



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in
Lingue Moderne per la Comunicazione e la Cooperazione Internazionale
Classe LM-38

Tesi di Laurea

Precariousness and gender in Italy in the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society

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Anno Accademico 2022/2023

Laureanda

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n° matr.2021027 / LMLCC

A coloro che mi hanno reso la persona che sono oggi.

Grazie mamma e papà per il vostro amore

e per il vostro supporto costante.

Abstract

Gendered labor is closely tied to the socio-cultural transformations of societies and does not follow a linear path. It serves as a privileged observatory for understanding how instability and precarity in labor have characterized the entire history of industrial capitalism, including the 1950s and 1960s, considered the era of economic stability par excellence. In an attempt to outline the role of women in relation to work within society, an exploration of an older framework starting from the past was undertaken to understand its origins and evolution.

It was observed that male dominance was absent in primitive societies, and as a result, its origins may date back to a period preceding the forms of private property. Reference is made to lineage societies, where work was distributed within families, and property was divided. Consequently, the origins of female subordination are intertwined with the origins of social and economic differentiation that emerged within families and societies. When the state institutionalized patriarchy, exclusive control of domestic authority was strengthened.

With the emergence of private property, men gained more and more power, and women were relegated to the domestic sphere. With the birth of class oppression, women were exploited to increase production and allow capitalists to lower the wages of all workers.

The 1950s and 1960s were considered years of Italian economic well-being that led the country back to stability. After a period of crisis marked by World War II, during which the male population had been immobilized for four years, creating a labor shortage in critical industrial sectors, efforts were made to resume work rhythms. However, the situation was not straightforward, and despite women gaining the right to vote in 1960, workplace discrimination persisted. From 1951 to 1961, Italy experienced unprecedented economic expansion: the agricultural reality was abandoned in favor of factories.

With the advent of industrialization and a lesser focus on agricultural work, there was a decrease in the number of women in the workforce. Factories forced workers into grueling rhythms, and the work was of low qualification. Regulations were quite strict: employers dictated the conditions of hiring and firing, and women had to sign clauses at the time of hiring that obligated them to choose between work and marriage. Fortunately, in 1963, a law was introduced that prohibited the dismissal of female workers for marriage-related reasons.

Lastly, it should also be noted that with the advent of industrialization, women were assimilated to machines. They were expected to work at the same pace, although it soon became evident that their efficiency could be compromised by various factors, including fatigue, homesickness, and stress.

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"It is open to men to debate whether economic progress is good for men or not, but for women to debate the desirability of economic growth is to debate whether women should have the chance to cease to be beasts of burden, and to join the human race."

W. Arthur Lewis, The Theory of Economic Growth, 1955.

INTRODUCTION

The work of women, labor simultaneously carried out in fields and factories, at home, and in family care, has been an irreplaceable resource that unfortunately has remained in the shadows over time. The presence of women in the world of work is documented by Italian population censuses, which have highlighted the evolution of this phenomenon with its many facets. However, from the outset, there have been difficulties in trying to classify women by profession, mainly because women were not aware of their own work, and this lack prevented them from categorizing it as work.¹

Anna Bellavitis explains that working with one's parents from childhood was the most common way to acquire a trade. Indeed, the family determined the work destiny of both males and females. She also helps debunk the idea that domestic tasks performed by women were not genuine work (Bellavitis 2008). She makes readers understand that, although some jobs were typically done by women, there was no clear gender division of labor. However precarious or invisible it may have been in their often-underground economies, it is clear that women have always worked both inside and outside their homes. Their gender identity has always prevailed over their professional identity. In this sense, women, rather than being specifically described as, for example, glassblowers, were seen as working like glassblowers. They were considered unskilled, and domestic work was viewed as natural, as it still is today.

Although women's work had long been an essential source of livelihood for groups and families, it was only with the Industrial Revolution that the concept of women as workers began to emerge. As awareness of women's work increased, other factors such as their biological sex and moral aspect came into consideration. These considerations made the exploitation of women and their subordination even more evident, as many jobs were deemed "unsuitable" for the female role, or non-domestic work in general was seen as incompatible with domestic duties and maternal care. As a result, women were perceived as fragile compared to men, when in reality, we know from

¹ Anna Bellavitis, *Il lavoro delle donne nelle città dell'Europa moderna*, Viella, 2016, p.176.

numerous documents that women have always worked, often performing tasks that were more strenuous (and often even more tiring than men's).²

The female world seemed to be confined within the domestic walls, where non-domestic work was hidden alongside the usual daily chores. Unfortunately, albeit in different ways, this situation has not changed today. Women's work is too often undervalued or sidelined compared to men's.³

The period we wanted to examine covers the years of the so-called economic boom in Italy and the years of the greatest economic prosperity. In fact, in the decade from 1950 to 1960, Italy experienced an unprecedented economic expansion: the country's reality changed drastically, and Italy became one of the most renowned industrial powers, abandoning the agricultural reality that had characterized the previous decades. In predominantly agricultural societies, women's work played an essential role, as the survival of these societies depended on the cultivation of food products. Women performed an overwhelming number of tasks: milking cows and sheep, grinding millet, making butter, preparing meals, taking care of children, and managing the household.⁴

During the twentieth century in Italy, it emerged that women were initially highly present in agricultural labor and textile production until the 1950s when industrialization began, and the presence of women in the workforce decreased. Women started working in factories and experienced a sense of inferiority and inadequacy. They worked at an exhausting pace, for very low wages, and received no professional training.

The domestic sphere has long been a place of work. However, in recent decades, it has been understood that the concept of work encompasses various work realities, even outside the market. In particular, reference is made to domestic activities, which did not even entail compensation. On the other hand, factories had absurd hiring and firing conditions for women, who were forced to sign clauses at the time of employment that forced them to choose between work and marriage.⁵

Claudia Goldin, in her most influential works, has focused her research on women's careers and families from a women's perspective, co-education in higher education, careers and marriage, and women's surnames after marriage as a social indicator. She argued that women's participation in the labor market has followed a U-shape. Exploring the relationship between economic development and gender equality reveals the rise of a new white-collar sector that encourages the paid employment of married women. Women's transition from the domestic sphere to the workplace promotes various forms of gender equality in society at large and within families. Regarding the U-shape of female labor force participation, a new reality is achieved.⁶

² Bethke Elshtain J., *Public Man, Private Woman. Women in Social and Political Thought*, ps.203-207.

³ Anna Bellavitis, *Il lavoro delle donne nelle città dell'Europa moderna*, Viella, 2016, ps.191-203.

⁴ Edward Evans Pritchard, *La donna nelle società primitive*, Editori La Terza, Bari, 1973, ps. 194-202.

⁵ Giulia Calvi, *Donne in fabbrica. Comunità femminile e socialità del lavoro in America (1900-1915)*, *Quaderni Storici*, vol. 17, no. 51 (3), 1982, ps. 817-51.

⁶ Claudia Goldin, *The U-Shaped Female Labor Force Function in Economic Development and Economic History*, University of Chicago Press ; 1995. ps. 61-68.

In a society where incomes are extremely low, and certain types of agriculture predominate (e.g., poultry, dairy, rice, cotton, peanuts; generally, not cereals, livestock, tree crops, sugarcane), women are part of the workforce. Sometimes they are paid workers, but more often they are unpaid workers in family farms and domestic enterprises, often involved in cottage industry production. As incomes increase due to the introduction of new technologies, women's labor force participation decreases. This is primarily due to an income effect, but it may also result from reduced demand for female labor in agriculture. Therefore, the higher the income, the more women and children withdraw from the labor market. Only later, after acquiring the same skills as men and receiving education, do they return to paid labor. However, Claudia Goldin's U-shaped thesis does not hold because not all women were registered at the time, resulting in inaccuracies in the sources available. Indeed, it will be explained how male workers and women were recorded in registers and sources.⁷

Finally, it should be emphasized that with the advent of industrialization, women were assimilated to machines. They were expected to work at the same pace, even though it soon became evident that their efficiency could be compromised by various factors, including fatigue, homesickness, and stress.

Consequently, the fact that they were assimilated to machines is linked to the large number of unskilled workers operating in factories. This clearly blurred official data, and even registers were unreliable.⁸

Universal suffrage, the right to vote guaranteed to all adult citizens, both men and women, is a 20th-century achievement. It is evident that the recognition of women's voting rights is a subsequent and more advanced result compared to the assertion of universal male suffrage. Unlike the recognition of men's voting rights, which occurred chronologically between 1848 and World War I, women's suffrage was generally granted in the period between the two World Wars and, in Italy, only after World War II, in 1946. Even when women had already obtained the right to vote years earlier, they were excluded from the workforce or paid less than men.⁹

It was only in the 1970s that it became clear that female employment did not reflect the actual percentage. The lack of clarity of the phenomenon was due to the inability of statistical sources to record the various forms of female employment existing at the time. Unlike other sectors, agriculture recorded a lower decline in employment. Women stayed home to cultivate the land while their husbands sought better conditions. This phenomenon, the "white widow phenomenon," did not arise after World War II but was an old problem that took on new characteristics in the 1960s and 1970s, linked first to the economic boom and then to the financial and oil crisis of the 1970s.¹⁰ It was only

⁷ *Ibidem*, p.81-87.

⁸ Giulia Calvi, *Donne in fabbrica. Comunità femminile e socialità del lavoro in America (1900-1915)*, Quaderni Storici, vol. 17, no. 51 (3), 1982, p. 819.

⁹ Diana Sartori, *Donne e Uomini Tra Pubblico e Privato*, Annali Di Studi Religiosi, vol. 5, 2004, ps.367-388.

¹⁰ B. Pisa, S. Boscato, *Tra miracolo economico e crisi petrolifera. Vedove bianche: una storia da scrivere. Donne negli anni Settanta di Patrizia Salvetti*. Voci, esperienze, lotte, Franco Angeli, 2013, p.96.

in the 1970s that the issue of women began to be analyzed within Fordist production when the initial theorization of the post-Fordism concept took place. The term no longer refers to a system of production centered on repetitive mass labor but to an industrial phase in which new technologies prevail.

Although the 1950s and 1960s are considered the epitome of stability, the prevalence of instability in women's work and its precariousness have characterized the entire history of industrial capitalism.¹¹

In the second half of the 20th century, precarious working conditions from a gender perspective were present in both Fordist and post-Fordist societies, periods in which women had to face a significant level of precarity even in the so-called "golden age" of the 20th century. In fact, precarity can be understood as a historical phenomenon that affected the entire industrial period. In reality, according to Marcel Van der Linden,¹² a longer history of precarity can be traced. According to the scholar, it refers to the conditions of work instability, economic fragility, and the subordination of labor to capital's power within which an increasing mass of individuals finds itself in the context of the global economy. From this condition, all the losses of social security observed in terms of diminished capabilities and access to full citizenship in European social democracy regimes stem, where the flip side of the same coin is the welfare crisis, the privatization of public services, and reduced real wages.¹³

The 20th century in western Europe witnessed the transition of the working class from poor and impoverished working conditions following the Industrial Revolution to significant improvement. Although not all countries experienced the change equally and simultaneously, working conditions became much more favorable, including a minimum wage, protection against workplace injuries, prohibition of arbitrary dismissals, the introduction of compulsory education, shorter working hours, and annual vacations. These social safety measures contributed to an overall improvement in the standard of living. In this context, reference was made to a "welfare that accompanied citizens 'from cradle to grave.' Unfortunately, the initial prosperity did not last long, and in the last quarter of the 20th century, there was a return to conditions of inequality. A sharp decline in employment was accompanied by the stiffening of permanent employment, pay based on quantity and quality rather than actual working time, and the promotion of self-employment and services.

¹¹ Bruno Walter Renato, *Le donne, il fordismo, Gramsci. Una prospettiva di genere sulla società statunitense*, *Diacronie* [Online], N° 32, 4 | 2017, documento 6, online from the 29th December 2017, consulted on 21st June 2023.

¹² Marcel van der Linden (1952) is Research Director of the International Institute of Social History and Professor of social movement history at the University of Amsterdam. He has published extensively on labor and working-class history and on the history of ideas.

¹³ Jan Breman, Marcel Van Der Linden, *Informalizzare l'economia: il ritorno della questione sociale a livello globale* in: "Di condizione precaria. Sguardi trasversali tra genere, lavoro e non lavoro, di Luca Salmieri, Ariella Verrocchio Trieste, EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2015, p.13.

It is important to note that only in the 1990s did the Italian debate on job precarity become centralized. On the one hand, most economists continued to consider flexibility as an opportunity and a necessity for creating new jobs, while on the other hand, an increasing number of sociologists began to emphasize the relationship between flexibility and precarious work. The most influential scholar was sociologist Luciano Gallino, who introduced the concept of the "human cost of flexibility," the basis for further research on the subject.¹⁴

The concept of "employment precarity" was rarely used as such in Italian sources in the 1950s and 1960s, as it had not yet been conceptualized. Hence the infrequent use of the terms "precarious" and "precariousness." Contemporary sources tended to emphasize the level of exploitation and discrimination, as well as the instability of working life characterizing, for example, fixed-term contracts. Sources produced by trade unionists, politicians, journalists, and women's associations in which, alongside "instability," explicit reference was sometimes made to the concept of "precarity," both concerning working conditions and women's lives, were an exception to this trend.¹⁵

Furthermore, in those years, there was no concept of stability in employment, against which the concept of precarity could be articulated. Until the 1970s, women's work was considered intrinsically unstable by entrepreneurs, politicians, and economists because it was commonly believed that women preferred domestic work, and this idea was particularly difficult to eradicate. Therefore, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Italian working women, both in factories and agriculture, fought the "classification battle" to have their worker status recognized. The women who fought the hardest were those working as industrial domestic workers because their occupation was not considered real work as it was not fully regulated by labor law.¹⁶

It is clear that when talking about economic boom, only men are included in the economic benefits; women did not experience full employment. Factories only welcomed young women without children into factory work, discriminating against all others. And the women who were hired could not be considered equal to men: fixed-term contracts, piecework, and unregulated dismissals did not provide female workers with either contractual continuity or a fixed minimum wage. Moreover, these women could lack any form of security or protection since they could lose their jobs at any time. Furthermore, dismissals due to marriage contributed to increasing the precariousness of women's work. Unfortunately, fixed-term contracts were used "to evade contractual or legal obligations" and to increase the subordination of workers. In this way, employers felt authorized to

¹⁴ According to Luciano Gallino, flexibility exists and is a powerful engine of the ongoing neo-capitalist rationalisation that is exercised through very precise entrepreneurial and economic choices that shape a model of society. He believes that the crux of the flexibility issue is to choose one mode of entrepreneurial organisation over another: only that certain precise consequences in terms of the social and political model depend on it. Luciano Gallino, *Il costo umano della flessibilità*, Laterza, Edizione 5, 2005, ps.16-19.

¹⁵ Betti Eloisa, *Gli archivi dell'UDI come fonti per la storia del lavoro femminile*, in: *Il genere nella ricerca storica*, Padova, Il Poligrafo, 2015, pp. 485 - 509 (atti di: VI Congresso della Società Italiana delle Storiche, Padova-Venezia, 12-14 febbraio 2013).

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

dismiss workers at any time. With the emergence of the so-called "spinster clauses," women could also be fired for getting married. It happened that women were forced to sign these clauses upon hiring and had to choose between work and marriage.

During the Fordist period, women working from home were paid entirely based on the quantity produced, that is, piecework, and not based on hours worked. Consequently, all those women who practiced home-based work, such as tailoring, did not have an employment contract and did not benefit from the security that a contract should have provided and guaranteed them. Women working from home represented a considerable number during the years of economic boom. They were paid poorly and did their best to produce as much as possible. Trade unions and women's associations tried to protect them as much as possible, and thanks to their efforts, a law was passed in 1962 to tighten fixed-term contracts. Another victory came in 1963¹⁷ when a law was introduced that prohibited the dismissal of female workers on marriage grounds. In 1965, the Union of Italian Women (UDI) promoted a national conference in Milan followed by a large demonstration of over four thousand women with the slogan "Women's Right to Stable and Qualified Employment." The following year, another law was passed that banned dismissals based on gender, religion, or union membership. This law marked a turning point for workers' rights in the workplace, providing more stability than the previous precariousness. In the Italian context, thanks to the enactment of these laws, the 1970s were characterized by both male and female employment. In particular, women found stable and paid employment in the tertiary sector. The UDI and other women's associations, through conferences and events promoting female employment, brought about significant innovations. In particular, reference was made to the introduction of part-time work in the industrial sector, which was previously considered a threat to the stability and qualification of women.

In summary, women in Italy over the past 60 years have experienced significant imbalances between work and family life. At times, they were even forced to choose between the working sphere and the private sphere. All these forms of discrimination, including dismissals for which there was no real work-related justification, characterized both Fordist and post-Fordist periods.

The work has been divided into three chapters.

In the first chapter, the working condition of women is analyzed, starting from the 19th century. Women, although identified with domestic work, have always worked, expending their energies in cultivation as well. Since the sustenance of families in these types of societies derived from family-based cultivation, women played an essential role.

¹⁷ "The employee's dismissal during the period from the day of the request for marriage bans, in so far as it follows the celebration, to one year after the celebration itself, is presumed to have been for matrimonial reasons. Any resignation submitted by the employee during the period referred to in the preceding paragraph shall be null and void, unless they are confirmed by her within one month at the Employment Office".

Prohibition of dismissal of female workers for cause of marriage and amendments to Law n° 860 of 26 August 1950: "Tutela fisica ed economica delle lavoratrici madri" in *Gazzetta Ufficiale*. Accessed 24 April 2023.

The chapter investigates the reasons behind female alienation. Some believe that the division of genders does not represent the true cause, which is instead to be found in social change. Others, on the other hand, believe that biological differences between the two genders played an important role. The former is considered the more accredited theory.¹⁸

Various publications have demonstrated women's participation in the family economy. They were recorded, according to the sources available to us, as "wife of..." or "housewife." In other words, their work was not considered genuine work because work is only considered as such if it is remunerated. Classification also occurred by profession and not based on their condition; only in 1901 did the situation change, and women began to be classified based on the profession they pursued.¹⁹

Many female authors have discussed the visibility and invisibility of women, associated with all those jobs that were indeed jobs but were not recorded in notarial registers, either due to errors during registration or because they were considered superfluous by the person conducting the census.²⁰

The second chapter has a more historical character. Following World War II, the Italian population saw a significant increase in 1950s; however, the standard of living remained low. These were also the years when the agricultural system was set aside in favor of industry, which led to the devaluation of human skills.²¹

Central to this was the so-called "economic miracle." This well-being is to be attributed to the low cost of labor. Given high levels of unemployment, the demand for labor exceeded the supply.

Furthermore, this prosperity was not recognized throughout Italy; while the North primarily offered jobs in factories, people in the South migrated in search of employment. Women and children who could not find employment in the North stayed at home.²²

In the 1970s, it became evident that the percentages did not reflect the actual female employment rates.

In the third chapter, the testimonies of some women working in factories are analyzed. Many of these testimonies were found in the online historical archive founded in 1944 'NOI DONNE' and in the works of Maria Rosa Cutrufelli (1977) and Anna Badino (2008). Women assumed rhythms comparable to those of machines. However, unlike machines, they had limitations: they could only work for a certain number of hours; external factors could compromise their efficiency in the

¹⁸ Angela Groppi, *Il lavoro delle donne*, Rome-Bari, Editori Laterza, «Storia delle donne in Italia», 1996, ps. 117-123.

¹⁹ Maria Agren, *Making a living, making a difference. Gender and work in early modern European society*, Oxford University Press, 2017, ps.18-21.

²⁰ Anna Badino, *Tutte a casa? Donne tra migrazione e lavoro nella Torino degli anni Sessanta*. Prefazione di Franco Ramella. Viella Editore, 2008, ps.82-85.

²¹ Camillo Daneo, *La politica economica della ricostruzione, 1945-1949*, Einaudi Editore, Torino, 1975, p.33.

²² Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi. Società e politica 1943-1988*, Einaudi, Torino, 1989, ps.59-81.

workplace; reaching a certain age, they struggled with learning; they could become pregnant and give birth to children who, at the time of birth, were considered unusable machines.

Testimonies reveal that it was easier to be hired if one was overweight, as a reserve of weight could be helpful in departments with high temperatures.²³

Having abandoned the fields, women found themselves within domestic walls and were marginalized from the apparent workforce. On the other hand, the hidden workforce continued to grow, distorting data on women's presence in the labor market. As if that were not enough, most women were not even registered on job lists (many were unaware of their existence). Thus, women excluded from production did not become unemployed but rather homemakers.²⁴

The percentage of women working illegally inflated by ISTAT sources, as a significant portion of women worked inside their homes. Some even brought factory machinery into their homes.

Until 1908, sources studying this problem were quite scarce. It was with the first major social survey, The Pittsburgh Survey, that the research community was thoroughly studied. Over the years, further progress was made, such as the 1958 law on workplace safety. However, many women were not informed and remained in ignorance, compromising their health, and, in the worst cases, losing their lives. There were indeed women who, due to benzene exposure, lost their lives after white spots appeared, or those who were poisoned by the glue used to attach doll hair, due to the fumes.

Unfortunately, home-based work also affected family members. Working in the domestic environment, in the absence of protection, both women and children breathed in toxic fumes emitted by the machines.²⁵



“Furga” dolls, Canneto sull’olio (Mantova), 1959, Ezio Quiresi, Donne. Il lavoro femminile in Italia nel Dopoguerra in 80 fotografie, MUP editore, 2006.

²³ Numero 45 del 1963, La donna-macchina. NOI DONNE, Archivio storico fondato nel 1944.

²⁴ Fiorella Padoa Schioppa, La forza lavoro femminile, Universale Paperbacks Il Mulino, Bologna, 1977, p.64.

²⁵ Numero 15 del 1963. NOI DONNE, Archivio storico fondato nel 1944, p.6-9.

