we deal with a lot, that we have to manage and also, one the more or less difficult things, anyway part of the life of a couple, the division of domestic labor: fundamentally almost all feminists have a partner who takes care of 75% of the domestic labor and that because then, at a certain point, he raises his hand and says "Parity is 50%! Are you going to do anything yourself?" There often is an element of irony in these men who surrender in a way becoming more active in the survival of the nuclear family<sup>28</sup> (cooking, grocery shopping, ironing, doing the laundry, leaving out a plate of pasta at midnight when you return from the last meeting); there is a very ironic side especially with our closest girlfriends, where these men are gratified and also there's a bit of irony in the fact that, poor things, it's a hard life for them, then this also becomes a factor because naturally all of this happens because your time is very important and you have very important things to do, but on the other hand, quite rightly, you are made aware that he would also have important things to do and that often these lives are a bit unbalanced and--and apart from the irony--and there is irony--it creates complicated situations on the personal level, and you have to know how to keep it in balance so that it doesn't pull you completely away and doesn't make you a bit forgetful that everything else exists. About this at least I have to do a constant exercise: I have periods that are all-consuming and periods where I try to discipline myself because otherwise I literally don't do anything else; that is I work and spend the rest of my time doing what is part of the activism and then there isn't more space for anything else, so every so often I have to try to retreat to bring myself back into balance and then break it and then find it again, but it is a continuous exercise. The latter is another of the factors, when you first asked me what are some of the differences: at a certain point this fire also makes you think that it is worth going through these imbalances, but they are very tiring; so I also understand that it is much easier to have a life where you have more time for relationships, that allows you to lower the level of conflict, to have a much more serene pace...

### **LD: But you don't have a choice...**

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<sup>28</sup> Nuclear family is a term that refers to a family that consists of only parents and their children. ("Nuclear family." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear\\_family](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_family). Accessed 5 November 2023.)



MV: No, not me, I don't have it, but I realize that if you find yourself in the situation, in which I have never found myself, that is balancing choices, it is a very tiring choice. There are a ton of good reasons for not doing it, so there really has to be something you can't resist and you have to learn from it, to know the beauty, that, when you don't discover it and you don't know it, it doesn't pull you inside. I see my girlfriends who every so often look at me and say "but who makes you do it, but why do you do that, but why? Stop, you're tired, look at you, how thin you are, sleep, you're losing weight, let it go!" But I think that this is the nice part of having that demon, and you know its beauty, so you know what it can give back to you, the thing that when you are most tired, most drained, it continues to sustain you. If you haven't experienced it, you don't know what it is.

**LD: Is there some activity that helps you be more...**

MV: I have been practicing yoga for many years, for ten years now, and this helps me so much because for me it is really the escape from the daily grind and to have a moment where I detach from everything, I don't think; even if I am very tired, it's as if I am recharging my batteries, it's the thing that absolutely brings me more than anything into balance.

**LD: It is very important.**

MV: Yes, for me it is. This became inevitable too.

**LD: What does the word "feminism" mean to you?**

MV: Well, it means everything to me. It means freedom, it means self-determination, it means choosing; you choose, and do not let anything or anybody decide for you. It means getting where you want, it means not having limits, it means making a design on a blank sheet of paper: the blank sheet is the limits that life gives to you; how much you live, what kind of life is destined for you, that is your sheet. It is not perceiving boundaries except for those that you give yourself. I cannot imagine my life without this word.

