

INTERVIEW WITH LEILA SIMONA TALANI

Leila Simona Talani is the editor of the volume *Women in the Mediterranean* (Routledge 2018), together with Serena Giusti, which served as point of departure and inspiration to the second Mediterranean Studies Symposium held virtually in June 2022. Talani is professor of International Political Economy and director of the Centre for Italian Politics @ European and International Studies at King's College, London, editor of the Palgrave series on the Politics of Migration and Citizenship as well as author of many scholarly publications, such as *The IPE of migration in The globalization era* (Palgrave 2022); *The Political Economy of Italy in the Euro* (Palgrave 2017), *The Handbook of the International Political Economy of Migration* (Edward Elgar, 2014-2017); *The Arab Spring in the Global Political Economy* (Palgrave, 2014),

Q. What is your definition of Mediterranean?

A. The Mediterranean is the mother of civilization.

Q. And how is the definition of “Mediterranean woman” linked or not to your definition of the term “Mediterranean”?

A. If the Mediterranean is a mother is a woman by definition

Q. What did prompt you to work on the theme of Mediterranean women?

A. The existence of inequalities and discriminations against women in the Mediterranean area.

Q. Your recent collective volume *Women in the Mediterranean* covers gender discriminations and inequalities, the equally serious but different challenges women have on the two shores of the Mediterranean as well as of the activism and feminism proved by the women in these areas. Could you summarize these challenges and activities and possibly update us on the status of these women's rights and obstacles?

A. Women face discriminations in the family, in society and in the economy on the two shores of the Mediterranean. Obviously different countries face different challenges and it is not here the place to review them all. But the common element is the persistence of gender inequalities and discrimination which do not seem to be easy to overcome. Female literacy rate in Egypt is 66% in 2017 the world average is 77%. Female employment rate in Italy is 40% in 2021 the world average is 46%, in the UK is 58% (World Bank data).

Q. Do you believe that these challenges and approaches to face them are different for women of/in other parts of the world and why?

A. Yes, they are. For cultural and historical reasons, but they exist all over the globe. I don't think there is a single element that explain all differences in the Mediterranean area.

Q. Do you believe that great publications on the topic like yours and attempts like ours to continue to discuss these issues can bring forth some change?

A. Yes, at least in terms of knowledge and awareness.

Q. Considering the long-standing challenges of women and the current situation, as you mentioned even in your introduction, how do you envision the role and position of women could change?

A. Women empowerment would start from giving them more opportunities to study and join the labour markets. Economic independence and knowledge are at the basis of their emancipation.