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The Hidden Working Class: Wages for
Housework and the Proto-Intersectionality of
Autonomous Branching.

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INTRODUCTION:

Why Wages for Housework?

Three years ago, coincidentally with the beginning of my experience as a university student, I began expanding my knowledge on themes I felt really close to me.

Raised in a working-class family by a factory worker and a housewife with limited education and income, I was the first one able to pursue university and leave the boundaries of my very small town.

What started as a personal research to answer my own doubts and hopes, made me realize how much elements that first felt disconnected between each other, such as feminism, queerness or class struggles were actually far more intertwined than I had previously understood. While I was already familiar with the concepts of intersectionality, my involvement and interest in Padua's intellectual and activist circles indirectly introduced me to the work of the *Wages for Housework* Movement (WfH). Their radical critique of labor, particularly domestic labor, and its connection to gender oppression, profoundly influenced my views, in particular my perspective on how older feminist movements organized.

The prolificity of historical material on this movement, alongside the noticeable lack of contemporary discourse in the region that saw the birth and dawn of such a wide movement, compelled me to dive deeper.

This is why I began researching the practices, theories, and political strategies of the movement, heavily seeking to understand how the insight of feminists from 50 years ago could be applied to current struggles.

This exploration has not only shaped the focus of my academic research but also my broader commitment to addressing the overlapping forms of oppression that affect marginalized communities.

This is why in this thesis, I explore the development of the Wages for Housework Movement both nationally and internationally, by looking at its core demands and the social context from which they emerged.

I also decided to further my analysis on how the movement's critique of domestic labor intersects with other forms of oppression, particularly those related to race, class, and sexuality.

By situating the Wages for Housework Movement within a broader framework of intersectional theory, I tried my best to illuminate its continued relevance in contemporary feminist and labor movements using the cultural gifts of women before me.

Why Housework as the central condition?

As other currents of feminism define the foundation of women's exploitation as either the sexism of patriarchal culture, biology, or their sexual domination, intellectuals coming from the *Wages for Housework* scene focus on the exploitation they receive within capitalistic society, specifically on the basis of the work performed by them.

Since the dawn of capitalism, domestic work has never been "exchanged" for wages, and because of this, any type of struggles over its conditions has been weaker than the one by waged people.

Under their own shackles of capitalism, working class men have been bound to intensify their power against the rest of the class by oppressing and dominating those whom capital has left to remain poor or without money.

Through the demand for wages for domestic work, women in the 70's challenged the image imposed on them by their first oppressor, the man, for the very first time. This demand allows women to reclaim their identity as workers, thereby reevaluating their relationship with capital without having to seek a secondary "outside" job. This shift in perspective clarifies the true enemies: first, the man, and second, in a more complex and overarching way, the state as the ultimate oppressor. The feminist subject thus transitions from being a mere supporter of other struggles to becoming the protagonist of its own fight, and being joined by students, the unemployed, and workers. The women reclaiming their own subjectivity during the 70's are many, but I want to focus on a specific movement created from the understanding of such intricate relations, the *Wages for Housework* movements.

In the general context of the fight taken on by these relevant militants, it's crucial to recognize that the demand of wages for domestic work is not the end goal. Instead, domestic work is the mean through which these activists frame their struggle.

The true objective of this strategy, centered on domestic work, is to build a material alternative that enables women to achieve the fundamental autonomy they need to reject such labor within the society they inhabit.

CHAPTER I
THE FIGHT AGAINST THE HOUSE CAGE: AN HISTORICAL
RECOLLECTION

1.0) GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE MAKING OF WAGES FOR
HOUSEWORK:

International settings:

What is now called neo-feminism or antequely defined as second wave feminism, appeared in a time and place that was very distant from actualizing those preached ideals.

Rudimentarily called “*first wave feminism*”¹, the former wave of action for universal suffrage leaves almost entirely no trace of itself in the world (apart from a few sporadic pieces of literature and theory) and rejects the political action of organizing intersectionally because of its deep root in white supremacy and classism, where many voices involved in the fight are white, cisgender and heterosexual.²

Motivated by an absence of prior history or social change, and endorsed by the political state of society, women born in the postwar years begin seeking a theoretical basis for their new idea of feminism.

The aim of reversing the current economic structure, now at its late stage, is one followed by a multitude of movements created and uplifted during the 60s, the same ones that would unfold a wave of unprecedented mobilization from the student and workerist movements and by communities such as the African American,

¹ (1848-1920) The first wave particularly fought for a universal suffrage, advocating for the right to vote and participate equally in the political process, but the majority of members were white heterosexual women, often racist.

² Toupin, L. et al. (2018) *Wages for housework: a history of an International feminist movement, 1972-77*. London Vancouver (BC): Pluto Press UBC Press.

Indigenous and Queer communities, each of them led by a common anti-authoritarian objective.

Women coming of age in the post-war are no strangers to this activist surge and often partake actively in it, being personally affected by these intersecting struggles. Factually, neo-feminism is brought to life around and thanks to these strong progressive waves of action, so to analyze the shift and achievements made by Wages for Housework, I must account how they were created, and around what influences they solidified.

Concurrently to the struggles experienced by women at the time, are three main trends:

The “*New Left*”, conjoining the workerist influences and Marxist studies of the time, strongly brought on by the ‘68 movements; the “*Women liberation front*”, or women’s lib trend, around which my study is centered, which also includes leftist feminism as a radical practice; and the contradictorily coexisting “reformist liberal” trend.

In Europe, especially in Italy, France and Great Britain, the influence of traditional workerist movements and the theoretical teachings of Marxism were the driving forces that influenced political action and activism, unlike in America, where the “*Civil Rights movement*”³ and the anti-racist waves had a bigger role in shaping the social action of the time.

The New Left represents a space of “mixed-sex progressivism”⁴, which places women in a difficult position. The core struggles of the movement, such as racism, classism, and imperialism, align and overlap with women’s issues. However, the mixed strategies employed often fail to acknowledge the intersectional struggle of gendered discrimination, due to men in the movement not actively reflecting and

³ (1950-1960) The Civil Rights movement was a collective struggle from racialized people (mainly from African Americans) to dismantle racism and the segregation laws under the Jim Crow legislation in America.

⁴ Every left leaning group where men and women coexisted. (I am using a binary idea of sex because people outside of the gender spectrum were also present, but often excluded from mixed groups as they were predominantly cis-hetero spaces).

engaging on the discourse advanced by female activists and at best incorporating their struggles only as secondary concerns.

One of the key misunderstandings among male activists regarding domestic wages, is the belief that houseworkers need only “exit” the home and enter the wage market to earn a salary and be free from exploitation. This reflects a broader failure to acknowledge the significant amount of work women did, and still do, perform at home.

The humiliating viewpoints of male activists are neither surprising nor new, as they follow misogynistic stances already taken by activists and intellectuals before them, that did not only openly ignore the necessary intersectionality to unify their political action, but also openly criticized the internal feminist movements, objecting that they were the ones to create a divide in the fight and take away precious resources, which did lack since retained by the state, and not by other liberation groups.

The women’s liberation movement:

Inside of this leftist trend the “*Women’s Liberation Movement*” establishes itself within social political dynamics.

For its founders, the new type of mobilization represents a genuine liberation effort, that must always align with the anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist national liberation movements of that era, but it’s able to distinguish itself from other waves by utilizing a new strategy in which all efforts are made to specifically center women and to uproot their discrimination as the first piece in a falling line of dominos.

This distances them fundamentally from the leftist comrades, as the heart of their fight is purely based on the waged working class, thus often excluding women, especially housewives.

The imperative goal of the women’s liberation movement is to acknowledge and fight all the ways in which gender discrimination takes foot, so the exclusionary behaviors within the new left push a lot of them to leave the mixed-gender groups and join the developing feminist collectives.

This new movement is not solely formed by women and gender non-conforming people⁵ that seceded from the new left, but it emerges from the cooperation of different backgrounds such as: the hippies' waves; the aforementioned trans and homosexual rights movement; the civil rights efforts and the workerist and student unions.

The prolific heterogeneity “barging” into the predominantly white, cisgender and heterosexual feminist landscape was an essential tassel in the deconstruction⁶ of the strategies utilized within the socialist framework of white feminism, that often exclusively tackled the class struggle because of its descentance from Marx's and Engel's school of thought.

Without the intrinsic diversity present in these groups, the strategies employed to fight against systematic oppression might have not been as impactful as they were. These groups mainly focused on patriarchy as a core system of oppression, advocating for more radical and intersectional methods to address gender inequalities. Delving into the cultural, psychological, and interpersonal aspects of gender-based relations, which are frequently overlooked by the class-centered analyses of socialist feminists.

Because of this, the constituents received the appellative of “radical”, a term currently used with derogatory undertones, which as a matter of fact means “to search the root of exploitation”.

Radical thinking compels the upcoming groups to find new ways to practice their advocacy and gives them an impulse to look for different ways to experience life, view language and do theoretical research.

Helped by this wave of mental change, at the end of the sixties and the start on the new decade, feminist intellectuals generated a considerable amount of written analysis to discern the reasons of women's devaluation in society.

⁵ For the sake of simplicity I am using this term as an umbrella that includes but is not exclusive to: lesbians; nonbinary; genderfluid and queer people outside and along the gender spectrum, as at the time there may have not been a name for their identity, their experience is valid and worth mentioning.

⁶ Deconstructing is the process of breaking down mental structures and question their meanings and assumptions.

International introductions to the familiar struggle:

In the United States, 1966 marked the creation and expansion of the Black Power movement (1966-1972), a significant force in advocating against racial injustice and African American empowerment. This period was also characterized by widespread protests regarding the long lasting censorship of Vietnam War (1955-1975), driven by organizations such as the “*Free Speech Movement*” (1964) and the “*Vietnam Day Committee*” (1965-1968), which played a crucial role in mobilizing the public and demanding policy changes.

Around the same time millions of lower-class women began using welfare policies⁷ to gain direct access to money with the goal of raising their children and gain a certain level of independence from the state.

The first flush of requests came mainly from black women, affected the most by the lack of pay since the layered effect of racism in America made them more subject to lower wages and worst working conditions for exhausting jobs.

Meanwhile, in Europe, a massive wave of student uprisings, initially sparked by a wave of student-led protests, quickly took on an international dimension. Although these movements were initially characterized by their fragmented and decentralized nature, with various, independent and small groups participating, they collectively contributed to a broader global discourse on political and social reform.

In the United Kingdom, one of the key campaigns that united marginalized groups and women was centered around family allowances. After World War II, the British government recognized that, with the loss of so many men, the working-class children they were supposed to use to replace the losses were living in absolute poverty. To ensure the working class could sustain itself, the government allocated funds to support low income families.

Relying on a fundamentally misogynistic rhetoric, the government chose to give this money directly to women rather than men, assuming that women, due to their nurturing nature, would use the funds for the children, whereas men would not.

⁷ A welfare state is a government system that provides a range of social services and financial security of its citizens.

Consequently, women began receiving two pounds every Tuesday, one of the few forms of direct financial support they received, unlike in Italy, where the family allowance was given to men.

In 1973, the government attempted to revoke this modest sum from women's hands. However, this occurred at a time when feminist movements were gaining momentum, with discussions on economic autonomy already taking place within these circles. The mobilization was so widespread and powerful that the government ultimately failed in its attempt to withdraw the funds from women.

1.1) THE ITALIAN ROOTS OF WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK:

Italy was the birthplace of the Wages for Housework movement, making it crucial to analyze its political history, cultural influences, and the contributions of Italian intellectuals who shaped the movement. This analysis also intersects with the development of *Social Reproduction Theory* (SRT), which examines how societies sustain themselves through unpaid labor, often performed by women, that supports the workforce and capitalist economies. SRT emphasizes the role of social institutions and cultural norms in reinforcing gender and class inequalities, linking domestic labor to economic production.

Therefore, it is essential to shed light on this historical context by exploring both the unique Italian experience and the broader events that are key to understanding the international strategy. Italy's engagement with feminist theory is notable not only for its alignment with radical leftist ideologies but also for the practices that are critical for evolving and comprehending these theories.

Extra-parliamentary left and feminism:

It's imperative to remember that, although women were not organizing under a unified feminist agenda, they remained active within the extra-parliamentary landscape. During World War II, women under the fascist regime played a crucial role in the resistance alongside their male comrades. This period of active

involvement did not cease with the end of the war. In fact, their post-war experiences revealed a continued resistance to the socio-economic pressures of the time.⁸

After the war, women found themselves displaced from the jobs they had occupied while men were away, often relegated to roles resembling “job ghettos”⁹. These positions, such as nursing, teaching, and clerical work, were considered suitable for women due to the prevailing belief that they were naturally inclined toward such tasks. This perception reinforced gender stereotypes and limited women’s opportunities for advancement in the broader labor market.

Additionally, during this post-war period, women continued to make political choices in subtle yet significant ways. For instance, in response to the fascist party’s efforts to increase the birthrate, many women chose to have fewer children, leading to a noticeable decline in birthrates.

This trend persisted in the post-war era, leading to a notable absence of the anticipated baby boom in Italy.

This behavior can be attributed to multiple factors, including the anxiety and instability brought on by the war, which fostered a reluctance to support the capitalist demands for reproducing the working class. Women, exhausted from their roles during and after the war, were increasingly unwilling to perpetuate the existing socio-economic system’s demands.

The Catholic church and its war on women:

The Catholic Church has long been a central institution in upholding and perpetuating patriarchal structures, both within its hierarchy and in broader society. Rooted in centuries-old traditions and interpretations of scripture, the Church has consistently maintained a male-dominated leadership, with all positions of

⁸ Rousseau, C. (2016). Housework and social subversion: Wages, housework, and feminist activism in 1970s Italy and Canada (Doctoral dissertation). York University.

⁹ Toupin, L. et al. (2018) Wages for housework: a history of an international feminist movement, 1972-77. London Vancouver (BC): Pluto Press UBC Press.

significant religious authority, such as priests, bishops, and the papacy, reserved exclusively for men¹⁰. This exclusion of women from leadership roles not only reinforces male dominance within the religious system but also sends a powerful societal message about the perceived subordinate status of women. The Church's doctrines emphasize traditional gender roles, promoting the idea that women's primary roles are as mothers and caregivers, which has shaped laws and cultural norms around family, sexuality, and reproduction. This influence is reflected in the Church's stance against practices like female ordination, contraception, and abortion, all of which underscore a broader resistance to gender equality and perpetuate a system where male authority is normalized.

During the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, this dynamic became particularly evident in Italy, where the Catholic Church played a pivotal role in shaping gender norms and reinforcing the marginalization of women both within its own institutions and in society at large. At a time when feminist movements were challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for women's rights, the Church held firmly to its conservative doctrines that emphasized women's roles as mothers and caretakers, excluding them from positions of authority and decision-making. The Church's influence extended beyond ecclesiastical matters, impacting national debates over reproductive rights, divorce, and women's autonomy, as it actively lobbied against legal reforms that would expand access to contraception, abortion, and divorce, thereby exerting control over women's bodies and choices.¹¹ Yet, these decades also witnessed a growing resistance from Italian women, including Catholic feminists, who began to challenge these restrictions and advocate for a reinterpretation of their teachings to align more closely with principles of gender equality. This period was marked by a profound tension between a conservative religion seeking to preserve its authority and an emerging feminist wave demanding justice, equality, and liberation from patriarchal structures.

¹⁰ Haskins, C. Y. (2003). Gender bias in the Roman Catholic Church: Why can't women be priests? University of Maryland Law Journal of Race, Religion, Gender & Class.

¹¹ Crivellone, S. D. (2020). "The Italian Job": How Italy's long history of Catholicism has influenced a culture of maschilismo and misogyny. Senior Thesis. Pp.15

Creation of feminist spaces for a new social action:

In the late 1950s, a notable decline in support for leftist political movements occurred due to widespread paranoia and repression. Leftist groups faced significant public condemnation, leading to a challenging period for workers and political activists. However, political engagement became increasingly central to the shaping of post-war society and by the end of the decade the left regained popularity, driven by growing interest in the evolving cultural and political landscape.

Moreover, women from this generation, more integrated into higher education and involved in the establishment of the Republic, found greater access to political participation unlike their predecessors.