**LD: How do you perceive the relationship between the women's rights movement, the political system, and movements for the rights of other groups in society?**

MV: I wanted to add only one thing: for me, feminism is also the community. This is a fundamental thing. It is a big family, a big community. This is the other fundamental thing for me. It is also the defense of places. I perceive it with great concern. It seems to me that there are very few women who do politics within the parties, and inside of institutions, that bring the cultural baggage of feminism. It seems to me that those who carry it have little courage, and they also have little ability to network among themselves. The big

feminist battles in this country were won by breaking party boundaries: it was that way for the divorce law<sup>29</sup>, it was that way for the abortion law<sup>30</sup>. This is the only truly viable road. It seems to me that you lack the ability to identify the obvious battles, to carry them forward, to know how to break, to cross the boundaries within the parties. It seems to me that the women who are currently in politics and within any party, who are able to do this, are truly few in number, too few and very isolated. It is as if you are really lacking that minimum of awareness that you could bring, not to form a community--because this would be too much to ask--but at least to form synergies to bring home some results. It seems to me a politics that is still very dominated by men; a politics in which the women who emerge are very accommodating with respect to their boss (now we are talking in generalizations, obviously, there are some exceptions) and they cannot challenge the status quo, because I think that feminism must do that: naturally, within certain limits and according to the arenas in which you move; one thing are the movements, another thing is to try to do politics inside institutions and parties; the level of challenge must be calibrated in a different way to reach different results in different places, but it seems to me that the few women who I see know that they are not challenging enough, not independent enough, not united amongst themselves enough, not incisive enough. Obviously it is partisan, I realize, but I have the impression that feminism in its various facets is in this moment, in this country (and not only in this country) the only truly unique force, the only force that truly has something to say outside of populism and that is able, even though it is unfortunately in a minority, to pursue a political discourse worthy of the name. It is clear that it is going to shake up the status quo, it is going to shake up the balance in the exercise of power where there's very strong pressure, even just in numeric terms, or this voice comes in shouting into the rooms of power or...or there are women who open the windows and the doors so that others can enter and this voice can come into the buildings or, in this moment, I find it hard to see how this can happen. Then there is also great confusion between the presence of women in institutions and the quality of the women in the institutions. In these last legislatures we have had parliaments with more women than we have ever seen and we owe this especially to the Five Star Movement<sup>31</sup> and not to the left; the problem is women with what training, what--as we say--feminist culture, what awareness of the fact that politics is sexual and not

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<sup>29</sup> The new divorce law in Italy allows for a shorter period of time between when the divorce was finalized and when it is legalized. If the divorce is consensual, it can take up to 6 months for it to be finalized. However, if the divorce is argued against, it will take up to a maximum of 1 year rather than 3 years. ("Divorce in Italy." Lawyers in Italy. <https://lawyersitaly.eu/divorce-in-italy/#:~:text=The%20new%20law%20establishes%20that,take%20up%20to%20three%20years>. Accessed 5 November 2023.)

<sup>30</sup> The abortion law in Italy states that women have the right to have an abortion within the first 3 months of pregnancy, regardless of the reason. ("Abortion in Italy." Istituto Superiore di Sanita. [https://www.epicentro.iss.it/ben/2001/aprile/1\\_en#:~:text=In%201978%2C%20a%20law%20was,%2C%20social%2C%20or%20familial%20reasons](https://www.epicentro.iss.it/ben/2001/aprile/1_en#:~:text=In%201978%2C%20a%20law%20was,%2C%20social%2C%20or%20familial%20reasons). Accessed 5 November 2023.)

<sup>31</sup> Five Star Movement is a political party in Italy. The party was started in 2009 and is referred to as a populist party. The party had a prime minister in Italian office from 2018 to 2021. ("Five Star Movement." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five\\_Star\\_Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Star_Movement). Accessed 5 November 2023.)

asexual, how many of them are there? Really I see only very very few of them. Here in my opinion there is a very very important element: it is not enough to be women to take women's side.