Certainly, unlike the 1950s when the data was more uncertain, the 1970s paint a clearer picture thanks to the sources and testimonies available to us. However, while the situation in Northern and Central Italy is clear, work in the South is more uncertain. The absence of data, surveys, and research, especially concerning factories, makes everything more complex.²⁶

Regarding the sources used within my work, primary sources highlight the role of women and the work they have done over time.²⁷

The merit of these sources is that they did not just scratch the surface but showed the margins available to women to qualify their presence. Women were undoubtedly much more flexible than men, thanks to their ability to enter and exit the market world and the lack of identification with a single profession. Other sources that have been involved in collecting data and putting together statistics (UDI and ISTAT), as well as the invaluable help of newspapers, have also allowed us to investigate the role of women.

Certainly, there is no shortage of historiographical essays that have contributed to marking female labor in Italy in the 1990s. Among these, we must remember the works of Paul Ginsborg, Giuseppe Berta, Christine Delphy, and Diana Leonard, Fiorella Padoa Schioppa. In the last two decades, there have been many studies that have investigated the transformations of female labor, the role and involvement of women in social struggles, and their relationship with the trade union. We certainly owe this progress to the works of Angela Groppi, Alessandra Pescarolo, Alice Clark, Anna Bellavitis, Beatrice Zucca Micheletto, Diana Sartori, Eloisa Betti, Giulia Calvi, Gloria Nemeč, Manuela Martini, Maria Agren, Raffaella Sarti.

These works have been very valuable, but female labor, especially from the 1950s onwards, has been investigated almost exclusively through sources from union archives and oral testimonies.

The archives of the UDI (Union of Italian Women), the archives of the Parliamentary Commission, the multiple ISTAT data, together with recounted magazines and trade unions like the CGIL, have set the goal of reconstructing the path that led to the progressive development of a political strategy on the issue of labor.

These sources allow us to analyze the contribution during a crucial period, from the 1950s to the 1970s. The commitment of an association like the UDI to women's right to work and its sensitivity to various aspects of women's work conditions have given rise to a valuable documentary heritage.²⁸

Even the magazines contained in the Historical Archive "NOI DONNE," founded in 1944, have proven to be valuable sources in order to have a clear picture of the stories of many women within

²⁶ Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, *Operaie senza fabbrica. Inchiesta sul lavoro a domicilio*, Editori Riuniti, I edizione Maggio, 1977, p.28.

²⁷ The studies of Alessandra Pescarolo (2019), Anna Badino (2008), Anna Bellavitis (2016), Angela Groppi (1996), Eloisa Betti (2016), Maria Rosa Cutrufelli (1977), Micheletto Beatrice Zucca (2020), Raffaella Sarti, A.Bellavitis and Manuela Martini (2018), Diana Sartori (2004) have been taken into account.

²⁸ Saveria Chemotti, Maria Cristina La Rocca, *Il genere nella ricerca storica*, Atti del VI Congresso della Società Italiana delle Storiche, volume I, Il Poligrafo, Padova-Venezia, Febbraio 2013, ps.123-151.

factories, their working conditions, the absence of protection, and even domestic work, as many brought machinery home and worked from their residences. Through the words of Carolina, Ada, Rosalia, Matilde, Emma, Loretta, to name a few, life and work paths emerge, contributing to enriching the history of our country and the years of economic boom. These stories allow us to give visibility to many trajectories that are often left in the shadows.²⁹

Some interviewed women claim to have found new spaces for recognition and self-assertion in the union, obtaining the protection of their rights and work.

An additional source could be family budgets. Although they have recently been used for research on female employment, they are not so reliable. Yes, they have the advantage of generally recording all incomes, including aid to the poor and self-provisioning, allowing us to assess the contribution of women and young people to the family economy, but they are not precise. The lack of precision is due to non-uniform survival over time and among different regions; furthermore, they have different levels of detail because they were compiled for different purposes.³⁰

However, we know with certainty that the decisive period was the decade of struggles from 1968 to 1973, which led to the approval of the Workers' Rights Statute in 1970, the more widespread use of the concept of "stability," and began to increasingly characterize the condition of a portion of industrial workers.³¹

²⁹ Anna Badino, *Tutte a casa? Donne tra migrazione e lavoro nella Torino degli anni Sessanta*. Prefazione di Franco Ramella. Viella Editore, Roma 2008, p.130.

³⁰ BBC website, *Women's Work* by Professor Pat Hudson, Last updated 2011-03-29. BBC - History - Women's Work

³¹ Eloisa Betti, *Gender and Precarious Labor in a Historical Perspective. Italian Women and Precarious Work Between Fordism and Post-Fordism*, «INTERNATIONAL LABOR AND WORKING-CLASS HISTORY», 2016, 89, pp. 67 (article).

1. THE WORK OF ITALIAN WOMEN IN SOCIETY

1.1 *FORMS OF FEMALE LABOR IN THE PRE-INDUSTRIAL ANCIEN REGIME*

For centuries, the work carried out by women has constituted a significant portion of society, yet it has often failed to fully manifest its significance even in statistical data. Undoubtedly, the division between the private and public spheres has been a crucial issue since ancient times.

"The dichotomy between the private and the public has been central in nearly two centuries of feminist writings and political struggle; it is ultimately what the feminist movement revolves around."³²

The separation between these two spheres marks the divide that separates the two worlds, a boundary that traditionally only men could cross and inhabit both. Women have always been associated with the world of home, family, and life in its bodily and passionate dimension.³³

It is not debatable that women have always worked, both within the domestic walls and outside, and today this is also a historically established fact. The issue lies in quantitative research: it is indeed challenging to accurately estimate how many women have been part of the production process, a deficiency further exacerbated by the so-called 'masking effect'³⁴ of documentation. This has predominantly occurred because, while male social identity was associated with a profession, female identity revolved around marital status.

On the other hand, the issue of female labor should not be reduced solely to a quantitative problem. It is true that numbers and presence are important in overall research, but it is equally true that identifying the quality, functions performed by women, and their representation is an even more critical aspect.

1.2 *THE MECHANISM REGULATING FEMALE PRODUCTIVE FUNCTION ACCORDING TO TRADITIONAL AGRICULTURE*

The 20th century witnessed significant changes in the realm of labor, both in terms of the workforce and the nature of work activities. Furthermore, the issue of gender has characterized work in all its facets. This means that male and female labor differ in multiple aspects. Consider, for instance, the division of roles within the family sphere, the sexual division of labor, the fact that female labor is less recognized compared to male labor, and class differences. Consequently, it is essential to remember that the work

³² Ruth Gavison, "Feminism and the Public/Private Distinction." *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 45, no. 1, 1992, ps. 1-45. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1228984>. Accessed 12 Mar. 2023.

³³ C. Pateman, *The Disorder of Women. Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*, Cambridge 1989, ps. 112-141.

³⁴ Angela Groppi, *Il lavoro delle donne*, Rome-Bari, Editori Laterza, «Storia delle donne in Italia», 1996, p. 201-212.

performed by women in various fields and different roles has undergone continuous changes, achievements, and setbacks.³⁵

In societies primarily based on an agricultural system, women's work played an essential role in society, as it provided crucial support for the family's sustenance.³⁶ Certainly, the survival of the family depended on food cultivation. Logically, the volume of tasks performed by women should ensure them a prominent



Harvesting foxtail millet, Cremona countryside, 1948. Ezio Quiresi, Donne. Il lavoro femminile in Italia nel Dopoguerra in 80 fotografie, MUP editore, 2006.

social role; however, their toil is concealed and undervalued. Consequently, women find themselves powerless, not even owning their produce or having control over the organization of their work. These women are thought of as a labor force, although it has not always been the case.

At this point, the question arises: what drives women to work in the fields and

consequently be subjected to rational exploitation? Undoubtedly, through marriage, a woman leaves her family and lives with her husband; she will cultivate the lands that the man has received from his ancestors, enabling him to survive. This reveals that a woman is not autonomous and needs a man, a father, or a husband to provide for her since she cannot inherit anything except a few common objects. Regardless of a woman's appearance, intelligence, or worth, quantitative aspects prevail over qualitative ones.³⁷

Lineage defines the behaviors and actions of each family, although differences may exist within the same society and era. It would be reductive to discuss a uniform family experience, as the family, an active element of society, undergoes changes within society itself.

Within the family unit, the gender role constitutes another disparity involving values, responsibilities, and power. Members of the same unit are bound by the respect for rules that define their relationships with each other.

³⁵ Alessandra Pescarolo, *Il lavoro delle donne nell'Italia contemporanea - Storia delle donne e di genere*- Roma. Editore Viella, 2019, ps.210-214.

³⁶ Denise Paulme, *Classes et associations d'âge en Afrique de l'Ouest*, Paris 1962, ps.39-42.

³⁷ Nicole Chevillard Sébastien Leconte, *Lavoro delle donne. Potere degli uomini. Alle origini dell'oppressione femminile*, la Brèche, Paris 1987, p.59.

Among anthropologists who have sought universal family functions and characteristics, Peter Laslett³⁸ identified four categories of domestic groups. According to Laslett, solitary women include widows, single women, or those without a well-defined status. Women who live with brothers or relatives fall into the "no family" category. Laslett uses the term "simple family" to encompass what is called elsewhere the "nuclear family," the elementary family, the conjugal family, or the biological family.³⁹ These are married couples or couples with children, including abandoned women with children. The "extended family household" category includes family units with one or more parents, with or without servants. The same applies to grandchildren or cousins. In essence, all relatives or blood relations, even if they are not directly part of the nuclear family, create an extension of the same nucleus. "Multiplicity" refers to the coexistence of multiple conjugal nuclei. This is the case with *frères* (households with several married brothers) where all married brothers live together with their families, or stem families where the older couple cohabits with the heir couple, or joint families where all sons marry and remain within the family nucleus with their wives, rather than moving to another residence. Unfortunately, not all family nuclei fit neatly into a specific category, or it has not always been possible to delineate their characteristics.⁴⁰

The widely accepted notion that the small nuclear family was a product of industrialization and urbanization became untenable in light of Laslett's work. He also conclusively demonstrated that early modern English society was highly mobile: only a relatively small minority of each rising generation lived lifelong in the same parish.⁴¹

The identification of family cohabitation requires clear rules defining family relationships and interactions among different individuals. This is what enables us to identify various types of families and make comparisons over time and across cultures.

Starting from the nineteenth century in Western Europe, the control of gender role adherence was primarily entrusted to institutions such as the Church, medicine, politics, and the family. They promoted the construction of dichotomous role structures, where stronger sexual impulse and active societal roles were attributed to men, while relatively less intense sexuality, passive societal roles, and a spirit of sacrifice were considered feminine prerogatives.⁴²

In the 19th century, women constituted a rather homogeneous group of exploited workers through the organization of production and the distribution of goods. This *modus operandi* would shape a woman's life from birth to death.

³⁸ Peter Laslett, Robert Wall, *Household and Family in Past Times*, Cambridge University Press, 1972.

³⁹ Hammel, E. A., and Peter Laslett. "Comparing Household Structure over Time and between Cultures," ps.73–109. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/178229>. Accessed 6 Mar. 2023.

⁴⁰ Barbagli, Marzio. "Peter Laslett e La Conoscenza Delle Società Del Passato", ps. 767–70. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24653246>. Accessed 6 Mar. 2023.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² Peter Gay, *The bourgeois experience. Victoria to Freud, vol. I, Education of the senses*, New York-Oxford 1984, ps. 109-168.

The question that one might ask is: what forms the basis of female alienation? According to some scholars, men and women would have engaged in society and contributed by bringing their skills from the beginning; in this way, women would have accentuated the division of labor, emphasizing differences between the two genders. According to other scholars, the division of sexes is not the cause of female alienation but rather the result of a social change.⁴³

Clearly, there are objective factors that cannot be overlooked. Considering the role of women, they have certain biological contingencies that set them apart from men: the female physique has less mass compared to males, and women are certainly less dynamic due to maternity.

First and foremost, the idea arises that biological differences between men and women could justify the differentiation of obligations imposed on the female sex and the functions that each gender should have within society. However, these differences are typical of different eras; this means that the rights and functions of individuals vary significantly in different cultures and historical periods.⁴⁴

Generally, women would have been engaged in gathering tasks, a task that gradually became more burdensome as male pressure pushed them to produce more and generate what we know as surplus. Nevertheless, it is not certain that the reason for the formation of property can be traced to the creation of surplus and thus the formation of lineage society. However, we have no evidence that this could be the reason. On the contrary, it could be argued that there is no documentation suggesting that women led a more sedentary life than men, as they made numerous movements for field cultivation or the sale of their products. It is true that one cannot speak of an equal division of tasks, but certainly, women devoted all their energy to the tasks assigned to them.⁴⁵

What has been stated so far seems to confirm that the division of labor that men and women have experienced is nothing more than the result of changing social obligations. Consequently, it would not derive from a division of labor between the sexes existing since the dawn of humanity.⁴⁶ Furthermore, it would have been offensive and unwise for women to accept or even consider the idea of such an obvious imbalance.

In recent years, there has been a growing need to balance economic history with the history of women's work. Since the 1980s, gender studies and women's studies have been instrumental in highlighting women's work, highlighting the difficulties that many women have had to navigate or confront in various countries.

Feminists have studied for decades the separation and interaction between the public and private spheres. The issue has often been discussed, as opposing views on privacy as an important or problematic concept

⁴³ Nicole Chevillard Sébastien Leconte, *Lavoro delle donne. Potere degli uomini. Alle origini dell'oppressione femminile*, la Brèche, Paris 1987, p.37.

⁴⁴ Ruggerone, Lucia. "Discorsi sul genere: alle radici della differenza.", ps. 21–39. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23004938>. Accessed 15 July 2023.

⁴⁵ Claude Meillassoux, *Femmes, greniers et capitaux*, Morice Alain, *Revue Tiers Monde*, 1976.

⁴⁶ Nicole Chevillard Sébastien Leconte, *Lavoro delle donne. Potere degli uomini. Alle origini dell'oppressione femminile*, la Brèche, Paris 1987, p.40.

have been examined: on one hand, privacy has been used as justification for legal birth control and abortions, but it has also protected perpetrators of domestic violence and child abuse.⁴⁷

Studies related to industrialization were the first to create a dialogue between economic history and the history of women's work. These studies associated the heyday of women's work with the pre-industrial period, highlighting how women's working conditions deteriorated during the period under examination.⁴⁸ Women, now confined to domestic and caregiving work, lost their economic and social recognition. In the last twenty years, the idea of searching for a golden age of women has been surpassed, and other research has even downplayed the idea that the industrial revolution pushed women out of the world of commerce. What is more interesting is that texts from the last century have recognized the existence and prevalence of women's work before the industrial age, highlighting that women have always worked.

In Italian historiography, the 1990s marked the entry of women's labor history into economic history, thanks to female scholars who delved into women's history. Although previous economic history studies and research had recognized, albeit marginally, the economic and social role of women, it was in the 1990s that a series of historiographical and editorial experiences emerged, making it impossible to ignore women's history any longer.⁴⁹

1.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY: WOMEN'S CONDITION COMPARED WITH MEN'S CONDITION

A long tradition of studies has recognized the crucial role of women and children's labor in the putting-out system's economy, as well as in the production system based on subsequent work assignment, especially in the textile industry. Unlike the domestic system, this system relied on a technical and complex division of labor.⁵⁰ However, in recent years, the gender turn and the development of feminist economics studies have shed light on the role of women by analyzing role hierarchies and power dynamics, thus revealing possible inequalities.

The numerous publications by Martini and Bellavitis (2014), Bellavitis, Martini, and Sarti (2016), play a significant role as they analyze a very broad chronological and geographical range from medieval times to the contemporary era in various European countries, demonstrating that women's participation in family businesses was a characteristic of Western European societies.

⁴⁷ Joan W. Scott, Keates, Debra, *Going public: feminism and the shifting boundaries of the private sphere*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

⁴⁸ H. Reynard, Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, *The Economic Journal*, Volume 30, Issue 118, 1 June 1920, ps.154-156.

⁴⁹ Angela Groppi, *Il lavoro delle donne*, Rome-Bari, Editori Laterza, «Storia delle donne in Italia», 1996, p. 214.

⁵⁰ Ervin Hafter, *Predicting the path of a changing sound: Velocity tracking and auditory continuity*, *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 2008, p.150.

It has been observed how many studies have indicated the pre-industrial period as the golden age of women's work and the family economy. These same studies show that during that time, work within households was often invisible due to the lack of recognition it received. They have also adopted an inclusive approach, transcending the dichotomy between productive and reproductive labor.⁵¹ All women who devoted their time to domestic work, care work, and child welfare gained recognition through these studies, thus falling into the "work" category. In fact, Aleandra Shepard, studying women's testimonies in English courts in the modern era, emphasized the importance of recognizing the occupational dimension of housewifery.⁵²

Through the comparison of various sources and an analysis of how information was collected and reported in documents, numerous scholars have been able to demonstrate that women, especially married women, were classified based on their marital status. Consequently, sources always included the terms "wife of" or "homemaker."⁵³ However, these classifications have shown different connotations over time. In the early modern era, the terms "wife" or "homemaker" referred to individuals who were responsible for managing the family, while in the contemporary era, it did not necessarily imply that their activities were economically irrelevant.

For this reason, to understand the work that women performed, historians of the early modern era have relied on specific sources. This is the case with the verb-oriented method illustrated in this volume by Maria Agren.⁵⁴ In this regard, her research project titled "Gender and Work" (GaW), recently developed at Stockholm University, has made a substantial contribution to the debate on women's and men's work. Inspired by the work of Sheilagh Ogilvie, the project employs a verb-oriented method that involves collecting verbal phrases describing work activities in the broadest sense.⁵⁵ This methodological approach draws on recent findings that when work is considered as such only if it is paid, it tends to become invisible when it does not yield income. The same project has also identified another connection between the domestic and working spheres: the term "wife" did not only refer to marital status but was also used to describe a woman with managerial and housekeeping abilities.

In Italy, according to the population census conducted in 1802, 42% of the active female population (aged 15 and over) and over 38% of the active male population were employed as waiters, cooks,

⁵¹ Christine Delphy and Diana Leonard, *A new analysis of marriage in contemporary western societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press: Cambridge, 1992, p.28.

⁵² Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status and the Social Order in Early Modern England*. Oxford University Press, 2015, ps.15-16.

⁵³ Raffaella Sarti, Anna Bellavitis, and Manuela Martini, , *What Is Work? Gender at the crossroads of home, family, and business from the early moder era to the present*. International studies in a social history, Berghahn Books, 2018, ps. 31-34.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p.195.

⁵⁵ Maria Agren, *Making a living, making a difference. Gender and work in early modern European society*, Oxford University Press, 2017, ps.24-26.

grooms, porters, laundresses, and ironers. In 1802, about 33% of employed women and 38% of employed men worked in craftsmanship and produced luxury goods for the royal court.⁵⁶

Research in notarial archives has shown that wills were made to thank or reward wives and other family members for their care and assistance in domestic work (Bellavitis, 2008). However, these bequests cannot be considered as wages. At the same time, it cannot be concluded that all women were only and always unpaid labor. For this reason, an important distinction needs to be made among family members based on the type of work they performed, whether paid or not. This means that, for example, wives could simultaneously be workers in the family business while also being owners.

Thanks to the bride's personal property dowry under her direct control, economic and family relationships were established. The dowry was used to purchase a shop, restock a store, or pay rent for a house. In contrast, documentation from Turin shows that in most cases, the dowry was invested in a common economic activity in which both partners were clearly active participants.⁵⁷

From this perspective, it is not surprising that women engaged in unpaid work. Because of her status as an owner and worker, the wife did not have the right to a salary. This explains how the lack of a salary did not always correspond to the exploitation of the wife's labor.

However, the underrepresentation of women in statistics was not only due to the classification of homemakers as non-workers, nor was it because women were particularly inclined to engage in irregular and/or home-based activities that, although paid, were easily unregistered.⁵⁸

Raffaella Sarti highlights that in the early Italian censuses, neither the term "housewife" nor "homemaker" was present. In the 1861 census tables, there were no specific data on housewives; one could only learn from the comments that the so-called "housewives," amounting to 2,916,491.15, were included among women without professions. Even in 1870, census tables did not show data on housewives.

Focusing on the Italian case, Raffaella Sarti explains that starting from the 1881 census, a category defined as "Persons attending to domestic duties" was regularly included among the categories used to classify Italians based on their activities. An excerpt from the General Report on the 1881 Census illustrated the "serious difficulties" in the "classification of women by profession, especially in rural areas." In 1881, women performing multiple activities were included among the workforce.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Beatrice Zucca Micheletto, , Only unpaid labour force? Women's and girls' work and property in family business in early modern Italy, *The History of the Family*, 2014, p.6.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p.8.

⁵⁸ Raffaella Sarti, Toiling Women, Non-Working Housewives, and Lesser Citizens: Statistical and Legal Constructions of Female Work and Citizenship in Italy, in Raffaella Sarti, Anna Bellavitis, and Manuela Martini, *What is work? Gender at the crossroads of home, family, and business from the early modern era to the present*, ps. 314-322.

⁵⁹ MAIC, DGS, C1881, *Relazione generale*, LXVII; MAIC, DGS, C1901, vol. V, *Relazione sul metodo di esecuzione e sui risultati del censimento, raffrontati con quelli dei censimenti italiani precedenti e di censimenti esteri* (Roma: Tip. Bertero, 1904), CVII.