During the 1960s, intensified state repression against labor movements happening across various countries prompted a significant surge in activism among leftist groups, including communists, socialists, and anarchists. This period saw a broad coalition of left factions rallying in response to the crackdown, leading to heightened political engagement and mobilization.

The first feminist experiences associated with the second wave came from women within these extra-parliamentary groups, such as *Potere Operaio* (1969-1980)¹² and *Lotta Continua* (1969-1980)¹³ in Italy.

These political activists were living the same experience most women worldwide did, coexisting inside mixed-sex groups.

The lack of understanding from male comrades bordered on being suffocating, with one feminist reporting that “comrades called our fight against the criminalization

¹² Potere Operaio was a Marxist extra-parliamentary group focused on the mobilization of the working class using a decentralized approach.

¹³ Lotta Continua was a Marxist Leninist extra-parliamentary group in Italy focused on working class mobilizations using a centralized approach.

of abortions and divorce “*rivolta delle zanzare*” (mosquito revolt)”¹⁴. This made feminists seek new ways to organize a gender centered mobilization.

A subsequent push the feminist groups receive to further distance themselves to the politics and ideals of male groups in and out of state politics, is one regarding their behavior on the theme of nuclear families.

On December 1st of the year 1970 the *Baslini-Fortuna act* is voted into law, after a strong raise in marital separations during the preceding decade.

As the state party *Democrazia Cristiana* (1943-1994), a Christian moderate governing force loses its grip on the population and the masses shift to a secular mindset, it takes the last chance at control and requests a referendum for abrogation of said law in 1974.

Even if agreed upon by most parties (even the Italian Communist Party), the attempt miserably fails, with 59.3% voting against the referendum, with a voter turnout of 87.7%.¹⁵

Clearly stating that the will of the population is not mirrored by the government nor the church.

"...only a massive clash on such demands from all of us women in confronting the state can give us a new level of power in the daily struggles which we always...conduct against the conditions of domestic labour itself, external labour, services, procreation and sexuality.”¹⁶

Unbeknown to men-centered cultural spaces, these combined rejections make the efforts to create an organized network in Italy even stronger.

Two of the pillar intellectuals leaving Potere Operaio were Mariarosa Dalla Costa, freshly graduated and teaching at the faculty of Political and Social Sciences in Padova, and Leopoldina Fortunati, who was also an intellectual feminist in Social Sciences, from Trieste.

¹⁴ Bimonthly bulletin *Le operaie della casa*, 1° Maggio 1975 curated by the International Feminist Collective, Venezia- Padova, Marsilio 1975, p.8.

¹⁵ Abrogating referendum turnout of 1974.

¹⁶ Bimonthly bulletin *Le operaie della casa*, 1° Maggio 1975 curated by the International Feminist Collective, Venezia- Padova, Marsilio 1975, p.14.

It is foremost thanks to Dalla Costa's work of redefinition of womanhood under capitalism, using workerist language, that a theoretic framework for housework is brought into existence.

*"For women who came of age in the aftermath of WWII, the struggle against housework became a defining characteristic of feminist struggle"*¹⁷

Joined by several other activists interested in this approach, these intellectuals will then be at the center of the creation of "*Lotta Femminista*" (LF, initially called "*Movimento di Lotta Femminile*") in the June of 1971.

Originally stationed in Padova, Mestre and Trento, the FL groups will expand to Bologna, Ravenna, Florence, Varese, Reggio Emilia, Naples and Rome by the end of 1976.

Distancing from other liberation efforts:

Coming from different backgrounds and social circles, a plurality of movements began developing after the split from the left. Some of them continued having close relations with the leftist extra-parliamentary movements, like "*Movimento Liberazione Donna*", created around the same time (with a convergence of efforts in Rome) while others decided to completely dislocate their organizing efforts from the male lead groups.

On July 7 in 1972, *Lotta Femminista* organizes a separatist seminar on "female occupation" at the faculty of Education in Rome. The event is brutally interrupted by a group of comrades claiming to be members of *Potere Operaio*, who disrupt the encounter by "kicking, breaking glasses and throwing condoms filled with water".¹⁸

The episode will lead to a heated journalistic debate on the platforms "*Lotta Continua*" and "*Il Manifesto*" (newspapers owned by the new left), that will drag

¹⁷ Federici, S. (2012). Revolution at point zero: Housework, reproduction, and feminist struggle p.9

¹⁸ Dalla Costa, Mariarosa cited in Meo. Grazia M.V *The Italian Womens Movement: an Anthology*. University Press, 1987.

on for an entire month and end with the official and definite split of combined efforts with the male lead forces.

As these groups grew and evolved different strategies, they began organizing with different practices and beliefs, as for some, the best course of action was different than for others.

As Dalla Costa recalls: "In the 1970s in Italy there were two major animating spirits within feminism: one was self-awareness, the other the workerist feminism of Lotta Femminista for housework"¹⁹

The first group aimed at the practice of *autocoscienza* (self-awareness) and was influenced by psychoanalytic theories. Its members preferred a separatist approach that focused on acceptance and growth of women's empowerment from the inside. This meant dividing into small groups and pursuing new consciousness by sharing experiences, opinions and breaking the silence around taboo themes such as abortion, maternity and sexual relationships.

This strategy will be fundamental specifically for the conscious work made during the media's peak of interest and coverage on the abortion issue in Italy.

The other wave had instead a more similar approach to the workerist movements and was heavily based on Marxist works and critiques.

Not created from its own historical trend, the issue of house wages is a byproduct of years of both national and international work from mainly black and indigenous women and an added inspiration from the struggle on welfare state of English and American houseworkers.

Because of this, it focused on political struggles and public action in a more organized approach, where the axis of the mobilization is fixated on the condition of the woman in the house, and especially the unpaid work in the home, moving along the international efforts for "more money and less work"²⁰.

¹⁹ Mariarosa Dalla Costa, ed., *Isterectomia: Il problema sociale di un abuso contro le donne*, 3rd ed. (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2002)

²⁰ Translation by A. Salviato of "più soldi e meno lavoro" from "8 Marzo 1974, giornata internazionale di lotta delle donne". Edited by Collettivo Internazionale Femminista, Marsilio Editori, 1974. Collana Salario al Lavoro Domestico, Strategia Internazionale Femminista.

When *Lotta Femminista* officially ceases existing the 6 of October 1974, after a national coordinated encounter hosted in Padova, the two main classes of thought take different directions, creating their own groups: the self-awareness initiative is identified within Rivolta Femminista, an autonomous effort co-founded by Carla Lonzi, Elvira Banotti, Carla Accardi, and the Milan Women's Bookstore²¹.

While the feminist Marxist trend creates "*Sindacato Lotta Donna (SLD)*" group that starts the official Italian branch of campaign: Wages for Housework, called "*Lotta al salario per il lavoro domestico (Fight for a housework salary)*".

Creation of the International Feminist Collective:

Integral to the LF was a second issue: the discourse around the creation of an International Movement.

Initially most branches of SLD had some kind of communicative web, but every committee acted mostly independently since reactionary practices took many forms and regional differences were extremely strong.

Those calling for a national and international approach to wages for housework shared the desire for-a unified front of action, as a closer and more active group would hold more power and help to make effective demands to the state.

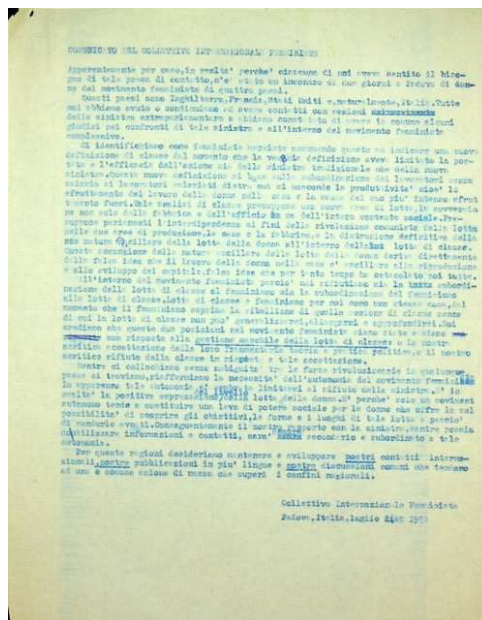
Twenty something activists meet in Padova in 1972, between these are Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, anticolonial militant from the *Notting Hill Group pf the London Women's Liberation*, Silvia Federici, Italian immigrant from Brooklyn and activist in the *Women's bank fund*²², the French activist Brigitte Galtier and the Italian scholar Alisa del Re.

In the meeting they discuss a common strategy of action about unpaid labour as a result begins the creation of the "*International Feminist Collective*" (1972-1977),

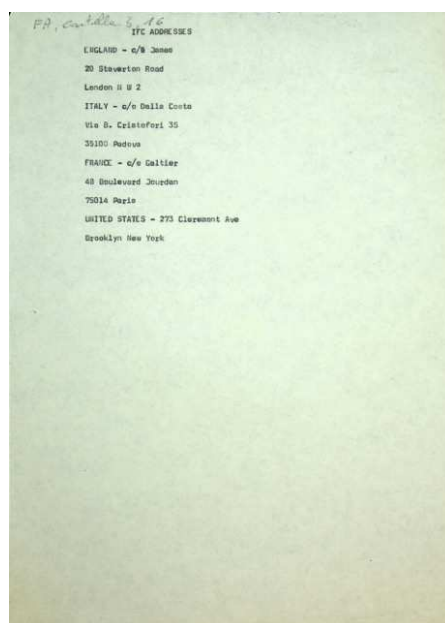
²¹ The Milan Women's Bookstore (Libreria delle Donne di Milano), founded in 1975, serves as both a bookstore and a cultural center, promoting feminist literature, organizing events, and fostering discussions on gender, politics, and society.

²² The Women's Bank Fund (Fondo per una banca delle donne) was a concept developed in the 1970s by the Italian feminist group Lotta Femminista. It was part of the movement's demand for wages for housework, aiming to compensate women for their unpaid domestic labor. The fund was envisioned as a financial institution managed by women, providing economic independence and challenging the capitalist structures that relied on women's unpaid work.

with its founding manifesto calling for “wages for all the wageless”²³ exhaustively describing the goals of the Wages for Housework Campaign.



(Figure 2.1) The founding document for the International Feminist Collective, (1972) Padova, from the Mariarosa Dalla Costa Archives



(Figure 2.2) Some signatures and names of the activists present for the creation International Feminist Collective, (1972) Padova, from the Mariarosa Dalla Costa Archives.

²³Federici, S. (2014). *Il punto zero della rivoluzione: Lavoro domestico, riproduzione e lotta femminista*. Traduzione e cura di Anna Curcio. Verona: Ombre Corte.

Counter-backing from the kitchen, strategy efforts:

In 1973 Mariarosa Dalla Costa, with the help from Silvia Federici, and the essential participation of Selma James, organizes a tour in America aimed at sharing and promoting the strategy of action of the *International Feminist Collective*.

Crucial in establishing a transnational dialogue and engaging with feminist and activists in the USA, the tour is composed by various events where Dalla Costa and James talk at universities, feminist gatherings and intellectual meetings around the country.

These encounters are vital for the creation of new groups and a communicative network in the movement, on top of raising money for the operations (as activism was a nonfunded effort).

After the USA dates James will have to continue the tour in Canada on her own, and Dalla Costa will have to go back to Italy to help with the abortion struggle, protagonist of the Italian mobilizations.

The spearheads of the interstate network in Italy are three Lotta Femminista branches: “*Group 1 in Padua*”²⁴, the “*Venice group*” and the “*Trieste group*”.

After some time of organizing together on copious political actions they will then merge and create the “*Tri-Veneto Committee for Wages for Housework*”²⁵ in 1973.

²⁴ I specifically refer to group one as there were two existing groups in Padova. The second one, referred to as the “Vial de Tadi” group, did not join the Tri-Veneto committee to focus only on local efforts.

²⁵ “Tri-Veneto” refers to the three Italian regions of Veneto, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, and Trentino-Alto-Adige, although the committee also maintained connections with groups beyond this geographical area.



(Figure 3) (6 December 1975) Manifestation in Rome, the shot shows a group holding a sign from the Tri-Veneto Committee.

From The 8th to the 10th of March, the groups (still under Lotta Femminista) will host a street event in Piazza Ferretto a Mestre, to increase visibility.

It is not by accident that the events stretch for three days and end on International Women's Day, as the Italian group declares: "Most women had no way to strike for a whole day from both waged and unwaged work, and those who put effort into the organization might not have been able to participate on Friday"²⁶.

In the itinerary were speeches, exhibitions of photos, songs, posters and screenings of feminist film that mainly extended to the first two days.

That weekend the first edition of "*Bollettino delle Donne*" gets distributed copresent with the first publication of "*le Operaie Della Casa*" with an excerpt by Mariarosa Dalla Costa. Both works are self-published texts containing experiences, pictures and accessible knowledge on the strategies for houseworkers.

The organization of the event doesn't stem from a reformist desire of celebration, but a true effort of organizational protests that peaks in a collective manifestation on the last day.

²⁶ Comitato Triveneto per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico. (1975). 8, 9, 10 marzo '74. *Un lungo week-end di lotta*. In Collettivo Internazionale Femminista (Ed.), 8 marzo 1974: Giornata internazionale di lotta delle donne. Marsilio. pp. 25-41.

May Day, “Le befane sono tornate”.



(Figure 4) Poster released in 1975 by Salario per il Lavoro Domestico groups in the Tri-Veneto region of northeastern Italy announcing a series of events in piazza Ferretto including theatrical performances, songs and speeches by group members.

The first of May 1975, internationally known as Labour Day or May Day, the International Feminist Collective organizes its first international demonstration in tandem with all the branches active at the time, as “it was about time for us to take over May Day”²⁷.

During the day of celebration, all places of work are close, and waged workers are given time to celebrate and rest. All but houseworkers, who still wash dishes and clothes, make lunch, iron clothes and take care of the family, as they do every day. The objective is to be present during a day reserved to waged workers and where housewives are deliberately ignored, and by occupying the streets collectively, impose a light on how the labour performed in the house should be recognized and safeguarded as much.

²⁷ *Le operaie della casa, 1° Maggio 1975* curated by the International Feminist Collective, Venezia- Padova, Marsilio 1975, p.4 Translated by A. Salviato. Original Text: “era più che suonata l’ora di impadronirci del primo maggio”.

“All over the world women have been saying that society rests on our labour and that we, like all workers, need wages to fight against our exploitation”²⁸.

Every branch organized the day differently and used different forms of protests: in Vento the Tri-Veneto committee distributed 20.000 leaflets and put up 2.000 posters inviting women to strike for the day ²⁹; the Los Angeles branch, with its three members, formed a well-identified contingent within a march organized by the “*Chicano community*” ³⁰, linking the struggle of wageless women at home to those of the immigrant community; The *Toronto WfH Committee* organized a gathering in front of the city hall attended by 250 people; in London, 25 women marched to the prime minister’s residence carrying banners, slogans and leaflets, carrying various symbols of women’s labour such as casseroles, brooms and pots. The protestors were not allowed to distribute those leaflets and were threatened with arrest for obstruction; In Bristol, six activists put a stand near the city’s most popular shopping center³¹, and the success of the protests was evident, as international media covered the before and after of the global event.

In the case of the Toronto group, even by going as far as to show on national television 3 minutes long recording of the event taken by the members of the committee; in Bristol, the local newspaper wrote a long article regarding the issue and covered the event on tv.

The events coordinator, Judy Ramirez wrote: “The May Day rally served as an "announcement" that we are on the scene and that we are beginning our organizing to get wages for housework. It has given wages for housework the public visibility it needs in order to begin functioning as a reference point to women in all situations throughout Ontario and Canada.” ³²

²⁸ Judy Ramirez (1975), *Opening Remarks in Wages for Housework, Women Speak out*, p. 5

²⁹ *Le operaie della casa, 1° Maggio 1975* curated by the International Feminist Collective, Venezia- Padova, Marsilio 1975

³⁰ The Chicano movements in the 60s dealt with the social issues suffered by Mexican Americans in the United States.

