

HOUSEWORK AND SOCIAL SUBVERSION:
WAGES, HOUSEWORK, AND FEMINIST ACTIVISM
IN 1970S ITALY AND CANADA

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Abstract

My dissertation, *Housework and Social Subversion: Wages, Housework, and Feminist Activism in 1970s Italy and Canada*, presents a history of the Wages for Housework movements in Italy and Canada (1972-1978), looking at the parallel development of autonomist feminist politics in these locations. Based on a series of interviews with feminists involved in the movement, my dissertation highlights the significant political value in the way the group's theoretical perspective influenced our current understanding of social reproduction. Social reproduction refers to the unpaid activities associated with family and societal maintenance – procreation, socialization, and nurturance – as well as paid work in social sectors such as health care, education, childcare, and social services. In the context of Wages for Housework, my dissertation re-examines the movement's understandings of wages, housework, and the gendered relations of production in the home. In critiquing the capitalist, patriarchal, imperialist nuclear family, they re-conceptualized wages and housework in a way that allowed for the uncovering of the most hidden aspect of housework: emotional labour and care. Looking at the parallel development of Wages for Housework movements in Italy and Canada, I also highlight the emergence of similar tensions regarding the demand for wages and the role of the working class housewife in their analyses. As Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici wrote, “Our power as women begins with the social struggle for the wage, not to be let into the wage relation (for we were never out of it) but to be let out of it, for every sector of the working class to be left out of it” (1975, 11). In light of the continued pervasiveness of care as work, this dissertation contributes to building a better understanding of social reproduction in a global context.

Dedication

To women in all parts of the world who continue to do the important yet invisible work of care and social reproduction.

To my late Nonna, Teresa Orsini. Though she won't get to celebrate this with me, she was a huge inspiration for this project.

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Introduction¹

Wages for Housework was more than a slogan or demand; it was the name of an international network of feminist activists engaged in campaigns for women's liberation in the 1970s. The group originated in 1972 in Padua, Italy, where a meeting of the newly established International Feminist Collective gathered like-minded feminists from different parts of the world. The name Wages for Housework also reflects the development of a movement informed by Marxist-feminist praxis whose aim was to mobilize against patriarchy and capitalism by demanding that housework be recognized as paid work. At the centre of this demand was the working class housewife, viewed as essential to capitalist production and seen to represent the normative ideal of women (Dalla Costa 1972, 21). My dissertation is a history of *Salario al Lavoro Domestico* (SLD) and Wages for Housework (WfH) campaigns in Italy and Canada in the 1970s. My purpose is to document this movement and to compare the trajectories of the WfH campaigns in two regional contexts. In particular, I focus on the activists who were involved in the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee and the *Comitato Tri-Veneto per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico*² (the Tri-Veneto Committee for Wages for Housework) because unlike many other groups in the network, these groups demonstrated similar political agendas, underwent parallel developments of autonomist

¹ Some of the ideas developed in this dissertation were later used to write an article published around the same time this dissertation as being submitted. See C. Rousseau (2016), "The Dividing Power of the Wage: Housework and Social Subversion," *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice*, 37.2: 238-252.

² A brief note to begin: there are times when I will refer to the group as *Salario al Lavoro Domestico*, and other times when I will refer to *Lotta Femminista*, or *Lotta femminile*. This is due to changes in the composition of the group. Women from SLD would come out of *Lotta Femminista* after a split that occurred in 1974. I talk about the reasons for this split in my chapter on the movement in Italy. Also refer to timeline in Appendix A. In addition, both the Tri-Veneto Committee and the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee are just two groups within a larger international movement, active mainly in Italy, Canada, the United States, and England.

politics, and experienced tensions regarding their political demand for the wage that was presented in abstract vs. material terms and led to splits within the movement. A further aim of my dissertation is to enrich the literature about social reproduction with specific attention placed on the story of WfH as an under-researched area of analysis. I contend that WfH is a fruitful area of analysis because the discourses they developed would later influence social reproduction theory and the work of feminist scholars looking at housework, care, and emotional labour. Moving beyond materialist debates about housework, I highlight the way women involved in these movements developed feminist consciousness related to the WfH perspective, and how they related to social reproduction within particular cultural contexts. My emphasis on feminist discourses related to social reproduction shows how the movement had broader political implications, and that its social analyses were deeper than many Marxists and feminists have understood. The aim of the group was to destroy the role of the housewife through refusing and subverting this idealized, normatively constructed female role, thereby abolishing the nuclear-family model as a pillar of support for capitalism.

Using interviews and supporting archival material, I present a history of these campaigns and re-evaluate them in light of current understandings of housework and feminist analyses of domestic labour. I present WfH within the context of a dynamic period of feminist activism beginning in the late 1960s and lasting through to the end of the 1970s. By positioning WfH in this context, I illustrate some of the ideas and terms specific to WfH, highlighting the political importance of these groups in transforming discourse and fundamentally changing our understanding of concepts such as wages, housework, and care.

Feminism in the 1970s: A Dynamic Period

In my examination of WfH in the context of the 1970s, I am cognizant of the danger of romanticizing the 1970s and of constructing a narrative of “return” (Hemmings 2011). I have not written about WfH as an ideal form of feminist action³ that we must return to; instead, my interest in the group is to record and share the stories of the women involved to re-evaluate the political and theoretical significance of these campaigns for the women’s movement and for feminism. The 1970s was a multi-faceted period of feminist activism, meaning there were many streams of feminism looking to end the oppression of women, including currents that were liberal, radical, and socialist. In other words, there are many stories to be told about feminism; the stories I am focused on are connected to the organizing campaigns of WfH.

Distinguishing Feminisms: Liberal, Radical, Socialist and Marxist

This section discusses the various streams of feminism that were active in the 1970s in order to contextualize the discourses that emerged specific to the Marxist-feminist analyses of WfH.

³ Feminist struggle as a movement divided into waves is a Western concept. The first wave relates to a period in the 19th and early 20th century, where the fight for emancipation was focused on the issue of women’s suffrage; feminism in the 1970s came to be known as the second wave, with a focus on sexual liberation and reproductive rights, the family structure, and entry of women into the workforce. The third wave emerged in the 1980s as a criticism against the focus on white, western, middle-class, heterosexual female struggles. Broadly speaking, the second wave lasted from the early 1960s to the early 1980s, depending on the perspective. The time period is difficult to pin down because of different ideas about what struggles was emblematic of this wave. Further, there is debate whether a third wave exists, and what exactly that means. If there is a third wave, we can assume we are currently in the middle of it, so it is difficult to have a clear perspective of what this means. To consider a deeper analysis of the division of feminism into waves, see H. K. Aikau, K. A. Erickson and J. L. Pierce, *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories from the Academy*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); M. Threlfall, *Mapping the Women’s Movement*, (London: Verso, 1996).

Liberal feminism's push for jobs outside the home was supported by deindustrialization, the rise of the service industry, and the growing need for female labour connected to the kinds of jobs once done for free in the home. In the 1960s, middle-class women began putting forward demands for work outside the home; an increase in the presence of middle-class women in the labour market is connected to Betty Friedan's (1963) view of work outside the home as a form of escape and emancipation: "The entry of both working-class and middle-class married women into the paid workforce was accompanied by a 'bourgeois revolution' for women. Liberated from the feudal aspects of the marriage contract, they emerged as economic actors in their own right" (Eisenstein 2010, 39). In other words, this shift in the labour market was mutually beneficial for capital and for certain groups of women because it supported the shifting economy while providing women with the opportunity to be financially independent. One of the most prominent liberal feminist organizations to gain mainstream status in North America was the National Organization for Women (NOW), which emerged "to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men" (National Organization for Women, 1966). The group's mandate was to push for women to enter existing structures; the focus was on individual women entering previously male-dominated spaces. Among liberal feminists of the 1960s and 1970s there was an understanding that equal economic opportunities (as well as sexual freedom) were needed for women's liberation, so the focus became ensuring women could compete with men for jobs and enter the workforce. Liberal ideology, therefore, emphasized equality of

opportunity between individuals so they could better navigate the system in order to claim what capitalism had promised them in the free-market system.

Radical women's liberation groups, including lesbian separatists, posed a challenge to dominant structures and the patriarchal ordering of rights and privileges. Groups like Cell 16, Lavender Menace, INCITE!, Redstockings, New York Radical Women, etc. positioned themselves against liberal feminism because they were not fighting for women to enter into established (male) structures while maintaining the status quo. Instead, they sought to expose patriarchy and address inequalities at their root. Similarly, they rejected socialist notions that promised liberation because they viewed gender, and not class, as the primary contradiction in their lives (Echols 1989, 3). For radical feminists there was a deliberate dismissal of men entirely, with many of these feminists moving to live in all-female enclaves as "woman-identified women" in order to best express feminist politics and the unique identity constituted by women (Rudy 2001, 190-93). In their analyses, heterosexuality and all men - including male children - were viewed as inherently oppressive. Coming out of radical feminism, cultural feminism had similar aims. Where radical feminists were interested in opposing male supremacy, cultural feminism placed an emphasis on the sameness of women and their inherent difference from men (Echols 1989, 244), leading to building female counter culture.⁴

Like the radical feminist groups, Marxist and socialist feminists also recognized the need to go beyond struggles to enter male dominated spaces. Yes, they argued, it would be nice for men and women to enter into marriage or partnerships on an equal economic playing field, but what about class stratifications and global economic

⁴ For more on radical and cultural feminisms, see: A. Echols (1989), *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*; B. Ross (1990), "The House That Jill Built: Lesbian Feminist Organizing in Toronto, 1976-1980," *Feminist Review*, no. 35: 75-91.

inequalities? Both Marxist and socialist feminisms are anti-capitalist in view, meaning there is an understanding that social and economic equality can only be achieved by worker control over the means of production. Both called for the abolition of capitalism as a mode of production because of the inequalities it fostered. In these analyses, a nuanced account of the specificity of women's oppression connects to the exploitation women face as workers and the role they inhabit in capitalist social relations (Luxton and Bezanson 2006, 11-13). From these perspectives we see a distinction between oppression and exploitation, in that exploitation is the expropriation of surplus value from workers by the dominant class; all workers are exploited under capitalism. Oppression, on the other hand, is a result of social relations of hegemonic power (Briskin 1980). Women, therefore, are exploited as workers and oppressed as women because of the lower social position they inhabit.

