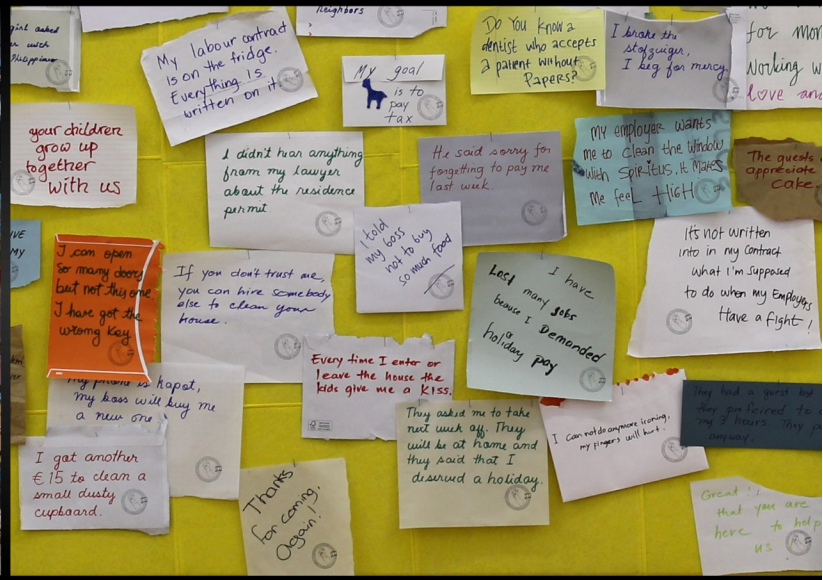


The Commoner

a web journal for other values

ISSUE 15
"CARE WORK"
AND THE
COMMONS



WINTER 2012
www.thecommoner.org



The Commoner

“Care Work” And The Commons

Issue 15
Winter 2012

www.thecommoner.org
www.commoner.org.uk

In the beginning there is the doing, the social flow of human interaction and creativity, and the doing is imprisoned by the deed, and the deed wants to dominate the doing and life, and the doing is turned into work, and people into things. Thus the world is crazy, and revolts are also practices of hope.

This journal is about living in a world in which the doing is separated from the deed, in which this separation is extended in an increasing numbers of spheres of life, in which the revolt about this separation is ubiquitous.

The Commoner

Issue 15

Winter 2012

Credits

Managing Editor: Massimo De Angelis

Editors: Camille Barbagallo and Silvia Federici

Book and Cover Design: James Lindenschmidt

www.thecommoner.org

www.commoner.org.uk

Acknowledgements & Credits

We would like to thank:

Laura Agustín for her essay “Sex as Work and Sex Work.” Laura Maria Agustín is an internationally known sociologist and anthropologist who studies undocumented migration, informal labor markets, and the sex industry. She is the author of many essays and books on sex work and migration, including *Sex at the Margins : Migration, Labour Markets, and the Rescue Industry* (Zed Books 2007).

Kolya Abramsky for his essay “Energy and Social Reproduction.” Abramsky is a long-time activist in the anti-globalization/alternative energy movement and the author of *Sparking a Worldwide Energy Revolution: Social Struggles in the Transition to a Post-Petroleum World*, AK Press, 2010.

Nicholas Beuret for the essay "Starting from the social wage". After being part of the failure to close all refugee detention centres in Australia, 6 years ago Nicholas moved to London. He is a long-term activist, who is currently involved in labour struggles and social movements against austerity in the UK. He has a young daughter and is a regular contributor to *The Paper* (wearethepaper.org).

Liliana Caballero Velasquez, of the Association *Madres Comunitarias* in Bogota (Colombia) for the interview she has given us.

Mariarosa Dalla Costa for the essays she has made available to us and allowing us to use her "Women and the Subversion of the Community," originally published in Italian in 1971, later published in England, in M. Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1975). Dalla Costa, "Reproduction and Emigration" – an outstanding contribution to theory and politics of social reproduction – is published here for the first time in English. It was originally published in A. Serafini ed., *L'operaio multinazionale in Europa* (1974). Dalla Costa's "A General Strike" was originally published in E. B. Freedman ed., *The Essential Feminist Reader*. (2007). Internationally known for her path-breaking contributions to feminist theory and long time contributor to *The Commoner*, Dalla Costa is a professor of Political Science at the University of Padova (Italy). Her latest works include *Our Mother Ocean* (co-authored) (Forthcoming, PM Press, Fall 2012).

Matthijs deBruijne for making available to us two of the pictures that we have used for our cover: On the top, left side: The (Dutch) Cleaners' Union Parliament (2011), originally published in the journal *De Volkskrant*.

On the top at the center is a painting with small notes about the labour conditions of the Domestic Workers in the Netherlands. deBruijne is an Dutch artist who has worked with several workers' organization, including domestic workers' and has collaborated in the production of videos on immigrant domestic workers in the Netherlands and in the production of the painting at the center of our cover.

Viviane Gonik for her essay "Is Work Soluble in Love." A long time feminist activist based in Geneva, Gonik has worked at the Institute of Occupational Health Sciences in Lausanne, and contributed to studies on work related mental health problems. She is co-author of *Hommes-Femmes: metamorphoses d'un rapport social*. Geneve, Georg, 1998.

Priscilla Gonzalez for the interview she has given us and the information concerning the campaign by DWU. Priscilla Gonzalez is the Director of the New York Domestic Workers United. As she stated in a Testimony before the New York State Assembly Committee on Labor on November 21, 2008, she is "the proud daughter of one of the 200,000 workers who make all other work possible in New York" and a fulltime organizer with Domestic Workers United since 2003.

RJ Maccani works, as described in his blog, as the Community Programs Producer for The Foundry Theatre in NY. He organizes with Regeneración Childcare NYC and the Challenging Male Supremacy Project. He is also on the Board of Directors of the Brecht Forum and a member of Another Politics is Possible. He is training as an herbalist at Third Root Community Health Center and as a generative somatics practitioner.

Victoria Mamani of the La Paz based feminist organization Mujeres Creando. Victoria Mamani has been a protagonist of the struggle of domestic workers that led to the passing of a legislation in 2003 specifying these workers' rights and entitlements.

Pascale Molinier for her essay: "Of Feminists and their Cleaning Ladies: caught between the reciprocity of care and the desire for depersonalization." The essay was originally published in *Multitudes* 2009/3-4, no. 37-38, p. 113-121. Pascale Molinier is a French psychologist whose field of research is the psychodynamic of work.

Ariel Salleh for her essay: "Fukushima: A Call For Women's Leadership." An internationally known Australian feminist writer and activist, Salleh is one the leading theorists in the social ecology and eco-feminist movements. Transdisciplinary in her approach, she has written extensively on the question of reproductive labor from a perspective she defines as 'embodied materialism.' She is the co-editor of the international ecology journal *Capitalism, Nature and Socialism*, and author of many essays on the relations between Marxism and Feminism, eco-socialism, deep ecology. Her best know work is *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern*. (Zed Books, 1997).

Konstanze Schmitt for the pictures of the street performance by the domestic workers of *Territorio Domestico* which we have included in the cover. On the background of one of the pictures is the "Triumph of the Domestic Workers," a painted canvass on bicycle wheels with gearwheels on its front, that Schmitt and *Territorio Domestico* created on the model of the "Triumph of the name of Jesus," a

colonial painting by Juan Ramos from 1703. As Schmitt writes:

One of the slogans of *Territorio Domestico* is: Without us, the world doesn't revolve.... In order to visualize this principle and domestic work in the society, the group *Territorio Domestico* has developed its own symbol: a system of gearwheels set in motion by a female domestic worker.... These gearwheels who are very present in the painting, are the link between the colonial painting/situation and the actual system of colonialism, and it focuses on the power of the persons under the wheels – answering the question of “Who moves the wagon/world?”

We also thank Konstanze Schmitt for the interviews with Rafaela, Marlene and Mary. Konstanze Schmitt is a Berlin based artist.

The Socialist Feminist Collective (Turkey). Based in Istanbul, the Collective is campaigning in several Turkish cities calling on women to stop their domestic work until they are paid for the work they do and men begin to share the work. <http://www.sosyalistfeministkolektif.org/>

Todos Somos Japon for allowing us to use “Nuclear Housework and The Enraged Mothers and Farmers of Japan.” Todos Somos Japon is a New York based group originally formed to publicize the consequences of the Fukushima disasters. It aims to create a network of activists in and out of Japan organizing not only around nuclear issues but against the capitalist politics of permanent crisis and displacement. Its website is: jfissures.org

Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas of the La Paz based, feminist Bolivian feminist organization, **Mujeres Creando**. Ana Rosario Adrian Vargas is one of the main organizers of the of the daycare center that Mujeres Creando has set up since 2007.

Contents

Preface: Care Work and the Commons	xii
1. Introduction	1
I. Archive	22
2. Women and the Subversion of the Community	23
3. On The General Strike	70
4. Wages Against Housework	74
5. On Sexuality as Work	88
6. Reproduction and Emigration	95
II. Articles	158
7. Starting From the Social Wage	159
8. The Unfinished Feminist Revolution	185

Contents

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work	198
10. On Elder Care	235
11. Sex as Work & Sex Work	262
12. Is Housework Soluble in Love?	278
13. Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies	287
14. Nuclear Housework	307
15. Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership	315
16. Energy and Social Reproduction	337
III. Documents/Interviews	353
17. Domestic Workers United	354
18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez	360
19. A Male Domestic Worker	386
20. The Regeneration Manifesto	396
21. The Triumph of the Domestic Workers	401
22. Servicio Doméstico Activo	405
23. Interview with Liliana Caballero Velasquez	413

Contents

24. Interview with Victoria Mamani	417
25. Socialist Feminist Collective	421
26. Interview with Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas	426

Preface: Care Work and the Commons

Massimo De Angelis

It is becoming increasingly clear that the current economic, social and environmental crises are degrading the conditions of everyday life for a vast range of people in many parts of the world, and are even posing apocalyptic threats to our social and ecological reproduction. It is also clear that the global elites' answers to these crises cannot provide any solutions to these problems. Indeed, short of a dramatic paradigmatic change in their strategic horizons, we find no hope on this front. It is not just that governments continue to cut social spending and entitlements to bail out the banks. As the struggles against the policies employed to deal with the crisis of neoliberalism intensify, we witness the rise of a post-modern form of fascism. The brutal attacks by militarized riot police against the occupy movements of the US and Europe, the endless butchering of civilians whose bodies now pile up in morgues throughout the Middle East, are all different modulations of this trend. Yet, new social movements are mushrooming everywhere with renewed creativity in their organisational forms. Even the moderate media, despite

its cynicism towards the constituent powers expressed by these movements, is beginning to acknowledge the rationality of these popular revolts, now circulating from New York to Athens, from Cairo to Madrid, often drawing parallels between diverse instances, highlighting unfamiliar alliances (such as that between army veterans, workers and students), and beginning to acknowledge “the outrage of the mainstream.”

In this context, there is an urgent need to construct non-capitalistic ways to reproduce our life, other than those provided by states and markets. From the beginning of the history of this journal, we have referred to these alternative as “the commons.” We were not alone in this endeavour. Many today think of the commons as the seeds of a radically new social system in which reproduction stems from the direct participation of communities of producers reclaiming, sharing, and pooling resources of various types, driven by values fundamentally opposed to those embedded in the capital circuits: solidarity, mutual aid, cooperation, respect for human being and the environment, horizontalism and direct democracy. But what has distinguished this journal is the recognition that the commons must exist today in a world in which the social and ecological metabolism is dominated by capital’s priorities and *the threat* they pose to social reproduction. Thus the commons – their development, their networking, their survival – must be conceived within fields of power relations, and viewed not only as sites of alternative ways of reproducing life, but as sites of struggle, as well as potential targets of cooptation and enclosure.

This implies two things. First, the present global crisis urges us to engage in the constitution of alternatives to

life under capitalism, and the construction of more autonomous forms of social reproduction. As neither the state nor the market can guarantee our survival, we need to embark in a journey of transformation built on the power of the commons. For this, however, we need to go beyond the logic of "survival" – ours and that of the ecosystem – as the social relations that we construct to reproduce ourselves are the true source of our power vis-à-vis capital. Ultimately this journey implies a “commoning” transforming our subjectivities.

Second, as the commons develop within a field of power relations, the character and social space of their autonomy are necessarily negotiated with capital. But negotiation can only occur on the basis of the commons’ constituted power, which is the power of reproducing with dignity and freedom the life and bodies of all involved in a process of reproduction. Here is the crucial importance of this issue of *The Commoner*, edited by Camille Barbagallo and Silvia Federici. The analyses and stories it weaves together force us to look at the power of the commons power from the perspective of the labour required to reproduce human beings as well as labour power: child-care, housework, sex work and elder care, both in the form of waged and unwaged labour. Its objective is not only “to examine how the neo-liberal restructuring of the global economy, over the last three decades, has reshaped the organization of this work” transforming “our bodies and desires” and re-configuring “our homes, our families and social relations.” Most importantly, this issue wants to highlight the struggles that domestic-care workers (mostly women, but also men) are making in response to the new conditions of reproductive labour. For these struggles pose the need for

Preface: Care Work and the Commons

and invent new forms of commoning, building bridges between and beyond roles, such as employees and employers, clients and service providers, parents and nannies. These forms of commoning are vital for us, not only in order to overcome the crisis of reproduction we face, and refuse to have those most socially vulnerable – women, children, the elders, immigrant workers – pay the price for it, but also to begin to mold a new society and reconstitute the common/s. For the articles in this issue demonstrate that the power of the common/s begins with the social powers we deploy to *materially* reproduce and *affectively* care for ourselves.

1. Introduction

Camille Barbagallo and Silvia Federici

In this issue of *The Commoner* we begin a discussion of *care work* and more broadly *reproductive work*, by which we refer to the complex of activities and services that reproduce human beings as well as the commodity labor power, starting with child-care, housework, sex work and elder care, both in the form of waged and unwaged labour. Our objective is to examine how the neo-liberal restructuring of the global economy, over the last three decades, has reshaped the organization of this work. In particular, we examine how it has transformed our bodies and desires, reconfigured our homes, our families and social relations and, most importantly, what are the struggles that women are making in response to the new conditions of reproductive labor and the new forms of cooperation that are emerging in this context. While focussing on reproductive work and care work in particular, we also revisit the feminist and Marxist body of knowledge that we have produced or inherited on this subject, testing its utility against the developments that have occurred in the field of reproduction with the increased mobility of women across borders, into cities, out of marriages, into paid work,

1. *Introduction*

out of traditional gender roles, into old age and in and out of motherhood. We also examine the intersection of reproduction/care work and migration, gender, race, labour relations; and the changing nature of both the work that is performed in the “private” sphere and the subjects who perform such work.

We believe that it is important to engage in this analysis because the struggle over “reproduction” is central to every other struggle and to the development of “self-reproducing movements,” that is movements that do not separate political work from the activities necessary to the reproduction of our life, for no struggle is sustainable that ignores the needs, experiences, and practices that reproducing ourselves entails. Moreover, the intensification and institutionalization of the global economic crisis poses with new urgency the necessity to construct an alternative to life under capitalism, beginning with the construction of more autonomous forms of social reproduction, for every day it becomes evident that neither the state nor the market can guarantee our survival. Thus, as people who are implicated in reproductive work (which we all are) we are eager to share ideas, questions and research with all those who are involved in social movements seeking to transform not only reproductive labour but also work in general and the home.

With this purpose in mind, we have selected a number of documents, interviews and articles that in no way pretend to give an exhaustive analysis of the re-organization of reproduction internationally, but help us investigate some of the questions most crucial for this task.

We begin by noticing that the concept of “care work” – which highlights the relational character of reproductive

1. *Introduction*

activities – is to a great extent artificial, for all care work requires domestic work and all domestic work requires, to lesser or greater degrees, some care work. However, this distinction, which originated with the marketization of many reproductive tasks, has a practical purpose. It helps domestic workers in their negotiations with employers, to reach agreement on the tasks and activities for which they are employed and to enforce limits to what can be asked of them as part of their jobs. For instance, if I am employed to clean your house, it would be outside of my job description as a cleaner to look after your six year old who happens to be at home sick from school on the day that I clean. The articulation of care work as distinct from domestic work also highlights the various skills required for the different jobs of reproduction, presumably enhancing the social value of reproductive activities.

But the distinction should not be understood in exclusionary terms, as it is often done in current sociological literature. For it makes no sense empirically or theoretically to discuss the care, affection and relationality required to look after a child or sick person without also thinking about the tasks of washing, hanging up and folding away their clothes or vacuuming and mopping the floor on which they play or rest. Indeed, “care work” is an outstanding example of the impossibility to separate material from immaterial labor, whether it is done for pay or no pay.

That care work cannot be separated from domestic work is most evident when this work is done by family members, who cannot limit their work to the communicative, affective aspects of reproduction and delegate to others the more material ones. Indeed, the case of parents who have only “quality time” with their children, that is time

1. *Introduction*

free from any material tasks, is a rarity found only in the upper classes. By privileging “care work” as the only focus of analysis we also risk contributing to the devaluation of domestic work and material activity, and making the unpaid domestic labor done in the home invisible again.

We treat “care work” therefore, as a particular aspect of reproductive work by which we refer to: household cleaning, shopping, preparing food, doing the laundry, paying the bills, providing intimacy and emotional support, such as listening and consoling; bearing children, teaching and disciplining them are also an important part of reproductive work. We must add the un-named, unnamable labor required to anticipate, prevent or resolve crises, keep up good relations with kin and neighbours, coping with the growing threats to our health –through the food we eat, the water we drink. This description still does not account for the work of millions of women and children across the planet who, in addition to the tasks outlined, must spend long hours fetching water, wood for fuel, making fire on open stoves. As Laura Agustín’s article highlights, a key component of “care work” is also sex work, an activity, she points out, that reproduces social life in the same way that other bodily services do, often including company, self-esteem boosting conversation, and as essential to our reproduction as eating food or keeping a healthy environment.

It was one of the theoretical and political revolutions brought about by the feminist movement of the 1970s to bring this work –traditionally invisible, taken for granted, performed for no pay outside of any social contract– to the foreground of political theory and organizing. Ironically, at the very moment in which they refused a destiny dedicated

1. *Introduction*

to housework, many feminists discovered the crucial social function of this work, redefining it as work that produces labor-power and, as such, a precondition for every other forms of capitalist production. In our ARCHIVE SECTION we present some of the texts in which this analysis was first elaborated, as we believe that its significance cannot be overestimated.

This new feminist perspective rejected the common assumptions that domestic/care work is a personal service or a pre-capitalist form of labor, redefining it, instead, as a key aspect of social reproduction in capitalist society and value-creation. To posit housework as work that re/produces the workforce revealed the immense amount of unpaid labor at the heart of the wage relation and had a liberating effect especially for women. By unmasking the capitalist function of this work, by showing that domestic work reproduces us, but for the most part is performed under conditions not set by us, it helped dissipate the sense of guilt that women have so often experienced whenever they have wanted to refuse this work. Equally important, it uncovered a whole field of struggles, relations and connections previously unrecognized, like the relation between women's "refusal of procreation" in Europe after the Second World War and emigration, which is the theme of Dalla Costa's insightful essay in our ARCHIVE. For these reasons, despite the initial opposition it was met with, coming from different quarters (feminists, leftists, liberals), this Feminist Marxist approach has had such a profound influence on the radical and even academic political discourse that its main tenets have become common notions. Also the demand for Wages For Housework continues to have an appeal, as shown by the recent campaign

1. *Introduction*

manifesto of the Socialist Feminist Collective (Turkey) included in the last section of this issue. Today, however, it is often asked if this perspective still holds given the changes that have taken place in the organization of reproductive labor over the last decades, with the massive entrance of women in the waged labor market, the ethnicization and marketization of many domestic tasks, and the feminist renegotiation of every aspect of family life.

Can we, it is asked, hold on to a perspective that looks at the world, capital, and male-female relations, from the viewpoint of women's unpaid domestic labor when so many women are now working for a wage, and so much reproductive work is performed outside the home on a commercial basis or in the home but by domestic "helpers" for pay? Isn't domestic work being already "valorized"? Further, how can we continue to claim that unpaid reproductive labor is a ground of commonality for women when the "globalization" and ethnicization of care have instituted between many of them a madam-maid relation? Hasn't the time come to go beyond gender distinctions and even the distinctions between production and reproduction, waged and unwaged labor?

Several of the articles that we have chosen touch on these questions, mostly arguing in support of the continuing validity of this perspective. Silvia Federici's "The Unfinished Feminist Revolution" points out that, even today, it is women, worldwide, who perform most of the unpaid work of reproduction, and as much reproductive labor has come back to the home (through the restructuring of health care and the spread of "informal labor") as it has been expelled from it with its reorganization on a commercial basis. She returns to this theme also in

1. *Introduction*

her analysis of the crisis of elder care, which, in her view, poses with urgency the need for the creation of cooperative/collective forms of reproduction. Similarly, Mariarosa Dalla Costa “Women’s Autonomy and Remuneration for Care Work in the New Emergencies” warns that, while the feminist analyses of housework in the 1970s ignored paid domestic work, the danger today is that the unpaid work women do in the home becomes invisible again. In turn, Viviane Gonik’s “Is Housework Soluble in Love?” argues that that while the sexual division of labor has become more complex, there has not been any significant change in the relation between women and men.

There is no doubt, however, that we face a very different situation from the one feminists in the 1970s confronted and rebelled against. One crucial area of change has been the crisis of the “welfare state,” that is, the drastic reduction of every form of investment in the reproduction of the work-force that, combined with women’s massive migration to waged labor, has generated a reproductive as well as a political crisis. The dilemma – as often posed by social justice/anti-capitalist movements— has been whether to struggle to reconstitute welfare as we have known it, or to accept its crisis as irreversible, and even welcome it, as the ground on which to construct more independent forms of social reproduction, not tied to any productivity deal or the mediating representation of unions and parties.

This, however, as Camille Barbagallo and Nicholas Beuret point out, in “Starting From the Social Wage,” may not be a practical alternative, in a context in which much of the wealth we have produced remains hostage in the hands of the state. The question, in their view, is not whether we should or not defend the “social wage,” but

1. Introduction

how to access and appropriate the resources held by the state –moneys, assets, services- without subordinating their acquisition and use to the state’s control over our lives.

The article raises this question while examining the struggles that parents and childcare workers have organized in response to the British government’s cut of funds for community-run nurseries, a first step towards the privatization of child-care. It argues that community controlled nurseries cannot be defended or expanded, without a broad mobilization involving different social groups, and without the articulation of a collective vision of the society we want to create, so that the struggle over childcare can become a public force for social change.

Exemplary in this context is the work of the Regeneración Childcare Collective of New York, an organization that since 2005 has provided child-care to low-income parents of color and queer parents in order to facilitate their participation in social movements groups. As they write in their manifesto, Regeneración members see their ally role as part of a broader project: demonstrating that interacting with children can be a creative activity enriching our life, producing a new kind of politics, and contributing to create a new generation of human beings who view cooperation as an essential part of our reproduction.

The same objectives structure the activities of the autonomous day-care center organized by *Mujeres Creando*, a feminist organization in La Paz, as described in an interview with Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas, one of the center’s leading operators. The *Mujeres Creando* daycare center is sustained by contributions by the mothers themselves and by women who pay for the mothers who cannot pay. In this

1. Introduction

way it can operate with a great degree of autonomy and can concentrate not only on liberating women's time but also on catering to the children's psychological, emotional, and physical development. As Vargas points out, this has required an intense process of consciousness raising, circulation of information, and production of knowledge, in which the mothers, and increasingly the fathers, of the children have been involved, defining the values and goals according to which the centre should be organized.

The experiences of the *Regeneración* Collective and the *Mujeres Creando's* center contrasts positively with the testimony of Liliana Caballero from the *Madres Comunitarias* in Colombia, that typifies the predicament of family care providers and paid care/domestic workers in almost every country. Caballero denounces that the *Madres* in Colombia have been practically abandoned by the employers and the state and are so under-funded that they must even pay for the materials necessary for the care of the children they attend to out of their own meagre wages, while their licenses can be at any time terminated if their care is judged to be substandard.

Caballero's testimony is important because on one side it confirms that any initiative aiming to transform day-care into a creative activity and a children/adult "common" must be premised on a *valorisation of care / reproductive work*, in terms of remuneration and social recognition; on the other, it demonstrates that *by itself* the commercialization of domestic work, i.e., its organization as waged labour – the other major innovation in the organization of care/reproductive work – is not sufficient to put an end to the devaluation of this work.

1. *Introduction*

The fact that this work has been for centuries and still is, considered as non-work, that it has been done for no pay and naturalized as “women’s labor,” added to its association with the history of slavery, colonialism, migration, weigh heavily on its social status.

But while the conditions of domestic workers remain abysmally poor, worldwide domestic/care workers’ movements are growing to such an extent that today they are one of the leading forces in international feminism and the struggle against the devaluation of reproductive work.

We turn to these movements with several interviews with domestic workers in the USA, Bolivia, and Spain. The women who speak come from different regions but the problems they face are the fundamentally the same. For a start the individualised nature of care/reproductive work, and the isolation in which it is performed, create an emotionally charged, potentially explosive situation that especially in the case of live-ins easily turns into abuse. It is also very difficult for domestic/care workers to draw a clear-cut line between work and personal relations, as they work in their employers’ homes and their work conditions include the caring of children and other people. Take the case in which the employer – likely another woman – comes home at night and treats the domestic worker as a surrogate partner, talking to her about her problems at work, while the live-in domestic might wish to go to sleep. Think also of what it means to work at a job that requires that you to become attached to the children you care for, while not having the power to intervene if their parents make mistakes, and knowing all along that your relationship with these children can be severed at any moment. As RJ Maccani reports, with an “uptight family” the stress

1. *Introduction*

can become high. As a male day-care worker, Maccani enjoyed a somewhat special treatment, like not being asked to perform task routinely expected of female workers. He too, however, describes the experience as potentially nerve wracking. As a nanny you have to make unanticipated decisions, but have to imagine what the parents would do in the situation, for “if you choose something other than what the parents would have done you can get in quite a bit of trouble.”

How difficult it is for domestic workers to establish satisfactory work relations, as long as they must negotiate them on an individual basis, is illustrated by Pascale Molinier in “Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies,” which describes the manoeuvres some Parisian feminists employ to limit their interactions with the domestic workers they hire. Though presumably committed to social justice and solidarity with other women, all the interviewed acknowledge being ill at ease in their relations with these workers and wishing them to be as invisible as possible. Part of the strain is that they clearly consider domestic work a dead end job and feel guilty delegating it to other women. But the outstanding reason is that they fear developing obligations and simply having to make space in their lives for women from whom they expect only work, and yet share their homes and inevitably develop personal relations with them. The result is a micro warfare – to mark territorial limits, pre-empt possible emotional claims, preclude remonstrations – all the more destructive as they are carried under the pretence of friendship and concern.

This is where a broadening of the stage and the subjects involved in the domestic workers labour contract

1. Introduction

becomes crucial. This process is now well underway, as the interviews we present demonstrate.

This is especially true of domestic workers in Latin America where, in the words of Victoria Mamani of *Mujeres Creando* and activists in the national Domestic Workers Movement, “the new generations are more combative, know their rights and if they are abused they denounce it immediately.” An expression of the new power domestic workers have built in this region has been their increasing tendency to become “external workers” rather than live-in maids. This move has enabled them to have an autonomous space, to become part of broader social networks (of neighbours, friends, political groups), and participate in social debates and struggles. However, the more evident sign of the new social power domestic workers in Latin America have gained is the legal recognition they have won in several countries (like Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia), which varies from inclusion within current labour legislations to the recognition of specific rights, like a minimum wage, paid vacations, pension, maternity leave and severance pay. In Bolivia, for instance, as we learn from the interview with Victoria Mamani, the domestic workers’ mobilization has led to the passing of a Bill in 2003 that recognized their right to 15 days of vacation, some severance pay, and an eight hours workday, something which domestic workers in the United States are still struggling for.

The same political transformation is visible among immigrant domestic workers across the globe. Wherever they have travelled, migrant domestic workers have formed transnational communities and associations providing new arrivals with different forms of assistance; they have

1. Introduction

also fought to obtain the same rights as other workers and created social spaces where to meet, exchange information, break their isolation, and discuss demands. An example is SEDOAC (Active Domestic Work), an association of domestic workers mostly from Latin America but now working in Madrid that was formed in 2006. With other domestic workers' groups, SEDOAC has formed *Territorio Doméstico*, a social space, located in the self-organized feminist center Eskalera Karakola, where women's collectives and activists of various nationalities who work as domestic workers or are otherwise connected with the issue meet once a month. Together with Konstanze Schmitt – a German feminist artist who has conducted the interviews with Rafaela, Marlene, and Mary which we include – several SEDOAC members have also collaborated to an artistic project: the construction of “The Triumph of Domestic Work,” a cardboard chariot on wheels, to be brought to demonstrations, exemplifying the principle that domestic work moves the world.

Meanwhile, in New York, Domestic Workers United is setting up community structures that are laying the foundations for new forms of collective bargaining, in a way constituting new “social commons.” In November 2010, after years of mobilization, DWU was able to obtain the passing of a Bill of Rights extending to domestic workers the same right as other workers. But as Priscilla Gonzalez points out, the problem at present is its implementation. For this purpose DWU is attempting to construct neighbourhood-based networks of contacts and groups, capable of acting as reference points and intermediaries between domestic workers and the employers, providing information about the domestic workers' rights, ensuring

1. *Introduction*

that agreements are fair and respected, and acting as a place where a common interest can be articulated. DWU also seeks the support of employers for its campaigns, convinced, as Gonzales argues, that it is in the latter's interest that the care workers they hire work under satisfactory conditions.

Dalla Costa as well (in the article previously mentioned) sees the possibility of a collaboration between employers and employees arguing that if properly remunerated and de-linked from the devastating economic policies now motivating female migration, paid care-work could be an acceptable job option, in the context of the alternatives currently available to women. While feminists at times have criticized women who hire domestic and care workers, Dalla Costa, like Gonzales, lays the ground for a politicization of the relation between domestic workers and their employers and a political recomposition among women, rooted in the realization that the devaluation of reproductive work is a common problem for women, and the shared need to force the state to place a broad range of resources at the disposal of this work.

No less than housework and other forms of domestic and care work, sex work has undergone a major restructuring since the 1970s, which feminists and sex workers movements are only beginning to analyse and mobilize around. We can safely say, however, that an aspect of this restructuring has been a significant expansion in the numbers of sex workers and the diversification of the types of commercial services available for purchase, as well as the internationalisation of the sex-workforce. There are several reasons for these developments, not least the reorganisation of work, gender relations and sexuality that neo-liberal

1. *Introduction*

policies have produced. Clearly further research needs to be undertaken on such developments. What is certain is that the majority of sex workers today are immigrant women and also men and trans-gender people coming from Africa, South America and Eastern Europe.

Statistics concerning the number of sex workers in any one country or region are notoriously disputed, due to the clandestine and stigmatised nature of sex work. However if the sex industry is understood to include not only those who work as prostitutes but also dancers, porn models and actors, peep show and “nudie” bars workers, phone sex operators, and internet webcam workers, reception staff, security guards, drivers – the number of female, trans and male workers in the worldwide “adult entertainment business” is staggering.

With the expansion and diversification of the sex industry there has also been a change in the figure of the sex worker as a social subject. Both because of the increases in global migration, widespread worldwide impoverishment, and the weakening of the stigma attached to sexualised work and in particular prostitution, sex workers today, especially among migrants, include workers from diverse social and economic backgrounds. Migrant sex workers today are former teachers, factory workers, nurses, students, they are shop-keepers who cannot keep up with skyrocketing prices due to monetary devaluation, mothers who can no longer pay the school fees for their children or the high cost of health care now privatized. Many sex workers see their work as a temporary job, accepted or chosen to achieve specific goals: pay school fees, buy a house, open a beauty shop or some other businesses at home (Carchedi 2004), often added to other forms of em-

1. *Introduction*

ployment, preferable in any case to working as domestic or care workers or in industrial sweat shops.

Thus, even within prostitution, the workforce is extremely differentiated ranging from fairly well-paid freelancing, self-employed workers, working in private apartments, with a high degree of control over their work, and providing a complex of services beyond “intercourse” (the girl friend experience, companionship, attending events, conversation) to the much broader category of prostitute, often migrant women, working in the streets or brothels, in assembly line conditions, tightly supervised and often in fairly risky situations. Keeping these differences in mind, it can be argued that the conditions of sex work have generally deteriorated in comparison to the late 1970s when the sex workers’ movement took off. Worsening economic conditions and increasing competition within the sex industry have made it more difficult for sex workers to exercise the type of control that prostitutes had previously established over the conditions of their work. Many migrant sex workers are undocumented and due to tightening border regimes and immigration policies in Europe, they have had to rely on criminalised intermediaries to finance and organise their travel abroad and as a result, the violence and coercion that sex workers experience has escalated. In fact, sex workers and particularly those who work in prostitution are today penalized on three counts: as sex workers, as undocumented workers, and as victims of debt-bondage and exploitation.

Since the 1980s, a key fault line of conflict among feminists has been the question of “sex trafficking” which has divided feminist analysis of prostitution into two opposite camps. On one side, those convinced that prostitution

1. Introduction

is a non-voluntary activity, one that no woman can ever make a free choice to do, propose to define all instances of prostitution as violence against women. On the other, there are those who argue that a position that constructs all prostitution as always-already violence jeopardises the safety of sex workers, in addition to being infantilising, moralistic and blind to the violence inherent in the alternative work options open to sex workers and generally to women, especially coming from countries that have been subjected to drastic forms of economic liberalization.

An extensive literature exists covering the various positions in the debate and in many ways there is little left to be said about trafficking in the sex industry. Instead of weighing in on a somewhat saturated debate we have included the article by Laura Agustín's¹ "Sex as Work and Sex Work", which argues that when we discuss sex work nowadays the focus is immediately on commercial exchanges, whereas we should give it a broader definition enabling us to realize that non commercial sex as well involves work (as well as other things).

To this day the controversy continues and has in fact reached a stalemate, partly because both sides mostly base their arguments on the motivations and responsibilities of individual prostitutes, debating whether prostitution is a result of coercion or spontaneous choices. The global sex industry, however, is not the result of millions of individual choices; it is a highly structured intervention by corporations (both legal and illegal) and international financial organizations. Thus, we cannot look at prostitution as presently organized as a set of individual transactions be-

¹<http://www.lauraagustin.com/>

1. Introduction

tween prostitutes and their bosses or between prostitutes and their clients. It is this broader context in which prostitution operates that decides the possibilities which sex workers have to gain more social power and the possibility for self-determination. From this viewpoint, sex-workers organizations are correct when they argue that prostitution is work; prohibition and criminalization can only worsens work conditions, making sex workers more vulnerable to police harassment and exposing them and indeed all migrants to the risk of deportation; commercial sexual work is not more violent or enslaving than many other jobs available in today's global labour market. Indeed, the increased incidence of slavery and indentured servitude is not unique to prostitution and cannot be eliminated by criminalizing sex work any more than chattel slavery in the 19th could have been abolished by prohibiting cotton picking.

It is also true, however, that the decriminalization of the sex industry will not be sufficient to improve the status of sex-workers, as in a world of increasing competition for survival the market itself becomes an instrument of violence. Nevertheless the argument that prostitutes are workers is more relevant now than ever; since increasingly the exploitation and abuse they suffer is on a continuum with that of other workers – migrant or not – internationally. Coercion, in fact, has become a key aspect of work in the present phase of globalization, that is reminiscent in many ways of the period of “primitive accumulation” when an *ex-lege* proletariat was formed (Federici 2004). This implies that the situation of sex workers cannot be transformed by an exclusive focus on sexual domination and sexual slavery, and by differentiating sex workers from

1. *Introduction*

other workers, in the same way as we cannot address the question of reproductive work by focussing exclusively on care work. Precisely to the extent that sex work is often non-free labour, the sex worker is becoming the paradigm worker in the global economy, in the same way as underpaid, precarious, “informal” female labour is becoming the paradigm for all forms of exploitation. As in the '70s, today as well, the question is whether this realization will become the ground for a recomposition among different sectors of the female work force. Indeed, sex work, like domestic and care work, poses one of the most significant challenge to the currently existing feminisms.

A different question is on what grounds a recomposition can occur today between women and men. It is often argued that the commercialization of domestic/care work has in many cases been the “solution” to men’s avoidance of housework, which remains the sore spot in many relations. It is also true, however, that the relation between men and women has to some extent been reconfigured or there is at least an expectation that it will be. While the structure of the nuclear family has been put into crisis by women’s struggles and entrance in the waged labor market, and while the bulk of reproductive work is still done by women, it is true that men’s relation today to reproductive activities is different from their fathers’ who used to come home, open the paper and expect that dinner would be served. With respect to their fathers, many men live a contradictory situation, being expected to do their share at home and at the same time face more precarious but nevertheless more demanding jobs. This “identity crisis” has been the subject of much psychological analysis, but whether the change will foster a politics of resentment or contribute

1. Introduction

to undermine gender based labor hierarchies remains to be seen. In this context, Gonik's "Is Housework Soluble in Love?" calls for the socialization of housework through the creation of associative, cooperative, self-managed networks and for its politicization, i.e. its placement at the center stage of political debates as the alternative "to becoming exhausted in the fight for the sharing of task at the couple's level."

Last, our discussion of care work looks at it from the viewpoint of the "energy question" and environmental crisis, which is every day more dramatic with the accelerating global warming, the proliferation of oil spills and other ecological disaster, wars included, and now the spreading of radioactivity through our skies and waters in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster. The testimonies by the "enraged" mothers of Japan are eloquent on this point, showing what a nightmare life becomes when radioactivity is in the water we drink, the air we breathe, the food we eat, the ground on which children play – and no moment of "care work" is possible without a daily struggle. Not surprisingly, then, we find – in Ariel Salleh's impressive account, "Fukushima: A Call for Women's Leadership" – that it is women, eco-feminists in particular, who have most staunchly organized against the nuclear and chemical industry's assault on our environment. There is, obviously, nothing biological in this phenomenon. It is that women are the ones who do most of the housework and child-raising in the world, and face most directly the cost of the destruction of our environment for our reproduction. Appropriately then, Kolya Abramsky "Energy and Social Reproduction" reminds us that the most important form of energy is work, in particular women's reproductive labor

1. Introduction

which, indeed, more than coal or wind-power, is to this day the energy that keeps the world moving.

Part I.
Archive

2. Women and the Subversion of the Community

**Mariarosa Dalla Costa
1972**

These observations are an attempt to define and analyze the “Woman Question,” and to locate this question in the entire “female role” as it has been created by the capitalist division of labour.

We place foremost in these pages the housewife as the central figure in this female role. We assume that all women are housewives and even those who work outside the home continue to be housewives. That is, on a world level, it is precisely what is particular to domestic work, not only measured as number of hours and nature of work, but as quality of life and quality of relationships which it generates, that determines a woman’s place wherever she is and to whichever class she belongs. We concentrate here on the position of the working-class woman, but this is not to imply that only working-class women are exploited. Rather it is to confirm that the role of the working-class housewife, which we believe has been indispensable to

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

capitalist production is the determinant for the position of all other women. Every analysis of women as a caste, then, must proceed from the analysis of the position of working-class housewives.

In order to see the housewife as central, it was first of all necessary to analyze briefly how capitalism has created the modern family and the housewife's role in it, by destroying the types of family group or community which previously existed. This process is by no means complete. While we are speaking of the Western world and Italy in particular, we wish to make clear that to the extent that the capitalist mode of production also brings the Third World under its command, the same process of destruction must be and is taking place there. Nor should we take for granted that the family as we know it today in the most technically advanced Western countries is the final form the family can assume under capitalism. But the analysis of new tendencies can only be the product of an analysis of how capitalism created this family and what woman's role is today, each as a moment in a process.

We propose to complete these observations on the female role by analyzing as well the position of the woman who works outside the home, but this is for a later date. We wish merely to indicated here the link between two apparently separate experiences: that of housewife and that of working woman.

The day-to-day struggles that women have developed since the Second World War run directly against the organization of the factory and of the home. The "unreliability" of women in the home and out of it has grown rapidly since then, and runs directly against the factory as regimentation organized in time and space, and against the social

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

factory as organization of the reproduction of labor power. This trend to more absenteeism, to less respect for timetables, to higher job mobility, is shared by young men and women workers. But where the man for crucial periods of his youth will be the sole support of a new family, women who on the whole are not restrained in this way and who must always consider the job at home, are bound to be even more disengaged from work discipline, forcing disruption of the productive flow and therefore higher costs to capital. (This is one excuse for the discriminatory wages which many times over make up for capital's loss.) It is this same trend of disengagement that groups of housewives express when they leave their children with their husbands at work.¹ This trend is and will increasingly be one of the decisive forms of the crisis in the systems of the factory and of the social factory.

* * *

In recent years, especially in the advanced capitalist countries, there have developed a number of women's movements of different orientations and range, from those which believe the fundamental conflict in society is between men and women to those focusing on the position of women as a specific manifestation of class exploitation.

If at first sight the position and attitudes of the former are perplexing, especially to women who have had previous experience of militant participation in political struggles, it is, we think, worth pointing out that women

¹This happened as part of the massive demonstration of women celebrating International Women's Day in the US, August 1970.

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

for whom sexual exploitation is the basic social contradiction provide an extremely important index of the degree of our own frustration, experienced by millions of women both inside and outside the movement. There are those who define their own lesbianism in these terms (we refer to views expressed by a section of the movement in the US in particular): “Our associations with women began when, because we were together, we could acknowledge that we could no longer tolerate relationships with men, that we could not prevent these from becoming power relationships in which we were inevitably subjected. Our attentions and energies were diverted, our power was diffused and its objectives delimited.” From this rejection has developed a movement of gay women which asserts the possibilities of a relationship free of a sexual power struggle, free of the biological social unit, and asserts at the same time our need to open ourselves to a wider social and therefore sexual potential.

Now in order to understand the frustrations of women expressing themselves in ever-increasing forms, we must be clear what in the nature of the family under capitalism precipitates a crisis on this scale. The oppression of women, after all, did not begin with capitalism. What began with capitalism was the more intense exploitation of women as women and the possibility at last of their liberation.

The Origins of the Capitalist Family

In pre-capitalist patriarchal society *the home and the family* were central to agricultural and artisan production.

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

With the advent of capitalism the socialization of production was organized with *the factory* as its centre. Those who worked in the new productive centre, the factory, received a wage. Those who were excluded did not. Women, children and the aged lost the relative power that derived from the family's dependence on their labour, *which was seen to be social and necessary*. Capital, destroying the family and the community and production as one whole, on the one hand has concentrated basic social production in the factory and the office, and on the other has in essence detached the man from the family and turned him into a *wage labourer*. It has put on the man's shoulders the burden of financial responsibility for women, children, the old and the ill, in a word, all those who do not receive wages. From that moment began the expulsion from the home of all those who did not *procreate and service those who worked for wages*. The first to be excluded from the home, after men, were children; they sent children to school. The family ceased to be not only the productive, but also the educational centre.²

²This is to assume a whole new meaning for "education", and the work now being done on the history of compulsory education – forced learning – proves this. In England teachers were conceived of as "moral police" who could (1) condition children against "crime" – curb working-class reappropriation in the community; (2) destroy "the mob", working-class organization based on a family which was still either a productive unit or at least a viable organizational unit; (3) make habitual regular attendance and good timekeeping so necessary to children's later employment; and (4) stratify the class by grading and selection. As with the family itself, the transition to this new form of social control was not smooth and direct, and was the result of contradictory forces both within the class and within capital, as with every phase of the history of capitalism.

2. Women and the Subversion of the Community

To the extent that men had been the despotic heads of the patriarchal family, based on a strict division of labour, the experience of women, children and men was a contradictory experience which we inherit. But in pre-capitalist society the work of each member of the community of serfs was seen to be directed to a purpose: either to the prosperity of the feudal lord or to our survival. To this extent the whole community of serfs was compelled to be co-operative in a unity of unfreedom that involved to the same degree women, children and men, which capitalism had to break.³In this sense the *unfree individual, the democracy of unfreedom*⁴ entered into a crisis. The passage from serfdom to free labour power separated the male from the female proletarian and both of them from their children. The unfree patriarch was transformed into the “free” wage earner, and upon the contradictory experience of the sexes and the generations was built a more profound estrangement and therefore a more subversive relation.

We must stress that this separation of children from adults is essential to an understanding of the full significance of the separation of women from men, to grasp fully how the organization of the struggle on the part of the women’s movement, even when it takes the form of a violent rejection of any possibility of relations with men, can

³Wage labour is based on the subordination of all relationships to the wage relation. The worker must enter as an “individual” into a contract with capital stripped of the protection of kinships.

⁴Karl Marx, “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of the State”, Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, ed. and trans. Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, N.Y., 1967, p. 176.

2. Women and the Subversion of the Community

only aim to overcome the separation which is based on the “freedom” of wage labour.

The Class Struggle in Education

The analysis of the school which has emerged during recent years particularly with the advent of the students' movement-has clearly identified the school as a centre of ideological discipline and of the shaping of the labour force and its masters. What has perhaps never emerged, or at least not in its profundity, is precisely what precedes all this; and that is the usual desperation of children on their first day of nursery school, when they see themselves dumped into a class and their parents suddenly desert them. *But it is precisely at this point that the whole story of school begins.*⁵

Seen in this way, the elementary school children are not those appendages who, merely by the demands “free lunches, free fares, free books”, learnt from the older ones, can in some way be united with the students of the higher schools.⁶ In elementary school children, in those who are

⁵We are not dealing here with the narrowness of the nuclear family that prevents children from having an easy transition to forming relations with other people; nor with what follows from this, the argument of psychologists that proper conditioning would have avoided such a crisis. We are dealing with the entire organization of the society, of which family, school and factory are each one ghettoized compartment. So every kind of passage from one to another of these compartments is a painful passage. The pain cannot be eliminated by tinkering with the relations between one ghetto and another but only by the destruction of every ghetto.

⁶“Free fares, free lunches, free books” was one of the slogans of a section of the Italian students' movement which aimed to connect

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

the sons and daughters of workers, there is always an awareness that school is in some way setting them against their parents and their peers, and consequently there is an instinctive resistance to studying and to being “educated”. This is the resistance for which Black children are confined to educationally subnormal schools in Britain.⁷ The European working-class child, like the Black working-class child, sees in the teacher somebody who is teaching him or her something against her mother and father, not as a defense of the child but as an attack on the class. Capitalism is the first productive system where the children of the exploited are disciplined and educated in institutions organized and controlled by the ruling class.⁸

the struggle of younger students with workers and university students.

⁷In Britain and the US the psychologists Eysenck and Jensen, who are convinced “scientifically” that Blacks have a lower “intelligence” than whites, and the progressive educators like Ivan Illich seem diametrically opposed. What they aim to achieve links them. They are divided by method. In any case the psychologists are not more racist than the rest, only more direct. “Intelligence” is the ability to assume your enemy’s case as wisdom and to shape your own logic on the basis of this. Where the whole society operates institutionally on the assumption of white racial superiority, these psychologists propose more conscious and thorough “conditioning” so that children who do not learn to read do not learn instead to make molotov cocktails. A sensible view with which Illich, who is concerned with the “underachievement” of children (that is, rejection by them of “intelligence”), can agree.

⁸In spite of the fact that capital manages the schools, control is never given once and for all. The working class continually and increasingly challenges the content and refuses the costs of capitalist schooling. The response of the capitalist system is to re-establish its own control, and this control tends to be more and more regimented on factory-like lines. The new policies on education which

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

The final proof that this alien indoctrination which begins in nursery school is based on the splitting of the family is that those working-class children who arrive (those few who do arrive) at university are so brainwashed that they are unable any longer to talk to their community.

Working-class children then are the first who instinctively rebel against schools and the education provided in schools. But their parents carry them to schools and confine them to schools because they are concerned that their

are being hammered out even as we write, however, are more complex than this. We can only indicate here the impetus for these new policies: (a) Working-class youth rejects that education prepares them for anything but a factory, even if they will wear white collars there and use typewriters and drawing-boards instead of riveting machines. (b) Middle-class youth rejects the role of mediator between the classes and the repressed personality this mediating role demands. (c) A new labour power more wage and status differentiated is called for. The present egalitarian trend must be reversed. (d) A new type of labour process may be created which will attempt to interest the worker in "participating" instead of refusing the monotony and fragmentation of the present assembly-line. If the traditional "road to success" and even "success" itself are rejected by the young, new goals will have to be found to which they can aspire, that is, for which they will go to school and go to work. New "experiments" in "free" education, where the children are encouraged to participate in planning their own education and there is greater democracy between teacher and taught are springing up daily. It is an illusion to believe that this is a defeat for capital any more than regimentation will be a victory. For in the creation of a labour power more creatively manipulated, capital will not in the process lose 0.1 per cent of profit. "As a matter of fact," they are in effect saying, "you can be far more efficient for us if you take your own road, so long as it is through our territory." In some parts of the factory and in the social factory, capital's slogan will increasingly be: "Liberty and fraternity to guarantee and even extend equality."

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

children should “have an education”, that is, be equipped to escape the assembly line or the kitchen to which they, the parents, are confined. If a working-class child shows particular aptitudes, the whole family immediately concentrates on this child, gives him the best conditions, often sacrificing the others, hoping and gambling that he will carry them all out of the working class. This in effect becomes the way capital moves through the aspirations of the parents to enlist their help in disciplining fresh labour power.

In Italy parents less and less succeed in sending their children to school. Children’s resistance to school is always increasing even when this resistance is not yet organized.

At the same time that the resistance of children grows to being educated in schools, so does *their refusal to accept the definition* that capital has given of their *age*. Children want everything they see; they do not yet understand that in order to have things one must pay for them, and in order to pay for them one must have a wage, and therefore one must also be an adult. No wonder it is not easy to explain to children why they cannot have what television has told them they cannot live without.

But something is happening among the new generation of children and youth which is making it steadily more difficult to explain to them the arbitrary point at which they reach adulthood. Rather the younger generation is demonstrating their age to us: in the sixties six-year-olds have already come up against police dogs in the South of the United States. Today we find the same phenomenon in Southern Italy and Northern Ireland, where children have been as active in the revolt as adults. When children (and women) are recognized as integral to history, no doubt

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

other examples will come to light of very young people's participation (and of women's) in revolutionary struggles. What is new is the autonomy of their participation *in spite of and because of* their exclusion from direct production. In the factories youths refuse the leadership of older workers, and in the revolts in the cities they are the diamond point. In the metropolis generations of the nuclear family have produced youth and student movements that have initiated the process of shaking the framework of constituted power; in the Third World the unemployed youth is often in the streets before the working class organized in trade unions.

It is worth recording what The Times of London (1 June 1971) reported concerning a head-teachers' meeting called because one of them was admonished for hitting a pupil: "Disruptive and irresponsible elements lurk around every corner with the seemingly planned intention of eroding all forces of authority." This "is a plot to destroy the values on which our civilization is built and of which our schools are some of the finest bastions".

The Exploitation of the Wageless

We wanted to make these few comments on the attitude of revolt that is steadily spreading among children and youth, especially from the working class and particularly Black people, because we believe this to be intimately connected with the explosion of the women's movement and something which the women's movement itself must take into account. We are dealing here with the revolt of those who have been excluded, who have been separated by the

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

system of production, and who express in action their need to destroy the forces that stand in the way of their social existence, but who this time are coming together as individuals. Women and children have been excluded. The revolt of the one against exploitation through exclusion is an index of the revolt of the other.

To the extent to which capital has recruited the man and turned him into a wage labourer, it has created a fracture between him and all the other proletarians without a wage who, not participating directly in social production, were thus presumed incapable of being the subjects of social revolt.

Since Marx, it has been clear that capital rules and develops through the wage, that is, that the foundation of capitalist society was the wage labourer and his or her direct exploitation. What has been neither clear nor assumed by the organizations of the working-class movement is that precisely through the wage has the exploitation of the non-wage labourer been organized. This exploitation has been even more effective because the lack of a wage hid it. That is, the wage commanded a larger amount of labour than appeared in factory bargaining. *Where women are concerned, their labour appears to be a personal service outside of capital.* The woman seemed only to be suffering from male chauvinism, being pushed around because capitalism meant general “injustice” and “bad and unreasonable behaviour”, the few (men) who noticed convinced us that this was “oppression” but not exploitation. But “oppression” hid another and more pervasive aspect of capitalist society. Capital excluded children from the home and sent them to school not only because they are in the way of others’ more “productive” labour

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

or only to indoctrinate them. The rule of capital through the wage compels every able-bodied person to function, under the law of division of labour, and to function in ways that are if not immediately, then ultimately profitable to the expansion and extension of the rule of capital. That, fundamentally, is the meaning of school. *Where children are concerned, their labour appears to be learning for their own benefit.*

Proletarian children have been forced to undergo the same education in the schools: this is capitalist leveling against the infinite possibilities of learning. Woman on the other hand has been isolated in the home, forced to carry out work that is considered unskilled, the work of giving birth to, raising, disciplining, and servicing the worker for production. Her role in the cycle of social production remained invisible because only the product of her labour, *the labourer*, was visible there. She herself was thereby trapped within pre-capitalist working conditions and never paid a wage.

And when we say “pre-capitalist working conditions” we do not refer only to women who have to use brooms to sweep. Even the best equipped American kitchens do not reflect the present level of technological development; at most they reflect the technology of the nineteenth century. If you are not paid by the hour, within certain limits, nobody cares how long it takes you to do your work.

This is not only a *quantitative* but a *qualitative* difference from other work, and it stems precisely from the kind of commodity that this work is destined to produce. Within the capitalist system generally, the productivity of labour doesn't increase unless there is a confrontation between capital and class: technological innovations and

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

co-operation are at the same time moments of attack for the working class and moments of capitalistic response. But if this is true for the production of commodities generally, this has not been true for the production of that special kind of commodity, labour power. If technological innovation can lower the limit of necessary work, and if the working-class struggle in industry can use that innovation for gaining free hours, the same cannot be said of housework; to the extent that she must in isolation procreate, raise and be responsible for children, a high mechanization of domestic chores doesn't free any time for the woman. She is always on duty, for the machine doesn't exist that makes and minds children.⁹ A higher productivity of domestic work through mechanization, then, can be related only to specific services, for example, cooking, washing, cleaning. Her workday is unending not because she has not machines, but because she is isolated.¹⁰

⁹We are not at all ignoring the attempts at this moment to make test-tube babies. But today such mechanisms belong completely to capitalist science and control. The use would be completely against us and against the class. It is not in our interest to abdicate procreation, to consign it to the hands of the enemy. It is in our interest to conquer the freedom to procreate for which we will pay neither the price of the wage nor the price of social exclusion.

¹⁰To the extent that not technological innovation but only "human care" can raise children, the effective liberation from domestic work time, the qualitative change of domestic work, can derive only from a movement of women, from a struggle of women: the more the movement grows, the less men-and first of all political militants can count on female baby minding. And at the same time the new social ambience that the movement constructs offers to children social space, with both men and women, that has nothing to do with the day care centers organized by the state. These are already victories of struggle. Precisely because they are the results

Confirming the Myth of Female Incapacity

With the advent of the capitalist mode of production, then, women were relegated to a condition of isolation, enclosed within the family cell, dependent in every aspect on men. The new autonomy of the free wage slave was denied her, and she remained in a pre-capitalist stage of personal dependence, but this time more brutalized because in contrast to the large-scale highly socialized production which now prevails. Woman's apparent incapacity to do certain things, to understand certain things, originated in her history, which is a history very similar in certain respects to that of "backward" children in special ESN classes. To the extent that women were cut off from direct socialized production and isolated in the home, all possibilities of social life outside the neighborhood were denied them, and hence they were deprived of social knowledge and social education. When women are deprived of wide experience of organizing and planning collectively industrial and other mass struggles, they are denied a basic source of education, the experience of social revolt. And this experience is primarily the experience of learning your own capacities, that is, your power, and the capacities, the power, of your class. Thus the isolation from which women have suffered has confirmed to society and to themselves the myth of female incapacity.

It is this myth which has hidden, firstly, that to the degree that the working class has been able to organize mass struggles in the community, rent strikes, struggles against inflation generally, the basis has always been the

of a movement that is by its nature a struggle, they do not aim to substitute any kind of co-operation for the struggle itself.

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

unceasing informal organization of women there; secondly, that in struggles in the cycle of direct production women's support and organization, formal and informal, has been decisive. At critical moments this unceasing network of women surfaces and develops through the talents, energies and strength of the "incapable female." But the myth does not die. Where women could together with men claim the victory – to survive (during unemployment) or to survive and win (during strikes) – the spoils of the victor belonged to the class "in general". Women rarely if ever got anything specifically for themselves; rarely if ever did the struggle have as an objective in any way altering the power structure of the home and its relation to the factory. Strike or unemployment, a woman's work is never done.

The Capitalist Function of the Uterus

Never as with the advent of capitalism has the destruction of woman as a person meant also the immediate diminution of her *physical integrity*. Feminine and masculine sexuality had already before capitalism undergone a series of regimes and forms of conditioning. But they had also undergone efficient methods of birth control, which have unaccountably disappeared. Capital established the family as the nuclear family and subordinated within it the woman to the man, as the person who, not directly participating in social production, does not present herself independently on the labour market. As it cuts off all her possibilities of creativity and of the development of her working activity, so it cuts off the expression of her sexual, psychological and emotional autonomy. We repeat: never had such a stunting of the physical integrity of woman

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

taken place, affecting everything from the brain to the uterus. Participating with others in the production of a train, a car or an aeroplane is not the same thing as using in isolation the same broom in the same few square feet of kitchen for centuries.

This is not a call for equality of men and women in the construction of airplanes, but it is merely to assume that the difference between the two histories not only determines the differences in the actual forms of struggle but brings also finally to light what has been invisible for so long: the different forms women's struggles have assumed in the past. In the same way as women are robbed of the possibility of developing their creative capacity, they are robbed of their sexual life which has been transformed into a function for reproducing labour power: the same observations which we made on the technological level of domestic services apply to birth control (and, by the way, to the whole field of gynaecology), research into which until recently has been continually neglected, while women have been forced to have children and were forbidden the right to have abortions when, as was to be expected, the most primitive techniques of birth control failed.

From this complete diminution of woman, capital constructed the female role, and has made the man in the family the instrument of this reduction. The man as wage worker and head of the family was the specific instrument of this specific exploitation which is the exploitation of women.

The Homosexuality of the Division of Labour

In this sense we can explain to what extent the degraded relationships between men and women are determined by the fracturing that society has imposed between man and woman, subordinating woman as object, the “complement” to man. And in this sense we can see the validity of the explosion of tendencies within the women’s movement in which women want to conduct the struggle against men as such¹¹ and no longer wish to use their strength to sustain even sexual relationships with them, since each of these relationships is always frustrating. A power relation precludes any possibility of affection and intimacy. Yet between men and women power as its right *commands* sexual affection and intimacy. In this sense, the gay movement is the most massive attempt to disengage sexuality and power.

But homosexuality generally is at the same time rooted in the framework of capitalist society itself: women at home and men in factories and offices, separated one from the other for the whole day; or a typical factory of 1,000 women with 10 foremen; or a typing pool (of women, of course) which works for 50 professional men. All these situations are already a homosexual framework of living.

Capital, while it elevates heterosexuality to a religion, at the same time in practice makes it impossible for men and women to be in touch with each other, physically or emotionally-it undermines heterosexuality except as a sexual, economic and social discipline. We believe that this is

¹¹It is impossible to say for how long these tendencies will continue to drive the movement forward and when they will turn into their opposite.

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

a reality from which we must begin. The explosion of the gay tendencies have been and are important for the movement precisely because they pose the urgency to claim for itself the specificity of women's struggle and above all to clarify in all their depths all facets and connections of the exploitation of women.

Surplus Value and the Social Factory

At this point then we would like to begin to clear the ground of a certain point of view which orthodox Marxism, especially in the ideology and practice of so-called Marxist parties, has always taken for granted. And this is: when women remain outside social production, that is, outside the socially organized productive cycle, they are also outside social productivity. The role of women, in other words, has always been seen as that of a psychologically subordinated person who, except where she is marginally employed outside the home, is outside production; essentially a supplier of a series of use values in the home. This basically was the viewpoint of Marx who, observing what happened to women working in the factories, concluded that it would have been better for them to be at home, where resided a morally higher form of life. But the true nature of the role of housewife never emerges clearly in Marx. Yet observers have noted that Lancashire women, cotton workers for over a century, are more sexually free and helped by men in domestic chores. On the other hand, in the Yorkshire coal-mining districts where a low percentage of women worked outside the home, women are more dominated by the figure of the husband. Even those

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

who have been able to define the exploitation of women in socialized production could not then go on to understand the exploited position of women in the home; men are too compromised in their relationship with women. For that reason only women can define themselves and move on the woman question.

We have to make clear that, within the wage, domestic work produces not merely use values, but is essential to the production of surplus value.¹² This is true of the entire female role as a personality which is subordinated at all levels, physical, psychological and occupational, which has had and continues to have a precise and vital place in the capitalist division of labour, in the pursuit of productivity at the social level. Let us examine more specifically the role of women as a source of social productivity, that is, of surplus value making. Firstly within the family.

A. The Productivity of Wage Slavery based on Unwaged Slavery

It is often asserted that, within the definition of wage labour, women in domestic labour are not productive. In

¹²Some first readers in English have found that this definition of women's work should be precise. What we meant precisely is that housework as work is productive in the Marxian sense, that is, is producing surplus value. We speak immediately after about the productivity of the entire female role. To make clearer the productivity of the woman both as related to her work and as related to her entire role must wait for a later text on which we are now at work. In this the woman's place is explained in a more articulated way from the point of view of the entire capitalistic circuit.

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

fact precisely the opposite is true if one thinks of the enormous quantity of social services which capitalist organization transforms into privatized activity, putting them on the backs of housewives. Domestic labour is not essentially “feminine work”; a woman doesn’t fulfill herself more or get less exhausted than a man from washing and cleaning. These are social services inasmuch as they serve the reproduction of labour power. And capital, precisely by instituting its family structure, has “liberated” the man from these functions so that he is completely “free” for direct exploitation; so that he is free to “earn” enough for a woman to reproduce him as labour power.¹³ It has made men wage slaves, then, to the degree that it has succeeded in allocating these services to women in the family, and by the same process controlled the flow of women onto the labour market. In Italy women are still necessary in the home and capital still needs this form of the family. At the present level of development in Europe generally, in Italy in particular, capital still prefers to import its labour power-in the form of millions of men from underdeveloped areas-while at the same time consigning women to the home.¹⁴

¹³Labour power “is a strange commodity for this is not a thing. The ability to labour resides only in a human being whose life is consumed in the process of producing. . . . To describe its basic production and reproduction is to describe women’s work” (From Selma James’ introduction).

¹⁴This, however, is being countered by an opposite tendency, to bring women into industry in certain particular sectors. Differing needs of capital within the same geographical sector have produced differing and even opposing propaganda and policies. Where in the past family stability has been based on a relatively standardized mythology (policy and propaganda being uniform and officially

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

And women are of service not only because they carry out domestic labour *without a wage and without going on strike*, but also because they always receive back into the home all those who are periodically expelled from their jobs by economic crisis. The family, this maternal cradle always ready to help and protect in time of need, has been in fact the best guarantee that the unemployed do not immediately become a horde of disruptive outsiders.

The organized parties of the working-class movement have been careful not to raise the question of domestic work. Aside from the fact that they have always treated women as a lower form of life, even in factories, to raise this question would be to challenge the whole basis of the trade unions as organizations that deal (a) only with the factory; (b) only with a measured and “paid” work day; (c) only with that side of wages which is given to us and not with the side of wages which is taken back, that is, inflation. Women have always been forced by the working-class parties to put off their liberation to some hypothetical future, making it dependent on the gains that men, limited in the scope of their struggles by these parties, win for “themselves.”

uncontested), today various sectors of capital contradict each other and undermine the very definition of family as a stable, unchanging, “natural” unit. The classic example of this is the variety of views and financial policies on birth control. The British government has recently doubled its allocation of funds for this purpose. We must examine to what extent this policy is connected with a racist immigration policy, that is, manipulation of the sources of mature labour power; and with the increasing erosion of the work ethic which results in movements of the unemployed and unsupported mothers, that is, controlling births which pollute the purity of capital with revolutionary children.

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

In reality, every phase of working-class struggle has fixed the subordination and exploitation of women at a higher level. The proposal of pensions for housewives¹⁵ (and this makes us wonder why not a wage) serves only to show the complete willingness of these parties further to institutionalize women as housewives and men (and women) as wage slaves.