³¹ Toupin, L. et al. (2018) *Wages for housework: a history of an International feminist movement, 1972-77*. London Vancouver (BC): Pluto Press UBC Press. pp. 108-109

³² *Ibidem*.

The collective effort was nonetheless organized weeks prior by the “reference points” (the intellectuals that organized and led the network): they rented a tiny office inside a women’s center and covered the expenses by getting the money from their own salary. These women were sacrificing their already small pay from waged work, putting aside time from housework, all in sake of this.

1.2) THE HOUSEWORK STRUGGLE IS A BODY AUTONOMY ISSUE:

“For a woman, struggling to recover her individuality, the integrity of her basic physical functions, starting with the sexual one which was the first to be robbed, demanding abortion rights, opposing contraceptive experiments performed on the bodies of poor third world women, linking all of these struggles to the struggles against motherhood conceived as the responsibility of women exclusively and housework conceived as female work, is to struggle against the division and organization of labor”³³

Abortion in Italy:

In the 1970s, Italy experienced one of the highest rates of illegal abortions in Europe, with estimates reaching as many as 3 million each year. This was largely due to the strong influence of the Catholic Church, which was closely tied to the state, making it difficult for women to access reproductive rights. Illegal abortions were also financially exploitative, with procedures performed by doctors in private clinics costing up to 1.5 million lire (equivalent to about 1,616 euros today, if inflation is taken into account).³⁴

The movement for free abortion faced significant opposition, with leaders often arrested and imprisoned for challenging both medical practices and state policies. In response, large demonstrations erupted, leading to a widespread awakening among women. The SLD movement in Italy was particularly active in advocating

³³ Mariarosa dalla Costa cited in Toupin, L. et al. (2018) *Wages for housework: a history of an International feminist movement, 1972-77*. London Vancouver (BC): Pluto Press UBC Press.

³⁴ Calculations made with inflationhystory.com

for abortion rights, as women's roles as housewives were linked to their reproductive capabilities. The struggle for bodily autonomy became a central issue. A turning point came in June 1973 with public demonstrations following the trial of Gigliola Pierobon, a young woman prosecuted for having an illegal abortion in 1967 while still a minor. In early 1974, 263 women faced similar charges, prompting further protests across the country. Increased media coverage helped raise awareness, allowing more women to join the feminist movement and making the already active members initiate the biggest self-denouncing of abortive practices.

Women all over Italy used this practice to demonstrate the widespread nature of said issue and the fundamentality of change in jurisdictions.



(Figure 5) (11/03/1975) Mobilization for free abortion in Italy. Women protesting, in front the sign made by "Comitato femminista autonomo per l'aborto gratuito" (Feminist autonomous committee for free abortion).

On December 6, 1975, a major international protest in Rome drew 25,000 women who demanded free access to abortion and resisted systemic oppression³⁵. These

³⁵ Information comes both from Toupin, L. et al. (2018) *Wages for housework: a history of an International feminist movement, 1972-77*. London Vancouver (BC): Pluto Press UBC Press and

protests were organized through university sit-ins and strikes led by feminist groups across Italy. Despite facing repression, the movement persisted, marking a pivotal moment in the fight for reproductive rights as women united to challenge and dismantle systemic barriers.

The communicant side of the struggle for abortion is the one regarding forced sterilization.

As this issue deeply affects racialized people, it is essential to recognize its intersectionality and address it as a critical aspect of the wider fight for bodily autonomy. The campaign against forced sterilization seeks to highlight how systemic racism and discrimination disproportionately target marginalized groups, often using these invasive procedures as a means of control of the population. Advocates of the matter argue that focusing solely on abortion rights without confronting forced sterilization fails to address the full spectrum of reproductive injustices. This broader struggle emphasizes the need for a inclusive approach to women's rights that includes fighting against all forms of coercive medical practices, assuring that the movement for bodily autonomy is truly inclusive and equitable for all women, regardless of their race or socioeconomic status.

Housework is robbery with violence:

Another key initiative the WFH strategy participated in was the "*International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women*," which took place from March 4th to 8th, 1976, at the Palais des Congrès in Brussels, Belgium, coinciding with International Women's Day. The tribunal aimed to raise public awareness about the various crimes committed against women, including both overt violence and systemic discrimination. The event brought together over 2,000 women from 40 countries to share their testimonies and engage in discussions.

“This widespread violence is unanimously unrecognized and passed off in silence. Even against specific acts of violence—rape, assault and battery—there is, in the

vast majority of cases, no recourse in a court of law. It seems that women are destined to suffer and to keep quiet about it.

“It is this destiny which will be forcibly rejected by the women gathering in Brussels. When I consider the impetus given to the process of decolonization of women by this Tribunal, I think that it must be regarded as a great historic event.”³⁶

The Wages for housework strategy groups were participative as “unwaged housework is robbery with violence; that this work and wagelessness is a crime from which all other crimes flow”³⁷.

Representatives from England, Italy, Canada, Switzerland, and Wages Due Lesbian London participated in the tribunal, calling for compensation from governments worldwide. They also voiced collective criticism regarding the tribunal's approach, arguing that the division of victims by crime was isolating and misplaced pressure on women's movements only to act against their own systemic oppression. They contended that this approach failed to address the underlying issue of exploitation, which they identified as the unrecognized and unpaid labor of housework. “We fight constantly against this work but we have no power because we have no money. We're easily manipulated by the attacks of men, of judges, of employers, and of the family”.³⁸

1.3) INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES AND THE STRUGGLES OF ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES:

The International Feminist Collective Conferences:

At the time the concept of power exercised by women in the political sphere was socially new.

³⁶ Simone De Beauvoir's remarks (1976) in Report on the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*. Compiled by Diana E. H. Russell. (1977). p.5.

³⁷ Russell, D. E., & Van de Ven, N. (Eds.). (1976). Crimes against women: Proceedings of the International Tribunal (p. 219). East Palo Alto, CA: Frog in the Well. p.139.

³⁸ Ibidem.

The international conferences were meetings made and organized by wages for housework groups autonomously, and they gave a perfect chance to collectively discuss and exchange reflections towards strategies and common action in concordance with all groups at the same time.

These efforts expressed the challenges and obstacles of “starting from zero” to invent a political strategy around housework.

The first encounter happened in New York in October 1974.³⁹ Since the whole network was relatively new, the tackled themes revolved around the means of action chosen by the network: the international campaign and what it would involve.

Questions arose about how the international campaign would progress organizationally, whether it would involve a unified strategy, and how local autonomy could be maintained while ensuring political consistency.

The groups asked themselves about the possibility to distinguish the WFH perspective from the demand for a wage by only using it a tool for raising awareness without explicitly demanding wages for housework.

Splits within the International Feminist Collective:

The discourse around organizational policy was present even within the first conference but became much more heated during the second one in Montreal in February 1975.

Two groups were coexisting in Toronto: “*the book group*”, a study group formed in the summer of 1973, and a second group, separated from a mixed sex political group in 1974.

The disagreement within the groups was mostly around leadership and the international aspect of the wages for housework strategy.

The first group used a more local perspective for development and believed that an international network would interfere with that certain commitment, (This is similar to what happened specifically in Padova with Group One and group 2).

³⁹ Toupin, L. et al. (2018) Wages for housework: a history of an International feminist movement, 1972-77. London Vancouver (BC): Pluto Press UBC Press.

The other issue was around the expectations of participants, as some believed it to be open to all while the international meeting was specifically made for wages for housework groups and open only to women. This misunderstanding from the Montreal group and the Book group from Toronto added to the fire of the discussion.

To those who believed that the perspective of wages for housework was already established, the conference was about organizing internationally and therefore did not require the presence of people outside of the groups and that the meeting should be only for their internal members.

But for the other groups the conference was intended to clarify the general political perspective more extensively and to discuss the wage demand as a public conference.

The latter side was therefore still crystallized around the question of “was wages for housework a tool for consciousness raising, or a material demand? A way of seeing the world to understand women's place in it or a political fight for wages?”⁴⁰

The Montreal and Book groups were seeing the strategy only as a consciousness tool and criticizing the “authoritarian”⁴¹ direction that the network was taking, while the other side of the network accused the groups of being libertarian, because applying the formula of an international link instead of an international strategy was not enough to gain a wage for housework.

As the attendees (after six hours of debate) believed that's the theoretical perspective shouldn't be separated from the campaign to demand wages, it was decided to vote whether to keep Group One in the network. “Out of 65 people who voted, 43 voted against keeping the group, two voted for, and 20 abstained”⁴² resulting in the expulsion of the branch.

⁴⁰ Wages for Housework Collective (Group 2), Statement on Political Differences with Wages for Housework Group 1.

⁴¹ Susan Wheeler, “To Everyone in the Wages for Housework Network,” letter dated July 1, 1975 (Silvia Federici Archives).

⁴² Information found on the Canadian Women's Movement archives.

This high abstention rate created frustration both from those expelled and the general intellectuals. Such feelings resulted in distanced discourse in the following months (the Post Montreal conference debates).

The legitimacy of the expulsion was throughout debated until October 1975, when the Montreal group was not invited to the Toronto conference, officially sedimenting the decision taken by voting during the last international meeting.

Reference Points and leadership:

Another common question discussed within these conferences was the one regarding leadership.

The difference in cultural and social ways to take political action created a critical juxtaposition of

of pushing positions addressing this aspect.

For example those who come from the left had a harder time addressing the struggle, as in their experience leadership was often dependent on a male hierarchical authority that left no room for action and autonomy.

What was essentially agreed upon is that even if not defined, leadership was often expressed by those referred as “points of reference”.

Feminist writer Lousie Toupin⁴³, describes them as “activists and intellectuals with more political experience, that were identified in the network and offered guidelines for thought and action”⁴⁴.

The reference points were the intellectual behind the theoretical development of the strategy and behind the founding of the IFC: Mariarosa Dalla Costa for Italy, Silvia Federici for New York and Selma James in England, later joined by Judy Ramirez for Canada and Beth Ingber for the west coast of the United States.

However, the main issue was not to define if leadership existed or not but the type which should be exercised and to obtain what kind of goals.

⁴³ Author of “Wages for Housework, A History of an International feminist movement.

⁴⁴ Toupin, L. et al. (2018) *Wages for housework: a history of an International feminist movement, 1972-77*. London Vancouver (BC): Pluto Press UBC Press.p.119

The discussions led during the conferences resulted in the belief that a good demonstration of working leadership existed when other people in the organization could take leadership positions and responsibilities, especially in the field of promoting initiatives and new theoretical perspectives that aligned (or not) with the ones existing.

The end of the International Feminist collective:

The Chicago conference held in April 1977 marks the beginning of a gradual split within the network.

Two of the major branches were not present: The Tri-Veneto Committee and the New York Wages for Housework group.

As ulterior proof, it seems also that after this encounter the campaign was no longer called the international feminist collective but instead the movement's activists had begun calling it the "*International wages for housework campaign*".⁴⁵

This campaign excluded the non-participant branches but took into account a few new ones such as "*Black Women for Wages for housework*", "*Wages Due Lesbians*" and new branches of wages for housework created mostly in american cities.

The end of the International Feminist collective happened gradually, as its central issues were incorporated into broader feminist and labor agendas. However, the movement's call for recognizing and compensating domestic labor did nonetheless influence feminist theory and policies indelibly, but its specific focus became less prominent as activism shifted toward other key issues, such as equal pay and reproductive rights.

Changes in the political and economic landscape also havily affected the movement's trajectory, leading to a broader reorientation of priorities. Despite this, the movement's core ideals continue to echo in contemporary discussions about the value of unpaid caregiving work, reflecting its impact on gender and economic justice debates.

⁴⁵ A press release was signed as "International Wages for Housework campaign" in the Wages for Housework bulletin n.3 in 1978.

CHAPTER 2

ANALYSIS OF THE THEORETICAL SPECTRUM OF WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

In this chapter I describe the theoretical framework of the wages for housework strategies, trying to reference the focal points of the conversations built around unwaged work in the house.

The feminist international spectrum is made of a diverse range of published and unpublished works related to this new wave of organizing and collectivism.

Each intellectual has had a distinct impact on the movement, where the context surrounding them helped develop different practices and collective actions, this is why each work often reflects diverse cultural needs and influences.

This is especially true for works by marginalized groups, as accessibility can vary by state and region due to differences in struggles, educational access, and affordable publishing options.

Although traditional publishers often overlooked feminist works, in rare cases some did collaborate with these thinkers.⁴⁶

I personally do not believe that feminism should be confined to academic and intellectual places, as the political basis of movements should always start from the struggling. This is why in this chapter I often try to implement collective and mass thinking into the chapter, though I will primarily rely on what was written and used within the strategies, as these works are easier to access due to time constraint.

Because of these multiple factors, a universal and strict theory for housework that is unchanged globally doesn't actually exist. What does is a series of interconnected issues that often link and evolve from other struggles, therefore the regional and national branches of the movement may have adhered more or less to some of the ideas or take different approaches that resonated more with their own cultural events.

⁴⁶ One example of this was Marsilio Editori in Italy and Falling Wall Press in English Speaking Countries.

However, since every matter tends to have an international influence, a common theoretical understanding embracing all of the collectives active in the network exists and is what I will try to cover most efficiently.

2.1) SOME PRECURSORY THEORIES TO WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

In exploring the theoretical framework that fashioned the wages for housework movement, an essential step to be taken is the examination of two influential feminist perspectives: material feminism and radical feminism:

Materialist feminism:

Materialist feminism is a feminist branch that argues the subject role of capitalism in the perpetuation of gendered oppression.

It creates mainly in France during the late 60s and focuses on the material conditions of women, and hosts intellectuals such as Silvia Federici, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Christine Delphy, Monique Wittig⁴⁷ and Colette Guillaumin⁴⁸.

Most of the works preceding the creation of the *International Feminist Collective* and the campaigns for housework fall into this category, while the entirety of *Wages for Housework* is recognized as a strategy based on it.

The main aim of the materialist wave is to highlight how gender and class happen to intersect within the societal structures created to exploit marginalized communities.

It critiques the existing division of a public sphere, that regards everything about the waged labor, from the private one, associated with the unpaid side such as housework and care.

⁴⁷ Monique Wittig (1935-2003) was an intellectual most prolific in feminist queer theory, critiquing an heterosexual framework in society.

⁴⁸ Colette Gaullamin (1934-2017) was best known for her works on racism ad feminism, especially her sociological analysis of race and gender as a social construction.

For the thinkers that recognize themselves as a part of this group, the existing gender divide is socially constructed, not biological in any way, and used to subordinate and devalue women's work to maintain their oppression.

Radical Feminism:

Radical feminism also emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s, and it focuses on dismantling patriarchy, which is seen by radical intellectuals as the root element causing women's oppression.

Unlike cultural or liberal feminism, which moves towards the obtainment of gender equality by working within the already existing societal structures, often through legal reforms and policy changes, radical feminism argues that these structures are inherently oppressive and must be fundamentally abolished. Since they believe the patriarchy to be a pervasive system of male dominance, one that stains and embeds every aspect of society, for them true liberation can only be happen by dismantling all power dynamics at their core.

This approach appears in direct contrast with liberal feminism's emphasis on individual rights and equal opportunities within said existing social framework, pushing instead on celebrating traditional feminine qualities as societal strengths.

Theoretical basis to create the strategy:

In 1969 the American Kate Millet publishes "*Sexual Politics*"⁴⁹, a pivotal work to understand the basis of what will become the main thread of thinking in the Women's liberation movement: she states that the pervasive system of oppression that is enforced specifically on women and people in and out of the gender spectrum is called "*patriarchy*" and is expressed firstly within the borders of the private

⁴⁹ Millett, Kate. *Sexual politics*. Columbia University Press, 2016. (1934-2017) She was an American feminist writer especially relevant during the 70s.

sphere: the family. This system, enforced by the patriarch⁵⁰ within the family, makes the internal relations ones of power and therefore political⁵¹.

Millet is the first to share the idea that political action can interfere with the private sphere as much as the public one, consequently suggesting that by acting within the family, we can change the dynamics that dictate society. This is how radical feminists link gender discrimination to capitalism.

As critical research began to emerge during a period when political discourse was heavily centered on issues related to the family, this work resonated strongly with activists of the time.