Approaching the oppression of women from a historical materialist perspective, Marxist-feminists looked at material forces and class relations and the operation of patriarchy specific to capitalism. We must think about "capitalist patriarchy" instead of "patriarchal capitalism," reflecting the constant form of patriarchy and the changing content based on mode of production (Briskin 1980, 147). In other words, patriarchy is not a freestanding system. On the surface, it would appear as though there is not much difference between socialist and Marxist-feminisms. However, there is an important distinction to be made between the two in the context of the 1970s. In some ways, socialist feminism was a bridge between Marxist-feminism (focused on capitalism and class-based oppression) and radical feminism (focused in patriarchy and sex discrimination). Heidi Hartmann (1979) identified major weaknesses in both Marxist

attempts to answer the "woman question," as well as radical feminist explanations of patriarchal oppression; traditional Marxism ignored patriarchy and gender in class-based analyses of oppression, while radical feminism presented an ahistorical, homogenous version of patriarchy. To remedy both these shortcomings, Hartmann proposed the "dual system" approach in order to explain the oppression of women in a way that looks at patriarchal social relations in capitalist societies:

Patriarchy, by establishing and legitimating hierarchy among men (by allowing men of all groups to control at least some women), reinforces capitalist control, and capitalist values shape the definition of patriarchal good... This helps to account not only for "male" and "female" characteristics in capitalist societies, but for the particular form sexist ideology takes in capitalist societies ... If women were powerless or degraded in other societies, the reasons (rationalizations) men had for this were different. (Hartmann 1979, 21)

Emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, Hartmann points to the limitations in Marxist-feminist accounts of the oppression of women, giving us a new perspective that attempts to be more holistic. While Marxist-feminism did well to look at the oppression of women resulting from capitalist social relations and class inequalities, an emphasis on patriarchy as an institution was missing. Socialist feminism, therefore, brought Marxist-feminism a step further through its emphasis on patriarchy as well as other intersecting forms of oppression, including racism. Hartmann's work outlines the mutually beneficial relationship between capitalism and patriarchy, but it is blind to the impacts of race within this dynamic. In other words, the exclusion of race from analyses of social relations under capitalism ignore the differential experience of

black people and people of colour (both men and women) on the labour market and in society more broadly. To speak of the woman question categorically vis-à-vis Marxism, therefore, is to perpetuate white female supremacy (Joseph 1981, 95). An anti-racist approach to the woman question, therefore, allows us to build alliances between white women, black women, and women of colour in order to understand our oppressions beyond Briskin's concept of "capitalist patriarchy" and account for intersecting forms of oppression that are exemplified by "white supremacist, capitalist [imperialist] patriarchy" (hooks 2000, 19; 52).

The Feminist Perspective of WfH

The WfH campaigns drew from two main tenets of feminism to counter the liberal feminist position. First, they drew from Marxist-feminists who used the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to analyze the reproductive and productive oppression of women inside and outside the home. Second, they drew from the socialist feminist perspective that women's emancipation is connected to the broader working class movement. While there is certainly a great deal of overlap between Marxist and socialist feminisms, the distinction I draw (which I elaborate later in this dissertation) in relation to WfH is: socialist-feminism, while looking to improve relations of power and socialize the state, is still largely reform-based. Marxist-feminism, on the other hand, is looking to overthrow capitalism in order completely overhaul relations of power. In the context of WfH, the difference can be summarized by looking at the way in which the wage itself was viewed: a socialist-feminist perspective sees the demand as symbolic, while a Marxist-feminist view sees it as a literal cash demand *because* it seems so impossible to

implement under current structures (thereby necessitating an overthrow of the capitalist system).

For WfH feminists, women in the home were working without a wage, and entering the workforce would only subject them to the same economic exploitation that is common amongst all workers in a capitalist economy. Their analysis rejected the traditional Marxist notion that women would cease to be oppressed if they were to enter the workforce. Marx and Engels are often criticized for their lack of attention to the specific plight of women under capitalism. Some of this lack of attention can be attributed to the fact that as the pair was writing during the rise of industrialization, working-class women who were “only” housewives were not the norm (at least in Germany and Britain) since both men *and* women entered into the factory system at this time. Nevertheless, WfH feminists argued that an emphasis on workplace entry only served to subordinate women and women’s issues to the broader working class movement. As a perspective, therefore, WfH was an example of Marxist-feminism because their materialist analysis of the oppression of women placed an emphasis on capitalist social relations and capital's reliance on women's unwaged labour in the home. Further, the WfH perspective was less focused on patriarchy as an institution, though it did talk about relations between men and women. For Silvia Federici, it is impossible to talk about patriarchy and housework outside of the context of capitalist social relations. In *Caliban and the Witch* (2003), Federici discusses the period of primitive accumulation in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In Marxist theory, primitive accumulation was the period in which people were separated from the land and means of subsistence in order to support the growth of capitalist development. According to Federici, this was a

period of violence that forced women into a position of social exclusion; housework, therefore, is a unique set of activities within capitalist social relations, rather than something that was held over from pre-capitalist days.

The Personal is Political: Setting the Terms for Wages for Housework

"The personal is political," a popular slogan that has been connected to the general period of feminist activism of the 1970s, refers to the endemic nature of inequalities. In other words, the various forms of oppression women experience are not because of personal shortcomings or individual circumstances, but rather reflect systemic issues resulting from patriarchal ideologies. This term has been traditionally connected to radical feminism of the 1970s, and originated with Carol Hanisch's 1969 essay "The Personal is Political,"⁵ written during her time with the New York Radical Women group. The formation of consciousness-raising groups was a practice used to enact the adage "the personal is political." While this practice is most often associated with radical feminist groups, where it originated, other feminist groups have used this practice (explicitly or otherwise). Sharing experiences in these groups, women analyzed the roots of their own oppression within the larger framework of hegemonic, patriarchal domination. This practice was important in altering women's consciousness in order to build movements and struggles against oppression. In other words, "Feminists are made, not born" (hooks 2000, 7). The conversations that took place in consciousness-raising groups were important in constructing feminist subjectivity, but more importantly were meant to

⁵ According to Hanisch, other women involved with the New York Radical Women group gave the title to her 1969 essay, which was originally circulated as a pamphlet and was then published in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*. See also: C. Hanisch (2009), "The Personal Is Political: The Women's Liberation Classic with a New Explanatory Introduction."

connect individual experiences to a larger collective struggle. Conversations were ultimately limited because political action is necessary to oppose oppression. In Chapter 5 I discuss the international dimensions of the movement, including the development of feminist consciousness-raising where the “personal” was brought to action through the development of political struggle.

For WfH, it was necessary to bring existing power struggles outside of the home and position them within the wider context of social relations. While feminists in WfH did not explicitly name the practice of consciousness-raising, the sentiment of "the personal is political" connected to the women involved in these movements. In researching the history of WfH, I have conducted interviews with several important representatives of the movement in Italy and Canada. The stories these women shared with me in interviews articulate collective forms of feminist theorizing and political action that informed the work of WfH. It was through these practices that a particular feminist standpoint examining the oppression of women vis-à-vis housework developed. WfH recognized unequal relations as a systemic, political issue, and not just the problem of individual housewives. When we consider that the personal is political, the word "political" implies power relations. WfH was interested in examining the power relations that existed between men and women, and between waged and unwaged workers. In these ways, therefore, we can apply this popular radical feminist saying to the work of WfH as a Marxist-feminist group. A significant contribution of WfH to Marxist and feminist discourses is the way their unique analyses have challenged our understanding of concepts like "wages" and "housework." In Chapters 3 and 4 on the campaigns in Italy and Canada, I demonstrate how their understanding of these terms influenced the types of

struggles activists in WfH were engaged in. Below I begin to outline some of the terms specific to WfH activism that will be present throughout the dissertation.

Working Class

In *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1972), Dalla Costa and James call for widening our conception of the working class to include unwaged workers, specifically housewives working without a wage in the home. Women are placed centre-stage in their analysis, which has had a major influence on the way we think about social reproduction and the meaning of work. The broadening of the working class in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* is connected to the tradition of *operaismo*. As the terrain of struggle expanded beyond the factory, mobilizations of Left feminists centered on broader issues, including education, day care, healthcare, housing, and a general lack of social services. The work of WfH feminists to highlight the divisions between waged and unwaged workers has influenced the way we consider other hierarchical divisions. For example, looking at formal vs. informal work, the position of migrant workers as indentured servants, the homeless, etc., we see all the ways the working class is internally stratified by the wage and otherwise.

Wages

An expanded view of the working class also meant recognizing the way the working class is divided according to who is paid a wage and who is not. Not only is the working class divided by the wage, but also wage labour itself is stratified according to hierarchical divisions. For WfH feminists, it was important to emphasize the fact that, while some

people did not receive a wage (like housewives), they were still embedded in capitalist social relations (James 1983, 109). From the perspective of WfH, the wage was a lever of social subversion through which work could be refused, thereby altering social relations. The wage was sought not to reinforce housework as women's work, but rather to be able to refuse it. As I shall demonstrate throughout the dissertation, the notion of refusal was broadly conceived and was connected to a demand for social wages, bodily autonomy, and access to contraceptives, abortion, and childcare. Refusal, therefore, meant rejecting capital's control over women's bodies. As James tells us, "Our struggle against the factory is not only to get out but never to go in. Our struggle against the family is to get out but not so we are free for the factory" (80). Seeking work outside the home was not a road to emancipation or liberation, according to James, because women were already engaged in household labour. The goal was financial security and less work for *everyone*, starting from the perspective of having housework recognized and valued as work.

Housework

A rereading of Marx and Engels by WfH feminists conceived the home as the base for the factory system, rather than its "other." The notion of the social factory was connected to Autonomist Marxism, whereby capital hegemony is so dominant that every social relationship is incorporated within this system, making it increasingly difficult to draw distinctions between what is social and what is work. Based on this analysis, WfH viewed housework as a number of different forms of labour. Physical and emotional forms of labour make up the daily existence of women, and according to WfH feminists, housework and social relationships in the home must be acknowledged as part of the

factory system and as *work*. In addition, they viewed housework "...as a discovery and denunciation of femininity as labour (domestic, reproductive labour), but at the same time demanding to shift its cost to the state, reduce the work-time involved, and break down the fundamental organisational cell within which the supply of this form of labour was primarily commanded, i.e. the family" (Dalla Costa 1988, 24). In other words, the struggle over the value of housework was viewed as a site of resistance, with control of reproduction (i.e. control over the number of children) envisioned as the primary terrain of struggle for women of the 1970s. This vision of struggle was meant to include women who were single or married, women with or without children, lesbians, women in the global south, and women of colour. As Louise Toupin has argued, this was the first truly intersectional feminist movement (2012).

Housewife

In talking about housework, the emphasis is on housewives as *women*. Here I must make clear that, in my references to women, I am talking about cisgender and cissexual individuals, or those whose physical bodies match their gender identification from birth (Schilt and Westbrook 2009). I focus on cis-women because this was the focus of the WfH groups. The focus on the category "woman" reflects the internalization of heteronormative assumptions and gender essentialism that were characteristic of the societies in which they were embedded.

