

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

SITE: ITALY

**Transcript of Michela Murgia
Interviewer: Lauren Duncan**

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Michela Murgia was born in 1972 in Sardinia. She works as a writer, blogger, playwright, literary critic, and television and newspaper columnist with the Gedi Group. She has won several awards for her fiction, in particular for *Accabadora*, for which she received the Campiello prize, and also for non-fiction, for *Ave Mary* and *Istruzioni per diventare fascisti*, with the publisher Einaudi in Turin. Already a supporter of Sardinian independence and politically active on the left, today she is committed to women's rights.

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).

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Lauren Duncan: I am talking with Michela Murgia, it is July 5, 2018. I would like to begin with a conversation about your childhood and first of all your family. What do or did your parents do? I know that you have an interesting history.

Michela Murgia: Yes. I am the daughter of a politically militant¹ and Sardinian nationalist² woman who, in Milan³ for work, met a Sardinian man; my parents are both Sardinian. I know seen from outside Italy it is all one country, but it isn't really like that. In Italy Sardinia has a special characteristic, it is a territory like Catalonia⁴ can be in Spain, that is it is a place that has very strong cultural and social specificity, it has its own language and the Sardinians believe that they are something else... So my mother and my father met each other and, in the years of their marriage when I was born, my mother had an handicraft store and my father worked for the Sardinian regional transportation agency. Then they decided to take a little leap: he retired from work and took his pension⁵ early, and my mother closed the store; they invested the money in a restaurant, so they opened a restaurant in a tourist resort in Sardinia, in the middle of the western coast. I spent my childhood in a very isolated place, indeed a tourist resort. "Tourist" in Sardinia means that it is touristy two and a half months a year, the rest of the time nobody lives there, it is uninhabited. So I, my brother and the other children were all children of people who had shops, restaurants, commercial activities, and during the winter we were very alone, so I grew up very isolated. When I turned 18 I decided to leave home, which in the Italian culture it is rather unusual to go away at 18 years. I hadn't even finished my studies, I had one year left, but my family was experiencing a very difficult time because of my father, he was an abusive man, and I decided to go away and pursue my own path. I was fortunate because in that year I had the opportunity to become "figlia d'anima" [*soul daughter,*] of another family. The parent-child relationship of the soul in Sardinia is...Mh, it is an informal voluntary adoption agreement that is possible to draw up with a family that isn't yours, that takes you as their son, their daughter, and assumes responsibility for you; not born of particular economic needs, not born of particular relational bonds; they can be strangers and you may not need money, but born because there is a fondness, an esteem, a push. So I became soul daughter and I have two mothers and two fathers. I spent eighteen years with my family of origin and another eighteen with my chosen

¹ Politically militant is a phrase used to describe an individual who is passionate about political change but may use aggressive or extreme methods. ("Militant Definition and Meaning." Collins English Dictionary. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/militant>. Accessed 15 August 2022.)

² A Sardinian nationalist is an individual who supports Sardinia's independence from Italy. ("Sardinian nationalism - definition." Encyclo. <https://www.encyclo.co.uk/meaning-of-Sardinian-nationalism>. Accessed 15 August 2022.)

³ Milan is a city located in the north of Italy. Milan is known as the fashion capital and financial hub of Italy. ("Milan." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milan>. Accessed 15 August 2022.)

⁴ Catalonia is an autonomous community located in northeastern Spain. ("Catalonia." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catalonia>. Accessed 15 August 2022.)

⁵ A pension is an amount of money that is given to the retired employee every year by the employer. ("Pension Definition." Bankrate. <https://www.bankrate.com/glossary/p/pension/>. Accessed 15 August 2022.)

family. This permitted me to study a lot more than I could have in my family of origin. I studied theology⁶ and, after graduating from a technical high school in business administration⁷ [*she studied foreign languages, including English, as part of her studies,*] I am-- how do you say... the family influence has a very important weight even in my writing. When I write fiction, I pretty much only tell stories about non-conventional families.

LD: Interesting, very interesting. I have to be sure that I understood: you were living with your family of origin?

MM: Until I was 18.

LD: And then?

MM: From 18 on I left home and continued to live with my chosen family.

LD: In the same town?

MM: In the same town, yes. In Sardinia it is a rather frequent thing, it was because we had more children and so we could do this more often. Now in Sardinia they have only 1.2 children per woman, lower even than the Italian average, and so there aren't more children being born.

LD: Very interesting, yes. The next question is do you have sisters or brothers, what do they do?

MM: I have a younger brother named Cristiano and he is a cook in my parents' restaurant.

LD: And he was living..?

MM: He stayed to live with them, yes.

LD: How was it to grow up in your family, was there a reason that...?

MM: It was very difficult. My father was an alcoholic and a violent man, so it was very difficult.

⁶ Theology is the study of religion. ("Theology." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theology>. Accessed 15 August 2022.)

⁷ Business administration consists of managing the people, work, time, and resources of an organization/business. ("What is Business Administration?" SNHU. <https://www.snhu.edu/about-us/newsroom/business/what-is-business-administration>. Accessed 15 August 2022.)

LD: Do you have a relationship with your parents or no?

MM: With my mother, yes, with my father, not for twenty years.

LD: And with the other family?

MM: Yes [laughs,].

LD: How would you describe your relationship with your family of choice?

MM: Eh, it is a completely different thing because the natural family is a constricting place because nothing is chosen. You don't choose your parents and your parents, even when they wanted a child, didn't really know that you would arrive, so birth is often a blind date [laughs,] and you spend your all life forgiving each other for not being what you expected. In the case of the family of choice, everything changes because those who chose you have really chosen you and have asked you if you agreed, so there is a willingness from the beginning that governs the whole relationship. It is the same type of relationship that can be established between... with a partner, yes.

LD: Yes.