“Family as an institution has been continuously perfected throughout the history of civilization, solely because of the reinforcement it provides to power and state apparatus”⁵².

In short, the obsession coming from governing forces to control the family and its relations is a more discreet way of controlling female and trans bodies to maintain the status quo and in agreement to this, *Sexual Politics* determines that women's financial reliance and role within families was never for a lack of work, but because the work they perform is not equally compensated or compensated at all.

Almost concurrently, further research is done to tie this phenomenon on a specifically economic level, this later works are mainly conducted by socialist feminist.

In 1969 one of this pioneer socialist theorists, Margaret Benston, writes: *The Political Economy of Women's Liberation*. In which by elaborating further on the works of Ernst Mandel she partially shifts a major belief sustained by leftist, assessing that “even though women, through their housework and domestic labour, produce goods and services with a use value and not an exchange value, these tasks, added to that of raising children, are essential to the economy and to capitalism⁵³”.

⁵⁰ Male figure with a leading role within the family, within the patriarchal state, the men that controls the private economy.

⁵¹ Toupin, Louise. *Wages for housework*. London: Pluto Press, 2018. p. 23

⁵² Öcalan, Abdullah. "Liberating life." *Woman's Revolution*, Cologne (2013).

⁵³ Benston M. (1969) cited in Toupin (2018)

But this relation is not marginal, as it is a “socially necessary production” as Benston specifies, but is ignored solely for its position outside of the wage territory. Women are then, by this interpretation, all connected by this peculiar relation with production, different from that of men, as they exist outside of the market sphere.

“The material basis for the inferior status of women is to be found in just this definition of women ... whether or not they are married, single, or the heads of households”⁵⁴.

Benston gives a material basis for the exploitation that is experienced, even if partially, preparing the ground for a more radical input on the theme.

Another argument supported by the intellectual is that the integration into the labour market is not a viable solution because “as long as work in the home remains a matter of private production and is the responsibility of women, they will simply carry a double workload”⁵⁵.

However, she doesn't question how the labor was necessary to capitalism and because of what, making the connection lack any historical link to capitalism.

A Year later, Christine Delphy, under the pseudonym of Christine Dupont, writes: “*The main Enemy: a Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*”⁵⁶ and completely shifts Benston's idea of use value and exchange value: in Delphy's view, the work is free because it's made inside the social construct of family and marriage, not inside the house.

She explains that when the work is supplied outside of the family, the service becomes a part of the labor market and is no longer something outside of it.

Furthermore, the labor and energy contributed within the marital and family structure remains uncompensated, even when the outcome of their work is commercialized.

⁵⁴ Benston, M. Lowe. "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation." (No Title) (1969).

⁵⁵ Benston, M. (1971). Women's work and family life. In E. F. Whitehead, V. R. Beechey, & L. McIntosh (Eds.), *Class and the household* (pp. 25-40). Pluto Press.

⁵⁶ Delphy, Christine [Dupont]. “L'ennemi principal.” *Partisans*, no. 54-55, July-Oct. 1970, pp. 157-172.

She uses as an example small businesses, crafts and women's work in the family production: She explains that “the woman thus does not dispose of her own labor power as it is appropriated by the husband”⁵⁷.

This means that men, legally speaking, take control of women's labor, justified in their behavior by societal beliefs on the dependance of women to men for financial support.

To approach the concept of different types of creation for the market, she distinguishes two modes of production: industrial, where the majority of goods are produced; and familiar, the production framework that includes domestic work, social reproduction and some of the goods of production. While the first is victim to capitalistic exploitation the second is affected by the familial patriarchal one.⁵⁸

This way of thinking socio-economic relations is radical as it separates the struggles of men from the struggle of women, as the latter pertains to a different victim, the other “working class”.

Delphy’s theorization, since domestic labour is framed as a mode of production “theoretically independent of capitalism,” has also received criticism. Some critics argue that a separation from the capitalist sphere implies that capitalist production can be understood without considering its gendered aspects. Additionally, she does not clarify how patriarchy, represented by domestic labor, intersects with other systems, such as capitalism.

Critics suggested that domestic work is a specific form of reproductive labor inherently tied to wage-based societies, and also contended that the gendered division of labor was not confined to the family but was a key component of the broader capitalist labor structure, requiring a unified analysis of both capitalism and its gendered dimensions.⁵⁹

2.2) CREATION OF A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AROUND HOUSEWORK

⁵⁷ Ivi. p. 9

⁵⁸ Ivi. pp. 62-63

⁵⁹ Some of these critics were Silvia Federici, Nancy Fraser and Rita Mae Brown.

The funding text of the strategy:



(Figure 6) front cover of the Italian edition of Dalla Costa, Mariarosa, and Selma James. "The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community." (1972).

This will be one of the aims of Mariarosa Dalla Costa in 1971 with her work "*Potere Femminile e Sovversione Sociale*".⁶⁰

Written in Italy, during a time of mobilization and unrest, the work has serious ties with the sociopolitical ambiance of the time: particularly, what makes her work so different from her predecessors is the Marxist understanding of political action brought by her experience within the workerist Italian movement *Potere Operaio*. In what will become the funding manifesto of the strategy, she theorizes that the exploitation of people "socialized as women"⁶¹ does not begin with capitalism but

⁶⁰ Dalla Costa, Mariarosa, and Selma James. "The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community." (1972).

⁶¹ People under the trans umbrella which are not women but socialized as such could receive the same level of oppression and more.

it does reinforce women's oppression by confining them to the idea of modern nuclear families and the social roles annexed.

Therefore, what has begun with capitalism is not the patriarchy, as the latter precedes the first, but the role of the housekeeper, a concept that effectively links capitalism to the patriarchy and potentially ties a series of other struggles in a proto-intersectional mode.

The publication of this work is a collaborative piece with Selma James, member of the *Women's Liberation Movement in London* and subsequently one of the co-founders of the International Feminist collective alongside Dalla Costa.

I believe it important to mention that the explicit demand of a wage for housework, is not immediately included in the first published edition of *Sovversione Sociale*, but it will be in the following one, thanks to the discourse growing at the time and the creation of a proto-network urging for a deeper analysis on unpaid work.

On Overcoming Marx and the common experiences of the Black liberation Movement:

“Power to the sisters and therefore to the class.” (Selma James, 1971)⁶²

In the introduction of *Sovversione Sociale*, Selma James explains and introduces a relevant theme of discussion, which is that often, if not always, the political discourse made by women who prioritize class, has a tendency of overshadowing the feminist movement.

This is because they respond not to feminist concerns, but to those of leftist circles traditionally dominated by men.

Mariarosa and James both openly criticize these groups, arguing that they reinforce the marginalization of women by adopting forms of struggle used traditionally by men, thus decentering the focus from women's experiences.

⁶² Introduction by Selma James. "The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community." (1971).

This kind of fallacious activism, where the strategies completely decenter from gender identity and race, can also be observed during the Black movement in the United States.

When the active liberation groups emphasized the importance of a strategy centering race over class, redefining the concept of class itself within the context of racial struggle, they faced strong criticism, especially by the white leftist counterparts, that once again were accusing the liberation movements of being dividing entities in the accomplishment of class unity.

Unstopped, in the 1960s and 1970s the movement began to articulate a vision of struggle that went beyond civil rights and wanted to redefine the concept of class. Figures like Malcolm X⁶³, and later Huey P. Newton⁶⁴ and Bobby Seale⁶⁵, emphasized that the condition of Black people in America was not only a matter of racial discrimination but also one of systemic and economic exploitation.

This approach resonates with Dalla Costa's rethinking of the working class. It's easy to draw parallels between the two movements because of a similar experience the racialized aspects of waged work have with the unpaid labor of housewives both being a fundamental part of capitalist production.

We can find this link in the perspective on the "lumpenproletariat"⁶⁶, which are those outside the formal labor market, critical figures to the understanding of capitalist exploitation in a racialized society.

⁶³ Malcolm X was a prominent African American civil rights leader known for his advocacy for Black empowerment.

⁶⁴ Huey P. Newton was a co-founder of the Black Panther Party.

⁶⁵ Bobby Seale was also a co-founder of the Black Panther Party.

⁶⁶ The lumpenproletariat is a social class introduced in Marxist theory, it's composed of the underclass: ones disconnected from the productive economy, including the unemployed and criminals. Marx saw them as a group that could be easily manipulated by the ruling class, as they lacked the class consciousness of the proletariat.

In the specific context of the Black movement, the term lumpenproletariat has been reclaimed and reinterpreted to describe marginalized and impoverished segments of Black communities who are often excluded from formal labor markets. The leaders of the Black Panther Party saw the lumpenproletariat as a revolutionary force and believed that their extreme exclusion gave them an advanced position to challenge oppressive systems in a more radical way than the traditional white working class.

Similarly, Dalla Costa's feminist reimagining of class was not restricted to traditional proletarian definitions but instead considered how unpaid reproductive labor (housework, caregiving, etc.) is vital to sustaining capitalist economies.

Without the deconstruction of these power structures allowing for a transition to revolutionary feminism, based on a redefined understanding of class, women who center their fight on caste issues risk being absorbed into the power structures dominated by white men.

The co-authors notably critique this phenomenon, highlighting the failure of traditional Marxism to adequately address women's unique struggles.

Dalla Costa uniquely “rejects both the subordination of class to feminism and the one of feminism to class”⁶⁷ but aims to identify the root of the problem by exploring the ways women have been degraded within both frameworks.

To do so, she takes into account Marx’s work and what he failed to understand or acknowledge and creates an effective critique able to inspire different ways of action.

Karl Marx’s partial analysis, does in fact reveal that social relations, particularly those tied to production, have an easier time arising organically rather than consciously, and these relations distinguish one society from another⁶⁸. Viewing history as a process of class struggle, where the oppressed, through revolutionary action, gradually transform social relations of production and the institutions that express them.⁶⁹

But for Marx, the family remained a fundamental biological unit, present even before class society emerged.⁷⁰ Mariarosa Dalla Costa, however, redefines the family as not just a center of consumption and an existence outside of economic

⁶⁷ Introduction by Selma James. "The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community." (1971).

⁶⁸ Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The German Ideology*. Edited by C.J. Arthur, International Publishers, 1970.

⁶⁹ Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Penguin Classics, 2002.

⁷⁰ The theme of exploitation within the family was also briefly mentioned by Engels Friedrich, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. Penguin Classics, 2010.

dynamics, but as a crucial site of social production. The refusal by Marxists to recognize the productive potential of women's domestic labor, represents a denial of women's potential social power extremely significant to the class struggle, because the "commodity" produced by women⁷¹ is unique and irreplaceable in the capitalist system: human beings themselves, the living workers who will then go on to sustain capitalism.

As Dalla Costa argues, "If your production is vital for capitalism, then refusing to produce, refusing to work, is a fundamental lever of social power."⁷²

Capitalism sustains itself and thrives off the accumulation of unpaid surplus labor, which continuously increases the capitalist's power over a growing number of workers. Wages, in essence, only pay for a portion of labor power, while the rest is extracted for free, thereby reinforcing capitalist exploitation.

Marx identified labor power as a commodity that resides within the human being, whose life is consumed by the production process.

The social sphere, therefore, is not an area of complete freedom but rather a hidden extension of capitalist exploitation. It is not merely a place where women serve men but an integral part of the capitalist system's organization. This hidden exploitation, where women's labor is crucial yet undervalued, is what Maria Rosa refers to as the "social factory."

In this framework, the social sphere is just as significant as the traditional factory in capitalist exploitation, revealing the broader dynamics of power that extend into all areas of life.

"The request coming from Wages for Housework is, as of today, the most revolutionary and strategic request for class unity".⁷³

⁷¹ The term "woman" is in this case utilized to mean biological women, I do however want to acknowledge that the capacity of childbearing is not a defining trait of the identity. Women can be sterile, trans or intersex, and trans men can give birth. People outside the societal definition of woman suffer the exclusion from housework in a parallel way, as they are judged for being outside of said production.

⁷² Dalla Costa, Mariarosa, and Selma James. "Potere femminile e sovversione sociale." (1972). p.8

⁷³ Translation of "La richiesta quindi da parte delle donne del salario per il lavoro domestico è oggi la richiesta più rivoluzionaria e strategica per la totalità della classe". *Le operaie della casa*, Marsilio editori a cura di Collettivo Internazionale Femminista. Venezia-Padova: Marsilio.

The Double Burden of Work: Why Escaping the House-cage Doesn't Liberate Women:

It is essential to recognize that no one believes true emancipation for women comes solely through waged work. Wage autonomy may provide economic independence, but under capitalism, it merely positions women as individuals to be exploited, much like their male counterparts. For this reason, those who see the liberation of working-class women solely in terms of employment outside the home address only a fraction of the problem, not the entire solution.

Women in the 1970s began walking outside of the very strict confinement of their four walls and pursue a second job, this behavior is an actualization of their first rejection of the roles imposed on them.

By doing so, they begin altering the dynamics both inside and outside the house, firstly inside the family, as acquiring a new salary gains them the ability to slightly change the subordinating role they live, because of the contribution to the "sustainment" of the family, therefore the husbands regard them differently.

But the exit of women in the outside marked doesn't happen only out of a liberation desire, this change is due to the inability of a single salary to effectively sustain a single family in late stage capitalism, and the first person that usually has to accommodate and balance the poverty within the household is the mother.⁷⁴

And by exiting the house to pursue what is most often a low paying job that resembles housework, she is not liberated nor free.

These working women in fact face a profound form of exploitation characterized by the "double shift" or "double burden".⁷⁵

What is intended with these terms is the afflicting stress and overwork that comes from pursuing a waged job outside of the already imposed housework, as the second

⁷⁴ James, Selma. *A Woman's Place*. 1972. Piece present in the collaborative work ("Potere Femminile e Sovversione Sociale.") but previously published autonomously.

⁷⁵ Dalla Costa, Mariarosa, and Selma James. "Potere femminile e sovversione sociale." (1972).

job outside the home overlaps with the first job inside it creating a multilevel type of exploitation.

In this social dynamic women are then subjected to two “masters”: the first one is the representative of the reinforcement of the unpaid labor involved in reproducing the labor force for others, therefore the figure of the patriarch within the family, while the second one involves the relation of reproducing and selling one's own labor for a wage.

This dual burden fails to offer genuine liberation because both forms of labor remain subordinate to capitalist production.⁷⁶

In Italy, the status of women as housewives is largely static, with a very small proportion working outside the home. Consequently, women who do work outside gain minimal social power or influence, making the formation of a strong feminist movement nearly impossible without a strong focus on the experiences of housewives. This particular context hepatises the unavoidable need for a feminist struggle deeply rooted in the domestic experience.

Moreover, this concept of double burden is further reinforced by the intersection of factors like race, class and ethnicity. A relevant example is the experience of women of color, who face a greater additional layer of exploitation and discrimination since on top of the already gigantic hardship of balancing housework and an outside job, are often only considered for the most extenuating works and lowest pays, if considered at all.

Another example is the case of Italian women, which are often isolated within a traditional Catholic society, that denies them the ability of receiving any kind of pay, and face limited opportunities for. However, international feminist struggles offer a pathway from capitalist underdevelopment to liberation through capitalist development. Women with wages gain the power to reject roles as domestic housewives or "wives of the factory."

Caliban and the Witch, the Bad woman archetype:

⁷⁶ Ibidem.

Another spearhead of wages for housework, is the acclaimed reference point for the New York Branches, Silvia Federici, who also produced a critical analysis on the overcoming of Marxism. In her work, Federici utilizes mythological and literary figures to portray effectively the social divisions created mainly in the medieval times, which are expressed by a series of historic events, such as the slave trade, colonialism and the witch trials.

She assigns the role of the anticolonial proletariat to the Shakespearian “*Caliban*”⁷⁷, reinterpreting him (while following the themes of his character) to represent the subjugated masses during the transition to capitalism. In her work *Caliban* embodies the exploited classes that resisted the rise of capitalism, represented in Shakespeare's work by the colonialist European figure of Prospero, and his part in subjugation of women.