Some of the criticisms against WfH stemmed from the fact that the group connected housewife to women. Meg Luxton reveals some of these criticisms in her book *More Than a Labour of Love* (1980), where some of the women she interviewed were

concerned for example, with where the wage would come from and whether this would mean housework would be regulated. The largest concern, however, was that a demand for the wage was not seen as adequate in addressing the sexual division of labour in the home or the “isolation and privacy of the working-class household” (Luxton 1980, 224). The demand for *housework*, and not *housewives*, is therefore an important distinction because it focuses on the nature of the work being performed. It is the socialization of both men and women that has led to gendered divisions relating to reproduction and sexuality. This is a point emphasized by WfH feminists: there is nothing about women that makes them more biologically adept at performing the tasks associated with housework, except for childbirth and breastfeeding (for now!).

An emphasis on the housewife would remain a point of tension within the movement. On one hand, there was a need to recognize that women were largely responsible for housework. On the other hand, WfH feminists criticized the structural position of social reproduction. While the emphasis was on working class women, the demand was for a wage for the work being performed in the home. The demand for wages was meant to demystify and disrupt the notion that housework and social reproduction were naturally women’s work, recognizing the strategic demand for the wage as it relates to the power it holds, rather than trying to restrict women to this role.

Family

Historically, the family under capitalism was constructed as a private unit outside capitalist social relations; because relations of reproduction are hidden in the private sphere, they appear as natural. The so-called nuclear family is a Western, Eurocentric,

middle-class concept that has been normalized through the Church and state. The emergence of the nuclear-family ideal was connected the rise of capitalism, as well as imperialism and the expansion of colonialism. In light of these influences, we should recognize how the nuclear family was shaped not only by capitalism and patriarchy, but also by racism. The normative construction of the nuclear family ideal, therefore, excludes a large number of women. While some viewed escape from the confines of the nuclear family as a goal of feminism, others have argued for the inclusion of marginalized women into this structure. Racism and classism mediate women's experience of the family, and we must also understand how these diverse experiences have come to be. The notion of the family wage associated with the nuclear family, for example, was denied to Black men because of relations of domination connected to race and class. Additionally, migrant farm workers and live-in caregivers have been forced by economic circumstances to live apart from their families for extended periods of time. These are just a few examples that illustrate the way race mediates one's experience of family.

In my literature review, I use the works of Wally Secombe, Linda Briskin and others to show how the emergence of the nuclear family ideal was connected to industrialization and the rise of capitalism. Leopoldina Fortunati discusses at great length the dynamic that exists in the household, where individuals are defined in relation to the family unit as mother/child, husband/wife, etc. (Fortunati 1995). This family dynamic has come to define the way we see ourselves as individuals, and so we become complicit in replicating and perpetuating roles that have been defined for us by patriarchy and capitalism.

Rejecting the family dynamic was crucial to the WfH perspective because "within this relationship it is very difficult to free oneself of a woman's responsibilities, which have been patterned as roles too long, not only in the material tasks of housework, but also those involved in the psychological, affective and other aspects of reproduction" (Dalla Costa 1988, 29). For WfH feminists, women performed the work of social reproduction under the pretence of love while capitalism ensured that the relations of reproduction between individuals were defined in terms of the family. Housework has been viewed as natural, and therefore has not been classified as "real work" with a commensurate wage. Further, much of this work is tied with our most intimate relationships in the family, which adds additional layers of complication.

Bodily Autonomy

The autonomous struggle against housework was tied to the control that women have over their own bodies. According to Dalla Costa, "*... for women the construction of autonomy has meant, in any region of the world, first of all the re-appropriation of her own body, to control that female body which has always been at stake in the relationship between the sexes*" (2006, 1).⁶ For WfH feminists, women needed control over their bodies in order to have control over their lives. Women did not have control over their own lives because of the "stigmatization of life choices outside of marriage, which forced [their] mothers to move from the house of their father to that of their husband, without

⁶ "*...per la donna costruzione di autonomia ha voluto dire, in qualunque regione del mondo anzitutto reimpadronirsi del proprio corpo, poter disporre di quel corpo femminile che è sempre stato la posta in gioco del rapporto fra i sessi.*" Translation by C. Rousseau; Italics in original.

ever having a chance to find out who they were and what they wanted (1).”⁷ The issue of bodily autonomy also emphasized sexuality and control over reproductive rights, framed with an expanded notion of the right to choose. This meant being able to choose aborting unwanted pregnancies and being able to prevent them in the first place, but also being able to support children women *did* want, as I discuss in Chapter 3. This expanded notion of the right to choose should be expressed in solidarity with women in the global south, immigrant, migrant, indigenous, and minority women in the global north, as well as incarcerated women and those with disabilities who have been sterilized against their will (and often without even knowing this is happening), or forced to abort or give up children they could not afford to keep.⁸ The wage was connected to bodily autonomy because it would allow women to make choices beyond receiving low-wages and staying in a relationship because of an inability to support oneself. For lesbians, the fight over bodily autonomy extended to challenges over sexuality and child custody battles within the homophobic court system, as I discuss in Chapter 4.

As we look at these terms, therefore, we can begin to see the importance of the WfH perspective in altering the discourse surrounding housework and gendered relations in the home. One of the most significant contributions of WfH to both Marxist and feminist discourses was the transformation of the meaning of “working class” and a nuanced view of housework. In addition, women were placed centre-stage in their analysis, and the wage was demanded in both concrete and abstract terms; this has had a

⁷ "... stigmatizzazione di una scelta di vita che non fosse il matrimonio per cui le nostre madri erano obbligato molto giovani a passare dalla casa del padre a quella del marito senza aver mai potuto chiedersi chi erano e cosa volevano." Translation by C. Rousseau

⁸ There has been a lot of material written about reproductive justice. An excellent starting point is the *Reproductive Justice Briefing Book: A Primer on Reproductive Justice and Social Change*, a collection of essays from the Pro-Choice Public Education Project and Sistersong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective, as well as other contributors.

major influence on the way we think about social reproduction and work generally. A distinction between a symbolic and material demand for wages was another tension that emerged within the movement, and as I discuss in Chapters 3-5, was one of many points of contention leading to splits within the movement. On one hand, a concrete or material demand acknowledged the division of the working class according to wages; giving women a wage for housework was intended to radically transform social relations. On the other hand, a demand for wages in abstract or symbolic terms highlighted the way housework was viewed as both physical and emotional forms of labour that proliferated multiple aspects of women's lives. As I demonstrate going forward, both of these views were necessary to the development of the WfH perspective and the trajectory of political action they undertook. The demand for the social wage can be described as the nexus between the symbolic and material demand, where childcare, access to abortion, etc. could give women more time to struggle against their oppression.

Chapter Outlines

The analyses emerging from WfH were connected to a larger discussion of the role of women in social reproduction, or what has come to be known as the "domestic labour debate." In Chapter 1, I present feminist standpoint theory as the theoretical basis that has informed the work in this dissertation, and look at feminist history as the methodological approach I have taken. I also introduce the women whose stories inform the analysis in the rest of the dissertation, and talk about my use of archive materials as artefacts supporting these stories. In Chapter 2, my literature review places the movement's seminal text, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* by Mariarosa

Dalla Costa and Selma James, in conversation with other key texts in these debates. Looking at the work of Dalla Costa and James in relation to these other texts allows us to see the way their analysis of housework and women's oppression differed from other Marxist-feminist analyses. Carrying this understanding forward to other chapters in the dissertation highlights the way their specific understanding of housework and oppression informed the group's political practice.

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5 I look at the historical emergence of the WfH groups in Italy and Canada, some of the changes they underwent, and highlight a paralleled split that occurred in both locations, further solidifying the political and organizational perspectives of the groups. These chapters are largely based on the personal interviews I conducted with WfH feminists, and their words appear throughout these sections. Chapters 3 and 4 are concerned with the specifics of the movement in Italy and Canada respectively, focusing on the stories of women behind the Padua/Tri-Veneto and Toronto groups. Through the stories of these women, and with the support of the documents they produced, I present a history of these movements. In particular, I am interested in the way these women articulated their experience of class and gender based oppression, and how they developed different struggles in response to it. For example, in Chapter 3 on Italy I highlight the emphasis that was placed on abortion and divorce legislation, while Chapter 4 on Canada highlights the importance of the struggle for welfare and advocating for lesbian mothers. Looking at the international focus of the network in Chapter 5, I explore the development of feminist consciousness in the move towards producing counter-hegemonic spaces for feminist struggle. Here I also consider issues of translation in a cross-cultural examination of ideas related to patriarchy and feminism.

In presenting a history of WfH in Italy and Canada, I emphasize contexts that expand beyond geographical specificity. In Italy, for example, the divide between north and south has historically been marked by difference in affluence, gender politics, and the construction of racialized subjects in the south. In the Canadian context, we cannot ignore the country's settler-colonial past that has come to shape policies of inclusion and exclusion. Finally, distinctions between Italy and Canada are connected to different social, economic, and political histories, as well as the emergence of different types of capitalism. The demand for wages, therefore, is considered in relation to these different cultural contexts. At the root of the demand was a rejection of the role capital has imposed upon women: "To ask for wages for housework will by itself undermine the expectations society has of us, since these expectations - the essence of our socialisation - are all functional to our wageless condition in the home" (Federici 1975, 5). In other words, demanding a wage meant rejecting the idea that housework was naturally women's work and that it was a labour of love. Because WfH viewed unwaged housework as the source of women's economic exploitation and social oppression, they also saw it as the site of revolutionary emancipation.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

My project of examining the WfH movements in Italy and Canada as a particular moment in feminist history was inspired in large part by my desire to understand the development of feminist consciousness in relation to mobilizations against patriarchy and capitalism. Throughout the dissertation, I employ feminist standpoint theory and draw from the practice of feminist history as alternatives to dominant modes of knowledge production, which have historically excluded women and so-called “feminine” ways of knowing, such as the privileging of experience. Using both feminist standpoint theory and feminist history as my methodological guideposts, I developed this project using semi-structured interviews, archive work, and personal reflection.

This chapter is divided into two major sections. In the first section I present my theoretical approach, where I discuss my approach to feminist standpoint theory and how it relates to my analysis of WfH. Second, I define feminist history, which I have used as my methodological approach to provide a historical, political, and social context in which to talk about WfH. In this section I also introduce the women whose stories I use throughout the dissertation, and outline my process of doing interviews, archive work, and translation.