MM: That is I choose you and decide that the bond of will and affection is worth more than all the others. It is a similar case, let's say, only that while the choice of a partner is usually a matter of love, so all of society accepts it, when this choice takes place within para-familiar relationships⁸ it touches on the Italian myth of the family, of the mother of whom there is only one, of the father (of the *pater familias*) all of whom are unique figures, there cannot be two mothers, there can't be two fathers. Here in Sardinia this is less strong because in Sardinia the concept of motherly uniqueness doesn't exist; the concept of co-parenthood⁹ is more common. It is possible that a child can be considered a child of more people and this is typically Sardinian, in fact when I write about this in Sardinia I never have to explain it, but in Italy when I leave Sardinia I always have to explain it because everyone says to me "but how is it possible?" So actually my relationship with my elective family was much more free and much less conflictual and then there is the fact that every day you choose yourself because, even in the strongest moments of conflict--there are, because you live together--that person can't say "you can't disown me because I am always your mother or father" because it's not true,

⁸ Para-familiar is defined as somewhat informal or easy-going. ("Familiar Definition & Meaning." Dictionary. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/familiar>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁹ Co-parenting is a type of parenting relationship in which both parents are not together but still both share the responsibility of taking care of their child. ("Co-Parenting Definition, Explanations and Guide." Maples Family Law. <https://www.maplesfamilylaw.com/divorce/co-parenting-definition-explanations-and-guide/>. Accessed 15 August 2022.)

you're not, you can't play the "blood card," it has to be another thing, so you choose each other every day.

LD: A beautiful thing!

MM: I think so, yes.

LD: Particularly for people different from the rest of the family... How would you describe your relationship with your brother now?

MM: Now, very good.

LD: And before?

MM: Before no, because the children of violent families have violent ways of being together. My father being a violent man, he pitted us against each other. To not be hit. That is every day he hit one of us and neither of us wanted to be the one he hit and so... That is if I blamed my brother, he'd be beaten and not me, and it was the same for him, so we spent our childhood blaming each other, to save ourselves and it wasn't... An abusive family is a place where the only necessity is survival; my brother and I are both survivors. With time and with a lot of therapy [laughs,] we have succeeded in salvaging in part the relationship but it is a relationship between two adult people, it isn't the relationship between two siblings that grew up together because I was far from home almost twenty years and I didn't want to have anything to do with them anymore, so...

LD: Yes, I understand. You can answer this question with regard to your natural family or your family of choice: how did you learn the political and social values of your family? Can you give me an example?

MM: Eh... It's complicated because I've always been a woman of the left,¹⁰ from my earliest memories, the thing that interested me the most was the unjust situation of the poor and of the marginalized,¹¹ that I've always lived with a sense of guilt, and not with a sense of destiny (I've never thought that being born poor is anyone's destiny). I've always been a separatist¹² because my mother taught me the history of Sardinia, instead of school--because in Sardinia the school is an Italian school-- in Italian history

¹⁰ Politically, being left is to be associated with the "left" of the political spectrum, which traditionally values social welfare and the interests of the working class. ("left." Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/left>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

¹¹ To be marginalized means to have little importance or power. ("Marginalized Definition & Meaning." Dictionary. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/marginalized>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

¹² A separatist is an individual who is in support of the separation of one country (or group) from another.

("Separatist Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/separatist>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

Sardinia doesn't exist. Because of this I was in a land and I spoke a language that didn't exist in the books I studied, and this made me very angry; it was the anger of denial. I said "if we are Italians and so Sardinia is a piece of the Italian culture, why don't they teach us this in school?" and I thought that the fact that they didn't teach us this meant to create the idea that we didn't exist, not just for us, there, but also for the rest of Italy who didn't know that Sardinia was something different. And so from the beginning I have had a strong sense of belonging to the separatist path and a strong allegiance to the left, because separatism can be either rightist¹³ or leftist; the separatism of the right is nationalism¹⁴; the separatism of the left is internationalist,¹⁵ modern, it is something different. My mother has always been a committed activist, and also a committed feminist, but there was a strong contradiction between her convictions and the man that she got married to. I couldn't accept her, I said "it isn't possible that you worked, that you grew up free, you taught me that women are equal to men, but you accept living with and have us live with a man who considers you inferior and that, all the times that you prove that you are not inferior he beats you and beats us. Divorce him. Leave this situation and take us away with you." I was a teenager and teenagers often are categorical and think in terms of black or white.

LD: Yes, it's true.

MM: Accepting compromises is very difficult. I didn't understand then the fragility of the woman but I demanded the strength of the activist. I went away very angry with my father but also with my mother, for two different reasons, and when I went away I was absolutely a partisan¹⁶ of the subjects that interested me, also because they came from my own experiences...I grew up in a family where my father thought that my brother and I didn't have the same rights. My brother was younger than me, but he could go out more and return later; me no. The housework, clearing the plates from the table or making the bed, my brother was not called to do it, if he wanted to do it he did it, otherwise no; I on the other hand, whether I wanted to or not, had to do it. This was a very big thing for me and I said "for what reason?" and then I watched my mother and said "you didn't teach me this, why do you allow him to tell me to do this?" So surely my ability to argue, the education in conflict, I had received it in the experience of my first

¹³ Politically, right is associated with having and conservative beliefs and upholding traditional values. ("Why do 'Left' And 'Right' Mean Liberal And Conservative?" Dictionary. <https://www.dictionary.com/e/leftright/>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

¹⁴ Nationalism is defined as an individual being very loyal to and supportive of their nation/country. ("Nationalism Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nationalism>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

¹⁵ An internationalist is an individual who promotes the idea of countries working together. ("INTERNATIONALIST." Cambridge Dictionary. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/internationalist>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

¹⁶ A partisan is an individual who takes sides in a conflict, debate, on an issue, or in judging a controversy person or action. ("Partisan Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/partisan>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

family. The second family was more fun because they were Christian Democrats,¹⁷ so by nature people of the center-right.¹⁸ I believe that from the year in which Berlusconi¹⁹ was a candidate, my second family never voted for anyone other than Berlusconi, and naturally I was very opposite. So, while my first family raised me in leftist activism, my second family was a place of activism was a place of activism was a place of activism My uncle and my aunt, my “elective” parents were very moderate, lower middle class, they feared every form of protest, every form of disorder, every form... *Les bourgeois [the middle class,],* that kind of stuff, “leave us in peace, don’t make too much of a racket, don’t complain too much,” that is for my aunt the poorest people were those to help with charity, with compassion, because they were very Christian, but not with the political fight, that it is was a very paternalistic²⁰ vision of taking on injustice: “injustice doesn’t get resolved, injustice has to be treated; it doesn’t have to stop existing, it is the place in which we can feel better”.

LD: You talked already about the type of messages you received about gender, but do you have anything more to say about the role of women and men in society?