Federici also brings into her work another main figure victim of Prospero’s Exploitation, the personification of the postulates of dysfunctional feminine models: “*the Witch*”.⁷⁸

The Witch is also a symbol of resistance to the emerging capitalist system, just like Caliban, but unlike him, she suffers from the active criminalization of female knowledge and confinement to a reproductive role.⁷⁹

In her works she implements the theories present in Dalla Costa’s work, furthering the idea of capital surplus as something that is sustained by women.

She explains to the readers that one of the most profitable secrets of capitalism is the naturalization of housework. She expands on this phenomenon by recollecting, through feminist lenses, the transition from a feudal society to a capitalist one.

⁷⁷ Caliban is a character coming from William Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*. In the play, Caliban is a monstrous figure who is the son of the witch Sycorax and the sole native inhabitant of the island before the arrival of Prospero, the main protagonist. Caliban is often portrayed as uncivilized and savage, and symbolizes the “natural” man or the colonized subject who is subjugated and oppressed by European colonizers, represented in the play by Prospero. (Willis, Deborah. "Shakespeare's *Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism." *Studies in English literature, 1500-1900* 29.2 (1989): 277-289.)

⁷⁸ Federici, Silvia, and Leopoldina Fortunati. "Il grande Calibano. Storia del corpo sociale ribelle nella prima fase del capitale." (1984): 7-306.
Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia, 2004.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

Federici's objective is to uncover all the relevant connections between what Marx called "primitive accumulation"⁸⁰, the process he identified as the true foundation of capitalism, where the structural conditions necessary for a society based on economic production were established and the several historical processes of social subordination of women happened.

Given the structural nature of the relation between capitalism and patriarchy, Federici pinpoints primitive accumulation at the dawn of capitalism, while simultaneously declaring its relevance within the now solidified and naturalized misogynistic social structures.

In this sense, she argues that "we can read the past as something that survives in the present."⁸¹

Federici's analysis of the witch hunts, when viewed through the lens of productivity, reveals how a new concept of "femininity" was constructed to serve the needs of capitalism. This femininity was passed as "naturally made", and enforced by the role of unpaid reproductive labor, just as conceived by James and Dalla Costa.

The cultural and ideological framework supporting this new standard of medieval femininity is built upon a degrading conception of women, often equating it with the carnality of bodily existence (compared to the rationality of men) and therefore were considered inferior, relegated distinctly to human functions⁸².

We can see this ideas in famous Medieval works such as *Summa Theologica* by Thomas Aquinas, where he says: "Man is the beginning and end of woman; as God is the beginning and end of every creature. But the woman, together with man, shares in the nature of man, and therefore she is directed by the intellect to the same things as man. But in matters of practical reason, woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates"⁸³.

⁸⁰ Marx, Karl. *Capital: Volume I*, Chapter 26. Translated by Ben Fowkes, Penguin Books, 1990.

⁸¹ Federici, Silvia. *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*. PM Press, 2012. p.13

⁸² Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Christian Classics, 1981.

⁸³ Ivi. Part 1, Question 92, Article 1, Reply to Objection 2.

Additionally, to elevate and solidify the new social role of women, it was necessary to deform and defame female sexuality and channel it into exclusively economic productive forms, enforced through the dichotomy of roles such as “prostitute” versus the “pure wife”.

The fear induced by the brutal witch trials, the torture of disobedient wives, and the punishment of sexually promiscuous women, accompanied by the social stigmatization of those who did not conform to the previously mentioned roles, even through executions (such as the witch trials), all served as operational tools for enforcing a new bourgeois sexual morality.

This morality aimed to ensure the forced obedience of women by severely punishing those who were independent-minded and resistant to being confined to the new prescribed roles.

By denaturalizing housework, Federici focuses on the theoretical branch seeking to reveal it as a form of labor that is socially and economically constructed rather than a biological or natural destiny for women.⁸⁴



(Figure 7) Hanz Weiditz (1532) *The witch's herbarium*, Art present in “*Caliban And the witch, Women and primitive accumulation*” by Silvia Federici.

The Good and Bad Housewife Dichotomy:

⁸⁴ Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia, 2004.

The constructed prototype of the "good housewife" is one idealized within capitalist societies, and portrays the exploited woman as the obedient, self-sacrificing mother who devotes herself to her family's needs without any question. She supposedly embodies the perfect archetype of womanhood, what all are supposed to aspire to be, a mindless compliant being, performing housework and child-rearing with dedication.

This figure is valorized by the patriarchy as morally superior, yet is the embodiment of exploitation, as her labor is unpaid, undervalued and taken for granted.

Contrarily, the "bad housewife" is a woman who rejects or fails to meet these unreachable expectations, the witch. This figure is seen as neglectful or rebellious, someone who does not conform to the idealized image of domesticity.

The "bad housewife" is stigmatized socially, and this stigma reinforces the power dynamics that keep women in subordinate roles. By labeling some women as "bad," society pressures all of them to conform to the expectations of the counterpart.

A secondary dichotomy of roles exists in relation to the type of work women do. "Clean" jobs refer to those forms of labor, like housework and childcare, that are considered respectable and appropriate for women within the confines of the private sphere. These jobs, while essential, are undervalued because they do not generate direct profits for capital but instead create the conditions that allow wage labor to exist.

"Dirty" jobs instead, such as sex work, are those forms of labor that are socially stigmatized and seen as degrading.

Sex work, like housework, is an issue deeply connected to the exploitation of women's bodies under capitalism.

Both forms of labor mainly cater to the multiplying of the workforce with slightly different approaches: housework does it through home life, and the downgrading of intercourse as love, sex work instead does it through the satisfaction of sexual demands.

However, the two are not perceived as the same in the patriarchy, the latter is viewed as "dirty" and degrading because it more overtly transgresses the boundaries of

"acceptable" behavior.⁸⁵ The stigma around sex work serves to marginalize further women who engage in it, reinforcing the broader structures of gendered exploitation, and criminalizing the practice, which makes establishing any type of effective worker care impossible. I find it important to mention that sex work is often performed by trans and racialized women, due to their even stronger exclusion from the waged market thus being subjected also to a multilayered discrimination.⁸⁶⁸⁷

Capital seeks to leverage the momentum generated by feminist movements, specifically the rejection of traditional female roles to reconfigure the labor force under new conditions.

The feminist liberation movement therefore, can only advance in opposition to these attempts and actively fight for the dismantling of said roles with counterinformation, and the raising of self-empowerment.

Alienating women to undermine their power, fighting the true Loneliness Epidemic:

Locked within the four walls that serve as their "factories," women are compelled to redefine their entire sense of self around the type of labor they perform and the role they must fit to survive.

Their lives are divided into "time spent on domestic work" and "time not dedicated to domestic work," limiting their existence to a simple binary structure centered around productivity, that will define if they are aligning with the ideal good housewife.

⁸⁵ In my thesis I do not further elaborate on the theme of sex work as it is a conflicting subject in feminist spaces, it's also not one of the focal points of my discussion. I nonetheless decided to briefly touch the subject because of my belief of its importance in the understanding of the use of stereotypes to perpetuate socio-cultural dynamics.

I agree with Mariarosa Dalla Costa's position: "its important to remove the debate from an area of moral question and highlight the working aspects of prostitution" (Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *Workerism, Feminism ,and some efforts from the United Nations*, The Commoner 15 (2012))

⁸⁶ Pia Turri, Maria. "Le Mogli di Tutti: Il personale è politico" Quaderni di Lotta femminista 2 (1973) pp. 51-60

⁸⁷ Black Women For Wages for Housework, *Money for Prostitutes is money for Black Women* (1977)

To break free from this imposed dichotomy, women must transform the relationship they have with time. This means “stepping out” of the house and breaking away from the restrictive role of the housewife to connect with other women who share the experience.⁸⁸

Leaving the confines of the home allows women to overcome the privatized rivalry that pits them against one another and fosters solidarity in shared struggles. This shift from isolation to community, is an act of common solidarity against common labor, and transforms the act of leaving the house into a form of resistance.

The conscious action of meeting other women, both those who work at home and those who work outside, helps creating new opportunities to spread accumulated knowledge regarding shared life experiences, and supports the creation of new forms of struggle and collective action⁸⁹, as isolation lived in the home also represents a level of oppression that detaches them from collective experiences of organization and social struggle.

This deprivation of social education and revolt experience reinforces the “myth of female incapacity”⁹⁰, a cultural belief rather than a factual reality, since the informal organization of women has been crucial for centuries and their support has been decisive at every stage of class liberation.⁹¹

Selma James tells us in her piece *A Woman's Place* that when a woman is confined within the boundaries of a family unit, she may find herself unable to turn to her husband in times of need. In such circumstances, her only alternative is to look for support from other women. These women, who live lives so similar to hers, possess a deeper understanding and empathy for each other than the one of the patriarchal husband. In the rare moments of female freedom, some women will naturally gravitate towards one another, and form bonds of solidarity.

⁸⁸ Dalla Costa, Mariarosa, and Selma James. "Potere femminile e sovversione sociale." (1972).

⁸⁹ Ivi. p. 59

⁹⁰ Ivi.

⁹¹ I talk about this more extensively in chapter one.

The creation of such bonds is essential, as it allows women to support one another and establish relationships based on equality, something that is often unattainable within the confines of the traditional household.⁹²

The act of forming these connections is far more revolutionary than it might initially appear. What may seem like the simple creation of social bonds is actually a profound disruption of the isolation imposed by the household. By forging relationships outside of the domestic sphere, women start dismantling the barriers that keep them isolated and powerless.

Often these connections represent the only form of external contact that many women are able to have, due to their overwork, so the very existence of these relationships becomes a powerful link to the outside world and sometimes a tool to their own survival, since these bonds of solidarity serve as a subtle but significant form of resistance against the political structures that confine them, and the expression of any tension or abuse lived within the home. Women can share their experiences, offer mutual aid, and cultivate a sense of agency.

As they share experiences, they develop a deeper understanding of their collective struggles and the systemic nature of the oppression they face.

While these relationships might appear to be only simple acts of friendship, they are, in fact, deeply subversive, as they represent a refusal to be isolated and a rejection of the idea that women should remain confined to the lonely domestic sphere.

“Women are as a group because they are treated like one. They live the same way on the whole, no matter how different the individual situation may be”.⁹³

Sexuality and procreation under the regime of nuclear families:

⁹² James, Selma. *A Woman's Place*. 1972. Piece present in the collaborative work ("Potere Femminile e Sovversione Sociale.") but previously published autonomously.

⁹³ *Ibidem*.

“The primary market for women’s labor is the family, where marriage serves as the employment contract. The external labor market for women has historically been shaped by the institution of marriage and the conditions of domestic labor”.⁹⁴

Capitalism does not only suppress opportunities for female creativity and the development of their economic independence, but it also obstructs their sexual, psychological, and emotional autonomy. Within this capitalist framework, women's sexual lives are completely stripped of personal agency and reduced to purely reproductive functions. Relegated to a bio-essentialist role that centers on reproduction of labor power for capitalist operations.

Women are forced to reproduce, a duty that is reinforced by restricted access to contraceptives and severe bans against abortion.

This lack of autonomy over their own bodies makes it impossible to cultivate genuine heterosexual intimacy and relationships.

A power dynamic arises that dictates affection and emotional bonds, reinforcing patriarchal control.

“The more strongly a woman has been seen as a mother, the more she has been denied as a person, as an individual”.⁹⁵

By institutionalizing the nuclear family, capitalism liberates men from domestic responsibilities, allowing them to be fully exploited as wage laborers. This setup enables men to earn enough to sustain themselves (and often only themselves) while women are tasked with reproducing them as labor power. The nuclear family, therefore, is the root of capitalist organization.

In a capitalist society organized around the exploitation of labor, from a woman’s point of view, the figure of the employer becomes secondary to that of the husband, who is the primary recipient of domestic services. Through emotional blackmail,

⁹⁴ Translation made by A. Salviato of “Il mercato fondamentale della forza lavoro femminile e la famiglia, il suo contratto di lavoro è il matrimonio. Il mercato della forza lavoro esterna a femminile è un mercato che venne strettamente dal ciclo del matrimonio e dalle condizioni del lavoro domestico”. Dalla Costa, Mariarosa, and Selma James. "Potere femminile e sovversione sociale." (1972)

⁹⁵ Translation made by A. Salviato of “Quanto più accanitamente si è vista la donna come madre, tanto più la si è negata come persona, come individuo”, from Documento 2, *Maternità e aborto* (Movimento di lotta Femminile Padova) 1971.

the husband assumes the role of the first overseer and manager of a woman's labor within the home. This is why the movement thought that the feminist struggle must begin within the family, which is the pillar of capitalist labor organization and not merely as a secondary superstructure.

Recognizing that the family is a critical place of exploitation, the feminist movement's aim is to dismantle the nuclear family model that capitalism relies on for reproducing labor power and maintaining these gender-based hierarchies. By challenging these structures from the inside, feminists can strike at the core of capitalist oppression and lay the basis for broader social and economic liberation.

In the time stretch where the imposition of societal norms began confining women within the home, a progressive shift in the perception of their roles occurred. Women were increasingly isolated from other family members and from any social and economic activities that characterized daily life.

This isolation was chronologically coincident with the propagation of a deeply ingrained belief that women could achieve their so called “physiological destiny” and fulfill their “natural vocation” only through the process of motherhood.

This belief was further encouraged by the common idea that a woman’s body was biologically “oriented” toward the perpetuation of the human species, thereby justifying a narrow and reductive view of her role in society. This perspective was used to reinforce bio-essentialist social policies, which sought to define and limit women’s identities and capabilities based on biological determinism.

These policies denied the dual responsibility of procreation, neglecting the role of men and the societal structures that influence reproductive choices, and refused to acknowledge the rich and diverse spectrum of gender and sexual identities that have existed throughout history. By defining women’s roles around reproduction, these policies not only marginalized other aspects of their identities but also perpetuated a system of control that restricted women’s autonomy and self-actualization.

The WfH groups believed that the more forcefully women were relegated to motherhood or denied access to it, the stronger they were stripped of their identities as individuals and denied their autonomy. This systematic demote bound women to

adapt their maternal functions to meet the demands of the labor market and the requirements of political control.

In this process, the role of motherhood was exalted and diminished at the same time, celebrated as a vital societal function, yet constrained as the only acceptable role for women. This contradictory dynamic served to both elevate and annihilate the essence of motherhood, reducing it to a tool of social and economic regulation rather than a choice freely made by women.

These feminists also took into account that one of the most utilized methods of controlling women's reproductive functions, beyond the regulation of abortion, was the implementation of mass sterilization programs.

These practices, which began in the 1930s in Puerto Rico, targeted women who were predominantly from racialized or colonized communities.

Women were subjected to state-sanctioned atrocities under the pretext of addressing demographic issues, such as overpopulation. However, these reproductive control policies were not merely a response to demographic concerns; they were a deliberate strategy to manage the labor market and maintain social order. The state, acting as a master over women's bodies, employed terms like "overpopulation" to justify these actions, obscuring the deeper realities of genocide, famine, and the systematic control of female sexuality.⁹⁶

Dalla Costa believed that the widespread prohibition of abortion was indicative of a broader phenomenon, where because of the institutionalization of the "mother" role, the risks became an inherent part of the female condition.

This prohibition did not emerge in isolation, as it was the result of a delayed focus on contraceptive research, which did not occur by accident and was largely due to the combined influence of governmental authorities and the Church. The lack of investments in development and distributions of contraceptive methods relegated abortion to being the only viable option for women seeking to control their reproductive lives. Yet, paradoxically, this option was almost universally

⁹⁶López, I. (2021). Sterile choices: Racialized women, reproductive freedom, and social justice. In *The Routledge Handbook of Anthropology and Reproduction* (pp. 165-180). Routledge.

prohibited, creating a situation where women's reproductive rights were severely denied.

This situation underscored the necessity of all feminist movements to organize a collective struggle for abortion rights as an immediate and fundamental objective. The inability to freely and safely access contraception made abortion not just “a choice”, but a necessity for many women.

However, the medical and scientific communities, influenced by restrictive social and political norms, (still) fail to provide the necessary support for the free and widespread availability of contraceptive methods. This lack of support to women aids the perpetuation of a system in which the illegality of abortion becomes a cornerstone of a broader enterprise that aims at exploiting women's bodies. The veil of moral illegality delays or entirely discourages research into contraceptive methods that could protect both the physical and psychological health of individuals, particularly women.