Now it is clear that not one of us believes that emancipation, liberation, can be achieved through work. Work is still work, whether inside or outside the home. The independence of the wage earner means only being a “free individual” for capital, no less for women than for men. Those who advocate that the liberation of the working-class woman lies in her getting a job outside the home are part of the problem, not the solution. Slavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink. To deny this is also to deny the slavery of the assembly line itself, proving again that if you don’t know how women are exploited, you can never really know how men are. But this question is so crucial that we deal with it separately. What we wish to make clear here is that by the non-payment of a wage when we are producing in a world capitalistically organized, the figure of the boss is concealed behind that of the husband. He appears to be the sole recipient of domestic services, and this gives an ambiguous and slavlike character to housework. The husband and children, through their loving involvement, their

¹⁵Which is the policy, among others, of the Communist Party in Italy who for some years proposed a bill to the Italian parliament which would have given a pension to women at home, both housewives and single women, when they reached 55 years of age. This bill was never passed.

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

loving blackmail, become the first foremen, the immediate controllers of this labour.

The husband tends to read the paper and wait for his dinner to be cooked and served, even when his wife goes out to work as he does and comes home with him. Clearly, the specific form of exploitation represented by domestic work demands a corresponding, specific form of struggle, namely the women's struggle, *within the family*.

If we fail to grasp completely that precisely this family is the very pillar of the capitalist organization of work, if we make the mistake of regarding it only as a superstructure, dependent for change only on the stages of the struggle in the factories, then we will be moving in a limping revolution that will always perpetuate and *aggravate a basic contradiction in the class struggle, and a contradiction which is functional to capitalist development*. We would, in other words, be perpetuating the error of considering ourselves as producers of use values only, of considering housewives external to the working class. As long as housewives are considered external to the class, the class struggle at every moment and any point is impeded, frustrated, and unable to find full scope for its action. To elaborate this further is not our task here. To expose and condemn domestic work as a masked form of productive labour, however, raises a series of questions concerning both the aims and the forms of struggle of women.

Socializing the Struggle of the Isolated Labourer

In fact, the demand that would follow, namely "pay us wages for housework," would run the risk of looking, in the light of the present relationship of forces in Italy, as though

2. Women and the Subversion of the Community

we wanted further to entrench the condition of institutionalized slavery which is produced with the condition of housework – therefore such a demand could scarcely operate in practice as a mobilizing goal.¹⁶

The question is, therefore, to develop forms of struggle which do not leave the housewife peacefully at home, at most ready to take part in occasional demonstrations through the streets, waiting for a wage that would never pay for anything; rather we must discover forms of struggle which immediately break the whole structure of domestic work, rejecting it absolutely, rejecting our role as housewives and the home as the ghetto of our existence, since the problem is not only to stop doing this work, but to smash the entire role of housewife. *The starting point is not how to do housework more efficiently, but how to find a place as protagonist in the struggle: that is, not a higher productivity of domestic labour but a higher subversiveness in the struggle.*

To immediately overthrow the relation between time-given-to-housework and time-not-given-to-housework: it

¹⁶Today the demand of wages for housework is put forward increasingly and with less opposition in the women's movement in Italy and elsewhere. Since this document was first drafted (June '71), the debate has become more profound and many uncertainties that were due to the relative newness of the discussion have been dispelled. But above all, the weight of the needs of proletarian women has not only radicalized the demands of the movement. It has also given us greater strength and confidence to advance them. A year ago, at the beginning of the movement in Italy, there were those who still thought that the state could easily suffocate the female rebellion against housework by "paying" it with a monthly allowance of £7-£8 as they had already done especially with those "wretched of the earth" who were dependent on pensions.

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

is not necessary to spend time each day ironing sheets and curtains, cleaning the floor until it sparkles or to dust every day. And yet many women still do that. Obviously it is not because they are stupid: once again we are reminded of the parallel we made earlier with the ESN school. In reality, it is only in this work that they can realize an identity precisely because, as we said before, capital has cut them off from the process of socially organized production.

But it does not automatically follow that to be cut off from socialized production is to be cut off from socialized struggle: struggle, however, demands time away from housework, and at the same time it offers an alternative identity to the woman who before found it only at the level of the domestic ghetto. In the sociality of struggle women discover and exercise a power that effectively gives them a new identity. *The new identity is and can only be a new degree of social power.*

The possibility of social struggle arises out of the *socially productive character* of women's work in the home. It is not only or mainly the social services provided in the home that make women's role socially productive, even though in fact at this moment these services are identified with women's role. But capital can technologically improve the conditions of this work. What capital does not want to do for the time being, in Italy at least, is to destroy the position of the housewife as the pivot of the nuclear family. For this reason there is no point in our waiting for the automation of domestic work, because this will never happen: the maintenance of the nuclear family is incompatible with the automation of these services. To really automate them, capital would have to destroy the

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

family as we know it; that is, it would be driven to *socialize* in order to *automate* fully.

But we know all too well what their socialization means: it is always at the very least the opposite of the Paris Commune!

The new leap that capitalist reorganization could make and that we can already smell in the U. S. and in the more advanced capitalist countries generally is to destroy the pre-capitalist isolation of production in the home by constructing a family which more nearly reflects capitalist equality and its domination through co-operative labour; to transcend “the incompleteness of capitalist development” in the home, with the pre-capitalist, unfree woman as its pivot, and make the family more nearly reflect in its form its capitalist productive function, the reproduction of labour power.

To return then to what we said above: women, housewives, identifying themselves with the home, tend to a compulsive perfection in their work. We all know the saying too well; you can always find work to do in a house.

They don't see beyond their own four walls. The housewife's situation as a pre-capitalist mode of labour and consequently this “femininity” imposed upon her, makes her see the world, the others and the entire organization of work as a something which is obscure, essentially unknown and unknowable; not lived; perceived only as a shadow behind the shoulders of the husband who goes out each day and meets this something.

So when we say that women must overthrow the relation of domestic-work-time to non-domestic-time and must begin to move out of the home, we mean their point of departure must be precisely this willingness to destroy

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

the role of housewife, in order to begin to come together with other women, not only as neighbours and friends but as workmates and anti-workmates; thus breaking the tradition of privatized female, with all its rivalry, and reconstructing a real solidarity among women: not solidarity for defense but solidarity for attack, for the organization of the struggle.

A common solidarity against a common form of labour. In the same way, women must stop meeting their husbands and children only as wife and mother, that is, at mealtimes after they have come home from the outside world.

Every place of struggle outside the home, precisely because *every sphere of capitalist organization presupposes the home*, offers a chance for attack by women; factory meetings, neighbourhood meetings, student assemblies, each of them are legitimate places for women's struggle, where women can encounter and confront men – women versus men, if you like, but as individuals, rather than mother-father, son-daughter, with all the possibilities this offers to explode outside of the house the contradictions, the frustrations, that capital has wanted to implode within the family

A New Compass for Class Struggle

If women demand in workers' assemblies that the night-shift be abolished because at night, besides sleeping, one wants to make love-and it's not the same as making love during the day if the women work during the day-that would be advancing their own independent interests as

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

women against the social organization of work, refusing to be unsatisfied mothers for their husbands and children.

But in this new intervention and confrontation women are also expressing that their interests as women are not, as they have been told, separate and alien from the interests of the class. For too long political parties, especially of the left, and trade unions have determined and confined the areas of working class struggle. To make love and to refuse night work to make love, *is in the interest of the class*. To explore why it is women and not men who raise the question is to shed new light on the whole history of the class.

To meet your sons and daughters at a student assembly is to discover them as individuals who speak among other individuals; it is to present yourself to them as an individual. Many women have had abortions and very many have given birth. We can't see why they should not express their point of view as women first, whether or not they are students, in an assembly of medical students: (We do not give the medical faculty as an example by accident. In the lecture hall and in the clinic, we can see once more the exploitation of the working class not only when third class patients exclusively are made the guinea pigs for research. Women especially are the prime objects of experimentation and also of the sexual contempt, sadism, and professional arrogance of doctors.)

To sum up: the most important thing becomes precisely this explosion of the women's movement as an expression of the specificity of female interests hitherto castrated from all its connections by the capitalist organization of the family. This has to be waged in every quarter of this society, each of which is founded precisely on the suppres-

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

sion of such interests, since the entire class exploitation has been built upon the specific mediation of women's exploitation.

And so as a women's movement we must pinpoint every single area in which this exploitation is located, that is, we must regain the whole specificity of the female interest in the course of waging the struggle.

Every opportunity is a good one: housewives of families threatened with eviction can object that their housework has more than covered the rent of the months they didn't pay. On the out-skirts of Milan, many families have already taken up this form of struggle.

Electric appliances in the home are lovely things to have, but for the workers who make them, to make many is to spend time and to exhaust yourself. That every wage has to buy all of them is tough, and presumes that every wife must run all these appliances alone; and this only means that she is frozen in the home, but now on a more mechanized level. Lucky worker, lucky wife!

The question is not to have communal canteens. We must remember that capital makes Fiat for the workers first, then their canteen.

For this reason to demand a communal canteen in the neighborhood without integrating this demand into a practice of struggle against the organization of labor, against labor time, risks giving the impetus for a new leap that, on the community level, would regiment none other than women in some alluring work so that we will then have the possibility at lunchtime of eating shit collectively in the canteen.

We want them to know that this is not the canteen we want, nor do we want play centers or nurseries of the same

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

order.¹⁷ We want canteens too, and nurseries and washing machines and dishwashers, but we also want choices: to eat in privacy with few people when we want, to have time to be with children, to be with old people, with the sick, when and where we choose. To “have time” means to work less. To have time to be with children, the old and the sick does not mean running to pay a quick visit to the garages where you park children or old people or invalids. It means that we, the first to be excluded, are taking the initiative in this struggle so that all those other excluded people, the children, the old and the ill, can re-appropriate the social wealth; to be re-integrated with us and all of us with men, not as dependents but autonomously, as we women want for ourselves; since their exclusion, like ours, from the directly productive social process, from social existence, has been created by capitalist organization.

¹⁷There has been some confusion over what we have said about canteens. A similar confusion expressed itself in the discussions in other countries as well as Italy about wages for housework. As we explained earlier, housework is as institutionalized as factory work and our ultimate goal is to destroy both institutions. But aside from which demand we are speaking about, there is a misunderstanding of what a demand is. It is a goal which is not only a thing but, like capital at any moment, essentially a stage of antagonism of a social relation. Whether the canteen or the wages we win will be a victory or a defeat depends on the force of our struggle. On that force depends whether the goal is an occasion for capital to more rationally command our labor or an occasion for us to weaken their hold on that command. What form the goal takes when we achieve it, whether it is wages or canteens or free birth control, emerges and is in fact created in the struggle, and registers the degree of power that we reached in that struggle.

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

The Refusal of Work

Hence we must refuse housework as women's work, as work imposed upon us, which we never invented, which has never been paid for, in which they have forced us to cope with absurd hours, 12 and 13 a day, in order to force us to stay at home. We must get out of the house; we must reject the home, because we want to unite with other women, to struggle against all situations which presume that women will stay at home, to link ourselves to the struggles of all those who are in ghettos, whether that ghetto is a nursery, a school, a hospital, an old-age home, or a slum. To abandon the home is already a form of struggle, since the social services we perform there would then cease to be carried out in those conditions, and so all those who work out of the home would then demand that the burden carried by us until now be thrown squarely where it belongs – onto the shoulders of capital. This alteration in the terms of struggle will be all the more violent the more the refusal of domestic labour on the part of women will be violent, determined and on a mass scale.

The working-class family is the more difficult point to break because it is the support of the worker, but as worker, and for that reason the support of capital. On this family depends the support of the class, the survival of the class – but *at the woman's expense against the class itself*. The woman is the slave of a wage slave, and her slavery ensures the slavery of her man. Like the trade union, the family protects the worker, but also ensures that he *and she* will never be anything but workers. And that is why the struggle of the woman of the working class against the family is crucial.

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

To meet other women who work inside and outside their homes allows us to possess other chances of struggle. To the extent that our struggle is a struggle against work, it is inscribed in the struggle which the working class wages against capitalist work. But to the extent that the exploitation of women through domestic work has had its own specific history, tied to the survival of the nuclear family, the specific course of this struggle which must pass through the destruction of the nuclear family as established by the capitalist social order, adds a new dimension to the class struggle.

B. The Productivity of Passivity

However, the woman's role in the family is not only that of hidden supplier of social services who does not receive a wage. As we said at the beginning, to imprison women in purely complementary functions and subordinate them to men within the nuclear family has as its premise the stunting of their physical integrity. In Italy, with the successful help of the Catholic Church which has always defined her as an inferior being, a woman is compelled before marriage into sexual abstinence and after marriage into a repressed sexuality destined only to bear children, obliging her to bear children. It has created a female image of "heroic mother and happy wife" whose sexual identity is pure sublimation, whose function is essentially that of receptacle for other people's emotional expression, who is the cushion of the familial antagonism. What has been defined, then, as female frigidity has to be redefined as an imposed passive receptivity in the sexual function as well.

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

Now this passivity of the woman in the family is itself “productive.” First it makes her the outlet for all the oppressions that men suffer in the world outside the home and at the same time the object on whom the man can exercise a hunger for power that the domination of the capitalist organization of work implants. In this sense, the woman becomes productive for capitalist organization; she acts as a safety valve for the social tensions caused by it. Secondly, the woman becomes productive inasmuch as the complete denial of her personal autonomy forces her to sublimate her frustration in a series of continuous needs that are always centered in the home, a kind of consumption which is the exact parallel of her compulsive perfectionism in her housework. Clearly, it is not our job to tell women what they should have in their homes. Nobody can define the needs of others. Our interest is to organize the struggle through which this sublimation will be unnecessary.

Dead Labour & the Agony of Sexuality

We use the word “sublimation” advisedly. The frustrations of monotonous and trivial chores and of sexual passivity are only separable in words. Sexual creativity and creativity in labour are both areas where human need demands we give free scope to our “interplaying natural and acquired activities”.¹⁸ For women (and therefore men)

¹⁸Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Band 1, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1962, p. 512. “Large-scale industry makes it a question of life and death to replace that monstrosity which is a miserable available working population, kept in reserve for the changing needs of exploitation by capital, to replace this with the

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

natural and acquired powers are repressed simultaneously. The passive sexual receptivity of women creates the compulsively tidy housewife and can make a monotonous assembly line therapeutic. The trivia of most of housework and the discipline' which is required to perform the same work over every day, every week, every year, double on holidays, destroys the possibilities of uninhibited sexuality. Our childhood is a preparation for martyrdom: we are taught to derive happiness from clean sex on whiter than white sheets; to sacrifice sexuality and other creative activity at one and the same time.

So far the women's movement, most notably by destroying the myth of the vaginal orgasm, has exposed the physical mechanism which allowed women's sexual potential to be strictly defined and limited by men. Now we can begin to reintegrate sexuality with other aspects of creativity, to see how sexuality will always be constrained unless the work we do does not mutilate us and our individual capacities, and unless the persons with whom we have sexual relations are not our masters and are not also mutilated by their work. To explode the vaginal myth is to demand female autonomy as opposed to subordination and sublimation. But it is not only the clitoris versus the vagina. It is both versus the uterus. Either the vagina is primarily the passage to the reproduction of labour power sold as a commodity, the capitalist function of the uterus, or it is part of our natural powers, our social equipment.

absolute availability of the individual for changing requisites of work; to replace the partial individual, a mere bearer of a social detail function, with the fully developed individual for whom varied social functions are modes of interplaying natural and acquired activities."

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

Sexuality after all is the most social of expressions, the deepest human communication. It is in that sense the dissolution of autonomy. The working class organizes as a class to transcend itself as a class; within that class we organize autonomously to create the basis to transcend autonomy.

The “Political” Attack Against Women

But while we are finding our way of being and of organizing ourselves in struggle, we discover we are confronted by those who are only too eager to attack women, even as we form a movement. In defending herself against obliteration, through work and through consumption, they say, the woman is responsible for the lack of unity of the class. Let us make a partial list of the sins of which she stands accused. They say:

1. She wants more of her husband’s wage to buy for example clothes for herself and her children, not based on what he thinks she needs but on what she thinks she and her children should have. He works hard for the money. She only demands another kind of distribution of their lack of wealth, rather than assisting his struggle for more wealth, more wages.
2. She is in rivalry with other women to be more attractive than they, to have more things than they do, and to have a cleaner and tidier house than her neighbors’. She doesn’t ally with them as she should on a class basis.

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

3. She buries herself in her home and refuses to understand the struggle of her husband on the production line. She may even complain when he goes out on strike rather than backing him up. She votes Conservative.

These are some of the reasons given by those who consider her reactionary or at best backward, even by men who take leading roles in factory struggles and who seem most able to understand the nature of the social boss because of their militant action. It comes easy to them to condemn women for what they consider to be backwardness because that is the prevailing ideology of the society. They do not add that they have benefited from women's subordinate position by being waited on hand and foot from the moment of their birth. Some do not even know that they have been waited on, so natural is it to them for mothers and sisters and daughters to serve "their" men. It is very difficult for us, on the other hand, to separate inbred male supremacy from men's attack, which appears to be strictly "political", launched only for the benefit of the class.

Let us look at the matter more closely.

1. **Women as Consumers**

Women do not make the home the center of consumption. The process of consumption is integral to the production of labor power, and if women refused to do the shopping (that is, to spend), this would be strike action. Having said that, however, we must add that those social relationships which women are denied because they are cut off from socially organized labor, they often try to compensate for

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

by buying things. Whether it is adjudged trivial depends on the viewpoint and sex of the judge. Intellectuals buy books, but no one calls this consumption trivial. Independent of the validity of the contents, the book in this society still represents, through a tradition older than capitalism, a male value.

We have already said that women buy things for their home because that home is the only proof that they exist. But the idea that frugal consumption is in any way a liberation is as old as capitalism, and comes from the capitalists who always blame the worker's situation on the worker. For years Harlem was told by head-shaking liberals that if Black men would only stop driving Cadillacs (until the finance company took them back), the problem of color would be solved. Until the violence of the struggle—the only fitting reply—provided a measure of social power, that Cadillac was one of the few ways to display the potential for power. *This* and not “practical economics” caused the liberals pain.

In any case, nothing any of us buys would we need if we were free. Not the food they poison for us, nor the clothes that identify us by class, sex and generation, nor the houses in which they imprison us.

In any case, too, our problem is that we never have enough, not that we have too much. And that pressure which women place on men is *a defense of the wage, not an attack*. Precisely because women are the slaves of wage slaves, men divide the wage between themselves and the general family expense. If women did not make demands, the general family standard of living could drop to absorb the inflation — the woman of course is the first to do without. Thus unless the woman makes demands, the family

2. Women and the Subversion of the Community

is functional to capital in an additional sense to the ones we have listed: it can absorb the fall in the price of labor power.¹⁹ This, therefore, is the most ongoing material way in which women can defend the living standards of the class. And when they go out to political meetings, they will need even more money!

2. Women as Rivals

As for women's "rivalry," Frantz Fanon has clarified for the Third World what only racism prevents from being generally applied to the class. The colonized, he says, when they do not organize against their oppressors, attack each other. The woman's pressure for greater consumption may at times express itself in the form of rivalry, but nevertheless as we have said protects the living standards of the class. Which is unlike women's sexual rivalry; that rivalry is rooted in their economic and social dependence on men. To the degree that they live for men, dress for

¹⁹"But the other, more fundamental, objection, which we shall develop in the ensuing chapters, flows from our disputing the assumption that the general level of real wages is directly determined by the character of the wage bargain . . . We shall endeavor to show that primarily it is *certain other forces* which determine the general level of real wages. . . We shall argue that there has been a *fundamental misunderstanding of how in this respect the economy in which we live actually works.*" (Emphasis added.) *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, John Maynard Keynes, N.Y., Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964, p.13. "Certain other forces", in our view, are first of all women.

2. Women and the Subversion of the Community

men, work for men, they are manipulated by men through this rivalry.²⁰

²⁰It has been noticed that many of the Bolsheviks after 1917 found female partners among the dispossessed aristocracy. When power continues to reside in men both at the level of the State and in individual relations, women continue to be "the spoil and handmaid of communal lust" (Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1959, p.94). The breed of "the new tsars" goes back a long way.

Already in 1921 from "Decisions of the Third Congress of the Communist International", one can read in Part I of "Work Among Women": "The Third Congress of the Comintern confirms the basic proposition of revolutionary Marxism, that is, that there is no 'specific woman question' and no 'specific women's movement', and that every sort of alliance of working women with bourgeois feminism, as well as any support by the women workers of the treacherous tactics of the social compromisers and opportunists, leads to the undermining of the forces of the proletariat . . . In order to put an end to women's slavery it is necessary to inaugurate the new Communist organization of society."

The theory being male, the practice was to "neutralize." Let us quote from one of the founding fathers. At the first National Conference of Communist Women of the Communist Party of Italy on March 26, 1922, "Comrade Gramsci pointed out that special action must be organized among housewives, who constitute the large majority of the proletarian women. He said that they should be related in some way to our movement by our setting up special organizations. Housewives, as far as the quality of their work is concerned, can be considered similar to the artisans and therefore they will hardly be communists; however, because they are the workers' mates, and because they share in some way the workers' life, they are attracted toward communism. Our propaganda can therefore have an influence over [sic] these housewives; it can be instrumental, if not to officer them into our organization, to neutralize them; so that they do not stand in the way of the possible struggles by the workers." (From *Compagna*, the Italian Commu-

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

As for rivalry about their homes, women are trained from birth to be obsessive and possessive about clean and tidy homes. But men cannot have it both ways; they cannot continue to enjoy the privilege of having a private servant and then complain about the effects of privatization. If they continue to complain, we must conclude that their attack on us for rivalry is really an apology for our servitude. If Fanon was not right, that the strife among the colonized is an expression of their low level of organization, then the antagonism is a sign of natural incapacity. When we call a home a ghetto, we could call it a colony governed by indirect rule and be as accurate. The resolution of the antagonism of the colonized to each other lies in autonomous struggle. Women have overcome greater obstacles than rivalry to unite in supporting men in struggles. Where women have been less successful is in transforming and deepening moments of struggle by making of them opportunities to raise their own demands. Autonomous struggle turns the question on its head: not “will women unite to support men,” but “will men unite to support women.”

3. **Women as Divisive**

What has prevented previous political intervention by women? Why can they be used in certain circumstances against strikes? Why, in other words, is the class not united? From the beginning of this document we have made central the exclusion of women from socialized pro-

nist Party organ for work among women, Year I, No.3 (April 2, 1922] , p.2.)

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

duction. That is an objective character of capitalist organization: co-operative labor in the factory and office, isolated labor in the home. This is mirrored subjectively by the way workers in industry organize separately from the community. What is the community to do? What are women to do? Support, be appendages to men in the home *and* in the struggle, even form a women's auxiliary to unions? This division, and *this kind of division* is the history of the class. At every stage of the struggle the most peripheral to the productive cycle are used against those at the center, so long as the latter ignore the former. This is the history of trade unions, for example, in the United States, when Black workers were used as strikebreakers – never, by the way, as often as white workers were led to believe – Blacks like women are immediately identifiable and reports of strikebreaking reinforce prejudices which arise from objective divisions: the white on the assembly line, the Black sweeping round his feet; or the man on the assembly line, the woman sweeping round his feet when he gets home.

Men when they reject work consider themselves militant, and when we reject our work, these same men consider us nagging wives. When some of us vote Conservative because we have been excluded from political struggle, they think we are backward, while they have voted for parties which didn't even consider that we existed as anything but ballast, and in the process sold them (and us all) down the river.

C. The Productivity of Discipline

The third aspect of women's role in the family is that, because of the special brand of stunting of the personality

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

already discussed, the woman becomes a repressive figure, disciplinarian of all the members of the family, ideologically and psychologically. She may live under the tyranny of her husband, of her home, the tyranny of striving to be “heroic mother and happy wife” when her whole existence repudiates this ideal. Those who are tyrannized and lack power are with the new generation for the first years of their lives producing docile workers and little tyrants, in the same way the teacher does at school. (In this the woman is joined by her husband: not by chance do parent teacher associations exist.) Women, responsible for the reproduction of labor power, on the one hand discipline the children who will be workers tomorrow and on the other hand discipline the husband to work today, for only his wage can pay for labor power to be reproduced.

Here we have only attempted to consider female domestic productivity without going into detail about the psychological implications. At least we have located and essentially outlined this female domestic productivity as it passes through the complexities of the role that the woman plays (in addition, that is, to the actual domestic work the burden of which she assumes without pay). We pose, then, as foremost the need to break this role that wants women divided from each other, from men and from children, each locked in her family as the chrysalis in the cocoon that imprisons itself by its own work, to die and leave silk for capital. To reject all this, as we have already said, means for housewives to recognize themselves also as a section of the class, the most degraded because they are not paid a wage.

The housewife’s position in the overall struggle of women is crucial, since it undermines the very pillar

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

supporting the capitalist organization of work, namely the family.

So every goal that tends to affirm the individuality of women against this figure complementary to everything and everybody, that is, the housewife, is worth posing as a goal subversive to the continuation, the productivity of this role.

In this same sense all the demands that can serve to restore to the woman the integrity of her basic physical functions, starting with the sexual one which was the first to be robbed along with productive creativity, have to be posed with the greatest urgency.

It is not by chance that research in birth control has developed so slowly, that abortion is forbidden almost the world over or conceded finally only for “therapeutic” reasons.

To move first on these demands is not facile reformism. Capitalist management of these matters poses over and over discrimination of class and discrimination of women specifically.

Why were proletarian women, Third World women, used as guinea pigs in this research? Why does the question of birth control continue to be posed as women’s problem? To begin to struggle to overthrow the capitalist management over these matters is to move on a class basis, and on a specifically female basis. To link these struggles with the struggle against motherhood conceived as the responsibility of women exclusively, against domestic work conceived as women’s work, ultimately against the models that capitalism offers us as examples of women’s emancipation which are nothing more than ugly copies of the male role,

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

is to struggle against the division and organization of labor.

Women & the Struggle Not to Work

Let us sum up. The role of housewife, behind whose isolation is hidden social labour, must be destroyed. But our alternatives are strictly defined. Up to now, the myth of female incapacity, rooted in this isolated woman dependent on someone else's wage and therefore shaped by someone else's consciousness, has been broken by only one action: the woman getting her own wage, breaking the back of personal economic dependence, making her own independent experience with the world outside the home, performing social labour in a socialized structure, whether the factory or the office, and initiating there her own forms of social rebellion along with the traditional forms of the class. *The advent of the women's movement is a rejection of this alternative.*

Capital itself is seizing upon the same impetus which created a movement—the rejection by millions of women of women's traditional place—to recompose the work force with increasing numbers of women. The movement can only develop in opposition to this. It poses by its very existence and must pose with increasing articulation in action that women refuse the myth of liberation through work.

For we have worked enough. We have chopped billions of tons of cotton, washed billions of dishes, scrubbed billions of floors, typed billions of words, wired billions of radio sets, washed billions of nappies, by hand and in machines.

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

Every time they have “let us in” to some traditionally male enclave, it was to find for us a new level of exploitation. Here again we must make a parallel, different as they are, between underdevelopment in the Third World and underdevelopment in the metropolis – to be more precise, in the kitchens of the metropolis. Capitalist planning proposes to the Third World that it “develop”; that in addition to its present agonies, it too suffer the agony of an industrial counter-revolution. Women in the metropolis have been offered the same “aid”. But those of us who have gone out of our homes to work because we had to or for extras or for economic independence have warned the rest: inflation has riveted us to this bloody typing-pool or to this assembly-line, and in that there is no salvation. We must refuse the development they are offering us. But the struggle of the working woman is not to return to the isolation of the home, appealing as this sometimes may be on Monday morning; any more than the housewife’s struggle is to exchange being imprisoned in a house for being clinched to desks or machines, appealing as this sometimes may be compared to the loneliness of the twelfth-storey flat.

Women must completely discover their own possibilities – which are neither mending socks nor becoming captains of ocean-going ships. Better still, we may wish to do these things, but these now cannot be located anywhere but in the history of capital.

The challenge to the women’s movement is to find modes of struggle which, while they liberate women from the home, at the same time avoid on the one hand a double slavery and on the other prevent another degree of capitalist control and regimentation. *This ultimately is the*

2. *Women and the Subversion of the Community*

dividing line between reformism and revolutionary politics within the women's movement.

It seems that there have been few women of genius. There could not be since, cut off from the social process, we cannot see on what matters they could exercise their genius. Now there is a matter, the struggle itself.

Freud said also that every woman from birth suffers from penis envy. He forgot to add that this feeling of envy begins from the moment when she perceives that in some way to have a penis means to have power. Even less did he realize that the traditional power of the penis commenced upon a whole new history at the very moment when the separation of man from woman became a capitalistic division.

And this is where our struggle begins.

3. On The General Strike

Mariarosa Dalla Costa

1974

Today the feminist movement in Italy is opening the campaign for WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK. As you have heard from the songs, as you have seen from the photograph exhibition, as you have read on the placards, the questions we are raising today are many: the barbarous conditions in which we have to face abortion, the sadism we are subjected to in obstetric and gynaecological clinics, our working conditions – in jobs outside the home our conditions are always worse than men's, and at home we work without wages – the fact that social services either don't exist or are so bad that we are afraid to let our children use them, and so on.

Now at some point people might ask, what is the connection between the campaign we are opening today, the campaign for WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK, and all these things that we have raised today, that we have exposed and are fighting against? All these things that we have spoken about, that we have made songs about, that we have shown in our exhibitions and films?

We believe that the weakness of all women – that weakness that's behind our being crossed out of all history,

3. *On The General Strike*

that's behind the fact that when we leave the home we must face the most revolting, underpaid and insecure jobs – this weakness is based on the fact that all of us women, whatever we do, are wearied and exhausted at the very outset by the 13 hours of housework that no-one has ever recognized, that no-one has ever paid for.

And this is the basic condition that forces women to be satisfied with nurseries like the “Pagliuca,” “Celestini,” “OMNI.” [“Pagliuca” and “Celestini” – both notoriously brutal nurseries. “OMNI” – the State nurseries which are poorly equipped and badly run.] This weakness forces us to pay half a million lire for an abortion and this, let's spell it out clearly, happens in every city and every country – and on top of that we risk death and imprisonment.

We all do housework; it is the only thing all women have in common, it is the only base on which we can gather our power, the power of millions of women.

It is no accident that reformists of every stripe have always carefully avoided the idea of our organizing on the basis of housework. They have always refused to recognize housework as work, precisely because it is the only work that we all have in common. It is one thing to confront two or three hundred women workers in a shoe factory, and quite another to confront millions of housewives. And since all women factory workers are housewives, it is still another matter to confront these two or three hundred factory workers united with millions of housewives.

But this is what we are putting on the agenda today in this square. This is the first moment of organization. We have decided to organize ourselves around the work that we all do, in order to have the power of millions of women.

3. *On The General Strike*

For us, there, the demand for wages for housework is a direct demand for power, because housework is what millions of women have in common.

If we can organize ourselves in our millions on this demand – and already there are quite a lot of us in this square – we can get so much power that we need no longer be in a position of weakness when we go out of the home. We can bring about new working conditions in housework itself – if I have money of my own in my pocket I can even buy a dishwasher without feeling guilty and without having to beg my husband for it for months on end while he, who doesn't do the washing-up, considers a dishwasher unnecessary.

So if I have money of my own, paid into my own hands, I can change the conditions of housework itself. And moreover I will be able to choose when I want to go out to work. If I have 120,000 lire for housework I'll never again sell myself for 60,000 lire in a textile factory, or as someone's secretary, or as a cashier or usherette at the cinema. In the same way, if I already have a certain amount of money in my own hands, if I already have with me the power of millions of women, I will be able to dictate a completely new quality of services, nurseries, canteens, and all those facilities that are indispensable in reducing working hours and in enabling us to have a social life.

We want to say something else. For a long time – particularly strongly in the past 10 years, but let's say always – male workers have come out to struggle against their hours of work and for more money, and have gathered in this square.

In the factories of Porto Marghera there have been many strikes, many struggles. We well remember the marches

3. On The General Strike

of male workers who started in Porto Marghera, crossed the Mestre Bridge and arrived here in this square.

But let's make this clear. No strike has ever been a general strike. When half the working population is at home in the kitchens, while the others are on strike, it's not a general strike.

We've never seen a general strike. We've only seen men, generally men from the big factories, come out on the streets, while their wives, daughters, sisters, mothers, went on cooking in the kitchens.

Today in this square, with the opening of our mobilization for WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK, we put on the agenda our working hours, our holidays, our strikes and our money. When we win a level of power that enables us to reduce our 13 or more working hours a day to eight hours or even less than eight, when at the same time we can put on the agenda our holidays – because it's no secret to anyone that on Sundays and during vacation time women never have a holiday – then, perhaps, we'll be able to talk for the first time of a 'general' strike of the working class.¹

¹Originally published in *All Work and No Pay: Women, Housework and the Wages Due*. Falling Wall Press. [1975]. Dalla Costa gave the above speech at a 1974 celebration of International Women's Day in Mestre, Italy.

4. Wages Against Housework

Silvia Federici

1974

They say it is love. We say it is unwaged work.

They call it frigidity. We call it absenteeism.

Every miscarriage is a work accident.

Homosexuality and heterosexuality are both working conditions...but homosexuality is workers' control of production, not the end of work.

More smiles? More money. Nothing will be so powerful in destroying the healing virtues of a smile.

Neuroses, suicides, desexualization: occupational diseases of the housewife.

Many times the difficulties and ambiguities which women express in discussing wages for housework stem from the fact that they reduce wages for housework to a thing, a lump of money, instead of viewing it as a political perspective. The difference between these two standpoints is

4. *Wages Against Housework*

enormous. To view wages for housework as a thing rather than a perspective is to detach the end result of our struggle from the struggle itself and to miss its significance in demystifying and subverting the role to which women have been confined in capitalist society.

When we view wages for housework in this reductive way we start asking ourselves: what difference could some more money make to our lives? We might even agree that for a lot of women who do not have any choice except for housework and marriage, it would indeed make a lot of difference. But for those of us who seem to have other choices – professional work, enlightened husband, communal way of life, gay relations or a combination of these – it would not make much of a difference at all. For us there are supposedly other ways of achieving economic independence, and the last thing we want is to get it by identifying ourselves as housewives, a fate which we all agree is, so to speak, worse than death. The problem with this position is that in our imagination we usually add a bit of money to the shitty lives we have now and then ask, so what? on the false premise that we could ever get that money without at the same time revolutionizing – in the process of struggling for it – all our family and social relations. But if we take wages for housework as a political perspective, we can see that struggling for it is going to produce a revolution in our lives and in our social power as women. It is also clear that if we think we do not ‘need’ that money, it is because we have accepted the particular forms of prostitution of body and mind by which we get the money to hide that need. As I will try to show, not only is wages for housework a revolutionary perspective, but it is the only revolutionary perspective

4. *Wages Against Housework*

from a feminist viewpoint and ultimately for the entire working class.

A Labour of Love

It is important to recognize that when we speak of housework we are not speaking of a job as other jobs, but we are speaking of one of the most pervasive manipulations, most subtle and mystified forms of violence that capitalism has perpetrated against any section of the working class. True, under capitalism every worker is manipulated and exploited and his/her relation to capital is totally mystified. The wage gives the impression of a fair deal: you work and you get paid, hence you and your boss are equal; while in reality the wage, rather than paying for the work you do, hides all the unpaid work that goes into profit. But the wage at least recognizes that you are a worker, and you can bargain and struggle around and against the terms and the quantity of that wage, the terms and the quantity of that work. To have a wage means to be part of a social contract, and there is no doubt concerning its meaning: you work, not because you like it, or because it comes naturally to you, but because it is the only condition under which you are allowed to live. But exploited as you might be, you are not that work. Today you are a postman, tomorrow a cabdriver. All that matters is how much of that work you have to do and how much of that money you can get.

But in the case of housework the situation is qualitatively different. The difference lies in the fact that not only has housework been imposed on women, but it has

4. *Wages Against Housework*

been transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character. Housework had to be transformed into a natural attribute rather than be recognized as a social contract because from the beginning of capital's scheme for women this work was destined to be unwaged. Capital had to convince us that it is a natural, unavoidable and even fulfilling activity to make us accept our unwaged work. In its turn, the unwaged condition of housework has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common assumption that housework is not work, thus preventing women from struggling against it, except in the privatized kitchen – bedroom quarrel that all society agrees to ridicule, thereby further reducing the protagonist of a struggle. We are seen as nagging bitches, not workers in struggle.

Yet just how natural it is to be a housewife is shown by the fact that it takes at least twenty years of socialization – day-to-day training, performed by an unwaged mother – to prepare a woman for this role, to convince her that children and husband are the best she can expect from life. Even so, it hardly succeeds. No matter how well-trained we are, few are the women who do not feel cheated when the bride's day is over and they find themselves in front of a dirty sink. Many of us still have the illusion that we marry for love. A lot of us recognize that we marry for money and security; but it is time to make it clear that while the love or money involved is very little, the work which awaits us is enormous. This is why older women always tell us 'Enjoy your freedom while you can, buy whatever you want now...' But unfortunately it is almost impossible to enjoy any freedom if from the earliest days

4. *Wages Against Housework*

of life you are trained to be docile, subservient, dependent and most important to sacrifice yourself and even to get pleasure from it. If you don't like it, it is your problem, your failure, your guilt, your abnormality.

We must admit that capital has been very successful in hiding our work. It has created a true masterpiece at the expense of women. By denying housework a wage and transforming it into an act of love, capital has killed many birds with one stone. First of all, it has got a hell of a lot of work almost for free, and it has made sure that women, far from struggling against it, would seek that work as the best thing in life (the magic words: "Yes, darling, you are a real woman"). At the same time, it has disciplined the male worker also, by making 'his' woman dependent on his work and his wage, and trapped him in this discipline by giving him a servant after he himself has done so much serving at the factory or the office. In fact, our role as women is to be the unwaged but happy, and most of all loving, servants of the 'working class', i.e. those strata of the proletariat to which capital was forced to grant more social power. In the same way as god created Eve to give pleasure to Adam, so did capital create the housewife to service the male worker physically, emotionally and sexually – to raise his children, mend his socks, patch up his ego when it is crushed by the work and the social relations (which are relations of loneliness) that capital has reserved for him. It is precisely this peculiar combination of physical, emotional and sexual services that are involved in the role women must perform for capital that creates the specific character of that servant which is the housewife, that makes her work so burdensome and at the same time invisible. It is not an accident that most men

4. *Wages Against Housework*

start thinking of getting married as soon as they get their first job. This is not only because now they can afford it, but because having somebody at home who takes care of you is the only condition not to go crazy after a day spent on an assembly line or at a desk. Every woman knows that this is what she should be doing to be a true woman and have a 'successful' marriage. And in this case too, the poorer the family the higher the enslavement of the woman, and not simply because of the monetary situation. In fact capital has a dual policy, one for the middle class and one for the proletarian family. It is no accident that we find the most unsophisticated machismo in the working class family: the more blows the man gets at work the more his wife must be trained to absorb them, the more he is allowed to recover his ego at her expense. You beat your wife and vent your rage against her when you are frustrated or overtired by your work or when you are defeated in a struggle (to go into a factory is itself a defeat). The more the man serves and is bossed around, the more he bosses around. A man's home is his castle . . . and his wife has to learn to wait in silence when he is moody, to put him back together when he is broken down and swears at the world, to turn around in bed when he says 'I'm too tired tonight,' or when he goes so fast at lovemaking that, as one woman put it, he might as well make it with a mayonnaise jar. (Women however have always found ways of fighting back, or getting back at them, but always in an isolated and privatized way. The problem, then, becomes how to bring this struggle out of the kitchen and bedroom and into the streets.)

This fraud that goes under the name of love and marriage affects all of us, even if we are not married, because

4. *Wages Against Housework*

once housework was totally naturalized and sexualized, once it became a feminine attribute, all of us as females are characterized by it. If it is natural to do certain things, then all women are expected to do them and even like doing them – even those women who, due to their social position, could escape some of that work or most of it (their husbands can afford maids and shrinks and other forms of relaxation and amusement). We might not serve one man, but we are all in a servant relation with respect to the whole male world. This is why to be called a female is such a putdown, such a degrading thing. (“Smile, honey, what’s the matter with you?” is something every man feels entitled to ask you, whether he is your husband, or the man who takes your ticket on a train, or your boss at work.)

The Revolutionary Perspective

If we start from this analysis we can see the revolutionary implications of the demand for wages for housework. It is the demand by which our nature ends and our struggle begins because just to want wages for housework means to refuse that work as the expression of our nature, and therefore to refuse precisely the female role that capital has invented for us.

To ask for wages for housework will by itself undermine the expectations society has of us, since these expectations – the essence of our socialization – are all functional to our wageless condition in the home. In this sense, it is absurd to compare the struggle of women for wages to the struggle of male workers in the factory for more wages.

4. *Wages Against Housework*

The waged worker in struggling for more wages challenges his social role but remains within it. When we struggle for wages we struggle unambiguously and directly against our social role. In the same way there is a qualitative difference between the struggles of the waged worker and the struggles of the slave for a wage against that slavery. It should be clear, however, that when we struggle for a wage we do not struggle to enter capitalist relations, because we have never been out of them. We struggle to break capital's plan for women, which is an essential moment of the divisions within the working class, through which capital has been able to maintain its power. Wages for housework, then, is a revolutionary demand not because by itself it destroys capital, but because it forces capital to restructure social relations in terms more favourable to us and consequently more favourable to the unity of the class. In fact, to demand wages for housework does not mean to say that if we are paid we will continue to do it. It means precisely the 'opposite. To say that we want money for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it, because the demand for a wage makes our work visible, which is the most indispensable condition to begin to struggle against it, both in its immediate aspect as housework and its more insidious character as femininity.

Against any accusation of 'economism' we should remember that money is capital, i.e. it is the power to command labour. Therefore to re-appropriate that money which is the fruit of our labour – of our mothers' and grandmothers' labour – means at the same time to undermine capital's power to command forced labour from us. And we should not distrust the power of the wage in demystifying our femaleness and making visible our work – our femaleness

4. *Wages Against Housework*

as work – since the lack of a wage has been so powerful in shaping this role and hiding our work. To demand wages for housework is to make it visible that our minds, bodies and emotions have all been distorted for a specific function, in a specific function, and then have been thrown back at us as a model to which we should all conform if we want to be accepted as women in this society.

To say that we want wages for housework is to expose the fact that housework is already money for capital, that capital has made and makes money out of our cooking, smiling, fucking. At the same time, it shows that we have cooked, smiled, fucked throughout the years not because it was easier for us than for anybody else, but because we did not have any other choice. Our faces have become distorted from so much smiling, our feelings have got lost from so much loving, our over-sexualization has left us completely desexualized.

Wages for housework is only the beginning, but its message is clear: from now on they have to pay us because as females we do not guarantee anything any longer. We want to call work what is work so that eventually we might rediscover what is love and create what will be our sexuality which we have never known. And from the viewpoint of work we can ask not one wage but many wages, because we have been forced into many jobs at once. We are housemaids, prostitutes, nurses, shrinks; this is the essence of the 'heroic' spouse who is celebrated on 'Mother's Day'. We say: stop celebrating our exploitation, our supposed heroism. From now on we want money for each moment of it, so that we can refuse some of it and eventually all of it. In this respect nothing can be more effective than to show that our female virtues have a calculable money value,

4. *Wages Against Housework*

until today only for capital, increased in the measure that we were defeated; from now on against capital for us in the measure we organize our power.

The Struggle for Social Services

This is the most radical perspective we can adopt because although we can ask for everything, day care, equal pay, free laundromats, we will never achieve any real change unless we attack our female role at its roots. Our struggle for social services, i.e. for better working conditions, will always be frustrated if we do not first establish that our work is work. Unless we struggle against the totality of it we will never achieve victories with respect to any of its moments. We will fail in the struggle for the free laundromats unless we first struggle against the fact that we cannot love except at the price of endless work, which day after day cripples our bodies, our sexuality, our social relations, unless we first escape the blackmail whereby our need to give and receive affection is turned against us as a work duty for which we constantly feel resentful against our husbands, children and friends, and guilty for that resentment. Getting a second job does not change that role, as years and years of female work outside the house still witness. The second job not only increases our exploitation, but simply reproduces our role in different forms. Wherever we turn we can see that the jobs women perform are mere extensions of the housewife condition in all its implications. That is, not only do we become nurses, maids, teachers, secretaries – all functions for which we are well-trained in the home – but we are in the same bind

4. *Wages Against Housework*

that hinders our struggles in the home: isolation, the fact that other people's lives depend on us, or the impossibility to see where our work begins and ends, where our work ends and our desires begin. Is bringing coffee to your boss and chatting with him about his marital problems secretarial work or is it a personal favour? Is the fact that we have to worry about our looks on the job a condition of work or is it the result of female vanity? (Until recently airline stewardesses in the United States were periodically weighed and had to be constantly on a diet – a torture that all women know – for fear of being laid off.) As is often said – when the needs of the waged labour market require her presence there – 'A woman can do any job without losing her femininity,' which simply means that no matter what you do you are still a cunt.

As for the proposal of socialization and collectivization of housework, a couple of examples will be sufficient to draw a line between these alternatives and our perspective. It is one thing to set up a day care centre the way we want it, and demand that the State pay for it. It is quite another thing to deliver our children to the State and ask the State to control them, discipline them, teach them to honour the American flag not for five hours, but for fifteen or twenty-four hours. It is one thing to organize communally the way we want to eat (by ourselves, in groups, etc.) and then ask the State to pay for it, and it is the opposite thing to ask the State to organize our meals. In one case we regain some control over our lives, in the other we extend the State's control over us.

The Struggle Against Housework

Some women say: how is wages for housework going to change the attitudes of our husbands towards us? Won't our husbands still expect the same duties as before and even more than before once we are paid for them? But these women do not see that they can expect so much from us precisely because we are not paid for our work, because they assume that it is 'a woman's thing' which does not cost us much effort. Men are able to accept our services and take pleasure in them because they presume that housework is easy for us, that we enjoy it because we do it for their love. They actually expect us to be grateful because by marrying us or living with us they have given us the opportunity to express ourselves as women (i.e. to serve them), 'You are lucky you have found a man like me'. Only when men see our work as work – our love as work – and most important our determination to refuse both, will they change their attitude towards us. When hundreds and thousands of women are in the streets saying that endless cleaning, being always emotionally available, fucking at command for fear of losing our jobs is hard, hated work which wastes our lives, then they will be scared and feel undermined as men.

But this is the best thing that can happen from their own point of view, because by exposing the way capital has kept us divided (capital has disciplined them through us and us through them – each other, against each other), we – their crutches, their slaves, their chains – open the process of their liberation. In this sense wages for housework will be much more educational than trying to prove that we can work as well as them, that we can do the same jobs.

4. *Wages Against Housework*

We leave this worthwhile effort to the ‘career woman’, the woman who escapes from her oppression not through the power of unity and struggle, but through the power of the master, the power to oppress – usually other women. And we don’t have to prove that we can “break the blue collar barrier”. A lot of us broke that barrier a long time ago and have discovered that the overalls did not give us more power than the apron; if possible even less, because now we had to wear both and had less time and energy to struggle against them. The things we have to prove are our capacity to expose what we are already doing, what capital is doing to us and our power in the struggle against it.

Unfortunately, many women – particularly single women – are afraid of the perspective of wages for housework because they are afraid of identifying even for a second with the housewife. They know that this is the most powerless position in society and so they do not want to realize that they are housewives too. This is precisely their weakness, a weakness which is maintained and perpetuated through the lack of self-identification. We want and have to say that we are all housewives, we are all prostitutes and we are all gay, because until we recognize our slavery we cannot recognize our struggle against it, because as long as we think we are something better, something different than a housewife, we accept the logic of the master, which is a logic of division, and for us the logic of slavery. We are all housewives because no matter where we are they can always count on more work from us, more fear on our side to put forward our demands, and less pressure on them for money, since

4. *Wages Against Housework*

hopefully our minds are directed elsewhere, to that man in our present or our future who will “take care of us”.

And we also delude ourselves that we can escape housework. But how many of us, in spite of working outside the house, have escaped it? And can we really so easily disregard the idea of living with a man? What if we lose our jobs? What about ageing and losing even the minimal amount of power that youth (productivity) and attractiveness (female productivity) afford us today? And what about children? Will we ever regret having chosen not to have them, not even having been able to realistically ask that question? And can we afford gay relations? Are we willing to pay the possible price of isolation and exclusion? But can we really afford relations with men?

The question is: why are these our only alternatives and what kind of struggle will move us beyond them?

5. On Sexuality as Work

Silvia Federici

1975

Sexuality is the release we are given from the discipline of the work process. It is the necessary complement to the routine, regimentation of the work-week. It is a license to 'go mad,' to 'let go,' so that we can return more refreshed on Monday to our jobs.

'Saturday' is the irruption of the 'spontaneous,' the irrational in the rationality of the capitalist disciplining of our life. It is supposed to be the compensation for work and is ideologically sold as the 'other' from work, a field of freedom in which we can presumably be our true selves, have the possibility for intimate contacts in a universe of social relations where we are constantly forced to repress, defer, postpone, hide, even from ourselves, what we desire.

This being the promise, what we actually get is far from our expectations. As we cannot go back to nature by simply taking off our clothes, so cannot become 'ourselves' simply because it is love-making time. Little spontaneity is possible when the timing, conditions and the amount of energy available for love are out of our control. Not only after a week of work our bodies and feelings are numb and we cannot turn them on like a machine. But what comes

5. *On Sexuality as Work*

out when we 'let go' is more often our repressed violence and frustration than our hidden self ready to be reborn in bed.

Among other things, we are always aware of the falseness of this spontaneity. No matter how much we scream, sigh, and how many erotic exercises we make in bed, we know that it is a parenthesis and that tomorrow we both will be back in our civilized clothes – we will have coffee together preparing to go to work. The more we know that it is a parenthesis which the rest of the day or the week will deny, the more difficult it becomes for us to turn into 'savages' at the socially sanctioned sex-time and forget everything else. We cannot avoid feeling ill at ease. It is the same embarrassment we experience when we undress knowing that we will be making love, the embarrassment of the morning after, when we are already busy re-establishing distances; the embarrassment (finally) of pretending to be completely different from what we are during the rest of the day.

This transition is particularly painful for women; men seem to be experts at it, possibly because they have been subjected to a more strict regimentation in their work. Women have always wondered how it was possible that, after a nightly display of passion, he could get up already in a different world, so distant at times that it would be difficult for her to re-establish even a physical contact with him. In any case, it is always women who suffer most from the schizophrenic character of sexual relations, not only because we arrive at the end of the day with more work and more worries on our shoulders, but because we also have the responsibility of making the sexual experience pleasurable for the man. This is why women are usually

5. *On Sexuality as Work*

less sexually responsive than men. Sex is work for us, it is a duty. The duty to please is so built into our sexuality that we have learned to get pleasure out of giving pleasure, out of getting men excited.

Since we are expected to provide a release, we inevitably become the object on which men discharge their repressed violence. We are raped, both in our beds and in the streets, precisely because we have been set up to be the providers of sexual satisfaction, the safety valves for everything that goes wrong, and men have always been allowed to turn their anger against us, if we do not measure up to the role, particularly when we refuse to perform.

Compartmentalization is only one aspect of the mutilation of our sexuality. The subordination of our sexuality to the reproduction of labor power has meant that heterosexuality has been imposed on us as the only acceptable sexual behavior. In reality, every genuine communication has a sexual component, for our bodies and emotions are indivisible and we communicate at all levels all the time. Sexual contact with women is forbidden because in bourgeois morality anything that is unproductive is obscene, unnatural, perverted. This has meant the imposition of a schizophrenic condition on us, as early in our lives we must learn to draw a line between the people we can love and the people we just talk to, those to whom we can open our body and those to whom we can only open our 'souls,' our friends and our lovers. The result is that we are bodiless souls for our female friends and soulless flesh for our male lovers. And this division separates us not only from other women but from ourselves as well, in the sense of what we do or do not accept in our bodies and feelings – the 'clean' parts that are there for open display, and the 'dirty,'

5. On Sexuality as Work

‘secret’ parts that can only be disclosed in the conjugal bed, at the point of production.

The same concern for production has demanded that sexuality, especially in women, be confined to certain periods of our lives. Sexuality is repressed in children and adolescent as well as in older women. Thus, the years in which we are allowed to be sexually active are the years in which we are most burdened with work, so that enjoying our sexual encounters becomes a feat.

But the main reason why we cannot enjoy sex is that *for women sex is work*; giving pleasure is part of what is expected of every woman. Sexual freedom does not help. Certainly it is important not to be stoned to death if we are ‘unfaithful’ or if it is found that we are not virgins. But sexual freedom means more work. In the past we were just expected to raise children. Now we are expected to have a waged job, still clean the house and have children and, at the end of a double work-day, be ready to hop in bed and be sexually enticing. And we must enjoy it as well, something which is not expected of most jobs for a bored performance would be an insult to male virility, which is why there have been so many investigations in recent years concerning which parts of our body – whether the vagina or the clitoris – are more sexually productive. But whether in its liberalized or more repressive form, our sexuality is still under control. The law, medicine and our economic dependence on men all guarantee that, although the rules are loosened, spontaneity is still impossible in our sexual life. Sexual repression in the family is a function of that control. In this sense fathers, brothers, husbands, pimps all act as agents of the state, supervising our sexual work,

5. *On Sexuality as Work*

ensuring that we provide sexual services according to the established, socially sanctioned productivity norms.

Economic dependence is the ultimate means of control over our sexuality. This is why sexual work is still one of the main occupations for women and prostitution underlines every sexual encounter. Under these circumstances, there cannot be any spontaneity in sex for us nor can sexual pleasure be more than an ephemeral thing for us.

Because of the exchange involved and the duty to give pleasure to men, sexuality for women is always accompanied by anxiety and it is the part of housework most responsible for self-hatred. In addition, the commercialization of the female body makes it impossible for us to feel comfortable with our body regardless of its shape or form. Few women can happily undress in front of a man knowing that they will be ranked according to highly publicized standards of beauty that everyone, male or female, is well aware of, as they are splashed all around us on every wall in our cities, and on every magazine or TV screen.

Knowing that our looks we will be judged and that in some way we are selling ourselves has destroyed our confidence and our pleasure in our bodies. This is why, whether we are skinny or plump, long or short nosed, tall or small, we all hate our body. We hate it because we are accustomed to look at it from the outside, with the eyes of the men we meet, and with the bodies-market in mind. We hate it because we are used to think of it as something to sell, something that has become almost independent of us and that is always on a counter. We hate it because we know that so much depends on it. Depending on it, we can get a good or bad job (in marriage or work outside the home), we can gain a certain amount of social power, some company

5. *On Sexuality as Work*

to escape the loneliness that awaits us in this society. And our body can turn against us, we may get fat, get wrinkles, age fast, make people indifferent to us, loose our right to intimacy, loose our chance to be touched or hugged.

In sum, we are too busy performing, too busy pleasing, too afraid of failing, to enjoy making love. The sense of our value is at stake in every sexual relation. It is always a great pleasure if a man says that we are good in bed, whether we have liked it or not; it boosts our sense of power, even if we know that afterwards we still have to do the dishes.

We are never allowed to forget the exchange involved, because we never transcend the value-relation in our love-relation with a man. 'How much?' is the question that governs our experience of sexuality. Most of our sexual encounters are spent in calculations. We sigh, sob, gasp, pant, jump and down in bed, but in the meantime our mind keeps calculating 'how much': how much of ourselves we can give before we loose or undersell ourselves, how much will we get in return. If it is our first date, it is how much can we allow him to get: can he go up our skirt, open our blouse, put his fingers under our brassier? At what point should we tell him to stop, how strongly should we refuse? How much can we tell him that we like him before he starts thinking that we are 'cheap'? Keep the price up, that's the rule, at least the one we are taught. If we are already in bed the calculations become even more complicated, because we also have to calculate our chances of getting pregnant, so that, through the sighing and gasping and other shows of passion, we have to quickly run down the schedule of our period. Faking pleasure in the sexual act, in the absence of an orgasm, is extra work

5. *On Sexuality as Work*

and a hard one, because when you are faking it you never know how far you should go, and you always end up doing more for fear of not doing enough. It has taken a lot of struggle and a leap in our collective social power to finally being able to admit that *nothing was happening*.

6. Reproduction and Emigration

Mariarosa Dalla Costa
1974¹

Introduction

1.

Since at least the end of the 19th century, under the guise of a “question” of the *optimal size of population*, political economy has actually been posing the problem of State

¹This article first appeared in the book edited by Alessandro Serafini, *L'operaio multinazionale in Europa*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1974. This American translation, done by Silvia Federici and Harry Cleaver, and revised by the author, is from the second Italian edition (1977). The French translation appeared in Collectif L'Insoumise (ed) *Le foyer de l'insurrection, Textes sur le salaire pour le travail menager*, Le Mont-sur-Lausanne: Coopérative d'Impressions Nouvelles and Genève: Collective L'Insoumise, 1977. The Spanish version was published in Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *Dinero, perlas y flores en la reproducción feminista*, Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 2009. The Japanese translation appeared in the book Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *Kajirodo ni Chingin-o-feminizumu no aratana tenbo*, Tokyo: Impact Shuppankai, October 1986, 2nd edition 1990.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

control over birth and fertility rates with an eye to the expansion or contraction of the labor market. The other side of this question in fact was the *optimal size of the state* and with it the associated problem of the availability of “cannon fodder” for imperial wars.

It is hardly surprising that this question arose precisely at this time as birth rates had begun falling in all European countries during the 19th century, with the exception of France where it had begun to drop earlier, in the last quarter of the 18th century.

The other side of the problem was that *population was growing in inverse proportion to its level of well-being*, thus a rise in the standard of living was leading to a drop in the fertility rate² allaying Malthusian fears of overpopulation but at the same time undermining government hopes that economic development would be made secure through the adequate reproduction of labor power.

State control over birth and fertility rates means above all *State control over women's fate* – it means diminished opportunities for them to be “social individuals” instead of mere appendages to State economic planning for growth or stagnation.

The *State only becomes concerned* about the gap between fertility and birth rates when the latter is considered to be *too low*, and it responds by abolishing all means of contraception and abortion. Both Nazism and Fascism

² See: Michael T. Sadler, *The Law of Population*, London 1830; Thomas Doubleday, *The True Law of Population*, London 1842. These two authors observed that population growth proceeds in inverse proportion to its well-being and that a rise in the standard of living causes a fall in the fertility rate removing the danger of overpopulation feared by Malthus.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

were typical in this respect although they enforced such policies only within the national boundaries of Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy and not in the colonies. However, as long as the birth rate is considered to be adequate, the State ignores any disparity between fertility and birth rates and remains indifferent to the fact that women abort or to how they abort.

We are not concerned here with listing all the independent variables that may affect the State's attitude, but it is worth noting that the State's interest in adjusting the birth rate and to a lesser degree, the fertility rate, may vary both in time and space and, most importantly, in the span of the same regime.

For example, the demographic history of the USSR after 1917 (and of Eastern European countries after 1945) shows a continuous oscillation between extreme permissiveness and rigid control.³ *Despite the provision of material incentives the birth rate fell short of the planner's expectations particularly in key areas of the USSR.* As will be seen later, this was also the case in Western Europe – the main focus of this analysis.

³ In the USSR until 1936 there were no restrictions concerning abortion; from 1936 to 1955 abortion was strictly controlled. Starting in 1956 the state again allowed a certain degree of liberalization. The popular democracies, after substantial incentives for population growth in the postwar period, introduced a number of very permissive measures between 1956 and 1958, but they abolished them in the Sixties: e.g., Rumania in 1966. Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria tried to stimulate population growth by means of material incentives such as increases in the Family Allowances, services for children and special maternity leave for waged and salaried women.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

How should one interpret *women's resistance to complying with such planning*? It seems to us that it can be interpreted very simply, as *women's lack of identification with the so-called common good*. Women could see that the "common good" effectively meant a planned rate of economic growth that would keep them tied to long hours of work either in the factories and offices of Eastern Europe or at home and in the fields of some Western European countries.

In his excellent book *World Revolution and Family Patterns*,⁴ the US sociologist William J. Goode argues that:

The important change is not, therefore, that the birth rate has dropped in the last generation, for its decline had already begun in France in the last quarter of the 18th century, in the United States by the early 19th century and in England and possibly Sweden and Belgium before 1875. Rather, the change is in the general acceptance of the opinion that husband and wife may control the number of their children if they wish to do so; as a consequence, both decline and rise may occur more quickly than in the past, as rapid adjustment to alterations in the life situation, such as prosperity or war, or the particular experience of special segments of the population.⁵

We can add that this *control* over the number of offspring – a greater burden for women than for the family as a whole

⁴ William J. Goode, *World Revolution and Family Patterns*, New York: The Free Press, 1970.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

– *has been a growing tendency* and not a particularly surprising one. In fact war after the war the State suffered a loss of credibility in the eyes of the average man and woman. If to this loss of credibility one adds the increasing awareness of parents that they could offer little else to their children than the prospect of a future in the factory, it is clear why women's reactions to State demographic policies were far from diffident. They and the State have unrelated, completely diverging interests, a divergence which is particularly visible in countries where the State wants to maintain high fertility and birth rates. It is not hard to see how the capitalist class in Italy found it had won many advantages from population growth during the years of Fascism. We can confirm as sure that women had only managed to combat and evade Mussolini's demographic policies by contravening the laws of both the Church and the State. Their success in evading those laws can be measured in terms of the relatively low increase in the number of births⁶ and the tens of millions of abortions that were carried out during and after the regime.

In the Fifties, the children born in the Mussolini period came of age. But where was most of that generation channeled? They went from the fields of the North and from the entire South of Italy into the *Italian industrial triangle* and to *Central Europe*. There is little doubt that the provision of labor power by the Italian governments of

⁶ The *Italian Statistical Yearbook*, ISTAT, of 1943 gives the following figures for the birth rate: 139.2 for the period 1920-22, 110.2 for the period 1930-32, 104.8 for the period 1935-37, 106.0 for the period 1939-40. As we can see, the period in which the index of fertility rose – but only from 104.8 to 106.0 – coincided with the provision of economic incentives.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

the time, particularly in relation to the Swiss and German governments, gave the Italian ruling class a powerful lever in bargaining with its foreign partners.

But what conclusions should women, particularly women of Southern Italy, draw about a State that bargains on the basis of a flow of labor power abroad?

Was this situation any different from the flow of labor power into Germany in the period between 1939 and 1942? A flow which was organized by the Heads of States⁷ and which people were forced to accept given the high level of unemployment in Italy.

As one can see, women's "NO", their refusal to accept State coercion has, and had, well founded reasons – reasons which lie both in the past, and in the future.

2.

But to make the argument more general, to go beyond the Italian case, what we are trying to show here is that *the formation of a multinational working class has its origins in the history of women as a section of the class.* Women began, particularly *since the war*, to take their own direction in an increasingly homogeneous and diffuse way. Hence, the emergence of *a new quality of political power*, as expressed by this class, has to be attributed to, and defined in terms of the *new processes of autonomy opened up within the class by its various sections and particularly by woman.*

Above all by women's refusal to *procreate.*

⁷ Edward L. Homze, *Foreign Labor in Nazi Germany*, Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1967.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

During the second half of the Sixties, all European countries registered a dramatic fall in the birth rate⁸ that cannot be wholly attributed to the increased availability of contraceptives.⁹ The birth rate fell particularly steeply among those sectors that formerly had proved to be less successful in controlling their fertility¹⁰

Women were better able to reject State controls over procreation the more they resisted pressure from within the family, from the elderly, from husbands, from other children.

⁸ Professor Roland Pressat, a well known expert in demography who teaches at the National Institute for Demographic Studies in Paris and is the author of an interesting work, "Analyse demographique" in his work *Population*, London: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 96, shows in a very clear graph the fall of the birth rate after 1964 in Holland, Italy, Great Britain, West Germany, France, Belgium and Luxembourg. In any case this is a phenomenon that is widely recognized by all demographers.

⁹ "Further, the degree of diffusion of the latest contraceptives, at least in Europe, has not been such as to account for the recent reduction in the fertility rate." *Ibid.*, p. 97. We add that in those European countries dominated by the Catholic Church, up to this day it is difficult for the overwhelming majority of women to gain access not only to the latest contraceptives but to any contraceptives at all. In this respect, Irish history has a new hero. Mrs. Mary McGee, aged 28, the wife of a fisherman and already the mother of four children, who had already cerebral thrombosis twice, was arrested last year at the customs by an officer who, searching in the woman's handbag, discovered an intrauterine device. Exasperated, Mary McGee appealed to the High Court which, in December 1973, issued the first liberalizing sentence on the matter: "It does not pertain to the State," the court decreed, "to interfere in such intimate and delicate matters. *La Stampa*, March 22, 1973, p. 3.