MM: Yes, one thing perhaps could be interesting because it directly concerns Sardinia. Sardinia is a place in which the feminine figure counts a lot, but this has been so for many years, both in Sardinia and outside, passed the existence of the legend of the Sardinian matriarchy.²¹ Often when I talk at domestic violence centers, at feminist conventions, they say to me “one sees that you come from another culture because in Sardinia you have a matriarchy.” This is untrue. The matriarchy doesn’t exist. Matriarchy is a theoretical projection, but in practice it never existed and in Sardinia it doesn’t exist. In Sardinia there is another thing that we call “matricentrismo” [*“mother centralism”, like androcentrism which is the centrality of the male,]*: matricentrismo means that the mother is the center of society, not the woman, the mother, so it is the maternal function, on which the entire patriarchal system is founded, discharging its

¹⁷ Christian Democrats are Christians whose political beliefs contain traditional Christian beliefs and progressive values as well. (“Christian democracy.” Britannica.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christian-democracy>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

¹⁸ In politics, center-right refers to having more right-wing beliefs, but being more moderate than others who are considered far-right. (“What does centre-right politics mean?” Definitions.

<https://www.definitions.net/definition/centre-right+politics>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

¹⁹ Silvio Berlusconi was the prime minister of Italy for a total of 9 years over the course of 3 different terms starting in 1994. He was also the head of the centre-right party in Italy from 1994-2013. (“Silvio Berlusconi.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silvio_Berlusconi. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

²⁰ Paternalistic refers to a system in which the authority usually acts for the good of the people in a parental or condescending way. (“Paternalistic Definition & Meaning.” Dictionary. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/paternalistic>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

²¹ The legend of the Sardinian matriarchy refers to Eleonora d’Arborea, who was the ruler of Sardinia during medieval times. She inherited the throne from her brother and is known for her support of modern values such as equality, protection of minors and women, and treatment of women who were raped. She is also known for bringing the country together and uniting them to drive away the Aragonese, who wanted control of the island. (“Eleonora d’Arborea, woman, mother, ruler in medieval Sardinia.” Chasing The Unexpected. <https://www.chasingtheunexpected.com/eleonora-darborea-woman-daughter-mother-ruler-in-medieval-sardinia/>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

weight on the fact that a woman accepts being the cornerstone of this system; meaning that if you move from that role, everything collapses. It means that you are not fighting only for yourself when you become a feminist, but you also have to fight the weight of the guilt of knowing that if you free yourself, all that structure will have to collapse; in that structure there is your mother, your father, your children, your sisters, your brothers, your girlfriends. It is very difficult to be feminists within a matricentral system, also because it is a system that seemingly offers you power and it says to you “see how much power you have?” Everything depends on you! You are the queen, you command everything, you govern everything.” The truth is that in Sardinia it’s called “matriarchy” when only one person knows where everyone’s underwear is, but this isn’t matriarchy; I find it to be a more evolved form of patriarchy, a “male chauvinism²² 2.0” in which “we don’t tell you that you are inferior any more, we tell you that you are superior” but it is the same: you cannot move from that spot.

LD: It’s called “benevolent sexism”.

MM: Exactly, “benevolent sexism”.

LD: I understand, and it is very insidious.

MM: It is the position of the Catholic Church.²³

LD: Yes.

MM: The Catholic Church under John Paul II²⁴ printed a document called “Mulieris dignitatem” [*On the Dignity and Vocation of Women, 1988,*] that is precisely a manifesto²⁵ of benevolent sexism, in which it’s no longer said to women “you are inferior,” it is said “you are special”--“the feminine genius”--“that thing that only you have that makes you so suitable for caretaking, so apt to understand, to love, to forgive, to console, to be Vestal Virgins [*virgin priestesses in Ancient Rome who took care of a sacred flame,*], to be geishas,²⁶ to be...” Yes, it’s an idea that is very...” But you should be

²² Chauvinism is defined as feeling and acting superior to an individual of the opposite gender. (“Chauvinism Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/chauvinism>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

²³ The Catholic Church is a community of baptized Christians under the pope, who is the only known authority in the church. (“Catholic church Definition & Meaning.” Dictionary. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/catholic-church>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

²⁴ John Paul II was the pope of the Catholic Church from 1978 until 2005. (“Pope John Paul II.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_John_Paul_II. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

²⁵ A manifesto is a written statement that publicizes the beliefs of an individual/group. (“Manifesto Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/manifesto>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

²⁶ A geisha is a Japanese woman whose job is to entertain men, usually through song or dance. (“Geisha Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/geisha>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

happy to be so special: why would you want to be like men who cannot do it? It is much better to be women, knowing that you are the only ones who can do this.”

LD: Yes, I understand. Did you receive any messages about sexual orientation?

MM: Eh...Absolutely homophobic-type²⁷ messages in the sense that in Sardinia homosexual²⁸ people are figures on the margins of society, not any more, but when I was growing up, being gay²⁹... Or you were very rich, and then you were gay, but if you weren't very rich and you were lower class, then you were a fag.³⁰ The word homosexual was perceived as a pathology, the term “homosexual” itself used to evoke a world of illness, whereas instead “fag” is an insult and “gay” is a word that evokes flamboyant characters, so homosexuality represented as over performed, never normal; that is never in all of my childhood was homosexuality presented as one of the possibilities of being in daily life. My brother and I didn't have a same sex orientation, so we didn't experience homophobia at home, but at school we always used the term “gay” as an insult, so probably in a part of my childhood, and even my adolescence, I was homophobic because as long as you think about homosexuality it is easy to be homophobic, then in life you grow up and you meet Mario and Giovanni, you meet Anna and Lucia, you meet people...Considering homosexuality is one thing, considering gay people is another thing, and when you meet them you realize that everything that you've been told is false, and so you grow up, but it is always a path in which the perception of the other is enriching, is an arrival point, it is never a point of departure; the point of departure is prejudice.

LD: Okay. Your mother was a “Sardinian radical”?³¹

MM: Yes [*laughs*,] “Sardinian radical” --not bad! She is a separatist, a militant...an activist.

LD: Yes, okay! What type of messages did you receive about how to resolve political problems?