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

MV: Look, maybe what I would tell you about in this moment is the birth of this festival that we created last year and we titled "Unrest" for the point that in Italian it is a word game: "stare in quiete" means tranquility; the adjective "inquiete"<sup>32</sup> means to be restless, so we chose it very carefully because it seemed to us that it represented us. For me it was a very important experience because it is as if it brought together so many forces and so many elements that for me are important for feminism, they have been so to me in these years of political actions. This festival was born two years ago now, in our heads, when for the thousandth time I--it was Christmas--opened the newspaper and there were suggestions for Christmas vacation reading, so ten novels that every time in Italy, I don't know if this happens in America too, at Christmas and the summer there are lists of novels that the newspapers advise you to read during vacation, always, and they are always only by men or there is a one or a maximum of two women; this has always happened, only that, evidently, that Christmas two years ago I was particularly pissed off and when I read it I really was infuriated: I said "this isn't possible." It is full of women who write wonderful novels and still we have the Italian newspapers (we are not talking about the latest magazines you read at the hairdressers; we are talking about the most important newspapers in this country) who continue to give reading recommendations of which 95% are males: as if the words of women were always Series B<sup>33</sup> literature or anyway literature with a capital L is made by men because they are the only ones able to write in a universal language, stories in which everyone can recognize themselves, while women write little novels about love that you read in the bathtub when you have an emotional crisis, only for women; there is this problem, in the sense that women function like an endangered panda reserve, that is, not talked about and if you really have to talk about it, they talk about them amongst themselves, so women's novels are read by women, women talk about them, women write about them because it is completely pointless that a man spend time measuring himself with small stuff of this type. So I was very angry, more than usual: I called my friend who organizes literature festivals, but not around gender, she organizes them around other themes, and I told her "look, enough is

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<sup>32</sup> Inquiete is an Italian word that means restless or worried. ("inquiet in English." Cambridge English Dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/french-english/inquiet>. Accessed 5 November 2023.)

<sup>33</sup> Series B is typically used to refer to a second round of funding for start-up businesses, but can also mean second class in this context. ("Series B Financing: Definition, Examples, and Funding Sources." Investopedia. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/series-b-financing.asp>. Accessed 8 November 2023.)

enough, we must have a festival that talks about women's literature because maybe, even if we continue to complain every time we open the newspaper at Christmas and summer and curse at the newspaper pages, maybe there's a need to try to do something else;" she told me "I like it, I really like this idea, let's do it." Together we went to the Libreria delle Donne - Tuba<sup>34</sup>, which is on Pigneto<sup>35</sup>, where if you've never been there you should absolutely go because it is a very interesting place. We went, we asked for an appointment (in some way they were already part of the activist community, we knew about each other--we did many things together, but always within the framework of the greater activist community) and we said "we have this project, let's do it together." They had a meeting, then some of them were willing to put this project together. This project started and from it this festival was born, that we did for the first time last year and we are doing it again this year, we will do it every year --I hope-- where we call only women who have written mainly novels in the current year ('17, '18, '19... ) to present their own novels; then we invented a series of other formats where we talk about the important women writers of the past (we called it "Ritratto di signora"<sup>36</sup>. The first thing we do at the opening of the festival each year is a portrait of Virginia Woolf<sup>37</sup>, about different moments of her life, different works...We decided to do this festival, which is obviously a feminist festival in its conception, but actually is a very "pop" festival, where we made a very deliberate decision, that it would be an educational festival for everyone (men and women): we chose within the festival to always have actresses who read to give the chance to those who do not know the authors, to those who haven't read the book, to those who don't read--there are many--to be able to hear the words, to be able to enter the story in a simpler way; we asked everyone to keep their presentations on a level that wasn't a literary criticism level but was an accessible level because nobody should feel excluded; we created programming for children at the same time to give the possibility to everyone and so that everyone would be able to participate even having little kids and to have a really close place, in a garden next door, where you could leave them if they wanted to participate in the festival. We tried to create a moment that was laying claiming from the point of view of the project and that had a precise political reason in its existence and in its development, but that could in a way be experienced by the other side on as many levels as possible: on a level-- so to say-- a political level of greater awareness, but also of those who love literature; of those approaching it for the first time; even those who

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<sup>34</sup> Tuba is a feminist bookstore and bar that is run by women and aims to create a safe and accepting space for individuals of all backgrounds. This bookstore hosts events and works with other feminist organizations as well. ("Who We Are." Tuba Bookshop. <https://www.libreriatuba.it/>. Accessed 8 November 2023.)