The level of illegality that surrounded abortion created a foundation upon which selective reproductive control was built. It enabled the concentration of abortion services in specific locations, often dictated by political and economic interests, and facilitated the organization of a system where the legal and illegal aspects of reproductive healthcare were manipulated to serve the state. This manipulation allowed the state to increase its control over women's bodies. Consequently, the movement for women's rights and reproductive freedom has identified the need to combat not only the specific restrictions on abortion but also the broader social and power structures that sustain this exploitation. The fundamental issue is not simply the right to abort; it is the right to become a mother when and only when a woman chooses. The struggle is for the ability to exercise that choice freely, repeatedly, and without coercion.

One of the most powerful forms of resistance that has emerged in response to these oppressive conditions is the mass “self-disclosure” of abortions.

This form of protest has gained traction among revolutionary women within the women's liberation movement and was present even in Wages for housework, however, it was mostly used by groups specializing in counterinformation.⁹⁷

The act of publicly declaring the act of one's abortion is not only a personal confession, it is a bold condemnation of a system that, while prohibiting abortion, simultaneously forces it upon women when their life circumstances, influenced by societal and economic pressures, make pregnancy untenable. Even when a pregnancy is desired, the harsh realities of life under such a system often render it impossible.

By self-reporting their abortions, women are participating in a collective act of resistance. This mass action was used as an indirect but powerful mean of protesting against the authorities and societal structures that compel women to make these painful choices. This form of mass denunciation aimed at exposing and challenging the inherent injustices that force women into situations where their reproductive choices are no longer their own. Through this act of resistance, women tried to reclaim their autonomy and demand recognition of their right to make decisions about their bodies and their lives free from coercion and control.

Refusing work:

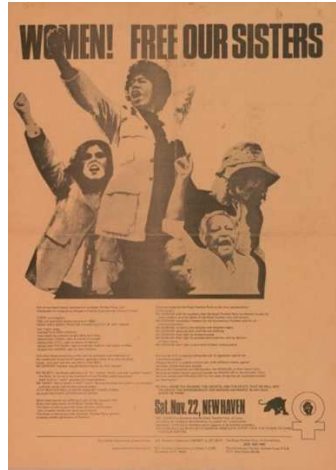
Drawing parallels to the strategies used by the Black radical movement, particularly by the *Black Panthers*, its noticeable that both groups employed the concept of "refusal" as a form of resistance.

For the Panthers, this meant the rejection of a passive civil rights fight, in favor of self-defense and community control. They established "*survival programs*"⁹⁸ like free breakfast programs, health clinics, and educational initiatives to support Black

⁹⁷ One example of this is the group Autonomia Femminista in Italy. Who also Seceded from Lotta Femminista in 1974.

⁹⁸ Community services created by the militants, they provided basic needs for racialized people to sustain themselves.

communities independently of state structures. This approach created a parallel form of power that did not rely on traditional economic or governmental systems.⁹⁹



(Figure 8) Poster featuring an image of protesting women and a list of demands. This poster was used to announce a protest scheduled for November 22, 1969 orchestrated by the N.E. Women's Liberation and the Black Panther Party of Connecticut in support of six female Black Panthers who were being held in Niantic Connecticut State Women's Prison. Its stored in the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Similarly, Dalla Costa's idea that women should "refuse to work" both in domestic and waged settings was a direct challenge to the foundational structures of capitalism. She argued that the unpaid labor women perform in the household is essential for reproducing labor power, which is critical for the survival of capitalist enterprises. A refusal to perform this labor would strike at the heart of capitalist production, mirroring the Black radical movement's focus on disrupting economic systems that perpetuate racial and economic inequalities.

The destruction of the role of the housewife is necessary. Until then, the myth of female incapacity has only been partially broken by women securing their own wages and stepping into spaces of economic independence. The rise of the feminist liberation movement, however, rejects this limited alternative.

As the Wages for Housework groups tell us "The struggles of women working outside the home is not meant to return them to the isolation of domestic life, just

⁹⁹ Dalla Costa, Mariarosa, and Selma James. "Potere femminile e sovversione sociale." (1972). pp. 13-23

as the fight of housewives is not intended to swap domestic confinement for enslavement to a typewriter or assembly line”.¹⁰⁰

So the challenge taken on by the feminist movement is to develop strategies of resistance that liberate women from domestic roles without subjecting them to a secondary burden (in this case the outside job) or allowing further capitalist control and regimentation.

This strategy is inherently revolutionary, and doesn't stop at the concept of reformism. It demands a restructuring of societal and economic systems, freeing women from both the oppression of domestic labor and the imprisonment of wage labor lived under capitalism.

Ultimately, the feminist struggle must focus on dismantling the structures that perpetuate the subordination of women, both in the home and in the workplace, because only by rejecting these roles entirely and creating new forms of solidarity and resistance can women achieve true liberation.

¹⁰⁰ Dalla Costa, M. (1972). *Potere femminile e sovversione sociale*. Padova: Marsilio. pp. 13-23

CHAPTER 3: ITALY AS AN EPICENTER OF FEMINIST EVOLUTION

3.1) VENETO AND LOTTA FEMMINISTA

The Italian working-class movement, with its unique history of struggle, has an advantage in the creation of a social climate able to fight the emerging waves of stereotyping and closure, and was more prone than others to slightly distance itself from the main course of European leftism.

Specifically, on top of an easier access to education for women and their enfranchisement, during the post-war period an influx of migration from southern to northern Italy and from outside the state led to the introduction of new rebellious elements into the factory labor system.

By the end of the sixties, these socio-cultural waves resulted in the explosion of a mass student movement with a unique extra-parliamentary left.

Unfortunately, even with its unique chronicles, the initiatives coming from this diverged left's fell victim of perpetuated and outdated dynamics due to happen in every mixed-gender group, in a less harsh manner than in other states but nonetheless dismissing those minority groups that helped in the defining and creation of this new left.¹⁰¹

Lotta Femminista:

Lotta Femminista (Feminist Fight), which I briefly mention in chapter one of my thesis, was a regional feminist militant group coetaneous to the women's liberation movement founded in the northern city of Padua (Veneto) in 1971.

LF represents one of the most pioneering and transformative collective organizational actions within both the Italian and international feminist sphere. The movement is widely regarded as the progenitor of Venetian feminism, from which many of the region's historical feminist groups emerged.

The movement's origins are deeply linked to the extra-parliamentary left, particularly within *Potere Operaio*, an influential leftist group active during the same period. This connection is largely due to the presence of Antonio Negri at the University of Political Sciences in Padua, as he was the withstanding leader at the time.

From his courses and alongside them, emerged professors such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa, (who worked as his assistant for a period of time), and notable academics like Franca Bimbi¹⁰² and Alisa Del Re¹⁰³, who widely contributed to the intellectual and organizational growth of *Lotta Femminista* and went on to help the growing of current mobilization groups.

Despite the Marxist foundations of the group, *Lotta Femminista* differentiated itself from other liberation groups thanks to its ability to surpass Marx's traditional theory, particularly through its original analysis of domestic labor. The movement utilized the term "*Marxist Feminists*" to describe their theoretical framework that recognized the fundamental interdependence between feminism and Marxism. Rather than viewing one as dependent to the other, this new perspective suggested that the struggles of women, particularly ones regarding unpaid domestic labor, were integral to a broader critique of capitalist exploitation.

The Padua-based groups distinguished themselves through their highly autonomous organizational capacity and their ability to position themselves as a strong opponent to the rest of the left.

Their ability to organize independently, outside the traditional structures of leftist parties, allowed them to become key players in advocating for the rights and recognition of women's unpaid labor in a state that was the pillar of conservatorism.

¹⁰² Franca Bimbi is an Italian sociologist and feminist scholar, specializing in gender, migration, social policies, and family dynamics. Her work explores the intersections of globalization, care work, and social inequalities, influencing both academic and policy debates.

¹⁰³ Alisa Del Re is an Italian feminist scholar known for her critical analysis of social reproduction, unpaid domestic labor, and capitalism's exploitation of women's work, influencing movements like *Non Una Di Meno*.

From its foundation, Lotta Femminista was one of the most innovative and forward-thinking forces within the feminist movement and played a vital role in many of the most significant moments of the era.

As an example of that, in 1972, the movement was one of the first internationally to make a significant split from collaboration with male-dominated new left groups and position themselves outside of political parties, emphasizing the necessity of autonomy within the feminist struggle, while at the same time, looking to extend their practices internationally.

A bold move that underscored the group's commitment to creating a feminist movement independent from the priorities of male revolutionary agendas and put them on the map for their forward thinking.¹⁰⁴

The watershed case of Gigliola Pierobon:

One of their most notable actions occurred in 1973, when Lotta Femminista took a relevant role in the organization of the first national demonstration against illegal abortion in Italy, the day coinciding with the trial of Gigliola Pierobon.

The young woman, coming from a small rural town called San Martino di Lupari (in the province of Padua). Born in 1950, was only 17 years old when she found out about her unwanted pregnancy, and shortly after chose termination due to economic and relationship reasons. Unable to pay the excessive sum required to abort in a private clinic, she had no other choice but to go to an unlicensed practitioner in Padova, and after almost risking her life due to complications was then, 3 years later, investigated for having the number of said practitioner and then later going to process for undergoing said abortion.

At the time the Italian legislation on abortion was still the same as when under fascist law making, so the process had close and conservatorist dynamics and scandalous practices of body policy.

¹⁰⁴ Zanetti, A. M. (1998). *Una ferma utopia sta per fiorire: le ragazze di ieri: idee e vicende del movimento femminista nel Veneto degli anni Settanta*. Marsilio Editori.

“The public dimension, as guarantor of rights and constitutional freedoms that is typical of a representative government, immediately comes into tension and conflict with the stickiness of its ancient inquisitorial logic, with police-like judicial practices, and the secrecy characteristic of the Italian legal proceedings of the time”. (Perini, 2014)¹⁰⁵

This event marked a defining moment in the history of Italian feminism, as the outrage of women from all layers of society pushed coverage by mass-media to reach international levels¹⁰⁶, successfully drawing national attention to the issue of reproductive rights, which until then had largely been marginalized and ignored in the country as a “private” business.¹⁰⁷

This the first time feminist liberation groups take control of a state practice result of systematic misogyny and make it a political case about all of them.

Common goals doesn't mean common practices:

However, by October 1974, Lotta Femminista experienced a relevant amount of internal tensions that led to its dissolution as a collective. These tensions arose from divergent political analyses and differing visions for the future of the movement, particularly regarding organizational strategies and the objectives to be pursued. As a result, the Wages for Housework oriented feminist groups in Padua and Venice split into two distinct factions: Lotta Femminista n.1, which became known as the “Centro Femminista,” led by figures such as Sandra and

¹⁰⁵ Translation By A. Salviato of “la dimensione pubblica, come garanzia e affermazione di diritti e di libertà costituzionali propri di uno Stato a regime rappresentativo, entra subito in tensione e conflitto con la vischiosità dell’antica logica inquisitoria, con le pratiche giudiziarie poliziesche e la segretezza che sono proprie dell’impostazione del processo in quel momento in Italia” direct citation from Perini, L. (2014). *Il corpo del reato*. Parigi 1972-Padova 1973: storia di due processi per aborto. bradypus. p. 20

¹⁰⁶ The specific dynamics happening within the court trial were not covered by media as the Italian government refused to have cameras inside.

¹⁰⁷ Perini, L. (2014). *Il corpo del reato*. Parigi 1972-Padova 1973: storia di due processi per aborto. bradypus.

Flavia Busatta; and *Lotta Femminista n.2*, which later adopted the name “Comitato per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico,” under the leadership of Mariarosa Dalla Costa.

Lotta femminista n.1,:

Lotta Femminista n.1 concentrated its efforts on counter-information campaigns and raising awareness among women in Padua’s working-class neighborhoods, particularly in the San Carlo area. They published a bulletin titled “Le Indomabili Bisbetiche”¹⁰⁸ which provided vital information on neighborhood activities, range prices and critiqued the medical-political establishment in Padua.

On the other hand, *Lotta Femminista n.2* focused on building a robust political organization driven by the priorities and demands of women, independent from male-dominated movements. Their primary goal was to mobilize women on a mass scale, using both mainstream media and their own communication tools. They aimed to address directly the figure of the housewife, who, they argued, was isolated within the “automated factory” of the home.

Particularly prolific in producing feminist newspapers, books, theater performances, songs, and other artistic expressions, the feminist group was one of the most culturally productive feminist groups of the time.

Comitato per il salario per il lavoro domestico:

In pursuing a direct communication with venetian housewives, *Lotta Femminista n.2* sought to equip women with the tools to break their historical silence. They promoted public speaking in assemblies, the production of movement newspapers, and the distribution of flyers and posters, all with the goal of fighting the cultural and historical erasure that had long afflicted women. In its later activity as “*Comitato per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico*”, the group expanded its network from Padua and Venice to include new groups in Trieste and the Trentino region,

¹⁰⁸ “*Le Indomabili Bisbetiche*” (1975) Bollettino delle donne del San Carlo, Centro Femminista Via dei Tadi, Padova.

becoming one of the most active and influential feminist organizations in Italy, with an impact that reached far beyond national borders.

What set LF apart from other feminist groups in Italy was its ability to expand its influence far beyond regional borders, to be more specific what I want to highlight most with my thesis is its proficiency in establishing itself as a beacon for feminist activism both nationally and internationally using new and unique methods.

Innovative communication for differentiated mobilization:

One of their notable efforts was the publication of the bimonthly newsletter “*Le Operaie della casa*” (“The Housewives/Workers of the Home”). The bulletin was made available in multiple languages in accessible wording and was distributed free of charge. This journal played a key role in keeping members of the movement informed about international matters, offering a platform for exchanging ideas, critiquing existing conditions, and promoting feminist thought around domestic labor in a pluricultural account. It helped sustaining the movement’s intellectual and political momentum by spreading its core messages to a wider audience..

In addition to prolific publishing, the Padova group was also active in the cultural sphere, using creative arts as a tool for activism.

They formed a theater group called, “*Gruppo Teatrale per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico*”¹⁰⁹, which staged performances focused on themes central to the Wages for Housework campaign. Through dramatization, the theater group highlighted the challenges faced by women in unpaid domestic roles, using comedic performances as a powerful tool to raise consciousness and sparking public debate to spaces outside of academia.

¹⁰⁹ Theatrical group for Wages for Housework.



(Figure 9) Cover of the Cd: *Canti di donne in lotta: Canzoniere femminista del Comitato per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico of Padova.*

“Gruppo musicale del Comitato per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico di Padova” often provided musical support for the theater group and also worked on the creation and distribution of their own songs, collected on an EP with the name *This musical ensemble connected the power of music and its potential to spread to convey the movement's messages.*

In Italy, a state so culturally diverse, exists a unique relationship between women and song, particularly evident in the Veneto region where the tradition of female protest through music in Italy has roots in medieval songs like “*La malmaritata*”,¹¹⁰ which take on a distinct character in the Venetian lagoon and its hinterlands.

Often times these songs blend melody and anger, irony with determination. Through their diverse efforts in journalism, theater and music, the Tri-Veneto groups utilized different and never seen before platforms to challenge the traditional communicative isolation of domestic labor. This multidimensional approach allowed them to engage with different audiences, from activists and intellectuals to the broader international public.

¹¹⁰ La Malmaritata is a traditional Italian song that tells the story of a woman trapped in an unhappy marriage, expressing her sorrow and longing for freedom from her oppressive situation.

An international mindset from the start:

The movement's slogan, after its evolution to "*Comitato per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico*" became "feminism is either international or it is nothing,"¹¹¹ effectively encapsulated their belief in the global dimensions of women's struggles.

Lotta Femminista was deeply aware that the fight for women's liberation could not and should not be confined to national boundaries, and instead required a broader, transnational approach.

Their global outlook was built by the knowledge of the activists in the contemporary struggles across the world, including the fight for the welfare state in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, as well as the civil rights movements led by Black women and other marginalized groups.

The care and attention to international matters allowed *Lotta Femminista* to situate its advocacy for women's rights within a broader global framework, recognizing that the subjugation of women, especially through unpaid domestic labor, was a universal condition under capitalist systems.