Theoretical Approach

In developing this project, I was interested in the way the production of knowledge grounded in women’s experiences provides a space for the emergence of counter-hegemonic discourses, emphasizing alternative ways of knowing. Traditional, masculinist

or androcentric methods that focus on quantitative ways of knowing are limited because they miss the nuances that emerge when we consider the intersecting aspects of our identities, and the way experience is embodied. In the following pages, I look at some of the key elements of feminist standpoint theory, emphasizing the importance of lived experience and social location in the production of knowledge. Following my examination of feminist standpoint theory, I consider the pull between essentialism and relativism as a major tension within the theory. Finally, I show how feminist standpoint theory is the ideal theoretical framework from which to examine the WfH movement by drawing some connections between the two.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist standpoint theory emerged in the 1970s as a way of reconfiguring Marxist and Hegelian theories to better understand the subject position of women in society. Though the range of theorists who use feminist standpoint theory is broad, my theoretical approach is rooted in the works of Dorothy Smith, Sandra Harding, and Nancy Hartsock. The term “feminist standpoint” was originally developed by Hartsock “The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism,” *an essay that was originally published in 1983. In this essay she argues*, “the feminist standpoint which emerges through an examination of women’s activities is related to the proletarian standpoint, but deeper going ” (Hartsock 2004, 41). The idea of proletarian standpoint, or the dialectic of class-consciousness, originated with Lukàcs (1971), who built upon Marx’s dialectical materialism. Within this framework, the standpoint of the proletariat emerges from the oppression of the working class, who are positioned to view

their oppression objectively because they have nothing to gain from it. The development of a specifically feminist standpoint theory, therefore, goes against the idea that we can have a gender-blind understanding of class-based oppression. Indeed, as Smith argues, the idea behind feminist standpoint theory is that, like the slave in the Hegelian parable⁹ of the master-slave relationship, women are the ones best suited to talk about their experiences of oppression because they inhabit a marginal social position that (white, middle-class) men do not. Much like the working class in Marxist theories, therefore, women have the ideal perspective from which to view their oppression and possibilities for struggle. For Smith, however, it is essential that the feminist standpoint is also mindful of class, race, and other aspects of identity that impact gender (Smith 2005, 8). As a form of situated knowledge, feminist standpoint theory looks to the situated knower as one who is able to reveal the perspectives of the subject. In other words, women are best able to reflect the perspectives and issues that are of importance to women. In this section I look at some of the major characteristics of feminist standpoint theory in order to demonstrate how these ideas have helped to inform my analysis of the WfH movement.

One of the central aspects of the WfH perspective is a challenge to traditional Marxist analyses of wages and labour; they considered how women's oppression has been rooted in the rise of private property, and the way capitalist social relations connected to industrialization have meant that women are tied to unpaid housework in a seemingly "natural" way. Stemming from a similar analysis, an early aim of feminist standpoint theory was to challenge the unconsciously gender-neutral, or androcentric,

⁹ In his development of dialectic theory, Hegel (1807) writes a parable about the relationship between a master and a slave; the slave is best suited to talk about his experience of oppression because he inhabits a marginalized social position, which the master does not. The slave is positioned from a standpoint that gives him a clearer and therefore more "objective" view of his own oppression.

focus that traditional Marxists have used to talk about class relations in a capitalist society. Shifting the lens through which we talk about class relations is imperative because, according to Harding, individual experiences are influenced by both social location and gender: “There are no gender relations per se but only gender relations as constructed by and between classes, races, and cultures” (Harding 1991, 179). Harding uses the example of Sojourner Truth’s famous “Ain’t I A Woman” speech to show us how the femininity required of white woman was denied to black women. Men and women are socialized differently, and their identities are therefore impacted by these experiences in the variously constructed realities they inhabit. When we begin an exploration of class relations according to the experiences of women, we are able to gain a better perspective of the experiences of women *and* men, as well as the whole social order in which they both exist. This is because the social position that women occupy is different from that of men; as a result, they are endowed with a unique type of knowledge and perspective that allows them to examine their lives more objectively because they have nothing to gain from their oppression. This unique type of knowledge and perspective is epistemologically significant in the way it allows us to understand the way social relations are created and influenced by gender and class position. According to Hartsock, like “Marx’s understanding of the world from the standpoint of the proletariat enabled him to go beneath bourgeois ideology, so a feminist standpoint can allow us to understand patriarchal institutions and ideologies as perverse inversions of more humane social relations” (2004, 36). Moving beyond an imagined, homogenous, male working class, the notion of standpoint can be expanded to consider a uniquely feminist perspective, beginning with the lived experiences of women. A view of the working class

should also be expanded to include considerations of how race and colonialism also shape unique and important perspectives from which to understand class-based oppression.

Using the standpoint of women allows us to reveal the way gender relations are structured by patriarchy and capitalism, and how both of these institutional structures are used as tools of subordination: “the inner experiences which also involved our exercise of oppression against ourselves were ones that had their location in the society outside and originated there” (Smith 1977, 10). In order to fully understand the way capitalism and patriarchy are used as tools of oppression, we must also consider the way these forms of oppression have been internalized through socialization. In my literature review I engage in a deeper discussion of the way the particular gendered social relations we experience under capitalism are connected to the division of labour between public production in the “factory” and private social reproduction in the home. Though these gendered relations are most obviously seen inside the home, these relations have also permeated the everyday aspects of our lives. Since my focus in the dissertation is on the unpaid work of social reproduction performed by women, feminist standpoint theory allows me to understand the way WfH feminists looked at the oppression of women vis-à-vis both patriarchal ideology and capitalist social relations focused through an examination of unwaged housework. Using feminist standpoint theory, therefore, creates an opportunity for a more nuanced account of women’s oppression connected to housework than a traditional Marxist analysis of capitalist social relations allows.

Tensions Within Feminist Standpoint Theory

One of the major tensions within feminist standpoint theory is between essentialism and relativism. In this section I understand essentialism as the view that we are imbedded with certain qualities or attributes, like the idea that men and women are inherently different. Relativism, on the other hand, is the view that what is “right and wrong” is context dependent; any qualities we have are viewed as either positive or negative depending on the framework in which they are assessed. When we consider the production of knowledge, therefore, we see that on the one hand experience and perspective are relative to one’s social location. On the other hand, women’s standpoint is privileged because it is able to provide greater objectivity. The latter claim suggests that there is an essential category of “women” that is able to provide greater access to truth, while the former claim suggests that there can be no category of “women” from which to draw because both knowledge and experience are depended upon social location. However, a closer engagement with feminist standpoint theory will demonstrate that such a framework is neither essentialist nor relativist.

When we consider feminist standpoint as stemming from women’s lives and experience, there is a danger of falling into the trap of essentialism: What does it mean to begin from the perspective of “women’s lives”? How can we talk of “women’s experiences” when there is so much diversity amongst women? A critique of the potential danger of essentialism in feminist standpoint theory is similar to the way WfH has been criticized for essentializing all women as housewives, which I discuss later on in this chapter and in my literature review. I contend that feminist standpoint theory does not essentialize women because of the emphasis on situated knowledge and the social position of knower. Since claims to knowledge are socially located and constructed, they

reflect the lived experiences and values of those claiming certain forms of knowledge. In other words, there is no objective perspective to be uncovered that exists outside of society and outside of power relations (Harding 1995, 23). Rather than assuming a homogenized experience of “women,” feminist standpoint theory allows us to recognize the similar experiences of oppression women experience as a result of patriarchy, while at the same time acknowledging that experiences of oppression are also impacted by race, nationality, class position, etc. In other words, we must understand that a diversity of identities and social locations means the existence of multiple standpoints; just as there are multiple categories of “women,” so too are there multiple feminist standpoints.

The second issue within this tension is the trap of relativism; that is, if we accept that there are multiple identities and standpoints, how can we make any claims at all? As Hartsock argues, “the criteria for privileging some knowledges over others are ethical and political rather than purely ‘epistemological’... The most important issue for me is the question of how we can use theoretical tools and insights to create theories of justice and social change that address the concerns of the present” (1998, 409). Where traditional objectivity seeks to uncover some ahistorical “truth,” relativism denies such a truth or singular perspective. A staunch relativist would argue for multiple, valid viewpoints. While feminist standpoint theory argues for multiple standpoints, they are not all viewed equally. As I have already stated, women’s perspective is privileged as more objective because women have nothing to gain in maintaining the status quo of their oppression. As a result, we are able to get a clearer or more “true” view of society if we use women’s lives as a vantage point.

Within feminist standpoint theory, using women's lives as a vantage point necessarily requires that we look at women's labour. Specifically, we must recognize the role that women play in social reproduction. Indeed, feminist standpoint theorists have pointed explicitly to housework and reproductive labour as realities in women's lives, which gives women an epistemic perspective that allows them to have a broader and more inclusive understanding of society (Hartsock 2004; Smith 1987). Since feminist standpoint theory compels us to begin our examination with women's lived experience, then we must recognize the realities of the everyday lives of women, including the role they play in unwaged social reproduction. According to Hartsock, women's unique standpoint stems from the sexual division of labour rooted in the rise of private property. She argues, "on the basis of an account of the sexual division of labor, one should be able to begin to explore the oppositions and differences between women's and men's activity and their consequences for epistemology" (2004, 40). While socialization certainly plays a significant role in the division of labour under capitalism, there is merit to thinking about a sexual division of labour *as well as* a gendered division of labour; talking about a sexual division of labour highlights the fact that certain forms of labour, namely childbearing, cannot be explained merely in terms of social relations. Material conditions are paramount in understanding experience, and we should also consider experience in relation to the bodies we inhabit. In other words, looking at both the sexual division of labour and the gendered division of labour gives us an entry point from which to understand the way men's and women's lives have been ordered differently, and how this has impacted and shaped normative societal ideas about men and women.

As I have argued, the knowledge emerging from feminist standpoint theory is socially constructed. Rather than creating some totally undistorted vision or “truth,” the feminist standpoint emerges simply as another form of discourse. In this case, however, the discourse that emerges is counter-hegemonic because it is positioned in opposition to dominant, androcentric discourses that have been used to try and understand society. Using feminist standpoint theory to look at WfH, therefore, allows me to examine the ways in which these feminists shifted the lens of Marxist theory in order to move beyond a gender-neutral examination of capitalist social relations to understand the oppression of women stemming from their unwaged role of social reproduction.

Standpoint Through Struggle

From my perspective, one of the most compelling aspects of feminist standpoint theory is the notion that the feminist standpoint is understood and produced through struggle. Throughout my examination of the WfH movement, I argue that WfH feminism was praxis-oriented; that is, for WfH feminist, there was a close relationship between articulating a common political perspective and organizing struggles oriented towards that perspective. Feminist standpoint theory is therefore connected to feminist politics and is concerned with engagement and change, rather than simply being a static point of “objective” observation. In other words, one’s standpoint is more than a simple articulation of experience; we need to talk about our experiences by talking about the context in which these experiences occur. As bell hooks writes, “Feminists are made, not born. One does not become an advocate of feminist politics simply by having the privilege of having been born female. Like all political positions one becomes a believer

in feminist politics through choice and action” (2000a, 7). There is a similar claim to be made about the feminist standpoint, which can be described as an achievement rather than something someone can simply claim. According to Harding, standpoints result from the collective processes of sharing experiences as a form of collective political struggle amongst groups of marginalized people:

Only through such struggles can we begin to see beneath the appearances created by an unjust social order to the reality of how this social order is in fact constructed and maintained. This need for struggle emphasizes the fact that a feminist standpoint is not something that anyone can have simply by claiming it. It is an achievement. A standpoint differs in this respect from a perspective, which anyone can have simply by ‘opening one’s eyes.’ (1991, 127)

In other words, the development of a standpoint is a relational process that involves struggle and recognizing oppression.