<sup>35</sup> Pigneto refers to a neighborhood in the city of Rome. This neighborhood is urbanized and is currently being renovating older buildings. ("Rome Neighborhoods: Pigneto." Rome & Vatican Card. <https://www.romevaticancard.com/quartieri-di-roma-pigneto/>. Accessed 8 November 2023.)

<sup>36</sup> Ritratto di Signora (The Portrait of a Lady) is a painting by Giuseppe Barison. Barison lived from 1853 to 1931. ("Ritratto di signora." Artvee. <https://artvee.com/dl/ritratto-di-signora/>. Accessed 8 November 2023.)

<sup>37</sup> Virginia Woolf was a writer from England. She is known for her writing style and is regarded as an important author of the 1900s. ("Virginia Woolf." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia\\_Woolf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_Woolf). Accessed 8 November 2023.)

pass by and stop by chance and have the chance to discover something new...We chose very precisely that we wanted to create a very open festival in which, if you know it-- you get to know us, you get a deeper sense of the project-- you know that's about a political project and a feminist project, which you may not understand with a more superficial approach, also because we are perfectly aware that there is a rejection of feminism, that is we are in a moment in which as soon as you say that it is a feminist project, that you are a feminist, immediately it becomes something terrible, obscure, boring, outdated, not very relevant now...We have, just on this, wanted to create a trap door in the sense of offering a situation that could also be apparently neutral and then, instead, send very precise messages without necessarily declaring them openly. For me this was very nice: in this moment, I'm feeling the absence of a movement in which I recognize myself in this moment, because I have places and I have my community in which I do politics, but I don't have--as it was in the case of "Se non ora quando" [If not now, when]- a movement in which I recognize myself precisely at this moment; the festival has become for me the place where I also express myself politically, a place where a beautiful community of five organizers has been created, and there is also the bookstore... We organize it in the middle of the street and inside a library courtyard, then there's the library community, there's the neighborhood community, there's the Tuba bookstore community, which is a very large community, very strong and very activist: it has become another piece of family... One of the reasons that I think it is a good story--and for me in particular, it was very important...In Italian we say (I believe in English it is very similar) that feminism is a karstic movement: it emerges and recedes, emerges and recedes...

**LD: Cyclical.**

MV: Exactly. For me personally, because personal moments are there, too, for me this was a moment in which the level was dropping just because I can't fully recognize myself in the part of the movements that are ascendent in this moment, for different reasons, so actually this was for me the way to create an alternative space to the movements that are ascendent right now, to also gather a community around a theme that for me is very precious, that of literature (because I am a big aficionado of literature) but diminished in a way...Indeed, creating another space that for me in this moment is very vital and that represents a place for those who can encounter it in some way; for me it's also a way to use a countervailing force: in the moment in which I felt that the movements that are moving in this moment are not resonating with me in a completely authentic way, I made myself think of a project with other women allowing us to take an activist role and also to take joy in activism and to create a vital project that could be also an offer for others. I am very happy to have succeeded; in this moment it is the part of activism that I enjoy the most, which does not mean...Obviously I go to the demonstrations, now I am very busy in

the defense of the Casa Internazionale delle Donne<sup>38</sup> which is under attack from the City of Rome, that is I am very active on other fronts, but (the festival) is a bit like the place where I managed to channel my most creative energies.

**LD: A nice idea.**

MV: There is always a project that can be brought to mind with other like minded companions in order to maintain living spaces and living projects that can be made available to the community.

**LD: Is there anything else you want to say?**

MV: No, I think I have told you many things and certainly those that are most important to me.

**LD: Yes, very interesting. Thanks so much!**

MV: Thanks to you. It was a pleasure.

**LD: The interview was very interesting for me; I learned a lot.**

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<sup>38</sup> Casa Internazionale delle Donne, or the International Women's House of Rome, was previously a prison and is now a building that is dedicated to helping fight for women's rights. ("International Women's House." Tourism Rome. <https://www.turismoroma.it/it/luoghi/casa-internazionale-delle-donne-0>. Accessed 8 November 2023.)