The movement's widely prolific theoretical production was helpful in supporting both its practical activism and its organizational efforts.

3.2) ACCOUNTING FOR REGIONAL DIFFERENCES, INTERSECTIONALITY WITHIN ITALY:

Southern Italy, has historically been marked by poverty and economic underdevelopment, largely due to the nation's elites (mainly from the north) refusal to modernize or introduce technological advancements.

The lack of universities in the south at the time also delayed the early politicization of many women, creating a strong difference from the experiences of young women in the north, where education served for most cases as an important entry point into feminist and leftist activism.

¹¹¹ Translated by A. Salviato from the book by Zanetti, A. M. (1998). *Una ferma utopia sta per fiorire: le ragazze di ieri: idee e vicende del movimento femminista nel Veneto degli anni Settanta*. Marsilio Editori. p.119

In the south there was also a higher chance of women working only temporarily, and using wages to save for essential family needs, fully aware that wage labor did not equate to liberation but merely added to their burdens.

The southern Italian regions suffered also from the profound challenge of organized crime and other violent forms which added more burdens on the women's quest for emancipation. For many women, fighting patriarchal oppression was intertwined with resisting these corrupt power structures. The political landscape in the north, was instead heavily influenced by the resistance to fascism during Mussolini's dictatorship and shaped leftist activism and feminist consciousness in distinct ways.

While southern activism was often centered around agrarian revolts, land occupations, and agricultural strikes, the north's political struggles were framed by antifascist resistance, leading to differing trajectories in the development of feminist movements in the two regions.

Additionally, it should be noted that, in the south, family structures were more often extended; they incorporated three or more generations living together.

A stark contrast to the nuclear family structure that prevailed in the urbanized north, where individual families consisted of the typical nuclear family.

The extended family in the south created a different dynamic for women, shaping their roles as housewives and limiting their opportunities for autonomy uniquely.

Though characteristically the nature of women's exploitation and oppression remained the same, the geographical variations changed the ways women suffered or the options they had to fight.¹¹²

This is why the creation of branches in southern Italy became such a complicated matter, in a space where women were struggling as is, and the additional intersecting struggle of coming from the south created a barrier in the organizational efforts made by the few branches.

¹¹² Rousseau, C. A. (2015). Housework and social subversion: Wages, housework, and feminist activism in 1970s Italy and Canada.

The Lotta Femminista network, predominantly focused in Italy's industrialized northern regions, demonstrated a fundamental will in understanding and addressing the significant presence of regional disparities between the north and the underdeveloped south, playing a part in the consideration of a imperative intersectional concept bound in national spaces.

To be more specific, these intellectuals recognized that strategies that may be successful in the urbanized, industrial centers of the north, might not work efficiently or on the same level in rural and economically disadvantaged zones, especially in the south, given the differing levels of feminist consciousness and socio-economic contexts.

It is important to emphasize that these differences should not be interpreted as one area's feminist development being superior or inferior to the other. Instead, the variations show that women's experiences of oppression and domesticity are far from universal, and what it means to be a housewife or a worker differs based on these regional contexts, but is nonetheless of interest in the advancement of a movement.

CHAPTER 4:

THE DISCUSSION AROUND AUTONOMY, A FUNDAMENTAL FOCUS ON BLACK WOMEN AND LESBIANS.

“The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives”. (Combahee River Collective, 1977)¹¹³

What is intersectionality:

Intersectionality, a concept which I find important to extend on now, as first articulated by Black feminists, is the existence of a framework fundamental to understand how various forms of social stratification, like race, gender, sexuality, and class, intersect and overlap to create complex matrices of oppression and privilege that are involved in shaping individual experiences.

The *Combahee River Collective* was instrumental in developing this concept with their 1977 “*A Black Feminist Statement*”¹¹⁴, which emphasized that the unique oppression faced by black women cannot be fully understood as the sum of two isolated experiences but must be seen as an intertwinement of race, gender, and class. The collective was one of the first to highlight the need of liberation of black women to practically dismantle all forms of systemic oppression.

The movements within the Wages for Housework groups aligned with these ideals and preached the concept in a similar way but with organizational differences.

Proto – Intersectionality elements in the “Revolt of the excluded”:

¹¹³ Collective, C. R. (1977). '*A Black Feminist Statement*' (pp. 210-218).

¹¹⁴ Ibidem.

Going back to the work of Mariarosa Dalla Costa, we can see how she openly challenges the eurocentric perspective, and does so by advocating for an international class approach where every racialized or discriminated individual is integrated into the broader struggle. Thus, offering a new analysis of the working class, she expands on the definition of work as a struggle lived not only by waged workers, to include those within the broader wage relationship, especially the nuclear families.¹¹⁵ She argues that all women who work outside the home continue to fulfill domestic responsibilities, and that this same unique aspect of domestic labor shapes a woman's position regardless of her race or class. Doing so she highlights that the oppression of women, while not starting with capitalist society, is intensified under capitalism due to their gender identity, and is intersected with race and sexuality. Capitalism disrupts the family and community as productive centers of pre-capitalist society and centralizes what it believes to be fundamental production in factories and offices, doing so, it transforms men into wage laborers. Consequently, by excluding those who do not procreate or serve wage earners, such as lesbians and sterile women, capitalism creates a dissonant dynamic where the revolt of one group (wage earners) against exploitation doesn't inherently represent the struggles of the excluded group (non-wage earners). But the opposite situation, in which the excluded takes the role of a spearhead in the mobilization dynamics, defines a cohesive effort in the undertaking of the struggle from every level. Dalla Costa calls this dynamic the "revolt of the excluded"¹¹⁶.

In this Chapter, I specifically focus on the militant energies of two autonomous groups within the WfH campaign: the Canadian/UK group Wages Due Lesbians and the US/UK based, Black Women for Wages for Housework. Reconsidering the WfH movement from the perspective of these groups and their intellectual contributions is fundamental to understand the internal conflicts and divisions that

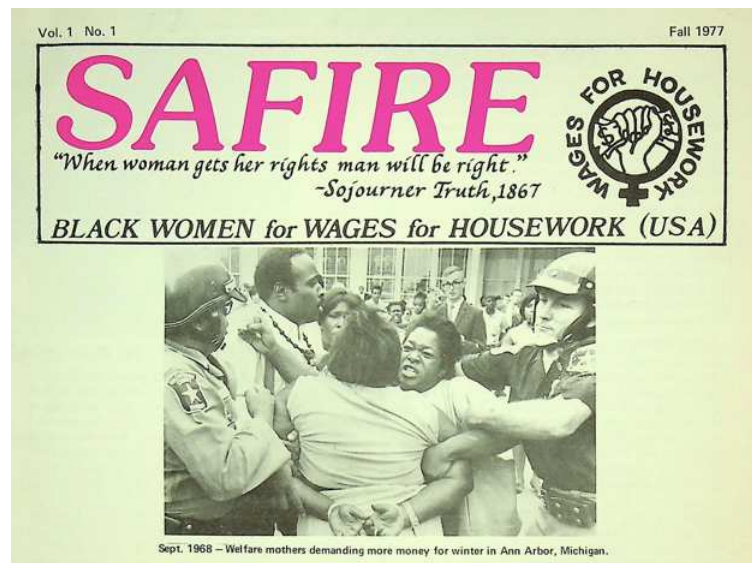
¹¹⁵ Dalla Costa, M., & James, S. (1972). *Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*.

¹¹⁶ Ivi. p.142.

shaped the movement, challenging the idea of housework as a unified and unifying site of struggle, but all the while highlighting necessary steps to be taken for an international movement to be truly transversal and intersectional.

4.1) THE NEED FOR BLACK WOMEN IN THE NETWORK

The inclusive potential of the Wages for Housework movement was well communicated within the WLM thanks to the presence of numerous black feminists such as Wilmette Brown, a member of Black Women for Wages for Housework. The intellectual introduced the themes of autonomous branching in her powerful essay “The Autonomy of Black Lesbian Women which will later become one of the key foundation texts for Black feminist criticism as an academic field in the United States.



(Figure 10) copy of Vol. 1 No. 1 of the newspaper Safire from Black Women for Wages for Housework (USA)

The Black Women for Wages for Housework group was firstly established after the Welfare Conference held in April 1976 by the New York Wages for Housework Committee.

Brown initially presented her essay at the Wages Due Lesbians conference in Toronto, which aimed to explore and clarify various aspects of lesbian autonomy. In her presentation, she highlighted what autonomy meant for Black, racialized,

and lesbian women, arguing that it needed to be exercised on more levels, in relation to African American men, to white women, and to Black heterosexual women.

Within her work, she argued that the struggles faced by Black women exposed the deeper dynamics of both racism and sexism since black men, due to systemic racism, had significantly less access to wages and economic opportunities compared to white men.

Despite having less power than white men, black men still held significant control over black women, reinforced by the economic power tied to the male wage. Brown pointed out that even the Black Liberation movement of the 1960s failed to liberate African American women, as its organizations were built on an ideology of Black male superiority. Similarly to the efforts in white leftist spaces, many black women who had done essential labor within these organizations eventually left, leading to their collapse, as these movements had been sustained largely by the unpaid work of women.

As if the problems suffered by black women in their community were not sufficient, they also dealt with the relative privilege enjoyed by white women, who had better access to white men's wages. This form of economic "protection," although dependent on class, was still distributed mainly to white women than to black women.

Historically, black women have seen continuously denied this access, particularly during slavery when they had limited opportunities for marriage and the financial security that came with it. A stark division of roles within labor emerged from the history of slavery in the United States.

By racist society, white women were seen as "ladies," objects of beauty and love, upheld by societal standards of femininity.

While black women were seen as "mammies", a racial stereotype for caretakers of white households, or, in some cases, as prostitutes or single mothers struggling for economic survival. This division reinforced the relative power of white women over Black women, compelling Black women to organize independently.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Brown, W. in Toupin, L. (2018). *Wages for housework*. London: Pluto Press.

“We organize on the basis of the particular conditions of our lives as Black women, and the particular nature of our struggle which is a constant battle against scarcity, against indignity, and against self-hatred. And we organize autonomously to struggle for wages for housework from the vantage point of our particular situation to do away with our work as Black people and to do away with our work as women”. ¹¹⁸

Wilmette Brown emphasized the unique challenges Black lesbians faced, particularly the need for autonomy from Black heterosexual women, and the difficulty of identifying as lesbian within the African American community. According to Brown, both slavery and capitalism had contributed to the hypersexualization of Black people. This led to a portrayal of Black men as controlled and defied by their sexuality, while Black women were often depicted as prostitutes or overtly sexualized. In this context, Black lesbians, by rejecting relationships with men and the societal expectations of femininity tied to serving men sexually, were seen as doubly transgressive in their rejection of imposed roles.

She introduces a term to describe the image Black lesbians have in society, which is "superfreak", ¹¹⁹ one that not only deviates from the norms of heterosexuality but also from the racialized expectations of Blackness, also constructed around sexual roles.

The intellectual also argues that this stigma places black lesbians in a unique position, where their autonomy is necessary to the movement.

Brown explains how black lesbians have to organize independently because their specific needs and struggles would otherwise go unrecognized.

Visibility, to her, was crucial for connection among black lesbians and for asserting their distinct position within both the feminist and black communities.

¹¹⁸ Brown, W. in Toupin, L. (2018). *Wages for housework*. London: Pluto Press p.69

¹¹⁹ Ivi. p.70

Only by being autonomous could black lesbians address their own interests and struggles first.

For Brown, being black and lesbian in a capitalistic society posed significant challenges, not just to sexual identity but to racial identity as well.

Simply because African American women often had to navigate multiple identities and the intersection of the obstacles afflicting each of them.

Allyship in common spaces:

The Wages for Housework movement, luckily, offered a path for black lesbians to organize and gain their deserved power.

It was commonly believed within the group that by fighting for economic independence, black lesbians could break free from their dependency on male wages that kept many women trapped in heterosexual marriages.

This framework also allowed for solidarity between Black lesbians and Black heterosexual women, who were both entrapped within the same struggle against housework and financial dependency on men. By framing their fight in terms of wages for housework, Black women, regardless of their specific situation, could unite against the exploitation of their unpaid labor and the societal pressure to conform to heterosexual norms.¹²⁰

In order to gain visibility and assert their rights, Black lesbians had to form autonomous organizations. By standing together and coming out of isolation, they could not only connect with each other but also strengthen their solidarity with other women. The Wages for Housework movement made this possible by highlighting how all women, regardless of race or sexuality, were subordinated to men due to the gendered wage gap. For Brown, this perspective offered a way for women's autonomy to enhance collective power rather than divide it, creating a stronger, more inclusive movement.

¹²⁰ Brown, W. (1976) *The Autonomy of Black Lesbian Women*. Mimeograph.

This concept of "heterosexual work" refers to the labor, both emotional and physical, that women provide within heterosexual relationships, which often directly benefits only men.

However, the group Black Women for Wages for Housework expanded this idea by framing the labor as ultimately serving the interests of "the Man", a term widely used in Black political discourse to refer to institutional power, particularly the capitalist and patriarchal systems that maintain social control. Black Women for Wages for Housework adapted this critique, linking it to the welfare rights activism of Black women in the U.S., and emphasizing how the capitalist state exerts control over domestic life and upholds the heteronormative family model.

Criticism within the black liberation movement:

The demand for wages for housework from a Black feminist perspective has sparked considerable debate. Critics, such as Angela Y. Davis, have argued that the WfH framework does not sufficiently address the unique challenges faced by Black women. Davis contended that WfH overlooks the racial and economic factors that compel Black women to engage in domestic work under conditions that are not addressed by the WfH model. She pointed out that Black women's experiences with domestic labor often differ significantly from those of their white counterparts, highlighting a need for a more nuanced approach.

Similarly, the "*Brixton Black Women's Group*"¹²¹ voiced concerns about the WfH campaigns, describing them as reflecting middle-class perspectives that did not engage with the broader issues facing women of color. In their 1984 statement "Black Feminism," they criticized WfH for focusing on the house and housework as central categories of analysis without addressing the racial and economic complexities involved. According to their critique, such an approach risks reinforcing outdated and inequitable gender norms rather than challenging them.

¹²¹ Toupin, L. (2018). *Wages for housework*. London: Pluto Press.

Despite these criticisms, Black Women for Wages for Housework approached the issue of housework with a distinct perspective. The group examined the historical context of slavery and its continuing impact on labor divisions, emphasizing the racialized nature of domestic work. They highlighted how Black women have historically performed labor for white families, a context that shapes their experiences in ways that differ from those of white housewives. The Housework movement sought to redefine the concept of housework by including various forms of reproductive labor, such as that performed by welfare mothers, paid domestic workers, and sex workers.

Yolanda Jones, a prominent member of *Black Women for Wages for Housework*, articulated this inclusive approach and responded to main concerns in a 1980 interview with WBAI, a New York FM radio station¹²². She underscored that the group's advocacy extended beyond the traditional definitions of housework and marital status, emphasizing support for all individuals engaged in any form of domestic labor. Jones's statement reflected the group's broader goal of challenging and reimagining the categories of housework and labor, aiming to address the diverse and intersecting experiences of those involved. Black Women for Wages for Housework's contributions to the Wages for Housework movement were marked by their commitment to addressing the specific needs of Black women and challenging conventional notions of domestic labor. Their efforts reflect a broader aim to integrate diverse experiences into the discourse on reproductive labor and social justice, pushing for a more inclusive and equitable understanding of these issues.

Their analysis dissociated from any possible "middle-class" or reformist approach as the aim of all wages for housework branches echoed the Combahee River Collective's assertion that true freedom for Black women would necessitate dismantling all systems of oppression. She argued that the autonomy of Black lesbian women not only acknowledges the violence they face but also creates a basis for a broad, inclusive queer feminist politics.

¹²² Wyland, F., & Toronto, W. D. L. (1977). Motherhood lesbianism and child custody. (*No Title*).