In *Constituting Feminist Subjects* (1989), Kathi Weeks provides a similar definition of feminist standpoint theory. Rather than looking at standpoint as a perspective that is automatic or inherent based on social position, i.e. “I have a feminist standpoint simply because I am a woman,” Weeks looks at standpoint as a collective understanding of a particular subject position. In other words, standpoint develops from political practice; “collectives rather than individuals are the agents of social change” (Weeks 1989, 136). A standpoint is a collective project achieved through sharing experiences and recognizing one’s position in capitalist society. Smith similarly argues that

... we discover oppression in learning to speak of it as such, not as something which is peculiar to yourself, not as something which is an inner weakness, nor as estrangement from yourself, but as something which is indeed imposed upon you by the society and which is experienced in common with others. (qtd. in Marsh 2013, 206).

The emphasis that feminist standpoint theorists place on struggle, sharing common perspectives, and raising consciousness has been central to my discussions of the WfH movement. Further, I argue that the recognition of class and gender oppression came from the process of consciousness-raising. Within WfH there was a strong relationship between the development of Marxist-feminist analyses of housework and the organization of political activism aimed at addressing hierarchical social relations governed by wages (or lack of wages).

Looking at WfH through the Lens of Feminist Standpoint Theory

Drawing on experience as a methodological approach is connected to the development of both feminist history and feminist standpoint theory. I use experience as knowledge here with the caveat that one's individual experience should not be universalized. Looking at experience reveals to us problems that need to be explained, and must be considered within the larger context of hegemonic social relations. Experience must be mediated and analyzed with a consideration of different subjects coming into relation with one another, and how these relations and our social locations impact experience. In other words, experience is an opening that permits us to explore how difference is constituted and how it operates. For Smith, experience can't be reduced to perspective; rather we should use it

as a way of generating problems and questions through which to examine the lives of women (Smith 2004). Hartsock argues for a grounding of experience in some kind of methodological argument in order to substantiate and validate claims (Hartsock 2004). Building off Marxist theory and using a feminist history lens to consider theories developed from women's unique standpoint in society, feminist standpoint theory gives truth claims an epistemological grounding; it is imperative that experience and identity be thought of in a contextual relationship with other identities and in relation to material conditions.

Though my decision to use feminist standpoint theory primarily originated from my desire to tell the story of WfH, this theoretical framework has three main characteristics that make it ideal to study the development and growth of this feminist movement and the place of the women within it. First, using feminist standpoint theory requires that we begin from lived experience, rather than from theoretical concepts. Though women's experiences are multiple, embodied or lived experiences have the potential to be a common ground from which to explore oppression on a broader scale. The unique feminist standpoint stems from the gendered division of labour, which "define[s] women's activity as contributors to subsistence and as mothers" (Hartsock 2004, 43). Feminist standpoint theory, therefore, allows me to assess the way feminists involved with WfH understood their experiences of capitalist and patriarchal oppression in the gendered division of labour. As I mentioned above, one criticism often aimed against WfH is their claim that all women are housewives, which has been interpreted as an essentialist claim. Using feminist standpoint theory and the focus on embodied experience allows me to demonstrate that the WfH's focus on the category of "woman"

recognized, on the one hand, that women have primarily been responsible for housework, while at the same time offering an entry point to critique the structural position of housework. According to Smith, “Taking work in a generous sense of Wages for Housework means speaking experientially and concretely. But there’s something else about the concept of work in this general sense; it incorporates the individual’s subjectivity and his or her experience” (2005, 154). Within the context of the gendered division of labour, WfH feminists developed particular understandings of concepts like wages, housework, the working class, etc. The feminist standpoint looks at the experiences of women relative to a particular set of social relations, and “returns us to the actualities of our lives as we live them in the local particularities of the everyday/everynight worlds in which our bodily being anchors us” (Smith 1997, 394). The relationship between experience and subjectivity, therefore, is rooted in a particular set of relations.

The second characteristic of feminist standpoint theory that is essential for my analysis is the notion that the standpoint is achieved rather than inherited. My use of interviews and personal narratives from feminist activists shows how involvement in activism impacted women, and also how individual lived experiences influenced the shape and direction of the WfH movement. Coming from similar backgrounds, many of these women shared comparable experiences. When beginning from women’s experiences, we should be concerned with group experiences rather than positioning individuals as the primary focus of interest. One of the fundamental aspects of Hartsock’s articulation of feminist standpoint theory is that a feminist standpoint can only arise by discovering a shared experience of oppression, and through an opposition to this

oppression. This does not mean that individual experiences are not important, but that the crucial element for us to understand is the social relations and material conditions that have shaped and constructed groups. In other words, we gain a better understanding of individuals when we consider them in *context*. My use of interviews to examine WfH groups, therefore, allows me to look at feminist activists in relation to their experiences within WfH, where their shared histories based on shared social locations in relation to positions of power become evident.

The final characteristic of feminist standpoint theory that makes it an ideal theoretical lens for my project is its focus on power relations. The focus on power relations shows us the ways in which hegemonic ideals dictate social relations. From a Marxist perspective, capitalists own both the physical and mental means of production, and therefore set the terms for relations of power in society at large. In examining the WfH perspective, we see that wages (or lack of wages) becomes the determining factor in hierarchical, class-based social relations. For WfH feminists, it is the lack of wage associated with housework that has kept women in a subordinate position, even when they receive a wage for other work outside the home. Feminist standpoint theory also tells us that marginalized or oppressed groups have less interest in maintaining the status quo of a dominating social order; it is their subordinate position, therefore, that presents the opportunity and basis for moving beyond unequal power relations. Feminist standpoint theory presents us with the opportunity for a politicized, counter-hegemonic analysis of women's oppression by focusing on the construction of social relations and the importance of our everyday lives. Using this understanding of power and

subordination has allowed me to uncover the way WfH feminists envisioned the demand for the wage as a necessary tool in abolishing capitalist social relations.

Approaching Wages for Housework Using Feminist History

Like feminist standpoint theory, feminist history is connected to the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement during feminism's "second wave" in the 1970s. Feminist history differs from a women's history approach, which focuses on the role of women in history. While women's history "adds women to the standard categories of historical analysis, and deals with them in those terms," *feminist* history "adds gender as a problematic relationship into all other historical categories" (Matthews 1986, 152). Feminist history politicizes traditional history by criticizing it for the absence of women and by rediscovering female voices (Butler and Scott 1992; Laslett 1997; Scott 1999). In addition, feminist history seeks to look at women outside of historical forms of inquiry that have been shaped by masculine standards of importance, and instead reframes history so that women's experiences are seen as important. Feminist history takes a critical approach to the study of women, where it is important to understand the power relationship between men and women, as well as distinctions between public and private spheres, from a historical perspective, rather than assuming these divisions exist naturally. There is an emphasis on suspending any myths about "natural" or inherent divisions between men and women, as well as between public and private spheres. Because there is no objective "truth," "reality," or bird's eye narrative to uncover, we must consider the ways in which the past is represented, and how this representation can never be removed from the ideological biases that are based on our social locations and lives experiences.

Jill Matthews (1986) outlines several steps that help to construct feminist history, which I review in relation to my examination of WfH. In constructing feminist history, we must first recognize how power imbalances between men and women are a central dynamic within capitalist social relations. Earlier in this chapter, I talked about feminist standpoint theory as an epistemological tool that helps us to have a clearer perspective of society by looking at the position of women and the everyday reality of unwaged labour in their lives. In my literature review, I look at the way Marxist feminists have talked about power relations and the gendered division of labour rooted in the emergence of private property and the rise of capitalism. I also examine the way the gendered division of labour is connected to the separation between “productive” and “reproductive” forms of labour. That is, once production – and men – moved out of the home and into the public sphere in the factory, the reproductive work that women did remained hidden in the home, and therefore their connection to the work they did in the home came to be seen as “natural.”

The second step Matthews recommends in constructing feminist history is to consider the role that institutions like patriarchy play in shaping the experiences of women. If we recognize that relationships are socially structured, we must also recognize that experiences of oppression are not individual, isolated instances. In other words, looking at the gendered divisions of labour and the power imbalances inherent within capitalist social relations enables us to see the way oppression is shaped by social and political structures. When we recognize that oppression is shaped by social and political structures, then we must also see that oppression and social relations need to be historically analyzed. In my examination of the WfH movement in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I

use this understanding of feminist history to consider the emergence of this feminist movement within particular social, economic, and political contexts. In addition, I also consider the social position women inhabited in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Italy and Canada. The final step in constructing feminist history is to acknowledge the diverse experiences of women, and the multiple feminist standpoints that emerge as a result. When we acknowledge this diversity, then we see there is no such thing as a unified “women’s” history. I therefore present my examination of WfH as an exploration of a particular moment in feminist history, focusing on the way this group of women came to understand their oppression in light of capitalist and patriarchal social relations.

A feminist understanding of the ways in which gender and class relations are socially constructed prompted me to re-examine the experiences of women in the WfH movement through the reclamation of female voices. The emphasis I place on these female voices is connected to the move WfH feminists made towards autonomous feminist organizing, asserting their struggles in opposition to the male-dominated Left's subordination of women's issues. Conducting interviews and using feminist standpoint theory allowed this project to be unpacked and presented in a way that privileges the voices of feminist activists involved with WfH. My project is largely based on interviews with feminists involved with the WfH movements in Italy and Canada, and is corroborated by the documents they produced. In the following sections I look at the processes I developed for conducting interviews and archive work.

Interviews

I decided to conduct interviews because I wanted to prioritize the experiences of the women involved with WfH through the stories they told and the documents they produced in the context of the movement. As a form of narrative research, interviews help to construct a story about the experiences of women in the WfH movement and the meanings they have attributed to these experiences.