²⁷ Homophobia describes prejudice or discrimination against gay people. (“Homophobia Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/homophobia>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

²⁸ Homosexual refers to people who are attracted to people of their same gender. (“Homosexual Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/homosexual>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

²⁹ Gay is another word for homosexual, which is defined as an individual who is attracted to a person of their same gender. (“Gay Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gay>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

³⁰ Fag is an offensive word used to describe gay people. (“Fag Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fag>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

³¹ A Sardinian radical is a individual who supports the idea of Sardinia gaining further autonomy from Italy and supports a revolutionized Sardinian government. (“Sardinian nationalism.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sardinian_nationalism. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

MM: *[laughs,]* Even to this day my mother and I have a big conflict about this because my mother was shaped during the Seventies and she has an origin that...You come from environments of the armed conflict and so for her the recourse to violence is one of the possible political methods. Today my mother is 75 and she... On the other hand I grew up radically democrat³² and I am... I don't want to say "moderate"; I am an extremist of democracy: all of the instruments that democracy puts at my disposition, I use them, but I am convinced that violence isn't part of this, so. Democracy has its own rules. To my mother we are not true fighters, we are "keyboard activists"³³--she says-- "you are not..." Because she says "there is no need to get the majority, there is a need to get power!" *[laughs,]* And she doesn't realize that actually the concept of "getting power" is a concept that expresses a masculine vision of power. I am convinced that women have a historical significance--not a genetic--a historical significance, a historical experience of relationships that allows us to imagine another model of power, that is not that masculine, muscular, macho,³⁴ virile.³⁵ My mother did not experience that because in the 1970s there was a need to break out of the constraints and there was no time to also prepare yourself conceptually, few could do it; the others had to take to the streets to show their strength, to burn their bras, to say "the uterus is mine". That is, that language there in that moment was necessary. Now we can make a more sophisticated synthesis, more...I think even more efficient in the sense that when it is necessary to break, it has to break, when it is necessary to build, indeed it isn't less of an effort. I think that my mother, who today is exactly 75 years old, is anxious to see results, she is afraid of dying seeing the loss of the rights that they were able to obtain, and this makes her more radical today than when she was 40. So she looks at me and says "get a move on, what are you doing? Why do you write? You write articles for newspapers? That doesn't change any of this, nobody reads newspapers anymore! Why aren't you all in the streets throwing rocks through the shop windows? Why aren't you all..." That is she would like us to be...when I reached age 35 my mother gave me a switchblade!

LD: *[Laughs,]*

MM: Yes *[laughs,]*. And she said to me "if you were a true militant you would have already had one of these."

LD: Your mother is very different than my mother!

³² A radical democrat is a person who holds democratic values and also promotes a strong version of equality and liberty for all. ("Radical Democracy." Wikipedia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radical_democracy. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

³³ Keyboard activists are individuals who use the internet as their platform to activate for certain causes and issues. This can be through posts or videos that often have no genuine impact on the issue at hand. ("Rise of keyboard activists." The Cord. <https://thecord.ca/rise-of-keyboard-activists/>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

³⁴ Describes an individual who is exceedingly masculine. ("Macho Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/macho>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

³⁵ Virile refers to having masculine qualities. ("Virile Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/virile>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

MM: When she retired, instead of crocheting, knitting, she founded an association called “Mamme No-Basi” [Mothers No Bases] against the American military bases in Sardinia. Perhaps you don’t know it but in Sardinia are 66% of the total of all of the Italian military easements [*territory that allied militaries are allowed to use,*] are found in Sardinia, so we honestly have a base every forty kilometers and for us separatists this a thing that is...It is an affront, it is a real occupation, we have a lot of fights about this, but it is an institutional fight, to try to reverse the balance of power. For my mother it is a physical fight, that is to go in front of the bases to take back the territory, to cut the entry nets with scissors and to say to the Americans “go away!” and to say to the Italian Ministry of Defense³⁶ “go away!” like that.

LD: Okay. In your opinion... How do you think that your childhood and your relationships with your family influenced the person that you are today? In particular with regard to your political activity.

MM: I believe that they put me, I would say, on the right path, but didn’t shape me because I don’t come from an educated family, neither the first nor the second. None of my parents ever even graduated from high school, so I had the feelings but not the ideas and I especially I didn’t have the instruments for organizing my dissent with respect to the situation. This meant that...Actually my political school was the Azione Cattolica [*Catholic Action, a non-political lay association,*]. When I was 19 I converted to...That is I began to have faith. I was baptized,³⁷ I took the sacraments,³⁸ but I was an atheist.³⁹ At 19 I had a conversion and I signed up for Catholic Action⁴⁰ and I was one of the smartest things that I’ve ever done in my life because Catholic Action is the only democratic association of the Catholic Church. That is the Catholic Church is not a democracy: the Pope⁴¹ is not voted in--yes, from the Conclave,⁴² but those that are in the Conclave are not voted in, so... and it is, so to say...no level of hierarchical control is actually elective.

³⁶ The Italian Ministry of Defense is an Italian government organization that is in charge of the Italian Armed Forces and any military issues concerning Italy. (“Ministry of Defence (Italy).” Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Defence_\(Italy\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Defence_(Italy)). Accessed 16 August 2022.)

³⁷ Baptized refers to having experienced a Christian ritual in which individuals are accepted into the church. (“Baptize Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/baptize>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

³⁸ A Christian ritual that is meant to be a symbol of spiritual reality. (“Sacrament Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sacrament>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

³⁹ An atheist is an individual who does not believe in god. (“Atheist Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/atheist>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

⁴⁰ Catholic Action is a group of Catholic people who promote Catholic influence onto society. (“Catholic Action.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Action. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

⁴¹ The Pope is an individual who is a bishop and head of the Roman church. (“Pope Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pope>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

⁴² The Conclave is a meeting of the Roman Cardinals to elect the new Pope. (“Conclave Definition & Meaning.” Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conclave>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

To the laity,⁴³ the people are taught that they are the flock in the hands of the pastors⁴⁴ and that they must obey, there is not equality. Well, you imagine inside a Church that thinks like this, that is structured like that, the most important lay association says exactly the opposite; that is Catholic Action, which is a true force inside the Church, votes at all levels: the parish,⁴⁵ the diocese,⁴⁶ the national level, and only lay people are appointed; the priests⁴⁷ cannot vote and cannot be voted in, so it is a body where dissent is organized democratically. That was a formidable school because not only did I learn how democracy is organized, but I learned how much democracy must fight to stay democratic when around you you have a system that isn't democratic. So it was very important for me, for my activism; when then I participated in "pure" political groups--so to say--dealing with a State like the Italian one, that is democratic "until page 5," [*not fully democratic,*] a little yes but a little no, especially regarding political independence. The State--you are a threat to the unity of the State, so it is very common to have to deal with law enforcement agencies...From Catholic Action in Italy have come many of the political managing classes, a large part of the leftist political figures came from Catholic Action, whereas the rightist Catholic figures came from Communion and Liberation [*a branch of Catholic Action,*] for example of from other...From the Scouts,⁴⁸ that is Matteo Renzi⁴⁹ for example came from the Scouts because they are structured much more hierarchically; the Scouts have uniforms, they have bosses, community heads; Catholic Action doesn't have community heads; you hold a position for three years, then you go away and you cannot do more than two consecutive terms, so a maximum of six years, then you leave, so everyone is expendable, nobody takes power; everyone makes a contribution, performs a service. This was very interesting and valuable for me. In this moment, if I think of the Italian situation--don't ever forget the weight of the Catholic background in the Italian political classes--the most read

⁴³ The laity are people of the religion, different from the clergy of the religion. ("Laity Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/laity>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

⁴⁴ A pastor is an individual of the clergy who serves a local church. ("Pastor Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pastor>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

⁴⁵ A parish is a small local church that contains its own clergy. ("Parish Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/parish>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

⁴⁶ Diocese refers to the the area a bishop has jurisdiction over. ("Diocese Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diocese>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

⁴⁷ A priest is an individual who is allowed to perform the rituals of a certain religion as a bridge between humans and god. ("Priest Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/priest>. Accessed 16 August 2022.)