¹⁰ See again, Roland Pressat, *op. cit.*

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

This rejection and resistance can be found to a greater or lesser degree in all countries irrespective of whether the number of women in waged work is high or low, whether the country is one of immigration or emigration and whether the women are “native” or immigrants themselves.

Thus *the family*, the centre of unpaid work and personal dependence, has emerged as the primary terrain on which women have managed to resist and to organize themselves at a mass level.

The more women succeed in freeing themselves from the constraints of the family the more they will be able to succeed in *emancipating themselves from conditions that limit their ability to improve their lives*.

First of all in the agricultural context:

a)

The process of emancipation from various family constraints within the passage from the patriarchal peasant family to the urban nuclear family has been marked by a change, a *transformation, in the way in which women manage the wage*¹¹ even though they have continued to prioritize children’s needs and not their own.

¹¹This is one of the main theses developed by Leopoldina Fortunati in *Le donne contro la famiglia (Woman Against the Family)* that analyzes womens’ relation to capital over the last thirty years in Italy. Some of her work which proposes an analysis relevant to the war period and early postwar period can be found in Leopoldina Fortunati, “La famiglia verso la ricostruzione” in Mariarosa Dalla Costa e Leopoldina Fortunati, *Brutto ciao. Direzioni di marcia delle donne negli ultimi 30 anni*, Roma: Edizioni delle donne, 1976, pp. 71-147.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

As the former authority and control of older relatives diminished so women became freer to spend the wage and not save it, which they had been under pressure to do before. They mainly spent it in order to improve their children's situations. Children began to be raised on baby food, and got used to having cigarettes, tape recorders and record players.

All of this is common in areas of a certain level of industrialization. However, this is not true of areas such as Southern Italy where *women, left alone because of emigration*, still have to struggle in their own interests, for example, for improvement in material living conditions in their neighborhoods, for water, for work, etc. But *their struggles catalyze the struggles of their children*, who use any means possible to obtain a better standard of life and it is in this context that the higher rates of "juvenile delinquency" and analogous phenomena found in the South should be understood.

In both instances, industrial and Southern, the course of women's autonomous struggles for better conditions of life for both themselves and their children has created a new generation, a new working class, a new level of struggle.

The fact that women are less and less inclined to or interested in getting married, that they have fewer children, and are willing to use any means possible to improve theirs and their children's life, *all this is reflected in the struggles in the factory*. Young workers, immigrant or not, are less concerned about whether they marry (because women are less concerned about getting married);¹² they

¹² Bennett Kremen, "Lordstown – Searching for a Better Way of Work," *New York Times*, September 9, 1973. Joseph Goodfreys,

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

are less likely to be the fathers of large families and are *already used to struggling at any cost* when the family wage fails to provide a certain standard of living.

Clearly women's refusal to procreate and their attempts to improve their children's situation have met with more success in some countries than in others. In countries such as France, Germany and Switzerland where there tends to be a shortage of labor power and workers have higher expectations, the working class is able to earn better wages. In other areas, for example Southern Italy, the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal), the Maghreb, Turkey etc., women are less able to restrict the number of births and have less chance of raising their children's standards of living. But when *European capital* attempts to 'buy' the children of underdevelopment and use them against the children of development, it *finds itself increasingly faced with women's resistance, their struggle and with the value of their work*.

b)

Thus *emigration is the State's policy response to women's refusal to comply and procreate*. It represents an attempt to recuperate the working class both qualitatively and quantitatively, i.e., to restore adequate discipline and to achieve a size that is functional for capital. It is also the

General Manager of General Motors' Assembly Line Division said: "Yes, our workers are less keen than they used to be to commit themselves. . . . There is a lot of restlessness and we feel this on the assembly line – war, youth, rebellion, drugs, race, inflation, moral crisis. Marriage is no longer what it used to be. We feel that their minds are elsewhere!" (translated from the Italian)

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

response both to what the refusal represents as a process of struggle and to the new relationships it establishes. The new multinational working class is the direct expression of the process.

Earlier we said that for women in Europe, the postwar years were years of struggle when they began to reject the agricultural life style with its long hours of work in the house and the fields, to reject the patriarchal peasant family with its hierarchical power structure dominated by men and elder relatives, and to reject the isolation of the small village and the power and influence of the Church. The many differences in levels of industrialization, in the proportion of women in waged work, in outmigration from the countryside, in immigration and emigration and so on, that one finds in various countries make no difference, however, to the general tenor of women's struggles; everywhere they were seeking to free themselves from personal and economic dependence and from interminable work schedules. And it is not difficult to draw a parallel here between the insubordination of mothers, wives and daughters in the unwaged workplace – the family – and the insubordination of both men and women in the waged workplace – the factory.

In *Western Europe*, *emigration* was seen as the answer to struggles in both of these areas, family and factory, an *arc of struggles* which had begun to take on new qualities and which were more subversive than their predecessors.

Emigration is therefore the State's counteroffensive launched against *women's refusal to procreate* in line with State policy, and against the new relationships between men and women and between the waged and unwaged workplaces. Emigration not only seeks to restore the birth

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

rate, or rather to restore the class to the required size and to the required discipline, it also seeks to break up the process of struggle that lies behind the refusal to procreate on demand.

a) *Emigration hits* not only at the individual who is separated and isolated from his/her community and its network of organization, *it also hits at the community itself, especially at women* who are its main pillar, who are deprived of their links with both the younger and more independent sections of the class.

b) *By means of emigration* labor power from the more “backward” areas is pitted against labor power from the “advanced” areas. This does not only involve the use of young immigrant labor power (which is more isolated and politically disorganized) against local more organized labor power, it is also a way of hitting at the women left behind – *the women of the more backward areas* – women who have had less success in developing their own struggles. Thus these women are effectively used against the women of the more advanced areas, against women who have gained more power.

c) *In the metropolitan areas* which receive the inflow of migrants, *each new wave of migration further distances in time and space the opportunities for immigrant women of different sections and for these women and the native ones* to organize among themselves. It marks another tear in the fabric that connects work in the home to work in the factory, i.e. reproduction work to production work.

d) And for all these reasons *emigration hits at women in the waged workplace too*, where men tend to take precedence over them.

3.

The rule that men take precedence over women in the waged workplace *began to be broken*, especially *after 1968* and during the Seventies. Emigrant women began to be hired in such sectors as *the machine tool, automobile and chemical industries*.

But how should this be interpreted? Did and does it mean that capital preferred to employ immigrant women rather than men in key sectors – such as those mentioned above? Is it a sign of a more general shift to employing women outside the home? One which would meet with the approval of reformists who think “women should do their best to grab this opportunity”? Broadly, no. As will be seen in the course of this argument, the conclusions one can draw from this new trend are very different.

In all these sectors, the machine tool, automobile and chemical industries, women were always taken on at the lowest, most unskilled grades. Thus, the reason behind their being employed seems to have been an attempt to break up the level of struggle reached by the more recent waves of male immigrants. At the same time, as has already been mentioned, and will be examined in greater detail later, women’s new independence had already created a tension in the relationship between them and capital, between them and the State, because of the requirements of planned economic growth and the levels of reproduction (both procreation and housework) that were needed in order to meet growth goals. This has increasingly become the cornerstone of development, not only in Western Europe but also in Eastern Europe and the rest of the

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

world.¹³ We have already mentioned women's refusal to procreate and to pay the price of reproduction in general and how this refusal has affected intra-class relations, new power structures, particularly in the case of women, and youth who depend on women's work.

Thus it is in this context that the employment of women in key sectors must be examined. And the main questions are therefore:

- For how long will capital be able to use women as a means of breaking up the struggles of the more recent immigrants who have often already assimilated and incorporated the struggles of women in the community they come from?
- How well can this policy realistically work, given that it is based on the *traditional political weakness of women in the factory*, and seems to ignore the fact that *women have already opened up their struggle outside the factory*?
- *To what extent can women be employed in the factory at the same time they are also being encouraged to fulfill their reproductive functions* – functions that women have learned to reject if they have to pay too high a price, given the conditions of housework, of factory and office work, of the conditions of their lives as a whole?

The hypotheses which we have formulated and will try to develop here, albeit briefly, also set out the more general

¹³ On a worldwide scale this refusal leads to rather contradictory policies, as demonstrated by the World Population Conference held in Bucharest in 1974.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

context in which another problem, that espoused by many politicians who claim to be responding to the international emergence of the Feminist Movement: the problem of female employment.

In this context it seems unrealistic to suppose that the admission of women into the bastions of male employment, the machine tool, automobile and chemical industries, represents an about-turn in capital's attitude towards female employment. That is, contrary to one line of argument, it cannot be taken as an attempt on the part of capital to abolish the separation of male and female labor markets. It is no coincidence that the people who now welcome the "mixed factory" as a means of abolishing this separation are the same people who once denied that such a separation even existed.

II. During the war and in the postwar period the "equilibrium" of the relationship between production and reproduction as embodied in certain geographical areas and community structures was broken.

Why start with *World War II*? Because *World War II* represented *a massive attack on the value of labor power* and the starting point for the reconstruction of capitalist power at a multinational level. However because labor power has for so long always been taken as male labor power this statement cannot indicate the true complexity of the kind of attack we mean nor the complexity of the new relationships that were created and formed during the process of forming a multinational working class.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

In his very original reading of workers' struggles during the Resistance in Italy, Romolo Gobbi¹⁴ cites the following important data, he says, "during this period the real wage was systematically eroded to the point where in 1945 it was only 22% of the real wage in 1913, thus it was only one fifth of the already low wage of 30 years before."¹⁵ Moreover he continues, "During World War I, taking advantage of the growth of the workforce employed in war production, the working class had launched a powerful attack on that earlier wage level, and by 1921 had succeeded in raising the wage level to 127 taking 1913 as 100 on the index. During this cycle of struggles the workers also won other victories, such as the 8 hour day and the recognition of worker's representation in the factory at the shop floor level."¹⁶ By contrast, in 1945, not only had the real wage fallen to one fifth of its 1913 level, but also, during the war itself, the workers had clearly failed to achieve a level of power in any way comparable with that won during the First World War. This indicates that the Second World War was based on a very different set of imperialist relations, qualitatively different, from those of World War I.

In the USA workers were largely successful in defending their wage. Of course, no army invaded the US and there was a much smaller loss of life in comparison with that in European countries.¹⁷ There was no drastic food

¹⁴ Romolo Gobbi, *Operai e resistenza*, Torino: Musolini, 1973.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁷ David Thomson, *Europe Since Napoleon*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957, Italian translation: *Storia d'Europa*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1961, p. 852. Concerning the war losses, Thomson gives the following figures: 500,000 in France, 445,000 in the Common-

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

rationing: “calorie deficiency caused by inadequate diet is a problem the average American never had to face, even in wartime.”¹⁸ Women’s employment in factories and offices in the US did not take place in the context of a violent attack on the whole community as it did in Europe. The highest levels of violence and deprivation all took place on the other side of the Atlantic and it was the consequent *weakening and breakdown of relationships that provided the base on which emigration was established.*

The attack on the value of labor power in Europe meant: the use of forced labor – male and female prisoners – in Germany, and the widest possible use and employment of women in factories, offices and services in Great Britain:

As long as there were jobless men on the labor market they did not resort to using women in war industry. At the beginning their existence was forgotten. In December 1939, the unempl-

wealth, 2,250,000 in Germany (just on the battlefield), 7,000,000 officially dead in Russia (but there are other figures) compared with 325,000 from the United States. See also F. Roy Willis, *Europe in the Global Era: 1939 to Present*, New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., Toronto, 1968, p. 180; Nicholas Valentine Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1963, Italian translation: *Storia della Russia, Dalle origini ai giorni nostri*, Milano: Garzanti, 1968, p. 604; Denna Frank Fleming, *The Cold War and Its Origins*, New York: Doubleday, 1961; Italian translation: *Storia della guerra fredda*, Milano: Feltrinelli 1964, p. 193.

¹⁸ Romolo Gobbi, *op. cit.*, p. 8. For a more detailed analysis see: Shepard Bancroft Clough, *The Economic History of Modern Italy*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1964, Italian translation: *Storia dell’economia italiana dal 1861 ad oggi*, Bologna: Cappelli, 1965; Rosario Romeo, *Breve storia della grande industria in Italia*, Bologna: Universale Cappelli, 1973.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

oyed women officially registered were 270,000 . . . in March 1941, the government decided to put women to work . . . their recruiting resembled in many ways the recruiting of men for military service. The only ones exempted were the farm women who replaced their husbands who were called up for military service, the nurses, the midwives and the teachers. In May 1942, mobilization was extended to eighteen and nineteen year old women. In 1944, 7,650,000 women found themselves organized in industry and the auxiliary services, or in civil defense. Another 900,000 worked part-time under the control of these same services. Yet another million were unpaid volunteers in the Woman's Voluntary Service. Eventually it became necessary to incorporate the farm women, nurses and teachers etc . . . and to decentralize production to the greatest possible extent. Deposits and factories were hurriedly organized in residential suburban areas, where it was possible to recruit mothers. . . . Part-time work grew rapidly.¹⁹

On the whole it was this *attack on the relationship between production and reproduction, on male labor power and female labor power* that undermined any possibility of working class defense (a defense previously maintained at women's expense) and that began the radicalization of the process of women's autonomy. Women, as labor power,

¹⁹ Evelyne Sullerot, *La donna e il lavoro*, Milano: Etas-Kompass, 1973, pp. 166-167.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

were not only hit harder by the war but were also the ones who were made most responsible for supporting and defending themselves and the community. In the face of the State's arbitrary will, women discovered that *this community could no longer protect them from anything*, but at the same time, precisely because of the weakness and the dependency of their relationships within the community they had to pay a very high price in order to support it. This is why later on women began to identify less and less with the community and also perhaps, why they were *the unexpected force* that emerged in the aftermath of World War II.

As for Italy, let us return to Gobbi's perceptive analysis: "The nosedive taken by working class wages and the drop in calories which fell below the level of subsistence were the outcome of two concomitant factors: inflation and the upsetting of the equilibrium of exchange between the city and the countryside."²⁰

The costs of reproduction, women's "primary" work, rose rapidly during the war. It was not simply that work multiplied because of the difficulty of obtaining provisions and the cost of basic goods, (the echoes of the women's demonstration in Turin in 1946 "will last a long time"),²¹ it was also the fact that women had to take on "secondary" work, low waged jobs, in order to send money and goods to the soldiers who would not have been able to survive on State pay.

²⁰ Romolo Gobbi, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

²¹ Liliana Lanzardo, *Classe operaia e partito comunista alla Fiat: la strategia della collaborazione: 1945-1949*, Torino: Einaudi, 1971, p. 332.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

Thus to reproduce themselves, their children, the soldiers and the elderly, women were forced to take on every type of work possible: in the home, the fields and the factory. But while working in a factory, in an office or driving a bus gave women an idea of the power of having a pay check of their own, it also revealed how low, how discriminatory their pay was in relation to that of men.²²

In Italy it was often easier to survive in the countryside, because of what could be gleaned from the land. In England, the countryside became the centre for the organization of home working. "Villages in the peaceful English countryside began to discover the novelty of being public clearing centers for equipment and for deposits of raw materials that women came to collect. In the Midlands alone, it has been calculated that the work done in the home using this kind of organization replaced more than 1,000 full time women workers. This decentralization of production was a great advantage in a country that was continuously subject to bombardments which were designed to upset its economy."²³

In countries such as Italy, France and Germany, often the only way to survive in the city was to take up prostitution. This work was accompanied by illegitimate births – the fruit of both the troops in transit and of centuries of terrorism directed against the use of contraception and

²² While this phenomenon is usually ignored by current political literature, we find it acknowledged and stressed in the earliest feminist literature. See, among others, in France: Evelyne Sullerot, op.cit., in Italy Luisa Abbà et al., *La coscienza di sfruttata*, Milano: Mazzotta, 1972.

²³ Evelyne Sullerot, op.cit., p. 167

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

abortion – and by venereal disease and high infant mortality.

As for women's role in the Resistance, there is not enough space here to go into such a complex subject. However, just to mention some of the biggest contradictions in their condition caused by the war, one point should be made, that their role in the Resistance becomes clear if one looks at it from the point of view of their work. Women *as well as* working in the home, the fields and the factories often performed the *most risky political work*, just like their Vietnamese²⁴ and Algerian²⁵ sisters. At the

²⁴ “The man would join the army to participate in the Resistance and the woman would replace him working in the fields and in the management of the household. Besides this (our emphasis) she participated in the guerrilla struggle and gathered supplies for the front.” (from *Aperçus sur les institutions de la République Démocratique du Vietnam (Nord)*, Hanoi and from *Nuova Rivista Internazionale*, n. 6, quoted in “Vietnam, la famiglia nel diritto vietnamita” in *Donne e politica*, IV, n. 19, October 1973, p. 30).

²⁵ What we described in the footnote above holds good also for Algerian women. It is well known that the bombs that exploded in the bars and the stadiums during the terrorist phase were all placed by women. But all over the world . . . wars of Liberation have always put women in a position that the literature of Liberation or Resistance has only mystified. What can we say about the classic example of the shaven woman, who is exposed to the ridicule of the population, when the war itself forces women into prostitution as the only form of survival? We can say that the war is also a celebration of male sadism and highlights in a less mystified manner, the relationship of men with women. Women are not only forced to guarantee reproduction, at a very high price, but they are also forced to defend themselves once more from men: from the “the enemy” who rapes them; the “partisan” who shaves them and the neighbor who despises them because they prostitute themselves.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

same time though, they had almost no voice in political organization.²⁶

The postwar period meant, for most women, redundancy, sacking or relegation to the lowest paid, most insecure jobs. In Britain, this happened, though on a lesser scale than elsewhere: "In December 1945 the Minister of Labor tried to control the movement of 'the return home'. Nevertheless the men came back looking for work for themselves and expecting women to return to looking after the reunited family. The numbers of officially unemployed women rose quickly. In order not to lose their jobs women were forced to accept lower wages. No laws were enacted to force the employers to give equal pay for equal work to men and women."²⁷

In Italy both the expulsion of women from waged jobs and the soaring cost of living were more extreme. In Turin, 10,000 women wanted to throw the Prefect out of the window in 1946.²⁸ The Communist Party accepted the Lateran Agreements; meanwhile in red Puglia Salvemini reports that women were attacking religious processions with stones and in the North there was a general air of rebellion even in the prisons. The Italian State's response was repression. Repression started out by hitting at the weaker sections of the class: women, youth and others and then moved on to hit at those sectors that the Christian

²⁶ The case of Vietnamese women may seem the "most advanced." But the political power they had access to was always very "sectorial." It is no accident that, up to this day, Vietnamese women who want to abort must *ask permission from a special judging commission*. It is a sad analogy with "European advanced situations."

²⁷ Evelyne Sullerot, *op.cit.*, 169-170.

²⁸ Liliana Lanzardo, *op. cit.*, p. 332.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

Democrats couldn't affect.²⁹ *Giving the vote to women* was a mere gesture, a "fig leaf", to cover up the discontent that the reformist parties were trying to repress by every means possible. Simultaneously, there was an attempt to re-launch the policy of demographic expansion that had been a feature of the years after 1929 – this time though it went under the banner of anticommunist restoration.³⁰ In post war Europe in general, there was a concerted effort being made to put everyone back into their traditional roles, the places they had come from.

Not everywhere though. In some countries women were not the subject of mass sacking and redundancy. In the countries of Eastern Europe for example, female employment in wage work rose in order to replace the millions of men who had been killed in the war. And in Western Europe, in Germany, the level of female employment remained high until after 1960 when it began to fall off.

Throughout Europe demographic policies that centered on the introduction or expansion of existing systems of Family Allowances were experimented with, and were generally coupled with other economic incentives as well. France began to reduce its traditionally high level of female employment and established a *salaire unique* allowance for the women who were sent back into the home.³¹

²⁹ The biographies of two women summarize the situation: Danilo Montaldi, *Militanti politici di base*, Torino: Einaudi, 1971 (the biography of "Margitt" and the last in the book: "Girl").

³⁰ Not the least of the means adopted for the restoration were the campaigns connected with the Holy Year and the sanctification of Maria Goretti and Domenico Savio.

³¹ Evelyne Sullerot, *op.cit.*, p. 207.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

This measure was not only intended to give a make-weight to these women but also to encourage a rise in the birth rate. The main aim of all these demographic policies was to rebuild the relationship between women and the family community. Their experiences during the war and in the postwar era had made women realize that the *family community*, extended or not, was a *centre of organization* of work that not only did not pay them but also *left them completely defenseless* both when the men were absent and when they returned, that not only did the community *oblige them to procreate* but it also exposed them to a *dual blackmail*: by the employers and by the men who expected them to return meekly to their “household chores”.

Cutting the umbilical cord that bound them both to the “general interest” and to the family *became an increasingly important issue for all women* in the immediate postwar years.

Above all the rupture came with the *refusal to procreate*³² – a function that performed within the family structure creates a high work load and restricted life style. For women, the war had come to mean not only the decimation of “the fruit of their womb” but also a lethal attack on women’s condition both in work and toil made at the risk of their lives.

Consequently, the struggle around procreation that spread throughout Europe was and is *a struggle against the organization of the family* – an organization that

³² Roland Pressat, *op. cit.* See also: Giorgio Mortara, “L’Italia nella rivoluzione demografica 1861-1961”, in *Annuali di Statistica*, anno 94, serie VIII, vol. 17, Roma 1965; Massimo Livi Bacci, “Il declino della fecondità della popolazione italiana nell’ultimo secolo”, in *Statistica* anno XXV, n. 3.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

instead of protecting women condemns them to powerlessness.

As a result, the rebellion that began in the family *extended beyond the confines of the unit itself out into the community upon which the family depends* – a community that both sustains and models the family: the village, the urban network of relatives and friends, that help women to get by in cities and towns where, especially in Southern Italy, access to a wage is limited. In this sense, the growth, spread and *development of a course of action led by women throughout Europe was also to determine to some degree the course of action followed by men.*

Women headed the flight from the rural areas into the towns; from rural small landowners (share croppers or smallholder families), from family owned and managed firms³³ from the villages and smaller towns. And did so, moreover, despite the restrictions on residence imposed by fascist laws that were still in force. It was a widespread, very broad movement which, as will be seen later, revealed women's lack of identification with their social environment, their refusal to bear the costs of, or accept the quality of life that this environment imposed on them. *Marriage itself will be used as an instrument for rejecting that environment.*

In countries like Italy during the Fifties and the Sixties the rejection of marriage was often used in this way.³⁴ The high proportion of women workers at home and therefore unwaged in relation to the numbers of workers working

³³ This is the topic of a number of ongoing studies whose results will, hopefully, soon be available.

³⁴ See Massimo Livi Bacci, *op. cit.*

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

outside the home i.e., in waged work, rendered the Italian situation anomalous in comparison with other European countries. Hence the *rebellion against their situation as women* could not have been simply a refusal of marriage³⁵ even if their situation within the family had been revealed to them during the war and in the postwar period.

The increase in the workload of housework during the war, the result of the difficulty of obtaining and of the high price of goods, has already been described. Rationing continued in the postwar period until 1947³⁶ and at the same time national income that had been halved in the period 1938 to 1945 “never rose above the pre-war level until 1949”.³⁷ Furthermore, despite the fact that by 1948, production had reached 1938 levels again, and that by 1960 both national and individual income had almost doubled, “the *national per capita income in Italy was still one of the lowest in Western Europe*”.³⁸

What this meant to women in terms of work and dependence, women who were left without any wage of their own and at best seen as appendages to their husband’s wages, is succinctly revealed by the statistics. These show that it was mainly women who died of the so-called diseases of underdevelopment, vitamin deficiency and problems of blood circulation.³⁹ In other words, in the countryside, but not only there, women would go to bed without eating in

³⁵ See Leopoldina Fortunati, *op. cit.*

³⁶ Shepard Bancroft Clough, *op. cit.*, p. 370.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

³⁹ See *Annuari Statistici Italiani*, ISTAT. The fact, however, that science takes no account of the harmfulness of housework requires a logical interpretation of every statistic.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

order to make sure others, husbands and children, ate⁴⁰ and would stand too many hours and spend too much time with their hands in water.⁴¹

Women and youth in the city had even fewer prospects. As Romita writes:

There was prostitution, a sad sore that always worsens after war. In this case too I gave precise orders . . . but a good, efficient, well-trained police force would have been required to deal with this problem”.⁴² “And”, he continues, “what is there to say about juvenile delinquency? This was a huge problem particularly in the big cities. . . . I immediately gave instructions . . . and the police did not fail (in their task) of searching out abandoned minors, who were often involved in illegal trading or in some way in danger of going astray. In the worst cases we attempted to rehabilitate them, as far as we could, that is, within the limits of a shortage of places available in the various Institutions. In other cases we were only able to warn their parents . . .”⁴³

⁴⁰ “Those who are waged or destined to be waged eat better,” no matter who works more. From this point of view *we believe that urbanization too did not make much of a difference.*

⁴¹ In this respect it is striking to discover that in that period electric household appliances were among the most important exports. (See Shepard Bancroft Clough, *op. cit.*, p. 407.)

⁴² Giuseppe Romita, *Dalla monarchia alla Repubblica*, Pisa: Editore Nistri-Lischi, 1954, p. 41.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

This is not new. But all this has not been said in order to simply discuss what happens during and after wars; instead, these statistics, and some facts, and the analysis of certain crucial aspects (ignored until now in political discussion) have been set out here in order to trace and find the drastic break in the relationship between production and reproduction. A break that brought about the disintegration of whole social areas, and it was on this break and the consequent social breakdown that emigration was founded. And it was from here that women began definitively to separate themselves from the community that even before, they had already wanted to leave to make their own path. Even before emigration began, the community had nothing to give to women.

Before concluding this discussion however, it is worth looking at what the *farm workers' struggles* had meant to women. While most people would agree about the backwardness of the slogan "the land to the tiller", (with all the ambiguities of the reformist program that went with it), what is of interest here is another "backwardness" or better weakness, that lay in a situation where women still hoped to be able to use the struggles of men at a time when *the proletarian family was profoundly changed and not only for the will of capital*.

The mass emigration of men would anyway have ended the cycle of insurrections wherein women occupied the land carrying red flags and barrels of water, becoming, together with men and young people, the defenseless targets of the police; taking part in actions in whose organization they were allowed no say. Angelina Mauro's death

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

marked the end of an era.⁴⁴ With emigration, only women, children and old people were left.

But the emigrants who now went North were able to send much less money back than their predecessors, the American migrants, had done. And they were less willing to send it home, to support someone else. Thus young women began to look for work, any work, domestic service in the cities, piecework at home, seasonal jobs etc. even though such work would only ever yield enough money to put together a trousseau.

One positive outcome of the farmhand struggles however was that women were freed from the infamous custom of having to serve the landowner's wife for free.⁴⁵ As their husbands emigrated and became factory workers and not farmhands women's refusal was definitive. Simultaneously, now that there were fewer men in the agricultural labor market women's wages on the land jumped from 400 lire a day to 1,200 – 2,000 lire.

Besides at last having some money of their own, remittances from the men began to arrive – though not always that regularly. And women began for the first time to

⁴⁴ Angelina Mauro, wounded in the insurrection of Melissa, died after eight days at the hospital of Crotona, on the 9th of November 1949.

⁴⁵ It was not just a matter of "customs and habits". This practice was also ratified on paper. Examples of contracts between landowners and "those who work the land" including a clause concerning women's unpaid work, are contained in Vincenzo Mauro, *Lotte dei contadini in Calabria*, Milano: Sapere, 1973. Moreover, *Il Giorno* of September 2, 1973 reports – via a letter to the editor – that during the assembly of fishermen being held in Trapani and attended by women as well as men, someone cried out "We aren't going to put up, anymore, with ship owners only choosing fishermen whose wives will go work in their houses for free!"

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

administer money directly, and to administer the property left behind by the men. They were still controlled by the elder members of the family, but all the same it marked a definitive change within the Southern Italian community. Women never followed the men on a large scale, although a few did, and this is why the South is full of women today. If the family had been unable to give anything to women other than dependence and work in the area of origin, what hope had they realistically that it would be any better for them in an immigrant ghetto? Women made another path.

III. *Emigration is founded in and on this break, but it functions as a catalyst and in some areas masculinizes women's paths for their autonomy that are already underway.*

a) The Italian Case

With the advent of Italian emigration to Germany, *women's struggle radicalized* in both North and South Italy, and took on many of the features of struggles in other European countries that were also being restructured in a similar way. *Emigration is the key factor in the process of the European postwar reconstruction of the working class.* It is used as part of a heavy attack on the value of both male and female labor power: an attack that was first unleashed during the war. This use of emigration is founded on the breakdown of the organizational structures of the proletarian community, the dislocation of whole communities and on the attack on their possibility of reproduction.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

It is reproduction that had to bear the main brunt of the attack – which is why the proletariat was forced to enter the factory, to become part of the multinational working class.

In 1943, women in Sicily burnt down the houses assigned to their family by the fascist government in order to defend the sense of community that the village offered even if it was only offered in a limited way. They did so despite their recognition of the contradictions inherent in that community. But when the men emigrated, these tensions and contradictions finally exploded; the village no longer offered them anything.

Through emigration and the way it revealed the precarious nature of relationships one can trace the progress of women's tendency to refuse and to build on this refusal of State policy and control. Their refusal to submit to the State's planning for economic growth, planning that meant them having to bear innumerable children, remain tied for interminably long hours to the house and the fields, planning that deprived them of any personal freedom and autonomy and left them always in a position of dependence on others, the family, the village etc. where now, in the absence of the men, the older generation held sway. In the South of Italy, administering the remittances in a family where only the elderly remained, and where women had to face the double burden of a large household and work on the land, meant paying a personal price that women would no longer accept.

This situation was common to both South and North. In the latter area it was particularly true in the context of small rural peasant farms. Wherever the State wanted to succeed in tying women to long hours and in isolating

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

them, they fled, they left the land. In her study, *Women Against the Family*, Leopoldina Fortunati shows how, in the Italian context, women's struggles against the family developed through struggles against farm labor. She shows how this struggle spread and intensified as more and more women began to manage the wage in new ways.

The movement from the land into the towns and cities took place on a very large scale despite government attempts to control it, "residence is only granted to those who have a job and a job is only given to those who have residence".

Among other strategies, women used marriage during this period as a way to leave the land. They were less and less willing to marry men who would not or could not take them to the city.⁴⁶ Moving to the city not only meant working for one person instead of for many, it also meant more opportunity to restrict and control the number of children they had since it meant freedom from the pressures of the family and the village. "Our hypotheses are confirmed . . . the voluntary control of procreation first spread and spread faster among urban populations than among other sections of the population. Such voluntary

⁴⁶ This is a well known fact. Today the men who in the North remain on the farms increasingly resort to the good services of some women or man in the South, who "deal in marriages." Thus, through an exchange of pictures they find (in some isolated village of Campania, Lucania and Sicily) the women who did not manage to leave by themselves. But it is not just agricultural laborers who look for these women; it is also those workers who are far from obtaining an "eight hour" working day.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

control, coupled with a lower propensity to marry had a considerable impact on the number of births.”⁴⁷

Writing about the fall in the birth rate in Italy between 1861 and 1961, Giorgio Mortara says that “where birth control is practiced through celibacy or late marriage one can see a fall in the total number of married couples, particularly young married couples; where the use of contraception or the suppression of the results of conception are commonly practiced one can sometimes see a rise in the numbers of married couples.”⁴⁸ He goes on to confirm our hypothesis that “the increased concentration of the population in urban centers and the suburbs has encouraged the spread of practices designed to limit births.”⁴⁹

The city meant and means *more power* for proletarian women. Not only are they *better able to control the number of their children*, they also have *greater opportunities to improve the quality of both their own lives and those of their children*.

b) The French Case

The movement from the land to the city, towards a higher degree of a power and control over reproduction, was a European-wide phenomenon for women. In the aftermath of World War II women throughout Europe began to fight against the demands of procreation even in areas where

⁴⁷ Massimo Livi Bacci, *op. cit.*, p. 410. See also Graph no. 3 for the proportion of married women versus single women and graphs 2, 1, 12 for the rate in wedlock fertility, general fertility rates and out of wedlock fertility.

⁴⁸ Giorgio Mortara, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

the social fabric had survived better, or rather disintegrated less, than in the South of Italy. Women everywhere were finding that the price they had to pay within reproduction was too high and the dependency and isolation that it brought were unacceptable.

The situation in France is closest of all to the Italian situation.⁵⁰ The State progressively cut female employment to a very low level. Notwithstanding this, and in part going against it directly, women deserted agriculture and small family firms in growing numbers. Moreover, French women won a degree of control over procreation earlier than women in other European countries.⁵¹ This control created problems for capital's plans for postwar reconstruction. In 1945, De Gaulle appealed to French women to produce "12,000,000 beautiful babies";⁵² simultaneously, the French government encouraged emigration from Algeria in a move that was seen explicitly as a "policy of repopulation".⁵³

This is not to say that De Gaulle's grotesque appeal found any immediate solution through Algerian emigra-

⁵⁰ Before the 20th century France could compare with the USA and Great Britain for its long tradition of female employment. By the beginning of the century, however, this employment was already reduced. The 1962 census registered 6,585,000 active women compared to 7,694,000 in 1906.

⁵¹ See William J. Goode, *op. cit.* p.53.

⁵² Marie-Françoise Mouriaux, *L'emploi en France depuis 1945*, Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, Collection U2, 1972, p. 35.

⁵³ "Cet accroissement de la population en France entre 1958 et 1965 est dû pour 52.4% à un excédent de naissance sur les décès et pour 47.6% à l'immigration. «Les Travailleurs immigrés parlent», in *Les Cahiers du Centre d'Etudes Socialistes*, n. 94-98, Septembre – Décembre 1969, Paris, p. 19.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

tion. The real problem was not simply one of the quantitative restoration of the working class, it was rather more an attempt, on the part of the State, to neutralize women's struggles which were threatening reconstruction plans. The connection between the orchestration of France's demographic policies⁵⁴ and female employment⁵⁵ after the war and the "structure" of Algerian emigration is clear. Algerian emigration was, as we have said, described as a policy of repopulation: it would be better to call it a policy for the restoration of the working class: Algerian women came with their husbands and children, and continued to

⁵⁴ Besides the *salair unique* there is a complete reorganization of the system of Family Allowances. "After World War II, a new organization, the High Consultative Committee on Population and the Family, was established by decree on 12 April 1945." (Translator's Note: In English in the text.) (The Population Council, *Country Profiles: France*, New York, May 1972, p. 8). This commission worked many changes in the family allowances system in view of what was happening in all the European countries. (See p. 9-10.)

⁵⁵ From the McCloy plan of 1949 to the Schuman plan of 1950, European economic integration postulated the profitability of a "political project . . . based on a non-downward rigid wage, that is on a widening of the downward stratification of labor power, obtained through the maintenance and expansion of highly labor intensive sectors.

This project implied a massive introduction into factory production of quotas of new and politically weak labor power . . . female labor power fitted only partially into this project. . . . Women resisted being deskilled. . . ." Franca Cipriani, *Proletariato del Maghreb e capitale europeo (The proletariat of the Maghreb and European Capital)*, in this volume, i.e., Alessandro Serafini, et al., *L'operaio multinazionale in Europa*, Milano: Feltrinelli, first edition: May 1974, second edition January 1977, p. 79.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

produce more children,⁵⁶ children who were in the main destined to go into the factory.

It should be emphasized again that this is not a mathematical but a political relationship, and should be seen in political terms. Although very few politicians recognize or even notice it,⁵⁷ the connection between an ‘unacceptable’ rate of population growth – uncorrected by the provision of material incentives or by the expulsion or further marginalization of women – and the use of emigration policies has a long history.

The path taken by women’s struggles in France is, as we said earlier, very like that taken in Italy. The exodus from agriculture was massive. From 1910 to 1954 one in four agricultural laborers left the land. The same percentage holds true for the period between 1954 and 1962. After 1962, the pace speeded up.⁵⁸ In 1962 there were 1,272,000 female farmers and agricultural laborers, in 1906, there had been 3,329,000.⁵⁹

Young women tend to leave the country first even before men. “The young peasants who want to stay on the land look in vain for a wife. The girls have all fled to the city so as not to be treated like their mothers, so as not to

⁵⁶ At present Algerian women are also urged to perform this function through “courses of home economics” taught by “social workers.”

⁵⁷ But with respect to the trends in French employment, Marie-Francois Mouriaux writes “Par suite d’une natalité très faible, la nation recourt de manière très large à l’immigration.” (Marie-Francois Moureaux, *op. cit.*, p. 29.)

⁵⁸ *Les travailleurs immigrés parlent*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁵⁹ Evelyne Sullerot, *op.cit.*, p. 206.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

be treated more like servants instead of “Queens of the Fireplace”.⁶⁰

The *country schools* taught boys agronomy and agricultural mechanics and taught girls home economics.

The flight from the country was more than a flight from personal isolation and slavery, from backwardness. It was a flight from dual work from which even the new agricultural nationalization couldn't save women. The state tried once again to send women back into the house and the countryside and to demand a reproductive function that none of the well known economic incentives could induce them to provide. In this context, it's worth noting that because the laws passed in 1920 – which prohibited abortion and advertising of contraceptives – had failed to raise the birth rate significantly⁶¹ from 1932 on, the French government had been forced to set up *a system of family allowances*.

After the war, these allowances – the *salair unique* – became a dangerously contradictory provision, dangerous, that is, for a system that had traditionally managed to maintain very high levels of housework – performed by women – precisely because housework had never been exchanged for a wage. Allowances did not provide a lot of money, but they did provide a monthly subsidy given by the state to the wife. The parallel with the program that was institutionalized in 1945 in England as Family Allowances is evident – both seek to encourage a positive

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ A further step in this attempt was reached with the approval of the *Code de Famille* in 1942.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

attitude toward procreation, something that had deteriorated at an international level.⁶²

Although the *salairé unique* was a small amount of money, a pittance, it was money which women tried desperately to accumulate along with any pay they might obtain from unofficial jobs.

Had women declared these jobs, they would automatically have lost the right to receive this payment. Thus, piece workers, domestic servants and part time workers never declared their occupation for fear of not receiving the allowance.⁶³

Once in the city it was difficult for French women to find employment, to find a steady wage.⁶⁴ The underlying aim of European integration was, as we have said, to

⁶² More specifically, the Family Allowance was given directly to the mother (it was not included in the paycheck of the father as in Italy), whether married or not married, who “would certainly spend it for her children”, thus assuring that qualitative improvement of labor power that the laborists (who were back in power) aspired to and promoted also with a general policy of social assistance.

⁶³ We know, on the other hand, the whole series of reasons, from the loss of pensions to the loss of family allowances, etc. that in each country rendered these works essentially not declared. This is why, also in the case of France, the extent of their market can hardly be measured by statistics but we can easily presume a rather wide range of them, when we consider both the low percentage of waged women and the heavy discrimination the State has managed to impose since the postwar period on the efforts exerted by women to gain an autonomous income.

⁶⁴ There is, however, a substantial level of employment in the service sector. This too is a European-wide phenomenon. With respect to France, see François Lantier, *Le travail et la formation des femmes en Europe. Incidences de la planification de l'éducation et du changement technologique sur l'accès aux emplois et aux carrières*, La Documentation Française, Bibliothèque du Centre

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

further marginalize female labor power and discriminate against it. Rather the novelty was that women began to be introduced into industrial sectors that had been exclusively reserved for male workers.

On the whole, though, female employment in industry has been falling both absolutely and relatively since the beginning of the century. During the postwar period, however, important changes have occurred in the distribution of this decreasing amount of female labor power. One important example of this can be found in the way in which the textile sector has been restructured, creating new, more skilled and better paid jobs that are largely given to men. The women who have been expelled from this workforce have found employment in electronics and the metal working industries at low skilled levels.

In the period from 1954 to 1962, women entered the machine tool industry on a large scale (the number of women employed rose from 136,646 to 194,222, a rise of 42.1%). After 1962 the situation remained more or less stationary. During the same period (1954-1962) the number of women in the electrical industries rose from 65,500 to 114,000 (up 74%). Again in this period the number of women employed in the chemical sector rose from 92,196 to 104,540 (up 13.4%) and in the food sector the number of women rose 8.8%, but here thousands of seasonal workers⁶⁵ have to be added to the figures for permanent workers. A certain increase in female employment also occurred in factories producing drugs, cosmetics and plastics.

d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Qualifications, num. 4, Octobre 1972, pp. 44. In particular see graph XIII, p. 45.

⁶⁵ François Lantier, *op cit.*, graph XIII, p. 45. Evelyne Sullerot, *op cit.*, p. 208.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

Both in traditional female sectors like footwear and porcelain and in “new” sectors such as machine tools, female workers are always relegated to the lowest positions. The only partial exceptions are the women who supervise female workshops in the clothing sector. But these jobs are not skilled, they are merely supervisory.⁶⁶ In the electrical sector there are no skilled female workers, because skilled work is reserved for men. The number of women employed as technicians in the industry is totally insignificant.⁶⁷ As Madeleine Guibert points out, the introduction of automation seems to have had the consequence “d’accentuer le cantonnement des femmes”.⁶⁸

c) The Algerian Case

We cannot close an analysis of France in the postwar period (the 1950s) given the close relationship between demographic policies, female employment and immigration, without considering what this meant for Algerian women. We need to examine whether the impact of immigration on areas such as the Maghreb or Turkey is in any way similar to that in the Italian South. In Italy’s case we said that immigration tended to set in motion forces that could break up the community, in particular the new experiences women gained in managing remittances and minimal wages of their own⁶⁹ which gave them moments

⁶⁶ François Lantier, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

⁶⁹ Besides the case of agricultural laborers we previously mentioned, see: “Il lavoro a domicilio,” in *Quaderni di rassegna sindacale*, anno XI, no. 44-45, settembre – dicembre 1973, for the much wider

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

of greater autonomy and power. Is this true of areas such as Algeria?

It is first of all necessary to emphasize that *the Algerian community was not devoid of tensions or subversive ideas on the part of women*. In the Algerian community there was, and still is, a lot of violence towards women. The Algerian state has always been violent towards women both before and after the revolution. Women are involved in a daily struggle against men and the State. Women's position in Algeria is revealed most clearly by the number of murders and attempted murders of women by men,⁷⁰ the number of suicides and attempted suicides by women, and the number of infanticides by mothers, especially unmarried mothers.⁷¹

proportion of cottage industry (as well as seasonal, temporary work) in the South as opposed to the North.

⁷⁰ See, in general, on Arab women (but the women of the Maghreb are not subject at least to clitoridectomy), Youssef El Masry, *Il dramma sessuale della donna araba*, Milano: Edizioni di Comunità, 1964.

⁷¹ The book *Les Algériennes* by the Algerian Fadela M'Rabet, Paris: Maspero, 1969 – a book whose importation and sale is forbidden in Algeria – gives evidence of a very high suicide rate among women. Moreover, when we evaluate these percentages, we must keep in mind that women are under-counted, whether at their birth or their death, and that their suicides are not recorded, not even failed attempts at suicide, e.g., jumping out of a window but failing to die. Suicides in general are recorded as “accidental” deaths. Infanticide is also widespread among single women and is, along with abortion (p. 169), the only available means of birth control.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

Marriage is still a bargain contracted by the parents⁷² even among the better off strata, although it has repeatedly been contested by women. The possibility of being repudiated still exists, even though now it is called divorce, and given the condition of Algerian women it always was and still is a tragedy.⁷³

In 1972, in order to maintain this situation Boumediene espoused De Gaulle's 1945 line about the "twelve million beautiful babies. While speaking to student volunteers for the civil service on the subject of the "demographic explosion", Boumediene remarked, "I personally think that the solution does not lie in family planning but lies instead in development. . . ." ⁷⁴ – development achieved in Algeria as well as in Europe by means of "an unlimited supply of labor power" whose *costs of reproduction must*

⁷² The Algerian woman is forced to get married when and with whom her parents decide. This holds good also for the small educated minority that reaches a few university courses. But we must remember that, as a rule, women are withdrawn from schools – those who go there to begin with – after the second elementary course. Today this small minority, that besides university courses has also discovered the birth control pill, has discovered a very specific use of the pill in marriage. Since they do not have the power to resist the imposition of marriage, these women get married, then with the pill they can pretend they are sterile; this in a short time leads them to repudiation-divorce, which in this case is what they want.

⁷³ But for the mass of Algerian women the use of divorce obtained on their own initiative has few chances of success, first because of the material conditions in which they live and furthermore because many of them have not been registered at birth. In fact, Algerian "civilization" while considering women very precious as a good, considers them non-existent as persons.

⁷⁴ From a speech by Boumedienne to the students volunteering for the civil service, in *Moudjahid*, July 22, 1972.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

be kept as low as possible. Thus in this matter at least the post-revolution Algerian State has kept up tradition: the exploitation and intimidation of women in order to ensure that women procreate.⁷⁵

In this context, one that appears to be different from that of Southern Italy, what changes could and did emigration bring for women?

The Algerians who emigrated during the 1950s were usually young men who *rarely had a wife with them*. It is easy to see why they were without wives if one considers that the average price of a wife, the cost of the dowry, was around 500,000 lire, and the average annual income of an Algerian agricultural laborer was about 200,000 – 250,000 lire. The women who remained behind in Algeria found themselves living in an ageing community, dominated by and the property of their husbands, fathers and brothers and left without any control over money. The women who went to France after some emigrant Algerian worker had managed to save enough money for the bride price, found that they had to face a new level of housework and moreover a level that tended to escalate all the time because, for a long time, each new immigrant who arrived had to join an already formed family in order to survive. Clans were formed, clans of men supported by one woman (and her small daughters) who, in reproducing this growing community of men found that she was also having to substitute for the women who had remained behind in Algeria. When, to support the War of Liberation,

⁷⁵ Concerning the condition of the hospitals and the cases of obstetric lesions, see: Ministère de la Santé, *Tableaux de l'économie algérienne*, Alger, 1970, pp. 82-83.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

the Algerian guerillas began to tax immigrants in France in order to raise funds,⁷⁶ this tax on an already meager wage meant an even greater load of housework for women. Thus the emigrant Algerian women also had a difficult role in the war, one not unlike that of women in other wars of Liberation.

Hence, during the Fifties, through its use of emigration, the French government managed to solve its problem of “development” mainly at the expense of Algerian women. In the same way, *it also managed to resolve the problem of the relationship between production and reproduction and the processes of struggle* that this implies. In short, the French State built this, the second great wave of Algerian immigration upon the weakness and lack of power of Algerian women both in the community and in reproduction.⁷⁷

While in countries that had attained a certain level of industrialization – such as Italy – the war and the postwar period acted as a catalyst for the contradictions present both in the community and in reproduction, the same is not true in the case of Algeria. It could not be true because of the existing social fabric. The war of Liberation could, on the one hand, trigger certain social tensions but could not, because of this social fabric, facilitate any attack by women on the organization of reproduction nor even, in more general terms, any attempt by them to win their emancipation from their conditions of backwardness.

⁷⁶ Yves Courrière, *La guerre d'Algérie*, Tome II, *Le Temps des léopards*, Paris: Fayard, 1969.

⁷⁷ The first wave should be calculated from 1935 to World War II.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

Because of the conditions from which they had come, as well as the conditions which they met with in France, Algerian immigrant women who found themselves managing a wage for the first time, initially found they were unable to use it as a means of gaining a new level of power within the community, or outside the community. Their conditions were far more restrictive than those of European women, even of women in Europe's "pockets of backwardness." Their opportunities of gaining more power were continuously being undermined because the wage had to support a *community that increased with the arrival of every new immigrant*.

The way in which Italian women used the wage as a means of rejecting the patriarchal peasant family, or the extended family in general (also in the South albeit with some differences) and chose instead a smaller family that could live better on a given wage⁷⁸ was simply not possible for the Algerian women in France. They could not use the wage in order to improve the quality of their lives or the lives of their children because they had to reproduce an entire community and substitute for the women still in Algeria.

These comments on Algerian emigration provide a basis, a perspective, for interpreting the hierarchies of power that exist within emigration itself: either in the community of origin or in immigrant communities abroad. The Algerian case can be used to examine other flows of immi-

⁷⁸ Leopoldina Fortunati, *op. cit.*, points out with respect to Italy, that the transition from the peasant patriarchal family to the urban nuclear family was the product of the disintegration of a certain kind of family operated not only by capital but by the women themselves.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

grants, e.g., Africans, who contributed to France's development in much the same way as did the Algerians.

Lastly, the almost continuous flow of migration into France from Italy, Spain and Portugal must also be seen in relation to both French women's early refusal to procreate and carry out reproduction work, and to the State's desire to keep them in a condition of backwardness (especially on the farms). It is a flow that the French State has always more or less openly encouraged – a flow that was at first channeled towards the same French fields that French women were deserting.

d) The German Case

Germany, a country with a high level of industrialization that, in the postwar years maintained an exceptionally high level of female employment.⁷⁹ What we have said concerning both the relation between women and the State and the difficulties women have caused for capital's reconversion at all levels, from which the need for a broader use of immigration derived, applies to Germany as well. The Fifties in Germany were the years in which women, finally freed from Nazi restrictions, developed their refusal of housework, of agricultural labor and of work done as "helpers" in family-run firms.⁸⁰ They also refused all the professions based on some kind of domestic economy. So great was women's refusal of housework that some people were led to envisage a "domestic service" organized like "military service" set up to fill the gap left by women.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Evelyne Sullerot, *op.cit.*, p. 231.

⁸⁰ See OECD, *Labor Force Statistics*, Paris, 1970, pp. 96-97.

⁸¹ Evelyne Sullerot, *op.cit.*, p. 230.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

However, women's flight from the countryside was hindered by a considerable flow of immigration. This included a large "political" flow from the East, and after 1957, a growing tide of Italian immigrants as well. Until the end of the 1960s these migrants (about 12 million) tended to settle in rural areas at first, areas less damaged by the war, and only later on did they move on into urban areas.⁸²

As both immigrants and Germans deserted the land and moved towards the cities, rural women changed from being "helpers" to being managers of farms in their own names. In areas such as Bavaria, it is not difficult to find families where the man works in industry and the woman has had to take on both housework and work in the fields, work that was formerly shared.

Likewise in the craft industries one begins to find "daughters of craftsmen who manage their father's firm alone when the son is no longer interested, and thus become the owners of bakeries, bookbinders and decorators."⁸³ However it was still more usual for women to be employed in unskilled jobs within the craft industry.

In general, the bargaining power that women had developed against *Kinder Küche Kirche* (Children, Kitchen and Church), did not translate into bargaining power in relation to working outside the home. The State saw to that by intervening with a decision to use immigrants from the East and Italy thus preventing women who had rejected procreation from entering the labor market and

⁸² Bruno Groppo, "Sviluppo economico e ciclo dell'emigrazione in Germania Occidentale" (Economic Development and the Cycle of Emigration in Western Europe), in Alessandro Serafini et al. *L'operaio multinazionale in Europa, op. cit.*

⁸³ Evelyne Sullerot, *op.cit.*, p. 231.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

finding employment on equal terms with German men. The fact that a flow of Italian immigrants had already been guaranteed during the 1930s⁸⁴ and then again during the war⁸⁵ by joint agreements made with Italy shows that the reproduction of the national working class was already inadequate even then.

The German State, afraid that there might be demographic gaps in a period of economic growth, continued rigidly to forbid abortion despite the fact that during the second half of the 1950s most countries in the East introduced a degree of liberalization. However, *in Germany, as in other European countries*, the dreaded “*unfortunate demographic development*” did occur and from the mid-1960s on, got worse. Although German postwar development relied upon the extensive use of labor power,⁸⁶ long work hours, a lot of overtime and the progressive depletion of agricultural labor,⁸⁷ women were heavily discriminated against with regard to industrial employment.

As in the case of France, women were eventually introduced into those industrial sectors from which they had been traditionally excluded.⁸⁸ Between 1950 and ‘60 all

⁸⁴ See on this subject *Foreign Labor in Nazi Germany*, op.cit.

⁸⁵ During the war they resorted to the forced labor of women sent by the East, besides that, as is well known, of Jewish, gypsy and political women.

⁸⁶ Bruno Groppo, *op. cit.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, graph no. 4.

⁸⁸ In this respect we always speak of novelties in a relative sense. When we go to the roots we discover always that every industrial sector has been based on a very large use of female and young labor power. For the Italian situation see: Stefano Merli, *Proletariato di fabbrica e capitalismo industriale. Il caso italiano: 1880-1900*, Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1973.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

industries increased the numbers of their female workers: in the steel and metal working industries, the number of women employed rose by 162.3%, and the electronics sector was not far behind. Female employment also increased both in traditional sectors, textiles, clothing, food, tobacco, sweets etc. and in precision mechanics, optics, watch making and photography,⁸⁹ areas where the consummate female skills of dexterity and precision reveal allegations of their lack of skill to be nothing more than a pretext for low wages.

IV. In the 1960s the lines traced by the previous processes are scored more deeply. The young working class is born out of refusal, rebellion and the struggles of the women behind it.

In the 1960s the movement that women had started during the postwar period grew and spread. That is, their refusal to function as appendages of development plans that wanted them to be the producers and providers of numerous children, tied to long hours of work at home, in the fields, in the factory and the office, chained and ghettoized in conditions of personal dependence. The drastic fall in the birth rate that began in 1964 gives an almost photographic image of the amount of control women had already achieved over procreation. As we said at the beginning, on a European scale this phenomenon is not simply the consequence of the spread of contraceptives. Furthermore, the fall in the birth rate was most rapid precisely in those strata that had previously been the least successful in controlling their fertility.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Evelyne Sullerot, op.cit., p. 231.

⁹⁰ See above, footnote 9.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

As we have seen, this fall in the birth rate expressed the level of power that women had won and is not an “event” that can be explained by this or that factor. A level of power built up through a process of struggle that has tended to offset the general “backwardness” to which every postwar or post-revolutionary government⁹¹ has always tried to confine women; a *lever of power* that increasingly allows women to bargain for a new quality of life.

*The control of women, close to the hearts of European planners since the beginning of European integration,*⁹² *grew in the 1960s.* But the basic instrument of this integration – emigration – has proved to be a double edged sword. Not only have immigrants become the spearhead of rebellion – as is fairly well known – but *emigration has definitely radicalized the centrifugal forces* set in motion by women and youths. This is also true for the elderly, who have increasingly demanded a certain quality of life, whatever the price, (though in Italy today it would be difficult to shout “grey power”).⁹³ One dividing line still functioning in favor of European integration (although less so during the 1960s) is that between areas where women can manage a wage, totally or partially (either remittances or their own) and where they cannot. In the latter areas survival is based on a rural income or expedients and *women are totally dependent* either on the men of the family or on older women. In this case, the emigration of some men, especially the youngest who are not responsible for supporting the community does not

⁹¹ We refer here specifically to the Algerian situation to which we will return.

⁹² See above, footnote 53.

⁹³ Leopoldina Fortunati, *op.cit.*

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

undermine the community itself. The case of Algeria is typical in this respect and is different from that of the Italian South which has areas of industrialization and is part of an industrial country. Not by chance is it possible for young women in the South of Italy to flee from the countryside, a type of behavior which is unthinkable in Algeria.⁹⁴ And if some Southern Italian women come to the conclusion that they had better find a dowry on their own because no money is likely to come from Germany any longer, whatever they decide, alternatives are open to them that are not available to Algerian women.

Another phenomenon connected to womens' growing independence which should be analyzed in order to understand the wave of working class struggles in the late 1960s is the fact that women have been able to impose a different use of the wage *within* the family – either when the elderly were not present or when they failed to subordinate women. Increasingly, the wives of Italian men who left for Germany and the wives of workers in Naples and Gela expected to administer the remittances and pay checks their husbands sent home, or even their own wage. *These women chose to invest the money that the elderly would have traditionally saved or invested in land, in their children.* The young proletarians from the South who went to work at FIAT in the 1960s had *assimilated this new*

⁹⁴ This “evasion” also takes place in Algeria both as an escape from the fields and as an escape from their husbands. They are desperate escapes in the attempt to disappear into the house of some European in Algiers working as maids. But, regularly, according to the rule of Ta’a the police take the woman back home. See the last chapter in Yussef El Masry op.cit.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

form of investment and with it the expectation of a higher standard of living.

We do not wish to underrate the innovative aspects of the rebellion of each new generation of workers and students, but we want to emphasize that this rebellion involves more than a direct confrontation outside of the family context. It also involves a certain level of disintegration of the family itself. *We need a new perspective on the family.*⁹⁵ *We must consider the erosion of authority emerging in the 1960s even in the proletarian family and relate this phenomenon to womens' management of the male wage.* This management has taken root among increasingly wider sectors of proletarian women as European integration (based on emigration) has progressed in the postwar period and as the process of urbanization headed by women has spread throughout Europe. In addition to the woman's own occasional wage (often earned in the underground economy: cottage industry, piecework, part time work etc. but in many cases the only source of support for the entire family) *this management of the man's wage gives women more power in relation to men and leads to a different relationship between the children and their mothers and fathers, giving rise to a certain crisis of authority.*

⁹⁵ We say "develop a new perspective" because the perspective implicit in this analysis began in the late Sixties in the USA and in the early Seventies in Europe, with the Feminist Movement on an international level. In these years, sociologists and politicians have only further confused the topic. See also, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Quartiere, Scuola e Fabbrica dal punto di vista della donna," in *L'Offensiva*, Torino: Musolini, 1972, 1974.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

In countries like Italy, during the 40s and 50s, certain sectors of *proletarian women first experienced the management of a wage*. Emigration did not affect these women in the same way it affected women in countries such as Algeria. In Italy emigration catalyzed womens' first steps towards independence. While in the latter countries, at least in the short term, it worsened womens' position. In countries with high levels of female employment *the breakdown of the family* associated with increasing insubordination among youth, inside and outside the factories were the results of the tensions stemming from the fact that women were working at home and outside the home.⁹⁶ However in both cases the young working class set in motion an entirely new cycle of struggles: in Italy (Turin, Piazza Statuto, 1962) and in Europe in general. This new cycle of struggle was born from the increasing refusal and rebellion of the proletarian women who had created and sustained the conditions for the struggle to grow in.⁹⁷ As we have already said, the attack on women, present since

⁹⁶ Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Quartiere, Scuola e Fabbrica dal punto di vista della donna," *op.cit.*, p. 27.

⁹⁷ Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *Potere femminile e sovversione sociale (con "Il posto della donna" di Selma James)*, Padova: Marsilio, 1972, 1974, p. 41. [English translation and publication: Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1972, 1974, pp. 26-27.] "In the factories youth refuse the leadership of older workers, and in the social revolts they are the diamond point. In the metropolis generations of the nuclear family have produced youth and student movements that have initiated the process of shaking the framework of constituted power: in the third world the unemployed youth are often in the streets before the working class organized in trade unions."

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

the beginning of European integration, became more intense during the 1960s, this tendency was accentuated by the wave of workers struggles at the end of the decade.

Although the Left has ignored it, in Italy the expulsion of women from the factory that began in 1962 is not over yet: another million women have joined the unemployed.⁹⁸ In Germany after 1960 capital intensive development and rationalization of the process of production gave rise to a further worsening of the situation of female work outside the home.⁹⁹ Women were increasingly expelled from the factories, and were forced to resort to part time work, piecework and temporary jobs: from 1961 to 1971 part time female workers increased by 83% reaching 2.3 million.¹⁰⁰ Immigrant women were employed either as unskilled (60%) or semi-skilled (1/3) workers.¹⁰¹

In France the percentage of women employed in the new industrial sectors from 1962 to 1968 increased: the electrical industry rose 11.1% from 114,000 to 126,660; chemical

⁹⁸ From the ISTAT monthly bulletin of March 1972 it appears that at the time of the inquiry the people included in the work-force over 13 years of age were 21,754,000, of which 16,168,000 were women and 5,586,000 were men. Among the women 10,701,000, that is 49.1% are housewives. More precisely in 1970, among employed women, 22% work in agriculture and almost all of them are married and not young. Among the others, 45% work in the service sector (married or not, young or not) and 33% in industry. See also for a comparison with the situation in England: M. Pia May, "Il Mercato del lavoro femminile, espulsione o occupazione nascosta femminile", in *Inchiesta*, anno III, n.9, genn.-marzo 1973, pp. 27-37.

⁹⁹ See, in general, OECD, *Labor Force Statistics*, Paris, 1970.

¹⁰⁰ Bruno Groppo, op.cit.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

industry rose 14.2% from 104,500 to 119,440; food industry rose 8.6% from 126,100 to 137,000; the machine tool industry rose 4% from 194,220 to 202,160. However, these changes did not significantly alter the sexual composition of the sectors.¹⁰²

In 1970, speaking at the Fourth National Congress of the CGT on female labor, Christine Gilles said “*the second figure, that of 33%*, that I mentioned, represents the difference between the real wages of men and women . . . In 1945 the coefficients of a female machine operator in the clothing industry were equal to P1 and P2 in metallurgy. They are far from being equal today. Last May minimum hourly wages were 3.93 francs and 4.10 francs.”¹⁰³

As for *immigrant women*, and Algerian women in particular, it should be remembered that in ‘62 – ‘63, fiscal policy forbade any Algerian to leave the country with more than 10 francs. This provided one more reason to have someone already established in France to go to a group of men supported by a few women.

Since 1967 further restrictions forbidding Algerian immigrants to send francs back to Algeria worsened the already bad situation of the women there, because, without remittances, they couldn’t buy certain goods which could only be bought with francs.

After Liberation, *Algerian emigration* changed. Small family nuclei or *single women* also began to emigrate, single women who rejected rural life or impositions in the

¹⁰² François Lantier, *op.cit.*, graph XIII, p. 45. More generally see OECD, *Labor Force Statistics*, Paris, 1970.

¹⁰³ Marie-Francoise Mouriaux, *op. cit.*, p. 150. [Translator’s note: CGT = *Confédération générale du travail* or General Confederation of Labor, one of several confederations of French unions.]

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

city life, like eating in a kitchenette separate from men, as expected by the leaders of “Islamic socialism”. Most of the women who emigrated alone to France were not proletarians. In fact most managed to enter the country by means of a tourist or a student visa. Once in France, however, *these single women – unlike single men – could not, and cannot, integrate with the Algerian community, because it does not accept women unless they are under the control of a man.* Therefore they end up at best as waitresses, but often as prostitutes. Proletarian emigrant women in general – from Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Portugal – either become waitresses or unskilled workers in the machine tool sector.

V. After 1968, the 1970s. Women began to bargain about reproduction. The community of immigrants has no longer to reproduce itself.

After 1968 the investment that women in Europe had made in their children (improving their childrens’ lives as well as trying to improve their own), is revealed by the potential for and level of struggle expressed by the working class on a European-wide scale.

Following these struggles there was a further cut back in the flow of Italian migration,¹⁰⁴ and Italians moved up the scale of immigrant employment. Now, the flow of immigration from other areas of the Mediterranean increased; Turks, Greeks, Algerians, Tunisians, Spanish and Portuguese moved in to take over the lower skilled and unskilled jobs.

Although one should not be too optimistic, it is clear that over the last few years emigration has, as the *Financial*

¹⁰⁴ The first slow-down of emigration took place after 1962.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

Times openly admitted, brought the “*spectre of revolution*” rather than social peace.¹⁰⁵

Because of this there has been an attempt, though fairly limited, to discover a source of labor power, a sector, that no matter where it comes from, is weaker, more easily blackmailed, than male immigrants: *women*. Here lies the problem of the 1970's, for in these years, the path trodden by women has reached a decisive turning point. In Europe, as well as in the United States, it has become a mass movement that expresses womens' need for independence and autonomy – a life no longer paid for at the price of the factory or of the home.

If men are less and less willing to submit to factory discipline is it unlikely that emigrant women will prove any more pliable. In this instance too the power difference that exists between men and women particularly among immigrants must not be forgotten. But given the direction in which women are moving – both in more “developed” and in “less developed” areas – it does not seem very likely that the use of women will or can provide a long term solution for the problems of European capital. In the midst of other better known images of “paper tigers” and “white elephants” perhaps the best image of this particular capitalist game is of “a cat chasing its own tail”.

¹⁰⁵ “Europe Keeps Revolution at Bay” in the *Financial Times*, February 28, 1973: “The spectre of revolution, this ghost moves about from place to place, visiting even the Netherlands, but is *fondest of all of Italy*. . . . What is important is that it is quite apparent that a great many of our leaders in industry, the trade unions and the government itself are aware, some consciously, others only vaguely, that Western society is in a more fragile state than it has been at any time since th war.” (In English in the text.)