Census	Classification of housewives (a) Italian original definition	Classification of housewives (a) English translation	Larger category including (a) Italian original definition	Larger category including (a) English translation	Men in the "housewives" category: yes/no	Volume and page
1861	[<i>Donne di casa</i> ^a]	[Women of the house ^a]	<i>Popolazione senza professione</i>	People without a profession	—	P. 106
1871	No information [<i>Persone attendenti alle cure domestiche</i> ^b]	No information [People attending to domestic tasks ^b]	No information [<i>Categoria 17a: 1° Personale a carico altrui 2° Popolazione senza professione</i>]	No information [17th category: 1. Personnel supported by others 2. People without a profession]	—	Vol. III, pp. 176–77; <i>C1881, Relazione generale</i> , p. LXIX
1881	<i>Attendenti alle cure domestiche</i>	People attending to domestic tasks	<i>Categoria XIX. - Senza professione. Gruppo unico: 1. Allievi delle università, dei licei, dei convitti e di altre scuole 2. Attendenti alle cure domestiche 3. Ricoverati negli ospizi di mendicizia, ospedali, manicomii, ecc.</i>	19th category - People without a profession. Unique group: 1. University students, secondary-school students, boarding-school students, pupils of any other schools 2. People attending to domestic tasks 3. People in charity hostels, hospitals, asylums, etc.	Yes	Vol. III, p. 15, pp. 668–69

*Classification of women defined as "housewives" in the Italian population censuses*⁶⁰

In 1901, there were changes in the classification of women. In her paragraph "statistical construction of the (non-working) housewife,"⁶¹ she explains that people were classified based on their professions, not their conditions. For example, if a capitalist lawyer performed both roles, they were still classified as lawyers and not as capitalists (without even considering the actual time the individual spent on the lawyer profession). Similarly, if a woman engaged in domestic work but also worked in activities such as weaving or spinning, she was classified as a homemaker (since it was considered a condition), among those supported by the family. Secondary professions were not included in the census.

1901	<i>Persone attendenti alle cure domestiche, donne di casa</i>	People attending to domestic tasks, women of the house	<i>Classe XXXIII. Persone mantenute dalla famiglia: 1. Persone attendenti alle cure domestiche, donne di casa 2. Studenti, scolari, seminaristi, collegiali 3. Persone senza professione (disoccupate da molto tempo o inabili al lavoro)</i>	Class XXXIII. People supported by their families: 1. People attending to domestic tasks, women of the house 2. Students, pupils, seminarians, school boarders 3. People without a profession (the long-term unemployed or people unable to work)	Yes	Vol. III, p. 31
1911	<i>Persone attendenti alle cure delle rispettive case</i>	People attending to the care of their homes	<i>Categoria 11. Condizioni non professionali: Proprietari, capitalisti, benestanti, redditieri Pensionati Persone attendenti alle cure delle rispettive case Studenti, scolari, seminaristi, collegiali Senza professione, disoccupati, invalidi Ricoverati che non lavorano Disoccupati che non lavorano Mendicanti e prostitute</i>	Category 11. Non-professional conditions: Owners, capitalists, wealthy people, rentiers Pensioners People attending to the care of their homes Students, pupils, seminarians, school boarders People without a profession, unemployed, invalids Hospitalized persons who do not work Inmates who do not work Beggars and prostitutes	Yes	Vol. IV, pp. 30–31; vol. VII, p. 129,

⁶⁰ Raffaella Sarti, *Toiling Women, Non-Working Housewives, and Lesser Citizens: Statistical and Legal Constructions of Female Work and Citizenship in Italy*, in Raffaella Sarti, Anna Bellavitis, and Manuela Martini, *What is work? Gender at the crossroads of home, family, and business from the early modern era to the present*, ps. 310.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 311.

1921	<i>Persone attendenti alle cure domestiche</i>	People attending to domestic tasks	<i>Condizioni non professionali ... Classe 46, Sottoclasse 184 Attendenti alle cure domestiche^a</i>	Non Professional Conditions' ... Class 46, Subclass 184 People attending to domestic tasks ^a	No	Vol. XIX p. 188*
1931	<i>Persone attendenti alle cure domestiche</i>	People attending to their domestic affairs	<i>Condizioni non professionali ... Classe 54, Numero d'ordine 333, Numero convenzionale 9, Attendenti alle cure domestiche^b</i>	Non professional conditions ... Class 54, Order number 333, Conventional number 9, People attending to domestic tasks ^b	No	Vol. IV, Parte II, p. 246
1936	<i>Persone attendenti alle cure domestiche</i>	People attending to domestic tasks	<i>Condizioni non professionali ... Classe 72, Sottoclasse 399, Attendenti alle cure domestiche^b</i>	Non-professional conditions ... Class 72, Subclass 399, People attending to domestic tasks ^b	No	Vol. IV, Parte II, pp. 66-67
1951	<i>Persone attendenti alle cure domestiche</i>	People attending to their domestic affairs	<i>Popolazione residente non attiva ... Attendenti alle cure domestiche^b</i>	Inactive resident population ... People attending to domestic tasks ^b	No	Vol. IV, p. 78
1961	<i>Casalinghe</i>	Housewives	<i>Popolazione non attiva ... Casalinghe^b</i>	Inactive population ... Housewives ^b	No	Vol. VI, p. 10
1971	<i>Casalinghe</i>	Housewives	<i>Popolazione non attiva ... Casalinghe^b</i>	Inactive population ... Housewives ^b	No	Vol. VI, Tomo 2, p. 531; Vol. X, p. 193
1981	<i>Casalinghe</i>	Housewives	<i>Popolazione non attiva Scolari e studenti Casalinghe Ritirati dal lavoro Altra condizione</i>	Inactive population: Pupils and students Housewives Retired from work Other condition	No	Vol. II, Tomo 3, p. xxiv, pp. 307-11

Classification of women defined as "housewives" in the Italian population censuses ⁶²

Considering that practically all women did (and still do) some form of domestic work, it is easy to deduce how difficult it is to establish a clear boundary between homemakers and women who are "workers."

Guglielmo Tagliacarne, in his article "The Employment of Women in Factories and Offices During the Last Fifty Years and the Decrease in Births" stated that most women were recorded with the generic title of "attendants to domestic care" or "housewives." The error made in classifying women in this field is so serious and of such varying intensity from one population census to another that it is not possible to rely on the data from various population censuses to study how the degree of women's participation in agricultural work has changed over the past decades.

Raggruppamenti professionali	1881			1901			1911			1921			1931		
	Totale persone impiegate Uomini e Donne	Donne	Percentuale donne sul totale	Totale persone impiegate Uomini e Donne	Donne	Percentuale donne sul totale	Totale persone impiegate Uomini e Donne	Donne	Percentuale donne sul totale	Totale persone impiegate Uomini e Donne	Donne	Percentuale donne sul totale	Totale persone impiegate Uomini e Donne	Donne	Percentuale donne sul totale
1. Industria . . .	4.245.006	1.921.062	45,25	3.928.417	1.324.738	33,72	4.563.864	1.403.049	30,74	4.621.679	1.250.601	27,05	5.309.674	1.252.404	23,58
2. Trasporti e comunicazioni . .	313.011	2.664	0,85	421.400	7.625	1,80	537.776	14.161	2,63	795.013	23.127	2,90	794.665	27.317	3,43
3. Commercio . .	746.132	166.423	22,30	736.185	161.793	21,97	755.571	176.099	23,30	1.055.219	221.491	20,99	1.319.167	280.534	21,26
4. Banca e assicurazione . . .	10.032	526	5,24	31.221	792	2,53	35.025	1.249	3,56	46.758	5.335	11,40	103.609	12.530	12,09
5. Amministrazione pubblica e privata . . .	186.736	3.432	1,83	234.486	6.516	2,77	240.301	11.364	4,72	360.480	46.735	12,96	393.575	49.980	12,69
6. Professioni e arti liberali . .	226.320	67.130	29,66	272.031	91.257	33,54	319.485	105.922	33,15	426.084	186.621	43,79	444.183	219.534	49,42
Totale sei raggruppamenti . .	5.727.237	2.161.237	37,73	5.623.740	1.592.721	28,32	6.452.022	1.711.844	26,53	7.305.233	1.733.910	23,73	8.364.673	1.842.299	22,02
Totale generale popolazione di qualsiasi professione o condizione . . .	22.551.126	11.292.158	50,07	24.701.612	12.509.446	50,63	26.580.048	13.680.201	51,46	30.962.528	15.823.606	51,14	32.120.508	16.592.438	51,65

Female labor force participation in six occupational categories according to population censuses. (Population aged 9 and above for the 1881 census, and aged 10 and above for the other censuses)

⁶² Raffaella Sarti, Anna Bellavitis, and Manuela Martini, What Is Work? Gender at the crossroads of home, family, and business from the early moder era to the present. International studies in a social history, Berghahn Books, 2018, ps.309-310.

Participation of female labor in six professional categories according to population censuses. (Population aged 9 and over for the 1881 census, and aged 10 and over for the other censuses)."

However, the table above takes into account the number of women employed in factories and the liberal professions, where the invasion of women was noted, with consequences for birth rates.

The author, considering the population censuses conducted in Italy in the years 1881, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, seeks to provide a clear picture of female employment in industry, transportation and communications, commerce, banking and insurance, public and private administration, and liberal arts. The decline is evident. In fact, women employed in various industrial classes amounted to 1,921,062, equal to 45.25 percent of the total workforce (both male and female), according to the 1881 population census, but this figure drops to 1,403,049, equal to 30.74 percent, in the 1911 census, and further decreases to 1,252,404, equal to 23.58 percent, according to the 1931 census.⁶³

The most significant progress is related to employment in public and private offices. Another important increase is seen in women employed in liberal professions. This is the field in which women have made the most significant gains, reaching numerical parity with men. However, the increase in women in banks and insurance institutions does not have the same impact as the previous category, and the same goes for women working in transportation and communications companies.

Nevertheless, women's employment in the above-mentioned categories fails to compensate for the significant reduction observed in the industrial sector. In total, all the considered categories show a decrease in female labor from 37.73 percent of the workforce in 1881 to 22.02 percent in the 1931 census. The data presented indicate that women tend to abandon more strenuous industrial work in favor of more comfortable and lighter jobs. Overall, the number of women remaining in domestic work tends to increase, as office jobs and liberal professions do not fully absorb the large number of women leaving factories.

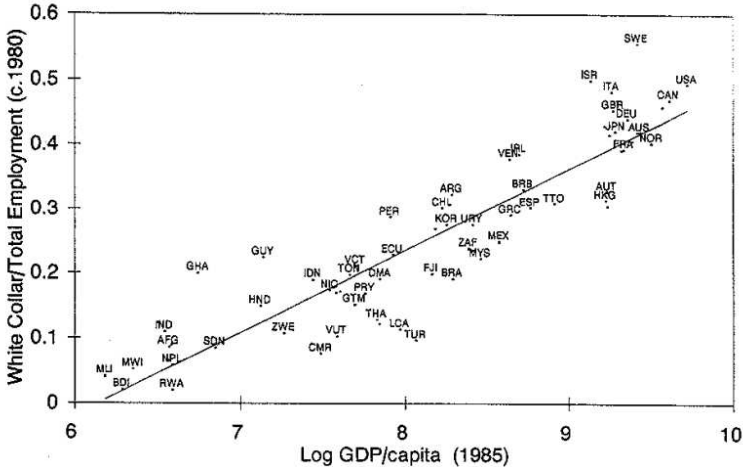
1.4 CLAUDIA GOLDIN AND THE U-SHAPED CURVE

According to census data and similar sources, long-term analysis of female labor force participation has revealed a U-shaped trend: in general, women's participation rates declined during the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, and then increased after World War II.

Claudia Goldin argues that when incomes are low and certain types of agriculture dominate (such as poultry farming, dairy, rice, cotton, and peanuts), women participate in the labor market to a considerable extent. Sometimes they are paid, while other times they are not by the companies or engage in production work in home-based workshops. As incomes in society increase, female labor force participation rates

⁶³ Guglielmo Tagliacarne, "L'occupazione Delle Donne Nelle Fabbriche e Negli Uffici Durante Gli Ultimi Cinquant'anni e La Diminuzione Delle Nascite", pp. 927–39. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23229642>. Accessed 31 Aug. 2023.

decline. Women's work is often implicitly provided by the family, leading women to withdraw into the domestic sphere.⁶⁴



*Fraction of Total Employment in White-Collar Occupations (c.1980) and the Log of GDP/Capita (1985, 1985 \$).*⁶⁵

Indeed, by observing the graph above and considering the significant economic development of the period, it is evident that employment in unpaid family labor and among self-employed workers decreased. On the other hand, wage labor maintained a relatively constant pace until the later stages of economic development. The U-shaped function depicted in the graph shows the trend of regions, with East, Central, and West Africa appearing in the upper left. North Africa and South Asia follow on the left. To the right and slightly below East, Central, and West Africa are South Africa and Southeast Asia. These seven poorer regions make up the majority of the descending part of the graph. At the bottom and beginning of the ascending part are South America and Central America. The curve resumes its upward trend with Southern Europe, East Asia, Western Europe, Northern Europe, North America, and some parts of the Pacific.

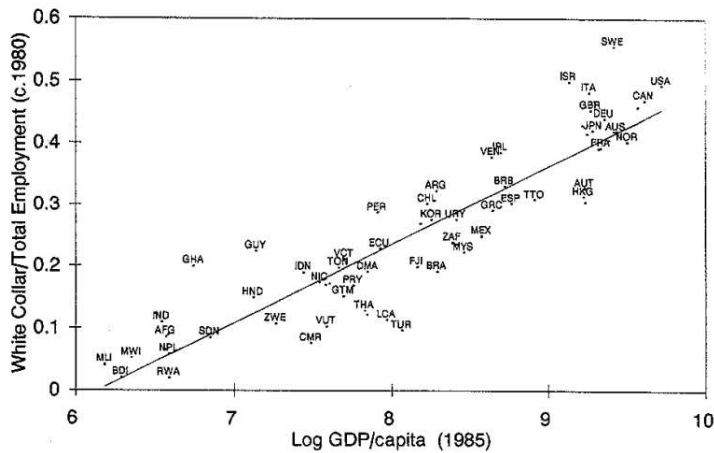
Despite numerous interpretations, it has emerged that women work on farms and in domestic production when incomes are very low; as soon as incomes rise, women move into factories, businesses, or places with paid work. It should also not be forgotten how the advent of new agricultural technologies has had a significant impact on women, as while new technologies increase income, they reduce women's tasks and increase the use of machines by men.

So, it is true that the decrease in women in the labor market is due to an income effect; on the other hand, it can also be due to a decrease in the demand for female labor in agriculture. Married women tend to be excluded from employment in the industry due to social customs or employer preferences.

Once female education becomes more prevalent, and the presence of women in the workplace gains value, women re-enter the paid labor market, following the rising part of the U-shaped curve.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p.62.

⁶⁵ Occupational distribution: United Nations (1992); GDP/capita: Summers and Heston (1991).



*Fraction of Total Employment in White-Collar Occupations (c.1980) and the Log of GDP/Capita (1985, 1985 \$).*⁶⁶

The graph depicts the increase in employment and per capita GDP. The rise in per capita GDP highlights an important factor and the transformation of the economy, which has seen a shift from agriculture to industry and services. Certainly, the demand for educated workers goes hand in hand with rising income. However, an increase in per capita GDP alone is not sufficient to increase the number of employed women. Despite equal education, there is a substantial difference between women and men. Southwestern countries have a very low level of female education. Of the northeastern countries, only three (including Singapore and Hong Kong) have a high proportion of women employed in professional jobs. This disparity is because men receive significantly more education than women. Unfortunately, as shown in the graphs, the data represented is generally cross-sectional or has limited historical information for countries. Therefore, it is challenging to obtain solid evidence to confirm U-shaped theories. Certainly, female education related to female labor force participation is the most significant factor.

Claudia Goldin believes that due to a stigma against women's work, gender balance in employment is hindered by fixed costs of work outside the home. Women employed in professional sectors have a low stigma because educated women are allowed to work for pay. Although theoretically, women with a low stigma could also be employed in these sectors, it is not the case. The interpretation suggested is as follows: when a woman accepts manual labor, her husband is seen as negligent because no educated man would allow his wife to work in his place in the manufacturing sector. That's why a woman employed in manual labor must come from a low-income family. In any case, these theories do not represent the norm because educated women married to hardworking men and educated women married to lazy men can coexist.⁶⁷

Certainly, providing a norm against women working in production serves to reinforce the income effect; in fact, the higher the income, the greater the likelihood of a binding stigma effect. Due to the education

⁶⁶ Occupational distribution: United Nations (1992); GDP/capita: Summers and Heston (1991).

⁶⁷ Claudia Goldin "The U-Shaped Female Labor Force Function in Economic Development and Economic History," University of Chicago Press, 1995.

obtained by women, they gradually take on jobs in professional sectors, eliminating the stigma effect and increasing the substitution effect. This way, the income effect decreases because more and more families are no longer subject to the stigma effect of manufacturing work. This is how Claudia Goldin outlines the U-shaped curve.

Despite some exceptions, the results of these efforts seem to confirm that female labor force participation in the long term has indeed followed a U-shaped trend, but with participation rates consistently significantly higher than those calculated previously using uncorrected original data from censuses and similar sources.

1.5 VISIBILITY AND INVISIBILITY OF FEMALE LABOR

Christine Delphy, a French feminist sociologist, writer, and theorist, and Diane Leonard, a British sociologist, social anthropologist, and feminist activist, focused their attention two decades ago on examining how the family had been previously conceptualized. Performing household chores and taking care of the sick are all recognized as legitimate jobs when paid for. However, when carried out by a homemaker, they lose their economic value. This is how domestic work becomes a lifelong obligation for wives, and male financial power translates into executive control of the family. Instead of being considered a form of unregulated, non-unionized, and unpaid labor, the performance of domestic tasks becomes invisible or regarded as a duty of care, or even as a hobby. Where domestic work is gendered, it is seen as a "favor" to men or as assistance with household chores. Such work that does not fit within the capitalist economy becomes invisible, as it is absent from the GDP.

Delphy and Leonard also criticize Marxists for ignoring the value of domestic work, considering them complicit in the invisibility of women's labor because they have overlooked microeconomic exploitation in favor of historical class oppositions. They also criticize Marxists for suggesting that wage labor is more prestigious than unpaid labor.

Marx and Engels believed that this system of oppression towards women did not always exist. They conducted studies on the development of human society from economic, social, and cultural perspectives, showing how the relationship between the sexes slowly evolved and changed over time, establishing a hierarchy that relegated women to a subordinate condition.⁶⁸

With the advent of private property, men acquire increasing power, and women are relegated to the domestic sphere. According to Engels and Marx, women can define themselves as free when they are integrated into the production process. However, women face a new enemy: class oppression. They are

⁶⁸ Engels Frederick. "Engels on the Origin and Evolution of the Family," , vol. 14, no. 4, 1988, ps. 705–29. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1973630>. Accessed 7 Mar. 2023.

exploited to increase production and enable capitalists to lower the wages of all workers. Capitalism has continued to use patriarchal ideology to keep women in a subordinate condition.

Women have historically not been a highly visible presence in the labor market, although this situation has changed considerably in recent years.⁶⁹

To demonstrate that the Italian situation was not fundamentally different from that of other industrialized countries, the study "Women's Work and Family Condition" conducted by the Regional Institute for Research in Milan (Irer) in 1977 on Lombardy was instrumental. Published in 1980, edited by Giuseppe Barile and Lorenza Zanuso, the study focused on a large sample of married women (2,002) aged between 20 and 50, cohabiting with their husbands, and living in Lombard municipalities with a population of over 5,000 inhabitants.⁷⁰

The main purpose of the research was to investigate how work within the family and domestic organization were managed, how paid roles in the market and roles in public participation were interconnected. Another aspect considered was social class.

Their interest primarily lay in drawing attention not only to women's work recorded in official surveys but also to "hidden" work and domestic labor, highlighting the social necessity of the latter.

Firstly, the level of participation in paid work by married women compared to their husbands emerged.

Secondly, cases of "marginal work," whose actual female presence appeared underestimated.

If the term "occupation" refers to all work situations, including occasional ones, the researchers identified "marginal work" as work performances with an annual and/or weekly duration less than prevailing ones (around 40 hours per week) and that were carried out at the worker's home. These were mostly characterized by low wages and a lack of private contractual protection. Following this approach, married women's participation in economic production was more significant than official data indicated: women represented 39.8% of the total sample, with an activity rate about ten points higher than that reported by standard statistical sources for Lombardy, considering both regular and irregular work.⁷¹

Among the results, it was evident that women worked shorter hours than men in all sectors. Only one-third of the interviewees had a continuous work history, and the vast majority had either left work or worked intermittently, primarily due to marriage or the birth of children.

This is how the idea gained ground that the spread of "irregular" work from a contractual point of view was leading to a spontaneous proliferation of part-time female employment. In fact, among those who declared themselves available for work, 72.7% considered it essential for employment to be part-time.⁷²

⁶⁹ Anna Badino, *Tutte a casa? Donne tra migrazione e lavoro nella Torino degli anni Sessanta*. Prefazione di Franco Ramella. Viella Editore, Roma 2008, p.63.

⁷⁰ Giuseppe Barile, Lorenza Zanuso Daniela Gregorio. *IRER - Lavoro femminile e condizione familiare*. Milano, Angeli, 1980.

⁷¹ Anna Badino, *Tutte a casa? Donne tra migrazione e lavoro nella Torino degli anni Sessanta*. Prefazione di Franco Ramella. Viella Editore, Roma 2008, p.61.

⁷² *Ibidem*, ps.63-64.

Interesting results also emerged concerning the workplace. Approximately 15% of the interviewees worked from home, with almost no social or work-related sickness insurance. This was certainly a form of marginal work.

Regarding wage levels, the specific characteristics of female work for the market reflected strong differences between men and women, even with equivalent education and professional category. Female income averaged around 60% of male income.

The elements described so far confirm the hypothesis that during the 1960s and 1970s, many women, especially married ones, were pushed towards much more flexible forms of activity due to the demands of their family roles.