When I was arranging my interviews, I kept in mind two key aspects of interviewing outlined by Gabriele Griffin (2005): interview subjects and format (175-194). I will begin by reflecting on my interview subjects. My interview subjects were women connected to or directly involved in these groups. Of my 11 completed oral interviews, Francie Wyland, Louise Toupin, Nicole Lacelle, and Dorothy Kidd were able to speak to the Canadian context while Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Franca Singra, Sonia Cavazzana, Giuseppina Sauffill-Paggi, and Lucia Donallice spoke to the Italian context. Silvia Federici was able to provide a more general context, as she was the overlapping figure between the Italian and larger North-American movements. Gaining the trust of the interviewees was important, because I wanted them to be open about their experiences. The issue of trust was relevant to this project because of the conflicts that arose in the groups and some of the circumstances that led to the dissolving of the movement in the first place. One way I was able to gain trust was by offering anonymity to the women I was interviewing, letting them know that they did not have to attach their names to anything they would be telling me, and that any identifying information could be removed from my transcripts. Without exception, all of my interview subjects waived their anonymity and expressed a desire for openness throughout the process. Another way I was able to gain trust was by using a snowball sample technique, where I connected

with each woman through existing connections and associations. For example, I was initially put in contact with Silvia Federici via a friend who has been involved with her in the context of a political organization. Federici then led me to other women to interview, and so on. Though I attempted to make contact and arrange interviews with others from the movement, this proved more difficult than I had anticipated. Scheduling times to meet was difficult, and some women were unwilling or unable to participate for a variety of reasons. Some felt too much time had passed since the events took place, and for some it may have been triggering to talk about what was a difficult time for some. Because of the time that has passed since the height of WfH activities, I had to resign myself to the fact that I may not get all the answers I wanted.

When I was initially developing my interview questions, I had a general sense of what I wanted to know, but also knew that not every question would be answered and that my interview subjects might have different information they wanted to share. For this reason I decided to do semi-structured interviews, where questions served as a general framework leaving plenty of room for adjustment or a change in direction during the individual interviews. This fluid participation was important for my project because the women I interviewed were not always able to comment on the specific questions I asked. As a researcher, I had to be open to being led in new and unexpected directions. I wanted the interviews to be conversational, so while I developed a list of questions, I was open to whatever direction the conversation would take.

In order to avoid limiting what information I would be able to gain from these interviews, I informed my interview subjects that while there were particular questions I was interested in exploring, I wanted them to share with me anything they felt was relevant

or critical to a narrative of the movement. I began each interview with the same question: “Were you involved in any other movements or organizations prior to your involvement with WfH? If so, what was your experience of your time in these groups?”¹⁰ I asked this opening question because I wanted to get a sense of where these women were coming from. The next question I asked was: “There was a saying popular in the 1960s and 1970s in connection to the women’s rights movement: The personal is political. What about wages for housework appealed to you? Were you a “housewife”? How did you view your relationship to housework? The wage?” This question arose from my desire to know more about what motivated these women to join WfH specifically. In assessing the interviews I considered the ways in which WfH feminists came to have a particular understanding of oppression because, going back to Harding (1991), the feminist standpoint is achieved, not given. The discourse developed by WfH feminists is an articulation of the material conditions of their lives, and the common oppression that was uncovered through collective action. One interesting thing I learned from this process is that the majority of the women I interviewed were single and childless at the time of their involvement with WfH, but were drawn to the perspective because they saw what kind of a difference a wage and sense of autonomy could have made for their mothers and aunts. Towards the end of the interviews, I asked “What issues and strategies do you think are important going forward?” Without exception, the women responded by saying that elements of the WfH perspective were still important for feminist activism going forward. Namely, they highlighted the importance of making visible the invisibility of emotional labour and continuing to uncover the sustained proliferation of unwaged work in the lives of women.

¹⁰ See Appendix D for full list of interview questions.

Archive¹¹

In the construction of narratives, it can be difficult to remain objective. Rather than seeking objectivity, however, I was mindful of the subjective meanings that are conveyed as stories unfold. In other words, all stories are reconstructions of experience. In my interviews I listened to the stories being told and compared that information with my own understanding of the WfH movement, which had largely been informed by looking at archival material. The archival research I conducted allowed me to corroborate or “triangulate” the stories I heard during the interview process. Using themes and patterns that emerged through the different interviews, therefore, has allowed me to gain a “truthful” re-presentation of the WfH movement from those who experienced it.

The archive documents I consulted included a series of publications, posters, letters, etc. produced by women involved in various WfH groups. The two larger-scale publications I consulted were *Le Operaie della casa* produced by the *SLD* group in Padua, and the *Wages for Housework Campaign Bulletin* produced by the Toronto WfH group. I also consulted a series of internal organization documents, including correspondence talking about the expulsion of groups from the WfH network, and a series of letters exchanged during what I call the “Post-Montreal Conference Debate,” which I talk about in Chapter 5. These letters provide insight into internal debates over issues that part of the wider discussion on the issue what it meant to demand a wage for housework: was it a literal or symbolic demand?

Throughout the research process, I was mindful of what was present as well as what was absent from the archives. The archival documents I use are vital to

¹¹ See Appendix F to see a complete list of the archives consulted for this project.

understanding how the concepts like wages and housework were understood and talked about in both Italy and Canada. For example, propaganda documents are useful in understanding how the collectives articulated their objectives to the larger community. Who were these materials aimed at? What kind of language was used? What were the important issues that came to the forefront of discussions?

At the outset of my archival work, I was mindful of the fact that archives are organized in a certain way for a variety of reasons, whether that means specific political decisions or simply decisions related to practicality. For example, the archive I consulted in Padua¹² is comprised mainly of documents collected by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, who had hidden documents she collected from the movement over the years. They were kept buried for years in cantinas, hidden in sheds, etc. because of the persecution of left activists in Italy at the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s¹³ (Dalla Costa 2012). This allows me to be cognizant of the fact that many documents may never be found because of the personal risk involved in keeping them. The way archives are organized can also be reflective of societal assumptions about what documents are considered important for preservation, which may not include documents produced by women.

Translation

The scope of my project meant that I had to access archive materials in Italian and English, and that I had to conduct interviews in French, Italian, and English. Though

¹² The Dalla Costa Archive at the Biblioteca civica in Padua was not open to the public at the time of my visit, though it is now. I obtained special permission to review the archive, so the materials I reference from this archive are only those I have been able to see.

¹³ For example, Antonio Negri and others in Padua's political science department were arrested in 1979, and others were exiled accused of being part of the Red Brigades and being involved in the kidnapping and death of former Prime Minister Aldo Moro (and Negri for also being the political ideologue of the RB).

English is my first language, I grew up speaking French and Italian, so felt comfortable undertaking the process of translation for the project. There were no alternative translations available for the documents I acquired from the archives in Italy, so I had to develop a contextual understanding in order to produce a faithful translation that would most accurately convey the intended meaning behind the texts. When I conducted my interviews in French and Italian, I encouraged my interviewees to speak in whatever language felt most natural to talk about their experiences, as some of them were also English language speakers. After transcribing the interviews in the language of the interview, I then translated to English for use in the dissertation. Whenever I use a piece of translated text or interview material throughout the dissertation, I have included a footnote with the original material.

Conclusion

Using feminist standpoint theory as a theoretical lens and feminist history as a methodological framework, this project prioritizes the perspectives of feminists involved with the WfH movements in order to gain an understanding of the social conditions in which their activism emerged. My emphasis on consciousness raising and *autocoscienza* in Chapter 5 underlines the idea of the feminist standpoint emerging as a political perspective, where women draw connections between their personal lived experiences and the broader oppression of women. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I compare the development of feminist consciousness in both the Italian and Canadian contexts to show how WfH activists were not automatically endowed with a Marxist feminist perspective. For WfH feminists, a Marxist feminist standpoint and their analyses of women's

oppression were developed in dialogue with other women, and through the organization of subsequent forms of struggle waged in response to capitalist social relations.

In the following chapter, my literature review focuses on the way productive and reproductive forms of labour have been theorized, and how distinctions between these two types of labour are rooted in the rise of industrialism and capitalism. In addition, I look at the different ways housework has been theorized, and how my own understandings of housework and social reproduction have shaped my writing on WfH.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter, I situate the WfH movement within the context of the domestic labour debate, which came to full force in the 1960s and 1970s. Coming from socialists, Marxists, and feminists (with some overlaps in some cases), the focus of these debates was to bring attention to investigations of housework in order to understand the subordination of women. While housework was the common issue, this problematic was addressed from two main perspectives. First, there was a view of housework as it figures in capitalist social relations with debates on whether it is a productive form of labour, and whether surplus value can be expropriated from this labour. This economic investigation of housework was mainly concerned with uncovering capital's creation of and reliance on housework, and transposing analyses traditionally focused on the factory to the household. The second perspective was primarily concerned with the role of women vis-à-vis housework, and how the gendered relations in the home might inform feminist political practice.

For WfH feminists, the focus on woman as subject position was a tension within the movement. Indeed, an emphasis on the working class housewife in the WfH analysis is one that has been critiqued for its perceived tendency towards reductionism or essentialism, as I discussed in the previous chapter. One such criticism, for example, comes from Kathi Weeks. In *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Dalla Costa asserts that the housewife is the determinant position for all other women, which Weeks argues is one example of the “various attempts to reduce complex gender formations and identities to the female role that then seems to have been attributed solely

to the constitutive force of capital” (Weeks 2011, 126). As I argue in this chapter, however, Dalla Costa’s focus – and indeed the focus of WfH movement – is on the specificity of capitalist social relations, which does not mean that she is ignoring the influence of capitalism. Rather than being reductionist or essentialist, Dalla Costa’s focus on woman as a subject position is a reflection of tensions within the movement regarding the position of women. On one hand, Dalla Costa and others recognized the role of women connected to housework, which came about as a result of the separation between productive and reproductive forms of labour with the rise of capitalism. On the other hand, they also offered a critique of the structural position of social reproduction. In the following pages, I look at some of the major contributions to the domestic labour debate and position WfH between an economic perspective of housework and one that focuses on gendered relations in the home, illustrating the way the WfH perspective engages with the tension I describe above. The contribution of interventions oriented towards the WfH perspective demonstrates the way they developed unique discourses related to wages, housework, the family, and the role women play within these systems.

If the writings of the domestic labour debate were an attempt to move beyond traditional Marxist understandings of class relations in order to develop a uniquely Marxist feminist analysis of the oppression of women, then my logical starting point is Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* because it has long been the foundation for traditional Marxist solutions to the "woman question." From here I look to several early works that also pre-date the domestic labour debate of the 1970s, particularly the works of Mary Inman (1940) and Juliet Mitchell (1966), which both responded to traditional Marxist ideas about the oppression of women. I look at the

works of Inman and Mitchell because they provide a context from which the work of the domestic labour debate would emerge. For my examination of the domestic labour debate itself, I begin with the work of Margaret Benston (1969) and Peggy Morton (1971) because they have been credited with beginning the domestic labour debate. While the other writings from the domestic labour debate that I examine are not exhaustive in terms of what has been written about housework and social reproduction, those I have chosen represent some of the major analyses that informed feminist theory and activism centered on housework and social reproduction. I also include criticisms of the WfH perspective in order to help evaluate the successes and failures of their feminist praxis, and consider some of the complexities that arise when we consider the refusal of housework.