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

European planners are now faced with a problem that appears to be as difficult as that of “squaring a circle”. In Germany, France and Italy (in FIAT after 1969) there have been further attempts to introduce women, particularly immigrant women, into the work force to replace male immigrant workers who have proved disinclined to accept factory discipline. In Sweden at Saab’s Scania’s of Soder-talje, comparable only with FIAT at Cassino, one finds “star like”¹⁰⁶ ways of organizing labor – especially adapted to be suitable for housewives including older women. At the same time however, European women are themselves less amenable to accept unwaged housework along with factory work, and are becoming more and more determined to make their reproduction work cost. Thus on the one hand, capitalist development is founded upon determinate levels of reproduction that must be continually guaranteed and that so far have cost the State very little, and on the other hand women have begun their attack precisely from this base: reproduction. It is true that the State does still succeed in blackmailing the politically weaker strata of women with work in the factory and work in the home, but in Europe at least, the State is being forced to respond to womens’ demands for payment of the costs of reproduction. Among the most important examples of this are: the proposal presented in France by the Union National des Associations Familiales for a wage for housework that would be the equivalent of 50% of the minimum

¹⁰⁶We refer to the arrangement of workers on the line. We read in the *Financial Times* of March 12, 1973, “Car Plants without Mass Disaffection”: “The assemblers, all housewives with no previous factory experience, work in groups of three.” (In English in the text.) This example, however, is an isolated case.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

wage, which would be subject to taxation and considered to be a wage in every respect.¹⁰⁷ The proposal already has some support in government circles. Another example is that of Italy, where women receive a monthly 50,000 lire check to pay for the extra housework involved when they look after a handicapped relative at home instead of leaving him or her in an Institution.¹⁰⁸ In the same country laws are also being proposed to raise the amount of the Family Allowance. While Family Allowances do not constitute a “wage” for housework, they are nonetheless a clear indication that reproduction is already an area of bargaining.

Before concluding, we should look briefly at the case of Great Britain, a country that has only recently joined the European Community, and which remains closely tied to US capital which explains some similarities found between the two countries’ policies and strategies around both population and female employment. The traditionally high level of female employment in Britain has already been mentioned. During the 1970s, the government encouraged and financed broad studies on the condition of women and their levels of employment. The commissions set up for this purpose continually ended up by recommending maximum flexibility in the organization of work so that

¹⁰⁷ «Les femmes au foyer», in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, April 10, 1973.

¹⁰⁸ This check, issued by the provincial administration in some centers of Emilia is officially in the name of the handicapped relative for whom it is supposed to have a therapeutic function: not to make him or her feel “dependent” or “a burden” on their family. Officially it is ignored that the person’s staying at home means an immediate intensification of housework for the woman, which the 50,000 liras are far from “paying for.”

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

“women could choose between part-time and full-time jobs.” They recommended a “rapid expansion of daycare centers and nursery schools, with flexible schedules adjustable to the mother’s needs” (mothers who should then go to work), they also recommended setting up cafeterias which would provide “meals to youngsters and children whose mothers work, *even in the school holidays* (our emphasis). Furthermore they recommended that the “Minister of Education should keep *in regular contact with womens’ organizations*”, and that an “adequate investigation be made on the proportions and conditions of home-working” (which apparently is not only a Mediterranean problem).¹⁰⁹

Yet despite all this it has still proved impossible for the British government to persuade British women to take factory jobs and replace West Indians, Africans, Indians or Pakistanis. British women have already shown resistance to accepting the discriminatory jobs they are constantly being offered, thus it seems unlikely that they will quietly accept jobs such as secretary, typist etc. which¹¹⁰ are the ones offered as a result of the talk about the need for more widespread employment of women at a certain skill level. Also the struggle around the costs of reproduction, for a wage for housework has already begun in Britain and has reached a national level in the campaign around Family Allowances.¹¹¹ Not only was the govern-

¹⁰⁹ See, on this subject, Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, *Sixth Report from the Expenditure Committee*, session 1972-73, *The Employment of Women*.

¹¹⁰ It is enough to take a look at the *Financial Times* and *Le Monde* of 1973.

¹¹¹ For a brief history of the Family Allowances System in Great Britain, see Suzie Fleming, *The Family Allowance Under Attack*, Bristol:

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

ment forced to abandon its plan of abolishing the Family Allowance (the only money which women receive directly), it also had to face the growth of a movement that has irreversibly opened up a struggle and begun bargaining about reproduction.

At the same time, the *community of male and female immigrants has reached a level of subversion that is already too high to permit the State to use women against men*. Indeed the *numbers of immigrant women in waged work is very high*, remarkably high in the context of a labor market where the *division between the sexes is very rigid*. The degree of subversion of the immigrant working class has been raised by the new generation of workers, the sons and daughters of the original immigrants, these young men and women, particularly women, who were either born or have grown up in Britain are freer from the innate constraints of their parents, who came from social areas where any wage was already a conquest, and have no illusions that they will be able to move more easily up the social and labor strata.

But the *stability* of a waged job has allowed the second generation to achieve a new level of power high enough to break that very stability itself. These young workers have the same attitude to wage labor as any of their peers

Falling Wall Press, 1973; *Hands Off our Family Allowances, What We Need is Money*, London: Crest Press, 1973.

As for the perspective behind this struggle – the struggle over wages for housework – and its relationship with the struggles of women who clean at night, see *Radical America*, vol. 7, no. 4 and 5, July-October 1973, pp. 131-192. The whole issue deals comprehensively with the debate over wages for housework that has been going on in Italy, Britain and the United States.

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

internationally, although their struggle is sharpened by the struggle against racism within the labor market. It is also sharpened by the fact that a supervisor is often seen in terms of the slave driver of old. Specific to women is the struggle against and refusal of the limitations imposed by family life, a family life that the parents' wages both sets up and requires. Womens' protest in the factory and at school has not yet reached the levels of that of the young men, but the force with which they confront their mothers and fathers, a struggle they often have to carry on alone and isolated within the family is a sign of their preparedness to struggle. Since these young women are rarely to be found in the streets in battle with the police their struggle for independence is often not even seen.

Also the Black Movement has, in Britain too, completely neglected womens' condition in its programs and aims. However, the results of their efforts can be surmised from the way in which the parents of these young people are increasingly more willing to become involved and help youth in clashes with the police and in dealings with the authorities in general. But while the young men remain the visible protagonists, the young womens' struggles although hidden, are often as effective.

Sometimes, a Black West Indian, realizing he was unable to support his family at home would escape to Britain, leaving his wife and children at home. Women had to go very far from home in order to achieve any independence of their own either with or without a man. Often it is the women who send money back so that their children can join them when they settle. It did not take long for such a situation to generate a crisis of authority. The British government, while long promoting *limitations on immigra-*

6. *Reproduction and Emigration*

tion, now in the Seventies has promoted the exclusion of these children by attempting to stop West Indian women from procreating; it *attacked the Black birth rate* by encouraging doctors to sterilize Black Women. This is *in line with US policies of the 1960s* both towards its own blacks and towards the Third World in general. When emigration ceases to work well, it is better to export capital, to take the factories to the workers. But Third World men and women do not seem to accept them peacefully.

Part II.

Articles

7. Starting From the Social Wage

Camille Barbagallo and Nicholas Beuret

We wrote the following article almost two years ago, when the global economic crisis had in many ways just begun, as had the intensification of the neo-liberal program of ‘austerity’ in Britain. Stuart Hall has recently argued¹ that the current conjuncture must be seen as an intensification and continuation of the neo-liberal project. While questions remain as to the ‘sustainability’ of neo-liberalism in the long term, we certainly agree that in relation to children and childcare as well as the (dis)location of women, it is very much a case of a continued onslaught. Unfortunately, many of the regressive processes and possible outcomes we describe in the article have come to pass or are currently being implemented. In the last two years in Britain, the number of unemployed women has reached over one million, the highest since 1988. Women now make up over 30 per cent of those

7. Starting From the Social Wage

claiming unemployment benefits – the highest proportion since the data series began in 1983. For those women who are still employed, nearly three quarters of a million are involuntarily working part-time.

Such dramatic changes and attacks make it clear that it is not enough to simply trace and track statistics and impacts or to outline possible futures for social reproduction and childcare that are currently taking shape in Britain. We need to place these changes within a context that is now clearer than ever – that is a crisis of social reproduction. Most importantly we need to develop methods and practices that mean we can not only survive this crisis but also create new terrains of resistance, hope and revolt.

What is this crisis? It is not just a social crisis – one of “Broken Britain” and social collapse – which has a much longer history, one which has intensified, though not been dramatically transformed, during the current economic crisis. It is also a crisis for capitalism. It is a crisis in the sense that as a system, capitalism finds itself lacking for both adequate markets for its goods and adequate profit rates. Currently the neo-liberal answer is to attempt to reduce the cost of ‘doing business’ by shifting more and more of the social costs of reproduction back onto the broader mass of society. From the contours of how these changes are impacting our families, homes and communities, we know this not a

7. Starting From the Social Wage

gender or race neutral process. However, it is also a crisis for the state. In that it is a failure of the institutions of governance of our social reproduction. Not only in relation the costs that the state has in relation to social reproduction – research shows that despite their best efforts, the basic ‘social wage’ in Britain has not been significantly reduced during the previous 30 years of neo-liberalism. It is more than that in that the state has failed to sufficiently transform and discipline the working class into solid, decent consumers and entrepreneurs who will do anything to get ahead.

Therefore, it is crucial to emphasis that the current British Government (as would the so-called opposition party) intends to resolve this multi-faceted crisis through processes of privatisation and abandonment to the market. If you can’t pay for it, and you will have to pay for all of it, you don’t get it. It is at this front line – of privatisation and abandonment – that the battle over the costs of living, the fundamental cost of reproduction and the availability of the resources essential to reproduction, must be fought.

– September, 2011

Try as she might, Margaret Thatcher failed in the early 1980s to impose ‘true’ austerity on Britain. Which is relevant for us today because the current financial crisis is not only being used to further the aims of the neo-liberal project, it is also trying to succeed where previous attempts have failed. Across Europe, the financial crisis

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

has turned into a social crisis as wages and the conditions of work and life are attacked through programs of austerity. The crisis is being used - indeed it is being put to work in the best tradition of neo-liberalism - to subject the populations of Europe to a brutal process of structural adjustment.

In Britain, as in previous decades, the neo-liberal reforms are going deeper and moving faster than elsewhere in Europe. The last remnants of the British welfare state are currently being abolished and restructured and in the process the government is winding back the state provision of social services to levels not seen for decades. Thatcher, and the New Labour governments that followed her, responded to the collapse of demand that austerity inflicted on the economy at the start of the 80s through the creation of a dynamic housing market (by selling council housing and increasing access to cheap credit) and an increasingly deregulated financial and banking market. For the last thirty years, wages and income have diverged, with credit (and rising asset values, especially housing) coming to stand in for relatively stagnant wages. The current round of restructuring is very much about a fresh attempt to impose true austerity. All the 'belt tightening' is focused on reducing incomes to the level of wages.

The agenda of re-linking the wage to expenditure is about reducing the amount of support provided by the state - that is to say, a reduction of the social wage. The social wage in Britain has remained stubbornly high throughout the decades of neo-liberalism, despite the attacks, cuts and reconfigurations it has suffered. The current austerity program aims to drastically reduce the social wage, and in the process deepen the divisions

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

between so ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor. However, the aim of the present austerity program is not just to wind back state expenditure, to reduce the ‘tax burden’ on corporations and banks, or to impose an even harsher discipline on workers. It is all of these to be sure, but it is also a continuation of the project of the production of a neo-liberal subject. As Thatcher famously said “Economics are the method, the object is to change the soul”. One of the aims of neo-liberalism is to produce a new kind of social subject – one that is coldly rational and entrepreneurial; one that is totally responsible for their own care, education and reproduction and is morally judged on how they put their ‘freedom’ to work. The processes of privatisation and marketisation that feature so heavily in neo-liberal ‘reforms’ are, as well as being part of a process of accumulation by dispossession, a means to that end.

The processes of neo-liberal subjectification, the re-linking of wages to income, and reducing social expenditure have certainly not been achieved and at best can only be said to have only partially succeeded over the previous decades. Continuing levels of high social expenditure and numerous consumer and housing ‘bubbles’ testify to the uneven successes and failures of the neo-liberal project, not to mention people’s stubborn refusal to act and think as cold entrepreneurs. This article will not attempt to examine the whole of the proposed neo-liberal ‘British experiment’, but will focus on one specific aspect: childcare and the social wage. We begin with the question of ‘who will look after the kids’ because that is where we have started from in practice (our need for childcare) and because theoretically we see a need to develop a critique of

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

neo-liberal capitalism that recentres and revalues social reproduction. We became involved in a campaign to ‘save’ community nurseries in the London borough where we live in 2010.¹ The nursery campaign, and its connects and disconnects to the broader neo-liberal austerity reforms, are our starting point for understanding the program of government reforms in Britain and the effects of the social wage more generally.

Women and Children First

The restructuring and reduction of the social wage is overwhelmingly an attack on women – no other group of bodies can be said to do so much unwaged work as women. And so it is women who will suffer most from the latest cuts to the social wage in Britain. Numerous studies in Britain have already shown that it is women who will bear the brunt of cuts to social expenditure, wage austerity and job losses. Research by the House of Commons Library² has shown that women will bear two-thirds of all of the financial effects of the neo-liberal reforms currently being proposed by the central Government. All across Britain, government funded services that provide care and facilities for children are being defunded, abolished and downgraded. This article addresses some of our experience in the east London borough of Hackney with a campaign to

¹<http://friendsofhackneynurseries.wordpress.com/>

²A gender audit of the Budget was commissioned by Yvette Cooper MP, and carried out by the House of Commons Library in June 2010. <http://www.yvettecooper.com/women-bear-brunt-of-budget-cuts>

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

save community nurseries. Community nurseries are one of the remnants of previous feminist struggles in the 1960s and 1970s that fought for progressive childcare provisions. They are not-for-profit nurseries run by community members, with control of the running of the nurseries very much in parents' and workers' hands as well as managers. But before discussing the specifics of both Hackney and childcare in Britain, it is necessary to explore the concept of the social wage.

The Program of 'Cuts' & the Social Wage

Let's be clear from the start. The public services that are being cut include things that we need, but we hate how they are given to us: like unemployment benefits. They also involve jobs that we rely on but resent having to do. But what is also true is that they are part of a 'social wage' fought for and won by previous generations. By 'social wage' we mean the services and direct payments provided by the state that enable our subsistence. The health services, childcare, unemployment benefits, social housing – they are our social wage. The social wage has a dual effect. It is a method by which the state organises our lives and produces disciplined social subjects, and it also a means of reducing the direct cost (to us) of our own material reproduction. It is both our tool and theirs. The social wage is a way of providing for those needs that exist under capitalism that cannot be or are not paid for by individual capitalists, for example the need for an

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

educated or healthy population. These are the social costs of capitalist reproduction and they are paid for through state expenditure. However, our needs are met on terms that are not our own or defined by 'us'. By determining both our needs and problems, as well the 'solutions', the state is able to produce particular compositions of social relations and subjects.

Through services and payments the direct costs associated with reproducing ourselves are reduced (and our needs to some extent satisfied). Instead of paying the 'full' cost for childcare out of our wages, we get subsidised or 'free' childcare. Instead of paying directly for health services when we are ill, such services are funded by taxation and provided by the NHS. Instead of having to put aside money in case we are sacked, we can claim the dole. In so far as our needs are real, these gains are real. By reducing the connection between wages and our 'quality of life' we have weakened the power of money to command our work and our existence. The social wage disconnects our material reproduction from our income levels, thereby undermining the discipline of the wage.

Importantly the social wage is also a way of 'paying the unpaid'. The social wage is one way of redistributing income so as to benefit those people whose (unwaged) labour is fundamental and vital for the reproduction of workers and capitalism in general. The primary focus of the social wage is social reproduction and this involves labour processes that would otherwise be unwaged. This work has historically been known as 'women's work'³ and involves

³Not women's work in the sense that these kinds of work are more natural for women, but that capitalism has created a gendered

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

tasks such as caring for young children, the elderly, the sick and disabled, the health of the body and emotional and psychological services such as counselling. The last forty years have seen significant shifts and changes to the who, where and how social reproduction occurs. For instance, more men are now involved in the work of looking after their children and more migrant workers are employed to look after our elderly relatives. While it is true that such work has been and continues to be gendered and racialised it is important to recognise that the landscape of social reproduction is by no means simple or without contradictions.

None of this is to say that the social wage is unproblematic. Obviously it is - because under capitalism wage relations are based on exploitation and alienation, and the various elements of the social wage are no exception. We need the services because we have no other choice. This need relates back to the dual 'freedom' that Marx saw as the precondition of wage labour in capitalist societies: we are free to sell our labour and we have been 'freed' from the ability to reproduce ourselves in any other way. In the past struggle around the social wage has had a tendency to orientate to the second aspect of this 'freedom' - our ability or lack of ability to reproduce ourselves outside of the wage-labour relation. It is here that the contradiction of the social wage appears because it is not a wage like any other. Its very existence undermines the authority and power of command of the wage. However, left as it is, the social wage also operates as a form of control and

division of labour where some forms of mostly unpaid and unwaged labour have been naturalised as 'women's work.'

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

discipline, and as a way of enabling wage labour to exist at all in its current form. So, like other wage struggles, our ultimate aim must be to go beyond the immediate relation and create a new social relationship. But we can't do this by opting out. Not only because dropping out and making our own little utopias does not get us any closer to the necessary transformation of the world in which we live, but because the social wage represents real struggles and gains. We need to be in, against and beyond the social wage.

The Hackney Situation

Hackney, situated in north-east London, shares its borders with the City and financial districts. With a population of around 220,000, the borough is densely populated. There is a concentration of migrant working class communities and unemployment that is above average, at around 11 per cent of the population. The state is the biggest single employer in Hackney; around 23,000 people are employed in the public sector. As one of the most deprived boroughs in the UK, Hackney will be particularly heavily hit by the Conservative /Liberal Democrats (ConDems) proposed cuts to social expenditure. The Hackney Council is already talking about possible 'restructuring', with temporary agency workers mostly likely being the first to go. If everything goes according to plan, there will be further cuts to local libraries, young people's services and there will continue to be job losses and cut backs in the already privatised social service bodies that deal with social housing (Hackney Homes), refuse and waste col-

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

lection, nurseries and other childcare services. Despite the ConDems championing of ‘family values’, parents in Hackney will be hard hit by the cuts to social benefits with a freeze on child benefit payments and restructuring of housing benefit. The cuts to housing benefits will particularly affect Hackney residents: almost 40% of households in Hackney claim housing benefit, with a quarter of these households in privately rented accommodation. The estimates of the number of people who will be forced to leave inner London because of cuts to housing benefits has been estimate to be around 250,000.

But our focus is the state of childcare provision through nurseries. Nurseries in Hackney are under attack ironically not directly because of the ConDems austerity budget, but because the Learning Trust, a private company that controls the provision for children’s services in Hackney, cut nursery funding in April 2010. In response Friends of Hackney Nurseries (FHN), a coalition of nursery workers, parents and community activists began campaigning and organising to try and stop these cuts from occurring.

The Hackney Learning Trust – the UK’s first private not-for profit company to take over the responsibility of running all education services for an entire borough⁴ – imposed cuts of up to £50,000 to community nurseries receiving commissioning grants. Commissioning grants subsidise childcare places for parents on low incomes. Commissioning grants have, until recently, only been paid to

⁴Hackney Council ‘outsourced’ the running of education services in the borough to the Learning Trust in 2002. However the Council remains responsible for allocating the Learning Trust funding and the Major of Hackney ultimately remains responsible for borough run services

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

the 13 remaining community nurseries in Hackney, out of 68 childcare ‘settings’ in the borough. These 68 include Council run children’s centres, community nurseries (not-for-profit parent and staff managed nurseries) and private nurseries (private nurseries make up half of the total childcare places). As a result of the massive cuts to commissioning grant funding and cuts to other funding streams, many community nurseries had to reduce both staff numbers and childcare places. Some are even facing closure because of it.

Both the Hackney Council and the Learning Trust have, after much public pressure, claimed that the overall pot of money for low-income families in Hackney had not been cut – apparently it had just been ‘redistributed’. They have resisted providing evidence of this redistribution, and the timeline of action then reaction tells another story – one of incompetence and a slow but steady strategy of privatisation.

When community nurseries were first told of the cuts (one month before they were to be implemented), FHN quickly reformed after 10 years of inactivity and immediately set about working with parents and nurseries to put pressure on the Council and Learning Trust to reverse the cuts. This all happened just prior to the national elections in 2010, making public shaming particularly effective as a tactic. In short order the Mayor of Hackney, Jules Pipe, condemned the Learning Trust’s behaviour⁵ and the Learning Trust scrambled to meet with the handful of nurseries that had started to publicly voice their

⁵<http://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2010/05/04/mayor-speaks-out-over-hackney-nursery-cuts/>

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

opposition. Despite saying publicly that the money had not been cut but redistributed, in the end the Learning Trust reversed half of the cuts largely through something they called a ‘cushioning fund’ – a one off grant to help the affected nurseries through the hardship of the cuts. They didn’t say where this extra money had been found.

After this shambles, things got even more interesting. Meetings between nurseries and the Learning Trust were set up then cancelled without explanation. Different letters were sent, seemingly at random, to different nurseries all saying slightly different things. The Learning Trust started contacting community nurseries to offer them help in winding down their operations. However, during the weeks of confusion and misinformation the Learning Trust announced that commissioning grants would now be available to all nurseries in Hackney, further reducing the amount available to community nurseries (due to increased competition with the private and Council run nurseries). Finally, the Learning Trust decided in July to cut yet another stream of nursery funding. Under the new Single Funding Formula – the funding stream that pays for the 15 hours of free childcare for all 3 and 4 year olds – all nurseries will face a per child funding cut compared with previous years. In addition, funding for children with special needs has been reduced, something that must be seen within the context of a general attack on the benefits and services for the disabled within the national austerity measures.⁶ FHN has managed to get a significant amount of funding returned to community nurseries for at least the next financial year. And we are continuing to apply

⁶<http://www.scope.org.uk/news/disabled-people-hit-by-welfare-cuts>

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

pressure on both the overall funding and funding for children for special needs. But the future of the latter two remains an open question.

What does all this mean? It would seem that the redistribution of funding from community nurseries to private nurseries is part of the last stages of the privatisation of childcare services. Over the last 20 years the total amount of money given to community nurseries has been steadily reduced. At the same time there has been an explosion of private nurseries in Hackney. Fifteen years ago there were no private nursery spaces in Hackney. Now, around half of all childcare places are privately provided. This process of privatisation has taken place within the context of reduced state funding, indicating not only a process of privatisation but also of marketisation of services.

A Brief Note on the Friends of Hackney Nurseries Campaign

The rebirth of the FHN campaign group came just prior to the national government and local council elections in the UK in May 2010. As a result the very first meeting saw over 30 people turn up, many of whom were associated with local political parties and looking for a community campaign to be identified with and ‘support’. Over the next few months however, participation in campaign meetings was reduced to a smaller group of about eight core members who are a mix of local parents, feminist activists and nursery workers and managers (with more managers than workers participating on a regular basis).

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

From the beginning the campaign collective has both struggled to find direction and retain members. The inability to figure out what was actually happening in the childcare sector in Hackney was both because of the complexity of childcare funding and because of the difficulty of getting enough information from nurseries where staff are both overworked and unsure of the state of their funding themselves. Because of the difficulty of finding out what was going on, it was not easy to establish clear objectives. As many of us were either new to childcare or were well established within existing structures, creating a collective vision of an alternative kind of childcare was difficult, especially as we spent most of our time just finding out what was already the case, rather than discussing what we wanted childcare to look like in Hackney.

It could be said that the lack of a clear vision has hampered the group's efforts to build its membership and create a more powerful public dynamic. It wasn't the only obstacle though. Time is the biggest stumbling block to mobilising both parents and community nursery workers and managers. No one has time to meet after work, or on weekends. Overworked parents and nursery workers have little space left in their lives outside of care and work (or care work). Those of us in the campaign felt the pressure of lack of time, and many of the activities we attempted or undertook suffered from this lack. Because of the lack of clear direction, and the reduced number of members and their lack of time, the campaign made most use of traditional lobbying methods as opposed to organising methods, despite the fact that many members of FHN had a clear preference for organising work. These methods led to a number of quick wins, but also to a series of engagements

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

with officials and councillors that took time from other activities.

One unresolved tension in the group was around the decision for FHN to work with managers of the community nurseries. Some group members felt that management was management and working with them was a compromise. This reflects a broader tendency in the Left to see managerial roles as something apart from ‘the working class’. However such simple notions are becoming more and more blurred under neo-liberalism, as we have seen a diffusion of managerial responsibilities throughout the workforce over the last 30 years – from low-level line managers and team leadership to an explosion of middle management - just senior and middle management alone accounts for 15 per cent of the workforce in the UK⁷. Radical left politics needs to become reconciled with the reality of everyday labour relations in the UK, which sees many workers with at least some managerial responsibility. Management, as a general mode of social relations, is diffused through the body of the proletariat and not just something external to it and is embedded within the production of the neo-liberal subject. This proliferation of managerial ethics and ideas is on its own a blockage to the production of different collective social relations, and formed a very real concrete material condition within FHN, with managerial priorities forming the basis for many of our collective tasks.

Clearly, though, excluding all people with some kind of managerial responsibilities is not an option, especially

⁷http://www2.managers.org.uk/content_1.aspx?id=10:293&id=10:290&id=10:9

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

not within a community nursery campaign where the gap between management and worker is often slight and at times imperceptible. However, different contexts lend themselves to different alliances. Of course a clearer distinction between management and workers would need to be made if the campaign involved staff undertaking union organising at nurseries. However, in the instance of a community campaign aiming to fight against government funding cuts and neo-liberal restructuring of the childcare sector, working with both affected nursery staff and managers, in community controlled and run premises, it not only strategic but necessary. The desire or idea of politics as pure neglects the actual messiness and contradictions so often present in the alliances, experiences and possibilities of social reproduction.

Why Does the Privatisation of Childcare Matter?

It could be argued, as it has been by many Hackney Councillors, that it doesn't matter if childcare is provided by the Council, by community-run centres, or by private businesses. So as long as the total number of childcare places in Hackney hasn't been reduced, does it really matter on what basis they are provided?

The short answer is yes. The case against privatisation can be summed up as follows. A service run according to the logic of the market tends to drive down costs (and therefore quality), reduce staff and employment conditions to the absolute minimum (reducing wages and reducing

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

the quality of the childcare again), increase the costs to the service user (through fee increases) and reduce provision to those areas where it is profitable (creating a system where having a service and the quality of that service directly relates to how much you earn). There is also the issue of directing public funds (via grants) to private-for-profit businesses. Any one of these outcomes is reason enough to reject the privatisation of community or public services.

The alternative to the market is often presented as the state. However state-run services are also deeply problematic. They provide us with services we need but are given in relationships of subservience or dependence. It is no wonder that state-run services are so unpopular, with most of the population of the UK preferring service cuts to tax increases.⁸ While the services we have are a direct result of the pressure we have been able to exert as antagonistic social movements, this pressure has been channelled into the creation of services that follow the logic of the state and serve the needs of capitalism. Our confrontation with capital is over the imposition of waged labour and the form this labour takes. But our struggle with the state is over the overall management of our lives, in particular the management of our own material reproduction.

Cuts to services are not the end of the state's management of our lives, just a reconfiguration. With the move from community-run to either Council or private childcare

⁸“Nearly three quarters of voters – including most Labour voters – say that the government's priority should be to cut spending rather than increase taxes” Guardian, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jun/21/budget-2010-guardian-icm-poll>

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

we lose something essential: control. The only childcare services parents (and to some extent workers) have any control over in a meaningful way are community nurseries. Committees of parents and staff manage them, and parents are encouraged to be involved at a decision-making and organisation level. In contrast, the Council appoints staff who manage Council run nurseries while private nurseries may ‘involve’ parents but they usually do so in order to reduce their costs. Privatisation undermines one of our most important gains from the struggles of the 60s and 70s: community run services that we manage for our own material reproduction but that have financial resources provided by the state. This is why the slow decline of funding and the latest attack on community nurseries is so important. They are the last of the childcare services we have any control over in Hackney.

Privatisation plays another important role beyond the redirecting of public funds to private companies and removing public or community control from services. Privatisation is also a state-led project of producing a new social subject: a rational, market-driven neo-liberal individual. Privatisation of community services introduces the functioning of the market and the logic of profit to areas of social life that had previously been structured differently. Importantly the aim is not just to wring profit from what were once public services, but to change the way people interact with each other and change their expectations of the state. In this context the privatisation of nurseries can be seen as an attempt to produce the parent as a rational ‘market actor’. Mum and Dad as entrepreneurs, who weigh up their options, calculate what will best deliver the outcomes they desire and act individually to achieve

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

that end. The end result of the project of ‘marketisation’ is the creation of a social subject who is judged (and judges) on their ability to meet their own needs (either through directly paying for them or providing them on their own) and make good on their ambitions and aspirations. To be sure, privatisation is not the only mechanism through which the neo-liberal subject is produced. It is however a process which has the immediate effect of reorganising the material conditions of our reproduction and creating a measure of productivity, profitability and efficiency.

Outside the Laboratory

Hackney was always something of a laboratory for the previous New Labour government, and the Learning Trust is a perfect case in point. However it is not just in Hackney that these cuts to care are taking place. Across the UK, at a borough level and at a University level, childcare services are facing declining funding and further cuts. At least 20 universities are cutting childcare services⁹, many other Councils are reducing funding, rents are being increased¹⁰ and central Government is looking to decrease childcare funding streams. In addition, the Government is reducing and number of specific benefits including Child Benefit. Specific grants and services for children are also

⁹Nursery world, <http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/923379/Full-scale-university-nursery-cuts-exposed-Unison/>

¹⁰Nursery world, <http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/923379/Full-scale-university-nursery-cuts-exposed-Unison/>

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

being cut, including grants for improving or building new buildings¹¹, and grants for the creation of playgrounds.

As other observers have pointed out,¹² the difference between New Labour and the ConDem's is a difference of degree. It is clear that had New Labour won the election they too would be embarking on cuts to the social wage. In fact the cuts in Hackney were announced prior to the ConDem's austerity budget, and are taking place as part of the broader historical tendency of neo-liberalism. Clearly cuts to nurseries need to be stopped, and sufficient funding restored in the short term. In the longer term there needs to be a conversation at both a community level and a national level about how we want our children to be cared for, outside of the logic of the market and beyond just making it possible for women to re-enter the waged workforce in greater numbers. Before we can begin this conversation, we need to understand why these cuts are happening now, and what they mean.

The neo-liberal project has developed along two axes in rich countries like Britain – holding down or winding back the wage and introducing the market as the basis for all social relations. However the difference between the current cuts in the UK and the cuts implemented in the earlier phases of neo-liberalism both here and elsewhere is twofold. Firstly capitalism has no need to increase the paid labour force in the UK not at least until wages have

¹¹<http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/bulletin/NurseryWorldUpdate/article/1032984/?DCMP=EMC-CONNurseryWorldUpdate>

¹²see Richard Seymour, http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/the_axemans_jazz_why_cuts_why_now_and_how_to_stop_them/ and Tony Wood, <http://newleftreview.org/?page=article&view=2830>

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

been drastically reduced. If anything, the total number of those available for waged work needs to be reduced to make sure that the numbers of unemployed do not grow excessively and that an entire generation of workers is not lost. Secondly, there is a need to ensure that there is not a reproductive crisis in the working class (this is expressed by Prime Minister David Cameron as the desire to ‘fix Broken Britain’). The government needs to find a way to reduce state expenditure on the social wage without significantly undermining the continuity of care and continued reproduction of the working class.

The post-feminist discourse of free-market liberal feminists and the pronouncements about the entrepreneurial or aspirational citizen by all of the major political parties takes centre stage as an organising ideological force within the financial crisis. It is through the discourse of ‘choice’ that women are being encouraged to either move away from waged labour and go back to the home or resume the gendered ‘second shift’ of unpaid work in the home as well as working outside the home for wages. It is through the rhetoric of ‘choice’ that parenthood is being increasingly cast as something that individuals rationally choose to do and in doing so bear all of the moral responsibility (and financial culpability) and therefore should not expect any ‘assistance’ from the state and other ‘tax payers’. The return to the home is not only being proposed to women – men too are being encouraged to consider this option – but only as long as their partners earn more than they do. The idea that life decisions are rational choices made on a cost-benefit analysis pervades current responses to both the paucity of care, the disparity between men and women’s wages and an ever-present desire to escape waged labour.

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

It is through the discourse of ‘choice’ that the state can withdraw funding from services without appearing to endanger social reproduction or provoking confrontation. The choice of love, family and community over money and careers is at the heart of post-feminist discourse. This ‘choice’ takes place within the context of a massive economic and political assault on women. From job losses (women make up 65 per cent of all public sector employees) to cuts to pensions and benefits, as well as specific programs dealing with everything from domestic violence to cuts in playground construction – the target is women and especially those women that care for children. So the ‘rational choice’ ends up being not a choice at all but instead a necessity to return to the home to perform unpaid reproductive labour. This rational choice also serves to mobilise the elderly, whose own pensions and benefits are under attack. When families are unable to return one person to the home full time to care for children, the first option taken by most parents in the UK is to turn to their own parents before turning to paid childcare.¹³

The aim of the ConDem’s cuts to government spending is to reduce the social wage, and to return social reproduction to the realm of the unpaid. It is also an attempt to change historical expectations. It is not a return to the 1950s so much as the creation of a voluntaristic morality that serves the same function of relocating people (women for the most part) back into the home to perform unpaid labour. The rational choice of generally lower paid women moving back

¹³The 14 million grandparents in the UK provide an estimated £3.9billion in childcare free of charge. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/oct/06/childcare-grandparents-strike>

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

to the home to perform unwaged labour also reinvigorates traditional gender relations with a neo-liberal logic of rational choice. It also further entrenches what has become, over the course of the last 30 years, a dual economy with a minority of well paid professionals at one end (with an even smaller number of the super wealthy above them) and a struggling majority of dual low-income households at the other.

In, Against and Beyond the Social Wage

Among the demands for childcare in the 1960s and 1970s there was the demand for community run and controlled nurseries. Feminists who struggled over questions of childcare and campaigned for community control of nurseries won this demand with varying degrees of success. To be sure, these nurseries have their problems. Like much of the labour involved in providing social services, looking after children is demanding, underpaid and undervalued. People's capacity to care and love is relied upon and it often means that people accept conditions they might not otherwise. The logic of childcare liberate's women's time but only for waged work. To begin to navigate a path of resistance out of the current crisis we need to return to the question of what kind of reproduction we want.

For the nursery campaign in Hackney, this will mean reinvigorating the community nursery sector. Even though it will mean swimming against the neo-liberal tide, community nurseries need to not just be defended

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

but expanded - with the state footing the bill. Outside of Hackney, for the various social movements engaged in resisting the ConDems austerity budget the task will be to organise and mobilise around the question of not only childcare provision but also the social wage more generally. At present the lack of an organised feminist movement and the continued lack of engagement by left groups and social movements with the issue of childcare means that this task is as urgent as ever.

The question of work needs be at the centre of all our struggles – waged and unwaged, concerning both conditions and compensation. But this must take place at a general level, across all social provision of services, and not be allowed to become a question of shifting resources from one group of workers to another. And this demand must take place in a broader conversation about care – what is it, where it happens and who does it. It is within this conversation that the question of the social wage can be raised once more from its starting point – as wages for the wageless and wages for reproductive work.

Central to our struggles around social reproduction is the necessity to return to the question of work-time – work-time paid for through wages and work-time unwaged. We cannot allow our reproduction to depend on how much time we have left from waged labour, instead we need to reduce the time we spend at waged work. If reproduction is brought to the centre of our struggles then perhaps the struggle become less a refusal of waged work and more a reduction of the working day so we have the time necessary to participate in our collective social reproduction.

More generally there is an urgent need to refocus anti-cuts campaigns around the question of our material re-

7. *Starting From the Social Wage*

production and place demands for control at the heart of them. Here, ironically, the David Cameron's rhetoric of mutualism could be used tactically. By starting from the idea of worker and service user alliances, there is a possibility of constructing a social force powerful enough to resist funding cuts and creating alliances that co-manage and co-control public services. By forcing the state to continue to fund our material reproduction and using their rhetoric to push for more control at the same time, we can build a resistance that means this crisis becomes a crisis for capitalism and the state – and not for us.

8. The Unfinished Feminist Revolution

Silvia Federici

One of the main political developments of the last decades across the planet has been women's revolt against confinement to domestic labor, leading to a redefinition of this work and women's relation to capital and the state. The Women's Liberation Movement of the '70s was the political expression of this revolt. It was a movement against 'housework' and its corollaries: economic and social dependence on men, social discrimination, and the naturalization of reproductive activities as attributes of femininity. Women took to the streets, the schools, the courts, demanding that the state cease to control their bodies, that abortion be decriminalized, that wife beating and rape within marriage no longer be tolerated, that school programs be revised to acknowledge women's presence in history. Their revolt also took less visible forms that only women in the movement could recognize as instances of 'refusal of housework,' like the fall of the birth rate, stiff in post WWII Europe (Dalla Costa 1977), and the increase in number of divorces and women-headed families.

8. *The Unfinished Feminist Revolution*

The central role that housework and reproduction have played in the feminist theories of the '70s was rooted in these struggles. Women's refusal to define themselves as housewives made it possible to conceive the unpaid domestic work done by women as a specifically capitalist form of labor-production and a terrain of exploitation: the social factory where the workforce is daily reproduced. It also made it possible to rethink Marx's concept of productive labor, through a critique that represents one of the most significant contributions to Marxist theory and practice in our time.

It was on the basis of this analysis that many feminists called for 'wages for housework,' as a strategic demand to subvert not only 'domestic slavery,' but the labor hierarchies created through the wage relation. The campaign for Wages For Housework spread in the mid '70s in several countries of Europe as well as in the US and Canada, but it never became a mass movement and its political potential was never tested. Among North American and European feminists, the dominant strategy was to fight against discrimination in the waged workplace, to ensure women's access to occupations formerly considered male domains, and to demand publicly supported day-care so that women could gain employment outside the home. In the US in particular, by the late '70s, the questions of housework and reproduction had practically vanished from the feminist agenda, so much so that, by 1976, the Supreme Court could defeat a proposal to make paid maternity leave compulsory for employers. It was assumed, especially among liberal feminists, that 'sameness' had to be the condition for equality; thus any gender specific demand—as e.g. maternity leave—was rejected as a call

8. *The Unfinished Feminist Revolution*

for ‘special treatment,’ presumably undermining women’s demand for political equality with men.

Since then, much has changed in the global political economy forcing a rethinking of feminist strategies worldwide. The neo-liberal restructuring of the world economy has redefined the political terrain, exposing the unreliability of wage labor as a means of sustenance and social reproduction. Most important, the worldwide emergence of grassroots women’s movements, organizing against the privatizations and corporate plunder of common resources, has demonstrated how urgent it is to create more cooperative forms of life and re-appropriate the basic means of our subsistence. At the same time, institutionalization of feminism by the United Nations have harnessed women’s struggle to the development of the neo-liberal agenda and market relations. Coming from a different quarter, the academic feminists’ refusal of a feminist standpoint – accused of authorizing partial accounts of the female experience and engendering stifling identity politics – has also destabilized feminism as a political movement.

These contradictory trends make it difficult to predict what role feminist movements will play in the future, particularly in the context of the unfolding global economic crisis. However, the last three decades have taught us important lessons about the limits of the wage struggle as a basis for ‘women’s liberation.’

In the ’70, North American feminists assumed that by obtaining extra-domestic employment women would free themselves from a paralyzing isolation, join the class struggle, and leave the home and housework behind. Four decades later, we see that these assumptions were misplaced, underestimating international capital’s capacity

8. *The Unfinished Feminist Revolution*

to disarticulate the composition of the workforce that had produced the feminist movement and recuperate its radical potential. Women thus entered the ‘workplace’ at the time of a historic, worldwide attack on workers’ wages and employment levels, resulting in the de-industrialization of large parts of the United States, the dismantling of local industries in the global South, and the precarization of work. Not surprisingly, the jobs awaiting them have been at the bottom of the work-scale, among the most monotonous, hazardous, least secure and lowest paid. In the countries of the OECD, the boom of women’s employment – reaching 60% of the female population in the 1990s – has been in the service sectors, which means that women have exchanged housework in the home with housework in restaurants, hospitals, cafeterias, in addition to providing the work-force for call centers and data entry firms.

The situation has been bleaker in the Global South. Here the increase in women’s employment has been in the ‘informal sector,’ a euphemism for low paid homework, or in the Free Export Zones – the global sweatshops in which the manufacturing industries shut down in the North have been relocated. Periodically we are told, by leftists as well, of beneficial effects that laboring in these modern workhouses has for women, of the skills they learn, the independence they gain through this kind of employment. But generations of young women have wasted their bodies and minds in them, earning a pittance while subject to prison-like regimes.

Temporary jobs, below the minimum wage, mostly without any contract, have also been the norm in the former socialist countries from China to Bulgaria. The transition from socialism to capitalism has devalued women’s labor.

8. *The Unfinished Feminist Revolution*

How little women can expect from employment in the marketized economies of Eastern Europe can be measured from the high number of female migrants from this region to every country of Western Europe and the US, where the jobs they can find (domestic workers, sex workers, eldercarers, nurses) generally involve a loss of social status and years of social isolation.

In sum, entrance in the waged workplace has contributed to feminize poverty and lengthened women's workday, while enabling employers to create new type of plantations, in which consumer commodities and services are cheaply produced, serving to minimize the cost of labor-power production.

We must also dispel the myth that, due to increased women's employment, unpaid domestic work and gender-based hierarchies have vanished. True, many housework tasks have left the home, being reorganized on a commercial basis, leading to the boom of the service sector. In the US, in the period from 1990 to 2006, employment in food services and drinking places has increased by three million. In the same period, the number of fast-food workers has gone from 2 million seven hundred thousands to four million. However, these are the lowest paid workers in America, according to official statistics and categories, earning \$7,77 cents an hour. [See Table 614, p. 406 of Statistical Abstract of the United States 2008].

Women have refused some housework by deciding not to have children or by reducing the number of children they have and the services they provide to their partners. In the US, the number of births has fallen from 118 per 1000 women in 1960s to 66.7 in 2006, resulting in an increase in the median age of the population from 30 in

8. *The Unfinished Feminist Revolution*

1980 to 36.4 in 2006. This procreation strike has been most dramatic in Europe where in some countries (Italy e.g.) birth rates have been for years below replacement. There has also been a decline in the number of marriages and married couples - in the U.S. from 56% of all households in 1990 to 51% in 2006, and a simultaneous increase in the number of people living alone, in the US by seven and a half million -from twenty three to thirty and a half million-amounting to a 30% increase. But these developments have not significantly affected the amount of domestic work the majority of women are expected to perform, nor eliminated the gender-based inequalities built upon it.

If we take a global perspective we see that not only do women still do most of the housework in every country, but due to the states' cuts of investment in social services and the decentralization of industrial production the amount of domestic work paid and unpaid that they now perform has actually increased, even when they have had a extra-domestic job. Indeed, across the planet, most working class women are carrying on two jobs, saddled with a tremendously lengthened workweek that leaves them no time for anything but work.

Three factors in particular have contributed to the lengthening of women's workday and the return of reproductive work to the home.

Women have been the shock absorbers of the economic crisis originally triggered by the globalization process but now destined to become a permanent feature of the world economy. Their extra work has compensates for lay-offs, skyrocketing food prices, the cutting and privatization of social services, and generally the vanishing family income. This has been especially true in the countries subjected

8. *The Unfinished Feminist Revolution*

to Structural Adjustment where the state has practically stopped investing in healthcare, education, public transports and other basic necessities. As a result across the globe they now must spend more time fetching water, obtaining and preparing food, and dealing with illnesses which are far more frequent and damaging now, for the marketization of healthcare has made visits to clinics unaffordable and malnutrition and environmental destruction have increased people vulnerability to disease.

In the US too, due to budget cuts, much of the work hospitals and other public agencies have traditionally done has been privatized and transferred to the home, tapping women's unpaid labor. Presently patients are dismissed almost immediately after surgery and the home must absorb a variety of post-operative and other therapeutic medical tasks (e.g. for the chronically ill) that in the past would have been done by doctors and professional nurses. Also public assistance to the elderly (with housekeeping, personal care) has been cut. Home visits have been shortened and the services provided reduced.

The second factor that has re-centered reproductive labor in the home, has been the expansion of "homework," partly due to the de-concentration of industrial production, partly the spread of 'informal work.' As David Staples, writes, in his *No Place Like Home* (2006), far from being an anachronistic form of work, homework has demonstrated to be a long-term capitalist strategy, which today occupies millions of women and children worldwide, in towns, villages, suburbs. Staples correctly points out that work is "inexorably" drawn to the home by the pull of unpaid domestic labor, because by organizing work on a home basis employers can make it invisible, can undermine workers'

8. *The Unfinished Feminist Revolution*

effort to unionize, and can drive wages down to a minimum. Many women opt for this work to earn an income while caring for their families, but the result is enslavement to a work that earns wages "far below the median the work would pay if performed in a formal setting, and it reproduces a sexual division of labor that fixes women more deeply to housework." (Staples: 1-5)

Last, working for a wage has not eliminated sexual discrimination, though it has given women more economic independence from men. Despite growing male unemployment, women still earn a fraction of male wages. We have also witnessed an increase of male violence against women, partly triggered by fear of their economic competition, in part by the frustration men experience not being able to fulfill their role as their families' providers and, above all, not being able to receive the same services women used to provide.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. First, fighting for waged work or fighting to "join the working class in the workplace," as some Marxist feminist liked to put it, cannot be a path to liberation. Wage employment may be a necessity but cannot be a political strategy. Second, as long as reproductive work is devalued, as long it is considered a private matter and a women's responsibility, women will always confront capital and the state with less power than men and in condition of extreme social and economic vulnerability. There are also serious limits to the extent to which reproductive work can be reduced or reorganized on a market basis. How can we reduce or commercialize the care for children, the elderly, the sick, except at a great cost for those to be cared for? The degree to which the marketization of food production has

8. *The Unfinished Feminist Revolution*

contributed to the deterioration of our health (e.g. the rise of obesity even among children) is instructive in this context. As for the globalization of reproductive work, this 'solution' only extends the housework crisis, now displaced to the families of the paid care providers.

What we need is the re-opening of a collective struggle over reproduction aiming to create new forms of cooperation around this work that are outside of the logic of capital and the market. This is not a utopia, but a process already under way in many parts of the world, that will certainly expand in the face of the continuing institutional assault on our means of subsistence. Through land takeovers, urban farming, community-supported agriculture, through squats, the creation of various forms of barter, mutual aid, alternative forms of healthcare -to name some of the terrains on which the reorganization of reproduction is more advanced- a new economy is beginning to emerge that may turn reproductive work from a stifling, discriminating activity into the most liberating and creative ground of experimentation in human relations.

Meanwhile we should not ignore that the consequences of the globalization of the world economy would certainly have been far more nefarious except for the efforts that millions of women have made to ensure that their families would be supported, regardless of their value on the market. Through their subsistence activities, as well as various forms of direct action (from squatting on public land to urban farming) women have helped their communities to avoid total dispossession, extend budgets, add food to the kitchen pots. Amidst wars, economic crises, devaluations, as the world around them was falling apart, they have planted corn on abandoned town plots, cooked

8. *The Unfinished Feminist Revolution*

food to sell on the side of the streets, created communal kitchens -ola communes- as in the case of Chile and Peru, thus standing in the way of a total commodification of life and beginning a process of re-collectivization of reproduction that is indispensable if we are to regain control over our lives.

For further reading see the following bibliography:

- Peggy Antrobus. (2004). *The Global Women's Movements. Origins, Issues and Strategies*. London: Zed Books.
- Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon eds. (2000). *Dear Sisters, Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*. New York: Basic Books.
- Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, Nicholas Faraclas and Claudia Werlhof eds. (2001). *There is an Alternative. Subsistence and Worldwide Resistance to Corporate Globalization*. London: Zed Books.
- Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa. (2008). *The Work of Love. Unpaid Housework, Poverty Sexual Violence at the Dawn of the 21st Century*. Brooklyn (NY): Autonomedia [Translated from Italian, First Edition 1978].
- Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James. (1975). *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. Bristol(UK) : Falling Wall Press.
- Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa eds., (1999). *Women, Development and Labor*

8. *The Unfinished Feminist Revolution*

of Reproduction. Struggles and Movements. Trenton: Africa World Press.

- Mariarosa Dalla Costa. (2008, 1994). "Capitalism and Reproduction." In Werner Bonefeld ed. *Subverting the Present Imagining the Future*. Brooklyn (NY): Autonomedia.
- Federici, Silvia. (2009) "Witch-hunting, Globalization, and Feminist Solidarity in Africa Today." (Forthcoming) In *Wagadu*. Joint Issue with the *Journal of International Women's Studies*. January 2009.
- "War, Globalization and Reproduction." (2008, 1992) In Matt Meyer and Elavie Ndura-Ouedraogo eds., *Seeds of New Hope. Pan-African Peace Studies for the Twenty-First Century*. Trenton (NJ): Africa World Press, pp. 114-164.
- (2006) "Prostitution and Globalization: Notes on a feminist debate." In Davies, Matt and Magnus Ryner eds. (2006). *Poverty and the Production of World Politics. Unprotected Workers in the Global Political Economy*. New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, pp. 113-136.
- _____. (2004). *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Brooklyn (NY): Autonomedia.
- _____. (2004). "Women, Land Struggles and Globalization. An International Perspective." *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 39, Issue 1/2, January March, 2004. London: Sage.

8. *The Unfinished Feminist Revolution*

- _____ . (1999). "Reproduction and Feminist Struggle in the New International Division of Labor." In Dalla Costa and Dalla Costa eds. (1999) pp. 47-82.
- _____ . (1980). "Putting Feminism Back on its Feet." In Sonhia Sayres et all eds. *The 60s Without Apology*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press. In collaboration with Social Text.
- _____ . (1975). "Counterplanning From the Kitchen." (with Nicole Cox) Bristol: Falling Wall Press.
- _____ . (1975) "Wages Against Housework." (1975). Bristol (UK) : Falling Wall Press.
- Leopoldina Fortunati. (1995, 1981). *The Arcane of Reproduction. Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital*. Brooklyn (NY) : Autonomedia (Translated from Italian, First edition 1981).
- Nona Glazer. (1993). *Women's Paid and Unpaid Labor. The Work Transfer in Healthcare and Retailing*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald and Pippa Norris. (2003). *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Mendez, Jennifer Bickham. (2005). *From Revolution to the Maquiladoras. Gender, Labor and Globalization*. Durham: Duke University Press.

8. *The Unfinished Feminist Revolution*

- Maria Mies, Maria, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen. (1999) *The Subsistence Perspective. Beyond The Globalized Economy*. London: Zed Books.
- Mies, Maria. (1986) *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*. London: Zed Books.
- Maria Mies, Maria, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Claudia Von Werlhof. (1988). *Women: The Last Colony*. London: Zed Books.
- Seguino, Stephanie. (2007). "Plus ca Change? Evidence on Global Trends In Gender Norms and Stereotypes." In *Feminist Economics*, Routledge. Volume thirteen, Number Two, April 2007, 1-28.
- Sigle-Rushton, Wendy and Jane Waldfogel. (2007). "Motherhood and Earnings in Anglo-American, Continental European and Nordic Countries." In *Feminist Economics*, Vol. 13, Number 2, April 2007. 55-92.
- Staples, David E. (2006). *No Place Like Home. Organizing Home-Based Labor In The Era of Structural Adjustment*. New York: Routledge.
- Wichterich, Christa. (2000). *The Globalized Woman. Reports From a Future of Inequality*. London: Zed Books.
- World Values Survey. *Data from the World Values Survey*. (2006). Accessed at <http://www.worldvaluesurvey.org>.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work¹

Mariarosa Dalla Costa

Every construction of autonomy has its own history that evolves in a specific context and must face specific obstacles and battles. Yesterday I mentioned the first stages of this history through the initiatives of that feminist movement in which I directly participated – initiatives necessary for women to regain the availability of their body. I have also recalled how, on a planetary level, this battle is far from being concluded. Here I would like to consider other aspects of this history, starting again from the initial moments of that political experience, to assess what is the relation between women and autonomy today with respect to some emergent problems, and also to ask, in relation to the latter, what has happened to both the

¹This paper has been presented at the international Conference on: “*La autonomia posible*” (*The Possible Autonomy*). Universidad Autonoma de la Ciudad de Mexico, October 24-25-26, 2006. It has been translated from Italian into English by Silvia Federici.

9. Women's Autonomy & Remuneration of Care Work

demand that housework (or care work) be remunerated and to women's economic autonomy.

First Act

Today there is a great celebration of differences. But I always feel the need to specify of what difference we are talking about, from whose point of view and for whom it constitutes a problem, for whose benefit or disadvantage it is. This is the only way to focus on the question and find any solutions.

We thought it was enough, at the time of the movement, to identify one *difference insofar as it was producing a crucial hierarchy*: the difference of being, as reproducers of labor-power, unwaged workers in a waged economy where men, as producers of commodities, would be destined, by the capitalist sexual division of labor, to be waged workers. We worked on this question, and it kept us busy for about ten years. The rest followed from this fundamental fact. By demanding *wages for housework* we wanted to attack *the capitalist stratification of labor* starting from *its deepest division*, that between the male work of production of commodities and the female work of production and reproduction of labor power. But *if this work was vital for capitalism*, as it produces its most precious commodity, labor power itself, then we had in our hands a *formidable lever of power*, as we *could refuse to produce*. Starting from this fact, we could demand a new type of development centered on different conditions for the care of human beings, beginning with *women's economic autonomy* and a more equitable sharing of care work with men. For this rea-

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

son we also demanded a general, *drastic reduction* of work time outside the home, so that women and men, both could share the burden but also the pleasure of reproduction. Thus *time, money and services*, were in those years the basic elements of our demands.

The high point of the movements in Italy, at the end of the '60s and beginning of the '70s, was *the training ground of our militancy*, the arena where many of us learnt to struggle and analyze that perverse thing that is capitalist development. I too, at the beginning of my work at the University (I had begun to work there in 1967), was holding seminars for students on *Capital*, but first I would go to leaflet, in pale dawns full of mosquitoes, in Porto Marghera, discovering what is a factory, its rhythms, its health hazards, its history. Because factories, I remember I wrote on a leaflet, trying to explain the concept, are not like trees that have always existed... I do not remember by any means that period as a time of convivial aggregation, as others have said they remember it. It was rather a period of great learning, of very austere living, of much sacrifice and commitment, of much determination. Perhaps the most beautiful thing was the immediacy of relations, finding ourselves active in the same cause, and the blooming of this great community to which we belonged. It was not necessary to fix appointments in order to meet, we all knew where the others were, it was a life in common. Seen from a woman's viewpoint, that experience represented undoubtedly the *decisive emancipation from the family* of origin and its expectations; it meant to have found a *free and friendly territory* from where to discover the world, without being forced to marry soon, a territory where *to learn different things* from those necessary to be a good

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

wife. Yes, like for the *insurgentes* of the Ezln, the question “when are you going to marry?” remained more and more unanswered.

But precisely that capacity we had elaborated, to become aware of a problem and analyze it, at a certain point made us discover that for us women in those relations there was still some *suffering and uneasiness*. For all relations are *power relations*, even in the *sexual revolution* which nevertheless took place, and everything that we represented and did as women continued to count very little and not to be recognized. We felt *split* between the imperative that wanted us to be like men, capable of being and acting like them, and the feeling that we belonged in any case to another world, where men as well would ask us different things and expected us to be different. But then the window would close again over that world that remained without a name. It was a sort of *clandestinity of femininity*. But not long after we would come out of the clandestinity and pass from resistance to the attack.

Already in 1970 I began the elaboration of a new course, the feminist analysis and path that I would undertake. But I usually point to 1971 as the turning point because in June of that year, in Padova, by inviting some women activists, to discuss a document I had drafted, I held the first feminist meeting. I gave birth to that organization that would be called *Lotta Femminista* (Feminist Struggle), which later was transformed into the network of Committees and Groups for Wages For Housework that was active at the national and international level. The *separation* from the male comrades was not *without pain*. Our hypothesis that they should be happy because by engaging in new struggles we broadened the anti-capitalist front was

9. *Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work*

not verified. On the contrary, because they thought that certain struggles were crucial, the fact that we privileged others meant for them that we subtracted militant power from these struggles. We also paid for the fact that since we were no longer under their eyes engaged in the same actions, from their point of view, we were "doing nothing." In the same way as they had not seen our housework, they did not see our autonomous political work. We were accused, especially at the beginning, of risking to embark in things that did not promote a class viewpoint, that were inter-classist, such as abortion and violence which concerned all women. Moreover, as women "in movement" we changed and consequently relations, even personal ones, broke up. When we began to speak of housework, the first reaction on the male front was a mocking smile. What were we bothering with? After all it was not a big thing, not even real work to be sure, and with the daycare centers all problems would be resolved. That strange idea that with daycare centers, that is, with a few hours of child care, every problem concerning housework would be resolved, lasted for a long time. There was not even a minimal idea of the number of material and immaterial tasks, predictable and unpredictable, that constitute the daily allotment of this work. We too were charged with being separatists, with wanting to divide the movement, but actually I think that it was no longer possible to speak of an anti-capitalist struggle without seeing how much unpaid labor the wage commanded, starting with women's labor, and without taking into account therefore women's "insurgency." In Rome, on July 7, 1972, we had organized, at the University, a workshop on female employment. We decided that it should be open only to women. This was an

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

absolute novelty, it had never happened at the university. The reaction of groups of men generically self-identified as comrades, was to prevent the workshop from taking place, by launching from outside the room condoms full of water that broke the windows. What followed was an intense debate in the pages of *Il Manifesto* and *Lotta Continua*² that gives an idea of what the times were like. Just the fact that women could meet by themselves could provoke a violent reaction. It would not be right to absolutize these kind of reactions. There were comrades who understood the centrality of our discourse, the importance of the work we carried on, and behaved accordingly. But that episode is indicative of how hysterical the male response could be when faced with the new fact: women analyzing and discussing autonomously not in the presence of men. Concerning the charge of separatism, I want to make it clear that we never theorized *separatism*, but theorized autonomy. However, there were at least *three good reasons* why, we, like many others, had to work separately. First, the presence of men, precisely because of the power relations between them and women, would have limited our ability to speak, to let emerge and thoroughly analyze the issues that most directly concerned us, and with regard to some of them, it would have undoubtedly created some uneasiness. Second, these issues were so big that they

² *Il Manifesto* (Translator's Note, TN:*The Manifesto*), July 14 and 20, August 4, *Lotta Continua* (TN: *Continuous Struggle*) July 15 and 21, 1972. See also *L'Offensiva, Quaderni di Lotta Femminista* n.1(TN: *The Offensive. Notebooks of Feminist Struggle* n.1), Mulolini Editore, Torino 1972, which collects the reports destined to that seminar and the militant materials that came out concerning that moment of confrontation.

9. *Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work*

would absorb all our energy, therefore, as I said on other occasions, the idea of a double militancy (in feminism and in some extra-parliamentary group) was never an issue, because we would not have had the time for it. Finally, if the behavior of the comrades was also a reason for our separation, they had to confront the problem of how to change it. Reversing the charge, we could say that it was their male chauvinist behavior that divided the movement.

From what I am learning, the same charge is now being moved against Mayan women. But I believe that only the women who experience a certain situation can decide how much separately or how much together they can conduct a cycle of struggles. It is true, however, that how much we can struggle "together" is a question that must be confronted also by the other side, that is, by men, in support of the issues raised by women, because generally support is given only by one side, that of women.

In Italy, today, young women who are active around some issues, often the precariousness of work and the transformations taking place in the university, consider it unacceptable to work separately from their male companions, they do not feel the need for it. But they are obviously benefiting from the victories won by their mothers and by the feminist movement of the 1970s. Their relations with their male partners are more egalitarian; the hard struggle to regain control over our body was fought by those who preceded them. Although there are still political forces who try to take away the freedom that women have won³, women today have the means to live their sex-

³ There was a particularly strong attempt, over the last years, by catholic forces to abrogate the law 194/78 which authorizes the

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

uality with less risks than a quarter of a century ago. In any case, even if one becomes pregnant, it is not likely that she will be thrown out of her home. On the contrary, many women decide to become pregnant independently of having a relation with a man. They are determined to have a child, but are less eager to embark in the type of life in which it is necessary to mediate daily one's choices with those of a partner. They are also determined to break a relation, even a marriage, if it is not satisfactory. On other issues, instead, various associations have formed, made only of women or predominantly of women, first of all those of the Anti-Violence Centers.⁴ Thus, we have a complex situation where, depending on the issue, one feels the need to work only with women or not, in a context in

voluntary interruption of pregnancy. The Veneto Region has proposed a regional bill that would authorize the presence of members of catholic organizations in the *consultori* (clinics for family counseling) and hospital wards. In response to all this, women have decided to make their voice heard and with the support of the CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labor) have organized a rally in Venezia on October 7, 2006, under the banner of "Let's break the silence." It was in fact from the times of the feminist movement of the '70s that women did not make their voice heard with such strength. And this time men, participating to the demonstration, supported the cause of women.

⁴ If in Europe the first Antiviolence Centers or Houses for Women (who have suffered violence) were formed at the end of the '70s, in Italy, aside from the initiatives set up by the feminist movement, we had to wait until the beginning of the '90s. Significantly, a decade of repression and normalization had to pass before Anti-Violence Centers began to be formed. Today there are more than eighty, of which one fourth offers hospitality in a secret apartment also called shelter. The first four houses for women who have suffered violence were formed between 1990 and 1991 in Bologna, Milano, Modena and Rome.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

any case not comparable to that of the movement of the '70s. Today, organizing in associations that have a relation with the institutions *has taken the place of the action of the spontaneous group* of that decade. Those groups functioned as a *battering ram demolishing the doors of the many prisons* in which the rights of women were enclosed. These associations try to monitor the situation and offer a first point of reference and aid to those who continue to be the victims of the violation of these rights.

It was immediately clear to us that *building our autonomy* required a *great battle*. We had to equip ourselves. Immediately maternity emerged as a *difficult knot to untangle*, for it is an irreversible choice that conditions the entire life of a woman and it is not resolved by taking children to a daycare center. But above all it became clear to us that the "*refusal of work*" strategy that we still approved of as a form of struggle, *was not applicable in all cases* to the work of reproduction and care work. We extended our refusal to the refusal of marriage, of co-habitation with men not to see our energies absorbed by the fact of having to respond to male expectations (a woman at home is always on call, we used to say). But we could never have had children and then refused to take care of them. Care work, insofar as it is work that concerns human beings, put precise limits to our action, it prospected a situation in which the strategy of refusal appeared not practicable, a utopia. In our hearts we had to decide. Those of us more engaged in organizational work renounced to have children, because it would have been incompatible not only with the amount of political work that we planned to do, to make the world more moonlike (to recall the ancient Mayan divinity, half sun, half moon),

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

but incompatible, above all, with *our mental availability* to program and deal with the deadlines and the contingencies of our activity. This too was in perfect correspondence with the decision of many Chiapas *insurgentes*, given the impossibility of combining maternity with that type of militancy. However, maternity became a cardinal point of our discourse: if the *productivity* of the capitalist family and the female body was centered on the production of children, then women's liberation required that we break with this imposition, with being condemned to this sole function, with the fixation of this role. Hence the slogan: "Women let's procreate ideas not just children!" This was a cry of liberation from biological determination, an invitation to a different creation, to procreate ideas that could generate another world in which the mother-wife function would not constitute any longer our only possible identity, or be paid at the cost of so much toil, isolation, subordination, and lack of economic autonomy. This is why we put forward *the demand for wages for housework*, to reject its gratuitous attribution exclusively to womankind, so that women's economic autonomy might be constructed starting from the recognition of that first work. In the refusal of maternity we read a behavior that would become more and more widespread in Italy, as in other advanced countries, and more recently in countries not particularly advanced ⁵, leading in our case to a natality rate of 1, 2

⁵ To this phenomenon is devoted the article "Ecco la generazione No figli" (TN: "Here the No children generation") published in the daily *La Repubblica* of August 28, 2006. It reports that very low natality rates are now found not only in Italy but in other countries of Southern, Northern, Eastern Europe and the far East, where in the case of Singapore and South Korea it is a new phenomenon.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

which is considered very negatively by politicians.⁶ *Not only the demand, but above all the perspective of making the work of reproduction cost* in all the places supported by this work, brought our struggles – a type of struggle very different from those that had been waged so far– to the neighborhoods, the schools, the universities, the factories, the hospitals. It would be impossible here to deal with them, in any case everything has been accurately documented in the material we used on our militant front: leaflets, pamphlets, journals, small books⁷.

What was the *response of the state* to all this, to that autonomy that women had begun to build by re-appropriating their own body, but that still needed to be

⁶ The Minister for Family Policies, Rosy Bindi, has declared the following on television: the most worrisome lack of growth in Italy is that concerning natality. (Rai 3, broadcast of the early evening program Ballaro', Tuesday, October 3, 2003).