The concept of gender-based division of labor has been a valuable tool for investigating the world of work in the past, as it has made it possible to restore visibility to women in economic and social activities, they have long been involved in. Starting from the 1980s, practices and representations that have influenced gender activities over time have been taken into account, with the aim of giving greater prominence to traditional issues and highlighting issues that seem to have afflicted women's work from the Middle Ages to the present day. This includes lower pay, lower qualification, lower social recognition, but also less subjective investment.⁷³ It has been able to highlight and interpret the recurring cultural and legal constraints that affected women in certain trades and professions based on biological and moral considerations. Women were considered to have less capability and strength and were limited due to their reproductive function. Once this purely biological view was abandoned, it became evident that a strong social construction had developed over time, shaping the characteristics of women workers and, conversely, those of male workers.⁷⁴ Over time, the two figures differentiated through each one's skills and the professions that defined their appearance and identity.⁷⁵ In this perspective, the distinction between qualified and de-qualified labor has taken on new connotations, as gender dynamics not only assign women less specialized jobs but also induce us to consider traditionally female jobs as less qualified.⁷⁶ In recent decades, numerous studies have shown that women participated in economic activities in past societies, despite the formal exclusions or limitations imposed by corporate systems.⁷⁷

According to the classical economic history view, wage labor predominates over non-wage labor, which is understood in opposition to domestic work. This dichotomy refers to the separation between the public and private spheres and a distinction between masculinity and femininity. Therefore, the domestic sphere was considered suitable for women, where they could showcase their caregiving

⁷³ Simonetta Cavaciocchi, Istituto internazionale di storia economica "F. Datini" Prato 1990, *La donna nell'economia*, Firenze, Le Monnier, p.76.

⁷⁴ Joan W. Scott, *Deconstructing equality-versus-difference: Or, the uses of poststructuralist theory for feminism*. In S. Seidman (Ed.), *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, ps. 167-177.

⁷⁵ Angela Groppi, *Il lavoro delle donne*, Rome-Bari, Editori Laterza, «Storia delle donne in Italia», 1996, p. 223.

⁷⁶ Memoria. *Rivista di storia delle donne* 1989, n. 27 (booklet).

⁷⁷ Valeri Melikidze, Rachel Stancliffe, George Tarkhan-Mouravi. 1995. *Human Development Report 1995: Gender and Human Development*. New York.

qualities and engage in managing the household and other naturally feminine activities. Conversely, the public sphere, the place of work and social interaction, was reserved for men, even though work and social activities were not excluded from the domestic sphere. Still, it was a space where men could rest and exercise their duty and right as heads of the family, fathers, and husbands.⁷⁸ Even a superficial look at the literature on the subject clarifies what is referred to as the "golden age," generally associated with the Middle Ages or the early modern era. Indeed, the ideology of separate spheres, in its various forms, is a long-lasting leitmotif of social, cultural, and economic history and the premise of a long historiographical debate.

The impact of capitalism played a crucial role in identifying the development of the ideology of the private and public spheres, and some scholars who have studied the Middle Ages have also tried to trace a "golden age" of women in the world of work, to pinpoint when women began to be confined to the domestic sphere.⁷⁹

Alice Clark, a British feminist and historian, highlighted the consequences of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution on women's work, recognizing the moment when gender differentiation occurred. From the Middle Ages until the 17th century, all family members worked together within the domestic walls. The family both produced and consumed what was made, without the need for exchanges of goods. Work was, therefore, shared by both male and female figures. By the end of the 17th century, all production became commercial and took place outside the domestic walls. Wives who had previously been part of the production process alongside their husbands found themselves confined within the domestic walls, while men left their homes to work.⁸⁰ Consequently, women began to focus on housekeeping, overseeing the servants, and the education of their children, including their instruction. These activities, which were an integral part of domestic life, were not considered economic activities or genuine work, and their economic value was not recognized.

As demonstrated by the studies of B.Z. Micheletto, even in ancient times, women's work was considered a service for the family's well-being rather than for economic purposes. Furthermore, in the late Middle Ages, women were excluded from the labor market and marginalized. B.Z. Micheletto notes that in recent years, numerous studies have analyzed the economic and social role of women as independent entrepreneurs at the beginning of the early modern era in various countries in continental Europe, challenging the ideology of separate spheres.⁸¹ Independent women entrepreneurs from middle and lower classes engaged in a wide range of economic activities: they actively participated in financial

⁷⁸ Beatrice Zucca Micheletto, *Paid and unpaid work from: The Routledge History of the Domestic Sphere in Europe, 16th to 19th Century* Routledge, 2020, p.101.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p.102.

⁸⁰ Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, Volume 159 of *Economic history Women's economic history*, McGraw Hill Professional, 2005.

⁸¹ Beatrice Zucca Micheletto, *Paid and unpaid work from: The Routledge History of the Domestic Sphere in Europe, 16th to 19th Century* Routledge, 2020, p.102.

markets and commercial investments, while others were involved in trade or ran shops, inns, taverns, and stalls. In essence, they represented a significant part of the workforce in preindustrial societies.

As a result, women merchants across Europe had the right to engage in economic activities on their own, with more or less formal and explicit permission from their husbands, although they did not enjoy flawless legal status.

Undoubtedly, the industrial revolution is seen as a turning point in the history of women's work. However, it would be misleading to claim that the ideology of separate spheres and the resulting devaluation of women's work were solely the result of social and economic phenomena related to industrialization.⁸² Even before the 17th century, women's work enjoyed very limited social and economic recognition.

One of the most significant recent contributions to the debate comes from Hannah Barker, who, in "The Business of Women: Female Enterprise and Urban Development in New England 1760-1830," provides a nuanced picture of the labor market and the English economy during the industrial revolution. The author challenges the hypothesis that capitalism worsened economic opportunities for English women and marginalized them. Considering that the process of industrialization took place over a much longer period and was characterized more by continuity than profound and rapid change, women never abandoned the labor market to devote themselves exclusively to the domestic sphere.⁸³

A recent research project coordinated by Anna Bellavitis, Manuela Martini, and Raffaella Sarti has shown the economic contribution of women and children involved in family businesses.⁸⁴ From the Middle Ages to the present day and considering a wide range of geographical contexts (France, Italy, Spain, as well as Sweden, England, the Netherlands, Greece, etc.), it demonstrated the importance of the work performed by wives, daughters, widows, and sons in family businesses, as well as the significance of home-based work for the economy. This explains how the domestic sphere was connected to work.

In their publications, the same authors have avoided equating the preindustrial period with a golden age for women and home-based work. Secondly, they have also emphasized that within the family, as a production unit, not all its members were equal, had the same rights, or the same authority.

However, historians face the problem that family members who worked in family businesses are poorly visible in archival sources. For this reason, the visibility and invisibility of family members in the workforce have been discussed because, unlike male presence, which can be recorded, female presence is much more challenging to detect. The work of women and children is widely underestimated.⁸⁵

⁸² *Ibidem*, p.105.

⁸³ D. Van den Heuvel, (2008). Barker, Hannah. *The Business of Women. Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England 1760–1830*. Oxford University Press, Oxford [etc.] 2006.

⁸⁴ Raffaella Sarti, Anna Bellavitis and Manuela Martini, "Introduction", in Sarti, Bellavitis and Martini (eds.), *What Is Work?*, ps. 1–84.

⁸⁵ Beatrice Zucca Micheletto, *Paid and unpaid work from: The Routledge History of the Domestic Sphere in Europe, 16th to 19th Century* Routledge, 2020, p.105.

Nevertheless, the participation of family members in domestic work can be investigated and quantified through a careful examination of notarial records, such as emancipation deeds, wills, dowry or marriage settlements, post-mortem inventories, and specific agreements between different parties. Silences, recording errors, and the gap between norms and social reality have contributed to the inaccuracy of sources.

2 THE ITALIAN ECONOMIC MIRACLE

2.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the war, the living conditions of the working class deteriorated significantly, both in cities and in the countryside. Cities were bombed, and basic necessities became scarce. Unlike in the countryside, where the situation was less drastic due to the self-sufficiency of farmers, urban populations fled to the countryside, causing overcrowding. Nationally, the cost of living increased by nearly 23 times between 1938 and 1945, while wages were halved.⁸⁶

At the end of the war, thousands of people interned in German labor camps or former prisoners of war began to return home in search of jobs that effectively did not exist.

A bitter conflict of interests arose between those who returned from the war and the thousands of women who had worked during the conflict and wanted to keep their jobs. In 1947, the number of unemployed in Italy amounted to 1.6 million. As a testament to this situation, factory worker Angelo Fumagalli, employed at a foundry in Ercole Marelli in Sesto San Giovanni, described the life of the working class in the North during that period in 1945:

"The salary was never enough; it was always a tight cage. If today you bought something for ten, tomorrow it was twelve, fifteen. To have even a bit of breathing room, you had to move. Strikes easily flared up [...]. Almost everything was still rationed; oil, butter, and sugar cost as much as on the black market. [...] Meat was available only once a week, on Saturdays... The way of life was very simple; you went to the factory on foot or by bicycle, and after work, to the club or back home. [...] It was already fortunate to have a job. The unemployed came from all over, and there were protests every day in front of the factories".⁸⁷

In major factories, mass layoffs were commonplace. Between 1946 and 1952, for instance, approximately 75,000 workers, previously employed in companies controlled by the IRI (Institute for Industrial Reconstruction), lost their jobs. Simultaneously, many well-known activists were fired or marginalized. When the economic situation improved and created new demand for labor, young workers, often from rural areas, who had not participated in the struggles of 1943-47, were hired. They were willing to accept more intense work rhythms and a new organization of labor.

⁸⁶ Camillo Daneo, *La politica economica della ricostruzione, 1945-1949*, Einaudi Editore, Torino, 1975, ps. 228-230.

⁸⁷ Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi. Società e politica 1943-1988*, Einaudi, Torino, 1989, p.104.

As small businesses prospered, wage disparities, which had been significantly reduced in the mid-1940s, began to widen again, with a growing disadvantage for lower-level workers. If one considers the increase in domestic work performed by women, the worsening of wage conditions becomes even more evident.⁸⁸

The Italian system benefited from the political strategies of the early governments of the Republic. Alcide De Gasperi,⁸⁹ in the elections of April 18, 1948, succeeded in including Italy in the European Recovery Program, better known as the Marshall Plan,⁹⁰ launched by the United States government to support European allies and attempt to reorganize the entire global economic system in opposition to the 'communist bloc'.⁹¹ The Marshall Plan allowed Italy to receive approximately 1.4 billion dollars in aid, which was used to complete reconstruction and revive the transportation, agriculture, public works, and industrial sectors. Marshall Plan aid was directed towards major companies, where facilities were renovated, and new technologies were introduced for more efficient work organization. In 1949, De Gasperi was invited to Washington to participate in the founding of the Atlantic Pact, of which Italy later became one of the founding members.

In 1954, the Minister of Finance, Ezio Vanoni, worked to pass new tax reporting regulations aimed at combating high tax evasion by making the annual income declaration mandatory for all taxpayers. He also attempted to address the country's major structural issues, such as the Southern lag, the unemployment crisis, and the shortcomings in education and healthcare systems. However, his premature death prevented the implementation of the plan, and indeed, the disparities increased significantly.⁹²

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, pp.106-112.

⁸⁹ De Gasperi, after establishing the abandonment of the reform of agrarian contracts, firstly reaffirmed the need for land reform and claimed greater freedom of action. Secondly, he emphasised the importance of controlling inflation and the stability of the lira, objectives against which the reform itself had to conform. Thirdly, while trying not to jeopardise relations with the landowners, he defended Segni from the accusation, levelled at him from several quarters, of being a communist 'disguised' as a moderate.

Bernardi, Emanuele. "Alcide De Gasperi Tra Riforma Agraria e Guerra Fredda (1948-1950)." *Ventunesimo Secolo*, vol. 3, no. 5, 2004, pp. 71–97. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23719889>. Accessed 9 July 2023.

⁹⁰ On the basis of a unified plan for western European economic reconstruction presented by a committee representing 16 countries, the U.S. Congress authorized the establishment of the European Recovery Program, which was signed into law by U.S. Pres. Harry S. Truman on April 3, 1948. Aid was originally offered to almost all the European countries, including those under military occupation by the Soviet Union. The Soviets early on withdrew from participation in the plan, however, and were soon followed by the other eastern European nations under their influence. This left the following countries to participate in the plan: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and western Germany. [...]The Marshall Plan was very successful. The western European countries involved experienced a rise in their gross national products of 15 to 25 percent during this period. The plan contributed greatly to the rapid renewal of the western European chemical, engineering, and steel industries. Truman extended the Marshall Plan to less-developed countries throughout the world under the Point Four Program, initiated in 1949. *Britannica*, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Marshall Plan". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 3 Mar. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Marshall-Plan>. Accessed 8 May 2023.

⁹¹ Emanuele Bernardi, "Alcide De Gasperi Tra Riforma Agraria e Guerra Fredda (1948-1950)." *Ventunesimo Secolo*, vol. 3, no. 5, 2004, pp. 71–97. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23719889>. Accessed 17 Apr. 2023.

⁹² Daniele Sanna, "Ezio Vanoni e la gestione della fiscalità: un'analisi storico-istituzionale." *Il Politico*, vol. 82, no. 1(244), 2017, ps. 139–57. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45433693>. Accessed 17 Apr. 2023. Ps.142-144.

By 1951, there were over two million unemployed, and it's important to consider the usual underestimation in official statistics. Another four million were classified as "marginalized employed." Unemployment was widespread in both the traditional sectors of the South, such as agricultural laborers and the urban poor in cities like Palermo and Naples, as well as in the industrial North. During this period, a substantial minority of Italians continued to live in conditions of extreme deprivation.

2.2 SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS: FROM 1958 TO 1963

After World War II, Italy experienced a long period of growth; the war had caused a high number of casualties. Once the war was over, it was not easy to return to familiar work rhythms; however, the Italian population returned to the industrial factories spared from aerial bombings and attacks by German troops and resumed work at full capacity. In this way, in 1952, there was the first significant increase in demographic values, so much so that the resident population in Italy was 47,538,945; this figure would later rise to 50,698,797 in 1962.

Territorio	Italia															
Tipo di indicatore	popolazione al 1° gennaio															
demografico																
Sexo	totale															
Selezione periodo	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	
Età																
89 anni	17 542	19 056	19 658	17 126	19 893	20 261	23 167	22 785	24 425	24 043	23 749	27 206	26 410	28 678	27 887	
90 anni	13 747	15 271	15 705	12 878	15 378	15 642	18 380	17 742	19 170	18 625	18 010	21 358	20 243	22 147	21 281	
91 anni	10 612	12 132	12 293	9 403	11 600	11 873	14 278	13 507	14 726	14 125	13 316	16 360	15 160	16 672	15 804	
92 anni	8 015	9 559	9 566	6 687	8 550	8 808	10 848	10 014	11 008	10 489	9 581	12 294	11 206	12 327	11 361	
93 anni	5 934	7 376	7 314	4 630	6 115	6 294	8 020	7 232	8 017	7 598	6 755	9 102	8 080	8 934	7 957	
94 anni	4 320	5 572	5 466	3 120	4 276	4 378	5 797	5 068	5 743	5 324	4 623	6 516	5 678	6 289	5 444	
95 anni	3 034	4 132	3 973	2 042	2 904	2 939	4 116	3 440	3 994	3 636	3 008	4 498	3 889	4 302	3 620	
96 anni	2 035	2 984	2 829	1 276	1 866	1 918	2 844	2 281	2 656	2 399	1 876	3 047	2 520	2 880	2 343	
97 anni	1 305	2 044	1 978	751	1 119	1 197	1 856	1 451	1 696	1 495	1 107	1 968	1 544	1 834	1 470	
98 anni	796	1 321	1 283	401	633	675	1 121	850	1 021	871	605	1 195	902	1 099	860	
99 anni	454	802	784	197	326	356	626	462	580	470	308	677	496	616	480	
100 anni e più	482	976	964	147	284	309	630	438	594	442	257	695	470	623	464	
totale	47 538 945	47 792 111	48 122 579	48 476 569	48 788 543	49 053 642	49 312 765	49 640 101	50 025 485	50 373 814	50 698 797	51 060 076	51 443 801	51 906 790	52 317 887	

Data extracted on 17 Apr. 2023 09:52 UTC (GMT) from I.Stat ⁹³

In the mid-1950s, Italy was still in many ways an underdeveloped country, and the standard of living for the Italian people was quite low. Industrial progress was evident in sectors such as steel, automobiles, electricity, and artificial fibers, but it was mainly limited to the northwestern regions; most Italians still earned their living in traditional sectors. In 1951, only 7.4% of Italian households had sufficient electricity, clean water, and indoor sanitation facilities.

⁹³ Popolazione residente ricostruita - Anni 1952-1971 (istat.it). Data extracted on 26 apr. 2023 12:51 UTC (GMT) from I.Stat.

According to data, agriculture continued to be the largest employment sector. In the 1951 census, 42.2% of the working population fell into the category of "agriculture, hunting, and fishing," and this percentage rose to 56.9% in the South.

During this period, especially in central Italy, sharecropping began to decline as fewer farmers were willing to follow in their parents' footsteps. Landowners, seeing their profits and authority decrease and market prices rise, were inclined to sell their land.⁹⁴

Unfortunately, the reduction in agricultural jobs was not offset by a similarly significant increase in industrial and service sector employment, with these sectors rehiring less than half of the workers displaced from agriculture.

Between 1959 and 1971, both male and female employment in industry increased by almost a million, especially during the years of the economic boom, before declining in the following decade. The growth had a clear gender connotation, affecting only the male workforce; in fact, male industrial workers grew by 1,154,000, while female workers decreased by 178,000.⁹⁵

One of the reasons for this decline was primarily an issue of age, as, unlike adult female workers, younger women, generally unmarried and without children, entered factories in nearly the same numbers as their male counterparts. While the decrease in self-employment affected both men and women equally in agriculture, in industry, it almost exclusively affected female workers.⁹⁶ This happened because they were concentrated in predominantly traditional sectors, some of which had been experiencing modernization and labor displacement for years. One example is the textile sector.

Regarding the service sector, it can be said that employment in services had a rather different evolution compared to the primary and secondary sectors. Total employment increased by over 1.5 million. Both self-employed and employees increased, but female workers were involved to a much lesser extent, growing by 176,000 between 1959 and 1971, compared to a growth of 781,000 male workers.⁹⁷

In general terms, it can be said that women in the labor market of the 1960s played a secondary role, along with those who were in demand. This phenomenon is very significant because it indicates an important shift away from non-domestic work in favor of caregiving. Women's work, outside of rapidly declining rural domestic units, seemed to be simply seen as an addition to men's work, especially for women playing the roles of wives and mothers within families.⁹⁸

In addition to the limitations on female employment, the female workers employed in industry during the boom years ranged from 1,300,000 to 1,400,000, with some variations. Between the 1950s and 1960s, they experienced a process of skill devaluation. To complete this process, gender inequality is once again emphasized by wage issues, as female industrial workers, even during the boom years,

⁹⁴ Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi. Società e politica 1943-1988*, Einaudi, Torino, 1989, p.283.

⁹⁵ ISTAT, *Sommario di statistiche storiche 1861-1975*, Forze di lavoro, cit.

⁹⁶ Ibidem.

⁹⁷ Ibidem.

⁹⁸ Eloisa Betti, *Il lavoro femminile nell'industria italiana. Gli anni del boom economico*, "Storicamente", 6 (2010), p.9.

received lower wages than their male colleagues, despite performing the same work. This wage discrimination was not only found in the salaries paid to female workers but was primarily enshrined in the employment contracts themselves.⁹⁹ As if that were not enough, the low wages in the industrial sector were further reduced when it was discovered that female workers earned on average 30% less than men on the base salary, and this discrepancy could go up to 50% of the total salary.¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, this inequality did not end even after the 1960 equal pay agreement. While the 1960 agreement on equal pay was helpful in the sense that it changed the nomenclature of manual worker qualifications, eliminating gender divisions, wage discrimination between manual workers and administrative staff continued to exist. Despite wage improvements during the economic boom years, female industrial workers continued to earn considerably less than men.

However, the years from 1950 to 1970 were a golden period for international trade: the economic integration of major industrial countries reached new heights, and consumerism was at the heart of the era. Among the reasons behind the economic success of our country was the level of technology achieved by Italian industry and a productive diversification capable of responding to the creation of the Common Market.¹⁰¹

During the same period, the fierce competition among Eni, Edison, and Montecatini resulted in significant progress in the petrochemical industry and the production of synthetic fibers and fertilizers. The Marshall Plan, as seen earlier, opened up new horizons for several Italian companies, thanks to the influx of machinery. Monetary stability, the lack of fiscal control over the business world, and the maintenance of a favorable discount rate by the Bank of Italy were all factors that helped create the conditions for capital accumulation and its subsequent investment in industry.

Certainly, the low cost of labor should not be underestimated, as it played a crucial role in the so-called economic miracle. High levels of unemployment in the 1950s meant that the demand for labor far exceeded the supply, with predictable consequences for wage trends. With the post-war decline in the power of unions, there was a shift toward increased productivity and exploitation.

Between 1953 and 1960, while industrial production increased along with labor productivity, real wages in industry decreased. With such low labor costs, Italian companies were extremely competitive on international markets.¹⁰²

Unlike an earlier period, from 1951 to 1958, when the development of the Italian economy seemed to be primarily due to domestic demand, in the years 1958-63, industrial production more than doubled, led by the metalworking and petrochemical industries. Textile and food products gave way to consumer goods that were in higher demand in various advanced industrial countries, reflecting a higher per capita

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

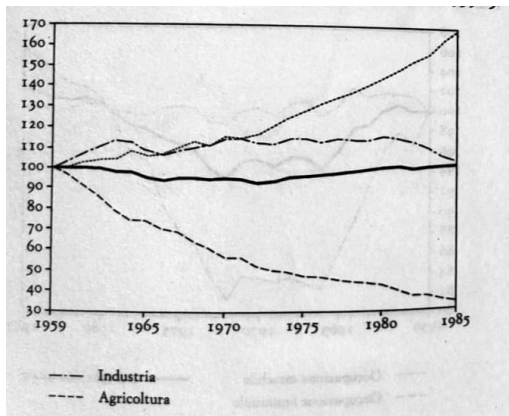
¹⁰⁰ ISTAT, *Annuario di statistiche del lavoro 1959*, cit.; ISTAT, *Annuario di statistiche del lavoro e dell'emigrazione 1963*, cit.