⁴⁸ Scouts are young boys of a similar age group in a troop that teaches young boys outdoor activities in the hope of building good qualities in the boys. Certain troops can be affiliated with different organizations, like the Catholic Church. ("Scout (Scouting)." Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scout_\(Scouting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scout_(Scouting)). Accessed 18 August 2022.)

⁴⁹ Matteo Renzi is an Italian politician who served as the prime minister of the country from 2014-2016 and is currently the senator. Renzi grew up in a Catholic family and as a boy was a Scout in the Association of Catholic Guides and Scouts of Italy. ("Matteo Renzi." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matteo_Renzi. Accessed 18 August 2022.)

newspaper on the left against the populist Salvini government⁵⁰ is L'Espresso,⁵¹ the weekly Espresso, that is a part of the Repubblica group;⁵² well, the director of L'Espresso, the illustrators of the Espresso are a part of the and a part of its contributors have all been part of Catholic Action, including me, yes.

LD: Interesting. I have to read more... Okay, can you tell me about your first political action? What were you trying to do and how did you decide to do it?

MM: It is a slightly strange question.

LD: Why?

MM: Because I am convinced that all actions are political. I was taking a political action when I was a candidate for class representative at my high school. It is formally not a political role...but it is because you represent; politics is representation and mediation, from a very young age I had the attitude to represent and mediate, so when I was 15 I was a candidate for student representative and I did it, so yes, my first political role was that. From that moment on...That is I do politics when I write a novel, too, I am always political.

LD: Yes, yes, but the first time was there a strong reason for...at school, yes, to run for election?

MM: I don't know if...There is the fact that my first personal experience, family, taught me to make decisions very early and to take responsibility for myself and of my actions really early. This thing here is called "leadership;" if you know how to do it for you, you can do it for everyone. People spontaneously recognize who knows how to do this and they say "seeing that you know how to do it better, do it for me too". The others tell you "represent me". And in that case you could say "no, I want to think only of myself, it is true, I know how to do it, but I do it for me" or you can say "well, for a little while I can do it for everyone, not forever, but for a bit I can do it; now I am here, I am in this class, you trust in me, I want to do it, I can do it, I do it." There wasn't a big injustice to combat. You have school elections every year and they are a part of the school

⁵⁰ Matteo Salvini is the current senator of Italy and was the Deputy Prime Minister of Italy from 2018 to 2019. Salvini's government is known for being a part of the neo-nationalist movement and their stance against illegal immigration in Europe. ("Matteo Salvini. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matteo_Salvini. Accessed 18 August 2022.)

⁵¹ L'Espresso is an Italian magazine that mainly investigates corruption in Italy's Christian Democracy and is known for exposing scandals in Italy's health and housing industries during the 1950s. ("L'Espresso." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27Espresso>. Accessed 18 August 2022.)

⁵² La Repubblica is a centre-left Italian newspaper that was founded by a previous director of L'Espresso. Over the years, the newspaper has progressively moved more toward the centre politically. ("la Repubblica." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Repubblica. Accessed 18 August 2022.)

bureaucracy.⁵³ It can end up that there is a battle to fight, but it depends...Politics don't exist only for the battles, part of political actions is about the maintenance of the presence.

LD: Yes, okay. How did you come in contact with the movements, for the rights of women or feminists?

MM: Eh... It is difficult to respond because a movement for women's rights doesn't exist in the sense that, in the Sardinian context of my youth, nothing like this existed. I felt the injustice but I didn't see the framework that would fight it. I could find women who agreed with me, but this didn't lead to joint action, there wasn't a common political push. Then the internet arrived and the internet changed everything. Suddenly things that you hadn't known arrived at home; reality that you hadn't imagined knocked on the door, first by computer and then by smartphone, and you realized that many...Everywhere there were women who were thinking like you and everyone believed they were alone, but we had a powerful instrument that our mothers hadn't had. This on the one hand makes you understand how monumental and tiring their fight was because for them the place of encounters was the streets, and also the parties; that is by means of the ordinary political subjects, the feminists could also act. The Communist Party⁵⁴ was important for feminists of those years, but for us today it's different, it is completely different. When I was 18 a thing like Me Too⁵⁵ wasn't imaginable. Also to declare oneself a feminist in a little town like mine was to say that in your house something was wrong with your husband, and many women didn't want to personalize the fight; each said "fight for the rights of the others, not for mine," even my mother. This thing here...I am very happy to live in the age of the internet because without the internet, I would probably never have found the courage to call myself a feminist, because in my environment of origin nobody uses this word any more, it was too Seventies, I don't know...

LD: Yes, yes. Do you remember any "aha" moments...? Do you get that?

MM: Yes, I remember them because I studied theology and if you study the dynamics of the Catholic Church you are continually faced with difference and discrimination, but you think that it is in the scripture;⁵⁶ however, when I started to study theology, I saw

⁵³ A bureaucracy is a hierarchical type of government in which there are rigid rules and regulations that must be followed. ("Bureaucracy Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bureaucracy>. Accessed 18 August 2022.)

⁵⁴ The Communist Party is a political party in which there is a dictatorship and prioritizes the values of the working class. ("Communist Party." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_party. Accessed 18 August 2022.)

⁵⁵ The Me Too movement is dedicated to helping empower women who have experienced sexual violence and protecting the rights of women. ("What is the #MeToo Movement?" Verywell mind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-the-metoo-movement-4774817>. Accessed 18 August 2022.)