⁷ I mention here, above all, the journal "*Le operaie della casa*" (TN: "The House-Workers"), published by Marsilio Editore, Venezia, and also a series of little books for militant use, put out by the same publisher, edited by the Collettivo Internazionale Femminista (International Feminist Collective). Of this series the following booklets were published: *Le operaie della casa*, (TN: *The House-Workers*"), 1975; *8 marzo 1974. Giornata internazionale di lotta delle donne*, (English Translation: *Wages for Housework Committee of Toronto, Women in Struggle. Italy Now*, n.3), 1975; *Aborto di Stato: Strage delle innocenti* (TN: *State abortion: Massacre of the innocent women*), 1976; *Dietro la normalità del parto. Lotta all'ospedale di Ferrara* (TN: *Behind the normality of childbirth. Struggle at the hospital of Ferrara*), 1978; Silvia Federici and Nicole Cox, *Contropiano dalle cucine*, 1978 (Original text in English: *Counterplanning from the kitchen*, 1975). And also *L'Offensiva* (already cited), and *Il Personale é Politico. Quaderni di Lotta Femminista* n.2 (TN: *The Personal is Political. Notebooks of Lotta Femminista* n. 2) Musolini Editore, Torino, 1973.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

rooted in an economic autonomy starting from the recognition of their first work? The response was fundamentally *a bit more emancipation*. This was accompanied, at the end of the 1970s, by *a repression of all the movements*. From 1972 to 1979, female employment increased by one million and a half. The new Family Code⁸ was approved, centered on the parity of the partners (this too corresponded to the need not to subordinate to the will of the husband the choices of a wife that increasingly was looking for and finding job). But the real wage diminished, and during the '70s the buying power of the families was rather guaranteed by the broader involvement of the various members of the family in the labor market, often with jobs off the table, in the new context offered by the decentralization of production.⁹ From then on the family would be supported by the presence of at least two paychecks that the passage from fordism to post-fordism and then to the neo-liberal globalization would have increasingly made precarious.

The state then managed to evade the demand that the women's movement had put forward on the economic level, and women accepted the only kind of autonomy that was being offered, that is emancipation, but *they did not perform the miracle of coupling, cost what may*, their unpaid

⁸ The Reform of the Family Code issued in 1942 was sanctioned with the bill n.151, approved on May 19, 1975, that stipulated first of all the parity of the partners in the married couple. Other bills were later approved that changed the regulation of other important aspects of the Code.

⁹ M. Dalla Costa, "Emigrazione, immigrazione e composizione di classe in Italia negli anni '70" (TN: "Emigration, immigration, and class composition in Italy in the '70s"), in *Economia e lavoro*, n.4, October-December, 1981.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

work in the family, including childcare, with work outside the home. Many never married, many decided to live alone, the number of divorces and separations increased¹⁰, and the collapse of the birth rate continued. Women's refusal of procreation triggered that type of *crisis of social reproduction* that later was reflected in the unbalance between young and old; for a time, however, there was no major cause for alarm.

The prevailing *sociological literature* spoke of the women's *double presence* as a female capacity to combine the two works, domestic and extra-domestic, and described the many strategies women used to implement it. In reality, in my opinion, *there were only two strategies*: the first, a drastic reduction of the number of children, the second, the use of unpaid work of women relatives, or the employment of other women as domestic workers by the hour. But the sociological literature did not use to speak of this side of the story. While the permanent live-in domestic worker, in Italy, was a figure on the way to extinction, domestic workers by the hour were a very important support to women's outside employment. Thus, the *salarization of housework proceeded in indirect ways*. Women had more and more consistently refused unpaid domestic work, changing the modalities of its condition, "rationalizing" it to the extreme, and reducing it, also by making life choices different from those of their mothers. They had chosen as their priority the construction of their economic autonomy, that state policies allowed them only through

¹⁰ *La Repubblica*, on November 9, 2006, reported that from 1995 to 2000, separations grew by 59%, divorces by 66,8%, and that it is the South that registers the most conspicuous growth, (p.38).

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

extra-domestic work. They had in their hands more money than they had in the days before the movement. With that money they paid other women to do a significant amount of housework; some more housework went out of the home to be transformed in goods and services offered by the market. It is enough to think, to give an example, of the restaurant and catering sectors. Thus, unpaid housework shrank, while paid work expanded, in and out of the family. Although the employment of a domestic and/or baby sitter often consumed a large part of the female wage, women more and more refused work that did not produce money. Moreover, in the 1970s, already in Italy a migratory flow was growing that had already brought to the country hundreds of thousands of people. Within it, by '77, it was calculated that the domestic workers of color were 100.000, out of a total immigrant workforce estimated as consisting of 3-400.000 of people. This female labor force tended to take those jobs of live – in maid that Italian women no longer wanted. It was the beginning of a type of immigration of men and women, mostly from Africa and Asia, of whom many would be destined to domestic work, a flow that in the following decades would become more robust and would be restructured as immigrant came from a broader range of countries. The *question of the relation between immigrant women and care work*, the so-called question of the *globalization of care*, was to become in time increasingly important. At the end of the '70s, therefore, women's autonomy has made great steps ahead, at least in Italy and other advanced countries, with respect to the re-appropriation of one's body and oneself as a person. Laws that are fundamental had been approved, like that on the voluntary interruption of pregnancy, and the law

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

instituting the *consultori* (clinics for family counseling). The referendum on divorce had been won, and there was a new family law. This autonomy, instead, remained in a precarious state as far as domestic work or care work was concerned, constrained between a refusal of this work that involved heavy sacrifices, like for example renouncing maternity, and emancipation. But precisely through that emancipation, housework would become more and more visible and waged. The '70s were also the decade in which, on the wave of the feminist movement, the United Nations' global conferences on the condition of women began. The first, to celebrate the International Year of The Woman, was held precisely in Mexico City in 1975. On December 18, 1979 the General Assembly of the UN adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which went into effect in 1981. We had to wait, instead, until 1993, when the UN Conference on Human Rights was held in Vienna to see women's fundamental rights recognized as an integral part of human rights, and to have the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women. This was a problem that had already been denounced in all its seriousness, and in the various forms it took across the world, at the Nairobi Conference of 1985, held at the end of the first UN Decade for Women. In the same conference it was also stipulated, in the final document¹¹, that "the contribution, remunerated and unremunerated, that women make to all aspects and sectors of development

¹¹ This occurred with the acceptance of the amendment (proposed by Housewives in Dialogue) of the paragraph 120 of the document "Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women." (In English in the text).

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

should be recognized, and that this contribution should be measured and included in economic statistics and the Gnp (Gross national product).”

There is always a lot of skepticism about the efficacy of these Charters but undoubtedly the planetary dimension of the policy debate has strengthened the power to decide what is just and what is unjust in traditions and legislations, and go beyond the constraints of both to affirm new principles and new norms.

Second Act

The '80s marked the take off of neo-liberalism that would fully unfold with the neo-liberal globalization of the '90s. In various countries these were years of normalization and repression after the great struggles of the previous decade. These were the years of the deepening of the international debt and the ever more drastic application of structural adjustment policies¹², officially adopted to enable the indebted countries to pay at least their service on

¹² On the problematic of international debt the literature is very vast. I refer above all to the works of Susan George. Among them: *Il debito del Terzo Mondo*, Edizioni Lavoro, Roma, 1989 (Translated from the English: *A fate worse than debt*, Penguin Group, England, 1988); *Il boomerang del debito*, Edizioni Lavoro, Roma, 1992 (Translated from the English, *The Debt Boomerang*, Westview Press, 1992); Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *L'indigeno che é in noi, la terra cui apparteniamo*, in A. Marucci ed., *Camminando domandando*, DeriveApprodi, Roma, 1999, (English translation “The Native in Us, the Land We Belong to” in *Common Sense*, n. 28, 1998, and in *The Commoner*, n.6, 2002, in www.thecommoner.org); M. Dalla Costa and G.F. Dalla Costa (a cura di), *Donne e politiche del debito*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 1993, (English translation: *Paying the Price*.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

the debt. These politics actually aimed at lowering standards of living and expectations, so that the new forms of production, premised on the cheapening and precarization of labor, could take off everywhere, thus enabling business to have a competitive advantage in the different regions of the planet. But, above all, being strongly oriented toward export, the type of development that was imposed through the structural adjustment policies could only aggravate the debt. In that period, the privatization of communal goods, like land and water, the privatization of public goods, like state and parastatal agencies, the currency devaluations, the withdrawal of subsidies from basic goods, the strong subsidies given to modernized, mono-cultural agriculture, the wage cuts, the reduction and precarization of employment, the cut of public spending on social services and entitlements, starting with pensions, the cut and restructuring of public expenditure with the privatization of health care and education, the increase in the fees paid by the consumers, the liberalization of commerce with the adoption of policies aiming to favor export and import, represented a *powerful instrument of the underdevelopment of reproduction* at the global level, functional to the take off of a new phase of accumulation. This also signified an unprecedented attack against the struggles waged by

Women and the Politics of International Economic Strategy, Zed Books, London, 1995). (Japanese Translation: *Yakusokusareta hatten?*, Impact Shuppankai, Tokyo, 1995) and by the same editors, *Donne, sviluppo e lavoro di riproduzione. Questione delle lotte e dei movimenti*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 1996 (English translation: *Women, Development and Labor of Reproduction. Struggles and Movements*, Africa World Press, Trenton, N.J., EE.UU., and Asmara, Eritrea, 1999).

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

women not only for the well-being of their families and the improvement of their living conditions, but *to gain a higher level of autonomy*. In the advanced regions this meant *the loss of a "good job,"* the loss, therefore, of the type of emancipation that this employment guaranteed, and *the immersion in precarity, poverty and dependence*. In the less advanced areas this meant, above all, that more and more land was expropriated, for so-called processes of agricultural modernization or for large and often devastating projects financed by the World Bank, of which the construction of dykes is only the best known example. This poverty - caused by the politics of debt, rooted in land expropriation and then, particularly in the '90s, by the intervention of a permanent politics of war that made the land increasingly unusable because of military operations and war residues - generated those *migratory flows* that brought to the advanced countries, of Europe above all, new subjects, of whom a considerable part, *mostly women*, were to do *large amounts of reproductive work*. These neo-liberal, belligerous (war producing) politics will be at the origin of a *new division of reproductive labor* worldwide, whereby increasingly women coming from the so-called developing countries or from others, defined 'in transition,' ("transition to democracy" in the case of Eastern European countries) would come to do this work for the advanced countries. They had to leave behind a torn reproductive environment, that of the family first of all, patched up at the cost of a greatly increased toil for those remaining, but at least compensated by the remittances sent by the women who migrated. The reproduction of *the areas considered 'more peripheral'* has been *devastated*, in order to redefine and deepen on a planetary level the stratification

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

of the working social body. The plan is to produce cheap labor power to employ in the reproduction sector of the more developed regions. In this way, the state could avoid confronting the problems emerging in this context and avoid taking on the financial burdens that should be its responsibility.

But what were these problems? What were these urgent necessities, becoming always more conspicuous, given that fewer and fewer children were procreated? What expanded this new need for labor? The emerging question, though it was not the only one, was the care of not self-sufficient elderly, an issue that was to become particularly crucial in the discourse on women's autonomy that we are elaborating.

Third Act

It is since 1990 on, after a decade of general application of the politics of debt and with the unfolding of neo-liberal globalization, that emigration has become a truly worldwide phenomenon, reaching the figure, according to the estimates of the United Nations¹³, of more than 175 million emigrants across the planet. Italy, traditionally an exporter of labor power, in the '80s and '90s, becomes a net importer, attracting laborers from Asia and Africa and more recently Eastern Europe. An increasing number of women have migrated towards Europe, during the last decades. At the end of the '90s, 45% of immigrants to Eu-

¹³ UN Census, 2000.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

rope were women, this coinciding with a growing demand for domestic workers in Southern Europe¹⁴.

It is exactly in the '90s that a new figure of worker begins to take a more precise shape, increasingly embodied by immigrant women, the *caregiver*. She is the one (at times it is a man)¹⁵ who cares for a person who is no longer capable of being self-sufficient in his/her daily tasks, *generally an elder, male or female, with more or less serious problems as far as self-sufficiency*. The *need* for this new figure of domestic worker, the demand for this *specific type of care work* stems from *demographic changes* that have seen both life expectancy increase as well as the percentage of the elderly in the population, as women's refusal of maternity has remarkably reduced the number of young people. This is a trend that affects the European countries as a whole, not just Italy. It is a *crisis of social reproduction* because the balance between young and old breaks down, and there is no longer an adequate generational replacement. Because of women's refusal of maternity, the prospect is that in Italy (a country that, according to the Istat estimates, has one of the lowest birthrates in the world, namely the 1,2 ratio mentioned above, recently raised to 1,3 thanks to the new born to immigrant women)

¹⁴ In Italy the immigrants registered as legal residents were 1.512.324 in 2002, of whom 45.8% were women (Caritas, *Dossier statistico immigrazione 2003*, (TN: Caritas, *Statistical dossier on immigration 2003*), Edizioni Nuova Anterem, Roma, 2003.

¹⁵ It is estimated that in Italy the male component of the work of *caregiver* is 25% and that 73% of those who do this job are about 30-40 years old (*La Repubblica*, October 16, 2006, p.16. It cites the following sources: Inps, Caritas Ambrosiana and the CGIL, Lombardia).

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

within a 30 year period one out of three people will be over 65.

The significant fact, that must be properly interpreted, is that *in Europe the majority of those over 65 (with the exception of those over 90) lives at home*, not in private or public institutions. This situation is obviously the result of a decision made non only by the elderly, when still able to express themselves, but by the younger woman, a relative, generally the daughter, who is aware that this is the most humane option. This decision is made, despite the fact that, due to the amount of tasks and duties involved, *it will heavily condition her life and limit her autonomy*, even with the intervention, whenever possible, of the paid work of other women. The feminist refusal of unpaid reproduction work, expressed also through the refusal of maternity, has not substantially liberated women from care work, except for a certain period of their lives, when they would have had to raise a child. "Mom has gone out" was the title of an exhibition organized by the Wages For Housework Group of Varese¹⁶. But "she had to come back," we would have to write today, if we were to have that exhibition again. The time out has lasted a brief period. The problem of care has returned, in an even heavier and more complex way, with the elderly, who are often not self-sufficient. A fifty or sixty years old woman, or even older, who had participated in the struggles of the feminist movement, who needs herself some rest, and if retired, needs to enjoy what during her work life she could not

¹⁶ This is discussed in the homonymous article in the journal *Le operaie della casa* (TN: *The houseworkers*), double issue, November-December 1975/January-February 1976, p.21.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

have, must face the problem of having parents in a very advanced age, *often over eighty*, with all the *typical old age ailments*. The burden is on her, who often has no adult sons or daughters who at least could in part collaborate. After having worked hard to construct her autonomy, this autonomy is further reduced because the problem of the care of others, who are weaker and depend on her, has not been resolved. The *social body* is precisely that, a body; it is not divisible, and it *re-proposes the problem of care in an eternal return*.

It is in this context that we must place the work of the *caregiver*¹⁷ that is done by women who migrate to Italy, in the wake of the disasters produced in their countries by structural adjustment policies, by wars, and by “democratizing interventions.” It responds to a need which state policies are still too far from satisfying. Their employment demonstrates first of all that also this type of care work has been increasingly subsumed under that *process of salarization* of housework that I just mentioned, and

¹⁷ It is calculated that half of these workers in Italy are not regularized. Many of the women who do this specific work come from Eastern Europe, from Romania, Moldavia, and Ukraine. Again *La Repubblica*, in the article already mentioned, dedicated to the presence and work of *caregivers* in Italy (October 16, 2006, pp.16-7) reports a growth of regular presences that goes from 51.110 in 1994 to 142.196 of 2000, to 490.678 of 2003, to 693.000 of whom 619.000 foreigners in 2006. See on this matter Rossana Mungliello, “Segregation of Migrants in the Labour Market in Italy: The Case of Female Migrants from Eastern European Countries Working in the Sector of Care and Assistance for the Elderly. First Results of an Empirical Study Carried Out in Padova,” in *Zu Wessen Diensten? Frauenarbeit zwischen Care-Drain und Outsourcing*, Zurich, Frauenrat fur Aussenpolitik, 2005, pp.72-77.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

that *the problem is such that it is usually necessary to employ a person full-time to deal with it*. But some common notions must be demistified. The first is that the *caregiver* liberates the relative from the care of the elder. On the contrary, the work of a caregiver cannot function well if it is not accompanied by the constant guidance, cooperation and verification of the female relative. A work that begins with the presentation of the case situation, which is always different and changing and requires a constant help, practically a division of tasks between the female relative and the paid woman. It is generally the former who must do the shopping, because it is difficult to do it together with the person cared for, she is also the one who does the bureaucratic work, keeps the administration and the financial management of the house, she takes the elder to the doctors and must guarantee an immediate presence and intervention in all the emergencies. Precisely because of the loneliness that comes with living every day with an elder, who is often mentally debilitated, the caregiver herself has to be reproduced. Thus, the so-called “work-of love”¹⁸ comes back not only as a real need in the care of the elders, who will be poorly assisted if there is not a real concern for their well-being, but also as a need in the relation between the employer (often the daughter) and the *caregiver*. The former will have to follow the situation as it evolves to cope in a timely way with those moments when the problems become difficult to sustain, and will have to offer all the resources and facilitations that can

¹⁸ G.F. Dalla Costa, *Un lavoro d'amore*, Edizioni delle donne, Roma, 1978 (English Translation: *The Work of Love*, Autonomedia, New York, 2008). (Japanese translation: Ai no rodou, Impact Shuppankai, Tokyo, 1991).

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

make that work less burdensome. Often she will have to substitute herself to the caregiver to concede her some extra periods of rest in the most demanding moments, and above all more money if the situation becomes too heavy. Let us keep in mind that if there is no extra money in the family to pay for another caregiver on Saturdays and Sundays, considering that this type of work has a high cost¹⁹ with respect to the normal family budget, it will be the daughter and the husband who will care for the elder relative during these days, which means that their weekly rest and the time that would have devoted to shopping, in case they still had a job, would vanish. This is how many couples spend their week-ends, and the problem returns during the vacation month of the caregiver, because while a cleaning job can wait, or find a temporary solution, elders who are not self-sufficient cannot be left alone even for a moment, and they cannot find themselves suddenly face with other people that they do not know

¹⁹ For the caregivers who have a regular contract, this stipulates from 750 to 900 euros net, plus 200 euros of contributions by the employer, one month of paid vacation, and another month of pay as a thirteenth monthly pay ("*tredicesima*"), and another again as severance pay. Food is provided by the employer, and so is a room in the apartment, a problem that is usually resolved by changing the use of another room. The live-in *caregiver* who stipulates a contract for at most 8 or 9 hours a day, has the right to have two or three hours a day free, and a day and a half a week also free, generally Sunday and Saturday afternoon. But there are also part-time contracts, not like those for live-in, it depends on the conditions of the person to be assisted and what the caregiver is most interest in. Many prefer to work as live-in for some years, not to have expenses for food and rent and be able to send home almost all the salary.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

and that have not been instructed about how to relate to them and what tasks to perform. This is not tendentially a precarious work because there is no convenience for the employer to change the caregiver after having done all the work of teaching that this work requires, and if a good relation between the caregiver and the person cared for has been established.

Precairity intervenes, instead, when there are irregular work conditions, and this shows how crucial it is that a more substantial economic support be given by the state to the families to enable them to stipulate regular work contracts.

I thought it was important to detail this combination of tasks, those done by the caregiver and those done by the relative, not to make the opposite mistake than the one mentioned before. There was a time, after the end of the feminist movement of the '70s, when the identification of women's emancipation with a job outside the home kept hidden the role of domestic workers employed by the hour; today, in dealing with the work of the caregivers, the risk is that it will be treated as an "*a solo*", with no mention of the work done by female relatives.

The employment of immigrant women has highlighted the magnitude of the problem. It is not a care work that the female relative, if she does it alone, can combine with other jobs. If today the subjects who take on this task have been forced to do it because of the political circumstances that have devastated their lives, it is desirable that in the future this work may become a normal "good job," done also by Italian women (in part this has already started), above all if the state gives a more substantial support to this work and its conditions improve. There is no ques-

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

tion, in fact, that the State should devote more funds to pay for this work, given that its cost for many families is already unsustainable, and this leads to conditions of irregular employment. Let's keep in mind, however, that this is a terrain where from the central State or from the local government some economic response to *care work* or *domestic work* arrived. It is thanks to this response that many families can manage to stipulate an employment contract. First of all there has been the *assegno di accompagnamento* ("Attendance Allowance"), 450 euros a month, paid by the National Social Insurance office (Inps), independently from income levels directly to the person to be assisted, when not self-sufficient physically or mentally. But it is very difficult to obtain it. It is conditioned on a declaration by the Health National Service of total and permanent disability. Many cases, above all of physical rather than mental disability, are not considered serious enough to justify it. There are other provisions as well, coming from the Regions, conditioned upon very low income levels, not alternative to the mentioned Attendance Allowance. Among them, is the "caregiver grant" ("contributo *badante*") up to a maximum of 250 euros monthly, given by the Veneto Region to those who have hired a *caregiver at least for 20 hours a week*. Then the Alzheimer grant (516 euros monthly) added to what is prescribed by the regional law n. 28 of 1991.²⁰ There are also specific support services. In order to put an end to the clandestinity of many caregivers and the risks connected with the

²⁰ Since 2007 these regional policies have been all replaced by only one provision: the "care grant", for a maximum of 520 euros monthly, introduced by the Veneto Region.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

possibility of infiltrations by criminal organizations, initiatives have been taken also by the Provinces, like Bergamo, which has decided to devote 400 euros monthly to families who have already hired a caregiver or need to do it.

Despite the neo-liberal tendency to cut public spending on social welfare, we must nevertheless reckon that the terrain of welfare, where some "salarization" of care work has been obtained, resurfaces as an irreducible terrain of bargaining, starting precisely from policies of this type. The crisis of social reproduction creates problems also for the state. Presently, the Minister for Family Policies, Rosy Bindi, is proposing to make banks and foundations participate in the expansion of the funds to be devoted to the elderly; at the same time, warning about the fall of the birthrate, she is proposing to give 2500 euros yearly for every new born till adulthood. *Wages For Housework*, so much opposed by the institutional forces in the high phase of the movement, returns articulated in various forms, as an irrepressible need. Those who would have preferred that this money be used again to support institutes for the elderly where to ghettoize the third or fourth age made a mistake. Institutes are appropriate for those extreme cases that cannot be cared for at home. Not only is the care they provide of a different quality, but above all the elderly themselves do not like these places and prefer to stay at home. The woman, *through her refusal* to be the one solely responsible for unpaid reproduction work, no matter what the case and conditions, *has led* in this specific sector as well to a *process* of "visibilization" and "salarization". But *she has also guaranteed*, by accepting a *limited freedom*, that is, a *relative autonomy*, the *preservation of the relative autonomy and the physical as well as*

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

psychological wellbeing of those, who, in weak conditions, depend on her. With her refusal and relative acceptance, she has shown that in the case of care work refusal alone is a utopia, and that this specific elder care work must be supported by a higher level of funding by the state, so that the families can cope with the cost, and the work itself can be performed in regular contractual conditions, in the same way as the state must expand the services devoted to this weak sector of the population. Women have also shown that one of the main obstacles to keeping an elder at home or in the home of a relative is the hike in real estate prices and rents, which has reduced the space in the apartments to a minimum, so that often there is not even a room available for the elder or for the caregiver. This is a problem that people had already faced for years in the case of children. Increasingly, apartments are holes that do not allow for visits and even less the permanent presence of parents or the arrival of children. Nevertheless, the problem posed by the presence of not self-sufficient elders also re-proposes the question of having children, and having therefore some economic support to raise them, in addition to different living conditions, so that people can begin to desire again to have a child and see it as a possible choice. In fact, with rare exceptions, nobody else but the children will care about keeping at home the elders who are not self-sufficient, nor will organize and watch over their reproduction. The problem of elder care is one that in different ways and with very different situations is present at a planetary level. Thus, the question of an economic support by the state for this work must, I believe, enter the political agenda as one of the most urgent issues.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

If these are the emergent problematic of care work, to say, then, that *domestic work, i.e. reproduction work*, tends to become more and more *immaterial work*²¹, or at least that it can be included into the sphere of immaterial work, indicates a lack of knowledge of this work. The work of reproduction, which is articulated in many components, of which here we have considered just one, has always been a combination of a lot of material work grafted on immaterial work of reproduction, psychological, affective etc. Therefore, there is nothing new under the sun. But to say that today the category of immaterial work would grasp better its novelty is to do an injustice to this work and the new realities that traverse it, of which the one discussed above is a good example, loaded with heavy and material tasks. The fact that these tasks must possibly be performed with affection does not make them immaterial. If the condition of being an elder and not self-sufficient is a significant difference, arguing that “women are increasingly burdened with the control of the flows of difference,”²² and to see this as immaterial work again implies not to see in its reality the work that is burdened with this difference and its problems.

It is equally clear, considering the terrain of eldercare (and similarly childcare) that the work of reproduction *cannot be resolved with communication*.²³ This is particularly so as its problematics are not exhausted by the search for better agreements among the partners, but im-

²¹ A. Negri, *Movimenti Nell'Impero* (TN: *Movements in the Empire*), Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano, 2006, pp. 241, 215, 184.

²² A. Negri, *op.cit.*, p.193.

²³ See C. Marazzi, *Il posto dei calzini* (TN: *The place of the socks*), Edizioni Casagrande, Bellinzona, 1994.

9. Women's Autonomy & Remuneration of Care Work

ply for women many hours of work, lack of money, the risk of poverty, the lack of autonomy. All these are problems that cannot be resolved with communication.

Nor is what is necessary a further technological innovation. Nor do we need the genial idea of some "informatic" worker, whose political program would seem to me not very promising precisely because of its coming from the realm of the immaterial²⁴. Genial ideas is not what we need.

What is needed is work more adequately remunerated, and more free time for all, women and men.

What is necessary is to recognize the materiality of life and of the works that safeguard it, in the house as in the field²⁵, and their ties with human relations and with the land, and this holds true for the work of women as for the work of peasants.²⁶ If anything, women have shown that

²⁴ A. Negri, *op. cit.*, p.184.

²⁵ The emerging networks of peasants in the South as in the North defend the fact of being able to have an agriculture managed according to sustainable methodologies often very traditional and with a large use of living labor (which implies a large occupation) resting on the availability of very material goods like land, water and natural seeds, instead of other methodologies that are being imposed on them. Even in the North it is significant what peasants say, as they do not refuse technology *tout court*, but prefer not to depend too much on machines and use, instead, where it makes more sense, the greatly available resource of labor. See on this point J. Bové and F. Dufour, *Il mondo non é in vendita*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2001 (English translation, *The world is not for sale*, Verso, London, New York, 2001). I believe that the new subjectivities, that are significant from a political viewpoint, emerge from these contexts, not from the leading capitalist methodologies.

²⁶ M. Dalla Costa, *L'Indigeno che é in noi, la terra cui apparteniamo*, see previous citation, and "Rustic and Ethical" in *Ephemera*,

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

the autonomy that everyone pursues and desires faces irreducible conditionings, whether it is by children or the elderly, and if today the difference is between those who are burdened with this work and those who are not, this is a difference that should not be celebrated but demolished, by building a more common responsibility with regard to care work, and demanding from the state (since the “common” does not exhaust the “public”) more substantial and generalized allocations of money and services.

Bibliography

- Bové J. e Dufour F., *Il mondo non è in vendita*, Feltrinelli, Milano, 2001 (English Translation: *The world is not for sale*, Verso, London, New York, 2001).
- Caritas, *Dossier statistico immigrazione 2003*, (Translator's Note, TN: *Statistical Dossier on Immigration 2003*), Edizioni Nuova Anterem, Roma, 2003.

Theory and Politics in Organization, Vol. 7(1) March 2007, ed. by Emma Dowling, Rodrigo Nunes and Ben Trott, in www.ephemeraweb.org. And still by the same author, *La sostenibilidad de la reproducción: de la luchas por la renta a la salvaguardia de la vida*, in Laboratorio feminista, *Trasformaciones de trabajo desde una perspectiva feminista. Produccion, reproduccion, deseo, consumo*, (TN: *The sustainability of reproduction. From the struggle for the wage to the safeguarding of life*, in Feminist Laboratory, *The transformations of work from a feminist perspective. Production, reproduction, desire, consumption*), Tierradenadie Ediciones, Madrid 2006.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

- Collettivo internazionale femminista (a cura di), *Le operaie della casa*, (TN: International Feminist Collective ed., *The Houseworkers*), Marsilio Editori, Venezia, 1975.
- Collettivo internazionale femminista (a cura di), 8 marzo 1974. *Giornata internazionale di lotta delle donne*, Marsilio Editori, Venezia, 1975; (English Translation: Wages for Housework Committees of Toronto, *Women in Struggle. Italy Now*, n. 3, selfpublished).
- Collettivo internazionale femminista (a cura di), *Aborto di Stato. Strage delle innocenti*, (TN: International Feminist Collective *State abortion. Massacre of the innocent women*), Marsilio Editori, Venezia, 1976.
- Collettivo internazionale femminista (a cura di), (autore: Gruppo femminista per il Salario al lavoro domestico di Ferrara *Dietro la normalità del parto. Lotta all'ospedale di Ferrara* (TN: International Feminist Collective ed., author the Feminist Group of Wages for Housework of Ferrara, *Behind the normality of child-birth. Struggle at the hospital of Ferrara*) Marsilio Editori, Venezia, 1978.
- Collettivo internazionale femminista (a cura di), (autrici: Silvia Federici e Nicole Cox) *Contropiano dalle cucine*, Marsilio Editori, Venezia, 1978. (Translated from the English: Silvia Federici and Nicole Cox, *Counterplanning from the Kitchen. Wages for*

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

housework. A perspective on capital and the left, Falling Wall Press, Bristol, 1975.

- Dalla Costa Mariarosa, “Emigrazione, immigrazione e composizione di classe in Italia negli anni '70”, (TN: “Emigration, immigration and class composition in Italy in the Seventies”), in *Economia e lavoro* (NT: *Economy and work*), n. 4, October-December, 1981.
- Dalla Costa Mariarosa, *Potere femminile e sovversione sociale*, con *Il posto della donna* di Selma James, Marsilio Editori, Padova 1972, 4° ed. Venezia, 1977, (English Translation: Dalla Costa Mariarosa and James Selma, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Falling Wall Press, 1972).
- Dalla Costa Mariarosa, *L'Indigeno che è in noi, la terra cui apparteniamo*, in Marucci Alessandro (a cura di) *Camminare domandando*, DeriveApprodi, Roma, 1999 (English Translation: *The Native in Us the Land we Belong to*, in *Common Sense* n. 28, 1998 e in *The Commoner*, n. 6, 2002 in www.thecommoner.org).
- Dalla Costa Mariarosa, “Rustic and Ethical” in *Ephemeria. Theory and Politics in Organization*, vol.7(1), 2007, edited by Dowling Emma, Nunes Rodrigo and Trott Ben, in www.ephemeraweb.org.
- Dalla Costa Mariarosa, *La sostenibilidad de la reproducción: de la luchas por la renta a la salvaguardia de la vida*, in Laboratorio feminista, *Transformaciones del trabajo desde una perspectiva feminista*.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

Produccìon, reproduccion, deseò, consumo, (TN: *The sustainability of reproduction. From the struggle for the wage to the safeguarding of life*, in *Feminist Laboratory, The transformations of work from a feminist perspective. Production, reproduction, desire, consumption*), Terradenadie, Madrid, 2006.

- Dalla Costa Mariarosa e Dalla Costa Giovanna Franca (a cura di), *Donne e politiche del debito. Condizione e lavoro femminile nella crisi del debito internazionale*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 1993 (English Translation: *Paying the Price. Women and the Politics of International Economic Strategy*, Zed Books, London, 1995). (Japanese Translation: *Yakusokusareta hatten?*, Impact Shuppankai, Tokyo, 1995).
- Dalla Costa Mariarosa e Dalla Costa Giovanna Franca (a cura di) *Donne, sviluppo e lavoro di riproduzione. Questioni delle lotte e dei movimenti*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 1996 (English Translation: *Women, Development and Labour of Reproduction. Struggles and Movements*, Africa World Press, Trenton. N. J., EE.UU. e Asmara, Eritrea, 1999).
- Dowling Emma, Nunes Rodrigo and Trott Ben (editors), *Ephemera. Theory and Politics in Organization*, vol.7(1), 2007 in www.ephemeraweb.org.
- “Ecco la generazione ‘No figli’ ”, (TN: “Here the No Children Generation”) in *Repubblica (La)*, 28 agosto 2006.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

- George Susan, *Il debito del Terzo Mondo*, Edizioni Lavoro, Roma, 1989. (Translated from the English: *A fate worse than debt*, Penguin Group, England, 1988).
- George Susan, *Il boomerang del debito*, Edizioni Lavoro, Roma, 1992. (Translated from the English, *The Debt Boomerang*, Westview Press, 1992).
- *Il personale è politico*, *Quaderni di Lotta femminista* n. 2, (TN: *The Personal is Political. Notebooks of Lotta Femminista* n. 2). Musolini Editore, Torino, 1973.
- Laboratorio feminista, *Transformaciones del trabajo desde una perspectiva feminista. Producción, reproducción, deseo, consumo*, (TN: *The transformations of Work from a Feminist Perspective. Production, reproduction, desire, consumption*), Terradenadie Ediciones, Madrid, 2006.
- *Le operaie della casa*, giornale dell'autonomia femminista, bimestrale edito negli anni '70. (TN: *The Houseworkers*, journal of the feminist autonomy, by-monthly, published in the '70s).
- *Le operaie della casa*, n. doppio 0 bis, novembre-dicembre 1975/gennaio- febbraio 1976. (T.N. *The houseworkers*, double issue, number 0 bis, November-December 1975).
- *L'Offensiva*. *Quaderni di Lotta femminista* n.1, (TN: *The Offensive. Notebooks of Lotta Femminista* n. 1), Musolini Editore, Torino, 1972.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

- *Lotta Continua*, (TN: *Continuous Struggle*), 15 luglio 1972.
- *Lotta Continua*, 21 luglio 1972.
- *Lotta Continua*, 1 agosto 1972.
- *Manifesto (Il)*, (TN: *The Manifesto*) 14 luglio 1972.
- *Manifesto (Il)*, 20 luglio 1972.
- *Manifesto(Il)*, 4 agosto 1972.
- Marazzi Christian, *Il posto dei calzini*, (TN: *The Place of Soks*), Edizioni Casagrande, Bellinzona, 1994.
- Mungiello Rossana, "Segregation of Migrants in the Labour Market in Italy: the Case of Female Migrants from Eastern European Countries Working in the Sector of Care and Assistance for the Elderly. First Results of an Empirical Study Carried Out in Padova" in *Zu Wessen Diensten? Frauenarbeit zwischen Care-Drain und Outsourcing*, Zurich, Frauenrat fur Aussenpolitik, 2005.
- Negri A., *Movimenti nell'Impero*, (TN: *Movements in the Empire*), Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano, 2006.
- *Repubblica (La)*, 28 agosto 2006.
- *Repubblica (La)*, 16 ottobre 2006.
- *Repubblica (La)*, 9 novembre 2006.
- United Nations *Census*, 2000.

9. Women's Autonomy & Renumeration of Care Work

- United Nations, *Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women*, in *Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace*, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985, United Nations Publications, (Sales n. E.85.IV.10).
- United Nations, *Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace*, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985, United Nations Publications.

10. On Elder Care

Silvia Federici

Introduction

“Care work,” especially eldercare, has come in recent years to the center of public attention in the countries of the OECD in response to a number of trends that have put many traditional forms of assistance into crisis. First among these trends have been the growth, in relative and absolute terms, of the old age population and the increase in life expectancy (Kotlikoff and Burn 2004), not been matched, however, by a growth of services catering to the old. There has also been the expansion of women’s waged employment that has reduced their contribution to the reproduction of their families. (Folbre 2006: 350) To these factors we must add the continuing process of urbanization and the gentrification of working class neighborhoods, that have destroyed the support networks and the forms of mutual aid on which older people living alone could once rely, as neighbors would bring them food, make their beds, come for a chat. As a result of these trends, it is now recognized that for a large number of elderly, the positive effects of a longer life-span have been voided or are clouded by the prospect of loneliness, social exclusion and increased

10. *On Elder Care*

vulnerability to physical and psychological abuse. With this in mind, I present some reflections on the question of eldercare in contemporary social policy, especially in the US, to then ask what action can be taken on this terrain and why the question of elder care has been absent in the literature of the Marxist left.

My main objective here is to call for a redistribution of the 'common wealth' in the direction of elder care, and the construction of collective forms of reproduction enabling older people to be provided for when no longer self-sufficient and not at the cost of their providers' lives. For this to occur, however, the struggle over elder care must be politicized and placed on the agenda of social justice movements. A cultural revolution is also necessary in the concept of old age, challenging its degradation as a fiscal burden on the state and the younger generations (on one side), and (on the other) its mystification as an 'optional' stage in life that we can 'cure,' 'overcome,' and even prevent, if we only adopt the right medical technology and the 'life enhancing' devises disgorged by the market (Joyce and Mamo 2006).¹ At stake in the politicization of elder care are not only the destinies of older people and the un-sustainability of radical movements failing to address such a crucial issue in our lives, but the possibility of gen-

¹As Joyce and Mamo point out in "Graying the Cyborgs" (2007), driven by the quest for profit and an ideology privileging youth, a broad campaign has been underway targeting the elderly as consumers, promising to "regenerate" their bodies and delay aging if they use the appropriate farmaceutical products and technologies. In this context, old age becomes almost a sin, a predicament we bring on ourselves, by failing to take advantage of the latest rejuvenating products.

erational and class solidarity, which for years have been the targets of a relentless campaign by political economists and governments, portraying the provisions which workers have won for their old age (like pensions and other forms of social security) as an economic time-bomb and heavy mortgage on the future of the young.

1. The Crisis of Elder Care & the Era of Neoliberalism

The present crisis of elder care, in some respects, is nothing new. Eldercare in capitalist society has always been in a state of crisis, both because of the devaluation of reproductive work in capitalism and because the elderly, far from being treasured, as they were in many pre-capitalist societies as depositories of the collective memory and experience, are seen as no longer productive. In other words, elder care suffers from a double cultural and social devaluation. Like all reproductive work, it is not recognized as work, but unlike the reproduction of labor-power, whose product has some recognized value, it is deemed to absorb value but not to produce it. Thus, funds designated for eldercare have traditionally been disbursed with a stinginess reminiscent of the 19th century Poor Laws, and the task of caring for the old, when no longer self-sufficient, has been left to the families and kin with little external support, on the assumption that women would naturally take on this task as part of their domestic work. It has taken a long struggle to force capital to reproduce not just labor-power 'in use,' but the work-force throughout its

10. *On Elder Care*

entire life cycle, with the provision of assistance also for those who are no longer part of the labor market. However, even the Keynesian state fell short of this goal. Witness the Social Security legislation of the New Deal, enacted in 1940 in the United States, and considered "one of the achievements of our century" (Costa 1998: 1). It only partly responded to the problems faced by the old, as it tied social insurance to the years of waged employment, thus excluding unwaged house-workers from it, and provided assistance only to those in a state of absolute poverty.

The triumph of neo-liberalism has worsened this situation. In some countries of the OECD, some steps were taken in the 1990s to increase the funding of home-based care, and provide counseling and services to care-givers. [OECD 2005; Benería 2008: 2-3,5] Efforts have also been made to enable caregivers to 'reconcile' waged work and care work. In England and Wales, where it is reckoned that 5.2 million people provide informal care, starting in April 2007, caregivers for adults were given the right to demand flexible work schedules. (Carmichael et al.: 7).² But the dismantling of the welfare state and the neo-liberal insistence that reproduction is the workers' personal responsibility have triggered a counter-tendency

²Benería cites as an example a law passed in Spain in 1999, mandating employers to provide "different forms of temporary leaves to facilitate care work" (p.5), followed by a more extensive one in 2006-7 "funding a portion of the expenses individuals household spend on care." (ibid.) In Scotland, the Community Care and Health Act of 2002 "introduced free personal care for the elderly" and also redefined caregivers as "co-workers receiving resources rather than consumers... obliged to pay for services." (Fiona Carmichael et al. : 7).

10. On Elder Care

that is gaining momentum and the present economic crisis is accelerating.

The demise of welfare provisions for the elderly has been especially severe in the US, where it has reached such a point that workers are often impoverished in the effort to care for a disabled parent. One policy in particular has created great hardships. This has been the transfer of much hospital care to the home, a move motivated by purely financial concerns and carried out with little consideration given to the structures required to replace the services the hospitals used to provide.³ As described by Nona Glazer (1993), this development has not only increased the amount of care-work that family members, mostly women, must do. It has also shifted to the home "dangerous" and even "life threatening" operations that in the past only registered nurses and hospitals would have been expected to perform.⁴ At the same time, subsidized

³According to various surveys, as a consequence of these cuts, ... 20-to 50 millions family members in the US provide care that has traditionally been performed by nurses and social workers. Family care givers supply about 80% of the care for ill or disabled relatives and the need for their services will only rise as the population ages and modern medicine improves its ability to prolongs lives.With more terminally ill people choosing to remain at home until their final days, family members or friends now serve as informal caregivers for nearly three fourths of sick or disabled older adults living in the community during their years of life, according to a report in the Archives of Internal Medicine of January 2007 (Brody 2008).

⁴As a consequence of this "transfer," the home (Glazer writes) have been turned into a medical factory, where dialyses are performed and housewives and aides must learn to insert caterers, medicate wounds, while a whole new sort of medical equipment has been manufactured for home use. [Glazer 154ff.]

10. *On Elder Care*

home-care workers have seen their workload double, while the length of their visits has increasingly been cut forcing them to reduce their jobs "to household maintenance and bodily care." [Boris and Klein: 180] Federally financed nursing homes have also been taylorized, "using time- and motion studies to decide how many patients their workers can be expected to serve." (Glazer, *ibid.*: 174)

The globalization of elder care in the 1980s and 1990s has not remedied this situation. The new international division of reproductive work that globalization has promoted has shifted a large amount of care-work on the shoulders of immigrant women. (Federici 1999: 57-8, Pyle 2006: 283-9) As is generally recognized, this development has been very advantageous for governments, enabling them to save billions of dollars they would have had to pay to create services catering to the elderly. It has also enabled middle class women to pursue their careers and has allowed many among the elderly, who wished to maintain their independence, to remain in their homes without going bankrupt. But this cannot be considered a solution to elder care. Beside conferring a new legitimacy to the neo-liberal doctrine that governments have no responsibility for social reproduction, this policy is condemned by the living and working conditions of the paid care workers, which reflects all the contradictions and inequities that are characteristic of the process of social reproduction in our time.

It is because of the destructive impact of economic liberalization and structural adjustment in their countries of origins that thousands of women from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean Island, and the former socialist world, migrate to the more affluent regions of Europe, the Middle East

10. *On Elder Care*

and the United States to serve as nannies, domestics, and caregivers for the elder. To do this they must leave their own families including their children and aging parents behind, and recruit relatives or hire other women with less power and resources to replace the work they can no longer provide. (Pyle 2006:289; Hochschild 2002) Taking the case of Italy as an example, it is calculated that three out of four "badanti" (as care workers for the elderly are called) have children of their own, but only 15% have their families with them. (Di Vico 2004) This means that the majority suffer a great deal of anxiety, confronting the fact that their own families must go without the kind of care they now give to people across the globe. Arlie Hochschild has spoken, in this context, of a "global transfer of care and emotions," and the formation of a "global care-chain." (2002: 26-7; 2000: 134-5). But it is a chain that most often breaks down, as immigrant women become estranged from their children, stipulated arrangements fall apart, relatives die during their absence.

Equally important, because of the devaluation of reproductive work and the fact that they are immigrants, often undocumented and women of color, paid care workers are vulnerable to a great deal of abuse: long hours of work, no paid vacations, or other benefits, exposure to racist behavior and sexual assault. So low is generally the pay of home care workers in the US that nearly half must rely on food stamps and other forms of public assistance to make ends meet. (New York Times, 1/28/09) Indeed, as Domestic Workers United –the main domestic/care workers organization in New York, promoter of a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights– has put it, care workers live and

10. On Elder Care

work in "the shadow of slavery."⁵ It is also important to stress that most elderly people and families cannot afford hiring care-workers or paying for services matching their real need. This is particularly true of elderly people with illnesses who require day-long care. According to statistics of the Cnel of 2003, in Italy only 2.8% of elderly receive non-family assistance at home; in France it is twice as many, in Germany three times. But the number is still low. (Di Vico 2004) A large number of elderly thus live alone facing hardships that are all the more devastating the more invisible they are. In the 'hot summer' of 2003, thousands of elderly people died, throughout Europe, of dehydration, lack of food and medicines or just the unbearable heat –so many died in Paris that the authorities had to stack their bodies in refrigerated public spaces until the families came to reclaim them.

When family members care for the old, the tasks falls mostly on the shoulders of women⁶, who for months or years live on the verge of nervous and physical exhaustion, consumed by the work and the responsibility of having to provide care and often perform procedures for which they are not usually prepared. Few jobs are as demanding as adult care; not surprisingly, a high percentage of family caregivers show symptoms of clinical depression. Those who have jobs outside the home are especially penalized.

⁵The Bill of Rights Domestic Workers United has campaigned for was finally introduced in the legislation of New York State in November 2010, the first in the country to recognize care work as work. Similar campaigns are presently taking place in other parts of the US, especially in California.

⁶However, in the US the number of men caring for elder parents has been steadily increasing. (New York Times)

10. *On Elder Care*

Though the number of adults caring for their parents has greatly increased,⁷ employers have made no provisions to help workers carry out this task. On the contrary, at a time when the power relation is in their favor, they expect workers to spend more hours on the job and are reluctant to make any concessions. Thus, according to a recent AARP report, workers caring for their parents, in the US, must hide the fact that they are care-givers for fear of being refused a raise or losing their jobs, well-knowing that lay-offs are always around the corner. They also fear the resentment of their co-workers (Abrahms: 12) Particularly stressed are those referred to as the "sandwich generation," who simultaneously are raising children and caring for their parents. [Beckford 2009] The crisis of care work has reached such a point that in low-income, single-parent families in the US, teenagers and children, some no more than eleven years old, take care of their elders, also administering therapies and injections. As the New York Times has reported, a study conducted nationwide in 2005 revealed that " 3% of households with children ages 8 to 18 included child caregivers." (New York Times, March 2009: A18).⁸

⁷According to a recent AARP report, in 2009, the number of US family care givers providing care for an elderly was estimated at 42.1 millions, the estimated monetary value of their contribution amounting to \$450 billions. aarp.org/bulletin, September 2011, p.10.

⁸Other countries where children have become care workers include Britain and Australia, which often recognize them the right to participate in "patient-care discussions" and ask for compensations for their work. (New York Times *ibid.*)

10. On Elder Care

The alternative, for those who cannot afford buying some form of assisted care, are publicly funded nursing homes, which, however, are more like prisons than hostels for the old. Typically, because of lack of staff and funds or these institutions provide minimal care. At best, they let their residents lie hours in bed without anyone at hand to change their positions, adjust their pillows, massage their legs, tend to their bed sores, or simply talk to them, so that they can maintain their sense of identity and dignity and still feel alive and valued. At worst, nursing homes are places where old people are drugged, tied to their beds, left to lie in their excrements and subjected to all kind of physical and psychological abuses. This much has emerged from a series of reports, including one recently published by the US Government in 2008, which speaks of a history of abuse, neglect, and violation of safety and health standards in 94% of nursing homes. (New York Times, 8/30/08) The situation is not more encouraging in other countries. In Italy, the country beside the United States that I have most researched, reports of abuses in nursing homes perpetrated against disabled or chronically ill elders are very frequent, as are the cases in which needed medical assistance is denied.⁹

⁹See on the topic: Francesco Santanera “Violenze e abusi dovuti anche alla mancata applicazione delle leggi” in *Prospettive Assistenziali*, n.169, gennaio marzo 2010. *Prospettive Assistenziali* is a journal in existence since 1968 dedicated to struggle against social exclusion, especially of disabled and elder people. Santanera’s article can be read also online: <http://www.superando.it/content/voew/5754/121>. According to government controls realized in 2010, one third of institutes for the elderly violate the legal norms.

2. Eldercare, the Unions, & the Left

The problems I have described are so common and pressing that we would imagine that eldercare should top the agenda of the social justice movements and labor unions internationally. This, however, is not the case. Unless they work in institutions (hospitals, nursing homes), as is the case with nurses and aides, care workers are usually ignored by labor unions, even the most combative like COSATU in South Africa. (Ally 2005: 3) Unions negotiate pensions, the conditions of retirement, and health-care. But there is little discussion in their programs of the support systems required by people aging, and by care workers, whether or not they work for pay. In the US, until recently, labor unions did not even try to organize care workers, much less unpaid care-workers. To this day, care workers working for individuals or families are excluded from the Fair Labor Standards Act, a New Deal legislation that guarantees "access to minimum wages, overtime, bargaining rights and other workplace protections." (Boris and Klein 2007: 182) And the US is not an isolated case. According to a ILO survey of 2004, "cross-national unionization rates in the domestic service sector are barely 1%". (Ally 2005: 1) Pensions too are not available to all workers, but only to those who have worked for wages and certainly not to unpaid family caregivers. As reproductive work is not recognized as work and the pension systems compute benefits on the basis of the years spent in waged employment, women who have been fulltime house-wives can

http://www.ansa.it/notizie/rubriche/cronaca/2010/02/26/visualizza_new.

10. On Elder Care

obtain a pension only through a wage-earning husband and have no social security in case they divorce.

Labor organizations have not challenged these inequities, nor have social movements and the Marxist Left, who, with few exceptions, also seems to have written the elderly off the struggle, judging by the absence of any reference to elder care in contemporary Marxist analyses. The responsibility for this state of affairs can be in part traced back to Marx. Elder care is not a theme that we find in his works, although the question of old age had been on the revolutionary political agenda since the 18th century, and mutual aid societies and utopian visions of recreated communities (Fourierist, Owenite, Icarian) abounded in his time. (Blackburn 2002: 32, 39-41; Nordhoff 1966).¹⁰

¹⁰As Robin Blackburn points out, it was at the time of the French Revolution that the first proposals for paying pensions to people in old age and want appeared. Tom Paine discussed the issue in the second part of *Rights of Man* (1792), so did his friend Condorcet who offered a plan that was to cover all citizens. On the footsteps of these proposals, "The National Convention declared that 10 Fructidor was to be the date of the *Fête de la Veillesse* and that there should be old people homes established in every department. . . The Convention adopted the principle of a civic pension for the aged in June 1794, just a few months after the abolition of slavery" (Blackburn 2002 : 40-1).

In Marx's time, forms of assistance against sickness, old age, and death, as well as unemployment, were provided by the "friendly societies," workers' clubs organized on the basis of trade, described by John Foster as "the one social institution that touched the adult lives of a near majority of the working population" (Foster 1974: 216). Moreover, while the zenith of utopian socialism was in the early part of the 19th century, as late as the 1860s communitarian experiments, committed to protect their participants

10. On Elder Care

Marx was concerned with understanding the mechanics of capitalist production and the manifold ways in which the class struggle challenges it and reshapes its form. Security in old age and elder care did not enter this discussion. Old age was a rarity among the factory workers and miners of his time, whose life expectancy on average did not surpass twenty years at best, if his contemporaries' reports are to be believed. (Marx, Vol.1; Seccombe 1993: 75-7) Most important, Marx did not recognize the centrality of reproductive work, neither for capital accumulation nor for the construction of the new communist society. Although both him and Engels described the abysmal conditions in which the working class in England lived and worked, he almost naturalized the process of reproduction, never envisaging how reproductive work could be reorganized in a different, non-exploitative society or in the very course of the class struggle. For instance, he discussed "cooperation" mostly in the process of commodity production overlooking the qualitatively different forms of proletarian cooperation in the process of reproduction which Kropotkin later called "mutual aid."¹¹

Cooperation among workers, in Marx, is a fundamental character of the capitalist organization of work, "entirely

from poverty, helplessness and old age, continued, especially in the United States. A contemporary journalist, Charles Nordhoff, counted at least 72 organized according to cooperative/communistic principles. For a powerful history of Fraternal Societies in the United States see: David T. Beito (2000), *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State. Fraternal Societies and Social Services*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

¹¹For Kropotkin's concept of Mutual aid see in particular the last two chapters of the homonymous work. Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid. A Factor of Evolution*. (1902)

10. On Elder Care

brought about by the capital[ists]," coming into place only when the workers "have ceased to belong to themselves," being purely functional to the increase in the efficiency and productivity of labor. [Vol.I, Chapter 13: 449, 451]¹² As such, it leaves no space for the manifold expressions of solidarity and the many "institutions for mutual support", "associations, societies, brotherhoods, alliances," that Kropotkin found present amongst the industrial population of his time. (Kropotkin: 208, 221) Yet, as Kropotkin noted, these very forms of mutual aid put limits to the power of capital and the State over the workers' lives, enabling countless proletarians not to fall into utter ruin, and they sowed the seeds of a self-managed insurance system, guaranteeing some protection against unemployment, illness, old age and death.

Typical of the limits of Marx's perspective is his vision of the last stage of capitalist production as articulated in the famous "Fragment on the Machines," in the Grundrisse (1857-8), where he projects a world in which machines do all the work and human beings only tend to them, functioning as their supervisors. Whether understood as a utopia or a dystopia, this picture ignores in fact that, even in advanced capitalist countries, much of the socially necessary labor consists of reproductive activities and this work has proven not to be easily replaced by mechanization.

Only in part can the needs and desires of non-self-sufficient older people, or people requiring medical assistance, be addressed by incorporating technologies into

¹²"As cooperators," Marx writes, workers "merely form a particular mode of existence of capital." The productive power they develop "is the productive power of capital." (*ibid.*)

10. *On Elder Care*

the work by which they are reproduced. The automation of eldercare is a path already well traveled. As Nancy Folbre (the leading feminist economist and student of eldercare in the United States) has shown, Japanese industries are quite advanced in the attempt to technologize it, as they are generally in the production of interactive robots. Nursebots giving people baths or "walking [them] for exercise," and "companion robots" (robotic dogs, teddy bears) are already available on the market, although at prohibitive costs. (Folbre 2006: 356) We also know that televisions and personal computers have become surrogate "badanti" for many elders. Electronically commanded wheelchairs enhance the mobility of those who are sufficiently in charge of their movements to master their commands.

These scientific and technological developments can highly benefit older people, if they are made affordable for them. The circulation of knowledge they can provide certainly places a great wealth at their disposal. But this cannot replace the labor of care workers, especially in the case of elders living alone and/or suffering from illnesses and impairments. As Folbre points out, robotic partners can even increase people's loneliness and isolation [ibid.]. Nor can automation address the predicaments -fears, anxieties, loss of identity, loss of the sense of one's dignity- that people experience as they age and become dependent on others often even for the satisfaction of their most basic needs, like walking, eating, washing, defecating. It is not technological innovation that is needed to address the question of eldercare, but a change in social relations, whereby the reproduction of our lives is no longer subordi-

nated to the valorization of capital and is organized as a collective process.

3. Women, Aging & Elder Care In the Perspective of Feminist Economists

For a start, we need to recognize (as some feminist economists like Folbre have done) that the question of eldercare is essentially a gender question. Although increasingly commodified, most care work is still done by women and as unpaid labor that does not entitle them to any remuneration and pension. Thus, paradoxically, the more women care for others, the less care they can receive in return, because they devote less time to waged labor than men and many social insurance plans are calculated on the years of waged work done. Paid caregivers too are affected by the devaluation of reproductive work, forming an 'underclass' that still must fight to be socially recognized as workers. In sum, because of the devaluation of reproductive work, practically everywhere women face old age with fewer resources than men, measured in terms of family support, monetary incomes and available assets. Thus, in the United States, where pensions and Social Security are calculated on years of employment, women are the largest group of elderly poor and the largest number of residents of low-income nursing homes, the lagers of our time, precisely because they spend so much of their lives outside of the waged workforce in activities not recognized as work.

10. On Elder Care

Science and technology cannot resolve this problem. What is required is a transformation in the social/sexual division of labor and, above all, the re-cognition of reproductive work as work, entitling those performing to a compensation, so that family members providing care are not penalized for their work. The recognition and valorization of reproductive work is crucial also to overcome the divisions which the present situation sows among care workers, which pit, on one side, the family members trying to minimize their expenses, and, on the other, the hired care-givers facing the demoralizing consequences of working at the edge of poverty and devaluation.

Feminist economists working on this issue have articulated possible alternatives to the present systems. In *Warm Hands in a Cold Age* (2007), Nancy Folbre has outlined the reforms needed to give security to the aging population, especially elderly women, taking an international perspective, and pointing to the countries that are in the lead in this respect. At the top, she places the countries which provide almost universal systems of insurance. At the bottom there are the US and England, where elderly assistance is tied to the history of employment. But, in both cases, there is a problem in the way policies are configured, which confirms an unequal sexual division of labor and the traditional expectations concerning women's role in the family and society. This is one crucial area where change must occur.

Folbre calls for a redistribution of resources re-channeling public money from the military-industrial complex and other destructive enterprises to the care of people in old age. She acknowledges that this may seem "unrealistic," equivalent to calling for a revolution. But

10. *On Elder Care*

she insists that it should be placed on "our agenda," for the future of every worker is at stake, and a society blind to the tremendous suffering that awaits so many people once they age, as is the case with the US today, is a society bound for self-destruction.

There is no sign, however, that this blindness will soon be dissipated. With the pretext of the economic crisis and low growth, policy makers are turning their eyes away from it, everywhere striving to cut social spending and bring state pensions and social security systems, including subsidies to care work, under the ax. According to the dominant, obsessive refrain the presence of a more energetic elderly population, stubbornly insisting on living on, is making every social form of assistance unsustainable. It was possibly thinking of the millions of Americans determined on living past 80, that Alan Greenspan, in his memoirs, confessed that he was frightened when realizing that the Clinton Administration had actually accumulated a financial surplus! [Greenspan 2007: 217] But even before the financial crisis of 2008, for years policy makers had been orchestrating a generational war, incessantly warning that that the expansion of the 65 + population would bankrupt the Social Security system, leaving a heavy mortgage on the shoulders of the young. And as the crisis deepens, the assault on elder care, either in form of cuts to services or cuts to pensions, intensifies. Already in Greece, since 2010, pensions have been cut by 25%. In England, the ideology of the "Big Society" masks the attempt to place social services on a voluntary basis, possibly to be picked up by laid off women. Meanwhile, in the US, conservative politicians (like the Republican candidate Rick Perry) call the Social Security system a "Ponzi

10. *On Elder Care*

Scheme,” or mechanically repeat the system is collapsing and must be drastically restructured.

For sure, no one is arguing for an increase in government funding of elder care, or a reduction of working hours to make space for eldercare, or a remuneration of this work. (Watson and Mears 1999: 193)

It is urgent, then, that social justice movements intervene on his terrain to prevent a triage solution to the crisis at the expense of the old, and to bring together the different social subjects implicated in the question of elder care: care workers, families of the elders, and the elders themselves who are now told they are in an antagonistic relation to the young. Examples of this kind of alliance are already visible in the struggles over elder care, as nurses as patients, paid care workers, and families of their clients are coming together to jointly confront the state, aware that when the relations of re-production become antagonistic both producers and reproduced pay the price. Meanwhile, a "commoning" of reproductive/care work is under way.

Communal forms of living based upon "solidarity contracts" are presently being created in some Italian cities by elders, who in order to avoid being institutionalized, pool together their resources, when they cannot count on their families or hire a care worker. In the US, a younger generation of political activists has been discussed creating "communities of care,"¹³ aiming at socializing the

¹³The organization of "communities of care" is the project of some anarchist activists, on both coasts of the United States, who are inspired by the solidarity work done by Act Up in response to the spread of AIDS in the gay community in the 1980s, which, against all odds, marked a major turning point in the growth of that move-

10. On Elder Care

experience of illness, pain, grieving and the care work involved, in this process reclaiming and redefining what it means to be ill, to age, to die. These efforts need to be expanded. They are essential to a reorganization of our everyday life and the creation of non-exploitative social relations. For the seeds of the new world are not to be planted online, but in the cooperation that we can develop among ourselves, which is most tested when confronted with the task of ensuring that the lives of those who are tied to wheelchairs or hospital beds do not become a living torture, as it is so often the case in our society.

Bibliography

- Abrahms, Sally. (2011). "The Caregiver's Dilemma." *aarp.org/bulletin*, September 2011, (10-12).
- Ally, Shireen. (2005). "Caring About Care Workers: Organizing in the Female Shadow of Globalization." *Center For Global Justice, San Miguel De Alende (Mexico): International Conference on Women and Globalization*, 27 July–3 August 2005.
- Anton, Anatole, Milton Fisk and Nancy Holmstrom. (2000). *Not For Sale: In Defense of Public Goods*. Boulder (Colorado): Westview Press.

ment. Information on "communities of care" can be found in a variety of zines produced on this subject. On this topic see "The Importance of Support: Building Foundations, Sustaining Community." In *Rolling Thunder. An Anarchist Journal of Dangerous Living*, Issue Six, Fall 2008, 29-39.

10. On Elder Care

- Beckford, Martin. (2009) "'Sandwich generation' families torn between demands of children and parents." *Telegraph.co.uk*, April 1, 2009.
- Benaria, Lourdes. (2008). "The Crisis of Care, International Migration, and Public Policy." *Feminist Economics*, 14(3), July 2008, 1-21.
- Blackburn, Robin. (2002). *Banking on Death. Or, Investing in Life: The History and Future of the Pensions*. London: Verso.
- Boris, Eileen and Jennifer Klein. (2007). "We Were the Invisible Workforce: Unionizing Home Care." In *Cobble* ed. (2007) 177-193.
- Brody, Jane E. (2008). "When Families Take Care of Their Own." *New York Times*. November 11, 2008.
- Calasanti, Toni M. and Kathleen F. Slevin eds. (2006). *Age Matters. Realigning Feminist Thinking*. New York: Routledge.
- Carmichael, Fiona, Claire Hulme, Sally Sheppard and Gemma Connell. (2008) In *Feminist Economics* 14 (2), April 2008. 3-35.
- Castegnaro, Alessandro. (2002). *La Rivoluzione occulta dell'assistenza agli anziani: le aiutanti domiciliari*. Studi Zancan 2002.
- Chandler, Michael Alison. (2007) "When a kid becomes the caregiver." *Washington Post*, August 25, 2007.

10. On Elder Care

- Cobble, Dorothy Sue. (2007). *The Sex of Class. Women Transforming American Labor*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Costa, Dora. L. (1998). *The Evolution of Retirement. An American Economic History. 1880-1990*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Cowell, Alan. (1994). "Affluent Europe's Plight: Graying." In *New York Times*, September 8, 1994.
- Dalla Costa, Mariarosa and Giovanna F. Dalla Costa eds. (1999). *Women, Development and Labor of Reproduction. Struggles and Movements*. Trenton (NJ): Africa World Press.
- Di Vico, Dario. (2004). "Le badanti, il nuovo welfare privato. Aiutano gli anziani e lo Stato risparmia." *Corriere della Sera*. June 13, 2004, p.15.
- Eaton, Susan E. (2007). "Eldercare in the United States: Inadequate, Inequitable, but Not a Lost Cause." In Folbre, Shaw and Stark eds. (2007) 37-52.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara and Arlie Russell Hochschild eds. (2002). *Global Woman. Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Federici, Silvia. (1999). "Reproduction and Feminist Struggle in the New International Division of Labor." In Dalla Costa and Dalla Costa eds. (1999) 47-82.

10. On Elder Care

- Ferguson, Ann and Nancy Folbre. (2000). "Women, Care and the Public Good: A Dialogue." In Anton et.al (2000) 95-108.
- Folbre, Nancy, Lois B. Shaw and Agneta Stark eds. (2007). *Warm Hands in Cold Age*. New York: Routledge.
- Folbre, Nancy, Lois B. Shaw and Agneta Stark eds. (2007). *Introduction: Gender and Aging*. In Folbre, Shaw and Stark eds. (2007) 3-6.
- Folbre, Nancy. (2006). "Nursebots to the Rescue? Immigration, Automation and Care." In *Globalizations*, Vol. 3. No 3, 2006 (349-360).
- Glazer, Nona. (1993). *Women's Paid and Unpaid Labor. Work Transfer in Health Care and Retail*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Green, Carole A. (2007). "Race, Ethnicity and Social Security Retirement Age in the US." In Folbre, Shaw and Stark eds. (2007) 117-144.
- Greenspan, Alan. 2007. *The Age of Turbulence. Adventures in a New World*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Harrington Meyer, Madonna and Douglas A. Wolf, and Christine L. Himes. (2007). "Linking Benefits to Marital Status: Race and Social Security in the US." In Folbre, Shaw and Stark eds. (2007) 163-198.
- Hochschild, Arlie and Ehrenreigh, Barbara (2002). *Global Women: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Holt.