4.2) WAGES DUE LESBIANS AND HETEROSEXUAL WORK

Lesbianism and Catholic Italy:

In Canada, the rise of the Wages Due campaign played a pivotal role in shaping the Toronto Wages for Housework movement. A significant text in this movement, “*Motherhood, Lesbianism, and Child Custody*”¹²³ was circulated internationally, reaching Italy where it was translated and distributed among women active in the “*Salario al Lavoro Domestico*”.

The pamphlet tackled how children are socialized differently based on gender and explored the intersections of race and sexuality in this process. Within this socialization, desires and needs are shaped to fit the demands of capitalism and patriarchy.

As Toupin puts it in her book, sexuality is not just assumed but favored because it serves capitalist interests, but as she noted, “Lesbians made us understand that heterosexuality is also work. It’s within that sphere that exploitation produces itself... Heterosexuality is not only sexual relations; it’s all a social organization”¹²⁴.

Relations between men and women are constructed by society, embedding unequal power dynamics. For Wages for Housework and Wages Due. Lesbians, lesbianism was seen as a form of resistance to the imposed relationships with men.

In Italy, it’s important to recognize the significant role of the Catholic Church in shaping debates on sexuality. While the primary focus was on struggles for abortion rights and divorce laws, it’s wrong to assume that lesbian activism was entirely absent, though it wasn’t at the forefront. For the feminists involved with the Italian Wages for Housework, sexuality wasn’t considered an inherent part of one’s identity and thus wasn’t a central issue for activism. Nonetheless, the idea of

¹²³

¹²⁴ Toupin, L. (2018). *Wages for housework*. London: Pluto Press.

women-only space organizing, including spaces specifically for lesbians, attracted the attention of the members.

Although sexuality wasn't a prominent aspect of the Italian movement, it was certainly present.

Part of the reason for the lack of overt focus on lesbianism was the marginalization of LGBTQ+ history in Italy. In the solidarity that emerged between lesbian and heterosexual women in the movement, there was an acknowledgment of the care and mutual support they provided each other, even when it wasn't fully expressed. For Dalla Costa and other members of *Salario al Lavoro Domestico*, the growing gay movement offered the potential for subversive action in a capitalist society that privileges heterosexuality while simultaneously suppressing emotional intimacy.

Creation of Wages due Lesbians:

The Montreal conference was in effect marked by the coming out of lesbians within the network under the name "*Wages Due Lesbians*". Up to then they were blended into the Toronto and London groups, but they decided to adopt a new organizational form and compose autonomous groups within the network.

*"This separation came out of long discussions on our need to organize autonomously within the network but also to work closely with non-lesbian women. We should stress that it is an autonomous organizational form and not a separate or different strategy. Wages for Housework is our perspective and our strategy. Lesbianism is one way in which we make a struggle."*¹²⁵

In Montreal is also presented "Fucking is Work"¹²⁶ the manifesto that establishes the theoretical basis for lesbians' participation in the network on their own terms.

¹²⁵ Toupin, L. (2018). *Wages for housework*. London: Pluto Press.

¹²⁶ Wages Due Lesbians. (1981). *Fucking is work: A manifesto*.

The group originally came from the lesbian movements and found in the Wages for housework a collective idea of power conducive and close to their own struggle.

Theoretically, in the early years of the movement, discussions around the limitations imposed by heterosexuality were already being explored by members of existing groups. Expanding on the foundational theories of the movement, WDL asserted that lesbians occupied a unique position within these conflicting labor dynamics. They were subjected to the sexual labor expected of heterosexual women, whether through marriage, involvement in prostitution, or child-rearing yet their sexual attraction to women posed a challenge to the stability of capitalism.

Selma James reached similar insights in her earlier unpublished essay “When the Mute Speaks”.¹²⁷ In this work, she refers to lesbians as the “enemy within” capitalist structures, cleverly using the anti-immigrant rhetoric used by British Tory MP *Enoch Powell* in 1970.

The author believes lesbian relationships hold anti-capitalist potential inherent in the existing relations of labour and accidentally create more closeness between women than to men in heterosexual relationships.

Therefore she theorizes that capital undermines heterosexuality, one of the structures which upholds it.

Wages Due Lesbians shared this perspective, and noted that capitalism disciplines lesbians because their sexuality has the potential to disrupt traditional household dynamics.

As Ruth Hall,¹²⁸ a co-founder of the movement stated, capital imposes discipline on lesbianism “in every way because it threatens an explosion”.

¹²⁷ James, S. (1975). When the mute speaks. Unpublished manuscript.

¹²⁸ Ruth Hall was a feminist activist, co-founder of Wages Due Lesbians, advocating for lesbian rights and labor.



Figure 11 Wages for Housework and Lesbianism, an invite to “Come to an afternoon of activities”. Sunday Feb. 20th 1977, Black Women for WFH; N.Y. WFH Committee

Lesbian sexuality is still work:

Within the Wages for Housework movement, activists argued that both lesbian and straight relationships were connected and tied to the capitalist labor system. Silvia Federici pointed out that intimate and sexual relations must be understood as forms of work, further reinforcing the movement’s broader goal of exposing the unseen labor that sustains the economy.

Activists within the Wages for Housework movement argued that neither lesbian nor straight sexual relationships completely existed outside the framework of capitalist labor relations.

In this context, Federici described the movement’s intellectual and activist mission as one of identifying the intimate and sexual relations that must be recognized as work, “so that eventually we might rediscover what is love and create what will be our sexuality, which we have never known.”¹²⁹

In particular, Wages Due Lesbians was the one to offer a radical rework on the postulates of lesbian identity, confirming it as both a form of housework and a

¹²⁹ Toupin, L. (2018). *Wages for housework*. London: Pluto Press.

contradiction within capitalism that could lead to the rejection and eventual abolition of domestic labor.

While they positioned lesbianism as an act of resistance against traditional work, they also recognized that it still played a role in upholding capitalist structures. This analysis, predating the widespread legalization of same-sex marriage, was ahead of its time and recognized lesbian relationships as a form of reproductive labor, challenging the common assumption present even in the movement that lesbian sexuality was inherently "non-reproductive."

As Waged Due Lesbians explained in their essay "Lesbian and Straight"¹³⁰, even in lesbian relationships, women continue to care for each other, perpetuating the cycle of labor: "In lesbian relationships, we still take care of ourselves and other women (other workers) so it is not an escape from our work" (Wages Due Lesbians).

At the same time, Wages Due Lesbians highlighted the dual nature of lesbian sexuality: while it might reproduce capitalist dynamics, it also sustains the struggle against these structures.

In the same essay, they noted, "When we sleep with a woman, we are still serving the state, she too must be kept happy enough to keep working. But at least when we spend our time and sexual energy on women, we are also maintaining her for her struggle against our work"¹³¹.

In their view, the demand for wages wasn't a complete rejection of the possibility of refusing work, but rather a vital step toward achieving that refusal by providing the material means for lesbians, seen as houseworkers, to organize and resist collectively.

They argued that true liberation could only be obtained through a revolution that would dismantle all productive relationships, including those shaping both lesbian and heterosexual sexual dynamics.

¹³⁰ Wages Due Collective, Toronto. (n.d.). Lesbians and straights. In M. Edmond & S. Fleming (Eds.), *All work and no pay* (pp. 21–25).

¹³¹ Hall, R. (n.d.). Lesbianism and power. In Collectif L'Insoumise (Ed.), *The home of the insurrection* (pp. 109–117).

In this sense, WDL's analysis diverged from the notion of lesbianism as an inherently liberatory position, instead viewing it as firmly embedded within the oppressive sexual relations of capitalism.

The complex relationship between lesbian identity and the sexual division of labor was a central theme in Hall's speech "Lesbianism and Power"¹³², delivered at a 1975 Wages for Housework conference in London. In her speech, Hall explored how the refusal of reproductive labor within heteronormative households intersected with the hardships of coming out as a lesbian.

However, Hall also acknowledged that this strategy of refusal to perpetuate heterosexual relationships inevitably triggered various forms of societal regulation and cultural pressures, with attempts to either discipline or reintegrate lesbians into the dominant framework of heterosexual production and reproduction. So even as lesbians "represented" a potential escape from the heterosexual work-discipline tied to housework, they remained deeply connected to the household as a core site of social reproduction.

This perspective underscores the often overlooked importance of queer sexualities within the Wages for Housework movement's understanding of social reproduction struggles.

Why was autonomy important and how did it play in the wfh movement:

The Wages for Housework movement had the potential to unite all women without having them set aside their differences. Within this framework, both Black women and lesbians formed their own autonomous organizations that addressed the specific needs of their members.

Their positions highlighted, for the first time, the unique contributions of the Wages for Housework perspective and its ability to connect with different demands that were previously made by seemingly distant groups within the women's movement.

¹³² Ibidem.

The Wages for Housework strategy thus became a crucial tool for empowering women and acted as a fulcrum to transform numerous aspects of women's situations, particularly the power dynamics between those who receive wages and those who do not, as well as between men and women.

This strategy had the potential to challenge the very foundations of capitalist social and economic structures, which relied on the division between the waged and the wageless.

The Wages for Housework struggle brought together all women, whether they were in precarious situations or wageless, breaking down barriers between homosexuals and heterosexuals, single women and those in relationships, and mothers and non-mothers.

Achieving a wage for housework is the beginning of dismantling all power imbalances within the working class that stem from the division between those who are waged and those who are not.

“To challenge these power dynamics within the working class is to challenge capital itself.”¹³³

¹³³ Federici, S. (2012). *Revolution at point zero: Housework, reproduction, and feminist struggle*. PM Press.

CONCLUSION:

Can we truly talk about embryonal Internationality?

The term "an *embryo of a women's internationale*," was used multiple times to describe the International Feminist Collective during its time of existence, the term was originally coined by the Swiss Wages for Housework group "*Collectif L'Insoumise*"¹³⁴.

While the use of the word "Internationale" might appear somewhat exaggerated, due to its strong historical meaning and weight, considering the International Feminist Collective never grew into a large-scale mass movement but had a relatively small participation throughout its existence as the specific demand was not universally accepted or put as a forerunner in other struggles.

Coupled with its brief lifespan, this tight fit adds to the perception that the term "international" may be overstated or irrelevant internally to such a wide and innovative decade.

But upon my studies and despite these factors, I still found the label fitting appropriately, especially within the nicher subject I'm focusing on as it effectively captures the network's early goals and its intention to launch a feminist mobilization across various countries, acting collectively on a global level.

So instead of focusing on its complete "domination worldwide", we can recognize how this was the final goal of the network.

The International Feminist Collective distinguished itself from other feminist groups exactly because it questioned other non-international forms of liberation, which merely seemed to double women's workload or to displace social labour in emerging countries.

On top of this they had the ability to effectively launch a structure of branches and groups working on the issue, taking action by organizing collectively in what was and a transversal way.

¹³⁴ Collectif L'Insoumise was a Swiss feminist collective emerging from the Wages for Housework movement.

The international campaign was chosen as an instrument and a goal by the International feminist collectives for several reasons: to expose the shared exploitative aspects of various situations lived by houseworkers, to bring them out of isolation and invisibility, and to end the divisions that capitalist organization had created among all women and not only.

A organized campaign also made it possible to link struggles that were already of interest in the branched but seemingly unconnected to each other.

This meant being able to provide support to the women living other struggles and being able to highlight the existing link them and housework.

A campaign was also a tool to circulate information or experiences that otherwise would be never heard about.

What can we take from Wages for Housework?

In a capitalist system that extracts surplus value from every aspect of life, recognizing our genealogy and the events that shaped our collective force becomes not only fundamental but also revolutionary.

It allows us to reconnect with the struggles and conflicts of the past that have been crucial in shaping our present and come from a shared effort to find new ways to organize and refuse patriarch-capitalistic structures of power.

By reflecting on historical battles, resistance, and mobilizations enables us to better understand contemporary dynamics and orient ourselves toward a more informed future.

Because every social movement has a time of effect, continuous progress makes it so that some practices and terms become obsolete or antiquated, this is the case for some of these practices.

Nonetheless, I still believe that some of the content used and practices by Wages for Housework remains relevant to the organizational experiences of today, and this is why my work was made.

Today, feminist extra-parliamentary groups focus primarily on the fight against gender-based violence. This struggle unites a wide range of movements and

actions, each with distinct characteristics and forms, and yet just like during the 70's, they all share a common goal, one where its collectively recognized that gender violence is not an isolated issue but rather a manifestation of power relations that pervade both the public and private spheres.

These power dynamics are deeply rooted in patriarchal legacies and colonial and capitalist models that continue to shape our societies just like housework did, and still does, during the cold war period.

I fervently believe that the Wages for Housework had the potential to reach a more advanced and revolutionary effect with the knowledge of what is now the contemporary queer understanding of "*transfeminism*", which does not take the normative home as an assumed site of struggle but instead focus on the experiences of those who are fundamentally excluded from it, or forcibly integrated into its structures and ideologies.

However I find that our contemporary peers, due to the institutionalization of rebellious practices such as strikes and occupations, sometimes lack the interest and tools to effectively make our voices heard, a thing I much admire from the Collectives of the time.

The advent of "second wave" feminism marks a pivotal moment in the analysis of social structures. It brought to the surface the fact that reproductive labor, predominantly carried out by women and often unpaid, is true and real work, essential for the functioning of the economic system.

Marxist feminism, in particular, emphasized how this reproductive labor is fundamental to productive processes and capitalist accumulation.

Reaching such understand at the time, created a long chain of events and actions that made it possible to open the possibility of a revolutionary reorganization of society, as reproductive labor was finally recognized as a key element capable of subverting the capitalist order.

However, today it is no longer viable to conduct a feminist campaign focused solely on domestic labor, unlike in the past.

Fifty years later, domestic labor must be examined and incorporated into a broader framework of productive and power relations that were excluded from academic

and political discourse at the time which is intertwined with other forms of exploitation and oppression.

Capitalistic dynamics have evolved, and so have the ways oppression is distributed, becoming more complex and stratified due to both globalization and the “web 3.0¹³⁵”.

The contemporary feminist movement has, in fact, become aware of the new forms of capitalist exploitation, not only by analyzing the political-economic conditions of the past but also by exploring the new dimensions of oppression in the present.

An example of this awareness is the practice of the “gender strike” promoted by the trans-feminist movement, which highlights how gender itself, understood as a social and performative construction, has become an additional site of value extraction by capital. Gender is no longer merely an identity category but also an economic and political dimension, exploited by the system to perpetuate control and oppression.

In this complex framework, the feminist struggle has expanded its perspectives, addressing not only gender violence but also the intersections between reproductive labor, gender dynamics, and economic exploitation. It is important to “go beyond”, by always taking into account the processes and evolving dynamics present in the relationships between capital and labor. This approach allows us to grasp not only the intricate connections between them, but also the effects of these interconnections and their influence on social reorganization.

Only by recognizing these intersections can effective strategies be developed to combat the multiple forms of oppression that characterize contemporary capitalism, and only by advancing a social revolution that touches all aspects of daily life, both public and private.

It is crucial to recover and reinterpret valuable elements from past movements and adapt them to create tools to address the processes and struggles we encounter today. By revisiting and reworking the lessons and strategies from the first periods

¹³⁵ Interactive internet that lets you communicate publicly back and forth, an example of this is the new social media wave.

of mutual aid and solidarity, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding to the challenges we as a community face in contemporary activism.

The ability to critically engage with the practices and theories that arose during times of urgent social need gives us the insights needed to organize and reconstruct a coherent and effective worldview. This process not only involves preserving the core principles of past movements but also integrating them into new frameworks that reflect our current realities and aspirations. A particularly important aspect is the re-evaluation of the concepts of interdependence and collaboration that were central to historical movements. While these practices may seem distant or less relevant to us as modern feminists, they embody foundational elements of solidarity and collective action that continue to inform and inspire our work today. Understanding how these relationships and collaborative strategies were developed and utilized in earlier contexts helps us appreciate their ongoing relevance and potential for innovation in our current struggles. As we work to create and revolutionize new content and approaches, it is crucial to recognize that many of the relational dynamics and collaborative models we are using now were already present in previous movements. These historical precedents provide valuable lessons and frameworks that can deepen our understanding of contemporary issues and strengthen our efforts to build a more equitable and just society. By incorporating these insights into our current practices, we can better navigate the complexities of modern social struggles and advance our collective goals with a more informed and nuanced perspective.

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