¹⁰¹ Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi. Società e politica 1943-1988*, Einaudi, Torino, 1989, p.286.

¹⁰² Paride Rugafori, *I gruppi dirigenti della siderurgia «pubblica» tra gli anni Trenta gli anni Sessanta*, in F. Bonelli, *Acciaio per l'industrializzazione*, ps. 358-366.

income than that of Italy. Italian refrigerators, washing machines, automobiles, televisions, precision instruments, typewriters, and plastic products were exported in significant quantities.

The persistence in using new technologies, the exploitation of low labor costs, and high productivity led to a significantly lower rate of employment in the agricultural sector, which constituted 30% of the workforce. The balance had clearly shifted, and Italy was ready to join the select group of industrially advanced nations.



Employment index numbers by sector of activity in Italy, 1959-1985.¹⁰³

Among the imbalances of the so-called "economic miracle," it is worth mentioning its predominantly spontaneous nature. It has been said that in 1954, the Minister of Budget Ezio Vanoni presented the Vanoni Plan with the goal of laying the foundations for a more balanced economic process for the entire country. Essentially, it focused on increasing employment, attempting income redistribution, and achieving a permanent balance. However, none of this happened as the economic boom developed with its own logic. Its export-oriented growth emphasized the development of public consumption, and, as expected, the economic miracle only intensified the interests of individual households.¹⁰⁴

Rather dramatic was the serious imbalance between the North and the South and the migrations that followed. Large mass movements, mainly of men, affected Northern Italy or foreign countries such as Germany and Belgium. The most popular areas were certainly the urbanized regions of the industrial triangle Milan-Turin-Genoa, where finding work in the industry was relatively easy. While job-seeking in the North could be a source of economic fortune, on the other hand, work rhythms were intense. Companies were able to keep the prices of goods competitive for a long time by exploiting the workforce and hindering union activities. During those years, economic production increased by up to 95%, and the average working hours reached 10 hours a day; the purchasing power of wage earners, on the other hand, remained almost static. Workers participating in union demonstrations between 1948 and 1954

¹⁰³ Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi. Società e politica 1943-1988*, Einaudi, Torino, 1989, p. 600.

¹⁰⁴ Mario Taccolini, *A servizio dello sviluppo. L'azione economico-sociale delle congregazioni religiose in Italia tra Otto e Novecento*, ps.69.72.

were killed, and others were arrested. Fortunately, there are testimonies from some workers, like that of a former Breda factory worker in Sesto San Giovanni, Milan, who recounts his experience inside the factory and the working conditions to which he and other workers were subjected:

"I worked as a welder in the factory with guys of various ages who came from all over Italy: from Friuli to Sicily, to Sardinia. In this place, Sesto, you could find all of Italy, you see? [...] We worked from 8 AM until 5 PM, and on Saturdays, it was all day. I even worked on Sundays because I was in maintenance, and the plants needed attention. When I entered the rolling mill, I didn't even know what it was. We made the 'bar,' they called it: it was a very small profile, like a ballpoint pen, a bit thicker than spaghetti. But you should have seen it when it passed through those rollers at a speed of 50/60 kilometers per hour, it was incredibly powerful! And there were workers who would grab it with tongs and then feed it into a cylinder. And if they made a mistake, their ankles would snap! Once, that iron bar shot out and hit the crane operator. It went through him from side to side. He died instantly. [...] Do you know where the C.T.O. is, the orthopedic hospital? Well, it was born when Breda was born: there were so many accidents, and they built a hospital there specifically for that".¹⁰⁵

Moving to the so-called "industrial triangle" or abroad unfortunately seemed to be the only way out of the situations that remained the same after the war.¹⁰⁶ The investigation into poverty in Italy and how to combat it continued until 1953, with the goal of "photographing" the real state of the country, especially in regions and geographic areas considered more "at risk" due to high levels of poverty and unemployment (Campania, Calabria, Sardinia, the Po Delta, and the outskirts of large cities).

Since the "miracle" was essentially a phenomenon in the northern regions, it initially seemed to favor the workers because demand slightly exceeded supply. But in the South, workers did not immediately enter the factories, and their working hours were extended with minimal safety measures. Consequently, many migrants from the South sought better conditions in the North. Southern women, once they joined their husbands in the North, found a job market that offered new opportunities. Most married women stayed at home, and many of them did some home-based work like sewing or similar tasks. However, a significant number of young Southern women entered factories for the first time, experiencing a terrible ordeal. Among the testimonies, Clizia, from Casoria in the province of Naples, recounts that she managed to get a job at Pirelli in Brugherio in the automotive seats department:

¹⁰⁵ This is a personal account of a worker describing his experiences working in a factory in Sesto San Giovanni, Milan, during the economic boom period. He talks about the dangerous working conditions and the accidents that occurred in the factory.

Chiara Attanasio, Andrea Villa, *Le dismissioni nelle grandi fabbriche di Sesto San Giovanni*, Fondazione Istituto per la storia dell'età contemporanea, 2010. Ps.5-7.

¹⁰⁶ Archivio della Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia e sui mezzi per combatterla - L'Archivio storico della Camera dei deputati

"They were all northerners, I mean they were all from the same town, they all knew each other, and I was the first southerner to work there... The first few days were terrible for me. Because even teaching me how to work, what to do, almost as if I had some disease, I don't know, they were even afraid to come near... Among themselves, they understood each other and did everything, and they would leave you aside. Just like a wall".¹⁰⁷

In other smaller factories, the female workforce was mostly from the South. These were companies that operated on the edge of legality, producing plastic materials, parts for televisions, light bulbs, beauty products, and so on. Salaries were roughly half of what men earned, and there were no safety measures; likewise, no insurance contributions were made. Despite these conditions, many southern girls experienced the factory as a form of emancipation, managing to escape the male hierarchy in their families; finally, they were able to earn money just for themselves. One of them, in Turin, told Fofi:

"In the factory, there are many of us, and we can feel independent. We are not criticized, and no one expects us to be educated. They pay us for what we work for".¹⁰⁸

The labor market in the North, of course, did not only offer factory work, but few became municipal employees, since access to the ranks of street sweepers or postal workers was mostly a strict prerogative of Northerners. Factory work, with its noise and repetitiveness, became intolerable for some. For others, the great journey to the North ended bitterly in petty crime or prostitution. In the early 1960s, the wide avenues of the outskirts of Milan were invaded at night by prostitutes who mostly came from the South.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ This is a continuation of personal testimonies describing the experiences of workers in Italy during the economic boom period. They talk about the challenges and opportunities faced by Southern Italians who migrated to the North in search of better employment opportunities.

Testimonies in Alasia e Montaldi, Milano, Corea cit, pp.364-65, in Paul Ginsborg, Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi, p.303.

¹⁰⁸ Goffredo Fofi, L'immigrazione meridionale a Torino, in Paul Ginsborg, Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi. Società e politica 1943-1988, p.303.

¹⁰⁹ Alasia e Montaldi, Milano, Corea cit, p.130, in Paul Ginsborg, Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi. Società e politica 1943-1988, p.304.



Automatic nougat packaging, Cremona, 1960. Ezio Quiresi, Donne. Il lavoro femminile in Italia nel Dopoguerra in 80 fotografie, MUP editore, 2006.

The largest cities in the South - Naples, Palermo, Catania, Bari - underwent significant transformations, but not to the same extent as those in Rome or the major cities in the North. From 1951 to 1961, they had attracted people from the countryside; in the following decade, however, their population growth was much less pronounced. The appearance of the cities remained mostly unchanged. In both Naples and Palermo, small factories in traditional sectors, such as textiles, food, leather, and wood, fell into ruin due to competition from consumer goods produced in the North.¹¹⁰

2.3 SOCIAL CHANGE: CHANGES IN CLASS STRUCTURE IN ITALY

The years of the 'economic miracle' brought about some radical changes in the class composition of Italian society. The active workforce experienced a significant decline: in 1951, it accounted for 42 percent of the total population, a percentage that dropped to 40.2 percent in 1961 and 35.8 percent in 1971. Considering the occupations in the North and Central regions, two main reasons seem to account for these low figures.¹¹¹

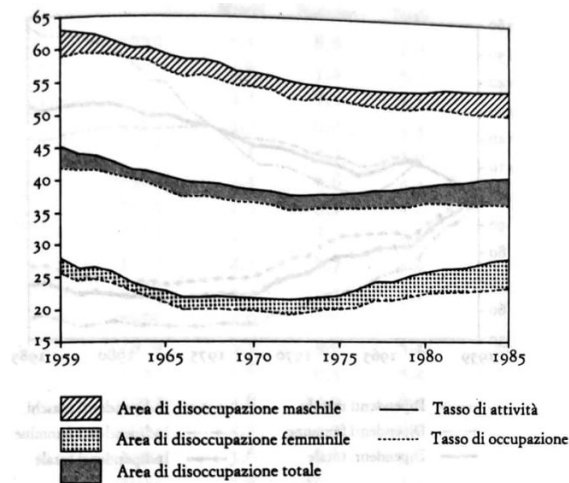
The first reason concerns the role of women in the labor market: those who were considered part of the active workforce in agriculture before the exodus from the countryside did not find full employment in

¹¹⁰ Ugo Ascoli, *Movimenti migratori in Italia*, p.134.

¹¹¹ Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi. Società e politica 1943-1988*, Einaudi, Torino, 1989, p.319.

the new urban settlements. We have seen that younger women entered factories in the North; however, most stayed at home and were officially classified as housewives even if they were engaged in home-based work.

The second reason pertains to employment prospects in the South, which were more negative than in any other region. While some men found work in northern Europe through emigration, many women and children remained at home.



*Tassi di attività, tassi di occupazione e aree di disoccupazione per sesso in Italia, 1959-85.*¹¹²

During the two decades from 1951 to 1971, the female workforce in Italy experienced a significant decline in labor force participation. However, this decline cannot be considered a recent phenomenon. Between the late 1950s and the early 1970s, more than one million jobs were lost in total, with over 90 percent of them affecting the female workforce.¹¹³ According to labor force surveys, total employment decreased by 1,524,000, of which 1,212,000 were women. Although the period of economic boom was considered a time of economic prosperity, employment decreased by over 500,000 positions. This decline appears to be primarily linked to the reduction in the number of female workers.

¹¹² Ibidem, p.599.

¹¹³ ISTAT, *Sommario di statistiche storiche 1861-1975*, Roma, 1976, Sezione Lavoro e retribuzioni, Forze di lavoro, TAV.107: Popolazione presente in Italia per condizione, posizione nella professione, settore di attività economica e sesso.

	1959			1963			Variazione 1959-1963		
	M	F	MF	M	F	MF	M	F	MF
Occupazione Complessiva									
Occupati dipendenti	8.287	3.120	11.407	9.292	3.417	12.709	+1.005	+297	+1.302
Occupati indipendenti	5.642	3.120	8.762	4.666	2.258	6.924	-976	-862	-1.838
Occupati Totali	13.929	6.240	20.169	13.958	5.675	19.633	+29	-565	-536
Agricoltura									
Occupati dipendenti	1.238	424	1.662	1.164	535	1.699	-74	+110	+37
Occupati indipendenti	3.264	1.921	5.185	2.349	1.243	3.592	-915	-678	-1.593
Occupati Totali	4.502	2.345	6.847	3.513	1.778	5.291	-989	-567	-1.556
Industria									
Occupati dipendenti	4.370	1.323	5.693	5.228	1.445	6.673	+858	+122	+980
Occupati indipendenti	978	507	1.485	952	368	1.220	-26	-139	-165
Occupati Totali	5.348	1.830	7.178	6.180	1.813	7.893	+832	-17	+815
Servizi (altre attività)									
Occupati dipendenti	2.679	1.373	4.052	2.900	1.437	4.337	+221	+64	+285
Occupati indipendenti	1.402	1.055	2.457	1.365	1.333	2.698	-69	+278	+209
Occupati Totali	4.081	2.065	6.146	4.265	2.084	6.349	+184	+19	+203

Evolution of employment in Italy during the years of the economic boom (1959-1963), by gender and economic sector (data in thousands).¹¹⁴

From the 1970s onwards, it became evident that female employment statistics did not reflect the actual percentage, as official statistical sources were unable to record the various forms of female employment existing at that time. Thanks to ISTAT's statistical sources on female employment, it is possible to gain a clearer picture of the phenomenon in question.

Between 1959 and 1971, a significant proportion of female workers were laid off from the industrial sector and struggled to find new employment in either the industrial or tertiary sectors. Female employment in the industrial sector decreased during the 1960s, while it only saw slight growth in the tertiary sector.¹¹⁵ In the agricultural sector, the decline in the number of employed women was less pronounced than that of men, leading to an increase in the "feminization of the agricultural sector," particularly in the southern regions and islands. These women, known as "white widows," continued to cultivate the land after their husbands had emigrated to financially support their families.

The phenomenon of white widows did not develop during the post-war period; it is an older problem that characterized the 1960s and 1970s. Even today, it remains unclear what compelled men and women to depart together or temporarily separate, as this field is not yet fully understood due to the lack of institutional sources (ISTAT, labor unions, political parties).

The sources at our disposal only partially allow us to provide answers. Undoubtedly, a significant factor is the substantial invisibility of white widows. In fact, all political, economic, and social institutions that dealt with emigration issues, especially in the 1970s, primarily focused on male emigrants and only

¹¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹¹⁵ ISTAT, *Sommario di statistiche storiche 1861-1975*, Forze di lavoro, cit.

secondarily on female emigrants. There is little interest in married women who remain in the country after their husbands' departure.¹¹⁶

The main institutions dealing with emigration in the post-war period, such as ISTAT, Censis (Center for Social Investment Studies), Acli (Italian Catholic Workers' Association), labor unions, Svimez (Association for the Development of Industry in the South), political parties, and Udi, dedicated very little attention to this issue.

The end of the post-war period witnessed substantial migratory flows directed mainly towards European destinations such as Belgium, France, Switzerland, and Germany. During the years of economic boom, these flows to Europe were accompanied by internal migrations, primarily towards Turin and Milan, involving entire families leaving their places of origin. These were significant labor movements that did not always yield positive outcomes, considering the precarious nature of new jobs and the risks and uncertainties for both those who departed and those who remained.

Many wives had to forgo the opportunity to join their husbands due to the practical difficulties of relocating their entire families to Europe. It is worth noting that the vast majority of emigrants returned home after a few years of working abroad. Unfortunately, those compelled to return to Italy often struggled to find new job opportunities, especially in Southern Italy, where employment problems persisted, particularly after the crisis of 1973.

Women, abandoned by their husbands for an indeterminate period, took on the temporary role of family providers, assuming additional responsibilities beyond caring for children, the household, and the elderly. This included tasks such as farming and managing money transfers, as they had the same responsibilities as men but were simultaneously denied recognition of these rights.¹¹⁷

When women found themselves performing all the tasks in the absence of their husbands, there was a gradual and imperceptible shift in the old patriarchal relationships. Through small steps, women gained greater emancipation. Thanks to a delegated role, they could now, for example, visit the post office, bank, or notary.

The image of the abandoned white widow became a sort of icon, particularly in Calabria, where the family structure was seen as a solid pillar. This phenomenon was also quite prevalent in Abruzzo and Sardinia. Other regions of the South heavily involved in the emigration phenomenon included Campania, Basilicata, Sicily, and Puglia.¹¹⁸

On the other hand, even the husbands who emigrated in search of work suffered from nostalgia and the absence of domestic services that were previously provided by their wives. Letters exchanged between separated spouses are one of the most valuable sources available to us, despite the difficulty of correspondence due to illiteracy or semi-literacy. Most of the letters that have reached us come from

¹¹⁶ Perry Willson, *Storia e società. Italiane: Biografia del Novecento*. Editori La Terza, 2020.

¹¹⁷ B. Pisa, S. Boscato, *Tra miracolo economico e crisi petrolifera. Vedove bianche: una storia da scrivere. Donne negli anni Settanta. Voci, esperienze, lotte*.ps.102-108.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

women, as they were accustomed to preserving them, unlike men who lived in precarious conditions. Interviews and documentaries, on the other hand, highlight the pain of separation, nostalgia, and the desire to reunite the family on the part of both spouses.

3 THE WOMAN-MACHINE

The individual is similar to a mechanical device, with *"wheels, a few more springs than in the more perfect animals, the brain proportionally closer to the heart and thus nourished by a greater amount of blood,"* stated Julien De La Mettrie in his essay "Man as a Machine" about two centuries ago.

If an industry executive were to consider factors such as maximum efficiency and minimal waste of time and money, it is clear that this "machine" has its limits: it can only be "utilized" for a couple of hours a day, a few days a week, and a few months a year. Furthermore, its efficiency can be compromised by external elements and, therefore, by the life it leads outside the factory walls. Modernizing it is not simple: after a few years, it loses its energy and no longer learns new techniques and production cycles as easily as before. It complains about the pace and fatigue. It gives birth to "other machines" that will not yet be "usable" and will remain inactive for several years. As if that were not enough, unlike other machines, she wants to know what she is doing, why she is doing it, and wants to have a higher qualification.

At the age of thirty, a woman finds herself excluded from any possible employment. Isa Cavallari is a woman of thirty-eight, who, however, does not look her age due to her well-maintained appearance. But the calendar speaks for itself.

Now that the factory where she worked, SAIT in Turin, is laying off its employees because it claims they worked poorly and did not adapt to the perfection of the machines, she has been forced to look for another job. But every attempt resulted in the same scene and the same brief dialogue. Youth and health are gone. In front of lathes and presses, looms and molds, people in the prime of their years are needed, capable of withstanding fatigue and the harshest environmental conditions, of continuing to resist occupational diseases and exhaustion for some time. This makes the inexperienced but healthy fourteen-year-old girl preferable to the forty-year-old woman who can have all the experience and professional capacity imaginable but cannot offer the same validity.¹¹⁹

At "Superga" - a twenty-year-old girl recounts - you are more easily hired if you are overweight. In fact, in departments where the temperature reaches forty or forty-five degrees, having a weight reserve to lose is important. Those who are deemed capable of losing ten or fifteen kilos are hired: needless to say, the consequences of such rapid and forced weight loss, which can have serious effects on the heart and vital functions of the body, are not taken into account. As soon as her body can no longer handle it, she is replaced. Once the standards that must be met, such as height, weight, and youth, are established, there is another obstacle: the danger that they may become pregnant.

¹¹⁹ Numero 45 del 1963, La donna-macchina. NOI DONNE, Archivio storico fondato nel 1944. <https://noidonnearchivistorico.org/>



¹²⁰ A young woman from Milan, whose letter was reported in the press, tells of a morning when twenty female workers are crowded into a room and made to wait for the company's "trusted doctor." He arrives and starts calling them one by one. First, they must specify in writing, as if it were an oath or a legal document, the exact date of their last menstrual cycle, then they must expose their breasts to see if squeezing them produces serum or milk. Finally, they undergo a gynecological examination. This is the principle by which they were selected at the time of hiring.¹²¹

As if this were not enough, the factory uses substances that burn the hands, cause eczema, or emit such strong odors that it takes away their appetite.

"But, after all," an industrial manager asked his female employees, *"what do you think you're coming to the factory for? You're not here to live as you please, but to work."* To reach these places where life is no longer lived, but where human life is ruthlessly subjected to a mechanical law, women often get up earlier than anyone else. In fact, the establishment of factories increasingly distant from urban centers has created this new phenomenon: the daily commute from home to the workplace no longer concerns just a few dozen or a hundred women who came from the countryside and the surrounding villages but thousands of women who live in

the city and must travel to the countryside. Settimo Torinese is one of the towns that has suddenly been reached by the expansion of industry and has had to adapt to new needs with its limited facilities and services suitable for a normal rural life. However, the discomfort of the situation seems to be felt only by those who work: in fact, no measures have been taken, such as organizing transportation for the workers. A factory worker in Settimo says, *"First the trolleybus, then the bus, and then again in reverse, these means of transportation, standing in the midst of the city's heavy traffic. I spend the whole day away from home and I feel dirty, dusty, and tired, with no way to wash or lie down for a moment."*¹²²

¹²⁰ Return home, Ezio Quiresi, Donne. Il lavoro femminile in Italia nel Dopoguerra in 80 fotografie, MUP editore, 2006.

¹²¹ Numero 45 del 1963, La donna-macchina. NOI DONNE, Archivio storico fondato nel 1944. <https://noidonnearchivistorico.org/>, p.20.

¹²² Ibidem.

Another continues, "I saw a film called 'The World at Night.' [...] I got bronchitis from constantly being in the middle of the streets to catch trams and buses. Not to mention how much weight you lose when you're always afraid of being late, whether at the factory or at home [...]." ¹²³

Time becomes a woman's greatest enemy: modern industrial complexes eliminate any work breaks and double the tasks assigned to each woman. She, in front of the machine that drives her, realizes she has lost the right to rest, to pause, and continues with her fatigue that she cannot let fall from her shoulders, with her hands hurrying not to disrupt a production cycle. There are female workers who carry crates with very heavy spools; they turn without stopping, as required by the signs hung on the wall. "Some signs warn us, as on the streets, that parking is prohibited. We often lose our sense of balance and fall. Then the nurse comes, who is also a worker, and is scolded if she stays in the infirmary 'with her hands idle.' Anyway, she comes and helps the worker get up and takes her away, while the supervisor shouts at the others not to stop." ¹²⁴

The brand-new and highly efficient machines are running at full capacity. Production has increased sevenfold in recent years, but at the same time, the number of workers in a single department has decreased from



Waiting for the bus, Goro (Rovigo), 1964. Ezio Quiresi, Donne. Il lavoro femminile in Italia nel Dopoguerra in 80 fotografie, MUP editore, 2006.

eleven to three, multiplying not their earnings, which have only been slightly adjusted, but their fatigue. For this reason, many women cannot withstand such inhumane work and, perhaps after years of activity and preparation, are forced to change professions. Sandra Zaninetti says that today she works as a hairdresser in Turin and had to leave her hometown of Biella and her family because her health was deteriorating in the factory where she worked with other girls. About ten of them would faint in a day. The supervisor would pass by and scold them without even helping them up. They were taken to the infirmary and revived with smelling salts. Then each of them was given a cup of chamomile, and as soon as they recovered, they had to return to the machines or risk losing a day's work.