⁵⁶ The scripture is the sacred books of the Bible. ("Scripture Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/scripture>. Accessed 18 August 2022.)

that there wasn't in the scripture, in the scriptural translation, so male chauvinism had affected the interpretation. That is to say that God is not a male chauvinist, but those who believed in God over the centuries were very sexist, and so to be able to put my hands on the biblical texts in their true language, so to speak, untranslated, and to see that the text was free, not discriminatory was very important to me.

LD: Okay. During university did you participate in political activity?

MM: In theology it is not very easy to participate in political activities because you study within the institutes of Religious Sciences⁵⁷ and within the Pontifical schools,⁵⁸ they are not places where politics are well accepted, but I was lucky. I would have followed a course like all the others probably, but one teacher, a very enlightened professor, perhaps picking up on my sensibilities, told me to "read this book" and gave me an incredible book by a theologian named Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza,⁵⁹ she is an American theologian, and the book is called *In memory of her*.⁶⁰ He told me to "read this," it was a Protestant⁶¹ book. In theology you study regardless of denomination;⁶² it isn't that Catholic theology is based only on Catholic thinkers, it is based on everyone. And so it wasn't strange that he gave me a book by a Protestant, it was strange that he gave me a book by a feminist, because Schüssler Fiorenza was very radical, she talked of the "Women's Church". So I read this book and my perspective changed from this to that. From that moment on, I dedicated all of my intellectual efforts to unmask the sexism in the interpretation of the scripture, so my political action was an intellectual action, that is to provide complex tools, to provide words to the people who hadn't had them, to provide examples. For ten years I did almost nothing but take famous biblical parables⁶³ and compare the original with the sexist version. When I started to write

⁵⁷ The Institutes of Religious Sciences are higher education programs across the world that teaches Catholicism in relation to education and teaching. ("Higher Institute for Religious Sciences." UPRA. <https://www.upra.org/en/offerta-formativa/istituti/istituto-superiore-di-scienze-religiose/>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁵⁸ Pontifical schools are universities whose teachings are specifically approved by the Pope and teach Theology, Philosophy, and Canon Law all in relation to Christianity. ("Pontifical university." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontifical_university. Accessed 18 August 2022.)

⁵⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is a research professor of Divinity at Harvard and is known for her work on biblical interpretation and feminist theology. She has served on the boards of many biblical societies and has received honorary doctorates from many universities all over the world for her work. ("Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza." Harvard Divinity School. <https://hds.harvard.edu/people/elisabeth-schussler-fiorenza>. Accessed 18 August 2022.)

⁶⁰ *In memory of her* by Elisabeth Fiorenza is an analysis of the origin of Christianity through a feminist, theological, and historical lens. ("In Memory of Her." Harvard University. <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/elisabethschusslerfiorenza/memory-her>. Accessed 18 August 2022.)

⁶¹ A Protestant is an individual that belongs to a sect of Christianity other than the Catholic or Eastern church. ("Protestant Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/protestant>. Accessed 18 August 2022.)

⁶² Denomination refers to different religious institutions that are united by similar teachings. ("Denomination Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/denomination>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁶³ Biblical parables are stories that are used to explain certain lessons or morals from the Bible. ("What Is a Parable in the Bible? Meaning and 10 Examples." Christianity.

many years later, when I was 35, I published a book called *Ave Mary. E la Chiesa inventò la donna* [*Ave Mary. And the Church invented the woman,*] in which I picked up on this path and for the first time my work, that was born in a theological environment, left that environment and was published in an editorial house that sells in ordinary bookstores; so people that had never discussed theology, but had been educated in Catholicism, and so knew those parables, were able to see the results of critical theological studies, of gender studies applied to the Bible, so. So that was for me the way in which I did politics. There wasn't a need to oppose the hierarchy; because you didn't have to oppose the hierarchy when you could use the tools of the hierarchy against them.

LD: This is my central question: there are other women that had experiences similar to you, not exactly, but they did not become activists. In your opinion what are the factors, personality, experience, etcetera, that distinguish you from them?

MM: There is a characteristic variable that cannot be explained. There are people for whom this is important and others for whom it is not, but there is one...I think there is an important question: I have always been very cold with respect to all the different versions of femininity, I have never thought that my fulfillment would be obtained through marriage and motherhood. I believe that my mother never knew how to make the most radical feminist choice because she was married and because she had us two and at a certain point children and a husband create for you a bigger role than your ideas; there is too much at stake, too much on you. Matricentrism becomes a cage because that is how your love is expressed. And I believe that my mother truly believed she was protecting us by not engaging in these fights, because by doing so my father would have become more violent (because the patriarchy defends itself.) From the time I was very young I always knew that I didn't want to depend on a man and especially that I didn't want children, so...I didn't want babies, I wanted children but not babies, so I knew, when the moment arrives, I will do what they did to me, that is, I will have children of the soul, but they have to be big, they must not be little. Their destiny cannot depend on my choices or non-choices. I must always be free to be radical. A baby impedes you from being radical because the consequences of radicalism⁶⁴ are always tough; you can pay them but you cannot make a person much younger than you pay. This thing here marked the difference with many of my girlfriends who had experiences similar to mine but got married at 25 years old or became pregnant at 23, and from that moment their life changed. I, the more they got married and had children, and I observed what happened to their choices, to their passions, to their aspirations, the more I decided that those choices were not mine.

<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/parable-bible-meaning-examples.html>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁶⁴ Radicalism is the idea that the government needs to be revolutionized. ("Radicalism." Vocabulary. <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/radicalism>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

LD: Very interesting perspective, I agree...

MM: It is a terrible thing that I am saying, that to be free women have to be sterile and alone, unless they are so strong socially and economically so as to be able to construct another model of relating both with men and their children. I had this luck because I am very strong...I have a social position that allows me to reestablish all the rules, but I know that I am an exception. My wish is to understand how a woman, who is not rich and not a celebrity, how can she live in her normal life with the same freedom that I have. Everyone knows that the rich are freer, that those who are famous have bigger margins of freedom. The problem...This is why they are called rights, because there are those who cannot buy them, otherwise they are privileges.

LD: But you talked of personality factors too, for example a strong sense of justice. Are there other "you" factors, I don't know which ones...?