Engels, Inman, and Mitchell

In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels writes about changes in relations of production in the home, where the transition from feudalism to capitalism signified a shift from multi-generational, more communistic households to monogamous, single family households. According to Engels, what we know as the modern family formation resulted from the emergence of private property; the monogamous family structure was essential to the creation and maintenance of the capitalist mode of production, as well as the reproduction of class relations. As one of the first Marxists to attempt talking about class difference and inequality within the private domestic sphere, Engels asserts that monogamous relationships emerged to serve two main purposes: to ensure the inheritance of private property was passed along biological lines, and to bond women to a life of unpaid domestic work and childbearing. Household management lost

its public, or visible, character during the transition from feudalism to capitalism in what is also known as the period of modernity.¹⁴ Work in the home became part of the private sector, and the wife was excluded from social production until the rise of industrialization, and then only the proletarian wife was welcomed into the public sphere in order to enter the factory (Engels 2010, 104). Engels offers what he sees as a clear solution to this problem: “Then it will be plain that the first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry, and that this in turn demands that the characteristic of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society be abolished” (105). In other words, if women entered the productive labour force, they would be on more equal footing with men. In this work, therefore, Engels sets the tone for future engagements with the “woman question,” where traditional Marxists would also argue that the key to women’s emancipation would be for them to gain work outside the home. In fact, Engels argues that relations between proletarian men and women were more equal than those between bourgeois men and women; at least proletarian men and women both worked outside the home, and neither could afford to own private property (even if they did earn different wages).

Though Engels discusses the sexual division of labour as the primary division of labour, he does not explain why this is the case. According to Engels, “The division of labour between the sexes is determined by quite other causes than by the position of women in society” (113). Here Engels argues that the gendered division of labour that exists in society somehow emerged independent of social relations. He talks about the

¹⁴ Modernity is not confined to a single time period, and is signified by three major epochs characterized by shifts in socio-cultural norms: early, classical, and late modernity. The period that is connected to the work of Engels and Marx is classical modernity. See: K. Marx (1992) *Capital v. I*; E. Durkheim (1964) *The Division of Labor in Society*; M. Weber (2002) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

sexual division of labour as a “primitive” division, rather than one that is socially constructed, which falls into the territory of biological determinism to account for differences between men and women. Further, Engels’ discussion of women is incorporated into his discussion of the family, which further frames the sexual division of labour in relation to the home and family as women’s sphere vs. the world of production as the male sphere. One final area that is lacking in Engels’ discussion is that he does not actually explain how the entrance of women into the sphere of production will lead to their emancipation, given that all workers are exploited in the context of capitalist social relations. Here we can consider that perhaps Engels was writing in relation to an anticipated communist context where work would no longer be exploitative. As we have seen, however, the equalization of class relations in communist societies did not do away with gender inequality.

Mary Inman counters Engels' early arguments, asserting that the oppression of women was not the result of their lack of work outside the home or from their inability to purchase private property. Rather, their subjugation stemmed from the devaluation of housework. Inman was an active member of the U.S. Communist Party in the 1930s, and her opposition to the party line on the “woman question” created a controversy within the Party.¹⁵ Due to the Party’s unwillingness to discuss the “woman question” in any meaningful way, Inman wrote a pamphlet called *In Woman’s Defense*; the Party refused to publish this work because Inman’s discussion of housework was not “Marxist” enough. The pamphlet was serialized in the West Coast Communist newspaper *Daily People’s World* in 1939, and published as a book in 1940. Inman's pamphlet was groundbreaking

¹⁵ Kate Weigand has written a comprehensive account of the Inman controversy. See: K. Weigand (2001), “The Mary Inman Controversy and the (Re) Construction of the Woman Question, 1936-1945,” in *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women’s Liberation*.

in the way it challenged the U.S. Communist Party for its inability to offer a meaningful analysis of the oppression of women based on their position in the home. While Inman's work was pushed to obscurity for many years, it saw a revival in the 1970s after it was re-discovered by the organizers of the first national Women's Liberation Conference in 1968 in Chicago.

In this work, Inman argues that housework is performed for the benefit of capital, with husbands acting as intermediaries: "The housewife does not cook eight or nine hours like the camp cook, nor wash and iron a stated number of hours like the laundry worker...but she performs all these tasks, and more, for unlimited and unstated hours every day, every week, and every month for years" (Inman 1992, 140). She highlights women's isolation in the home as one of the indicators of oppression, asserting that housework is productive labour and must be recognized as such: "Most important of all, the housewife must be given credit for performing, in the home, work that is indispensable to the present method of machine production" (143). In addition to her framing of housework as productive labour, Inman also highlights the pervasiveness of sexism in American culture, arguing that a challenge to male supremacy is as necessary as changing economic and social relations. In other words, it is necessary to smash both capitalism *and* patriarchy. Inman's work was one of the first to link the economic oppression of women under capitalism to the social and cultural practices inherent to patriarchy: "Like other job needers, if she cannot get the job she would like she has to sometimes take what is available. But, unlike others when forced to take jobs they do not want, she has to live, eat and sleep with hers" (141). Inman reveals that, shockingly, even working class men sometimes oppress their wives! Due to her cutting-edge claims at the

time, it is not entirely surprising that Inman's work was met with mixed reception:

Mary Inman was described to me as 'deranged,' or with a like word impugning her mental stability, and she was ridiculed by Party authorities who pronounced her work 'dangerous' and 'anti-Marxist.' My ignorance of this history and my fear of Mary Inman's work cannot have been an anomaly. Rather, it suggests the extent to which the Party of the 1960s systematically erased the evidence of its women's history; it remained thoroughly male-dominated, male-centered, and anti-feminist. (Aptheker 2003, 519-520)

While many progressives embraced her work, there were critics within the Party who were opposed to it because Inman maintains that housework has an economic value, and that housewives should be organized as workers in their own right (Weigand 2001, 37), rather than as auxiliaries to male workers.

Inman's work challenged the traditional views of the Communist Party at the time, and was one of the first to seriously consider who benefits from the exploitation of women vis-à-vis housework. While her work certainly makes an important contribution to the study of social reproduction, I take issue with her assertion that women are oppressed as a group despite class differences amongst women (Inman 1992, 143). While all women may be oppressed as a result of patriarchy, an intersectional view of women's issues forces us to consider how the experience of oppression is dependent on other factors, such as race and class.

Juliet Mitchell's 1966 essay "Women: The Longest Revolution" is an early attempt to link socialist thought with the question of female liberation. This article was circulated widely in Britain and North America prior to becoming the 1971 book

Woman's Estate. My focus here is on the original 1966 article, because this allows me to illustrate Mitchell's early attempts to engage socialist theory with the question of female liberation. Socialist-feminism was not yet fully developed at this time, so Mitchell's work was certainly influential on this point. In this article, Mitchell looks at classical Marxist writings on the "woman question," critiquing them for their overly economic assessment of the oppression of women. She looks at the situation of women in society in terms of capitalist social relations and the emergence of private property, building on the attempts by Marx, Engels, Lenin¹⁶ and others to answer the "woman question." As I discussed earlier, their work, beginning with Engels, places women outside the structure of the family, where their liberation is dependent upon entering into political life. On Engels, Mitchell writes: "Engels effectively reduces the problem of woman to her capacity to work. He therefore gave her physiological weakness as a primary cause of her oppression...If inability to work is the cause of her inferior status, ability to work will bring her liberation..." (1966, 14). In her work, Mitchell addresses the shortcomings she identifies in Marxist and socialist theories of women's oppression by incorporating theories of psychoanalysis into her writing, focusing on gender, sexuality, and even the family as socially constructed notions. Mitchell's assertion that there is nothing natural or inherent in the form or social appearance of gender or the family goes against Engels' framing of differences between men and women vis-à-vis biological determinism:

The biological function of maternity is a universal, atemporal fact, and as such has seemed to escape the categories of Marxist historical analysis. From it follows—apparently—the stability and omnipresence of the family, if in very

¹⁶ See: V.I. Lenin (1971). "Capitalism and Female Labour." In *Lenin: Collected Works*; F. Engels, Friedrich (2010). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.

different forms. Once this is accepted, women's social subordination—however emphasized as an honourable, but different role... —can be seen to follow inevitably as an insurmountable bio-historical fact. The casual chain then goes: Maternity, Family, Absence from Production and Public Life, Sexual Inequality. (20)

In this passage Mitchell illustrates the way ideological constructions of the role of women have come to be viewed as natural facts. However, she degrades domestic labour as a poor imitation of the productive work of the factory. In addition, Mitchell's fusion of Marxist and psychoanalytic theories with feminist discourses results in a largely ahistorical account of the oppression of women, which misses the impacts that colonialism and slavery have had on women. Though this ahistorical account of the oppression of women is limiting, Mitchell's work is incredibly important because she was one of the first to attempt to account for the complexity of women's lives and the different ways we experience oppression. In addition, Mitchell continued to build upon the theories she was developing in this piece, and has come to stand as one of the most influential scholars providing psychoanalytic theories with a critical, feminist lens. She was also responsible for laying the groundwork for socialist feminist theories, which subsequent scholars would take up and further develop.

While these three texts by Engels, Inman, and Mitchell offer us an entry point to begin thinking about the “woman question” from the point of view of Marxist-feminist theory, they are all missing a consideration of how the rise of capitalism is connected to colonial expansion, as well as to the rise of industrialization. Further, there is no discussion of how race factors into newly emerging capitalist social relations. Particularly

problematic is Inman's assertion that women are oppressed as a class, because this ignores the impacts of race and class position on experiences of oppression. Patriarchal domination must be understood not only in term of its connection to capitalism, but also in relation to colonialism and the construction of race. As former colonies, or countries in the global south, became embedded into capitalism's international division of labour, women from these countries soon became the cheapest source of labour. The construction of Black people and people of colour as "other" came about during the period of colonial expansion, and these pejorative notions were passed on to European women as well; they thought it was their duty to save colonized women not from the oppressions of colonialism, but from what they saw as inherently oppressive indigenous cultures. When we assume a universal experience of women's oppression, therefore, we are ignoring the different experience women of colour have within capitalist social relations.

Benston, Morton, Dalla Costa and James

Continuing the trajectory of writings following from Engels, Inman, and Mitchell, there is an evolution and refinement in the analysis of housework and the position of women within the family unit as a result of capitalist social relations. In the following pages I look at the work of Margaret Benston, Peggy Morton, and finally Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, whose respective works were seminal texts in the domestic labour debate, showing a direct relationship between streams of feminist thought emerging in Canada and Italy. Taken together, these works form a conversation focused on how to account for the oppression of women, while also considering how we can use these new understandings to subvert social relations and move towards struggles for liberation.