¹²³ Ibidem, p.21.

¹²⁴ Ibidem.

As some workers demonstrate, the pace is exhausting. *"We can't even understand each other anymore - say the Superga factory workers - sometimes we argue over nothing... At home, we have no patience with our children, and we keep shouting,"* says Isa Cavallari of SAIT. *"I can't sleep at night anymore, and I have nervous tremors all day... I cry for no reason."* *"My marriage is falling apart because we can't be happy and get along anymore,"* say others.¹²⁵

In fact, doctors confirm that eighty percent of the illnesses suffered by workers are nervous disorders. However, these nervous disorders, the exhaustion that so easily strikes those who spend part of the day in factories and the other part outside, are not considered occupational diseases and are not examined in relation to the environment that caused them.¹²⁶

Giulietta Ascoli, in the 1968 issue number 15 of the magazine "Inchiesta tra le operaie di Torino" (Investigation Among the Female Workers of Turin), recounts the March 8th celebration in two factories in Turin, the Superga and the Alpina. The women celebrate by shouting loudly that the infantry are the women themselves, but no one recognizes it. Years pass, many are veterans, and many others have been laid off. A girl just over eighteen years old interrupts to tell about the strike that took place the day before, a day when students blocked the city center streets with a procession and made their voices heard. *"Don't act like sheep!" the excited and angry girl shouted at the few hesitant ones who didn't know whether to enter the factory or not, fearing retaliation. You will resist for a couple more years, and then the management will give you the pink slip, with the excuse that you can't keep up anymore and you're old."*



The pace is exhausting. Marilena Sabotero, a worker at the Philips factory in Alpignano, turns on a light bulb every second to check its efficiency. In the sixty seconds that make up a minute, Marilena turns on sixty light bulbs, and every hour, she turns on three thousand six hundred light bulbs. For eight consecutive hours, with eyes burning from fatigue. This is assembly line work, conditioned by machines that operate at an inexorable pace and demand unbearable effort and concentration. The average monthly salary for female workers in the Turin industry is 50,000 lire; with 50,000 lire, you can't even buy a small car; at most, you can get the four wheels. Moreover, there

¹²⁵ Ibidem.

¹²⁶ Ibidem.

is a difference of about ten thousand lire per month between male and female salaries. Women are paid less; there is no equality because female workers are always placed in the lowest ranks of company qualifications.



¹²⁷ The female infantry, the army of factory workers in Turin, consists of forty thousand women; in 1955, there were twelve thousand more, but they have been laid off. Below are some interviews that narrate the daily drama experienced by female workers, subjected to scandalous working conditions.

Annetta Bergeri recounts her experience at the Philips factory: *"I have my hands in the water all day. For washing, the pace is this: 4,000 light bulbs per hour. Being a third-class worker at Philips is already a privilege because it's rare or almost impossible for a woman to advance and move to the second or first class. I know a colleague who went to claim her right to move from the third to the second class, and do you know what they told her? No, because she*

doesn't wear pants. Out of 1,600 employees, we are 850 women, and unfortunately, because we don't wear pants, we are all relegated to the lowest categories, and almost all of us are on the assembly line. Men consider us servants at their disposal. What a view they have of women's emancipation! Another acquaintance of mine, who is thirty years old, asked to be hired, but the answer was negative. - Why? she asked. Because now she is old, ma'am." ¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Artisanal pasta factory, outskirts of Parma, 1965. Ezio Quiresi, Donne. Il lavoro femminile in Italia nel Dopoguerra in 80 fotografie, MUP editore, 2006.

¹²⁸ Numero 15 del 1968. NOI DONNE, Archivio storico fondato nel 1944, p.14. Noi donne n.15 del 1968 (noidonnearchivistorico.org)

Aide' Oliosi worked at Philips for 25 years and was a member of the internal commission. *"In the factory, there is an infernal pace and unbearable heat: in summer, we arrive in the department at 50 degrees (Celsius), and when you pour water on the floor, it's already dry after half a second. Things have gradually gotten worse, and when I went to see Dr. Coppo, the head of personnel, to protest, he replied, 'What do you want? We can't perform miracles. I also noticed that over the years, the machines have increased, and the departments are increasingly overcrowded. We go on with headache pills. Our eyes are constantly strained: I know many who have to change their glasses every two years because their vision is deteriorating."*¹²⁹

Ida Toma joined Superga on June 20, 1967, and has been working there for a year. She was immediately assigned to the presses, where the temperatures are so high that people faint. *"I've changed positions since then, so much that I feel like a gypsy. Changing departments is always tough because it takes some adaptation, at least a month or two, to get back in the groove and regain confidence. Production speed is our biggest challenge: we all know that we have to keep a certain pace. Some despair because sometimes they can't do it, but it's not their fault; it's the work that doesn't take human beings into account."*¹³⁰

Carla F. also shares her experience, although she cannot reveal her full name because the Alpina, her factory, is considered a prison for minors, as it employs only girls under twenty who are treated as detainees.

*"I want to tell you about the scandal at our company, which consists of imposing fines all day long, so that at the end of the month, you discover that six or seven thousand lire are missing from your paycheck. The reason for the deduction is not written, and the fines are called debts. Do you want to know for what reasons a woman gets fined? Because she arrives two minutes late (while if she stays an extra fifteen minutes in the evening for production reasons, there is no fine in that case). If a girl is absent on Saturdays, the company thinks she took a long weekend... even if she had an appendicitis attack. If someone stops because the sewing machine is stuck, fine. If you break a needle, you pay for it. If a pile of undershirts is placed diagonally on the table, fine. This happened to me the other day. They gave me a bundle to sort out, containing sweaters with loose threads, and warned me: If the work is not finished within two hours, you'll buy twenty sweaters out of your pocket. I replied: And where should I put twenty men's sweaters? In the basement? Tired of all these fines, one fine day, on our own initiative, we stopped the machines and said: Enough!"*¹³¹

¹²⁹ Ibidem, p.15.

¹³⁰ Ibidem.

¹³¹ Ibidem.

Marisa Prassuit talks about the gas fumes present in her department, department 55 at "Superga".

"The molds emit gas and vapors, and the environment is shrouded in mist... I've become skeptical about our fate; it doesn't even satisfy me to know that we will soon have a Safety and Hygiene Commission because I already know that when it's established, it will be something mild that won't scare the bosses. They say that the environment is not harmful at all, but it is. There are, indeed, exhaust systems, but our departments are not ventilated at all. A high percentage of workers are suffering from anemia; others are intoxicated, while some have skin diseases. Some faint because they can't keep up with the pace, and others collapse because the press's temperature is very high. The bosses pay us for the harmful conditions, and you know how much? Six lire (Italian currency) per hour, but the money doesn't compensate us for our health; the



Women at the olive oil mill", "Ceramics from Cremona" (1956). Ezio Quiresi, Donne. Il lavoro femminile in Italia nel Dopoguerra in 80 fotografie, MUP editore, 2006.

equipment needs to be renewed, or the working hours should be reduced with the same salary... Every day, we have to check 700 to 1500 pairs of slippers... The worker stamps the box and makes the necessary repairs. You have to be very careful and make quick decisions because the production rate is so high, and the items often arrive with defects, and you have to quickly decide what needs to be discarded and what needs to be fixed. If someone fails the inspection three times, a fine is imposed, equivalent to an hour of unpaid work." ¹³²

¹³² Ibidem, p.16.

Anna Teppati explains that the shifts are from six to two or from two to ten in the evening.

"Those who start in the morning work from six to nine and then have a ten-minute break to catch their breath and for their needs. However, if, with all due respect, someone needs to use the bathroom at another time because there's no time even to blow your nose at the assembly line, she gets stomach pains



and has to hold it in. At noon, we stop for half an hour to eat, but there are also workers, obsessed with the fear of not being able to produce all the pieces, who don't even stop for those thirty minutes. In fact, the unexplained dismissal for those who can't keep up with these terrible rhythms affects the fifteen hundred workers at "Superga." As for the schedule, we working mothers definitely prefer the morning shift because at least you arrive somewhat rested after sleep; although many of my friends, who come from places like Bosconero or Castiglione Torinese, have to get up at three-thirty or at most at four. The afternoon shift is heavier; a woman arrives tired at work because she also worked at home in the morning, so the day really never ends."

*The work is finished. Santa Vittoria (Reggio Emilia), 1964.
Ezio Quiresi, Donne. Il lavoro femminile in Italia nel
Dopoguerra in 80 fotografie, MUP editore, 2006.*

Iolanda Barbiroglio recounts her nine-hour workday, standing all day at Philips in Alpignano. *"Imagine the life of a working mother who spends nine hours a day in here and doesn't know where to place her young child. We asked the company for half a day off on March 8th. We wanted to go together to Mayor Bertoli to ask for his support for a new initiative: a nursery. We collected 650 signatures from the female workers... but the half-day off was denied. Philips has never obeyed the law that obliges companies to establish a nursery..."*¹³³

Anna Brero was a union activist and was punished. *"I was born in 1921 and have been working since I was twelve years old. For twenty-two years, I worked in a shoe factory... Later, I joined 'Superga' as a specialized worker capable of making a whole shoe. Because I was a union activist... I was downgraded*

¹³³ Ibidem.

and sent to work as a piecework laborer, meaning the woman who has to produce a certain amount per day... Woe to those who dare to fight for their own interests and those of other female workers."¹³⁴

A recent investigation into polyneuritis in the shoe factories in the province of Arezzo highlighted the extent of the problem, the seriousness of this attack on workers' health: windowless, poorly ventilated, small rooms, where kerosene stoves in winter make the air even more unbearable. Workers see their colleagues getting sick day by day and leaving the factory with paralyzed legs or serious disorders. Here are some testimonies from women: *"The exhaust systems are such that they push harmful fumes from one point to another in the factory"; "When the kerosene stove was running, the environment immediately became hot because it was closed and without windows, and there were even fainting spells."*¹³⁵

In 1973, in Naples, after dozens of cases of polyneuritis paralysis, the fight against harmful conditions erupted. First, a committee of families of girls paralyzed by adhesives was formed, which filed a complaint against unknown persons with the Naples court and began to mobilize neighborhood councils and workers on the issue. In 1975, a Committee of Democratic Workers and Technicians was formed, which asked INAIL for recognition of the occupational disease. We read in a committee document: *"Almost all of us women are affected by polyneuritis; in Naples, we are about 90%, but it is the same throughout Italy. We represent only 43% of the total workforce in the shoe industry, but if we take into account the smaller factories and home workers, we immediately become the majority. It is not a coincidence that these small factories correspond to the unhealthiest environments. However, our situation does not improve even in large factories, where we perform the least qualified tasks (hemming, assembling), the same tasks that force us to be in contact with glue and solvents all day long. This is why newspapers have sometimes written that adhesive polyneuritis is a disease that mainly affects women. Women are more affected by adhesive polyneuritis not because of their gender or their organic weakness, but because of the weakness and inferiority of their situation in today's society and the subordinate role they are forced to play."*¹³⁶

3.1 THE CONTRIBUTION OF HOME-BASED WORK

In the 1970s, the crisis of the Fordist system led to a significant expansion of home-based work, revealing its persistence through and beyond the Golden Age of the 20th century.

¹³⁴ Ibidem.

¹³⁵ Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, *Operaie senza fabbrica. Inchiesta sul lavoro a domicilio*, Editori Riuniti, I edizione Maggio, 1977, p.27.

¹³⁶ Clara De Marco e Manlio Talamo, *Lavoro nero*, Milano, Mazzotta, 1977, ps.126-127.

During these years, industrial home-based work became increasingly dominated by women. While young adult men were entering factories in large numbers, only a small proportion of young women did so. In the process of transitioning from agrarian to industrial dominance in the 1950s, a growing number of rural women and former factory workers became home-based industrial laborers.¹³⁷

Starting from 1966, as previously mentioned, we witness a restructuring of the industry accompanied by a phenomenon of "selection" of the workforce. By this, it is meant that male labor becomes privileged, and the marginalization or even expulsion of women, young people, and the elderly from the world of work begins to spread. While for young and elderly individuals, the condition of marginality is considered transitional, for women, it constitutes a structural fact. This occurs not only in the industry but also in agriculture and in more modern and advanced sectors. Women are increasingly confined to the so-called "agricultural sector," as well as to the backward agricultural sector and precarious and seasonal activities.¹³⁸ Even trade union action fails to stem this trend, nor to counter the expulsion of female labor from factories or companies in general.¹³⁹

The 1970s will see a resurgence of home-based work since the decrease in female employment in factories transforms into total unemployment, but much more frequently into underemployment (home-based work) or precarious employment (small businesses and craftsmanship). The black market expands beyond measure without providing any protection or, at best, only partial protection. The so-called "dualism" of the Italian industrial labor market ultimately consists of an increasingly clear separation and opposition between strong labor force (corresponding to adult male labor force) and marginal labor force (female labor force in general).¹⁴⁰ In simpler terms, this division corresponds to the fragmentation of the unity of the working class to unprecedented levels. Furthermore, it results in greater vulnerability for working-class families, whose head of the household, being the only one with a stable job, is more susceptible to blackmail and willing to endure extremely heavy working conditions. But, on the other hand, precisely because he is the "head of the household," the man cannot withdraw from work, which is why he is offered a stable role. In the 1960s, women with family responsibilities were progressively expelled from the stable labor market and reaffirmed in their domestic and subsidiary worker roles.

Family responsibilities within the family, unfortunately, are not equal. Behind this distinction lies the origin of the traditional division of roles, which implies layoffs, delays in hiring, downgrading in tasks and professional positions. In this way, women are forced to be marginalized from the manifest labor

¹³⁷ Betti, Eloisa. "Industrial Home Work and Fordism in Western Europe: Women's Activism, Labour Legislation and Union's Mobilization in Golden Age Italy, 1945–75." *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers (1800-2021)*, edited by Malin Nilsson et al., Brill, 2022, pp. 227–44. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv29sfvdz.20>. Accessed 25 Sept. 2023.

¹³⁸ Fiorella Padoa Schioppa, *La forza lavoro femminile*, Universale Paperbacks Il Mulino, Bologna, 1977, p.85-86.

¹³⁹ Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, *Operaie senza fabbrica. Inchiesta sul lavoro a domicilio*, Editori Riuniti, I edizione Maggio, 1977, p.16.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p.20-22.

force, adding to the hidden labor force. These women denounce their alienation from the labor market in terms of exclusion, stating their willingness to perform paid work within the family roles.¹⁴¹

Statistics and the study of the general trend of employment highlight the factors underlying the current process of women's marginalization from active life. Some factors have certainly played a decisive role; among these, the following should be remembered: the long-term structural crisis of some sectors with a high intensity of female labor, such as agriculture and the textile industry; the economic recession of the years 1963-67 that particularly affected female employment; the low mobility of female workers of a certain age; the lack of education and insufficient professional qualification of women and the consequent poor economic and psychological gratification they derive from work activities. To these general factors, we must add that the slow expulsion of female labor is also due to laws that do not sufficiently protect female workers. For example, Law No. 1204 on working mothers, approved in December 1971, which aims to extend the protection of female workers who were previously excluded (such as farmworkers, female agricultural workers, and home-based workers), still only applies to employers with female workers.¹⁴²

A significant aspect of female employment is the failure of women to register on the employment lists during periods of unemployment. In fact, if we consider the female workforce listed in the table below, we can see that from 1959 to 1971, the percentage of employed women, both in Italy and in Lombardy, is constantly decreasing. These data clearly demonstrate that women expelled from production do not register on employment lists; therefore, they do not become "unemployed" but rather "housewives."¹⁴³

ANNI	LOMBARDIA					ITALIA				
	Forze di lavoro			Altra popolazione	Totale	Forze di lavoro			Altra popolazione	Totale
	Occupate	Disoccupate	In cerca di 1 ^a occ.			Occupate	Disoccupate	In cerca di 1 ^a occ.		
1959	25.4	0.5	0.7	73.4	100.0	25.0	0.6	0.6	73.8	100.0
1960	25.9	0.4	0.4	73.3	100.0	24.0	0.5	0.5	75.0	100.0
1961	26.0	0.3	0.4	73.3	100.0	24.1	0.4	0.4	75.1	100.0
1962	25.6	0.2	0.4	73.8	100.0	23.3	0.4	0.4	75.9	100.0
1963	26.4	0.2	0.4	73.0	100.0	22.1	0.3	0.3	77.3	100.0
1964	25.0	0.3	0.5	74.2	100.0	21.0	0.3	0.4	78.3	100.0
1965	23.8	0.4	0.5	75.3	100.0	20.1	0.4	0.4	79.1	100.0
1966	22.9	0.3	0.6	76.2	100.0	19.1	0.4	0.4	80.1	100.0
1967	23.0	0.2	0.5	76.3	100.0	19.1	0.3	0.4	80.3	100.0
1968	22.9	0.2	0.4	76.5	100.0	18.9	0.3	0.5	80.3	100.0
1969	22.9	0.2	0.3	76.6	100.0	18.7	0.3	0.6	80.4	100.0
1970	22.7	0.1	0.4	76.8	100.0	18.6	0.2	0.5	80.7	100.0
1971	22.0	0.1	0.4	77.5	100.0	18.4	0.2	0.5	80.9	100.0

*Forze di lavoro femminili: incidenza percentuale rispetto alla popolazione presente femminile.*¹⁴⁴

The table below illustrates the decline in activity, taking into account the age factor. In Lombardy, for example, in 1970, female activity stands at 54.8% among those aged 20-29, while among those aged 30-

¹⁴¹ Fiorella Padoa Schioppa, *La forza lavoro femminile*, Universale Paperbacks Il Mulino, Bologna, 1977, p.85-86.

¹⁴² F. Dambrosio, E. Badaracco, M. Buscaglia. *Mazzotta, Donna salute e lavoro*, Mazzotta editore, 1975, ps.111-114.

¹⁴³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁴ ISTAT, *Yearbook of Labor and Emigration Statistics - National Labor Force Survey*.

39, it drops to 33.4%. This sharp decline in activity after the age of 30 confirms the trend of production exploiting very young labor and, at the same time, the difficulty faced by women with families in remaining in the workforce due to the severe lack of social services for children and the elderly. In fact, 50% of women who stop working do so because of family obligations.

CLASSI DI ETA (anni compiuti)	L O M B A R D I A						I T A L I A					
	Maschi		Femmine		Totale		Maschi		Femmine		Totale	
	1969	1970	1969	1970	1969	1970	1969	1970	1969	1970	1969	1970
14 - 19	50,3	46,3	52,5	49,1	41,4	47,7	41,3	37,9	30,9	28,8	35,1	33,4
20 - 29	84,5	85,1	55,0	54,8	69,6	70,0	80,8	80,3	38,2	38,4	58,9	58,9
30 - 39	98,9	98,6	32,8	33,4	65,5	65,8	98,4	98,2	29,3	29,7	62,9	63,3
40 - 49	96,7	97,1	30,2	31,1	62,3	63,3	96,0	96,1	30,0	30,0	62,1	62,2
50 - 59	85,9	86,2	16,0	17,0	49,6	49,5	85,5	85,2	21,5	21,6	52,7	52,4
60 - 64	36,5	35,2	6,1	6,2	20,4	19,7	48,4	48,2	11,2	10,6	29,3	28,8
65 e oltre	9,7	9,4	1,9	1,8	5,2	5,0	13,5	12,9	2,9	2,6	7,6	7,1
Totale	74,5	74,3	29,4	29,2	51,1	50,8	72,5	71,8	25,1	24,8	47,9	47,5

*Forze di lavoro: tassi specifici di attività.*¹⁴⁵

The constant decline in female employment has led to the proliferation of home-based work, where female workers are subjected to intensive exploitation (12-13 hours of work per day) with meager earnings and often involving child labor, resulting in truancy from school. Determining the exact number of these female workers is not straightforward, but it is estimated that there are approximately 1.2 million such workers nationwide, with around 200,000 in the Lombardy region. These are thousands of women (and minors) engaged in various types of work (textiles, footwear, knitwear, mechanics) who evade all forms of oversight, benefiting hundreds of employers who evade legal obligations.¹⁴⁶

As a result, women are confined to the domestic sphere and economically discriminated against, as they are not compensated for the demanding work they perform. Official statistics do not classify these women, who are of working age but engaged solely within the family circle, as employed, unlike domestic workers who perform the same tasks but are paid and are included in official statistics.¹⁴⁷ The housewife, therefore, is a hidden worker engaged in work that technological progress has negatively affected. She does not receive social security protection, is not entitled to holidays or absenteeism. By conflating the essential maternal role of child-rearing with domestic chores, the freedom of the housewife is curtailed, while the educational role of men in the family is weakened and deemed insignificant. Housewives are not only women who do not officially work; in fact, all women are also housewives, whether they are retired or working.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ ISTAT, Yearbook of Labor and Emigration Statistics. In this table, the activity rate is higher than in the previous table that includes the entire female population. This time, women from the age of 14 and older are considered.

¹⁴⁶ F. Dambrosio, E. Badaracco, M. Buscaglia. Mazzotta, Donna salute e lavoro, Mazzotta editore, 1975, ps.111-117.

¹⁴⁷ Fiorella Padoa Schioppa, La forza lavoro femminile, Universale Paperbacks Il Mulino, Bologna, 1977, p.96.

¹⁴⁸ Ibidem p.101-103.