MM: Lauren, I am a child of abuse. I am a child that grew up in the arms of a violent father. There there are two choices, in cases like mine, in families like mine, there are two ways of being in the world: you are the one who beats or you are the one who is beaten. I saw what was happening and I said "I will not be the beaten one, if I have to be in a place in the world it has to be as one who gives it, not one who takes it" so from a very early age I understood the idea that all expressions of will were violent. This brought me to be in the front line more from anger than from conviction; within that front line, however, my conviction was formed. So many girls that had my same convictions didn't have to use them for survival; they were more fortunate, their lives were smoother, they didn't have to fight and so they never discovered how much like "generals" they could be. I discovered it very early and this is not a good thing. Character is formed within difficulties, or they break you or you become that which breaks. Today I have to be careful not to reproduce the violence. Every day I have to pay attention to this and it is also one of the reasons that I didn't have children, and when sometimes they say to me "ah, certainly..." when people, women for example, or also those who want to criticize my feminist positions say to me "you don't have a boyfriend because of fear of becoming like his mother" are stupid. I am not afraid of becoming like my mother, I am afraid of becoming like my father, that seems much worse to me, so I tend to reproduce power relationships of that type. Even to assume a leadership position means being faced every day with the risk of surpassing the limits, of passing from leader to boss, inspiration to command. It is very complicated, it is very complicated, but it is also the only way that we have not to just divide society into oppressors and victims, this way of seeing society is a way...It is the jungle, and the survival of the fittest. Democracy breaks the law of the jungle. I believe that in democracy there are the tools to be powerful together and not only powerful against one another.

LD: How important are relationships in your activism? Do you have close personal relationships with other activists?

MM: They are fundamental, they are fundamental. Between women in particular, also because men don't participate in the feminist battle, they don't do it much, the gays don't do it. Feminists show up a lot for LGBT⁶⁵ causes, but the LGBT world doesn't ever show up for non-LGBT causes and this... There is a lot of misogyny⁶⁶ in the gay male world, I believe also in the gay female world, but it takes other forms. In every case to be a feminist is to be alone with other feminists and necessarily the relationships become important. We legitimate ourselves with the others continually: Giulia [Blasi] told you "call Michela". It happens a thousand times that they say to me "who can we talk to other than you?" and I say Giulia, I say Maddalena [Vianello], I say Francesca [?], I say the others because... And each one has an area of interest. I deal with the media communication, it is important to me to expose that sexism; Giulia does work specifically on harassment, on business communication; others do work on literature, on representation. Each one has their area of interest, but all of us know that it is such a complex battle that nobody can fight it by themselves. And besides we have to battle the popular myth that wants women to be the worst enemies of themselves: "Ah, you women, they put four of you in a room and you fight, you are not capable of networking". Women are much more capable of networking, not because they are better, but because historically there hasn't ever been a woman so powerful that she can command others. Power has always been non-hierarchical and often been mutually supportive. It is just a question of historical heredity.

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

MM: The parties hate feminists at all levels and especially the Italian political parties have a serious problem with gender representation, in that none of the parties has a woman leader, except the extreme right, paradoxically,⁶⁷ no? Actually no, pure matricentrism, that is when a woman knows how to be a man better than a man she becomes a right-wing leader. On the question of the homosexuals I already told you, that world is very self-referential,⁶⁸ and yet it is a stupid way of behaving because

⁶⁵ LGBT is an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. It is used to refer to an individual's sexual orientation and gender identity. ("Defining LGBTQIA+." The Center. <https://gaycenter.org/about/lgbtq/>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁶⁶ Misogyny refers to prejudice against women. ("Misogyny Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/misogyny>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁶⁷ Paradoxically describes when something contradicts itself. ("Paradoxically Definition & Meaning." Dictionary. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/paradoxically>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁶⁸ Self-referential is defined as when something refers to itself. For instance, a film about making films is self-referential. ("Self-referential definition & meaning." Collins English Dictionary. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/self-referential>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

homophobic discrimination depends on feminine derogation.⁶⁹ The heterosexual macho man or the presumed one hates gays because gay is closer to women, so it is inferior for that reason. If homosexuals don't defend women's rights they don't defend their own; women have understood this, the homosexuals much less. Then with other rights, you know, the workers...Paradoxically many of the feminist claims are perceived as a danger for other weak categories. The fact that women want to work is read as supposedly depriving men of their jobs; not only, the fact that women want to work and have children in Italy is super-problematic, because everyone tells you "you want society to pay for your pregnancy; if you want to become a mother, be a mother," so many women are choosing, "choosing" so to speak, to not have children so they can work. Every time there is an economic crisis the first ones to lose their jobs are women and, even though this is evident, no labor union takes to the streets for this, it's tolerated just as the salary difference is tolerated on all fronts, there isn't equitable pay, equal, equal pay, and no party does it right, this isn't a battle, everyone is convinced that women have to earn less. You think that in Italy the female athletes are not professionals, not one of them is, female professionals don't exist, despite their gold medals, despite their Olympic records, they are all amateurs, they don't have time cards,⁷⁰ they don't have the same type of insurance protection,⁷¹ the same paycheck, they don't have the high pay, they don't have the big sponsors, and this is obviously...Many of them, to be able to participate have to join the armed forces because in the armed forces there are athletic sections that they pay for, they have insurance guarantees that they can be athletes. Federica Pellegrini,⁷² the great gold-medal swimmer is a carabinieri [*a member of the Italian military police,]*; all of the women fencers⁷³ are carabinieri or members of [*La Guardia di,] Finanza [police force of the Minister of Economy and Finance,]* or... that is members of the police; the women soccer players are not professionals, not even in Serie A [*the top level of professional soccer competition,]*; they are all amateurs. Why haven't we taken to the streets yet? The work that I am doing is on the pages of the newspapers, for example: all of the front pages of La Repubblica or of di Corriere (*della Sera,)* have few women and no political women; all deal with themes or women or do interviews with a man or are concerned with local

⁶⁹ Feminine derogation is the idea that women are worth very little. ("DEROGATION." Lexico. <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/derogation>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁷⁰ A time card is a card used to track when an employee starts and stops their job each day. ("Time card Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/time%20card>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁷¹ Insurance protection is an example of risk management. An individual can purchase insurance and pay a certain amount annually to protect their costly investments or belongings. ("Insurance." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insurance>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁷² Federica Pellegrini was a world renowned Italian swimmer. She currently holds the women's world record for 200 meters freestyle and is the only swimmer to have won 8 consecutive medals in the same event at the World Championships. ("Federica Pellegrini." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federica_Pellegrini. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁷³ A fencer is an individual who practices the sport of fencing. Fencing is a sport in which two individuals with a sword fight each other to score points against each other. ("Fencing Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fencing>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

news, but there is never a women that explains things that are happening, that is they are always in the lifestyle section.

LD: Yes, I understand. Okay. What does the word feminism mean to you?