10. On Elder Care

- _____ (2000). "Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Value." In Will Hutton and Anthony Giddens eds., *Global Capitalism*. New York: The New Press.
- Marx, Karl (1973). *Grundrisse*. London: The Penguin Press.
- Marx, Karl (1976). *Capital*. Volume I. London: The Penguin Press.
- Kotlikoff, Laurence J. and Scott Burns. (2004). *The Coming Generational Storm. What You Need to Know About America's Economic Future*. Cambridge (MASS): MIT Press.
- Kropotkin, Peter (1998). *Mutual Aid. A factor of evolution*. London: Freedom Press. (First Edition 1902)
- Joyce, Kelly and Laura Mamo. (2006). "Greying the Cyborg. New Directions in Feminist Analyses of Aging, Science and Technology." In Calasanti and Slevin eds. (2006) 99-122.
- Luatti, Lorenzo, Serena Bracciali, Roberta Renzetti, (2007) *Nello Sguardo dell'Altra. Raccontarsi il Lavoro di Cura*. In collaborazione con Donne Insieme. Arezzo: Collana Briciole.
- Lyon, Dawn (2006). "The Organization of Carework in Italy: Gender and Migrant Labor in the New Economy." *Indiana Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol.13, Issue 1, Winter 2006, 207-224.

10. On Elder Care

- Misra, Joya, Jonathan Woodring and Sabine N. Merz. (2006). "The Globalization of Care Work: Neoliberal Economic Restructuring and Migration Policy." *Globalizations*, Vol. 3, N. 3, 2006, 317-332.
- New York Times. (2009). "In a Turnabout, More Children Take on the Care Giver Role for their Elders," *New York Times*, February 23, 2009.
- Nordhoff, Charles. (1966). *The Communist Societies of the United States. From Personal Observation*. New York: Dover Publications, INC. (First edition 1875)
- OECD Health Project. (2005) *Long Term Care For Older People*. OECD Publications.
- Parrenas, Rhacel Salazar. (2002). *Servants of Globalization. Women, Migration and Domestic Work*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Pear, Robert. (2008). "Violations Reported in 94% of Nursing Homes." *New York Times*, September 30, 2008.
- Philipps, Lisa. (2008). "Silent Partners: The Role of Unpaid Market labor in Families." *Feminist Economics*, 14 (2), April 2008, 37-57.
- Povoledo, Elisabetta. (2008). "Italian Plan to Deal with Migrants Could Affect Residents Who Rely On Them." *New York Times*, June 21, 2008.

10. On Elder Care

- Pyle, Jean L. (2006) "Transnational Migration and Gendered Care Work: Introduction." In *Globalizations*, Vol.3, N.3, 2006, 283-296.
- _____.(2006). "Globalization and the Increase in Transnational Care Work: The Flip Side." *Globalization*, Vol.3, N.3, 2006, 297-316.
- Ranci, Costanzo. (2001). Il mercato sociale dei servizi alla persona.
- Secombe, Wally (1995, 1993). *Weathering the Storm. Working-Class Families From The Industrial Revolution To The Fertility Decline*. London: Verso
- Shaw, Lois B. and Sunhwa Lee. (2007). "Growing Old in the US: Gender and Income Inadequacy." In Folbre, Shaw and Stark eds. (2007) 174-198.
- Symposium: Globalizations, Transnational Migrations, And Gendered Care Work. *Globalizations* Volume 3, Number 3, September 2006.
- Timothy M. Smeeding and Susanna Sandström. (2007). "Poverty Income Maintenance in Old Age: A Cross-National View of Low Income Older Women." In Folbre, Shaw and Stark eds. (2007) 163-174.
- Agneta Stark. (2007). "Warm Hands in Cold Age – On the Need of a New World Order of Care." In Folbre, Shaw and Stark eds. (2007) 7-36.
- Watson Elizabeth A. and Jane Mears. (1999). *Women, Work and Care of the Elderly*. Burlington (USA): Ashgate.

10. *On Elder Care*

- Zajicek, Toni Calasanti, Cristie Ginther, Julie Summers. (2006). "Intersectionality and Age Relations. Unpaid Care Work and Chicanas." In Calasanti and Slevin eds. (2006) 175-197.
- Zimmerman Mary K., Jacquelyne S. Litt, and Christine E. Bose. (2006). *Global Dimensions of Gender and Carework*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

11. Sex as Work & Sex Work

Laura Agustín¹

An army colonel is about to start the morning briefing to his staff. While waiting for the coffee to be prepared, the colonel says he didn't sleep much the night before because his wife had been a bit frisky. He asks everyone: How much of sex is 'work' and how much is 'pleasure'? A Major votes 75-25% in favor of work. A Captain says 50-50%. A lieutenant responds with 25-75% in favor of pleasure, depending on how much he's had to drink. There being no consensus, the colonel turns to the enlisted man in charge of making the coffee. What does he think? With no hesitation, the young soldier replies, 'Sir, it has to be 100% pleasure.' The surprised colonel asks why. 'Well, sir, if there was any work involved, the officers would have me doing it for them.'

¹Laura Agustín is the author of *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry* (Zed Books 2007) and recently participated in a BBC World Debate on Human Trafficking held in Luxor, Egypt. She has been studying sex work since the early 1990s and blogs several times a week at The Naked Anthropologist.

11. *Sex as Work & Sex Work*

Perhaps because he is the youngest, the soldier considers only the pleasure that sex represents, while the older men know a lot more is going on. They may have a better grasp of the fact that sex is the work that puts in motion the machine of human reproduction. Biology and medical texts present the mechanical facts without any mention of possible ineffable experiences or feelings (pleasure, in other words), as sex is reduced to wiggly sperm fighting their way towards waiting eggs. The divide between the feelings and sensations involved and the cold facts is vast.

The officers probably also have in mind the work involved in keeping a marriage going, apart from questions of lust and satisfaction. They might say that sex between people who are in love is special (maybe even sacred), but they also know sex is part of the partnership of getting through life together and has to be considered pragmatically as well. Even people in love do not have identical physical and emotional needs, with the result that sex takes different forms and means more or less on different occasions.

This little story shows a few of the ways that sex can be considered work. When we say sex work nowadays the focus is immediately on commercial exchanges, but in this article I mean more than that and question our ability to distinguish clearly when sex involves work (as well as other things) and sex work (which involves all sorts of things). Most of the moral uproar surrounding prostitution and other forms of commercial sex asserts that the difference between good or virtuous sex and bad or harmful sex is obvious. Efforts to repress, condemn, punish and rescue women who sell sex rest on the claim that they occupy a place outside the norm and the community, can

11. *Sex as Work & Sex Work*

be clearly identified and therefore acted on by people who Know Better how they should live. To show this claim to be false discredits this neocolonialist project.

Loving, With and Without Sex

We live in a time when relationships based on romantic, sexual love occupy the pinnacle of a hierarchy of emotional values, in which it is supposed that romantic love is the best possible experience and that the sex people in love have is the best sex, in more ways than one. Romantic passion is considered meaningful, a way for two people to 'become one', an experience some believe heightened if they conceive a child. Other sexual traditions also strive to transcend ordinariness in sex (the mechanical, the frictional), for example Tantra, which distinguishes three separate purposes for sex: procreation, pleasure and liberation, the last culminating in losing the sense of self in cosmic consciousness. In the western romantic tradition, passion is conceived as involving a strong positive emotion toward a particular person that goes beyond the physical and is contrasted to lust, which is only physical.

It is, however, impossible to say exactly how we know which is which, and the young enlisted man in the opening story might well not understand the difference. Sex driven by surging or excess testosterone and sex as adolescent rebellion against repressive family values cannot be reduced to a mechanical activity bereft of emotion or meaning; rather, those kinds of sex often feel like ways of finding out and expressing who we are. And even when sex is used to show off in front of others, or to affirm one's attractiveness

11. *Sex as Work & Sex Work*

and power to pull, ‘meaningless’ would seem to be the last thing it should be called. Here it is true that one person may not only lack passion but totally neglect another’s feelings and desires, but just as often this other person is engaged in the same pursuit. The point is that reductions like lust and love don’t go very far towards telling us what is going on when people have sex together. Moreover, while real passion is meant to be based on knowing someone long and intimately, a parallel story glorifies love at first sight, in which passion is instantly awakened – and this can occur as easily at a rave or pub as at the Taj Mahal.

Part of the mythology of love promises that loving couples will always want and enjoy sex together, unproblematically, freely and loyally. But most people know that couples are multi-faceted partnerships, sex together being only one facet, and that those involved very often tire of sex with each other. Although skeptics say today’s high divorce rate shows the love-myth is a lie, others say the problem is that lovers aren’t able or willing to do the work necessary to stay together and survive personal, economic and professional changes. Some of this work may well be sexual. In some partnerships where the spark has gone, partners grant each other the freedom to have sex with others, or pay others to spice up their own sex lives (as a couple or separately). This can take the form of a polyamorous project, with open contracts; as swinging, where couples play with others together; as polygamy or temporary marriage; as cheating or betrayal; or as paying for sex.

The Sex Contract

Even when love is involved, people may use sex in the hope of getting something in return. They may or may not be fully conscious of such motives as:

- I will have sex with you because I love you even if I am not in the mood myself
- I will have sex with you hoping you will feel well disposed toward me afterwards and give me something I want
- I will have sex with you because if I don't you are liable to be unpleasant to me, our children, or my friends, or withhold something we want

In these situations, sex is felt to be and accepted as part of the relationship, backed up in classic marriage law by the concept of conjugal relations, spouses' rights to them and the consequences of not providing them: abandonment, adultery, annulment, divorce. This can work the opposite way as well, as when a partner doesn't want sex:

- I will not have sex with you, so you will have to do without or get it somewhere else

The partner wanting sex and not getting it at home now has to choose: do without and feel frustrated? call an old friend? ring for an escort? go to a pick-up bar? drive to a hooker stroll? visit a public toilet? buy an inflatable doll? fly to a third-world beach?

People of any gender identity can find themselves in this situation, where money may help resolve the situation, at

11. Sex as Work & Sex Work

least temporarily, and where more than one option may have to be tried. Tiring of partners is a universal experience, and research on women who pay local guides and beach boys on holidays suggests there is nothing inherently male about exchanging money for sex. That said, our societies are still patriarchal, women still take more responsibility for maintaining homes and children than men and men still have more disposable cash than women, making the overtly commercial options more viable for men than for others.

We don't know how many people do what, but we know that many clients of sex workers say they are married (some happily, some not, the research is all about male clients). In testimonies about their motivations for paying for sex, men often cite a desire for variety or a way to cope with not getting enough sex or the kind of sex they want at home.

- I want to have sex with you but I also want it with someone else

This is the point in the sex contract many have trouble with, the question being Why? Why should someone with sex available at home (even good sex) also want it somewhere else? The assumption is, of course, that we all ought to want only one partner, because we all ought to want the kind of love that is loyal, passionate and monogamous. To say I love my wife and also I would like to have sex with others is to seem perverse, or greedy, and a lot of energy is spent railing against such people. However, there is nothing intrinsically better about monogamy than any other attitude to sex.

11. *Sex as Work & Sex Work*

If saving marriages is a value, then more than one sex worker believes her role helps prevent break-ups, or at least allows spouses to blow off steam from difficult relationships. Workers mean not only the overtly sexual side of paid activities but also the emotional labour performed in listening to clients' stories, bolstering their egos, teaching them sexual techniques, providing emotional advice. Rarely do sex workers position clients' spouses as enemies or say they want to steal clients away from them; on the contrary, many see the triangular relationship – wife, husband, sex worker – as mutually sustaining. In this way sex workers believe they help reproduce the marital home and even improve it.

Sex as Reproductive Labour

In support of the idea that sex reproduces social life, one can say that people fortunate enough to experience satisfying sex feel fundamentally affirmed and renewed by it. In that sense, a worker providing sexual services does reproductive work. Paid sex work is a caring service when workers provide friend-like or therapist-like company and when they give a back rub – whether the caring is a performance or not. The person providing the caring services uses brain, emotions and body to make another person feel good:

- Leaning over to comfort a baby
- Leaning over to massage aching shoulders
- Leaning over to kiss a neck or forehead or chest

11. Sex as Work & Sex Work

- Leaning over to suck a penis or breast

If the recipient perceives the contact as positive, a sense of well-being is produced that the brain registers, and the individual's separateness is momentarily erased. These effects are not different simply because the so-called erogenous zones are involved rather than other parts of the body. In this sense, sex work, whether paid or not, reproduces fundamental social life.

The argument against sex work as reproductive labour is that sexual experiences, while sometimes temporarily rejuvenating, are neither always felt as positive nor essential to the individual's continued functioning. Humans have to eat and keep our bodies and environments clean but we don't have to have sex to survive: the well-being produced by sex is a luxury or extra. Sex feels as essential as food to a lot of people, and they may be very unhappy without it, but they can go on living.

Sex as a Job

The variability of sexual experience makes it difficult to pin down which sex should properly be thought of as sex work. My own policy is to accept what individuals say. If someone tells me they experience selling sex as a job, I take their word for it. If, on the contrary, they say that it doesn't feel like a job but something else, then I accept that.

What does it mean to say it feels like a job? There are several possibilities:

11. Sex as Work & Sex Work

- I organise myself to offer particular services for money that I define
- I take a job in someone else's business where I control some aspects of what I do but not others
- I place myself in situations where others tell me what they are looking for and I adapt, negotiate, manipulate and perform – but it's a job because I get money

There are other permutations, too, of course. All service jobs involve customer relations, which are eternally unpredictable. Some clients are able to specify exactly what services they want and make sure they are satisfied, but some cannot and may end up getting what the worker wants to provide. To imagine that the worker is always powerless because the client pays for time makes no sense, since all workers jockey for control in their jobs – of what happens when and how long it takes. This is a simple definition of human agency. And it's important to remember that a very large proportion of sex work is spent on selling: the seduction and flirtation necessary to turn atmosphere, potentiality and possibility into an exchange of money for sex.

Furthermore, although we like to think about the two roles, salesperson and customer, as separate, in the sexual relation roles can be blurred. Theorists want to think about the worker doing something for the client or the client commanding the worker to act. But carrying out a command does not exclude doing it one's own way, nor, for that matter, enjoyment, feelings of connectivity and the reproduction of self.

Non-Partner Sex in the Home

Many would like to believe that non-commercial (or ‘real’) sex takes place in homes, while commercial sex lurks in seedy other places. However, sex outside the partnership easily takes place while one of the partners is not there. This can be sex that is ordered in and paid for or adulterous, promiscuous, play or non-monogamous sex. Sometimes the non-partner is considered ‘almost one of the family’ – a live-in maid or nanny. Other times the non-partner is someone who’s come to perform some other paid job – the proverbial milkman or plumber. There’s also sex in the home online, via webcam, or over the telephone, as well as images or objects that enhance a sexual experience in which no partner is necessary at all. The sex industry penetrates family residences in many ways and cannot be, by definition, the family’s Other.

Most commentary on how the sex industry is changing focuses on the Internet, where apart from more conventional business sites, sexual communities form and reform continuously. Social networking sites like facebook provide spaces where the commercial, the aesthetic and the activist intersect and overlap, also complicating the traditional divide between selling and buying. Chat and instant messaging provide opportunities for people to experiment with sexual identities including commercial ones. Much of all this is unmeasurable, taking place on sites where all participants are mixed together, not sorted into categories of buyers and sellers. Statistics on the value of pornography sold on the Internet focus on sites with catalogues of products for sale, but the sphere of webcams,

11. *Sex as Work & Sex Work*

like peep shows of old, blurs the wobbly line between porn and prostitution.

Although some (like my colleague Elizabeth Bernstein 2007) claim that sex workers offering girlfriend-like experiences are a manifestation of post-industrial life, I am not convinced. Sex worker testimonies from many periods reveal the complexity always waiting to happen when brief encounters are repeated, when clients seek again someone with whom they felt a bond as well as a sexual attraction. Nor am I convinced that the experiences of upper-class clients patronising courtesans, geishas or mistresses are inherently different from the socialising of working-class men and women in 'treating' cultures. Instead, it is clear that the lines between commercial and non-commercial sex have always been blurry, and that middle-class marriage is itself an example.

Scholars of sexual cultures won't get far if they follow dogma that considers marriage to be separate and outside the realm of investigations of commercial sex. In societies where matchmaking and different sorts of arranged marriages and dowries are conventional, the link between payment and sex has been overt and normalised, while campaigners against both sex tourism and foreign-bride agencies are offended precisely because they see a money-exchange entering into what they believe should be 'pure' relationships. We have too much information now about non-family forms of love and commitment, non-committed forms of sex and non-sexual forms of love to hold on to these arbitrary, mythic divisions, which further oppressive ideas about sexually good and bad women. We know now that monogamy is not necessarily better, that paid sex can be affectionate, that loving couples can do without sex,

11. *Sex as Work & Sex Work*

that married love involves money and that sex involves work.

I see no postmodern crisis here. Some believe that the developed West was moving in a good direction after the Second World War, towards happier families and juster societies, and that neoliberalism is destroying that. But historical research shows that before the bourgeoisie's advancement to the centre of European societies, with the concomitant focus on nuclear families and a particular version of moral respectability, loose, flexible arrangements vis-à-vis sex, family and sexuality were common in both upper- and working-class cultures (Agustín 2004) . In the long run it may turn out that 200 years of bourgeois 'family values' were a blip on the screen in human history.

Sex, Equality & Money

Understanding professional sex work has not been made easier by making 'equality' the standard for gender relations. We can only really know whether sexual experiences are equal if everyone looks and acts the same, which is not only impossible but repressive of diversity. In sexual relations, equality projects run into the problem of dissimilar bodies, different ways of exhibiting arousal and experiencing satisfaction, not to mention differences in cultural background and social status. Those who complain about other people's perversity and deviance are accused in return of being boring adherents of repressive sex.

In terms of the work of sex, we run into a further difficulty vis-à-vis equality, the cliché that sees participants taking either an active or a passive role and identity. But

11. *Sex as Work & Sex Work*

many people, not just professional sex workers, know that the work of sex can mean allowing the other to take an active role and assuming a passive one as well as taking the active role or switching back and forth. Sometimes people do what they already know they like, and sometimes they experiment. Sometimes people don't know what they want, or want to be surprised, or to lose control.

For some critics, the possession of money by clients gives them absolute power over workers and therefore means that equality is impossible. This attitude toward money is odd, given that we live in times when it is acceptable to pay for child and elderly care, for rape, alcohol and suicide counselling and for many other forms of consolation and caring. Those services are considered compatible with money but when it is exchanged for sex money is treated as a totally negative, contaminating force - this commodification uniquely terrible. Money is a fetish here despite the obvious fact that no body part is actually sold off in the commercial sex exchange.

Sex Work & Migrancy

In many places, migrant women and young men do most of the paid sex work, because:

there are enormous structural inequalities in the world, because there are people everywhere willing to take the risk of travelling to work in other countries and because social networks, high technology and transportation make it widely feasible (Agustín 2002). Migrants take

11. *Sex as Work & Sex Work*

jobs that are available, accept lower pay and tolerate having fewer rights than first-class citizens because those are less important than simply getting ahead. Even those with qualifications for other jobs, whether as hairdressers or university professors, are glad to get jobs considered unprestigious by non-migrants. While many view migrants in low-prestige jobs as absolute victims too constrained by forces around them to have real agency, social gain or enjoyment, there are other ways to understand them (Agustín 2003).

Critics hold that migrants who work in private homes reproduce the social life of their all-powerful employers but accomplish little on their own behalf. This is strange, because low-prestige workers who are not migrants are acknowledged to gain a connection to society, knowledge of being a useful economic actor and more options because of having money.

We look at migration as neither a degradation nor improvement . . . in womens' position, but as a restructuring of gender relations. This restructuring need not necessarily be expressed through a satisfactory professional life. It may take place through the assertion of autonomy in social life, through relations with family of origin, or through participating in networks and formal associations. The differential between earnings in the country of origin and the country of immigration may in itself create such an autonomy, even if the job in the receiving country is one of a live-in maid or prostitute. (Hefti 1997)

11. Sex as Work & Sex Work

One of the great contradictions of capitalism is that even unfair, unwritten, ambiguous contracts can produce active subjects.

Ways Forward

I have proposed the cultural study of commercial sex (Agustín 2005), in which scholars are free of the constraints of the traditional study of prostitution, where ideology and moralising about power, gender and money have long held primacy. Cultural study does not assume that we already know what any given sex-money exchange means but that meaning changes according to specific cultural context. This means we cannot assume there is a fundamental difference between commercial and non-commercial sex. Anthropologists studying non-western societies consistently reveal that money and sex exchanges exist on a continuum where feelings are also present, and historians reveal the same about the past (for example, Tabet 1987 and Peiss 1986).

Sex and work cannot be completely disentangled, as the officers knew and the enlisted man would some day find out.

Works cited

- Laura Agustín. 2005. The Cultural Study of Commercial Sex. *Sexualities*, Vol 8, No 5, pp 618-631.
- _____ 2004. 'At Home in the Street: Questioning the Desire to Help and Save.' In *Regulat-*

11. Sex as Work & Sex Work

ing Sex: The Politics of Intimacy and Identity. E. Bernstein and L. Shaffner, eds., 67-82. New York: Routledge Perspectives on Gender.

- _____ 2003. 'Sex, Gender and Migrations: Facing Up to Ambiguous Realities.' *Soundings*, 23, 84-98.
- _____ 2002. 'Challenging Place: Leaving Home for Sex.' *Development*, Society for International Development, Rome, Vol. 45.1, March, 110-16.
- Bernstein, Elizabeth. 2007. *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity and the Commerce of Sex.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hefti, Anny Misa. 1997. 'Globalisation and Migration.' Paper presented at European Solidarity Conference on the Philippines, Zurich, 19-21 September.
- Peiss, Kathy. 1986. *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Tabet, Paola. 1987. 'Du don au tarif. Les relations sexuelles impliquant compensation', *Les Temps Modernes*, n° 490, 1-53.

12. Is Housework Soluble in Love?

Viviane Gonik

This paper discusses two connected yet distinct points: on the one hand the status and value of domestic and family activities, and on the other the question of the control of these activities. While these two points can be thought of as distinct, it is important to stress the connections and links between the two.

The problem of housework appears as such with the beginning of industrialization and the concomitant separation between productive and domestic spaces and times. For Marx there is on the one hand production work and on the other the work of reproduction: reproduction of life and the labour force. This separation is registered in the sexual division of work and reinforces it: production work is constituted in a separation from the reproductive work which historically has been assigned only to women. Factory work is thought, in its temporality as in its organization, by underlying the separate existence of family and domestic work: it is work full-time, without interruption, using physical and mental capacities to the maximum, since one can rest once back at home.

12. *Is Housework Soluble in Love?*

As Danièle Kergoat, among others, defines it, the sexual division of work rests upon “the priority assignment of men to the productive sphere and women to the reproductive sphere.” Productive work is organized according to the temporality of male workers (who are freed from all family and domestic concerns), despite the fact that since the beginning of industrialization women have been present in waged production. Domestic activities have been relegated to the private sphere and are unpaid. Viewed from the market, these activities are neither recognized nor visible: housework is only visible when not done. Let us recall that until the 1970’s Swiss statistics had a single category for “shareholders, housewives and other inactives”.

Are domestic activities differentiated from productive work only by the fact that they are not paid, or are they of a different nature? Is it the fact of producing, of transforming nature that defines work (Marx), or is it the framework of norms and measures in which these activities are inserted which determines the “work” quality?

This question can be illustrated by thinking through the example of sexuality: sexual relations with a prostitute (a sex worker, as they define themselves) fit clearly into the logic of work: there is a contractual negotiation which defines the time, the conditions and the remuneration. There is also what the Latin-American feminists call transactional sex, i.e. a sexual relationship associated – explicitly or not – with a symbolic or real remuneration. At the other extreme, there is a sex act which is part of a relation of desire and affection. In these three cases, the actions and activities are the same, and it is indeed the framework in which they fit and the type of relations

12. *Is Housework Soluble in Love?*

which result from this which are determinant. The same applies to child-care or to housework itself.

Domestic and family activities are thus characterized as tasks carried out in one's own home (or surroundings) concerning oneself or one's family and unpaid. One could also add that they are mainly carried out by women. Dominique Méda for instance argues that human activity has different forms: "productive activities (work) which at the same time aim at producing and obtaining a remuneration. . . . family activities, love, friendship. . . the logic of which is clearly unrelated to the one of work: the family community and the relations instituted between its members differ radically from the relations established between workers and their boss, the activity is not forced in the same way, it does not pursue the same goals." (Presentation seminar, Paris 1).

According to this logic one we would describe family activities as more of the order of gift exchange, as described by Mauss. They would aim, through gifts and counter-gifts, to develop and maintain social bonds between the members of a family, which is why it is only when the bond breaks that one starts [counting], and that one demands and obtains a form of remuneration (e.g. alimony).

However this apparent separation is problematic since it supposes the existence of two separate spheres, driven by irreconcilable logics. It partly obliterates the question of domination and the social relations of sex, and it naturalizes in a way family activities. The social relations of sex are constructed in the private as well as in the public and professional spheres. Housework and paid work cannot be analyzed as two separate entities because they form a system. "The time of wage-earning is placed and

12. *Is Housework Soluble in Love?*

conditioned by the time of housework” (Hirata and Zari-fian) and viceversa. Professional life and family life are articulated to one another because they participate in the same logic of relations of sex and of the sexual division of work. The professional trajectory of women and/or men, as well as their family trajectories, are thus narrowly dependent on the dominant conceptions concerning relations between men and women in society.

Productive work does not exist without the incommensurable contribution of reproductive and domestic work. Enterprises thus valorize this “human capital” that they themselves never accumulated, but which they nevertheless regard as forming an integral part of their fixed assets. This “capital” was constituted by the common and daily unpaid activities, which make up the activity of reproducing one’s life in an inhabited area. (Dalla Costa, Fortunati, Gorz)

To end the invisibility and the non-recognition of domestic activities, the feminist movements of the 1970’s strongly asserted its status of “work”. As D. Kergoat and H. Hirata write: “it then became obvious that an enormous mass of work is done for free by women, that this work is invisible, that it is done not for oneself but for others and always in the name of nature, of love or maternal duty. . . . as though the fact that it is done by women – and only women – was self evident, and that it should be neither seen nor recognized”.

Inspired by the work of Mariarosa Dalla Costa (Italy), Selma James (England), Silvia Federici (USA), a feminist movement for wages for housework appeared in Italy, the USA, England, Switzerland and Germany. With a Marxist vision of social relations, it demanded wages for this work,

12. *Is Housework Soluble in Love?*

in order to show, on the one hand that it is invaluable, on the other hand to reinforce through this claim the social power of women, the level of wages reflecting here the existing balance of forces. The demand for wfh also aimed to put an end to the capital's theft of women's unpaid labor and subvert the division capitalism has created within the workforce through the differential between waged and unwaged work.

Another feminist current, of a more neo-liberal inclination, seeks to calculate the monetary value of domestic activities and to include them in the calculation of the GNP. In this logic, the only light which can reveal this "black and invisible" economy is that of the commercial economy. However, the very nature of this lighting and its socio-economic vocabulary can only reveal its transformations and the extent of its penetration by capital and the state. As Louise Vandelac puts it "only what is recognizable according to the analytical grid and patterns of thought of the commercial economy (i.e. similarities and reductions already effectuated by the dominant economy) makes visible this shadow economy".

To analyze everything through the grid of the commercial economy implies that it is the only explanatory framework for human activities, and to that extent it partakes of the neo-liberal ideology, which affirms that the merchant logic must penetrate all aspects of our lives. On this subject, one can also note that women's desire "to free themselves" from part of this work was largely instrumentalized in order to widen the range of consumer goods. Women's demands encouraged the creation of services and goods which, on entering the domestic sphere, accelerated the transformation of work itself. Family work remains

12. *Is Housework Soluble in Love?*

‘free,’ unpaid, but is more and more expensive. An important part of our wages are used to pay for these products and services. As Monique Haicaut says: “housework thus becomes increasingly expensive, technical and specialized. It is increasingly dependant on commercial innovation and public services.”

That brings me to the second point of the article, i.e. the question of control, the standardization, or even professionalisation of the domestic sphere. Indeed, to accord domestic activities with commercial logic (spaces of production and/or consumption) it is necessary, exactly as capital does for paid work, to control productivity and standardize activities.

From time immemorial, religion [has] codified and controlled social relations and more particularly sexuality. With the separation of public / commercial and private / domestic spaces and times, control has been differentiated. If there is not yet an office of “time and methods” in private houses, there are various authorities which propose normative frameworks for domestic activities. From the 19th century on, the medical discourse has replaced little by little the religious one, always targeting sexuality, but also the education of children (to fight against the “degeneration of the race”) and hygiene, as Genevieve Heller showed in her book “Propre en Ordre” (trans. « Nice and Tidy »).

In addition, these normative injunctions are directed first of all towards women. Today, with the diversification of the medical disciplines, the normative discourse is also conveyed by psychologists, nutritionists, pediatricians, discourses and rules taken up and dramatised by the media (e.g. TV shows like *Super Nanny*, *My house is dirty*).

12. *Is Housework Soluble in Love?*

The state too plays a big role, mainly through compulsory schooling, which imposes a temporal framework, but also through standards of cleanliness and for education of children. For example: until the 1960's, it was obligatory in some Swiss cantons for young girls in secondary education to spend some months doing « home economics », while their male school-fellows did their military service. Let us note in passing the parallel between service to the nation and service to the husband, between obedience learned by training with weapons or with the ironing board.

As I already mentioned, housework has deeply changed: women must now manage a variety of machines, transport their children for leisure or extra-curricular activities, juggle with the programs of all the family members. If manual work has decreased (mending socks, preparing jams etc.), the organization of space, of activities and family programs has become more and more complex, without bringing any change in the social relations between sexes. The sexual division of work is recomposed according to “a sexual semantics which does not show any signs of deep and durable changes” (Mr. Haicaut).

Consequently, one observes a growing porosity between productive and domestic spaces, or rather an extension of managerial modes into family and domestic spaces: planning, negotiation, arrangement, establishment of objectives become domestic requirements. The couple has to be managed. One must have educational objectives for his/her children, plan one's stocks. Standards of efficiency and productivity, rules concerning know-how, tend to impose themselves and standardize practices, and thereby control them.

12. *Is Housework Soluble in Love?*

By this extension of commercial and managerial relations to all the aspects of living together, capitalism tries to force into the “market” all the human capacities, and that which still escaped it - the forms of collaboration or human solidarities which resisted a purely financial or “managerial” approach, i.e. the non-profitable (F. Bloch).

In conclusion, the question is how to make housework recognized without inserting it into commercial, thus controlled, categories. How to obtain recognition for activities centered on concern for the other and the creation of social bonds, without having them be analyzed only from the point of view of the commercial economy, and finally how to recognize that a great part of human exchanges are outside market relations? Perhaps it is a question of reconsidering the analyses and social organizations centered on productive, paid work and an economicistic vision of the world. This vision has constantly devalued living, non-commodified work. Economists, Marxists as well as neo-liberals, when they finally accepted - under the pressure of the women’s movements - the existence of housework, tried at all costs to see it in relation to the productive sphere, which remains the only measure of social recognition and power.

How to struggle against social exclusion and the exploitation of this production-reproduction relation? How to fight so that women do not pay such a scandalous price, how to fight the poverty and solitude of the mothers, while avoiding reinforcing a productivist logic, the logic by which the sexual division of work and male domination were developed? It is a question of putting reproductive work at the center of the debates and perspectives of alternatives to neo-liberal thought, such as those developed in

12. *Is Housework Soluble in Love?*

the networks of the social and solidarity economies? We must collectively find the means of socializing housework through associative, co-operative, mixed, self-managed networks of friends, without becoming exhausted in the fight for the sharing of tasks on the level of the couple, and while debating the role of the state. As Gorz says “Social relations withdrawn from the influence of value, from competitive individualism and from commercial exchange reveal these, by contrast, in their political dimension, as extensions of the power of capital. This opens up a front of total resistance to this power. It necessarily overflows towards new practices of life, consumption, collective appropriation of common spaces and the culture of everyday life.”¹

¹André Gorz, *économie de la connaissance, exploitation des savoirs*, Entretien avec Carlo Vercellone et Yann Moulier Boutang, 2004, *Revue Multitudes* N°15.

13. Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies

Caught Between the Reciprocity of Care & the Desire for Depersonalisation

Pascale Molinier

This article was originally published in French in the journal « Multitudes » in 2009. To quote this article: P. Molinier, Of Feminists and their Cleaning Ladies: caught between the reciprocity of care and the desire for depersonalisation, Multitudes 2009/3-4, no. 37-38, p. 113-121.

Housework cannot be reduced to a series of chores. "I was often surprised to realise that I was 'lovingly' cleaning the little girl's room, and had to say to myself: "I'm not at home," writes Sylvie Esman in an article in which she analyses her activity as a cleaner. What do the female employers perceive of this caring aspect of cleaning work? How do they respond to it? This is one of the main issues

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

that I have tried to explore by bringing together feminist women who employ cleaners for three three-hour sessions.

According to Teresa de Lauretis, feminists are in an *eccentric* position in relation to the gender system, in that they are both *outside* of it, since they are equipped with a critical awareness without which feminism would not exist, but also *inside* it, insofar as no-one can attempt to live, work and love without a degree of collusion in established institutions and cultural systems. Gender "sticks to the skin like a wet silk dress". The analysis of what "resists" to it – not just in terms of men or women who would not define themselves as feminists – forms the basis for exploring the subversive potential of feminism as well as its capacity to act at an individual or more political level. This was the gamble that this discussion group was making: accepting entanglement, embarrassment, privileging "bad conscience" as an access route to something which is not normally given public expression. Seen through this prism, the relationship with the cleaner displays a *psychological tension* between the desire to be served without needing to think about it – in which we find what Joan Tronto refers to as the "irresponsibility of privileged people" – and the desire to create a reciprocal link which "domesticates" this relationship (see Martin-Palomo, here). This tension is not specific to the relationship between female employers and their domestic employees, it interrogates our relationship with care more widely, in that we all benefit from it.

Having a Domestic

The discussion group (formed using the so-called "snowball" method) is very homogenous: 7 women, white and heterosexual, between 37 and 60 years old with university educations, most of them intellectuals, some with professional preoccupations connected to female work. The issue is located on that famous boundary between *private* and *public* life which second wave feminist movements have all tried to break down. We all know the phrase: *the personal is political*. The cleaner comes and applies pressure right where it hurts: in the contradiction between theory and practice, between ideals and compromises.

The bitter words of Nadège are a good way of summing up the situation:

"I hate housework! I really hate household chores. I think I got a cleaner before my daughter was born. I can see myself pregnant and opening up an empty fridge. The cleaner was the answer to the fact that he just wasn't doing anything. It was about getting rid of that tension."

Pacifying the relationship within a couple is, in this group, apart from one exception, the main reason for which a cleaner eventually becomes necessary. Of course, having been brought up with cleaners or nannies helps the decision to employ one oneself, especially before the children are born. The cleaner is a middle-class solution to effectively (but never completely) reduce the conflict with a partner who is reluctant to share the housework. From this point on, even though the participants claim to

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

strongly resist masculine injunctions of the "you'll tell the cleaner that..." variety, they become responsible for household management and the feeling of unease connected to it.

"Laid-back" Female Bosses for Politically Correct Employees

Maité refers to her middle-class mother-in-law and her "little maids", as she used to call them. What would be the appropriate model for the feminist boss? Precisely not to be exploitative, *not being a boss*. We are all "laid-back bosses" adds Maité.

The group participants unanimously acknowledge that housework is a real job. In fact, it is rather paradoxical to observe that it is more *their own work* which does not appear to be considered, in their home, as a "real" job. Reading a book, writing, is supposedly not seen as such, be it by their children (who interrupt them while they are doing it), or, as they suppose, by their cleaners. Unless they are projecting a sense of embarrassment onto the latter, of which we might wonder if it is not of a specifically feminine nature: the guilt of being engaged in an intellectual activity while another woman is carrying out *their* household chores? The participants all limit "orders" and instructions as much as possible. It is sometimes preferable for the work to be done badly than for it to be a source of conflict with the employee and of additional hassle (making a detailed list of chores, checking the work behind the cleaner's back, trying to find a way of convey-

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

ing criticisms without hurting her feelings). They give a favourable description of situations where the employee has a level of domestic expertise that is higher than theirs. This is not just a guarantee of quality work, it also appears to tend to make the relationship more equal, with each woman having their area of expertise, their "skill". However, this "equality" remains a relative one, as Audrey points out:

"She (the cleaner) would rather be doing a different job. If she had stayed in Algeria, she wouldn't have been doing this job. She invests a lot in her daughters' education, tells me about what they do, which is the only subject which she considers me to be an expert on (Audrey is a teacher). It makes me feel less guilty that it will stop at her."

Thus, even women who consider housework to be "a real job" could not ask just anybody to do their cleaning. According to Nadège, some feminists tend to reduce their sense of unease by employing a male cleaner, a strategy she views as hypocritical. She justifies herself by calling on the services of an organisation which rehabilitates women from difficult backgrounds and which guarantees decent levels of pay and working conditions, while also offering training opportunities and a sense of independence for both parties.

Elsa relates that a "very liberated Moroccan woman" usually cleans the family holiday home. Last time, she was not available. It was necessary to go to a remote village and fetch her sister, who did not speak French well, wore a veil and was accompanied by her little eight-year-old sister,

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

both to help her communicate and "probably to keep an eye on her". "It all depends on the individual and how she lives her life," comments Elsa, who could not bear to ask this woman, who for her embodied "total imprisonment", to do what she would happily ask her "liberated" sister to do. It is as though too much asymmetry shattered the possibility of establishing a relationship on a morally acceptable basis.

The feeling that they are being "exploitative" seems to depend to a large extent on the *representations* which the participants have of their employees' social trajectories. Women being rehabilitated, the daughters of Audrey's employee, the "liberated Moroccan woman" embody supposed forms of social mobility in which doing other people's housework is just a *moment* in a person's or a family's biography. Other situations however are deemed unacceptable due to a high level of qualification: a Polish woman was a qualified optician, a woman from Burkina Faso was a history teacher. Elsa wonders if getting out of the village, seeing people, would not be beneficial to the "veiled sister". Her perplexity is interesting: there is no politically correct profile of the cleaner. Each cleaner's situation can only be evaluated in terms of its singularity, which implies that *first* a bond must be created.

In Praise of Transparency

"I'd like things to be done the way I want them but without having to tell her."

"If I have to break down the tasks before she does it, it's more work for me."

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

(Nadège)

"What I wanted: for it to be done without me and perhaps even for me not to see it..."

(Véronique)

Housework, as we know, if it is well done, should not be seen and should not disturb the daily life of whoever is benefiting from it, otherwise it has failed. Nadège believes she currently has the perfect employee. She is "transparent". "She puts everything back exactly where it was. It must... take more time...". But more often, employees make themselves visible through a style or objects which carry the mark of their own aesthetic tastes, of their culture. The failure of discreet work thus finds its most obvious expression in the error of "bad taste". Maité, having said at the beginning of the session, "I love this woman, we cook together, we garden together..." adds:

"But there are some things that bother me. Every year, she goes to Portugal, she brings stuff back, last time it was a porcelain plate... this really ugly thing. Now in my kitchen, I've got this artwork which a friend of mine made, and I mean you can think what you want... She (the cleaner) says: "We're getting rid of this" and puts the Portuguese plate there instead. What do we do? We put back our... We ended up getting rid of the plate. Another time, it was a little Fatima virgin as a good luck charm, really ugly. She insists that it be visible. She thinks it's pretty. It's to mark out her territory."

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

Even though Maïté fights against it through gestures of reciprocity and shared tasks, social and cultural asymmetry is brutally expressed in a prejudice which opposes beauty which can be the object of value judgements and debates (the friend's work of art) and ugliness which is given an irrevocable negative judgement (it's ugly) between people who share the same life style and sense of aesthetics (highly qualified Western women).

It can also happen that the employees' initiatives are met with a positive aesthetic judgement, which then leads to the sense of a threat of intrusion:

"I had a seat, she thought the material covering it wasn't very pretty, I was a bit worried as to how it would turn out, but she brought me a great piece of (oriental) material and we used it. I'd like it if that didn't happen again. Does it open up a door? It is our home, after all."
(Audrey)

The participants thus particularly value their employees' discreet know-how. However, their comments highlight an important point: not only must the work disappear, the physical person and personality of the employees must disappear with it. However, any intervention in the world implies a process of *subjectifying activity*. To be effective at your work, you must be *as one* with your environment, the subject perceiving his/her surroundings as *an extension of him / herself*. Housework, like any other work, requires this kind of physical appropriation of the environment. The care which we bring to a domestic space – even if it is not our own – is *personalised in our own image*. The participants agree in thinking that cleaners act "as they

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

would at home". Hence a major contradiction: to be successful, housework must be discreet, but it cannot be done without being marked with one's own lifestyle and personal and cultural characteristics. Can it therefore never fully satisfy those it serves?

Magic Disappearing Powder

In *La société décente*, Margalit also uses the term of "transparency" to discuss the humiliating relationship with indigenous people. He refers to "the magic disappearing powder' which is so to say thrown over the Arabs of the occupied territories who work in Israel – a magic powder which makes them invisible: 'A good Arab should work and not be seen". Here, the territory has not been unduly occupied - "it is our home, after all". However, for the work to be appreciated, the person doing it must also disappear. "We expect our servants," Margalit also writes, "to make the necessary effort for their masters to easily and safely ignore them." This is what the employee so valued by Nadège succeeds in doing, her transparency being the result of a combination of her know-how and of Nadège's absence. We can however wonder whether this *depersonalisation* of the relationship should not also be connected to the wearing down which Nadège also mentions: "There is a cycle with the cleaner from an organisation. She starts really really well. Once you've got past the second year, things get progressively worse..." As Elsa points out: "We can tell that they need to see us. It's not much fun on your own."

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

In longer term relationships, the presence and the expressions of the employee sometimes cause embarrassment. According to the different stories, they can be experienced as a threat of invasion ("it is our home, after all") or of fusion-confusion. Thus Elsa refers to "a certain taking of power over my space," before saying: "She does the same thing as me. If I'm having the bathroom redone, she does so too, it makes me feel guilty..." Nadège exclaims with a kind of horror: "Oh she's identifying with you! But I would find that very worrying!"

Véronique remembers a past situation where she "took advantage of moving house" to "let go" a woman who was doing the housework and looking after her children. "She was an isolated woman," she says. "Her solitude was handy for me..." Véronique then corrects this initial picture: "But that's not true! There was a man she was living with. This man died, she resented the fact that I didn't go to his funeral." "It was heavy, a real weight," says Véronique to describe the period during which this woman already knew that she "wouldn't be coming along." "What was oppressive was feeling more or less mean for not bringing her along, for not continuing a relationship which had lasted ten years. For not giving her all my recognition, for letting her go." But at the same time, "letting her go was a relief... She was always promoting what she had done. She loved my parents, my parents-in-law... She resented me. She was angry not to be the nanny of my third child, as she was for the previous two, she saw it as an initial betrayal." Véronique then recounts how, when her first-born was a baby, when she came home from work she would ask if things had gone well: "yes, yes." Many years later, the employee revealed that in reality the child

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

would cry for very long periods of time. "I understand the fact that she didn't say anything because she needed this job, but if I had known... I could have explained things differently to the child..." "She was a bit shifty," she concludes, "an image which gets a bit fuzzy, a personality you can't get a hold of..." Véronique's story reveals an *opacity*: a psychological thickness, motives which you aren't aware of, a presence which "weighs you down", "a kind of hold on you", she adds.

We cannot say that the desire for the employee to disappear as a person is the product of a will to humiliate her in order to subject her, as is the interpretation in traditional analyses of relationships between master and servant, colonised and coloniser. However, we do in fact observe *depersonalisation* and *isolation* here, two major traits of the "all-purpose maid condition" which was theorised in the 1950s by the psychiatrist Louis Le Guillant for whom this condition illustrated "with particular force the psychological and psychopathological mechanisms connected to these elements of the human condition which are servitude and domination."

Depersonalisation consists, in Margalit's terms, in creating the conditions which allow you "not to see people in detail", to neutralise the expressions of their individuality, as though they were part of the scenery. The desire that the employee make herself transparent sends us back to an unconscious wish which Jean Cocteau poetically rendered in *La Belle et la Bête*: the wish for a subjectless care in which servants are reduced to candelabra arms or hands pouring jugs, a faceless availability which does not expect any reciprocity.

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

On two occasions, the group participants dwelled on their cyclical irritation with the symmetrical ordering of objects – cushions arranged in a row, ornaments placed at four corners of a table, a rug folded into a square. This ordering upsets and contests the *bo-bo* aesthetic of a falsely neglected, destructured space. We might see here nothing more than anecdotal evidence of the irreducibility of class relations. However, if we agree to grant these statements the same level of importance as the participants themselves did, we find ourselves faced with a real theoretical difficulty: the very particular *scene* on which domestic antagonisms are played out: the house in that it is *the body*, *the psychic space*, which interrogates "the close relationship between the order of things in the world we live in and the internal structure of this order". A good employee is therefore one who does not upset the psychic order of things.

At home: this term should be considered as a key concept in the analysis of the sharing of domestic care. Employees want to "mark out their territory". This metaphor can be understood as particularly pejorative, as if domestic employees were animals. But we can also think that "territory" hearkens back, *for the employer as well*, to archaic dimensions which are connected to the preservation of one's own integrity. As we have already pointed out, fantasies about threats of intrusion and confusion were clearly expressed in the group.

As Margalit stresses, "humiliation does not require a humiliator," and we do not know how the employees perceive and feel about the "magic disappearing powder" strategies adopted by their "cool" employers. For Le Guillant, the maids' resentment was integral to their condition, and we

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

can wonder if irritation and the feeling of being invaded are not integral to the psychic centrality of "living in a space". Things would always *heat up*, and on both sides. The expression of the excessive presence of the employees takes on cultural forms due to their social origin. The employers' irritation is then tinged with condescendence, with class and racial judgements, even if they claim it is not.

Where Domination Softens

The care in the work carried out by the employee is expressed with more or less success and discretion in the care she lavishes on the domestic environment. But who is taking care of her? Care, taken as the attentiveness of the employer to her employee, stands in contradiction to the desire for depersonalisation and this tension underlies most of the relationships described by the participants. Care, attentiveness, are expressed in gifts exchanged, in gestures of reciprocity, of prohibition or sharing of unpleasant tasks. Several participants also describe ritualised reciprocity strategies, such as coffee, sometimes served by the employer, whether it is drunk together or separately depending on the situation.

The dimension of caring for the other is explicit in the attentive tone of Elsa's comments, the only one who refers to her cleaner using her first name. She describes a very close and emotional bond. "When she says your sofa is rotten, I listen to her. Her shoulders hurt, I'm worried about her future, she's 54 years old but she's in bad shape, I try to find work that's not too hard for her." Elsa refers

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

to the transformation of her *home* as being connected to care, to attentiveness tinged with affection. "It's done with loads of care, with a professional conscience. It's endearing. She tries to leave her aesthetic imprint on my home." The domestic employee's work is then fully acknowledged in its aesthetic and ethical dimensions: creating a pleasant environment so that people can live well within it (see also Audrey's oriental sofa). The interpretation in terms of an "endearing" feeling, of small details which could be irritating – objects that have been moved or arranged differently – suggests that Elsa also admits that her *interior space* bears the personalised mark of Rachida, as she seems to accept a certain permeability between their personal lives without (too much) fear of confusion: imitation in works done to the home. Finally, Elsa describes a relationship in which what remains an enigma to her is precisely the emotional implication on both sides of a relationship in which each individual feels responsible for the other. "I've often thought," she adds, "that since I live alone, if anything were to happen to me she would be the person who found me."

Whereas, for Nadège, the moral conflict of "exploitation" is solved by using an organisation and by her low level of domestic requirements, in the relationship between Rachida and Elsa it seems that the moral conflict is always ready to be reactivated in concrete situations where the limits of what it is acceptable to require or to do are renegotiated. Elsa tells the story of having asked Rachida one day to serve in a baptism that was bringing together forty *pieds-noirs* from her family. The origin of the guests made the situation more servile, which was the reason for an initial refusal which Elsa managed to overcome

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

by suggesting they serve the guests together. Elsa also suggests that it would not always be easy to evaluate why a task is experienced as more difficult or servile than others. Rachida does not like cleaning brass, especially the outside handle of the door, because, according to Elsa, this is perceived as "extravagant" and not simply useful work. Elsa thus implies that she understands that "extravagant" work could be humiliating. The participants emit an additional hypothesis: it may not just be because the door handle is made of brass that the employee is reluctant to clean it, but also because it is located outside the apartment. People can see her doing the devalued job of a cleaning lady, which would increase the humiliation.

If It's Mummy...

The dilemma of the "letting go" recounted by Véronique and Elsa's story both suggest that the employer-employee relationship is only bearable *in the long-term* if it is "domesticated", if it becomes emotional and moral. Regarding her works in the bathroom, Elsa comments:

"These are works which everyone always postpones, you need an impulse to do it, so at the end of the day it's a good thing. She's also doing that to fight against the same things as me, to fight against subservience. She also often compares me to her son. So when she puts my little cushions on my bed, when usually they're all over the place, that endears me. If it's mummy then there's no more issue of subservience."

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

"To deal with the issue of exploitation, we introduce a family relationship, which avoids making us feel guilty," adds Elsa. "If it's mummy" however hides the fact that the "mummies" could also be exploited by their children! We *also* love our mothers because they serve us discreetly, and we hate them, especially as teenagers, when they do not respond ideally to the confused and contradictory web of our expectations. Joan Tronto is right to criticise the reduction of all care situations to the mythical one of the mother-child dyad. The concealment of the care work in maternal love nevertheless constitutes the main matrix for fantasies of unlimited availability which underpin the requests made by the beneficiaries of care to its purveyors. And the perspective of care would in fact probably not have emerged without the exasperation of some mothers rebelling against the naturalness of their position as a subordinate in their own family.

The Uncanniness of the Ordinary

Male resistance to the sharing of housework is not confronted through to the end by the women in this group, but strategically worked around by employing a subordinate woman. The recourse to *female* domestic help in order to avoid *having a domestic* is part of a displacement activity which allows the woman to maintain her feminist posture in an individualistic feminism, but without any social change, by upholding a culture which continues to favour men and implies the supply of a non-qualified female workforce. Even if they sometimes argue against this, the participants know it, just as much as they know

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

what kind of model they are passing on to their children. And the "wet silk" continues to stick to their skin. Whether the connection is gotten rid of in favour of an impersonal register (Nadège) or overinvested with a pseudo-filial register (Elsa), in both cases, the opportunities to reflect on one's own compromising with the gender, class and colonial heritage system are reduced. For, if colonial history inevitably "weighs" on the relationship between the daughter of *pièdes-noirs* and the Moroccan woman, it is one of the invisible linchpins around which are constructed most of the domestic employer and employee relationships in France today. In the discussion group, all the women in fact spoke only of women coming from the third world or from European countries that are poorer than France: Portugal and Poland.

From taking notes to interpreting them, throughout this work, I felt an enduring feeling of insecurity and scepticism in the face of this "evanescence of the real", a reality that is so close and quotidian that we could relate it to what Stanley Cavell calls "the uncanniness of the ordinary". This strangeness is doubtless better served by cinema and literature, whether we think of *La Porte* by Magda Szabo or of the short stories of Grace Paley. But what of it in terms of a psychological or sociological analysis? What is the point, for example, of noting that Dominique had to give up on using environmentally friendly cleaning products, because the cleaner refused to use them on the basis that she had to scrub harder? This fading in itself constitutes an important data of this incursion into the domestic world. On the condition that we take care seriously, the question is: How can we be environmentally conscious without worsening the musculo-skeletal

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

problems of the cleaning lady? More widely, what theoretical framework can we use to formulate in a pertinent or significant manner the issues raised by care? As Sandra Laugier points out, care does not invite us to reveal the invisible, but rather to see the visible, the one that is just there, right under our nose. To take it into account ethically and politically. Now that these products under the sink and this burnished brass ball on our entrance door have been *defamiliarised*, are we going to be able to see them more... *precisely*?

- S. Esman, « faire le travail domestique chez les autres », *Travailler*, 2002, 8:45-72. The investigation was carried out together with Valérie Moreau, an occupational psychologist.
- T. de Lauretis, *Théorie queer et cultures populaires*, Paris, La Dispute, 2007 (see chapter "La technologie du genre"). All first names have been changed. Audrey describes a couple which shares household chores equally, but where the cleaner is necessary due to this reconstituted family's five children. Some women (same profile) have told me that they gave up on employing a cleaner because they would clear up and clean everything before she came.
- F. Böehle, B. Milkau, *De la manivelle à l'écran. L'évolution de l'expérience sensible des ouvriers lors des changements technologiques*. Paris, Eyrolles, 1998.
- S. Esman (op. cit.) notes: Two expressions which I often hear sum up this ambiguity: "Do like you do for yourself" and "put yourself in my position..."

13. *Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies*

- A. Margalit, 1996, *La société décente*, Paris, Flammarion 2007. Using the "magic disappearing powder" also means leaving before the cleaner arrives, so that one neither has to see her nor speak to her, a strategy which was employed by several members of the group. The third being domestics' resentment which supposedly generates a "swallowed hatred". Véronique's story suggests her former employee's resentment.
- L. Le Guillant, 1957, « Incidences psychopathologiques de la 'condition de bonne-à-tout-faire' », re-ed. in *Le drame humain du travail*, Toulouse, Eres, 2006. For example through wearing a uniform. Translator's Note: The term "bo-bo" ("*bourgeois-bohème*") is commonly used in France to designate members of a social class that lays claim to a bohemian lifestyle, while in fact tending to be relatively well off financially.
- R. Kuhn, « L'errance comme problème psychopathologique ou déménager », *Présent à Henri Maldiney*, Lausanne, L'Âge d'Homme, 1973. It is a question of know-how, but not just that. In Nathalie Kuperman's novel, *J'ai renvoyé Marta* (Folio, 2005), the heroine's madness starts when she employes a cleaner who, as well as various other coincidences, has the same name as her grandmother and her daughter. Translator's Note: The term "pieds-noirs" refers to French nationals who were born in Algeria during the period of its colonisation by France.

13. Of Feminists and Their Cleaning Ladies

- See Lise Gagnard, in « A plusieurs voix autour de Teresa de Lauretis », *Mouvements*, 57, 2009, p. 148-154.

14. Nuclear Housework

& the Enraged Mothers & Farmers of Japan

Todos Somos Japon New York, September 2011¹

Our thoughts should go especially to the women of Japan who, we are told, are those who are most strongly opposed to the government propaganda about patriotism and sacrifice. We understand they are struggling to resist this suicidal logic, which demands their families consume radioactive products to show the world that all is well in this country and a nuclear disaster is something we can live with. Their struggle is our struggle and their resistance needs our support.

– Silvia Federici.

¹Todos Somos Japon is a project of network building, of creating a current in and out of Japan, to support Japanese activists and movements and for a new association of the struggling people of the world.

14. *Nuclear Housework*

The following is an edited version of the presentations that women activists in Japan have made at the American Friends Center in New York, on September 22, 2011, to denounce the situation that has developed in their country following the Fukushima Daiichi disaster, and the refusal of the Japanese government and TEPCO, the electric power company that owns the nuclear plants, to evacuate and relocate the people exposed to radiation, except for those in the immediate vicinity of the reactors.

The decision to come to the US was prompted by the yearly convening of the General Assembly of the United Nations which the President of Japan is attending. The women knew that he would come to reassure the world that everything is fine in Japan and decided to come too, to tell their stories and bring their demands for relocation and reliable information to a broader stage.

They have come to denounce that they are trapped, that they have been abandoned by the government and TEPCO, and have no money to move, do not know where to go, do not know what will happen to them, living in a place where every day they and their family are exposed to very high levels of radiation. On the same day of their presentation, the “mothers” also held a demonstration in front of the UN, to protest the curtain of silence that has been drawn on their plight and alert the public to the dangers of nuclear power.

History

On March 2011, the nuclear reactors at Fukushima Daiichi plant were stricken by an earthquake and a tsunami.

14. Nuclear Housework

Immense amounts of radioactive materials have since traveled throughout Northeast Japan. The land and people have been contaminated. But many residents in the area were told that they did not have to evacuate as everything was alright and they could carry on with their lives. Rather than doing the utmost to guarantee the safety of the population, in the wake of the disaster, the Japanese government has raised the maximum limit of radiation considered safe from 1mSv (millesieverts) to 20mSv - note that after Chernobyl the maximum limit adopted for exposure was 5mSv. This new measure allows children who are more vulnerable to the effects of radiation to be exposed to doses 20 times higher than the normal standard. Changing the maximum limit of 'safe' radiation exposure has served originally to claim that only those within a 12 miles distance from the reactors should be evacuated. Later the area to be evacuated was expanded to a radius of 20 KM (12,5 miles) on April 22. But the problem is far more dramatic than these measures acknowledge. The effects of radiation are being felt as far as Tokyo, 150 miles away from Fukushima, where apparently the water system is now contaminated; so are the aquifers of a large area around Fukushima. And the economic consequences of the nuclear disaster affects an even broader range of people.

One of the women activists who testified at the American Friends' gathering, Yukiko Anzai, told us, for instance, that she is from the island of Hokkaido, which is 630 KM from Fukushima, but her family's life has been hugely impacted by the disaster. She and her husband are organic farmers and during the winter they keep their bees near Fukushima, so now they must throw away all the honey

14. Nuclear Housework

they have produced because it is contaminated. They also feed their chickens with fishmeal, but now fear that this too is contaminated, which in, her view, means the end of Japanese agriculture.

The government is not helping, neither financially nor logistically, those who need to relocate. They would still have to pay taxes on their homes, they have no place to go, no guarantee about their future. Thus, of the 300.000 children in Fukushima area only 3.000 have been evacuated. Some were able to leave in the summer but now they have to come back to go to school, despite the fact that the buildings are contaminated.

The government has withheld information concerning the levels of contamination present in the waters, the fisheries, the soil, the air, the food. Instead of providing reliable figures, it has made repeated appeals to patriotism urging people living near Fukushima to carry on with their lives and even continue to eat this area's produce. They have issued a leaflet "To Respond to Pregnant Women and Mothers with Small Children with Anxiety Towards The Effects of Radiation," where with pretty-colored illustrations and texts they advise women that water is safe to drink and even if they eat contaminated food it will have no health effects. Their breast milk will be completely safe for nursing, and if they get too anxious about the radiation this will have negative effects on their babies. Authorities are also coming down on people who tell the truth. A teacher said that she talked about the radiation to her students; but she was called by the principal and told that she had to stop right away or she would lose her job. She also reported that when one of her colleagues wanted to evacuate his family the other teachers yelled at

14. Nuclear Housework

him, and after he left they kicked his desk, and from then on he was completely ostracized.

People, however, have not remained passive. After the accident, activists in Japan contacted the survivors of Nagasaki and Hiroshima and asked them what they had done to protect themselves, receiving useful suggestions e.g. about which food stuff to eat, how to monitor their movements. Women have been in the forefront. Faced with this crisis, Fukushima mothers have been mobilizing to survive through everyday life, and protect their families, not wanting to see their children die of contamination. They are raising their voice against the government and TEPCO [demanding a] wider evacuation effort and compensation for the homes they have to abandon. And they are taking their Geiger Counters in hand to monitor the radioactivity [levels] on their own, despite the government's attempt to discredit their findings. A mother cried in the face of the officials [telling] them to eat the bag of contaminated soil she brought from a schoolyard where her children play. As the government is doing nothing to help, people are trying on their own to decontaminate some places, like the schools for the children. But because the environment is so radioactive, the areas cleaned up soon become contaminated again. Now many mothers in Tokyo and other groups all over Japan are checking food, they check the urine, to test level of radiation. They found that many people have already been internally affected. With this monitoring they have also found that evacuation helps, because after being away from the contaminated area, the radiation level in the body goes down.

However, throughout the Fukushima area, families and communities are torn apart, as those who have decided

14. Nuclear Housework

to remain look at the others who move as traitors who are putting their lives in jeopardy by telling the world that the food produced at Fukushima is not safe. Often the same family is split, as the women usually do all they can to move or at least send their children away, while the husbands want to remain. Many families are divided not only emotionally but physically, as women and children leave, coming back only once a month. And the mothers who remain are also torn, between believing the safety myths the government promotes and facing the day to day threats posed by the invisible radiation that is contaminating, their bodies, their environments and people's minds. Should I evacuate or should I stay? Should I eat or not eat? Should I make my kids wear masks and long sleeves or not? Should I let my kids play outdoor? Should I raise my voice or keep my mouth shut? These are questions every mother is constantly asking.

Meanwhile, no solution is in sight for how to deal with the exploded reactors, the ongoing escape of radioactive gasses, and the outflow of the waters used to cool the reactors into the sea. At best there is talk of excavating a trench around the plants, so the radioactive material does not spread into the environment. Still, the government is urging people to carry on "business as usual." There is even evidence that radioactive sludge produced by the Fukushima reactor is being sold to fertilizer companies, which means that the contamination is bound to spread throughout the country and it will be even more difficult for the inhabitants of the Fukushima area to validate their claims. Also, it seems that the Japanese Government is now planning to send products from Fukushima area to 'third world' countries under the guise of 'food aid.'

14. Nuclear Housework

As of now only 11 nuclear plants are operating of the 54 that had been operating in Japan, as dozens were shut down after the incident because of their similarity with the one in Fukushima. But now TEPCO wants to restart some, despite the fact that the causes of the accidents have not been properly investigated. Fukushima's mothers and an anti-nuclear organization that was formed after the accident are doing everything they can to stop it. They have sat in front of the government offices. But on August 17th, a company rep deceptively claimed they had received the approval from a local community for the reopening of a plant (Tomari 3) [local governments in Japan have the ability to block nuclear facilities restarts]. This is because of the great amount of corruption that exists at the higher levels of the Japanese Government and business, and the revolving door principle whereby government officers and TEPCO officers are tied by many threads and complicity agreements, also extending to the academic world, the scientists, the media, members of the judiciary. Thus, in July the government passed a law to help TEPCO to avoid bankruptcy, while the victims of the accident have no relief, no guarantee for their future, and have to organize their own evacuations. Colonial relations and militarism are also part of the problem. There are 135 US bases in Japan, for which Japan itself pays a considerable amount of money. In fact, Japan pays two billion dollars just for Okinawa, the same amount it has allocated for the decontamination of the area around Fukushima. And now the government is talking of spending one billion dollars to fix fighter jets that need to be repaired.

There are many in Japan who now believe that TEPCO, the Government officers who ignored safety standards, and

14. Nuclear Housework

all those responsible for the disaster and for withholding information should be tried for crimes against humanity, in fact, for crimes against all living things.

15. Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership

Ariel Salleh¹

On 11 March 2011, the Fukushima nuclear electricity plant in Japan was hit by a powerful earthquake and tsunami. An undetermined land area remains uninhabitable; thousands of people are trying not to breathe, touch, eat or drink, the toxic levels of radiation in their environment. It is believed that BHP Billiton's Olympic Dam and Rio Tinto's Ranger mine exported uranium from Australia to this reactor. Now, confusion and anger, sickness, and disability, will mark many Japanese lives for years to come.²

Over 80,000 people have been forced to abandon their homes. Thousands of people are now without a livelihood or the hope, in the near

¹ Ariel Salleh is a researcher in Political Economy at the University of Sydney; longtime Science for People activist; and writer on eco-political matters: www.arielsalleh.info

² Jim Green, 'Fukushima: The Political Fallout in Australia', *Chain Reaction*, No. 112.

15. *Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership*

future, of rescuing one. Compensation claims are certain to be well over \$100 billion; rebuilding of infrastructure and housing will cost at least \$200 billion. Then there's the cost of clearing over 20 million tonnes of rubbish, some of it radioactive, and the cost of securing and decommissioning the stricken reactors over the coming decades. Add to this the relocation of people and factories and the settling of injury and health issues, and the cost of this disaster will be in the neighbourhood of \$450 billion, just a little under 10% of Japan's GDP. There are an estimated 1,000 corpses too radioactive to retrieve. Even when they are, who will cremate or bury them, and where?³

Fukushima was a civilian incident, but nuclear power and military weapons are joined in the global production system. After World War II, occupied Japan would enter an economic boom as chemical weapons were converted into pesticides for farms and nuclear know-how turned into power for cities.⁴

³ Roger Pulvers, 'Japan after its Triple Disaster of 2011', *The Science Show*, ABC Radio National, 23 July 2011 (accessed 7 August 2011).