	Occupati	Occupate	« Casalinghe »
Tempo di lav. dom. nei giorni di lavoro	2,2	3,7	8,7
nei giorni di festa	2,6	5,7	5,9

*"Average time (in hours and tenths) spent on domestic work by employed males and females and by 'housewives' in twelve countries (mid-1960s)."*¹⁴⁹

It is now clear that, on one hand, not only women labeled as "housewives" by ISTAT actually perform domestic work, but on the other hand, not all women categorized as such by ISTAT are housewives in the strict sense. In fact, among those labeled as "housewives," there is also a large group of individuals engaged in underground activities (approximately 9.99% according to a study from 1974), and they can only be referred to as housewives in a broad sense.¹⁵⁰ ISTAT itself contributes to concealing the real phenomenon of informal employment by inflating the percentage of "housewives" when it establishes that individuals who "attend to domestic duties while also engaging in a professional activity [...] if the professional activity is not prevalent [...] and if these women perform professional activities only occasionally, they must still be considered housewives."¹⁵¹

Nevertheless, from a legislative perspective, a person is considered a home worker only if they carry out "a remunerated work activity in their own home on behalf of one or more employers" and not on behalf of other families or third parties.

An interesting case is that of Rosa, who, due to an arranged marriage, leads a somewhat secluded life, interacting exclusively with family members. Before her marriage, she worked with nuns, "a nun would provide work and keep track of it with records and everything. In short, we worked. Back then, they paid little, but they paid." Rosa recalls working as an embroiderer for the nuns for "3 or 4 years," but after getting married, she worked from home.

"After getting married, the nuns no longer wanted me to work for them because they were afraid, I might talk about marriage and things like that, you know. But they saw that I never talked, that I was good, that I did not tell anyone about marriage and those things. So for a while, they let me work from home, so I could put the voluntary tips, everything in order. Then the nun said to me, 'Rosa, come on, you can

¹⁴⁹ Alexander Szalai, Women's Time: Women in the light of contemporary time budget research, Futures, Volume 7, Issue 5, 1975, ps.389-392.

¹⁵⁰ ISFOL-DOXA, Forms and Characteristics of Labor Participation, quote: Of the one million, 424 thousand are secretly employed, with nearly 1 million 100 thousand declaring themselves as "homemakers," while the others are either retired, students, or officially unemployed.

¹⁵¹ Fiorella Padoa Schioppa, La forza lavoro femminile, Universale Paperbacks Il Mulino, Bologna, 1977, p.102.

*come, you're a good girl now,' and I said, 'No, I won't come anymore.' I worked from home for about a year. I worked only a few hours."*¹⁵²

She spends her years in Turin and receives an education on the brink of obscurantism. After marriage, she dedicates sixteen years to taking care of her four children and doing some embroidery work at home independently. But once her children are a bit older, at the age of 35, she starts working for her cousin's company. The experience is disappointing because the owners do not register her with the required documentation, so she resigns from the job. Unlike many women who, for various reasons, were unaware of employment offices.

*"I registered with the employment office when I stopped working for the nuns. Nobody had told me. In the past, people used to register. They knew. But I was the only one who registered. All my sisters are housewives. It seems that it was fate that I should go to work. I do not know why. My sister worked a bit from home and paid her own contributions to secure her pension."*¹⁵³

In contrast, her story represents one of the rare cases of reentering the official job market after a period devoted to childcare.

On the other hand, a similar situation is represented by Loretta's story, who moved to the North from Foggia. She is one of the few women who, after getting married and being financially able not to work, is happy not to do so. Unfortunately, a few years later, her husband falls ill with bronchitis and, before passing away, finds her a job as a caretaker.

*"When I came here [to work as a caretaker], I suffered a bit. But then, when I started receiving the first salary - my husband also worked - that's when things started to get a bit better. In 1970, we were doing a bit better."*¹⁵⁴

Loretta is not alone in having to face a difficult situation due to her husband's illness. Several women have found themselves to be the primary breadwinners in the family very early on.¹⁵⁵

In addition to the many women who choose to work outside the home for reasons other than strict economics, we have seen that there are others who find themselves in situations of particular need related to their husband's illness or death, or abandonment by their spouse when there are young children involved. They are forced to become breadwinners, taking on the role of the primary providers for the entire family. Many women have had to abandon the exclusive role of mothers and homemakers,

¹⁵² Anna Badino, *Tutte a casa? Donne tra migrazione e lavoro nella Torino degli anni Sessanta*. Prefazione di Franco Ramella. Viella Editore, Roma 2008, p.109.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*, p.110.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p.111.

becoming the sole sources of income for themselves and their children. Left alone, they found opportunities for employment through migration that allowed them to survive.¹⁵⁶

Ada, employed at a surveyor's office, becomes a widow at the age of only 30, when her son is just 11 years old. She is thus forced to choose a job as a simple factory worker at Pirelli because the shifts allow her to spend more time at home with her child.

*"My husband and I got along fairly well; work was going quite well. But then... he died of liver cirrhosis at the age of 33. I was 30 years old, and my son was 11 years old [it was 1974]. From there, I had to give up my office job and work at Pirelli because I earned more, and I could also work shifts. I had to look after my son; I could spend some half-days with him. The shifts were convenient for me because half a day was free."*¹⁵⁷

Delfina's husband, originally from Rovigo, became disabled after only a few years of marriage. From that moment on, the man was frequently ill and could no longer work continuously. It fell upon his wife to provide for the family's financial security with her factory job.

*"We had a very tough life, very tough. Because he always had some ailments, illnesses... once it was an ulcer, another time... some other health issues, and so I had to take on some work... like this. [...] We came here because my sister wanted us to move closer to her, and there was enough work. I needed to support my family, to do some overtime. My husband was already disabled, already retired. Because he had a heart attack in '72 and then he stopped working, he did odd jobs, couldn't even work anymore. He had a heart attack at the age of 38. So, I had to do my part. So, I came to Turin to my sister's because there was work. I didn't mind working, and I didn't mind bringing home some money to support my family. And that's why we came here."*¹⁵⁸

For many married women, the choice to work is often justified by the need for two incomes. However, this is not always the case. Some women complain about not being able to make ends meet with a child to support and only one salary, while others, although in the minority, claim that they lived well and even saved money with the same type of income and more than one child.

Carolina, a young woman from Puglia, marries a Venetian factory worker hired by Fiat, and like Rosalia, at some point, has to give up her factory job to take care of three young daughters. She tells me that she always struggled to make ends meet with only her husband's salary. To supplement their income, she took on domestic work by the hour.

¹⁵⁶ Chiara Saraceno, Manuela Naldini, Sociologia della famiglia, collana "Manuali", 2021.

¹⁵⁷ Anna Badino, Tutte a casa? Donne tra migrazione e lavoro nella Torino degli anni Sessanta. Prefazione di Franco Ramella. Viella Editore, Roma 2008, p.151.

¹⁵⁸ Ibidem, p.153.

"When I quit my job, I felt sorry to leave this job - also to help my husband because life is tough with three kids. [...] I led quite a sacrificial life. [...] Going from having two paychecks to having one was a bit tough. It was always a bit of a struggle to get by. [...] We didn't buy the house; we're always renting. But how can you do it? With three kids, one thing and another, just one salary... I always managed by doing some extra hours."

From a strictly economic point of view, the choice to live on the husband's salary alone proved to be a failure for the family, as indicated by Emma. With two children to support and only one monthly income, she says she never managed to save money because the money barely covered their basic expenses.

"No, I couldn't save money. That's a word I don't know. It didn't exist then, and I still don't know it now. At the time, there were so many expenses, and if there was a little margin, it was for taking the kids on vacation in the summer, hoping to at least get them out of Turin for a month every year. Nowadays, it's not possible because there's no hope. No, I couldn't save money because ten years of work weren't enough to have anything. You had to have at least 15 years of work to have a minimum pension."

Understanding what "economic necessity" actually meant does not seem straightforward, as it's not clear what monthly income threshold was considered sufficient to cover family expenses. This threshold could vary significantly depending on the perceived essential expenditures and priorities. Moreover, having many children and only one salary in the family did not necessarily force married women to work. Saving money and making it grow was of paramount importance to women, and work, especially factory work, could also provide an important opportunity for socializing for immigrant married women, whose other social interactions might be limited.¹⁵⁹

We have seen that various types of irregular work were prevalent during the years of the economic miracle. Anna Badino interviewed some women whose testimonies correspond to the list of "opportunities for female work" for "marginalized workers" compiled by Laura Balbo. Part of this work was within the so-called "urban tertiary sector" (where many foreign female immigrants work today). Many women, after moving away from their hometowns in search of economic well-being, sought employment in the tertiary sector. They carried out part-time domestic work for private families or cleaning communal areas in apartment buildings or workshops. These were often jobs done off the books and required a low level of qualification. Furthermore, these jobs could be easily combined with other responsibilities, making them suitable as secondary employment.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Giuseppe Barile, Lorenza Zanuso Daniela Gregorio. IRER - Lavoro femminile e condizione familiare. Milano, Angeli, 1980.

¹⁶⁰ Anna Badino, Tutte a casa? Donne tra migrazione e lavoro nella Torino degli anni Sessanta. Prefazione di Franco Ramella. Viella Editore, Roma 2008, p.158-159.

Laura Balbo tells the story of Tina, originally from Basilicata, who arrived in Turin after an initial migration to Germany that lasted for five years. She decided to get involved in stairwell cleaning. She continued to do this work for twenty years, both on her own and for a company, but she was never in compliance with social security contributions. According to Tina, the cleaning company had her working off the books without her knowledge.¹⁶¹

"How could we live without going to work? He [her husband] went back and forth to Germany for a while. But to avoid using his salary all the time, our youngest daughter, who was still unmarried, found a job nearby, in a small factory. And I started finding stairwells to clean. To do stairwell cleaning. At first, there were only a few cleaning companies. And I adapted. I even took the stairwell in the building where my daughter lives now. It takes two hours to clean one stairwell. Then, little by little, I took care of two or three stairwells. Then, when he came, we had eight or nine stairwells to clean. He helped me too. I did it twice a week, on Saturdays. The only problem was that I did it without declaring it, and that was my downfall! They didn't declare it. I cleaned stairwells for 20 years without declaring it because my daughter lived there, and to avoid hurting her, we kept it quiet. But I'm not feeling well about it now. Because I receive such a small pension, I only get the German one."

Another sector that was easily accessible to women was caregiving, which involved assistance tasks that did not require specific qualifications, much like what is now referred to as "caregiver" work.

Comasia, already married and with three children, came from the province of Foggia and found her first job as a caregiver for an affluent elderly couple (though she mainly kept them company). Later on, she started working as a general nurse at the Molinette Hospital and enrolled in an obstetrics course. The skills and experience she gained made her highly sought after in the informal job market, allowing her to significantly expand her social circle in the city.¹⁶²

Another sector that engaged many women but required specific skills was home-based tailoring work. These activities allowed many women with children to continue earning income when they left their official jobs to focus on family commitments. For example, Matilde resigned from the factory after giving birth to twins.

"I raised them, watching them, and sewed - when they started going to nursery school - for other people, but always at home so I could watch the kids; there was no other way to do it [...] and then I always sewed something for my family and a little something for others, and I still do cleaning on Sundays. I even had to fix a wedding dress once when I was working. [...] I learned to sew from my mother, who

¹⁶¹ Paola Di Nicola. "Breve contributo bibliografico sul tema « famiglia e servizi sociali », Studi Di Sociologia, 1976. pp. 277–96.

JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23003257>. Accessed 4 Sept. 2023, p.277-296.

¹⁶² Anna Badino, *Tutte a casa? Donne tra migrazione e lavoro nella Torino degli anni Sessanta*. Prefazione di Franco Ramella. Viella Editore, Roma 2008, p.161.

was a seamstress; I was born with a needle in my hand. The first thing I did when I was little and wanted to learn was sewing the buttonholes on shirts. My mother would cut by hand... I took a basic sewing and cutting course, and then I took another one with these special rulers that came out, because my mother pushed me, saying, 'You'll need this.' When I was here, 10 or 15 years ago, I got my diploma to teach this cutting method! I went to junior high while working 21 years ago. I did it because it was always my dream to go to school, which I couldn't do when I was young. "¹⁶³

Rosa, on the other hand, is an experienced embroiderer. In Calabria, when she was young, she even taught the younger children how to embroider. So, during the 16 years she spent at home taking care of her four children, she worked on commissioned embroidery projects.

"I raised my children, and I didn't work [outside]. I did some things at home: baby bonnets, things like that, embroidery or sewing, some tailoring work. I found work through newspaper ads. I looked at the ads and called. Or maybe there was an aunt of mine who knew someone making baby bonnets, and I would make them at home. They paid me okay. If someone didn't pay, I wouldn't do them anymore. "¹⁶⁴

Emma was encouraged by her husband, who was an office worker, to resign from Rinascente department store immediately after they got married.

"As for returning to work, no, by then, my children were older, and I was older too. I didn't have the desire to start all over again. I tried to do something when the kids were still in childcare. I knitted; I had found a shop owned by a friend's mother, the mother of one of my son's schoolmates, and I started making sweaters for her shop: embroidered sweaters, all that stuff, but the earnings... meager! When she needed it, she would come and call me if I could spend a week in her shop to help her out, and I would go, but these things were not a permanent job. This continued until this lady had her shop, I think for a couple of years. Then, when she closed her shop, I saw that the work wasn't paying enough because... handmade work, where you invest a lot of effort, isn't very appreciated, so... In fact, there were customers who wanted the sweaters, but they didn't want to pay. And all those very complicated works, they wanted them complicated, very large embroideries... Then she closed her shop, and that was the end of that. That's the only job I did [in Turin]. "¹⁶⁵

Even in the industry, undeclared work is prevalent, as we have seen. Adele, who immigrated from Veneto to join her husband in Turin, found regular employment at a company that produced pots shortly

¹⁶³ Ibidem, p.162.

¹⁶⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁵ Ibidem, ps.162-163.

after her arrival. After two years, her first daughter was born. Later, the owners offered her the opportunity to return to work, but she had to quit again due to the arrival of her second child.

"When I arrived here, I immediately got interested and started working at a factory that made pots. I didn't stay without work for long. I arrived in August, and by November, I had found this job [...]. Then my daughter was born in 1971, and I had to stop working [...], then, between my daughter and my son - my son was born in 1975- I went back, but it wasn't legal anymore because at that time, he was winding down his business. But he still gave me some work. Then, with two children, I had to quit altogether."¹⁶⁶

3.2 THE SCANDAL OF HOME-BASED WORK

In the ninth volume of the investigation ordered by the American Congress on the conditions of women and children in industry, it is specified that "the history of female labor is a history of underpaid work, exploitation, and a lowering of male workers' wage levels." Unfortunately, in 1911, very little was known about working women, especially those in factories, as they were never considered a significant part of the workforce and, as a result, were widely neglected.¹⁶⁷

Their entry into the factory, their relationship with wages, and the sense of inferiority that characterizes them are elements that define women, especially Italian women. Numerous testimonies reveal their submissiveness, the tendency to work excessively for meager wages, and the lack of apprenticeship and professional training.

In summary, labor, especially factory work, is considered unsuitable for women. This common belief inevitably contributes to shaping the profile of women. Being mothers becomes the quintessential female profession, to be pursued according to new levels of domestic productivity and scientific childcare. Thus, extra-domestic work is gradually remodeled based on this parameter, emphasizing that female occupations are merely extensions of domestic ones.¹⁶⁸

In the 1963 issue of "Noi Donne," in an article titled "*A Scandal of Home-Based Work*" written by Luisa Melograni, the tragic story of Anna Franchini is recounted. Anna was a home-based worker in the bustling city of Milan who tragically died of benzene poisoning after being exposed to it for five years.

¹⁶⁶ Ibidem, p.164.

¹⁶⁷ U. S. CONGRESS, Senate. Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States, S. Doc. 645. 61st Congress, 2nd sess., Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1911, vol. IX, History of Women in Industry in the United States, p. 11.

¹⁶⁸ Calvi, Giulia. "Donne in fabbrica. Comunità femminile e socialità del lavoro in America (1900-1915)," Quaderni Storici, 1982, p.824.

For five long years, Anna unknowingly breathed in this deadly poison. She was admitted to the Maggiore Hospital, and after a month and a half of agony, Anna Franchini did not survive.¹⁶⁹

The entire story of Anna Franchini should be enough to expose the grave responsibilities of those who clandestinely assign home-based work or continuously violate the laws meant to protect these workers. Anna's husband struggled to earn enough, so Anna Franchini contacted the company and began her work. It all seemed very easy, according to the explanations provided by the client who had placed the advertisement in the newspaper. It was a small company producing radio and television devices. Anna was to receive the necessary materials to assemble small coils and would be paid based on piecework: the more she produced, the more she would be paid. Anna Franchini accepted gladly. It was 1958, and in that same year, a law was passed in Parliament to protect workers like Anna Franchini. However, she was not informed about this protection and remained unaware of the harm caused by benzene. Four years later, in '62, Anna began experiencing the first symptoms of illness: dizziness, migraines, and nausea. One morning, white spots appeared on the back of Anna Franchini's hands, and she rushed to call the doctor, who immediately ordered emergency hospitalization. Unfortunately, the name of the company that had assigned her the work and the benzene that ultimately led to her death are not mentioned.¹⁷⁰

Anna Franchini's case is, unfortunately, not isolated. Caterina Volpato and three other female workers from the Oltre Po Pavese region were also poisoned by the deadly fumes of glue while attaching hair to dolls.

Despite the law protecting home-based work being published in the Official Gazette and approved by Parliament, it remains unenforced. Moreover, home-based work has not decreased; on the contrary, women continue to work without their working hours being respected, receiving meager wages, and without being registered in the home-based worker registry.¹⁷¹

In the 1970s, home-based work loses any characteristics of backwardness or marginality. In fact, Tomasetta's investigation into home-based work in Emilia-Romagna (1973) highlights that female workers not only extensively use machines but even complex ones. In addition to traditional sectors like textiles, clothing, ceramics, and woodworking, home-based work is increasingly spreading into some areas of the chemical industry, plastics, and mechanical engineering, thus becoming decisive for the entire country's production structure.

It showed that men, after being laid off from factories, joined their wives in industrial home-based work. Trade unionists and politicians were aware of the extent of this practice. They began discussing the regulation of industrial home-based work in the early 1950s.

¹⁶⁹ Numero 15 del 1963. NOI DONNE, Archivio storico fondato nel 1944, p.6-9. Noi donne n.15 del 1963 (noidonnearchivistorico.org), ps.6-7.

¹⁷⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁷¹ LEGGE 13 marzo 1958, n. 264 Tutela del lavoro a domicilio. Gazzetta ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1958/04/09/058U0264/sg>

In an investigation by FLM (Federazione Lavoratori Metalmeccanici) on metalworking factories in the province of Bologna, it is emphasized that decentralization in the early 1970s could still be considered a conjunctural rather than structural strategy. Today, this assessment of decentralization appears outdated, especially because it has become a deliberate choice for numerous factories.¹⁷² The main consequences of this type of decentralization are seen in employment, particularly in the phenomenon of female underemployment. Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, in "Operaie senza fabbrica" (Workers Without a Factory), asserts that the process of production decentralization cannot be attributed solely to technical and technological changes; it is also, and above all, a political choice. In the past years, the failure to implement social reforms has gone hand in hand with the expansion of home-based work. This suggests that the weakness of the female workforce has been a result of this political choice: women, expelled from factories due to being perceived as less productive (as they may have higher absenteeism than men and be less available for overtime), have become the main protagonists of the restructuring of entire sectors.¹⁷³

Home-based work, being the primary form of informal labor, is largely beyond any control, making it very difficult to accurately estimate the number of people engaged in this type of activity. According to the table below, these estimates are not only consistently lower than the actual figures but also rely on "indirect" calculations and research conducted in relatively limited areas, making it challenging to provide a highly reliable picture of the phenomenon, its territorial distribution, and its impact on specific production sectors.

The studies by Eileen Boris, Elisabeth Prügl, and Cynthia Daniels have allowed us to understand the actual role of home-based work in various phases of industrial and post-industrial capitalism.

During the post-Fordist years, the spread of home-based work in the global South and in Northern countries has generated new research questions about the role of industrial home-based work in the long-term global economy. The Italian case is of particular interest due to the large number of existing sources for the understudied Fordist period.¹⁷⁴

Industrial home-based work was legally defined as "self-employed" in 1924; consequently, industrial home-based workers were officially considered self-employed.

Surveys conducted by women's associations and the Italian Communist Party revealed that the downsizing of factories and closures led to a boom in industrial home-based work, often referred to as a "social plague" because it involved entire families (including young and elderly members). *Noi Donne*, the magazine of the Union of Italian Women (UDI) on the left, reported on industrial home-based work in the Emilia-Romagna region, a key center for home-based production in the 1950s and 1960s. It

¹⁷² FLM provinciale di Bologna, *Ristrutturazione e organizzazione del lavoro*, cit., p. 140, in Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, *Operaie senza fabbrica*, p.26.

¹⁷³ *Ibidem*, p.28-29.