MM: I want to hope that it means what it meant in the seventies. For me feminism is even to this day the radical assertion that women are people. Oh, yes, we are boring, but you can't take it for granted because it comes down to people, not special people, not the worst people or the best people, "people": all of the rights of the other people have to be women's rights, that is, human rights; women's rights are human rights. If you don't accept that women are people, if you accept that women are paid less, that they have less freedom, that they are less safe...you are questioning that women are people, you are saying "yes, they are people" in a certain sense, but in another sense no. And so even now it means this and I realize that for young women this isn't true because they think that feminism is the opposite of male chauvinism, for which being feminist means you have to reverse the power relationships, to leave the model like it is but to change the place of men and women. And they tell me "but I don't want to wage war on men, I don't want..." But feminist isn't the opposite of male chauvinism, feminist is the opposite of injustice, it is the opposite of discrimination; male chauvinism is discrimination,⁷⁴ it is injustice. So, yes, it means this to me: women are people; if you accept this, fighting for their equality is normal.

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

MM: This is difficult. One thing yes, however, I can say. Maybe ten years ago I would not have answered this question, now, however, yes. At the beginning of my career there was a public moment that was very very virulent,⁷⁵ that was a type of "casus belli," [*Latin term meaning an act that provokes a war,*] that is in my life it remained like a beacon. I was picking up the Campiello prize,⁷⁶ that is the second most important literary prize in Italy, and before we were given the prize there was a young woman writer who was winning the Campiello Giovani. The award ceremony took place at La Fenice theater in Venice,⁷⁷ so it was a very elegant contest, very...so, very elegant. We

⁷⁴ Discrimination is defined as prejudiced treatment or beliefs. ("Discrimination Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discrimination>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁷⁵ Virulent is defined as something that is exceptionally strong. ("Virulent Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/virulent>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁷⁶ The Campiello prize is an annual literary award in Italy that is judged by 300 readers, all from different backgrounds in Italy. ("Premio Campiello." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Premio_Campiello. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁷⁷ La Fenice is an Opera theater in Venice that is highly respected due to several world renowned composers whose work was performed there during the 19th century. ("La Fenice." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Fenice. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

were on the stage, she was sitting in the first row. The host of the evening was Bruno Vespa,⁷⁸ so the most important Italian political host, the man that for thirty years has had a televised salon where politicians sit (it's called "Door to door") and Bruno Vespa said "now we award the Campiello Giovani, it goes to Silvia Avallone,"⁷⁹ so this woman writer that was debuting, she was 26, she was invited onto the stage; she gets up and comes up the steps. She was wearing a very beautiful evening dress with a beautiful neckline; she is very beautiful. Bruno Vespa gave her his hand to help her to climb the last step and he looked at her neckline and said, "oh, I ask the director to frame this amazing neckline". In that moment Silvia had to turn in front of the whole theater, and those watching on the television at home, they were all looking at her breasts because the director had framed her breasts. I was shocked and I said "how is it possible that this is happening in front of me?" I was to be awarded my prize after this and I had to pretend to have not seen what I saw? I had to smile too, let it slide and say "all right, it isn't serious, he was joking...I have to do this?" I didn't do it; while I was receiving my prize a journalist asked me "what did you think of Bruno Vespa?" and I said "Bruno Vespa is an old pig". He is an old pig because he used a violence of power on that girl, not desire; she was there because she had written a book, he treated her as if she was there for her neckline and forced everyone that was watching to look at her body, rather than the person she was. Well, the next day all the headlines read: "Premio Campiello Michela Murgia says 'Bruno Vespa is an old pig' etcetera, 'Controversy about Silvia Avallone's décolleté'⁸⁰ etc." What happened that week? What happened was that I was left alone for having done this. They told me "but if she didn't complain, why did you have to complain?" Because she is 26 and was debuting, I am 35 and I am stronger (I won the biggest prize and so nobody could say to me "you're jealous because she was awarded a prize and you weren't") and because anyway, whether she complains or not, the representation of that relationship threatens us all; I wasn't doing it for her, it was for me and for my daughters, for my niece, for my sister, for all the women that were watching, because this was happening on the stage and tomorrow it happens on the street, only that it happens on television it becomes social pedagogy.⁸¹ Then they said to me "you are jealous because he didn't say it to you" (women said this to me too). The men turned away like it wasn't their problem. The only man that stood by my side at

⁷⁸ Bruno Vespa is a controversial Italian journalist. Many of his commentaries on live television have been criticized by other Italian journalists. He is known to be a strong supporter of Silvio Berlusconi. ("Bruno Vespa." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruno_Vespa. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁷⁹ Silvia Avallone is an Italian author and poet who won the Premio Campiello in 2010. She has 6 published works. ("Silvia Avallone." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silvia_Avallone. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁸⁰ Décolleté refers to a something having a low neckline, usually women's clothing. ("Décolleté Definition & Meaning." Merriam-Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/décolleté>. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

⁸¹ Social pedagogy is a specificity way of working in an educational setting in which people work together over the course of many years. This way of teaching places an importance on social inequality and learning. ("Social pedagogy." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_pedagogy. Accessed 19 August 2022.)

that moment is the journalist Gad Lerner,⁸² but all the others didn't do it (not even the leftist journalists); all of them said to me, "exaggerated, you didn't have to make a fuss, you didn't have to..." Now if I have to say what there is to learn from that, I would say every time that a woman has the courage to point out a patriarchal mechanism in the moment and say "look at that this thing that threatens us all, that ruins us all," we say it, not smiling, not saying, "all right, it's not serious". It is very serious, don't leave them alone. Who has the courage to raise their hand and say "this thing that is happening is disgusting" must not be left alone. So anyway, I went on my way and I've built my profile more strongly on this even as a political activist, but many women in their context, they thought they didn't have that power and so they kept silent. In my opinion, it would have been important in that moment for other women to also say "what happened is serious". We are afraid of paying too high of a price for our dissent.

LD: I agree. Okay. Is there anything else you would like to say?

MM: (*shakes her head,*) I have the feeling of having said too much.

LD: Oh, no, you are very introspective and this is a good interview.

MM: You are asking me personal questions, I have to be introspective.

LD: Yes, I am very interested, I am a psychologist. Thanks so much.

MM: Thank you.

⁸² Gad Lerner is an Italian journalist and was one of the founding members of the Italian Democratic party. In the past, Lerner has left news broadcasting service companies and the Italian Democratic party over differing beliefs with other people. ("Gad Lerner." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gad_Lerner. Accessed 19 August 2022.)