⁴The military-industrial complex is the world's foremost environmental polluter. Michael Renner, 'Assessing the military's war on the environment' in L. Brown et al. (eds.), *State of the World Report*, New York: Norton, 1991.

Who is Served by Denial?

I started thinking seriously about nuclear radiation in 1976 after hearing a talk by the Australian pediatrician Dr Helen Caldicott. A mother myself, and worker in Aboriginal communities at the time, within days I was helping set up a Sydney branch of the Movement Against Uranium Mining and within months we had 100,000 people marching down George Street. For a while, the Australian Labor Party spoke with the people's voice, but its political will gave way eventually to the mining lobby. In the US, Caldicott's efforts at public education were also targeted through the energy cartel's media outlets. As she points out in a recent letter to the *New York Times*, the nuclear industry can only survive by misleading the public.⁵

Physicists talk of a 'permissible dose' of radiation, but biologists know there is no such thing. The fact is that radiation damage in the body takes time to reveal itself.

Nuclear denial takes place in private and public sectors. Installation accidents at Windscale in Cumberland, UK, 1957, and at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania, US, 1979, were largely 'contained' by public relations expertise. Following the meltdown at Chernobyl, USSR, 1986, an embarrassed Soviet government failed to guide its citizens with health advice. Caldicott observes that today, both Belarus and the Ukraine have group homes full of deformed children. After the Chernobyl cloud crossed Turkey, leaders were so determined not to panic 'the peo-

⁵Helen Caldicott, 'Unsafe at Any Dose', *New York Times*, 30 April 2011:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/opinion/01caldicott.html> (accessed 11 August 2011).

15. Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership

ple' that relevant information was censored. Doctors who helped mothers terminate pregnancies were jailed, and journalists who tried to report this, were jailed too.

In terms of cancer outcomes, Peter Karamoskos, a nuclear radiologist, and medical doctor Jim Green, offer the following assessment of Chernobyl.

The International Atomic Energy Agency estimates a total collective dose of 600,000 Sieverts over 50 years from Chernobyl fallout. A standard risk assessment from the International Commission on Radiological Protection is 0.05 fatal cancers per Sievert. Multiply those figures and we get an estimated 30,000 fatal cancers.

But they go on to add that:

In circumstances where people are exposed to low-level radiation, studies are unlikely to be able to demonstrate a statistically significant increase in cancer rates. This is because of the 'statistical noise' in the form of widespread cancer incidence from many causes, the longer latency period for some cancers, limited data on disease incidence, and various other data gaps and methodological difficulties.⁶

Formulae for calculating nuclear casualties vary, but the problem of denial is a constant.⁷ Since the Fukushima meltdown, Japanese citizens have become increasingly

⁶ Peter Karamoskos and Jim Green, 'Do We Know the Chernobyl Death Toll?', *Chain Reaction*, 2011, No. 112, 23.

⁷ The Australian firms, Toro Energy, Uranium One, and Heathgate Resources have sponsored lecture tours by scientists who dismiss public concerns about radiation. Peter Karamoskos, 'Radiating Risk and Undermining Public Health', Online Opinion, 13 December 2010: <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=11358> (accessed 13 August 2011).

15. Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership

disturbed by an absence of transparency from both the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) and government officials. And neither the World Health Organisation, nor International Atomic Energy Agency, has provided women with information about radiation exposure effects on their reproductive function.⁸

If anything, dis-information is order of the day. A *Wall Street Journal* article quotes Genichiro Wakabayashi from Kinki University's atomic-energy research institute, claiming that wearing masks or staying indoors during summer will harm children more than radiation will.⁹

So too, Japanese people have been encouraged to support their country by eating local produce. Yet as Roger Pulvers tells us:

No one knows how badly the sea around Fukushima has been contaminated, and we are only beginning to assess the effect that radiation has had on the land. Several hundred kilograms of tainted beef from Fukushima have been sold to markets as far away as Kagoshima on the southern island of Kyushu. This beef has registered up to 2,300 becquerels of radioactive caesium per kilo, more than five times the government-set safety limit. 648 head of cattle in Fukushima, Yamagata and Niigata Prefectures have eaten contaminated straw. It

⁸Whitney Graham and Elena Nicklasson, 'Maternal Meltdown from Chernobyl to Fukushima', *Global Movement for Children*, San Francisco, 26 April 2011: (accessed 11 August 2011).

⁹Mariko Sanchanta and Mitsuri Obe, 'Moms Turn Activists in Japanese Crisis', *Wall Street Journal*, 17 June 2011 (accessed 11 August 2011).

15. *Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership*

has been shown that the feed itself contained up to 57,000 becquerels of radioactive material per kilogram.¹⁰

Oppression is Economic and Cultural

The self-interest of those who deny nuclear risk is both capitalist (economic) and patriarchal (cultural).¹¹ Psychological denial protects a structural hierarchy of wealth, power, and bonding opportunities between men. But near the lower rungs of this narrow ladder of rewards stand youth, indigenous peoples, and housewives – the 'others' of neoliberalism and its hegemonic masculinity. These 'others' exist in direct contradiction to the military-industrial complex, and they each bring complementary insights and skills to its political transformation. However, my focus in this essay is on women, mothers, housewives, many of whom are also indigenous, giving double-strength to their political work. People whose labour sustains human bodies and links to natural habitat prioritize social reproduction over economic production. This observation gives rise to a distinct political analysis known as eco-feminism. It emerged fifty years ago, from thinkers and activists on every continent, and the nuclear question was central to it.¹²

¹⁰Pulvers, *op. cit.*

¹¹Chigaya Kinoshita, 'The Shock Doctrine of Japanese Type: Neoliberalism and the Shadow of America', 29 May 2011, <http://www.jfissures.org/>: (accessed 14 August 2011).

¹²The section that follows draws on Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmodern*, London/New York:

15. *Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership*

What is unique about women's resurgence in ecological struggle is how they combined it with their self-understanding as 'women'. Their focus on pollution was both inner and outer, personal and political. Women demeaned by men's objectification of their 'femininity' felt a need to purify and rebuild a self-identity on their own terms. Ecofeminists rejected what they saw as 3,000 thousand years of mal-development in the social construction of sex-gender relations. Their political activity went hand-in-hand with attention to psychological growth in mutually supportive consciousness-raising sessions. This revolutionary strategy is a profound existential commitment. And women would come to be disappointed to find so few environmentalist brothers entering into a parallel reflection on selfhood under the predatory model.

After a short review of the formative years of this radical resistance, I will touch on the rise of 'management' environmentalism and its cultivation of liberal feminists, before coming home again to the urgent situation in Japan.

The Birth of Ecological Feminism

In the US, as far back as 1962, law suits against the corporate world were coming out of the kitchens of mothers and grandmothers - *Mary Hays v Consolidated Edison*, *Rose Gaffney v Pacific Gas*, *Jeannie Honicker v Nuclear Regu-*

Zed Books, 1997, chapter 2. For sources on Japanese ecofeminism: Keitaro Morita, 'For a Better Environmental Communication: A Materialist Ecofeminist Analysis of Global Warming', Rikkyo University, Tokyo: www.eca.usp.br/caligrama/english/06_keitaro.pdf (accessed 11 August 2011).

15. Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership

latory Commission, Kay Drey v Dresden Nuclear Power Plant, Dolly Weinhold v Nuclear Regulatory Commission at Seabrook.¹³

Japanese women were also foot soldiers in campaigns against local pollution. One, Ishimure Michiko founded the Citizens' Congress on Minamata Disease Countermeasures in 1968. Others set up the path-breaking producer-consumer cooperative known as the Seikatsu Club - which economic model would grow to some 200,000 or more members.¹⁴ Parisian writer Francoise d'Eaubonne's book, *Le feminisme ou la mort*, and US Democratic Socialist Rosemary Ruether's *New Woman: New Earth* gave early intellectual impetus to ecofeminism. A conjectural history of the self-deforming practices of western mastery was drawn. If the Greek word 'oikos' was etymological root of both ecology and economics - the latter had lost its way.

In 1974, the unquiet death occurred of whistleblower Karen Silkwood, a unionist at Kerr-McGee's Oklahoma plutonium processing factory. In 1975, women blockaded land clearing for construction of a nuclear reactor at Wyhl in Germany. More than economic loss of vineyards, they said, it was a matter of 'our human-being-in-nature'. By 1976, in Australia, women Friends of the Earth in Brisbane were conferencing on women and ecology, and some taking a co-ordinating role in the new Movement Against

¹³Dorothy Nelkin, 'Nuclear Power as a Feminist Issue', *Environment*, 1981, Vol. 23; Mary Goebel Noguchi, 'The Rise of the Housewife Activist', *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 1992, July/September.

¹⁴Mike Danaher, 'On the Forest Fringes?: Environmentalism, Left Politics and Feminism in Japan', *Transformations*, 2003, No. 6. http://transformations.cqu.edu.au/journal/issue_06/pdf/danaher.pdf (accessed 6 August 2011).

15. Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership

Uranium Mining. Even the mainstream women's magazines were printing pieces on women and the anti-nuclear issue. In 1977, a consciousness-raising group Women of All Red Nations (WARN) emerged among tribal Indians in South Dakota. They were especially worried about weapons tests, aborted and deformed babies, leukaemia and involuntary sterilisation among their people.¹⁵

Women circulated articles on artificial needs and consumerism, animal exploitation for cosmetic manufacture, recycling, indigenous health, and of course, uranium.¹⁶ Separatist anti-nuclear groups were established in Australia - Women Against Nuclear Energy (WANE) in the eastern states, and a Feminist Anti Nuclear Group (FANG) in the west. Women's ecology collectives started up in Paris, Hamburg and Copenhagen, and ads for feminist organic farming communes appeared on every noticeboard. Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature: the Roaring Inside Her* was published in 1978. Elizabeth Dodson Gray's *Green Paradise Lost* followed in 1979. Each author in her own way described the self-alienation of the andro-centric ego-construct; the obsession with control of 'other' peoples, the fascination with militarism, and its counterpart in instrumental logic and scientific calculation. Women wanted nothing less than a new language, reintegrating reason and passion.¹⁷

In the late 70s, the US League of Women Voters began lobbying for a moratorium on nuclear plant construction

¹⁵Carolyn Merchant, 'Earthcare', *Environment*, 1981, Vol. 23.

¹⁶Friends of the Earth, *Chain Reaction*, 1978, Vol. 3, No. 4.

¹⁷Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: the Roaring Inside Her*, New York: Harper, 1978; Elizabeth Dodson Gray, *Green Paradise Lost*, Wellesley, MA: Roundtable Press, 1979.

15. *Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership*

licences; the YWCA initiated an anti-nuclear education campaign; while the National Organisation of Women (NOW) instituted a National Day of Mourning for Silkwood. A further group - Dykes Opposed to Nuclear Technology (DONT), organised a New York conference on the energy crisis a patriarchally generated pseudo-problem, and a Women and Technology Conference was held in Montana the same year. Delphine Brox-Brochot of the Bremen Greens called for an end to high-tech aggrandisement while millions around the world still starve. Everywhere in the so called 'developed world', women's political lobbies and protests over effects on workers and children of pesticides and herbicides, of formaldehyde in furniture covers and insulation, of carcinogenic nitrate preservatives in foods, of lead glazes on china, were gaining momentum. But there was a weary road ahead - to quote Joyce Cheney:

I am annoyed that I feel forced to deal with the mess the boys have made of the earth. It is a hard enough struggle to survive and to build and maintain a life-affirming culture....¹⁸

In 1980, a collective called Women Opposed to Nuclear Technology (WONT) organised a Women and Anti-Nuclear Conference in Nottingham, UK. Women in Solar Energy (WISE) began meeting in Amherst, Massachusetts, and Ynestra King mounted the first Women and Life on Earth Conference. By November 1981 a 2,000 strong body of women marched on the US capital, symbolically encircling the Pentagon. By now, Helen Caldicott, president of Physicians for Social Responsibility, had started a Women's

¹⁸Joyce Cheney, 'The Boys Got Us into This Mess', *Commonwoman*, 1979, quoted by Nelkin, op. cit. p.38.

15. Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership

Party for Survival in the US, with some 50 state and local chapters. This was subsequently broadened to become Americans for Nuclear Disarmament.¹⁹ In India, the *Manushi* collective published their influential piece 'Drought: God Sent or Man Made Disaster?'²⁰

Historian of science Carolyn Merchant's classic *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* began to make itself felt in academic circles from this time on.²¹ By the mid 80s, the following networks were operating in the US: Lesbians United in Non-Nuclear Action (LUNA) v Seabrook Reactor; Church Women United; Feminists to Save the Earth; Feminist Resources on Energy and Ecology; Dykes Opposed to Nuclear Technology (DONT) v Three Mile Island and Columbia's TRIGA Reactor; Women for Environmental Health demonstrating in Wall street; Mothers and Future Mothers Against Radiation v Pacific Gas and Electricity; Women Against Nuclear Development (WAND); Spinsters Opposed to Nuclear Genocide (SONG), and Dykes Against Nukes Concerned with Energy (DANCE) v United Technology. Women's environmental conferences were held at Somona and San Diego State universities.

In Japan, a kamakazi encampment of grandmothers known as the Shibokusa women were running continual guerilla disruptions on a military arsenal near Mt Fuji, while a further 2,500 women marched on Tokyo in the

¹⁹Helen Caldicott, correspondence with the author, 1982.

²⁰ Manushi collective, 'Dought: God Sent or Man Made Disaster?', *Manushi*, 1980, No.6.

²¹ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco: Harper, 1980.

15. *Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership*

cause of world peace.²² By 1981, Women Opposed to Nuclear Technology had grown into a string of non-violent direct action cells around the UK; many began what would become the perennial encirclement of Greenham Common missile base; and in Germany 3,000 women were demonstrating at Ramstein NATO base. In Australia, Margaret Morgan drew together a rural anti-nuclear organisation at Albury, and the *Sun Herald* newspaper was reporting on Labor Party and Democrat women's decisive inter-party policy stand against lifting bans on uranium-mining.

In 1983, a new collective, Women's Action Against Global Violence was encamped at Lucas Heights Atomic Energy Establishment near Sydney. This was followed by a protest in the desert with Aboriginal men and women outside the secret US reconnaissance station at Pine Gap. A first ecofeminist anthology, *Reclaim the Earth*, was brought out by Leonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland.²³ An Environment, Ethics and Ecology Conference in Canberra opened up debate between women ecofeminists and not so gender aware deep ecologists.²⁴ British elections saw a combined Women for Life on Earth & Ecology Party ticket; and a year later, ecofeminist Petra Kelly led Die Grunen into the Bundestag. Kelly's passionate biography, translated as *Fighting for Hope*, told how her anti-nuclear

²²Lynne Jones (ed.), *Keeping the Peace*, London, Women's Press, 1983; Alice Cook and Gwyn Kirk, *Greenham Women Everywhere*, London: Pluto, 1983.

²³ Leonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland (eds.), *Reclaim the Earth*, London: Women's Press, 1983.

²⁴On the deep ecology debate see the journal *Environmental Ethics* 1984-94.

15. Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership

politics began as she watched her young sister die of leukaemia.²⁵

The soviet reactor accident at Chernobyl in 1986 alerted women to the lack of accountability in capitalism and socialism alike. Across Germany and Eastern Europe, a 'birth strike' expressed outrage, as governments from Turkey to France suppressed vital facts about environmental radiation levels for fear of damaging national economies. Sami people to the north of Scandinavia met official lies about post-Chernobyl radiation with a firm resolve for land rights. From the other side of the earth, Joan Wingfield of the Kokatha tribe flew from the Maralinga site of 1950s British bomb tests to address an International Atomic Energy Agency conference in Vienna. German sociologist Maria Mies published *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, the first substantial socialist ecofeminist statement.²⁶ A more New Age rejection of high-tech 'progress' was US bioregionalist Chellis Glendinning's *Waking Up in the Nuclear Age*. In 1987, Darlene Keju Johnson from the Marshall Islands and Lorena Pedro from Belau, both Women Working for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific, went public about the jelly fish babies born to islander women and cancers in ocean communities following US atom tests.²⁷

The First International Ecofeminist Conference was held in 1987 on campus at the University of Southern

²⁵ Petra Kelly, *Fighting for Hope*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1984.

²⁶ Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, London: Zed Books, 1986; Chellis Glendinning, *Waking Up in the Nuclear Age*, New York: Morrow, 1987.

²⁷ Women Working for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (ed.), *Pacific Women Speak*, Oxford: Greenline, 1987.

15. *Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership*

California. North, south, east, and west, women's commitment to life on earth now spanned the nuclear threat, reproductive technologies, toxic chemicals, indigenous autonomy, genetic engineering, water conservation, and animal exploitation. Depleted uranium would become a focus with the Balkan and Middle East wars. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), Code Pink, Madre, and the World Women's March continue to pursue many of these concerns.²⁸ It is now two generations since ecofeminists came to politics, the movement continues to grow in experience, cross-cultural networks, and theoretical sophistication. Debates over gender literacy in environmental ethics or eco-socialist formulations have become standard fare for university courses, academic journals, and publishing houses. International initiatives by Vandana Shiva have even been recognised with an Alternative Nobel Prize.²⁹

The Liberal Backlash

Ecofeminism is at once an autonomist socialism, an ecology, a postcolonial movement, and a case for respecting women's initiatives in designing 'another world'. This said: ecofeminist work has been affected by changes in the political character of both feminism and environmentalism. Occasionally, one-dimensional thinkers unaware of the depth and complexity of women's eco-political renaissance, judged it to be little more than a public extension of the

²⁸ See WILPF and other feminist organisational websites for details.

²⁹ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, London: Zed Books, 1989.

15. *Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership*

housewife role. Articles from liberal feminists used patronising and demeaning titles like 'Still Fooling with Mother Nature' and 'Calling Ecofeminism Back to Politics'.³⁰ But a glance at the now extensive literature of ecofeminism shows its reach from epistemology to economics. My sense is that the establishment had become uneasy about this radicalism quite early on, because as women were writing their herstory, transnational corporations stepped up proactive measures – structural and ideological – for taking global control of the environmental agenda.

In the structural domain, the principle of neoliberal competitiveness would be legally embedded in international treaties and bureaucratic agencies like the UN. First the 1982 Brundtland Commission routinised a materially contradictory policy of growth with 'trickle down benefits' for sustainability. Then the 1992 Rio Earth Summit leveraged this up, setting the politics of Bio-Diversity and Climate Change Conventions in motion.³¹ Soon the Kyoto Protocol and a rolling agenda of international COP meetings would have movement activists running to keep up with the newly institutionalised discourse of environmental management, and the public was carefully marginalised and disempowered by the academic complexities of 'risk analysis' and 'biosecurity'.

³⁰Chris Cuomo, 'Still Fooling with Mother Nature', *Hypatia*, 2001, Vol. 16; Sherilyn MacGregor, 'From Care to Citizenship: Calling Ecofeminism back to Politics', *Ethics and the Environment*, 2004, Vol. 9.

³¹Stephan Schmidheiny (ed.), *Changing Course: A Global Business Perspective on Development and the Environment*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992.

15. *Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership*

The globally orchestrated politics of liberal environmentalism enlisted UN, private foundation, and government sponsorship of special women's ecology organisations to 'mainstream' women's views in international policy. Women's 'citizenship' became the new liberal mantra. Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) founded by the late US Congresswoman Bella Abzug in the early 90s, played a big role in this. Thus, at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change COP13 in Bali, December 2007, Women in Europe for a Common Future are found hard pressed keeping nuclear power out the Clean Development Mechanism. The depth analysis of hegemonic masculinity gives way to ironing out its incoherencies.

Interminable international environmental meetings focus on women as 'victims' or objects of natural disaster and women who play the liberal feminist card to this policy are rewarded as 'professionals' for not rocking the androcentric boat to much. There is no place for an ecofeminist diagnosis of the cultural context of such 'crises'. Nor is the knowledge of indigenous women from say Oceania, acceptable as an existing model of low carbon provisioning. Instead, the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety (?) will draft women from the global South into 'capacity building' workshops for 'climate adaptation and mitigation'. While such neoliberal operations are ostensibly about 'justice and sustainability', the orientation is always framed by business as usual.

In the ideological domain, management environmentalism relies on several techniques for the pacification of citizens and governments. Public relations firms are

15. *Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership*

employed to 'greenwash' or minimise local damage from capitalist industrial enterprises.³² Again, the packaging of ecology as a media commodity thins out the reporting of grassroots voices in favour of a few colourful and iconic feminist 'personalities'. A further silencing of ecofeminist politics has occurred as a result of public reliance on the internet as chief recorder of radical movements – since 90 per cent of web based material is selected and posted by men – radical youth notwithstanding. A final ideological assault on women's ecological struggles has come through the universities. In the 90s, as Left analysis was overtaken by a new field of cultural studies, many women students took to the deconstructive study of political texts, an innocent but elitist move, leaving the concerns of threatened communities far behind.³³

The Indigenous Turn

While the institutions of eurocentric globalisation insured themselves against critique from within, peoples at the geographic periphery began celebrating the 500th year of Columbus. Then, at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, grassroots environmental politics would implode, taking a distinctly postcolonial turn. The articulation of this perspective by South American activists is very rich. In 2009, as anti-nuclear activists from the Arrernte,

³² Jed Greer and Kenny Bruno, *Greenwash: The Reality Behind Corporate Environmentalism*, Penang: Third World Network, 1996.

³³ For an overview, Ariel Salleh, 'Embodied Materialism in Action', *Polygraph: special issue on Ecology and Ideology*, 2010, No. 22: www.duke.edu/web/polygraph/cfp.html (accessed 7 August 2011).

15. *Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership*

Tuareg nomads, and Acoma Pueblo, spoke truth to power in Washington, a First Continental Summit of Indigenous Women in Peru produced a Manifesto in the cause of all life. The preamble to the document shows the women weaving together a seamless politics of sex, class, ethnicity, and species justice.

We are the carriers, conduits of our cultural and genetic make-up; we gestate and brood life; together with men, we are the axis of the family unit and society. We join our wombs to our mother earth's womb to give birth to new times in this Latin American continent where in many countries millions of people, impoverished by the neo-liberal system, raise their voices to say ENOUGH to oppression, exploitation and the looting of our wealth. We therefore join in the liberation struggles taking place throughout our continent.³⁴

In short, from the Mujeres Creando of La Paz: 'You cannot decolonize without de-patriarchalizing'.³⁵ In Bolivia, this deeply integrative indigenous politics opened into The Peoples Alternative Climate Summit at Cochabamba, April 2010, advancing a substantive economy based on the principle of 'living well', to replace the death risking formal economy of the mega-machine.³⁶ In 2011, the circle

³⁴First Continental Summit of Indigenous Women', *Lucha Indigena*, Llapa Runaq Hatariynin, 34-Inti Raymi 2009. Translation by Marilyn Obeid, Sydney.

³⁵ Personal communication Silvia Federici, 15 February 2011.

³⁶ Ariel Salleh, 'Climate Strategy: Making the Choice between Ecological Modernisation or Living Well', *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, 2011, No. 66.

15. *Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership*

closes with Vandana Shiva and Maude Barlow seeking UN ratification of a Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth:

affirming that to guarantee human rights it is necessary to recognize and defend the rights of Mother Earth and all beings in her and that there are existing cultures, practices and laws that do so ...³⁷

Putting Life Before Profit

In the current crisis of global warming, the international nuclear industry presents itself as 'a clean, green, alternative' to fossil fuel based power generation. But not only is it a threat to all natural processes, the engineering of installation components and their daily operation draws massive amounts of electric power. Nevertheless, Japan's ruling class with US corporate partners aims to put nuclear power back on track with more science and better 'technocratic management', even as Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis point out:

... the damaged nuclear reactors can hardly be blamed on the lack of capitalist development. On the contrary, they are the clearest evidence that high tech capitalism does not protect us against catastrophes, and it only intensifies

³⁷ Cormac Cullinan, 'The Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth' in Maude Barlow et al, *Does Nature Have Rights?* Ottawa: Council of Canadians, 2010.

15. *Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership*

their threat to human life while blocking any escape route.³⁸

It is not rational to pursue a fantasy of 'ecological modernisation' by means of this arsenal. The Fukushima meltdown may be a bonanza for reconstruction companies like Haliburton once they're done in Iraq, but the revolving door of men in suits know well that 'business is merely war by other means'.

Can the crisis of Fukushima become a political turning point? Japanese women and men have pioneered nuclear resistance. I think of the late Women and Life on Earth activist, Satomi Oba, president of Plutonium Action, Hiroshima.³⁹ And the perennial warnings of Kenji Higuchi, much sought after for the lecture circuit now.⁴⁰ Hisae Ogawa and others in the international ecofeminist peace organisation Code Pink are working all over Japan. Friends of the Earth is attending the special needs of women and children, demanding wider evacuation zones, and sackings in high places. Greenpeace is encouraging the public to mobilise, and in the months since March, mass demonstrations have rolled across Japan urging the end of nuclear power. Suddenly politicised, angry mothers

³⁸ Silvia Federici and George Caffentzis, 'Must We Rebuild Their Anthill?': <http://jfissures.wordpress.com/2011/04/22/>: (accessed 6 August 2011).

³⁹ See the Women and Life on Earth website for an obituary of Satomi Oba: <http://www.wloe.org/Remembering-Satomi-Oba.513.0.html> (accessed 7 August 2011).

⁴⁰ Michael Chandler, 'In Japan, New Attention for Longtime Anti-Nuclear Activist', *Washington Post*, 11 April 2011 (accessed 7 August 2011).

15. Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership

and housewives have taken to the streets in their thousands.

This nuclear disaster has re-energised international opposition to the industry and here too, women's organisations are highly focused. The Asian Rural Women's Coalition meeting in Chennai has condemned plans for nuclear power plants in India, Burma, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. The Gender_CC Network is contesting nuclear power through its regular climate change campaigning.⁴¹ In the US, the National Organization of Women (NOW) and United Farm Workers are looking into the possibility of bioaccumulation of radioactive cesium from Japan in California cows milk.⁴² In Australia, indigenous women continue fighting the government's proposed nuclear waste site on their land at Muckaty, Northern Territory.⁴³

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, an NGO with consultative status to the UN, recently wrote to the Prime Minister of Japan, observing the unique vulnerability of women in post-disaster situations – as objects of violence, as part-time employed, and as those doing most of the country's care work. They noted only one woman among the 16 members of the Reconstruction Design Council. They referred the Prime Minister

⁴¹ See www.Gender_CC.org; also Meike Spitzner, 'How Global Warming is Gendered' in A. Salleh (ed.), *Eco-Sufficiency & Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology*, London/New York: Pluto Press, 2009.

⁴² NOW, Media Release: 'Spike in Infant Mortality in the Northwest Linked to Radiation Fallout from Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant Disaster', 16 June 2011: www.canow.org (accessed 13 August 2011).

⁴³ For more information: www.beyondnuclearinitiative.com.

15. *Fukushima: A Call for Womens' Leadership*

to Japan's obligations under the United Nation's Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). They urged that gender disaggregated statistics be collected to prepare gender specific budgets. And the letter requests the Japanese government to exercise accountability by consulting with local women's organisations and promoting women's participation as planners and decision makers at prefecture, municipal, and town council levels.⁴⁴

How can a country call itself a democracy when it does not give women equal seats on its Reconstruction Design Council? Yet would the achievement of this liberal feminist objective actually turn Japan around? Like the affirmative action for women at big international environment meetings, it would simply paper over an unjust and unsustainable order. An ecofeminist politics is essential to expose and neutralise the deeply cultural androcentric interests that let Fukushima happen. A balanced committee is one thing, but it is even more essential to redefine its 'terms of reference' – putting life before profit. Workers responsible for the labour of social care think differently about 'value' and 'security' – this is why women must take leadership in Japan now.

⁴⁴Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Letter to Prime Minister Mr Naoto Kan, Prime Minister of Japan, 7 July 2011: www.apwld.org (accessed 8 July 2011).

16. Energy and Social Reproduction

Kolya Abramsky

“Listen! We ought to be in a wood choppers union! Chop wood for breakfast! Chop wood, wash his clothes! Chop wood, heat the iron! Chop wood, scrub floors! Chop wood, cook his dinner!”

(Miner’s wife in *Salt of the Earth* 1954)

“When oil prices rise... the costs of variable capital will also increase as the costs of subsistence for labor are tied to the costs of oil and other energy sources. Because cheap energy inputs have been able to reduce the subsistence costs for the world’s working class, an increase in energy prices caused by oil production peaking will see a dramatic rise in food, electricity and transportation costs, all of which the capitalist class will try to get the working class to pay for through a significant decrease in real wages” (Keefer 2005: 55).

There has been little written about energy and labor. Even less has been written about energy and social reproduc-

16. *Energy and Social Reproduction*

tion, either from those analyzing social reproduction or from those analyzing energy. George Caffentzis' "The Work/Energy Crisis and the Apocalypse" (1980) – a classic connecting the crisis of the Keynesian mode of accumulation with the struggles against work both in the factories and in the kitchens and bedrooms and fields of the world, is one of the few, outstanding exceptions. Given that energy is a vital means of subsistence, as well as means of production, this is somewhat surprising. In this paper, I argue that to understand the current so-called "energy crisis" and a possible future "transition to renewable energies and/or post-petrol future" it is crucial to consider the question of social reproduction, and the related questions of primitive accumulation and dispossession. How might changes in energy production, trade and consumption effect relations of reproduction (and vice versa)?

There are three broad (and interconnected) areas which I will discuss here: a) energy as a means of reproduction/subsistence b) energy resources exist on land, c) unwaged labor in the non-commercial energy sector. Following these three sections, I will go on to discuss some questions and uncertainties relating to a possible "transition" to a post-petrol energy scenario, and/or a transition to renewable energy.

Energy as a Means of Reproduction/Subsistence

Energy is a crucial means of subsistence, due to its importance for food production and preparation, shelter, lighting and heating especially.

“Energy is the fundamental prerequisite of every life. The availability of energy is a fundamental and indivisible human right... It is violated billion-fold” (WREA 2005).

This poses the question of ownership, control and access to energy production and consumption, and which purposes it serves. Namely, does it serve the needs of accumulation of capital, or subsistence needs? As with land and other means of subsistence, the degree of separation between the producer and consumer becomes of great importance. On the one hand there is the question of whether energy is a resource held in common outside of market relations or whether it is commodified, on the other hand is, to the extent that it is already commodified, to what degree is this the case. It is important to understand the processes through which this separation is established, reproduced and expanded, or is resisted, subverted and reduced.

According to De Angelis (2001) differing degrees of separation between workers and means of production may exist, and this separation is neither permanent nor given, but is the subject of a continual struggle. Primitive accumulation... was capital's effort to regain and reassert control once it had lost it due to limits set by workers' struggles.

16. *Energy and Social Reproduction*

To the extent class conflict creates bottlenecks to the accumulation process in the direction of reducing the distance between producers and means of production, any strategy used to recuperate this movement of association is entitled with the categorization. . . of primitive accumulation (De Angelis 2001:13-15).

Common or public energy resources, from forests to oil fields, are facing increasing privatization, and energy markets are being liberalized world-wide through regional and multilateral free trade agreements, such as NAFTA, FTAA, EU, or WTO. This is greatly affecting prices and people's ability to access reliable sources of energy, regardless of whether it is clean or dirty. Privatization of forests, through the WTO (World Trade Organization) forestry and logging agreement, is of particular importance since forests until now have been communally owned throughout much of the world, and most of the world's population still depend on (non-commodified) biomass fuels for heating, cooking and lighting. This [privatization] process is reminiscent of the enclosure of commonly owned and managed woodlands in Europe over the course of several centuries, that was integral to the emergence of the European-centred capitalist world-economy. (Marx 1842; 1976: 877-896)). This world-wide process is greatly undermining people's capacity to be "self-provisioning" (Perelman 2007).

Once energy is commodified its pricing plays an important part in social reproduction. Key issues are the magnitude of the price and who pays for it. Does capital or labor pay for it? Waged or unwaged labor? Throughout

16. *Energy and Social Reproduction*

the 20th century, especially in the post-World War II period, the availability of “cheap” oil has greatly influenced the cost of reproducing labor. On the one hand, in high wage countries such as the USA, the cost has been much reduced through cheap food, heating, electricity etc, enabling a massive increase in the ratio between surplus and necessary labor.... On the other hand, energy intensive (and consequently money intensive) Green Revolution agriculture has contributed to processes of dispossession throughout much of the world (especially in Asia), undermining subsistence agriculture, and pushing people towards migration to cities or production for the world-market. These mechanisms have been vital in ensuring capitalist forms of labor reproduction and containing class struggle.

However, at times, it has been advantageous for capital to increase the cost of reproduction, as this has enabled it to indirectly attack wages. In the mid 1970s, following an intense period of social struggle throughout the world, including the USA, in which the struggles of waged and, above all, the non-waged workers converged provoking an accumulation crisis (Federici 2006), inflation was used to indirectly attack wage levels. Raising oil (and consequently food) prices was a crucial part of this process

In the current inflation this kind of manipulation of money has been joined by another – the administered increases in the prices of oil. . . have been achieved by restricting the availability of [this] commodity to back up the price increase. . . The resultant price increases, that is, the increase in the amount of money required

16. *Energy and Social Reproduction*

to obtain a given amount of commodity value, have acted to undercut working-class wages all over the world and are part of a world-wide counteroffensive by capital to stem the wage offensive (Cleaver 1979: 168).

Such an attack on wage levels had the effect of shifting the costs of reproduction further onto unwaged work, mainly carried out by women in the form of domestic work.

The problems that women are facing appear particularly serious given the economic alternatives we are currently offered, as they emerge from the current debate on the “energy crisis” and the feasibility of a growth versus a non-growth economy. It appears that no matter what path will prevail, women will be the main losers in the “battle to control inflation” (Federici 2006:75).

But despite the renewed expansion of the world-market and worldwide privatization and enclosure process, seeking to shift the balance of power in favor of capital (Midnight Notes 1990; Von Werlhof 2000), resistance has not been missing. As De Angelis (2001) writes:

“any discussion of alternatives within the growing global anti-capitalist movement must pose [the question] of direct access to the means of existence, production and communication: the issue of *commons*” (2001:20, italics in original).

Next to the struggles for control over land, there is perhaps no area in which such struggles for “commons” ...

16. *Energy and Social Reproduction*

are more central than in relation to the two interrelated processes of the expropriation of common energy resources and increased energy pricing. Many if not most of these struggles have been internationally networked, with local struggles inspiring and informing one another, as well as supporting each other through a range of global networks.

Anti-privatization struggles seeking different forms of common, collective, cooperative or public ownership are currently one of the major characteristics of the energy sector worldwide.... There has also been a marked increase in the resistance to energy pricing hikes. Early examples of this resistance occurred in Italy in the 1970s, through the movement for “self-reductions,” in which entire neighborhoods organized to decide how much they would pay of their utility bills, their rents and, at times, transport costs. These struggles were explicitly linked to wider struggles over social reproduction and the “social factory” including “wages for housework” campaigns (Ramirez 1975).

Since 2000, rising oil and fuel prices have also been the source of major street protests, blockades and rioting in Indonesia, Nigeria, UK, France, Belgium, Germany and Italy (Keefer 2006). In Karnataka, India, there have been intensive struggles between peasant communities, electrical companies and police over electricity pricing. Similar processes have been occurring since 1992 in indigenous communities in Chiapas, Mexico. In the USA, welfare organizations, such as the Kensington Welfare Rights Union, have begun resisting rising utilities bills. Many of these struggles have been led by women, who frequently bear the brunt of rising energy costs through an increase in unwaged domestic labor....

Energy Resources Exist on Land

Most energy resources exist in rural areas. To harness it capital must expropriate land, or at least control it. As companies are given expanded investment rights over an increasing geographical area throughout the world, as environmental constraints on investment are removed and ownership is forcefully transferred from peasants to capital, the territorial autonomy of rural communities is undermined (Midnight Notes 1990; Von Werlhof 2000)... [Lands] that contain energy resources are particularly central to this process.

Oil, gas, coal and uranium exploration and extraction, as well as large scale hydro-electric dams are all having a major social and environmental impact on communities in the vicinity of the energy sector activities. This is producing major social conflicts relating to land rights, pollution and displacement. In the case of oil extraction, there are struggles over displacement, pollution and associated violence in Nigeria, Colombia, Ecuador, as well as several other countries. Particularly affected are: peasant, indigenous, Black communities (in Latin America) and fishing communities, many of which still have communal land ownership structures. Tactics used in such struggles have ranged from parliamentary struggles, to autonomous community organizing, street protests, non-violent civil disobedience, and (in Nigeria) armed struggle and kidnapping of oil company employees. In Colombia, the U'wa Community even threatened to commit mass suicide in the face of continued activities from OXY (Occidental) Petroleum. The construction of the world's biggest oil pipeline, the Ceyhan-Tblisi-Baku (BTC), pipeline has

16. *Energy and Social Reproduction*

also provoked protest from land rights and environmental activists, both within the affected countries, and by their international supporters. In Venezuela, indigenous peoples are facing displacement from coal mining activities, from a range of state owned and foreign multinationals. In the USA, Navajo communities are being displaced in Black Mesa, in Arizona, by the coal giant Peabody Coal. Millions have been displaced throughout the world by the construction of large hydro-electric dams, in India, China, Brazil and Indonesia, amongst others. As the nuclear industry gears up for a renewed expansion, anti-nuclear struggles have also grown in strength, both in areas where power stations are to be sited, as well as areas where uranium is mined, like the Indigenous territories within the Nevada/Arizona desert of the USA or the uranium dumps and mines on aboriginal land in Australia. As with struggles over the ownership of energy resources, these, and many other struggles associated with energy-related conflicts over land use have successfully sought international allies.

Unwaged Labor in the Non-Commercial Energy Sector, the Pillar of Cheap Reproduction of Labor

“Since [WW2] nations of the global south have been transferring energy resources to nations in the global south at a steady rate. A number of oil-exporting countries have achieved impressive levels of economic growth on the basis of

16. *Energy and Social Reproduction*

this trade. However, the main effect has been to intensify long-standing global inequalities in levels of energy consumption. . . throughout the modern period core states have attained much higher levels of per capita commercial energy consumption than their semi-peripheral or peripheral counterparts. . . the average citizen in the United States consumes five times as much as the world average, ten times as much energy as a typical person in China, and over thirty times more than a resident of India. Even in such major oil exporting nations as Venezuela and Iran, per capita consumption of commercial energy resources is less than one half and one quarter of the US average, respectively” (Podobnik 2002: 254, 255).

In addition to being a result of the expropriation of energy resources described above, the existing inequalities in the rates of energy consumption are also the product of a hierarchically defined global division of labor in the energy sector. The reproduction of labor in the US, subsidized by “cheap” energy, is also subsidized by the exploitation of labor in other parts of the world. This includes both waged and unwaged labor, much of it women’s labor. Although Mies (Mies 1986) does not talk specifically about energy, her general arguments nonetheless apply to this specific situation.

The complement and essential pillar of commercial energy in the world-market is non-commercial energy combined with non-waged labor. Throughout much of the world, especially in rural areas, people do not satisfy their

16. *Energy and Social Reproduction*

energy needs for subsistence exclusively, or even predominantly, through the commercial use of energy, but rather through the non-commercial use of dung, wood and other biomass that provide heat, lighting and cooking fuel, as well as animal traction. More than one third of humanity, 2.4 billion people, currently rely on these fuels for their daily energy needs. In Sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa), between 40 and 90% of all energy consumption is from biomass fuels, and it is common for rural areas to have electrification rates of less than 5%, all of which greatly impacts on the work (and health, due to long walks, smokey kitchens etc) of women (Mapako and Mbewe 2004:16, 20, 23). Collection of such fuels is most commonly done by women and children, as part of “domestic work” without recourse to wages and the (limited) protection that the so-called “formal economy” and its trade unions, or other organizational forms, may be able to offer, as exemplified by the quote from *Salt of the Earth* at the beginning of this essay (Warwick and Doig 2004).

The cost of reproduction of labor in these areas is brought down even further by this unwaged labor, a double edged sword. On the one hand capital pays nothing for it, by extracting women and children’s unpaid labor, on the other hand the people concerned are paying the costs of their own reproduction while not maintaining independence from the money economy, but rather resting at the lowest, most excluded layer of the hierarchical global division of labor (Perelman 2007). The importance of privatization of forests must be seen in this context. The privatization of forests means that journeys to fetch firewood and other biomass materials increase in distance and hours required, and so do the legal risks, as access to

16. *Energy and Social Reproduction*

these materials requires encroaching on newly privatized land (i.e. poaching), all of which is borne by unwaged workers, mainly women and children. At the same time, communities which formerly relied on non-commercial energy sources are increasingly forced to rely on energy and fuel inputs purchased with money.

Questions and Uncertainties with Regard to Renewable Energy

All of the above raises important questions for any possible transition to renewable energy. Crucially, on whose terms will the process be and to what ends? If the cost of energy rises, who will pay for it? Will capital be able to shift the increasing costs of reproduction onto labor (especially unwaged domestic and agricultural labor, predominantly carried out by women) or will labor, and in particular women, refuse to accept this? What new struggles are already emerging and likely to increase in the future?

How will changes in the energy sector change the relation between capital and labor? Between waged and unwaged labor? How will different sectors of the worldwide division of labor relate to one another?

Rural communities are, in theory, ideally located to benefit from renewable energies and to lead the way, since it is precisely such areas that are richest in natural resources such as wind, sun, biomass, flowing rivers, animal wastes etc. Yet, in practice the situation is very different. As already described, the current period of expansion of the world market, is an attack on rural communities through-

16. *Energy and Social Reproduction*

out the world, a renewed process of primitive accumulation and incursory investments. Given that renewable energy resources exist throughout most of the countryside, and not just in specific geographical areas as is the case with oil or coal, it is possible that renewable energy at the service of capital accumulation could result in even harsher patterns of displacement and appropriation of land than those brought about by other forms of energy. Black Communities in Colombia are being forcibly displaced from their land by paramilitary violence so that the land can be used for monoculture plantations of African palm to be used as fuel oil. Communities in Indonesia and Malaysia are facing ecological destruction for the same reason. Industrial wind farms serving capital accumulation have displaced peasants, provoking resistance in Mexico and China. In China three peasants were killed by police in the course of such resistance.

Finally, there is the issue of food – agrofuels compete with food crops, provoking a whole new process of struggle around land use and ownership and around food prices (e.g. the current tortilla crisis in Mexico is related to corn use for ethanol, and in Brazil landless movements are taking on the sugar industry (also related to ethanol).

Will new energy sources be able to serve capital accumulation in the same way as existing energy sources have, in particular in its role in social reproduction, or will they provide a material basis for the long term construction of alternative social relations of reproduction based on “commons” and reduced dependency on the wage?

Bibliography

- Biberman, Herbert 1954 *Salt of the Earth* Independent Productions/International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers
- Caffentzis, George “The Work/Energy Crisis and the Apocalypse.” First published in *Midnight Notes*, N.3, 1980. Republished in *Midnight Oil. Work, Energy, War 1973-1992* (pp.215-2723).
- Cleaver, Harry 1979: *Reading Capital Politically* The Harvester Press, Brighton
- Dalla Costa, Mariarosa “Reruralizing the World” in *The Commoner* No.12 2007
- De Angelis, Massimo 2001 “Marx and Primitive Accumulation: The Continuous Character of Capital’s Enclosures” in *The Commoner*, No. 2, September 2001.
- Federici, Silvia 1980 *The Restructuring of Social Reproduction in the United States in the 1970s* in *The Commoner* No.11, Spring 2006
- Keefer, Thomas 2005: *Of Hand Mills and Heat Engines: Peak Oil, Class Struggle, and the Thermodynamics of Production* MA Thesis, York University, Toronto
- Keefer, Thomas (2006) *Marx, Machinery and Motive Power: the Thermodynamics of Class Struggle*

16. *Energy and Social Reproduction*

- Mapako, Maxwell and Mbewe, Abel 2004 *Renewables and Energy for Rural Development in Sub-Saharan Africa* Zed Books & African Energy Policy Research Network
- Marx, Karl 1842 *On the Law on the Theft of Wood* in *Rheinische Zeitung*
- Marx, Karl 1976 *Capital Volume 1* Penguin Books in Association with New Left Review, London
- Midnight Notes 1990 “Introduction to the New Enclosures” in *Midnight Notes 1990* New Enclosures Autonomedia, Massachusetts
- Midnight Notes Collective 1992 *Midnight Oil. Work, Energy, War. 1973-1992*. New York: Autonomedia.
- Mies, Maria 1986 *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale – Women in the International Division of Labour* Zed Books, London
- Perelman, Michael 2007 “Primitive Accumulation from Feudalism to Neoliberalism” in *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 18:2, 44-61
- Podobnik, Bruce 2002: Global Energy Inequalities: Exploring the Long-Term Implications, in *Journal of World-Systems Research*, VIII, 2, Spring 2002 (252 - 274)
- Podobnik, Bruce forthcoming: *Global Energy Shifts : Fostering Sustainability in a Turbulent Age* Temple University Press

16. *Energy and Social Reproduction*

- Ramirez, Bruno 1975 “Self-Reduction of Prices in Italy” in Midnight Notes Collective 1992 *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War, 1973-1992* Autonomedia, Brooklyn
- Von Werlhof 2000 ““Globalization” and the “Permanent” Process of “Primitive Accumulation”: The Example of the MAI, The Multilateral Agreement on Investment” in *JWSR Festschrift for Immanuel Wallerstein, Part II* JWSR, Vol. VI, Number 3, Fall/Winter 2000 Special Issue
- Warwick, Hugh and Doig, Alison 2004 *Smoke – the Killer in the Kitchen: Indoor Air Pollution in Developing Countries* Intermediate Technology Development Group, London
- World Renewable Energy Assembly (WREA) 2005: *Final Communiqué: The Human Right to Renewable Energy* WREA Bonn November 26th-30th 2005

Part III.

Documents/Interviews

17. Domestic Workers United

Following is an adapted version of information taken from the website of Domestic Workers United (DWU), one of the main organizations of domestic workers in the United States, which recently scored a crucial victory with the passing in November of 2010 of a Bill of Right DWU had fought for many years to achieve. [See Domestic Workers United website, at <http://www.domesticworkersunited.org/>]

“Tell Them Slavery is Done”

After 400 years in the shadows of slavery.....
75 years of invisibility and exclusion under US labor law.....
6 years of a hard-fought struggle in the New York State legislature....
Domestic workers are finally gaining rights, respect, and recognition.
The Domestic Workers Bill of Rights has been signed and will officially go into effect on November 29th, 2010!

17. *Domestic Workers United*

Founded in 2000, Domestic Workers United [DWU] is an organization of Caribbean, Latina and African nannies, housekeepers, elderly caregivers in New York that has been organizing to obtain fair labor standards and to build a movement addressing the root causes of injustice and exploitation facing domestic workers. DWU recognizes however that the domestic workers struggles are tied to those of all workers, poor people, migrants, immigrants, people of the global South and all oppressed communities. Its objectives are:

- to break the isolation and to build the power of the estimated 200.000 domestic workers in the New York metropolitan area whose work literally keeps the city going.
- to educate the public to the importance of domestic work, a work now generally devalued as “unskilled” and taken for granted.
- to expose the racial and gender inequality in the labor market, and fight for the recognition of domestic work as real and skilled work.
- to obtain fair labor standards.

Until less than a year ago domestic workers in NY state, as in most of the United States, were excluded from many of the most basic protections afforded to other workers including The National Labor Relations Act, Title VII discrimination protection, and Occupational Safety and Health protections. For over six years domestic workers in NY have struggled to reverse this situation and make the

17. *Domestic Workers United*

NY State Assembly pass a Bill of Rights placing them on equal stand with other workers. After much campaigning and educational work, on August 31, 2010, “an unforgettable day for DWU and domestic workers,” Governor Paterson signed the bill into law, the first of its kind in the United States.

The new law represents a momentous advance for New York’s domestic workers – housecleaners, nannies, elder companions, and other home-based workers – who have historically been excluded from state and federal labor laws. Thus, the passing of the Bill has been described as “an incredible victory.” It is “the nation’s first Domestic Workers Bill of Rights” and it is guarantee to spur similar efforts across the country. [In California this year, the sister organization *Mujeres Unidas* is concluding a two years drive to have a similar bill placed on the State’s legislation]. Nevertheless, the law falls short of mentioning several of the provisions that were included in the original draft. While it represents improved labor standards, the final version of the law did not include five critical benefits that would confer job security and stability, and better enable domestic workers to stand up for their rights to fair wages and workplaces free of harassment. These are:

1. paid sick days;
2. paid personal days;
3. paid vacation days [it only provides 3 paid days off after one year of employment];
4. advance notice of termination;
5. severance pay.

17. *Domestic Workers United*

It also does not include annual cost of living adjustments, health benefits (except for temporary disability benefits). All these provisions have still to be fought for. Another challenge now is how to make the law count in employers-workers relations, not an easy task given the individual nature of the contract and the isolation in which most domestic worker find themselves. To this end DWU plans to work with the Department of Labor on devising a new form of collective bargaining fit for domestic work and care work, recognizing that due to the specific conditions typical of domestic work, there is a need for an innovative, alternative framework for collective organization.

To this end, DWU is leading “a mass Know Your Rights campaign among workers” with the aim of “engaging employers in community-based dialogues on improving employment practices”. DWU has also been conducting extensive interviews with domestics in the NY metropolitan area, documenting the hardships the majority still faces due to the systemic devaluation of this work and the specific condition of domestic work. The study has revealed that:

1. Domestic workers work more hours for lower wages than other workers. [The average number of hours per week was 44.4, with 73% of respondents employed between 40 and 70 hours per week. Domestic workers also work more hours than other workers in comparable industries].
2. Many do not earn enough to meet their basic needs.
3. Domestic workers lack paid sick and personal days and are unable to choose vacation days. 57% of do-

17. Domestic Workers United

mestic workers surveyed do not receive any paid sick days, as compared to 48% of all working New Yorkers.

4. Domestic workers lack notice of termination and severance pay. The Bill will certainly improve labor condition, but due to the isolation, the individual nature of the relation only a major effort not only by domestic workers but also by other civic organization will succeed in altering their work situation.

The New NYS Domestic Workers Bill of Rights Summary

On July 1, the New York State Legislature passed the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights (A1470B/S2311E). Governor Paterson signed the Bill on August 31st, 2010, and the law will go into effect on November 29th, 2010.

Work Hours

- establishes 8 hours as a legal day's work
- overtime at the rate of 1½ of the regular rate of pay after 40 hours for live-out domestic workers and 44 for live-in domestic workers

Day Of Rest

- one day of rest in each calendar week (should try to coincide with a worker's day of worship)
- overtime pay if a worker agrees to work on her day of rest

Paid Days Off

- After one year of employment, entitled to 3 paid days off

Workplace Protection

- Protection against workplace discrimination based race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, marital status, and domestic violence victim status.
- Protection against sexual harassment by employer.
- Protection against harassment based on gender, race, national origin, and religion.
- Covers full-time and part-time (pending legislative revision) domestic workers for temporary disability benefits.

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

Silvia Federici: In your website you describe the recent passing in New York State of the Bill of Rights that Domestic Workers United (DWU) has been fighting for as a historic victory. Can you explain why this bill is so significant? What is at stake in this Bill? What does it change in the conditions of domestic workers in New York and in the country? And why it had been so difficult for domestic workers in the US to win the right to be treated as other workers?

Priscilla Gonzalez: The domestic workers bill of rights is historic because it is the first comprehensive law in the history of the United States to not only recognize domestic workers as real workers but also to guarantee basic rights and protections that most other workers won 75 years ago when the first labor laws were enacted in the U.S. Domestic workers, having been primarily African American women, were excluded because of a strong Southern Democrat lobby that fought to prevent African Americans from being able to assert any kind of political power, which gaining labor rights would have afforded them considering the legacy of slavery that domestic work is rooted in.

18. *Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez*

So, for 75 years, this exclusion has continued to remain. [As a result] what we have seen is rampant abuse and exploitation that really has not changed much since the turn of the last century. Behind closed doors [domestic/care workers] are facing all kinds of abuse and exploitation: verbal, physical, emotional, even sexual violence and the law has not reached into these households, because it is never considered that someone's home could be someone else's workplace or that these workers are real workers deserving of rights and protection like any other worker.

It is significant also because it is the first time that domestic workers are recognized. The first paragraph of the legislation says, "Domestic workers are..." and it describes who they are. It recognizes the race and gender-based discrimination and the exclusion that workers in the sector have been suffering. It spells out the important contributions that domestic workers make to our society by caring for the homes and families of countless people. The women's movement obviously highlighted the importance of recognizing household work. In this sense, it is also significant that we won rights for a sector [of workers] who are based in the home and perform domestic services that have always been devalued because it is work done by women. Of course, the other significant aspect is that this workforce, in the 21st century, [consists] primarily of immigrant women from the global south, who have fled the devastation of globalization, free trade agreements, structural adjustment programs and the like to come here only to find themselves [living and working] in exploitative conditions. Many are undocumented. To have fought a campaign that was led by immigrant women of color, many of whom were undocumented, that was about the

18. *Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez*

expansion of [their] rights, was really significant in the absence of an immigration reform in this country.

[Add to] all these reasons the fact that we have included over 200,000 domestic workers -which is what we estimate we are in New York- under the labor laws, which is a labor victory that we had not been able to obtain in decades, and affects specifically excluded workers who are primarily women. All of these factors are what make the passage of the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights so significant. What also is significant is what is at stake. What's at stake in the fact that we were able to gain inclusion for this otherwise excluded and invisible workforce, is that it is going to have an impact and repercussions on many other excluded sectors and could potentially be meaningful also for other workers regardless of whether or not they have been excluded from [labor rights] until now. One of the things that we won in the bill was paid leave. Granted it was a minimum: 3 paid days of rest a year after the first year of employment, which is literally the bare minimum and certainly less than what domestic workers deserve. But it is the only sector [of domestic workers] in the entire country that has been able to win paid leave. Having paid leave included in the statute sets a precedent and could potentially give us an opening, maybe not within this decade but certainly in the future, as we are continuing to work toward an expansion of rights at a time where the rights that we have gained in the labor movement are continually being eroded. That we were able to win this victory in this period of crisis is really significant and is certainly a sign of what is at stake, because we have to keep pushing and we have to keep winning because it has significance for all working people.

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

SF: Can you explain how have you organized your campaign? What kind of tactics/ strategies have you used? What help/support have you received from other organizations (feminist, for instance) and other workers?

PG: The story behind the campaign is that in 2003 we organized a convention called the "Have Your Say Convention" where we brought together over 200 domestic workers from across the city to share with each other –off of the playground, off of the park benches where they are sometimes within ear or eyesight of their employers- to share conditions, to identify similarities and to imagine what being treated with dignity and respect would look like.

For that convention we did mass outreach, so there were people there who were connected to the organization and there were workers for whom that was the first event. That was the event that I went to with my Mom, and my Mom had never gone to a DWU event before, and I had just barely gone to one or two meetings before that. So it was really open because what we realized as an organization was that our first couple of years were focused on building the base and we were also doing a lot of cases for individual workers and what we realized was that going case by case by case was never going to address what was fundamentally a systemic problem and that we needed to take an industry wide approach. So we organized the "Have Your Say Convention", and this list of demands came out that was pointing toward changing the labor laws in the state of New York that would have an impact on the entire industry.

The list of demands that emerged at that convention would later become the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights

18. *Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez*

and that is what we introduced into the state legislature in 2004.

The first couple of years after that we spent a lot of time doing education. Public education, both among the legislators and the public, about the exclusions, about the [work] conditions. We were focused on building our base so that we would have enough power to move the legislation forward. After that we realized that there was no way domestic workers were going to win alone and that we needed to engage more people, and different kinds of sectors. So we started engaging unions and policy advocates and students and employers. We structured the campaign in such a way that it was open enough for every sector, every individual to participate from their location and could engage in the campaign with their whole selves. For example, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, who organized the employers were coming into the campaign grounded in Jewish traditions, grounded in Jewish values, grounded in a progressive, Jewish social justice world view and commitment, and organized from that place. Students organized as the sons and daughters of domestic workers. Unions organized as the relatives of domestic workers or as fellow workers in the same neighborhoods and locations. The story that we always like to tell is SEIU 32BJ who organized the doormen. The doormen are the gatekeepers in the buildings where members work. They are the ones who know who the good employers are, who the bad employers are. They are the ones who call the taxi for our member at one or two o'clock in the morning for our members when they are going home after work. When we did outreach for any number of activities, including the convention, they helped us do the outreach. They distributed the postcards

18. *Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez*

and flyers to the domestic workers in their buildings. It was like this real class solidarity that was organic, that was not orchestrated or manipulated but that came from the real on the ground conditions. These workers were interacting with each other and the campaign gave them the opportunity to actually work together on something that was about dignity and respect and a set of values and principles that they shared.

In building the coalition we thought about the messages of the campaign. There are these organic relationships, how do we broaden them? How do we bring in more sectors? So we framed the campaign in such a way that literally anyone who believed in dignity and respect and was educated on the history of exclusion and the value of domestic work could find a place in the campaign. The three key messages were one: "Reverse the history of discrimination and exclusion," which was about educating people including the employers- taking it out of the personal and putting the conditions of the work in a historical context. The second was "Respect the work that makes all other work possible." So we asked, "What is a day in the life of a domestic worker? What is the value added in our society? How is it that these workers actually allow all other work to happen?" And then finally, the third, which was "Standards benefit everyone," which was key for the legislators and for everybody. Who doesn't want to have a stable work force? Who doesn't want to have clarity in employment relationships? So those were the three key messages in the campaign that anybody could find resonance with.

In terms of the strategy, the heart and soul of the campaign, in addition to building a cross sector coalition of

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

multiple voices and having a broad enough frame that [other workers] could meaningfully participate in, what we also did was to anchor the campaign by the stories. Domestic workers being front and center, sharing their stories, bringing their stories to light. Contrasting and challenging the invisibility of the workforce to say "This is what I go through", "This is what has happened to me", and "This is why I am part of this campaign. This is why I am fighting for this."

In that process we were doing leadership development. Supporting the workers, their families and their communities to recognize the dignity and value of their labor. It was also about training them to be spokespeople for the campaign and to lead campaign strategy and development. To go up to Albany [New York State's Capital] and become expert lobbyists. They led the lobby teams. We would have these huge Albany days when we would bring two, three hundred people. We structured the teams so that at least one member of the team had to be a domestic worker who would go in there and lead the team with her story, with the conditions, with the history of exclusion, and with the reasons why the bill of rights was the only possibly solution for this industry, which had been made invisible and by default and by design did not squarely fit into existing labor laws which had been created in the context of an industrial US. The campaign was this beautifully transformative opportunity for everyone who participated. For the workers and the supporters and the allies.

RJ Maccani: What years does the campaign span?

PG: The fall of 2003 was when the convention happened. We introduced the bill in 2004. From 2004 to 2006 we were devoted to doing education and base-building. From

18. *Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez*

2006 to 2008 was about building a broad-based coalition of support. We won in 2010. Those last couple of years were really about scaling up the organizing and testing our power and making that visible. So we scaled up our actions. We did the marches, the huge lobby days, and we really brought our power to bear not just with the workers, but making visible the coalition that we had built around this campaign, that technically concerned a particular sector of workers but ultimately inspired and transformed so many people. There was a hearing we had when we were trying to get the bill passed through the labor committee in the Assembly. There were female employers who testified, who were also women's rights advocates, and they said that one of the central struggles of the women's movement was to strike a work/family balance, and that the bill of rights campaign gave them this incredible "ah ha moment", when they realized they could achieve that by depending on the labor of another woman. And because of it, they said they needed to participate in the struggle, because this was about lifting up household work and lifting up the value of another woman's labor, lifting up the value of women's work in the home as wage labor, needing to be protected and afforded the same rights as any other form of wage labor.

RJ: Were there other ways that feminists or women's rights advocates participated in the campaign as an organized force?

PG: The organized feminist presence in the United States is more middle class, upper-middle class and white. That's the traditional feminist identity in this country. The ways they were engaging were as female employers that had these reflections and these experiences and also,

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

simultaneously, as women's rights advocates recognizing that the bill of rights wasn't just a labor rights struggle but also a women's rights issue, because it was about lifting up the value of household work and recognizing the reproductive value of that labor that has also been a long struggle in the women's movement.

I feel like it [feminist participation in the campaign] can't be separated out because it was rooted in that experience. That the policy advocates and feminist lawyers that were testifying were reflecting on their experience as employers of nannies, housekeepers and elder caregivers for their parents.

RJ: How many trips would you say you took to Albany [New York State's capital] over the years?

PG: We estimate about 40 (laughing).

RJ: What's the typical trip to Albany look like?

PG: It depends. We count literally all of the trips. The trips could range between a van full of ten people, mostly workers and a few employers and other allies, to busloads of workers and a broad range of allies and supporters. Essentially the trips were about being a presence. The first few years it was just about creating a buzz in Albany about domestic workers and about domestic worker rights. We realized when we went up there that a lot of legislators claimed not to know anything about who domestic workers were, about the conditions, about the history of exclusion. So our charge was really to educate them: These are the conditions they are working in, this is who they are, these are the professions we are representing, this is the demographic, here are the particularities of the industry: it's totally diffuse, completely dispersed, workers behind closed doors. The government doesn't recognize these

18. *Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez*

households as workplaces. And then you have employers who don't recognize themselves as employers because the work has never been valued as work.

So those trips were about educating and being a presence. When we started scaling up our tactics then it became about making our power felt. That included yellow t-shirts (laughing). Being a sea of yellow in Albany. It also included really creative methods to engage our constituents and engage the legislature. We did so through art and culture. Our members composed a calypso about the bill of rights. They adapted the electric slide [a popular dance] to the "domestic slide" and put in lyrics that were reflecting the conditions and the struggle for dignity and respect and recognition. One of the highlights, and one of these moments of transformation that was significant, was the president of the AFL-CIO [the largest labor federation in the US] at the time, John Sweeney, came to Albany for the first time in over a decade to lobby for the domestic workers bill of rights. The first two statements that he made to the delegation that we had brought up there of about 250 people were, "Ten million workers are behind this legislation because we think that it is one of the most critical pieces of legislation in the history of this country" and "I am here because my mother was a domestic worker for 40 years."

This campaign had so much heart and integrity, and was so led by the workers themselves, that it resonated in a different way with our targets so that on July 1 [2010], on the night that the bill made its way on to the Senate floor, every single Democratic Senator including the one Republican who voted for it- stood up and made a speech. They made speeches addressing the 100 work-

18. *Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez*

ers that we had brought up to Albany that night directly. They said, whether they were reflecting on their mothers or grandmothers who had been domestic workers, or their constituents that included domestic workers, or they were just talking about how this was the just and right thing to do. Almost every one of them thanked domestic workers, and the campaign they had led, for giving them the opportunity to be part of history and to correct a wrong that was decades overdue. All of us, I think for a moment, saw this genuine heartfelt gesture in the legislature at a time when the Senate was in complete chaos in New York. The most dysfunctional Senate in the history of the state. They were at each other's throats. There was no consensus on anything. They weren't unified on anything and this was the one thing that brought them all together and it was unanimous. You could see that there was this genuine reflection that, "This was why I got in to public service. To pass these pieces of legislation."

When we were reflecting back on the campaign. We thought about passing this law but also, in the process, built a movement that was really grounded in dignity and respect and that those words actually meant something substantial to everyone that participated, even marginally. Our lead organizer on the campaign, Ai-jen Poo, has said that there is no such thing as unlikely allies when you are fighting for dignity and respect and when it is clearly spelled out what that looks like. And when the people that are fighting for that are friends, are sharing their stories and leading the movement, there is no such thing as unlikely allies. All you have to do is create an opportunity for people to participate and do the right thing. That is ultimately what grounded the campaign. We went

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

into it with this genuine belief in the ultimate goodness of people. That employers, given the opportunity, want to do the right thing. They want to have clarity in the employment relationship, they want to have guidelines. That is what they said time after time in Albany when we lobbied together. Just as the workers wanted rights and protections, they wanted guidelines. They wanted to know, "What is a fair number of vacation days to give? What does severance look like? What kind of notice do I need to give before my conditions change and I have to terminate the relationship?" Those were real questions that people grappled with, and that they reflected on, and the campaign provided that opportunity for them to do. In the same way, or perhaps a much more powerful way, it did so for the workers too. To have a space to come out and say proudly, "I am a domestic worker."

RJ: What reasons, if any, did those who voted against the bill of rights give for that decision?