¹⁷⁴ Betti, Eloisa. "Industrial Home Work and Fordism in Western Europe: Women's Activism, Labour Legislation and Union's Mobilization in Golden Age Italy, 1945–75." *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers (1800-2021)*, edited by Malin Nilsson et al., Brill, 2022, ps.230-231.

demonstrated that men, after being laid off from factories, joined their wives in industrial home-based work. Trade unionists and politicians were aware of the extent of this practice. They began discussing the regulation of industrial home-based work in the early 1950s.¹⁷⁵

Gruppi di regioni	Occupazione corretta totale	Occupazione artigianale	Lavoranti a domicilio	Totale	Percentuale di occupazione corretta
Piemonte					
Lombardia					
Veneto Liguria	683.100	82.900	98.500	181.400	26
Emilia-Romagna	164.500	33.500	66.700	100.200	61
Toscana Umbria	200.500	42.300	55.700	98.000	49
Lazio Marche					
Abruzzi Molise	107.800	18.250	38.000	56.250	52
Campania	84.000	15.000	20.500	35.500	42
Basilicata Puglia	90.700	20.650	35.700	56.350	62
Calabria	22.000	110	125	235	1
Sicilia	77.800	5.600	16.500	22.100	28
Sardegna	8.000	—	—	—	—
Totale	1.435.000	217.000	323.000	540.000	38

*Artisanal employment and strictly home-based workers involved in the decentralization processes in the textile and clothing sectors at the end of '72 - beginning of '73 by groups of regions.*¹⁷⁶

As demonstrated by Tania Toffanin, the decentralization of production in the 1970s led to an increase in home-based work across all regions of the country. The 1973 law created an opportunity to improve and stabilize the conditions of home-based workers by defining them as subordinate workers and granting them access to key social protections related to employment. However, it failed to curb the growth of industrial home-based work. Since home-based work facilitated labor cost reduction and allowed for the "maximum possible flexibility in the use of the workforce," industrial home-based work witnessed a parallel growth in small businesses.¹⁷⁷

Home-based work is indeed much more useful as it allows for the reduction of production costs through piecework payment and the outsourcing of investments in machinery. It also provides greater work flexibility, especially in terms of working hours according to market demands. Home-based work is well-suited to both long-term industrial plans and the agility of the post-Fordist just-in-time approach. This is where, according to Tania Toffanin as well, industrial work and the social reproduction work performed by women intersect. By working from home, women not only sell their labor but, as women,

¹⁷⁵ Eileen Boris, *Regulating home labors: the ILO and the feminization of work*, in *What Is Work? Gender at the crossroads of home, family, and business from the early moder era to the present*. International studies in a social history, Berghahn Books, 2018, p.248.

¹⁷⁶ Dati presentati alla II conferenza economica, Bologna, 1975.

¹⁷⁷ Tania Toffanin, "Fabbriche invisibili. Storie di donne, lavoratori a domicilio", Ombre Corte, Verona 2016, ps.196-224.

also perform care work, thus contributing to the generation of male labor that can be employed in factories.¹⁷⁸

Among the numerous studies in this field, the most significant one, conducted by Luigi Frey, examined the relationship between production decentralization and the expansion of home-based work in the textile-clothing sector. Italy responded to the crisis of Fordism by decentralizing industrial production. Decentralization seemed to be stronger in areas with a concentration of unemployed or underemployed individuals willing to accept lower wages, especially women, young people, and the elderly. Women constituted 90 percent of home-based workers due to a lack of alternatives. Often classified as housewives in official statistics, many home-based workers came from backgrounds of rural underemployment, marked by a prevalence of female and youth unemployment.¹⁷⁹

Frey estimated that "almost two million workers, of whom 80-90% are women, are currently involved in this type of activity."¹⁸⁰ Syndicate-based data on the spread of the phenomenon in Lombardy speak of 350,000 individuals, with 80% being women (however, these figures were collected without taking into account the number of minors and the elderly, who are numerous in some provinces). In provinces such as Como and Bergamo, the phenomenon is primarily linked to a significant reduction in agricultural employment. The lack of nurseries and preschools is also mentioned as a factor that forces women into domestic work.

Unlike the northern and central regions of Italy, where the phenomenon of home-based work is quite clear, the situation becomes more confusing in the south. There is a lack of data, surveys, and research. Everything becomes more challenging precisely because the "reference point" provided by the factory is often missing. It is known that home-based workers in the South are paid less: for example, in Sicily, they earn on average in one day what a home-based worker in the province of Milan earns in an hour.¹⁸¹ The offer of precarious work by women is particularly abundant in southern areas. Women are burdened with a series of personal limitations: the presence of double work prevents them from having leisure time, and the marital factor exacerbates women's subordination, as the income women earn is considered secondary and supplementary to that of their husbands. In this way, marriage institutionalizes the precariousness of women's work.¹⁸²

In the case of home-based work, the issue of "harmfulness" arises with more dramatic urgency than in the factory because it does not affect only the worker but also the entire family unit. In particular, children play and live in an environment where they breathe toxic fumes and come into contact with the

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁹ Betti, Eloisa. "Industrial Home Work and Fordism in Western Europe: Women's Activism, Labour Legislation and Union's Mobilization in Golden Age Italy, 1945-75." *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers (1800-2021)*, edited by Malin Nilsson et al., Brill, 2022.

¹⁸⁰ Luigi Frey, *Il potenziale di lavoro in Italia*, Roma, ISVET, 1975.

¹⁸¹ Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, *Operaie senza fabbrica. Inchiesta sul lavoro a domicilio*, Editori Riuniti, I edizione Maggio, 1977, p.28.

¹⁸² P. David, E. Pattarin, *Retroterra rurale e condizione operaia femminile: il settore della maglieria*, in *Inchiesta*, a. V, n. 20, ottobre-dicembre 1975.

harmful products used by their mothers. According to a survey conducted by the municipal administration of S. Giovanni in Persiceto in June 1971, out of 978 home-based workers surveyed, 469 worked in the kitchen, 180 in the dining room or a bedroom, 60 in the garage, and only 21 in a dedicated room. The fact that the work environment often coincides with the home further reduces an already small space. Lighting, temperature, and humidity levels are also unfavorable. The noise from the machines is unbearable, and dust spreads throughout the house, affecting the health of all family members. In such a situation, these female workers also work longer hours than those in factories.¹⁸³

Considering that not only did domestic work resemble family work, but family responsibilities also interfered with employment, therefore, home-based work interfered with family life, endangering the home due to illnesses, dirt, and generally unhealthy conditions.

The hazards of domestic work permeated most discussions on craftsmanship. Scattered in "private" homes without any regulation, such work was often carried out by women, often with their children alongside, without other income options. ILO staff were concerned about how to protect craft workers "from abuse by intermediaries and the exploitative conditions of home-based industrial labor." They sought to eliminate intermediaries by developing local supplies of raw materials and alternative sources of credit.¹⁸⁴

Development required women to enter the workforce, but working mothers needed assistance. When defining the areas in which the ILO should formulate its resolutions on equal pay as early as 1947, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women highlighted the "provision of measures to alleviate the tasks arising from women's domestic responsibilities, as well as those related to maternity."¹⁸⁵

In the 1950s, the ILO slowly addressed this challenge. Initially, the ILO conceived of a worker as a man employed in industry, transportation, agriculture, or other locations distant from residential spaces. Although ILO conventions were supposed to include all workers regardless of gender, few women appeared in the listed sectors, except for the textile sector and plantations, where they were subject to restrictions, such as limitations on night work.

In ILO deliberations, the female worker emerged as a special type of worker who required targeted conventions that addressed bodily functions and social circumstances, such as maternity, exposure to hazardous substances, and family responsibilities, which were thought to distinguish women from men.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁴ Eileen Boris, *Regulating home labors: the ILO and the feminization of work*, in *What Is Work? Gender at the crossroads of home, family, and business from the early moder era to the present*. International studies in a social history, Berghahn Books, 2018, ps.224-245.

¹⁸⁵ ECOSOC, Report on the Third Session of the CSW, Beirut, Lebanon, 21 March to 4 April 1949, E/1316, E/CN.6/124, 19 April 1949, "Equal Pay for Equal Work," 17-18.

¹⁸⁶ Eileen Boris, *Regulating home labors: the ILO and the feminization of work*, in *What Is Work? Gender at the crossroads of home, family, and business from the early moder era to the present*. International studies in a social history, Berghahn Books, 2018, ps.432-433.

In 1919, one of the early conventions was the "Maternity Protection" convention. However, this convention excluded domestic work and home-based work until it was revised in 1952, where maternity was discussed as part of women's economic rights. This revision included not only specified maternity leave but also medical assistance and reintegration into work in the case of maternity.¹⁸⁷

Despite the intention to encompass "all categories of workers," the focus still remained on women's participation in easily identifiable occupations within the labor market. Instead of diminishing due to mechanization, domestic work had actually intensified with improved standards for cleanliness and care, remaining a barrier to women's employment.¹⁸⁸

Once again, the North-South divide becomes evident. In this context, relief for rural women in the Global South required additional effort. The differentiation between urban and rural areas also applied. According to members of the ILO, easing the domestic burden would allow women to leave their homes to work. With the World Employment Programme in the 1970s, attention began to shift towards social reproduction. It embraced the concept of "basic needs," which called for equality between women and men within families as well as between nations, with women gaining access to decision-making and purchasing power, as well as an improvement in self-sufficiency.¹⁸⁹

The UDI played a crucial role in exposing the conditions of home-based workers; it published comprehensive reports in *Noi Donne* during the years of the economic boom. Shortly before the approval of the 1958 law, the association initiated a National Congress of Home-Based Workers in Florence on February 23, followed by local meetings in many other cities, including Bologna. These events led to greater awareness not only of the conditions of women home-based workers but also of their numbers, estimated by the association to range from 800,000 to 1 million. Home-based workers gathered in large numbers at the Congress to protest against their working conditions, revealing the widespread nature of industrial home-based work throughout Italy.

Union reports and UDI investigations show how an increasing number of rural women were subjected to expanding industrial home-based work. This is not surprising, as rural women suffered from chronic underemployment.¹⁹⁰

The investigation exposed the conditions that made home-based work the most precarious form of labor. It detailed how the closure of factory units corresponded to installing the former factory machinery in

¹⁸⁷ Elizabeth Johnstone, "Women in Economic Life: Rights and Opportunities." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 375, 1968, p.103. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1037896>. Accessed 23 Sept. 2023.

¹⁸⁸ Judith A. McGaw, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *HISTORY OF TECHNOLOGY: A SPECIAL SECTION*, Volume 75, Number 4, Dec., 1984.

¹⁸⁹ Eileen Boris, *Regulating home labors: the ILO and the feminization of work*, in *What Is Work? Gender at the crossroads of home, family, and business from the early moder era to the present*. *International studies in a social history*, Berghahn Books, 2018, ps.436.

¹⁹⁰ Boris, Eileen, and Jennifer N. Fish. "'Slaves No More': Making Global Labor Standards for Domestic Workers." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2014, pp. 411–43. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.15767/feministstudies.40.2.411>. Accessed 25 Sept. 2023.

workers' homes, previously located in industrial facilities. After being laid off, workers were forced to rent or purchase machines simply to continue working. In essence, they were compelled. The investigation documented the absence of contracts, the lack of protections for workers in case of illness, pregnancy, termination, or reduced work, and every other form of exploitation.

Between 1963 and 1965, the UDI (Italian Union of Women) published numerous studies on the effects of the crisis on female workers. The objective was to understand how women reacted to the "great fear of unemployment" and their living and working conditions during the crisis. The main slogan of the UDI became "We're not going back home." Italian female workers and their associations were demanding job stability. In 1965, the UDI organized a national conference in Milan followed by a large demonstration involving over 4,000 women. The title of the conference, which became the primary slogan of the demonstration, was "Women's Right to Stable and Qualified Employment," highlighting the innovative approach of the UDI.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Betti, Eloisa. "Industrial Home Work and Fordism in Western Europe: Women's Activism, Labour Legislation and Union's Mobilization in Golden Age Italy, 1945–75." *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers (1800-2021)*, edited by Malin Nilsson et al., Brill, 2022, pp. 227–44. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv29sfvdz.20>. Accessed 25 Sept. 2023.

Although women have come a long way, they still have more ground to cover to earn recognition for their differences. Excluded from the job market, over time, they have managed to assert their presence. Women, even when engaged in external employment, continue to fully uphold their domestic responsibilities regarding housekeeping and childcare. Furthermore, these obligations are imposed on them as priorities from which they cannot deviate.¹⁹²

Such commitment forces women to make significant sacrifices, both in terms of their work and private life spaces.

In recent decades, there has been a significant shift in gender roles within the family: undoubtedly, today, men are more active in household activities, although for fewer hours compared to their working wives. However, unlike men, women cannot fully engage in their professional careers, as they remain mothers bound by their career choices.¹⁹³

The work concludes by asserting that marginalization is a characteristic factor in many female occupations. It is evident in women's removal from the mainstream job market, as they are confined to domestic or informal labor. As we have seen, even though women are as efficient in production as men, they come at a higher cost due to factors such as pregnancy, increased absenteeism, reducing annual working hours. These are all economic burdens on the companies that employ them, which is why, for the same reasons, they often prefer male employees. The hidden workforce is thus inflated, and its economic contribution remains largely unrecognized.

Therefore, efforts should be made to promote the presence of women in the workforce, making their working conditions more flexible. However, the main reasons for female vulnerability are cultural and social; this is why the division of educational tasks is unequal.

The years under consideration, including those during the war and the subsequent ones, were the years in which the industry was one of the most involved sectors in the economy.

Following the decline of sharecropping, the agricultural sector was set aside and was no longer the driving force of the economy. Consequently, there was a shift towards a more urbanized model and new technologies. The population thus experienced the transition to factory work, contributing to the expansion of the industrial sector starting in the 1950s.

Notably, human skills were increasingly devalued as machines took over certain tasks, and the industrial sector continued to grow. Both men and women entered this sector, and it was here that biological distinctions were even more emphasized, particularly in terms of wage differences.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Laura Balbo, La doppia presenza, in «<Inchiesta>», marzo-aprile 1978, ps. 3-6.

¹⁹³ Letizia Carrera, “Donne «oltre la soglia». una rivoluzione incompiuta.” *Studi Di Sociologia*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2008, ps. 233–57. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23005213>. Accessed 23 Sept. 2023.

¹⁹⁴ Paul Ginsborg, *Storia d’Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi. Società e politica 1943-1988*, Einaudi, Torino, 1989, p.283.

In 1917, an Office for Female Labor in War Industries was established within the Central Commission of Labor. Similar offices were set up in each Regional Committee. The primary goal was to establish that the working hours for female and child labor should not exceed 60 hours per week, and the requirement for a weekly day of rest was reintroduced. However, in practice, this regulation remained unenforced or, in the best-case scenario, was only applied in specific companies.

Alongside the industry, an important role was also played by mechanical, steel, textile, food, chemical, and extractive industries.¹⁹⁵

These productions were concentrated mainly in industrialized northern Italy, specifically in the area known as the Industrial Triangle formed by the regions of Lombardy, Piedmont, and Liguria; in fact, 70% of the female workforce in the war industry was employed here.¹⁹⁶ Italy experienced a series of significant internal migration movements: "a strong immigration current led the population to move where work was now available, that is, in the war industry."¹⁹⁷ Movements also occurred within the same regions, as part of the population from rural areas was forced to move to industrialized cities. Once the experience of the fields was set aside, and once husbands migrated in search of better working conditions, women who remained in their home regions moved to cities hoping to take up the jobs vacated by their husbands.

Women who managed to migrate to the North combined factory work with agricultural work. Unlike the period before the conflict, which saw women mostly employed in the textile sector, after the war, the entry of female skills surprised many as they began working in traditionally male-dominated roles, including the production of weapons and ammunition.

As shown by the testimonies collected in Chapter 3, many women were also engaged in chemical or explosive factories under working conditions that offered no protection. This new female workforce was predominantly composed of young girls who could learn the trade more easily and work faster. However, many lacked qualifications, which affected production more than once. Moreover, the entry of women into the factory, in the early 1990s, sparked distrust among male workers, especially in arms and ammunition industries. Many were afraid that women might pose a threat since they worked the same hours as men and yet accepted lower wages for the same tasks. Unlike many women who experienced suffering, many others adapted to the new environment and saw factory work as an escape from the monotonous reality, as well as a way to engage with others. These were the same women who, faced with poor working conditions in factories, exacerbated by the circumstances of the war, initiated protest actions.

Women were, in fact, the main promoters of rebellion actions against the restrictions caused by measures aimed at militarizing all workers in these industries.¹⁹⁸ The issue of workplace safety, shift and time

¹⁹⁵ Antonio Gibelli, *La Grande Guerra degli italiani. 1915 – 1918*. Milano, Sansoni, 1998, p. 193

¹⁹⁶ Barbara Curli, *Italiane al lavoro. 1914 – 1921*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1998, p. 67

¹⁹⁷ Simonetta Ortaggi Cammarosano, *Le donne italiane nella Grande Guerra*, p. 221.

¹⁹⁸ Barbara Curli, *Italiane al lavoro. 1914 – 1921*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1998, p. 76.

organization, and the granting of weekly rest were all issues left to the discretion of the various companies. The issue of salary was also pressing for women. They needed to find free time to take care of household chores.

Fortunately, many institutions addressed the issue. Institutions such as ISTAT, Censis Acli, labor unions, Svimez, political parties, Udi, made it possible to analyze a crucial period, spanning from the 1950s to the 1970s.

Industrial home-based work contributed to the "dual" labor market, in the sense that women found themselves working without protection out of sheer necessity, in conditions that affected their health. Unlike factory work, which first saw a decline and then the dismissal of women, industrial home-based work did not experience any crisis during the golden age of the twentieth century, even though its function was partially redefined by changes in the industrial system. Home-based work was supported by factory owners who exploited women within domestic walls, paying them very low wages, providing them with no protection and no rights. During the economic crisis that Italy experienced in 1963/64, industrial home-based work grew significantly due to its low cost and flexibility.

Although difficult to enforce, legislation on industrial home-based work, conceived and established during the Fordist period, showed political commitment to improving the conditions of industrial home-based workers. Women played a crucial role in advancing the regulation of industrial home-based work and exposing the conditions of industrial home-based workers. Thanks to the actions of labor activists in parliament and associations, women's action was an important aspect of Italian discussion and mobilization in the field of industrial home-based work.

The abolition of the home-based industrial system was never discussed during the golden age years because that employment was considered necessary despite its negative characteristics. Only in the early 1970s, in the post-Fordist crisis period, were concrete attempts made to balance the relationship between factory work and industrial home-based work.¹⁹⁹

It has been shown how specific studies on the conditions of female industrial home-based workers highlighted the worsening job insecurity for women since the late 1960s. Many women were, in fact, pushed out of stable employment and into the realm of marginal and precarious work. Married women with children appeared to be overrepresented in industrial home-based work and undocumented work in general, primarily due to the difficulty of finding jobs that allowed them to reconcile productive and reproductive work.

Low levels of female education also contributed to the lack of registration on employment lists. In fact, only a small percentage of women were aware of such lists. When women were expelled from

¹⁹⁹ Betti, Eloisa. "Industrial Home Work and Fordism in Western Europe: Women's Activism, Labour Legislation and Union's Mobilization in Golden Age Italy, 1945–75." *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers (1800-2021)*, edited by Malin Nilsson et al., Brill, 2022.

production, they often found themselves without a job and became homemakers, expanding the informal labor market.²⁰⁰

This situation led to workplace accidents during home-based work, with associated lack of job protection, compromising their health and the health of other family members, including children, as the workspaces were small, poorly lit, and poorly ventilated, especially given the high temperatures.

Finally, it is possible to assert that Italian women experienced the Great War in different ways. The war led them, in one way or another, to undertake experiences different from those of their mothers and grandmothers in the preceding decades. They experienced independence, and although it was often accompanied by painful separations or mourning, it gradually led women to a new self-awareness and awareness of their own abilities. This consideration applies to both women who were forced to travel long distances to get to work and take care of household chores and to more affluent women, many of whom chose to engage in innovative volunteer activities.

Some women did experience a sense of independence. There are indeed testimonies where women express that, although the work was demanding, they were in favor of home-based work because it allowed them to earn extra income alongside their husband's earnings and enabled them to balance it with domestic responsibilities.²⁰¹

Women experienced independence, and this consideration should also be added to the fact that upon their return, men expected everything to return to as it was before the war. However, even though it might have seemed that nothing had changed, the memory of that period, lived under the banner of a new freedom, seemed never to fade completely.

²⁰⁰ Barbara Curli, *Italiane al lavoro. 1914 – 1921*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1998, p. 76.

²⁰¹ ISTAT, *Sommario di statistiche storiche 1861-1975*, Forze di lavoro, cit.

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RINGRAZIAMENTI

A conclusione di questo percorso, ci tengo anzitutto a premiare la mia determinazione, la mia forza ed il mio duro lavoro, anche nei momenti di sconforto.

Desidero ringraziare coloro che sono sempre stati presenti, sia nei momenti di gioia che in quelli meno felici.

Ringrazio quindi i miei genitori, senza i quali molto probabilmente non sarei la persona determinata che sono ad oggi. Mamma e papà, il vostro amore ed il vostro supporto si sono rivelati gli strumenti essenziali che mi hanno accompagnato in questi anni. Per questa ragione, anche questo secondo traguardo di magistrale lo dedico a voi.

In modo particolare, questa giornata è la nostra, Papi, perché oggi di traguardi ne festeggiamo anche un altro: i tuoi 70 anni. Non posso che augurarti Buon Compleanno ed augurarci tanti altri traguardi felici insieme.

Ringrazio la mia piccola grande Stitch che, a distanza, mi ha sostenuto nella ricerca iniziale del materiale. Anche se lontane, sappi che sei sempre nel mio cuore e che ti voglio strabene.

Ringrazio il mio Portes per esserci sempre. Al nostro futuro insieme.

Ringrazio anche le mie amiche (storiche) che porto nel cuore ormai da diversi anni: alla mia Pollon e alla mia Francescuccia, che hanno deciso di camminare al mio fianco accompagnandomi oggi sin qui.

Solitamente l'amicizia viene determinata dal tempo ma posso dire che nel nostro caso non è stato così: grazie alla mia Chiaretta che ad oggi per me è come una sorella. Ringrazio anche la mia Fedegu per aver sopportato in questi mesi le mie lamentele.

Ringrazio la mia amica Lorianana per tutto il sostegno in questi lunghi anni ed il bene che ci vogliamo.

Ringrazio Federica ed il nostro Erasmus in triennale, momento che ci ha permesso di conoscerci ed essere ad oggi amiche.

Ringrazio il prof.re Caracausi, relatore della mia tesi, per il supporto, i consigli e la pazienza dimostratemi durante la realizzazione di questo lavoro.