PG: Throughout the campaign the pushback was always, "You are fighting for special rights. Why should domestic workers get these rights legislated when everybody else actually has to form a union or negotiate a contract to obtain?" Part of the education was about how our sector is not like any other sector. You have isolated workers. You have a power differential that is 2-to-1 because they are often employed by a couple in these households. You have got these labor laws that were created with different industries in mind. They were not thinking about households. They were thinking about a minimum number of employees in a factory on the shop floor. The labor laws do not readily apply to our sector. We need a specialized solution for the problems that domestic workers are facing.

18. *Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez*

At the beginning we said that we are not asking for special rights, we are just asking to be put on equal footing with every other worker. Maybe not all workers have these things but they have the ability to secure them. But then at a certain point we realized that if we were special enough to be excluded than we need to be special enough to be included in a way that actually responds to the particularities of our sector. So that was the challenge throughout. Where the union voice, the voice of the labor movement, was critical was that as workers we were a united front. It was just as much in the interest of unionized members to have this piece of legislation passed as it was to the excluded members to have this legislation passed. Because we needed the victory, we needed to have an impact on labor laws. Working people are suffering all throughout this country and we needed a ray of hope. This legislation had every possibility of passing because we had solid campaign strategy, good leadership and we had a good message that spoke to any number communities.

On the Senate floor on the night of the vote that essentially got it out of the legislature and in to the executive chamber, the arguments that were made were not surprising. One that stood out in particular was, "Parents need to be able to let go of someone who does not give them a good feeling." The discourse was all about parents. At no point was the word employer mentioned. [It fit with] everything we had been saying: that employers do not identify as employers, and that this is why we need this law to make it clear that this is actually an employment relationship that is formal and, as such, needs to have all the corresponding labor laws apply.

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

That was one argument. The other was that this "is a loophole for illegals to get rights that they don't deserve" and that "these workers are probably doing a lot better than they would in their home countries." So, these arguments exposed the bigotry and ethnocentrism, and a whole slew of views that, at the end of the day, just didn't pass muster.

Those were the primary arguments. But the other thing that is also significant in some ways, which is also the irony, is that we didn't have an organized opposition. Like the farm workers have the farm bureau, a really well funded agribusiness lobby. We didn't have an organized opposition because employers don't identify as employers. And that actually worked for us. Where we continue to be positioned is that we are positioned to set the terms in our industry. We want the employers to identify as employers. And they didn't, which was fine, because it allowed us to just have to engage with the legislature on their arguments that we could easily respond to.

SF: I understand that the main focus of your organizational efforts now is to find means to ensure that the provisions of the Bill of Rights are implemented and expanded. You are also exploring how the right of collective bargaining can be extended to domestic workers. How do you propose to achieve these goals? What kind of community-based structures are envisaging as necessary to make collective bargaining relevant to the situation of domestic workers?

PG: One of the things that we are doing is revamping our base building structure, which basically means formalizing the current, informal networks that exist among domestic workers. The workers are already connected

18. *Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez*

to each other. Whether it is in the neighborhoods where they live or in the neighborhoods where they work, on the park bench, in the playgrounds, they are already in conversation with each other.

So this year, after the bill of rights victory, what we want to do in order to expand our capacity to reach the estimated over 200,000 workers in the metro area is to train a few dozen worker leaders to be the front line of defense. To be the organizational contacts for workers in a given area. So we're gonna be training these worker leaders in "know your rights", in negotiation, and also to be grievance intake specialists where they can respond quickly to cases of abuse and exploitation in a given area. In doing that not only will we be raising the visibility of DWU among workers but also among employers, [letting them know] that there is someone in the neighborhood that is keeping a watch on any potential cases where workers rights are being violated. As part of that, we are hoping that this program will build our capacity to engage in collective bargaining where we can build our power to sit at the table across from employers. One of the things that we are planning to do is with Jews for Racial and Economic Justice to launch what we are calling the "Domestic Justice Dialogue Project". Given that so much of our strategy has been about also doing transformative organizing, what we want to do is to bring groups of workers and groups of employers to talk about the challenges in the employment relationship, to get educated on the history of the industry in the United States, and to start thinking about an agreement or terms that would be of mutual benefit. [We need] to think about incentives that would be useful for employers, whether it is investing in a health care

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

pool, where they would have to pay two dollars an hour to pay for full health care for their worker, together with a bunch of other employers in the neighborhood, or organizing workers around the idea that it would be possible for them to negotiate as a group, and not have to individually walk into a household, given the power differential that we have in this industry, to have to negotiate terms that could or could not lead to a job. [We need] to create the conditions where we could identify what our standards are in the industry, what we are not willing to go under, and to present that and have an honest negotiation with employers to try to establish an agreement that families in a given neighborhood will follow, and where we try to organize as many households as possible to follow that. With the ultimate vision of using these local agreements as industry-wide standards that we can take back to Albany and say, "Look. This is what we were able to accomplish on the ground. It has the color of law. We have some real recommendations to make about collective bargaining and how negotiations in this industry look." That is our vision for next couple of years and what we'll be organizing toward. The majority of workers are downstate [New York City and the bordering counties], so our focus will be downstate. When we have the capacity we can investigate what it looks like statewide.

SF: Is the campaign for a Bill of Rights taking place also in other parts of the US? What has been so far the impact of your victory on the struggles of other domestic workers across the country? And what kind of help/support have you received from other workers?

PG: One of the things that we're doing through the National Domestic Workers Alliance that we helped build and

18. *Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez*

form three-and-a-half years ago, is a national research project that will be anchored in several different cities where we'll try to take a snapshot of what the conditions look like for the over two-and-a-half million domestic workers that we estimate are employed in this sector. And with that build momentum and provide additional data to advance similar campaigns in other states. So California and Massachusetts are two states that are launching domestic workers bill of rights campaigns. They are ready to go and will be modeling their campaigns on the New York victory. And also one thing that was interesting that we learned recently is that the California domestic workers bill of rights actually has the right to collectively bargain. So it is possible that we could pilot collective bargaining, or standard negotiation agreements, in tandem and be able to share lessons learned and employ similar tactics and create the momentum beyond one state.

We're also uniting forces with other excluded sectors through what we're calling the "Excluded Workers Congress" where we're bringing together about nine different sectors of workers: domestic workers, farm workers, guest workers, day laborers, taxi workers, restaurant workers, formerly incarcerated workers, work-fare workers to work on the expansion to labor protections for these sectors that have been excluded by either default or design or both. One of the key things that we're gonna be focusing on is precisely collective bargaining because a lot of our sectors share similar characteristics of workers being really isolated, many of the workers not having papers and being in these really vulnerable conditions and our labor laws just not being up to par with the realities of the 21st Century workers. It is one of the things that

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

we're really excited about and we're hoping that our pilot projects in New York will be able to help create data, experience and lessons learned.

SF: DWU is an impressive umbrella organization made of workers from every part of the world, from the Caribbean Islands to Nepal to Brazil. How have you been able to achieve such multinational composition, cutting across language/cultural, ethnic differences?

PG: We found that the bill of rights campaign served as a really critical tool to unify a really diverse workforce because no matter where people came from, the conditions they shared were really similar and that the demands that had been established or identified at the "Have Your Say Convention" really resonated with workers who had not been there. So we could go to a playground and we could talk about sick days and holidays and vacation and notice and severance and a living wage and across the board so many workers, regardless of where they were from, regardless of the language that they spoke or the different religious traditions that they came from, really identified with the fact that as workers they were being denied these basic rights. In a lot of ways the industry-wide approach that we took is ultimately what brought together all these different workers. In the same way that the Excluded Workers Congress and the campaigns that we're identifying as critical for our bases is also unifying folks from across many different sectors, from across many different racial and linguistic backgrounds.

RJ: Are there other things that might be relevant to share that might be helpful for other organizations that might try to launch campaigns that involve bridging such diverse communities?

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

PG: I think prioritizing story-telling is really a critical component of any organizing because that is where you can identify the similarities in the experiences that would allow you to tell a story that resonates with people of many different walks of life. Being able to create those opportunities where people can come together, hear from each other, talk about the conditions they are facing and be able to develop a common analysis about the root causes, that is what is gonna unify people. It is being educated about the history of how something evolved. About why we are where we are right now and just being able to just hear from each other and identify the experiences that they share in common. I feel like that is something that is really critical and often not done, where you sort of do it in reverse. Somebody else identifies what the problem is and what the solution needs to be. But it needs to be from the ground where people actually have face-to-face time where they can speak from the heart and say, "This is what I have to go through every single day. And if I can see myself in you then we can struggle together." And it is in the process of that struggling together that transformation happens and where you actually create the possibility for building movement that ultimately is about uniting people that are ostensibly from different, that occupy different spaces.

SF: What are the main problems, economic/social/emotional, that domestic workers are facing in their everyday work-experience, in their relations to their employers, as well as the authorities and the law? Does working in a 'global city' like NY hinder or facilitate organizing?

PG: I think it is probably both. Easier in that people are in close proximity to each other even though it is still a city that is pretty segregated. Also it is harder because

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

you are dealing with so many different types of people. What I was saying earlier about being really intentional about bringing different individuals face-to-face with one another and creating opportunities for those interactions to take place and for that sharing to happen. There is a lot to be said about that. There is a lot of potential that gets created by bringing people together. We always tried really hard in the bill of rights campaign not to make assumptions about anybody. The campaign was intentionally structured in a really open way. Sure, at times, we needed to question, "Well, we don't agree with this particular group on the other stuff that they work on, right? But we can agree on this." And for us that was OK because the priority was identifying shared interests and shared values and if we could start from there then we have hope for transforming those other areas where there is no overlap, where there is difference. But you have to create the opportunity for people to interact and participate.

SF: It is often said that domestic/care work is like no other work because its product is the well-being of the people cared-for, this being especially true in the case of child-care and eldercare. It is said that the forms of struggle and resistance that have been typical of industrial work do not apply here, because it is work dealing with human beings. At the same time, many care-workers, nurses in particular have rejected the blackmail used by employers claiming that they cannot strike because people's lives depend on them. How do you see this contrast?

PG: I think that is a false assumption. Our experience has been that our members identify as workers, first and foremost. In the industry in which they work, sure, the

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

problems are embedded in the fact that it is largely informal. That it is a pretty intimate relationship that is different from other employment relationships. But ultimately this is work that we are fighting to have considered real work. Our members identify as workers and have no qualms about one day going on strike if we can build to that level where it would make a meaningful difference where we could turn out thousands and thousands and thousands of workers. Our members will often talk about how we say, "This is the work that makes all other work possible." If we stop, New York City would stop running. We want to test that. We want to be able to build to a scale that would allow us to put that to test because ultimately it isn't about that blackmail or that false assumption. Our domestic workers are workers just like the steel workers or any other factory worker. They will be ready to go on strike when the time, place and conditions are right for it.

SF: How do you see the relation between paid and unpaid domestic work? Do you think that if all domestic work were paid the condition of domestic workers would improve? Do you agree with the position taken by women in the Wages For Housework Campaign that was launched internationally in the 1970s which argued that the unpaid condition of housework, its naturalization as "women's work," is the main cause of the devaluation of paid domestic/care-work as well?

PG: I think that ignores the very explicit racial history, particularly in the United States. It is identifying the devaluation of women's work as being a principal factor when in the United States what we also have to consider is that domestic work has its roots in slavery. Enslaved African women were the first domestic workers in this

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

country. In the 1930s, when labor laws were being negotiated, because domestic workers were primarily African American they were denied these rights. To ignore that history is not taking into account why domestic workers have been in the position that they are in, because it is a multitude of factors. It is the fact that they do work that is been considered "women's work," it is the fact that there is this really clear lineage to slavery, it is work that in particular brown women and immigrant women have always done, that as a form of wage labor- has always been exploited, [and treated as] expendable. When we talk about why domestic work is ultimately devalued and excluded we have to talk about all of those factors together in order to really get at the root cause and to think about solutions that would actually address and get at all that. So if we were to have this cultural shift where you start valuing women's work in the household it still would not fundamentally transform the domestic work industry. We would still have a long way to go in terms of thinking about the work that immigrant women of color in particular in this country have done for the last couple of decades as a form of wage labor that deserves to be protected and respected and valued.

SF: What is your relation with feminist organizations? What do you think of the position that some feminists take that women should not hire domestics or care-workers because it creates an unequal power relation among women? What would you say to these feminists?

PG: I am thinking about how our members would respond to that question actually. Ultimately our struggle is about valuing and lifting up the dignity of this profession, understanding it as a profession. Everyone has to

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

work, right? Many people have employers. Many people have supervisors. Many people work in workplaces that are hierarchical. So domestic workers aren't necessarily fighting to be treated differently. They are fighting to be on equal footing with all other works. If there is a woman that wants to hire someone to work in her home, if the conditions are dignified, if the conditions really reflect the value of the work, the contributions that that working is making to the home, of raising a child, of having to employ a variety of skills, everything from basic pediatrics to child psychology to health and safety to language instruction, and they are getting a living wage, a wage that really honors all of the different things that they're doing then there is no reason for that to be shameful, right, or to be wrong, or to necessarily be unequal. Ultimately what we want is fair working conditions and to get pay for an honest day's work. It is not as simple as saying, "Well, I am a feminist, I am not gonna hire somebody. If I have kids I'll just take care of my kids." Folks need work and they want to work. This is a profession. It is skilled. There is a career ladder, contrary to popular belief. There is a way for this to work, you know?

SF: How can women and men best support the struggle of DWU and domestic workers in general? What concretely each of us can do to expand domestic workers rights?

PG: We are at the place now where, at least in New York, we're launching a Know Your Rights campaign, which we understand has to have a really strong communications infrastructure because our industry is so disperse. What we're looking for our allies for support around is to help spread the word about this law in New York. If they're not in New York, to help spread the word about the value

18. *Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez*

of domestic work because what we want to do in terms of fundamentally transforming the industry, in addition to expanding basic labor rights and protections is also to change the way that people think about domestic work. To shift from this thinking that it is invisible, unskilled, inexperienced work to this thinking that is really reflective of what the work actually is, which is skilled, expert, professional and contributing significantly to the overall functioning of society and to our economy. That is not a concrete call to action but it is encouraging people to have these conversations, to think differently about the brown woman who is pushing the white kid in the stroller that for so long has been a really visible presence in New York City but that, for the reasons that we know, have been really invisible and it is about us recognizing it, making it visible, talking about the law in New York, talking about the movement of domestic workers nationally, talking about it internationally. The ILO, the International Labor Organization, is dedicating the next five years to investigating domestic work around the world and in June of 2011 will be passing a convention on the rights of domestic workers. It is on the international radar that this is a burgeoning movement that is setting precedent, not just for domestic workers but for all excluded workers and ultimately for all working people in terms of redefining the value of labor and challenging the traditional instruments and frameworks that we have relied upon to protect our rights as workers in the world.

RJ: Thinking about the international context of the readership of this interview, something that you mentioned within the interview was the notion of "transformative organizing." Do you have a few words to say about

18. Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez

what that means to you or Domestic Workers United or what that means in the context of organizing in the United States?

PG: It means a lot of things. Transformative organizing is about challenging structural inequities but it is also about personal transformation and unlearning all of the values that we have inherited through capitalism and through existing and surviving in capitalist society. It is about shifting our consciousness around building community in a different way and looking beyond individualism. In our particular context around domestic work it is been a lot about making visible the invisible. It is a lot about exposing histories of racism and discrimination. It is about self-reflection and revaluing human relationships in the context of struggle. You create campaigns with a movement building perspective, that it is not just about the ultimate win and what you can gain in the short term but that ultimately it is about the struggle you engage in with people you never thought you would engage in struggle with, who would be standing by you and who you, just by virtue of struggling together, you are transformed by. Your worldview is changed, your consciousness is shifted and that, by having participated in something like that, in a campaign that had that perspective, you will change the way that you engage in the world as a conscious, just human being. That to me is "transformative organizing" and that to me is what the bill of rights campaign gave to us and gave to everybody who ever participated in it.

For campaign information and updates regarding the implementation of the NY Domestic Workers Bill of Rights and collective bargaining, please visit

18. *Interview with Priscilla Gonzalez*

<http://www.domesticworkersunited.org> and
<http://www.knowyourrightsny.org>.

19. A Male Domestic Worker

An Interview With RJ Maccani¹

Silvia Federici: What is it like to be a male nanny? What are the main differences from the viewpoint of how you are treated by employers, what is expected of you, what tasks you may be asked to do or not to do, and the power relations generated by this work? Were you treated with more respect? Were you better paid?

RJ Maccani: I supported myself for three years by working as a nanny. I've just recently transitioned to other paid work. Over the course of those three years I cared for seven different children from four different households here in New York City.

The vast majority of my peers in this work were immigrant women of color. Sometimes I would run into a young white American woman who was working as a nanny. On only one or two occasions did I meet another man who did so. I was the only 30-year-old man that I knew working as a nanny.

¹ Interview by Silvia Federici with RJ Maccani, on his experience working three years as a child care-worker, in New York. RJ is a member of the Regeneración Collective.

19. *A Male Domestic Worker*

Amongst the other nannies, even those I was closest with, differences of gender, race, class and citizenship always felt greater than our shared experience as domestic workers. This difference held not only in the rest of our lives but within our experiences of domestic work as well.

My peers were often expected to clean their employers' homes, cook for the family or do their laundry in addition to caring for the children. At most I was responsible for ensuring that the home was in the same condition as when I began the workday, and that the children had well prepared food.

Having worked as a union organizer, I was comfortable initiating frank conversations with other nannies regarding pay and conditions. I discovered that I was usually better paid than most of the other nannies, not always, but sometimes much more so and for less work.

In one case a nanny with whom I was particularly close confided in me that she earned just \$10 an hour, which is a paltry sum given the cost of living in NYC. She worked long hours caring for two children who were in different places developmentally, which is important to note and generally more difficult than taking care of two children of about the same age/ability. She did their laundry and often cooked dinner as well. She was from Mexico, without papers and with little facility in speaking English. The family she worked for was well regarded amongst the network of middle class families in the neighborhood for whom we all worked. Perhaps more troubling, the father of that family had himself immigrated to the United States from Central America, albeit under much more favorable conditions.

19. *A Male Domestic Worker*

So in some ways I believe that other factors turned out to be as decisive as gender with respect to how employers treated me. The distance between my class background and education level, and that of my employers, was trivial next to the chasm between them and the other nannies.

I was like a value added commodity: an articulate, youthful and earnest white man to take care of your kids. From the most cynical of perspectives, I was the perfect solution for middle class parents who didn't want to see an oppressed person working in their home. I can safely say that none of the families I worked for were so cynically calculating. And in most cases we had, and maintain, a rich connection to each other.

I occupied this undefined, in between position in the neighborhood. Over a couple of years living and working in the same place, socializing outside of work hours with nannies and employers alike, I was inside of conversations that one side or the other, nanny or employer, is not normally included in and yet I was still not privy to the entirety of either group's discussions I suspect.

SF: How has working in a typically female, gender/cast job affected your relationship with your friends, family, and the people you interact with in the course of your work? How do people react on learning you work as a nanny? What has been the reaction of other nannies towards you?

RJM: Well my grandmother always inquired as to when I'd get a real job. I felt sad hearing this. Not because I felt ashamed of my work but because one of the major undertakings of my grandmother's life was raising three children.

19. *A Male Domestic Worker*

In general, though, reactions from people varied greatly. I got the impression that my employment as a nanny wasn't the sort of thing to announce at a big social gathering. You know, something must be a bit off with me if this is what I'm doing at my age. The more classed the setting, the less accepting or interested people would generally be about my work. My grandmother notwithstanding, women tended see my being a nanny much more positively, unless they were sizing me up as a potential life partner.

My political community in New York City, as well as my Mother, her partner and a few others, all understood my nanny work as an expression of my pro-feminist commitments.

I met other nannies while on playgrounds and in other public and semi-public settings where it was common for us to congregate with the children. They always assumed that I was the children's father. I was usually met with surprise and either appreciation or suspicion when it was established that I was also a nanny - appreciation for seeing a man take on this work or the suspicion of my intentions for deciding to spend so much time around children.

SF: Care work is often described as a problematic type of work, because of the individualized relation it establishes between worker and employers, because of the isolation in which the work is done, the precise definition of the tasks expected and also because the work takes place in the home of the employer and thus creates a situation of intimacy and at the same time of conflict (about control of space) that is not present in other jobs. How did you live this experience? What were the main difficulties and points of conflict you experienced?

19. *A Male Domestic Worker*

RJM: Nannying can be quite nerve-wracking for all the reasons you've listed. It's better or worse depending on how happy the parents are, if they are relaxed and down to earth or overprotective and uptight.

With an uptight parent, or worse, an uptight family, the stress level of the work can get really high. As a nanny I often had to make unanticipated decisions without input from the parents. But it's not a question of, "What would I do if this were my kid?" You've got to try to read their minds. If you choose something other than what the parents would have done, you can get in quite a bit of trouble.

Injuries can be terrifying. One day I had an accident where one of the children fell on their head. I can't remember the last time I felt that much terror. Would this poor child be permanently injured? I remember when this sort of thing happened to me while I was a kid with my mother and her friends. But it's different when you're not the parent. The child was fine, thank goodness, and the parents were sympathetic; they had had a similar accident with their older son.

However, there was a family that I worked for where the isolation of the work, the family dynamics and expectations were particularly hard. After working with their two children for a year, the mother scolded me so harshly, and in front of the kids, that I began sobbing. She apologized later and acknowledged that they'd been very happy with my work. But there was no one else there to bear witness to that treatment, or to have a memory of the events that led up to it.

Upon reflection I realized that the mother had frequently talked down to the father in front of the children

19. *A Male Domestic Worker*

as well. The misgivings I had about the way I was treated wouldn't be validated by anyone else's first-person experience until a friend of mine also worked in that home some time later. That kind of affirmation can be a rare luxury for a nanny. It was through our conversation as back-to-back nannies that we recognized a pattern when the older of the two children began talking down to the father as well. This is the kind of really intimate stuff that stays with me.

SF: How did you deal with the emotional aspect of childcare: the desire to and danger of becoming too attached to the child/ren you care for, in a situation in which you can be suddenly separated from them and have no authority to shape decisions affecting their lives or preventing negative treatments of them by the parents?

RJM: I miss all the children that I've known through this work. They're so cute, how could I not want to see them? That being said, I don't miss the work itself. It feels very mundane at times, and yet it often requires your full attention. I was usually quite happy to return the kids to their parents at the end of my shift.

I never felt that I had much authority. I could mitigate a problem, or be supportive of the child's self-determination, but that was about it. There was a very young boy I took care of who insisted on wearing dresses. It was great to be there for him, to affirm his choice, to talk gender with a four year old, but I had no illusions about my overall power in the dynamic of his home.

I do want to see all of them again, to see how they are doing. This is for me more than them, though. The youngest ones will not even remember who I am.

19. *A Male Domestic Worker*

SF: Has being a man enabled you to better control the conditions of your work or made it more difficult? What tactics, forms of ‘subversion’ have you used to resist unwanted tasks, express discontent, force different relations? Have you joined care workers organizations? What have been the most effective form of resistance /struggle you have engaged in?

RJM: Sometimes just my being a “man” was a service I provided. In some cases the parents felt their children needed to spend more time around men, or needed a man to keep up with their kid. Lowered expectations around my capacity to provide certain forms of care, such as cleaning or food preparation, meant that I often got out of work that female nannies would not. This was a curious reproduction of part of the problem that I was presumably there to solve: in three out of the four households it was the mother, in some form or another, who was more responsible for the children than the father.

I got involved with care work as political work as early as 2004, maybe earlier. For example, as members of Critical Resistance NYC, a local chapter of a national penal abolition organization, Mayuran Tiruchelvam and I would step out of meetings inside of an alternative to incarceration facility for women to take care of the children so the mothers could more fully participate. Over the summer of 2005 I joined two other volunteers, Ileana Méndez-Peñate and Radhika Singh, in serving as a bilingual presence within a childcare cooperative, Pachamama, that was created and run entirely by mothers of color in Brooklyn – most of whom spoke only English or only Spanish.

Pachamama was a political project that grew out of Sista II Sista and other organizational experiences of women of

19. *A Male Domestic Worker*

color in the city. One of the organizers and mothers in the cooperative, Ije Ude, was the person who first politicized me around my experiences of sexual abuse as a child. By the end of 2005 Ileana, Radhika, Mayuran and I formed *Regeneración*, a collective grounded in working with children and relationship building with radical immigrant, queer and women of color organizations.

I've found *Regeneración* to be an effective form of struggle. Many more people have become involved in the collective since we initiated it back in '05. We've worked in concert with local organizations as well as national gatherings to create space for children to be present and sometimes directly participate in struggles. For example, a couple of years ago we worked with one of our partner organizations, Domestic Workers United (DWU), and Jews for Racial and Economic Justice as well, to create a children's vigil in support of the Domestic Workers Bill of Rights campaign. The children of domestic workers came together with children taken care of by domestic workers to draw, sing and demonstrate in front of City Hall.

And, of course, *Regeneración* being there to work with the children has facilitated parents' participation in groups such as DWU, Families for Freedom (fighting detentions and deportations) or Center for Immigrant Families (defending, improving and building beyond public education in Manhattan). It was through working with the collective that I was first approached to do paid childcare work, to be a nanny.

Although I was a domestic worker, I never joined DWU as a member because of that chasm I described earlier between the relative privileges of my lived experience and those of the immigrant women of color who are DWU's

19. *A Male Domestic Worker*

base. It's been through *Regeneración* that I've found a space to directly organize around care work.

SF: What are the main lessons you have learned about (a) the nature of care work, childcare in particular, and (b) the forms of struggle that are appropriate for this type of work. It is often argued (also by childcare/eldercare workers) that the forms of struggle that apply to industrial work do not apply, as you cannot (for instance) sabotage the people you are caring for. On the basis of your experience how would you want childcare/carework to be restructured, reorganized?

RJM: Part of the reason that I became a nanny, aside from the fact that I needed to earn a wage, was to gain experience in a sphere that felt very unfamiliar. I learned that childcare is very hard work. It's led me to think hard about whether or not I want to be a parent one day. As a job, it's harder still for how little money and respect is granted to those who do the work.

Domestic Workers United is an obvious reference point here as a form of struggle for this kind of wage labor. Beyond this, taking into account the mostly uncompensated care work that is happening all the time can lead us to shift how we struggle. This is one of the insights we've had within *Regeneración*. What's the pace of a movement that includes parents, children, elders, people who have fallen ill or are living with disabilities? These categories inevitably encompass each of us for at least some period of our lives. What do we gain when we acknowledge that, plan for it, build all of ourselves into the plan of struggle?

I'd like to see care work reorganized so that it is not always some who are giving and others who are receiving. It is something to which we all can contribute, in one fashion

19. A Male Domestic Worker

or another. It can be a pleasure not only to receive care but also to give it. Care work can be deeply humanizing. Let's share this work. Let's feel joy, despair, suffering and relief, together.

20. The Regeneration Manifesto

Regeneración Childcare Collective

The Regeneración Childcare Collective is committed to growing an intergenerational movement for collective liberation, in which people of all ages can participate, learn from each other, take care of each other, and dramatically reshape the conditions of their lives. Since 2005, Regeneración has built relationships with and between domestic workers, immigrant families, families facing detention, queer families organizing for racial and economic justice, and radical parents and caretakers; we've sent delegations to the U.S. Social Forum, facilitated a children's program at the Critical Resistance 10 conference, and been in dialogue with radical childcare providers across the country; we've occupied cafeterias in New York City, swung on swingsets in Detroit, and played hide-and-go-seek in Oakland.

As we did all this, we discovered an incredible secret: the walls that constrain our everyday lives are riven with fissures, tears and holes. The holes are hard to spot, but once we notice them, they nourish us with a powerful magic. We can peer through them and see realities that

exist right now, inside this world and inside of ourselves—magical realities in which people fashion their world together, everyone feels respected and loved, and people are responsible to one another and to a collective vision. The more we practice our magic, the more we're able to notice these holes, tug at their edges, and begin stepping through them into what awaits us. Here are some pieces of the magic we've practiced so far. Use them wisely.

Intergenerational Movements are Powerful

When movements provide people of all ages a way to participate in their own liberation—from the very young to the very old—they are capable of fantastic things. Intergenerational movements sustain themselves through periods of intense repression and regenerate over time. They develop a profound collective memory, which allows each generation to learn from the experiences of those that came before. They offer more than a scene, which one dips into and out of on a whim, or a phase, which one ultimately abandons for more serious responsibilities. Intergenerational movements create cultures of resistance that people use to understand themselves, their communities, and collective action in the world throughout their entire lives. Struggles that embody this vision continue to surge from the global south, and they remain a huge inspiration for *Regeneración*.

Kids Change How we Do Politics

Kids teach us that movement is a process—not a program—and that this process is playful, imaginative and creative, not just serious and rational. In turn, we teach kids that their play is a powerful tool they can and should cultivate throughout their lives, with serious implications for the world we inhabit. Interactions with kids produce another kind of politics, one that recognizes play as a crucial ingredient of any movement, and demolishes the walls that sequester it in childhood or bar it from our adult lives.

Childcare is a Central Element, But Not the Only One

From its inception, *Regeneración* has provided childcare to low-income parents of color and queer parents, in order to facilitate their participation in movement groups. This ally role remains central to our work, but it's situated within a larger vision. *Regeneración* also wants to change and deepen the way groups interact with children. We want to build connections between radical parents and caretakers, furthering their self-organization and nurturing movement that is relevant and accessible to folks with kids. Ultimately, we want to change how individuals and groups connect: not just through formal meetings and compartmentalized issues, but through all our various forms of life, including families, caretaking and personal relationships. Connecting in this way enriches our movement, and at the same time, changes its scope and vision.

Childcare is Valuable, Critical, Beautiful Labor

As a form of work, childcare has been feminized and devalued in our society. All around us, women are expected to care for children in isolation and without support; schools and jails produce kids like commodities on an assembly line; and domestic workers are exploited while raising the children of the wealthy. Regeneración wants something better. We believe childcare is a central part of our creative activity as a people, a kind of labor that creates and molds subjectivity, producing human beings who can interact with others and cooperate with their peers. We believe childcare is the crucial labor that reproduces human community, generation after generation. We want to draw it into the open, recognize its true importance, and make it the collective labor of all.

We are a Cultural Catalyst

We aren't capable of organizing an entire intergenerational movement under our umbrella, nor do we want to. Our primary focus is not to grow our organization, but to grow our vision of an intergenerational movement for collective liberation. To do this we will model the movement we want to see, inspire other groups to transform themselves, and provide resources to help the process along. Our work is about more than just changing political positions, or having people adopt ours. It requires us to make

anew our entire culture, and reshape our communities and movements.

We Are On a Journey, Building the World We Want as We Go

Our dreams are big, and we still have much to do. But after some years of growing with kids and their communities, we see many more holes in the walls of the system than when we first started. They are all over the place, growing in size and connecting with one another. The small things we're doing now will further these openings, and the world that awaits us will become bigger, stronger and more beautiful.

21. The Triumph of the Domestic Workers

Konstanze Schmitt

In the rich countries, we are having a *boom of domestic labour*. More and more children, elderly persons and people with disabilities are being cared by domestic workers who often work under precarious conditions. A new type of female migration has emerged from these conditions in the last years. Female migrant workers not only contribute to the economic growth of their home countries by sending money home, they also contribute to and maintain economic standards in the countries they are working in. By leaving the care of their families in hands of other women, the migration of women leads to the creation of global care chains. As a disputed political field, care work gives birth to new gender subjectivities, hierarchies, desires and resistances.

I met Rafaela from *Territorio Domestico* at a conference about care work in 2008. Herself a domestic worker, she told us how the women of her group presented themselves as lawyers in order to recover the wage of an undocumented colleague who was kicked out of her work without getting paid. They succeeded. The women, most of them

21. *The Triumph of the Domestic Workers*

from Latin American, founded the association *SEDOAC* (Active Domestic Work) in 2006. Territorio Doméstico is located in the self-organized feminist center Eskalera Karakola in Madrid, where women, collectives and activists of various nationalities and with different experiences, who work as domestic workers or are otherwise connected to this issue, meet once a month. Together and along with other domestic workers' associations and collectives, SEDOAC and Territorio Doméstico are *fighting for equal rights* of domestic labour, against precarization, and for the rights of domestic workers no matter what their residence permit status is.

I began to work with Territorio Doméstico in 2009, having meetings with the group and various discussions with different persons. These discussions formed the main basis for the performative work we realized together in February and March 2010. During this time, I worked with six domestic workers on four short documentary based scenes that thematize *the conditions of a domestic worker's daily life*: migration, precarious work conditions, exploitation and irregular residence. The performance was part of the 'International Action Day of the Domestic Workers' that took place in the center of Madrid on the 28th March and at which hundreds of women took part.

The scenes had to be short and easy to understand – even without hearing the words. The most adequate form for this we found was *Agit Prop*. The short scenes about repression and resistance in the daily life of the domestic workers were written and performed by the workers in an assertive and forceful presentation. At the time, *the performance fitted in* with the other parts of the demonstration. For example, after our last scene, the manifesto

21. *The Triumph of the Domestic Workers*

of the demonstration was read in front of the wagon and the carpet in the middle of Plaza del Sol.

The wagon, which was constructed with a painting on bicycle wheels and moving gearwheels, was a very important part of the performance. It accompanied the demonstration and formed the scenery for the scenes. Territorio Doméstico, Stephan Dillemath and I painted it together on a Sunday with grilled chicken and Coca Cola. The commonly developed painting shows various *revolutionary women*/icons of the women's and workers' movement, state institutions and the many-headed hydra. *The hydra attacks* the judges of the Spanish Higher Court.

The painting is called "Triumph of the domestic workers" and it refers to a colonial painting that it reinterprets and turns upside down: "The triumph of the name of Jesus". Being invited to "The Potosí Principle,"¹ an exhibition about actual and historical forms of colonialism and the involvement of picture production in this process, we were asked by the curators to refer in our work – as were all of the participants – to a colonial painting.

The "Triumph of the name of Jesus" *shows a chariot* with several floors and the prophets, church fathers, apostles and saints of the Catholic Church on it. The four evangelists seem to pull the chariot – their sashes seem

¹The exhibition „The Potosí Principle“ is curated by Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann and Max Jorge Hinderer. It opened in May 2010 in Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, and moved to Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, in October. In 2011, it will be shown in Museo Nacional de Arte, La Paz, Bolivia. The installation „The triumph of the domestic workers“ by Territorio Domestico, Stephan Dillemath and Konstanze Schmitt consists of the wagon, a video of the performance, fotos, texts and various stage props.

21. *The Triumph of the Domestic Workers*

to disappear into the mouth of the serpent which squirms around the chariot. Above the chariot, we see Ignatius from Loyola, founder of the Jesuitic Orden (really important for the missionary work in Latin America), and behind him, John Baptist. On the flag are the allegories of church, faith and justice. Behind the chariot, there is the family tree of Jesus. But under the wheels of the wagon, there are four women who represent the four continents. A much-discussed question when looking at the picture was: Who actually *sets the wagon in motion*? Is it the four evangelists in front of the wagon, the siren twining around it, or the four women under the wagon moving its wheels with their hands?

One of the slogans of Territorio Domestico is: *Without us, the world doesn't revolve*. Care and domestic work is in its different forms the *base for social and capitalistic production*. Reproduction work as the central element of the society dovetails with all other areas of production, be it companies, universities, hospitals or careers in general. All work depends in the end of the work of these women who mainly come from Spain's former colonies.

In order to visualise this principle and domestic work in the society, Territorio Domestico has developed its own symbol: a system of gearwheels set in motion by a female domestic worker. Indebted to the wealth of images of the classical labour movement, domestic work now takes on the central position in regard to factory labour. These gearwheels who are very present in the painting, are the *link between* the colonial painting/situation and the actual system of colonialism, and it focuses on the power of the persons under the wheels – answering the question of “Who moves the wagon/world?”

22. Servicio Doméstico Activo

The Association of Domestic Workers in Madrid

Konstanze Schmitt

Rafaela, Marlene, and Mary from the Sedoac association in conversation with Konstanze Schmitt

Rafaela is from the Dominican Republic, where she did key educational, social, and cultural work. She has been in Madrid for twenty years. For four years she had no papers. Now she has acquired Spanish nationality. For a few years now she has been working forty-hour weeks in domestic service for a private family.

Marlene is from Colombia, where she was a secretary. She fled the insecurity of her own country in search of a “better life” and more financial stability. She has been in Madrid for eight years. Marlene works forty hours a week cleaning banks for a temporary employment agency for a monthly salary of €580. She does so to allow herself to make social security contributions. As her salary is not

enough to live on she has to work on an hourly basis in private houses.

Mary was also a secretary. She left Colombia during the economic crisis in the 1990s. She spent several years working in Costa Rica. She has been living and working as a live-in domestic employee in Madrid since 2007.

Konstanze Schmitt: The association Sedoac was set up in 2006. What prompted the group to be set up and how does it work? What are your objectives?

Marlene: We met each other at some workshops organized by another association related to care work. We started talking to some other domestic workers and we found we were in some pretty tough situations; there are some very bad employers and families out there. There are live-in workers who barely get food to eat. We said no. And we had the idea of setting up an association for domestic staff, to make ourselves heard, to make ourselves seen and to claim our rights. Sedoac has been a legally established association for a year and a half, and I am the treasurer.

Konstanze Schmitt: Attending your meeting yesterday, I realized that it is a larger space: it was not only women from Sedoac, but also Agencia Precaria and other women's groups.

Mary: The workshop at the La Karakola feminist social center where we meet on the second Sunday of every month is called "Domestic Territory." It is a place where we listen, provide support and help, and get involved with all aspects of our work, with what the government wants to do with foreigners, etc. "Domestic Territory" is not a collective, but a place for building, with very different women and groups participating. What unites us is that we are

all, in some way or other, involved in care work and domestic service. We want to get stronger and join up with other groups to make us stronger, and to fight for our rights. Sometimes there are fifty women, sometimes twenty. And we come from many different countries, such as Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Morocco, Bangladesh, and, obviously, Spain. As there has been a big crackdown recently some women without papers no longer turn up, for fear of being arrested and deported. I have been here for three years as a live-in care worker for the elderly, and I have no papers.

Konstanze Schmitt: What are your political objectives?

Rafaela: One of the main motives is our working conditions. Domestic service is a very poorly paid profession and, besides that, we do not get the same benefits as other welfare systems. We are in a special system that means we do not have the right to unemployment benefit, sick leave, a minimum wage, or paid vacations. The law gives us absolutely no protection. Along with other domestic service associations, we form part of a national platform of domestic workers. We want domestic work to be covered by the general system, for it to be valued as highly as any other job. I consider myself to be a worker, and my rights should be respected. We are also fighting for the legalization of people in our sector who have no papers. The current government has a dual strategy; on the one hand, they are promising more rights for domestic workers with papers, and at the same time introducing intermediary companies to operate as temporary employment agencies. On the other hand, they are criminalizing workers without papers. But these are the very women who end up in

22. *Servicio Doméstico Activo*

domestic service, not just because it is one of the few options for them, but because employers are always looking to pay as little as possible, and that is why they look for women from new countries, not women who are already organized.

In 2005, the Zapatero government legalized 800,000 people without papers. Now, the climate has changed. Previously, you could be legalized by being established. If you had been in Spain for three years and you had an employment contract, they gave you a residence permit. Now it is much more restrictive, and we are afraid that Spain is bringing its immigration laws in line with European regulations. We believe that the policies of the government and Europe want to split us into “the good ones” with papers and “the bad ones” without. We cannot allow this to happen.

But our criticism goes beyond that; the Spanish State and the Spanish economy have profited from us for years, to do a job that no one paid a real wage for. Now it is time for them to provide the money required to give us dignified working conditions. Now is the time for them to pay to bring us into the general system, and to recognize our right to sick leave, and to implement the financial aspect of the Dependency Law. I am also talking about professional training.

It is thanks to us that Spanish women managed to get out of their houses. Some people criticize us for perpetuating gender roles. But it is not the domestic workers who perpetuate them, it is the people who employ us. This is the work that we were given.

Marlene: We also have an education project, mainly aimed at new arrivals, so that we can raise their awareness and let them know about their rights.

Konstanze Schmitt: What do you actually do? What strategies do you use?

Marlene: Let me give you the example of Latifa. Latifa is a girl from Morocco who worked as a live-in, until they fired her for no reason and refused to pay her wages. At the Sunday meetings, we told her that she had to report them, but Latifa was scared. Of course she was. Firstly, because at the time she did not speak Spanish very well, and secondly because she had no papers. Then, one of the girls at Karakola called Latifa's former employer pretending to be a lawyer. They filed the complaint, followed it up, the settlement process was a success and they had to pay Latifa. This shows that you can file a complaint, even if you do not have papers, but you have to know who to complain to, because if you go to the police without any papers, they will deport you.

Mary: Without the girls at Karakola we would not be where we are now. They lend us their space, they advise us, they help with our projects and our dreams. They are always with us. They use their influence, for example by getting lawyers to advise us on the current legal situation. We are always looking for partner associations and movements to help us fight against precarious employment.

Konstanze Schmitt: You mentioned the issue of domestic work being invisible. What do you do to protest about this issue, and to raise awareness?

Rafaela: The first time Sedoac went out onto the street was in November 2008. We were claiming our rights, confronting rumors about intermediary companies, something

22. *Servicio Doméstico Activo*

which was being negotiated in government without our input. We denounced the fact that undocumented employees are treated as slaves, and we chanted our slogans for the first time: “The world would stop without us!” and “No more slavery!” We also did some street theatre on the issue of domestic work. This gave us a lot of strength. There were not many of us, but we were able to break the silence. At the same time we issued a leaflet on “advice for powerful domestic workers,” which we handed out in the streets, inviting women to our meetings. On March 8, we got together as a group for the International Women’s Day demonstration, for the third year running. And on March 28, for International Domestic Workers Day, we took to the streets with associations and individuals who want to join in our fight.

Konstanze Schmitt: Mary, what is it like as a live-in worker with no papers?

Mary: Well, the two things kind of depend on one another. Women without papers do not have many options. I cannot do cleaning work by the hour like Marlene, it would be very risky for me. I try not to move around too much, and I take taxi cabs whenever I can. I do not go out at night. I always try to go along slowly. I avoid stations and places where there are lots of migrants. Once I got caught in a raid in the Metro. They arrested everyone who looked Latin American, but they did not check me because I am fair-haired and blue-eyed.

The drawbacks of being a live-in worker are obvious: It is very difficult to have your own space and time. There are people who think that because you are there twenty-four hours a day, you can work all the time. You have to set boundaries, including for your personal life. I am

caring for an elderly man. Like other live-ins, I have to put up with sexual harassment at work from some employers. But living in helps me to save money. My dream is to return to my country and to set up a project.

Rafaela: Yes, there are a lot of expenses here. Even I – and I am in the “privileged” position of earning €950 a month for a forty-hour week with a contract, insurance, and vacations – spend €550 on accommodation. I cannot save anything, I work to live and to send something back to my family. My mother is ill and has no pension.

Konstanze Schmitt: It sounds like you are in one of the “global care chains” described by Arlie Russell Hochschild and other sociologists. Women who emigrate for work, often as carers or domestic workers, leave the care and education of their families (children, parents) to other, poorer women or family members. What are your experiences?

Rafaela: The people migrating to Spain up until the 1990s were women. The men came in the early 1990s, with the rise in construction. But all that has passed now. On the other hand, there has always been demand for domestic staff in Spain. It was the women who went, they made the chain in two ways: Your family depended on you. So all you could do was work. You feel responsible. I paid for my sister to do an economics degree. She worked for a little over a year at a law firm, then I told her to come to Spain. She is here now, working as a domestic worker. The fact is that she earns eight times more here than in the Dominican Republic. It is another chain: we bring our sisters, our mothers, and our aunts here to work. I also think it is very common for there to be an emotional chain in domestic service: You leave your children there,

22. *Servicio Doméstico Activo*

and you get really lonely. There is a great deal of solitude in migration, especially among live-ins, and eventually, whether you like it or not, your affections are projected onto the people you are working with, especially if they are children. There are families that take advantage of these feelings to further exploit you.

The interview was conducted in Madrid and Vallecas, October 10/12, 2009.

On March 28, 2010, domestic workers demonstrated in downtown Madrid for labor rights and rights of residence. The women of Territorio Doméstico, a platform of organized domestic workers, individuals, and activists, wheeled this wagon through the streets. It was a stage set for several scenes of an agitprop performance staged within the frame of the demonstration: “Latifa’s Story,” “Sans Papiers in Europe,” and “Arrested” – scenes in which domestic workers give an account of oppression and resistance in their daily lives.

23. Interview with Liliana Caballero Velasquez

Interview conducted via email by Silvia Federici with Liliana CABALLERO VELASQUEZ, of the Association MADRES COMUNITARIAS in Bogota' Colombia. [February 2011]

This is our situation, us being the COMMUNITARIAN MOTHERS. We are a group dedicated to caring and protecting young children in Colombia. We look after the nutrition as well as the physical, social and emotional growth of the children in general. For the past 22 years we have been fighting to have the Colombian State recognize this work as a most important work, but apparently these people could not care less given that we have been exploited for a long time, first of all with bad remuneration, which affects us to a great extent given that many of us are heads of our families or rather single mothers raising our children on our own.

We have had connections with organizations at the national level including farmers' and factory workers' organizations... and many others. Through these unions we have motivated each other. Beside looking after 12 kids every day I have to prepare the food for them and sit down and feed them myself. And on top of it all there is no

23. *Interview with Liliana Caballero Velasquez*

space to welcome them and I have to use my own home where I live with my children, using all of my own services, like electricity, water, gas, and the cost of all of them is 150,000 Columbian pesos. I have to pay for the cleaning with the 24,000 pesos that they provide for, and my wages, if you can call them that, because they are 221,000 pesos a month which is not even enough to go the market for the week.

Generally, we work in our homes and we have 13 to 14 kids under our care, but some communitarian mothers work in groups and cover the rents with their own wages because the employer doesn't help them in any way. The working hours are half shift from 5 am to 1 pm, our wages are called bonuses because none of us are state employees and we cannot say that they are wages. We have no benefits; we do not have paid holidays; and we don't have weekly time off, because in our time off we must assist obligatory meetings and trainings.

The tasks we have to carry out are the following: we prepare the food to give to the children, we carry out pedagogical activities, ensure they receive a good nutritional diet, we take care of their health. Apart from these, we must make sure that the children's rights are respected, that we are up to date with the planning of the activities that we do with the kids. They [the authorities] do not help us to improve the space where we attend to these 13 or 14 children; the parents are freed from their responsibilities and these are imposed on us, the communitarian mothers.

Our working conditions are very hard. Some communitarian mothers don't have any social security because the employer doesn't take responsibility for this. With our

23. Interview with Liliana Caballero Velasquez

struggle we managed to force the state to create a special regime within social security, which includes the 1023 law of May 3, 2006. But the employers do not want to take responsibility to pay for it. Some communitarian mothers have worked for 22 years without receiving any benefit in exchange; some are 59-60-65 years old and it is injustice what they get for a pension. We will end up with nothing.

We also do not have any type of job security. We can be fired at any time, and many of us have been, unfairly, some because they were very ill, others for minimal problems. To these we must add the dismissals or termination of our services following standard quality checks, when they evaluate the space in which we attend to the children. If this is not adequate they close the communitarian homes down with no second thought; the employers demand all this but they do not help us make these spaces suitable, which are our own homes which we offer to provide the services to the children.

Our main problem is the lack of recognition for our work and the fact that we working consecutive hours. We also have problems with the workers who are sent by foundations to manage the communitarian homes, that is, we are managed by an operator. The relationship with the children is excellent because of the work we do; those who love what they do keep good relations with all that surrounds them, we are never scared to look after children, on the contrary, it is our duty to do so. But we, communitarian mothers, end up neglecting our own children to look after those of the community, because they do not allow us to bring our children to the communitarian homes, because according to them we would be neglecting the children we are caring for.

23. Interview with Liliana Caballero Velasquez

Our organization is a union for communitarian mothers, we organize together with all the other organizations at the national level, which has prepared us to manage to defend our own rights and problems. We organize mobilizations, meetings, trainings, and we know people who are part of the parliament and support us. Our demands? We want recognition for our work, we want to obtain respect, and a lot benefits because we are the pillars of early childhood.

The situation I am describing is a general one. Out of 100% of communitarian mothers, 99% of us work in our own home, while the remaining percentage work in places called 'gatherings' where the communitarian mother has to be, according to the employer, the one in charge of paying the rent and the services of such place. The reality is that we live in a state of labour exploitation that you cannot even imagine, you know, Rihoacha, la Guajira in Colombia is a place where indigenous Wayuu live and many of their women are communitarian mothers, they are much more exploited, you know, if you saw the depressing conditions in which these indigenous women work you would immediately publish all of this.

24. Interview with Victoria Mamani

Interview conducted by Silvia Federici with Victoria Mamani (Vicky) of Mujeres Creando, at the Mujeres Creando Center, in La Paz, on February 25, 2011. Victoria, who is a member of Mujeres Creando, speaks of the struggle of domestic workers, in which she participated, that led to the passing of a legislation in 2003 specifying these workers' rights and entitlements.

Victoria: Already in 1952 there was an organization of women [domestic workers] that struggled to obtain some rights: the right to rest at least once a week and to have a vacation, because at the time they did not have the right to go out. In 1984, the struggle started again. At the roots of the discrimination against them is often the fact that domestic workers in Bolivia are indigenous women who cannot speak Spanish, because they are from the rural areas; they are discriminated also because of the clothes they wear, often they have to stop wearing their *polleras** and put on a dress, they are also criticized because they use too much water.

24. *Interview with Victoria Mamani*

The union that women formed in 1984 was the first union of women domestic workers in the country. The struggle began when one woman who was a member of the Catholic Church was accused of theft. The women then decided to organize. This is how the first union was born. Their mobilization eventually led to the passing of the Bill 2450 that regulates domestic work and was approved by the Bolivian Congress on April 9, 2003.

With the passing of this law domestic workers have obtained 15 days of vacation, some severance pay, calculated on every year of work performed, the fixing of the hours of work, which are supposed to be eight. But in many cases the law cannot be implemented and many women now work ten hours a day. Why the difference? Because employers say that the women consume food and enjoy other benefits. They say it is right that they work ten hours because they sleep in the house. What most matters to the workers is mutual respect. The new law was first presented in parliament in 1993. There was some hope because the vice president was an indigenous person, Hugo Cardenas. But nothing happened. There was a strong struggle. There were marches. The domestic workers were the first to enter in Plaza Murillo something that before had been forbidden. Ten compañeras gathered and started screaming.

I never told my employers that I was part of the union. We had a representative who later became the Minister of Justice under Morales, but in this period was the executive secretary of the union. We demanded to be able to rest on Sunday. The police came with gas. We decided to march also on Monday. We passed in front of the house of the president; many people insulted us, “what are you doing

24. Interview with Victoria Mamani

here” – they yelled – “why you are not in the kitchen?” But many supported us too.

Today there are four union organizations of domestic workers. The most important is made of women who do skilled manual work. They make *polleras* and mantas. Still, domestic workers face the problem of where to meet. First it was in a church, then the squares have been the places of meeting, they would meet there and bring there their machines, and this served to unite them and gave rise to new organizations. As I said, there are now four organizations, with the same name, but existing in different localities, including in El Alto. We struggle with the Federación Nacional de Trabajadoras del Hogar de Bolivia (FENATRAHOB) [The National Federation Of Domestic Workers of Bolivia] that gathers 15 unions in Bolivia.¹

In Latin America in the 1990s there was a meeting that was held in Bogotá (Columbia) bringing together 15 countries, on the theme of domestic work. The Latin American Confederation has its main centers in Chile and in Brazil. The objective now is to obtain a daycare for domestic workers so that they can work more freely. Domestic workers

¹[Note of the editors] FENATRAHOB is a national grassroots union for women only. Membership is now up to 6,000. Its general objective is to improve living, working and salary conditions for Bolivian domestic workers (trabajadoras del hogar). FENETRAHOB comprises 17 affiliated unions active in the departments of La Paz, Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, Potosi, Trinidad, Sucre, Oruro and Tarija. Its offices are located in La Paz, Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, Oruro and Sucre. This federation ensures that its members receive organizational support and provides them with training. It offers domestic workers general training to enable them to expand their areas of expertise, increase their self-confidence and develop their professionalism.

24. *Interview with Victoria Mamani*

want to work in a more self-controlled, self-managed way. They pay for the fliers they make by assigning a quota to their members. But despite the Law there has not been any success in the matter of health-care, pension, health insurance. There is a government project to grant domestic workers health insurance, but the problem is always implementation. We have publicized the law with fliers to raise consciousness and obtain respect on both sides. When an employer does not pay we denounce him/her publicly, so, bit by bit, a new attitude is beginning to take hold. The new generations are more combative, they know their rights and they demand to be respected, and if they are abused they denounce it immediately. For our part, we have done workshops and many meetings to raise consciousness. The government every year decides what is the minimum wage. Presently it is 670 bolivianos per month (roughly \$100), but few domestic workers earn this amount. Most earn between 350 and 450 bolivianos.

As migrant women, domestic workers received no support from the government. They are very independent. We received support from a sister organization that helped us organize, helped us with a lawyer, to elaborate the law. We also got support from young students. Now that we have a general law the problem that we face is how to make sure it is implemented. The federation now is focusing on this questions. Now the domestic workers are affiliated with the Central Obrera Boliviana and other national and departmental organizations of human rights; they are also affiliated with a research organization.

25. Socialist Feminist Collective¹

We would like to inform you about a campaign started today in Turkey, in 5 different cities including Istanbul. The campaign will take one year and will be run by Socialist Feminist Collective.²

The main theme of the campaign is to highlight women's double shift between unpaid and paid labor and clarify our demands from men, capitalists and the state. Below you may find the video of preparations and the public announcement in English.³

¹Sosyalist Feminist Kolektif
sosyalistfeministkolektif@gmail.com
www.sosyalistfeministkolektif.org

Adres. Tel sok. No.20/3 Beyoğlu-İstanbul Tel:0212 243 49 93

²<http://www.sosyalistfeministkolektif.org/>

³<http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/7Wd5wBaf4w2rgl8YDv5KQg?feat=email>

Manifesto

We want back the hours, Days and Years we have spent on housework! We want back our due in the house!

We are calling on women to stop doing any housework until we are paid back our due. We want housework to be men's work. Cooking, laundry, ironing, dish washing. . . Let men do the housework, day in and day out, for hours on end.

Let the fathers care for their children: Prepare them for school in the morning, prepare their meal in the evening and help them with their homework. When the kids are ill, let the fathers leave work and run home to look after them.

On the weekend, let the fathers take the kids to their leisure activities, go searching in the markets for cheap, healthy, nourishing food, go back to pick them back with their arms loaded.

Let sons care for their elderly mothers and fathers. Let them look after their parents when they are ill; let them remember to remind them when to take their pills; let them remember to give them baths. . .

While we women are watching TV in the evening, let men put the kettle on, put the kids to sleep and make the necessary preparations for the next day.

Let men learn how to share other people's problems and to establish proper relations with their own fathers and sons.

We Want Back Our Due in the House!

We are calling on women to stop doing any housework until we are paid back our due. We want housework to be men's work. Cooking, laundry, ironing, dish washing... Let men do the housework, day in and day out, for hours on end.

Let the fathers care for their children: Prepare them for school in the morning, prepare their meal in the evening and help them with their homework. When the kids are ill, let the fathers leave work and run home to look after them.

On the weekend, let the fathers take the kids to their leisure activities, go searching in the markets for cheap, healthy, nourishing food, go back to pick them back with their arms loaded.

Let sons care for their elderly mothers and fathers. Let them look after their parents when they are ill; let them remember to remind them when to take their pills; let them remember to give them baths...

While we women are watching TV in the evening, let men put the kettle on, put the kids to sleep and make the necessary preparations for the next day.

Let men learn how to share other people's problems and to establish proper relations with their own fathers and sons.

We Demand from the Bosses!

We refuse to work exclusively in low paid, insecure and flexible jobs. Women also have the right to be unionized and to have access to social security.

Are men better in weaving, cutting out, sewing and designing? We want equal pay for equal worth!

We know very well that when parental leaves are transferable and optional, men prefer not to use them. We want non-transferable leaves for fathers.

We want crèches in all work places which hire more than fifty workers irrespective of sex! We want our children to go the crèche in their father's work place.

We also demand neighbourhood crèches. Bosses hiring less than fifty workers should make financial contributions to the neighbourhood crèches in proportion to the number of their workers.

You have been privileging men for centuries. We want positive discrimination when we apply for jobs, while we work and in professional training courses. We demand quotas in "male jobs"!

The streets are not safe for women. We want safe transportation for 24 hours to and from work.

We Demand from the State!

We demand the right to retirement pension at fifty, in return for the domestic labour we have spent on our husbands and companions. Retirement pension for housewives!

25. *Socialist Feminist Collective*

Although we run our households for years on end, when we go out to look for work, we are counted as unqualified labour. We want to be paid unemployment fees once we start looking for a job, until we get one.

We are only offered training courses in “female skills”. We demand quotas for women in technical skill courses.

We refuse to be deprived of social security when we do home-based work, work as care workers or cleaning ladies, or when we work on land for practically nothing.

We don't want to have to count on our fathers or husbands when we are ill; we do not want to live on the street with an empty stomach. The right to individual health security and a decent shelter for all women!

We work both at home and in the work place. We do double shifts. We want early retirement!

When we say “enough is enough” and want to get a divorce, we want unconditional alimony payment: We refuse to be preached on decency, virtue and morals. The state should pay the alimony when the divorced husband fails to do so.

Is it only our responsibility to care for the elderly? We want professional public care for old people if they prefer to go on living in their own homes. We also demand good quality homes for old people.

26. Interview with Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas

Interview conducted by Silvia Federici with Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas of Mujeres Creando. [The Interview took place on February 22, 2011, in Virgen de los Deseos, the Center of Mujeres Creando, in La Paz (Bolivia).]

Rosario Adrián is the person in charge of the daycare center that Mujeres Creando has set up since 2007, which now cares daily for an average of 38 children. As she explains, the center is organized to support women so they can have time not just to hold a paying job but to expand their possibilities, to regain some control over their life. The center is qualitatively different from the standard daycare in that it is not a ‘parking lot’ for children, but it is a place of activities focusing on all the needs of a child, physical, educational, emotional. The women who work in the center also try to involve the mothers of the children in the process. Together they discuss what it means to raise a child: this is a question that is central to the work in the daycare and that has forced a constant expansion and innovation of the activities provided.

Rosario: There are now in Bolivia more than 10 million people, more than 1 million and a half children between

26. *Interview with Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas*

the ages of 0 and 6. They are mostly taken care of by their mothers. But what does it mean to be a mother, what do motherhood and paternity mean? What is the meaning of this social figure? As things are now, women must assume their maternity as their primary, almost exclusive responsibility, but this is something we want to change. The Bolivian state so far has not been able to understand the reality of the mothers and, as a result, it contributes very little to their and their children's reproduction. So far, the state provides a bonus to pregnant women of 200 Bolivianos (Bs) every two month (approximately US\$30) until the child is two years old. It sends a message saying: have more children that the state will protect you. It has a view of women as machines for biological reproduction. It considers women as uteruses. This worries us. *Mujeres Creando* is critical of this view of women and the short term solution the state is offering to mothers. 200 Bolivianos (Bs) is a very small sum, moreover women do not want or need bonuses, they need to have stable sources of employment, especially in a situation where there is a great amount of paternal irresponsibility. Often when men separate from their wives they separate from their responsibility for their children as well; but in many cases they refuse to take responsibility for their children even when they are at home. In this context, the state has now approved another bonus for children from their birth up to two years of age, and then when at six they start school there is a new bonus which is seen almost like a reward. Recently, the mayor of El Alto has proposed to give a bonus also to students who complete a college degree (baccalaureate).

26. Interview with Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas

The municipality and the Prefecture have popular daycares (*guarderías populares*) located in the popular markets for the women who are selling there as well as for the general public. But they are few, there are about 14 in La Paz, and in El Alto they are only 8. The municipality has its daycares, each taking 30 to 40 children, from six months to 5 years of age, but it cannot respond to the demand and what is more worrisome is that the people who do his work are people who are not prepared, they are chosen on the basis of political interest. So the daycares are popular, they are cheap, they are accessible also to other sectors of the populations, but they do not have a vision, an understanding of what is required for the educational development of the child.

What do women do when they do not have childcare available? They try to combine their work activities with the care for the children; many work in the informal trade (*comercio informal*), or in their homes or they leave the children at home alone. Many women do not trust the daycare centers because some have been accused of child abuse and mistreatments. On December 16 an education bill was passed stating that children from the ages 0 to 3 are the responsibility of the family and the community (which in reality means they are taken care of by the mothers or grand mothers, or aunts); then, starting from four, they are taken care by the school system. They cannot recognize what is the real situation. They do not see that very often the family nucleus is constituted just by the mother who must also go to work for money. And who is the community? There is not communal situation in the city, there are no community groups. Probably you have more of a community in the rural areas. In the urban

26. *Interview with Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas*

areas people are not organized in a communal way. In EL Alto all the women go out to work. If there is a problem with water or light they call an assembly, but there is no neighbors' organization that can take care of the children. This lack of provisions by the Bolivian state makes us think that they do not believe in the future generations. In the very period when children (boys and girls) have the greatest learning capacity there is no recognition of their pedagogical potential. There is a need for daycare in every neighborhood (barrio). The law says that there should be a daycare in all the workplaces, but this is not what happens in reality. Last year the public university asked Mujeres Creando to present a proposal for a day-care center, because they wanted to have their own daycare, to take care of the children of the University's workers. And MC did present them a proposal. What we see is a vacuum in the provision of basic/initial education. The Bolivian state does not open centers with people who are qualified for their jobs, although there are many professionals out there who are; for example at the Popular University in El Alto (UPEA), there are more than 3,500 students in the Education Department, so there is the possibility of opening spaces with people prepared for the task.

Mujeres Creando, that was created in 1992 by Maria Galindo and a team of other women, has developed as a social movement that looks at society from the viewpoint of women, and we have seen the need to put pressure on society on this issue. Starting from 2005, we have had this space, Virgen de Los Deseos (Virgin of Desire) which we have built as a place in which to question the role assigned to women which defines us as one-sided, static individuals. We are questioning that and want to put an end to the

26. Interview with Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas

norms that are imposed on us and that stifle us. We have dealt with many social problems: violence against women, the construction of our autonomous economy. Our objective is to build an autonomous political subject starting from a women's perspective. We have seen the need to enable women to make their voice heard. In 2003, when Sanchez de Lozada (Bolivia's president) left the country, there was a great mobilization of women, but it was mostly men who stood up to speak. This is why for us it is urgent to build this political subject, woman as an active subject. It was as part of this process that we decided to create a daycare center, to free women's time. Generally, you need to get a permit from the municipality and we got it. But we did not get the permit from the *prefectura*. But we have the support of the movement because we do not do anything that violates the dignity of people. This is a space offered to mothers. Initially, we made it available only to popular sectors, especially to children of women in situation of prostitution because they live in very restrictive conditions, and many of them are financially squeezed by the municipality. But over the years we have learned that other women too need this space and they have now the possibility of bringing their children here. So, we began to open our doors to women from other sectors, women who are facing a divorce, who are threatened by men. Providing this space was important to make these women feel safe, to make them feel that they have some political support because we believe in women. It allows women not just to 'work' but to grow, to gain some autonomy, to do things, including helping other women.

The theme of maternity touches all the social systems. It is necessary to break with the image of maternity as

26. *Interview with Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas*

something that is suffered; we need to create other models, another vision of maternity: a sovereign, creative, rebel maternity, a planned maternity. We need to question the type of maternity that has been imposed. We also need to question the irresponsibility of the fathers, to question their figure as “standard” fathers. But increasingly fathers too are becoming interested in our work. They want to know what is this space that we talk about.

Our daycare is organized along the lines of the Montessori educational model as well as the vision of education articulated by Paulo Freire. Starting from them, we provide a non-sexist education that can develop the educational potential of the new generations. It is a feminist vision. The objective is an integral, holistic development of the person. For example, we provide sexual education, something that is not included in the new education law that that is now into force. Women who teach sexual education at our daycare center are educators who are prepared, we have a team which is well qualified to speak of sexuality, in a way that enables us to reclaim our body as our own and as a sovereign space. We also deal with the question of sexual violence prevention. We have handbooks for the prevention of sexual violence and we work both with the children and with the mothers. It is a work both internal and external. We have meetings and workshops with the mothers; it is a whole process to overcome the fear that women have of this topic. We work above all with the mothers, but now some fathers too want to join. The mothers ask us: why don't you organize a workshop on sexuality for the fathers too? So we have started to have fathers participating in our workshops as well. In the workshops we touch on many themes – nutrition, recre-

26. *Interview with Ana Rosario Adrián Vargas*

ation and the question of happiness, among other topics of common interest.