These texts effectively set the groundwork for the domestic labour debate, and the interventions that followed were responding to these early contributions and building on the theoretical concepts they initiated.

Because of Benston's impact on the growing global women's movement, I mark 1969 as the beginning of the domestic labour debate. Copies of her article "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation" (1969) were circulated around Canada and subsequently translated into several languages, contributing to the process of consciousness raising happening within newly emerging or expanding feminist groups around the globe: "Benston's argument anchored a particular materialist feminist approach rooted in the briefly happy marriage of Marxism, women's liberation, and the New Left in the last years of the 1960s" (Palmer 2009, 118). An important aspect of Benston's work is the way she highlights the cognitive resistance that makes it difficult for many of us to view child-rearing and other forms of domestic work as work, and argues that paid forms of this work have made that classification easier. According to Benston, the work women do is *quantitatively* different from that of men; housework does not count as work because it does not have a wage. Though women perform necessary work, like childcare and cooking, she argues they are engaging with use values; there is no exchange value, and therefore no surplus value is produced. Because of the way productive and reproductive work is organized, "To pay women for their work, even at minimum wage scales, would imply a massive redistribution of wealth" (Benston 1969, 23). Benston further argues that women are permitted to enter the workforce as secondary wage earners as long as they are not negligent in their primary responsibility: childcare. Even as women have been granted more equal access to employment (even

those in Soviet-era Russia or Eastern Europe, where class differences were supposed to have been equalized), they have not been granted the liberation they sought. This lag in liberation is due to the fact that women are not seen as “structurally responsible” (19) for earning a wage and supporting a family, so they continue to be primarily responsible for domestic work. In other words, the persistence of housework places an extra burden on women as both waged and unwaged workers. For Benston, there are two necessary prerequisites for women's liberation: equal access to jobs outside the home and the complete, public socialization of private household production. However, as more women have entered the workforce and as many aspects of “housework” are now present as waged labour, we see that housework is still largely considered “women’s work,” even when it has a public character.

Benston’s Marxist-feminist analysis of housework and domestic labour is premised on the idea that an economistic view of the oppression of unwaged women shows us that their relation to the means of production is different from that of waged, male workers. Benston describes housework as a “pre-market,” “kin-based,” private mode of production where use values are produced. Because Benston views housework existing in a separate mode of production, she argues that women constitute a separate class apart from men:

This assignment of household work as a function of a special category “women” means that this group does stand in a different relation to production than the group “men.” We will tentatively define women, then, as that group of people, which is responsible for the production of simple use-values in those activities associated with the home and family. (Benston 1969, 15-16)

In other words, like serfs and others who exist outside the relationship of commodity production, women are a separate class; the relations of production in the home are “pre-capitalist.” (13-14). Similar to Inman, there is a problem with the way Benston ignores the impacts of racialization on gendered relations in the family and in society more broadly. Further, her assertion that women constitute a separate class ignores the class differences that exist *amongst* women. Looking at the demands of certain “Second Wave” feminists for jobs outside the home or at critiques of the “glass-ceiling,” for example, we see a desire for parity with men of a certain class. These struggles have not done much for working class women. Indeed, the working class as a whole is stratified according to wages, and the relational hierarchy that exists amongst elements of the working class on the basis of wages is true for both men *and* women. There are, in fact, some women who inhabit a higher place in class-based hierarchies than some men. Nevertheless, women continue to hold a secondary position in society on the basis of both patriarchy and capitalism. Though the societal pressures of heteronormativity may compel many women to marry, however, sex (or gender) does not represent a condition similar to class.

Morton's "A Woman's Work is Never Done" (1971) is an expanded version of an article that first appeared in 1970. For the purpose of the literature review, I look at the expanded version of the article. Morton's contribution to the domestic labour debate largely supports arguments put forward by Benston; for both Benston and Morton, social reproduction takes centre-stage in their considerations of the oppression of women. Morton, however, pushes slightly further, arguing, “the family is a unit whose function is the maintenance and reproduction of labour power” (1971, 214). In other words, Morton

seems to recognize that the reproduction of labour power inside the home is connected to the production that happens outside the home, unlike Benston, who presents housework as a private, “kin based” mode of production that is entirely separate from work outside the home. Another area of divergence between Benston and Morton’s analyses is the issue of strategies for liberation. Morton criticizes Benston's vision women's liberation, arguing that true material changes for women will not come when housework is socialized and women enter the workforce. Such a strategy fails because it does not consider the changing nature of the family as an economic institution, as well as the demands of the labour market (214). According to Morton, "Our revolutionary potential lies in the fact that most women are both oppressed as women and exploited as workers, and our strategy must reflect this duality" (224). Morton demonstrates trends in women being pushed out of industry jobs as the need for job training increased because women were seen to require time off for childbirth and child rearing; spending time and money to train them was seen as a waste. As labour demands shifted, however, the presence of women in the workplace increased. The increasing presence of women in the waged labour market shows us that women are central to production, rather than simply inhabiting a peripheral role. Even as a reserve army of labour, women are central to capitalist production because of the role they often play in filling low-waged positions (221-223).

Morton advocates organizing around issues that would give women economic independence, which James (1972, 20, note 6) agrees is necessary in order to develop revolutionary consciousness. According to Morton, "We can give expression to the needs that women have and at the same time raise the level of these struggles through militant

actions around some of these issues" (Morton 1971, 227). A call to build struggles out of ideological demands is the same kind of trajectory that would later be undertaken by the WfH movement. In the context of WfH, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* became the theoretical foundation in the development of a Marxist-feminist praxis aimed at attacking the oppressive nature of housework, where the demand for the wage was viewed as a means through which to refuse work.

The final key piece in laying the groundwork for the domestic labour debate, therefore, is *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1972), which was the seminal text of the WfH movement. Written by Dalla Costa and James, this text is informed by discussions and contributions from members of the meeting of the International Feminist Collective in Padua. From these discussions, Dalla Costa wrote an essay called "Women and the Subversion of the Community," which was published along with James' "A Woman's Place." In this book, Dalla Costa and James examine unwaged housework in the United States, Britain and Italy, to show how capitalism is predicated on the oppression of women. Women, they argue, are not only oppressed by the sexual division of labour in the household, but also in their position amongst the working class. This text provides a Marxist-feminist investigation of the changing nature of the working class and identifies wages and wagelessness as the greatest dividing line between workers. Furthering the analysis present in the work of Benston and Morton, Dalla Costa and James identify housework as the root of women's oppression because of the lack of wage associated with this work. As a strategy for liberation, Dalla Costa and James prescribe the demand for the wage as the greatest form of struggle against the exploitative nature of capitalism because it provides a lever with which to refuse this work and subvert social

relations.

For Dalla Costa and James, the family unit is essential for capitalist production. This idea counters the early work of Mitchell, who positioned production completely outside of the family unit. It also counters the work of Benston, who saw housework as an entirely different mode of production that exists apart from capitalism. For Dalla Costa and James, therefore, housework is presented as productive, and the extraction of surplus value is mediated through the family wage. In other words the wage is paid to the husband, who is then responsible for the exploitation of the housewife and her labour. In this analysis, the working class housewife becomes the central point of analysis, as she is a central component of capitalist production. For Dalla Costa and James, all women are housewives, whether or not they also work for a wage outside the home. For Lise Vogel, Dalla Costa's analysis of the working class housewife demonstrates a sophisticated grasp of Marxist theory and politics (Vogel 1981, 203). However, Vogel argues that both Morton's and Dalla Costa's focus on the position of working class women does not connect to a broader examination of the oppression of all women. As I have already discussed, the assertion that all women are housewives is not meant to essentialize the nature of women. Dalla Costa talks about the position of women as housewives from a global perspective, and her focus on the struggle of working class housewives is not to suggest that *only* working class women are exploited, but rather to show us how the working class housewife serves as the basis that determines the position of all other women (1972, 21). Further, her assertion is based on a nuanced definition of housework, recognizing that housework is not a *kind* of work but is viewed "as quality of life and quality of relationships which it generates, that determine a woman's place wherever she

is and to whichever class she belongs" (1972, 21). In other words, it is capitalist social relations that construct housework as a feminine attribute.

The issue of the wage is key to the analysis brought forward by Dalla Costa and James. It is precisely the lack of wages that obfuscates the productive nature of housework. For Dalla Costa, the presence of women in the paid workforce shows us that the exploitation of women resulting from housework does not stop once they leave the home:

The question is, therefore, to develop forms of struggle which do not leave the housewife peacefully at home...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. (Dalla Costa 1972, 36)

The struggle for wages, therefore, is presented as necessary in abolishing housework and liberating women.

The Domestic Labour Debate

In this section, I look at the various contributions to the domestic labour debate according to three common themes I identified in the body of the literature. The first theme is connected to productivity, and whether housework is “real,” productive work or “merely” reproductive. I use quotation marks around the words “work” and “merely” in order to challenge the devaluation of housework on the basis that it does not generate income or surplus value. The second major theme is related to the family structure. Specifically, the

family structure that is talked about in the writings from the domestic labour debates is a heterosexual family structure. Nevertheless, exploring the structure of the family and the formation of relations under capitalism contests the illusion of housework as “naturally” gendered. Finally, many of the authors consider the impact of the dual identity of women as waged and unwaged workers. That is, women work outside the home, housework does not disappear. How does these dual identities impact woman? As I demonstrate in the following pages, these themes are certainly not prescriptive, and there is a lot of overlap between them. I contend that these overlaps demonstrate the complexity of housework, and in particular its relation to the home and the family structure. One theme intrinsically connected to the three aforementioned themes is the location of housework in the home. The location of housework in the home is a unique characteristic, which I argue, creates complexities in the labour relations and conditions of the work of social reproduction.

Housework as "Real" Work: Is it Productive or Reproductive?

The nature of housework was conceived in different ways during the roughly ten year span of the domestic labour debate, and generated a number of questions including:

Is it productive or reproductive? What does it produce? There were those who viewed housework as existing outside of capital, and therefore subordinate to the capitalist mode of production. For others, housework was a specific form of work existing within capitalist social relations. The nature of housework is complicated, and continues in debates today.

The rise of industrialization fundamentally changed the relations in and conditions under which most women worked, though this change is sometimes obfuscated. In his

examination of the "domestic revolution,"¹⁷ Wally Seccombe (1980b) identifies the ways relations in the home were altered by the rise of industrialization. Domestic production moved out of the home and into industry, resulting in an increase in the sexual division of labour. As a result of this shift in production, certain aspects of household production moved into the realm of capitalist production, creating distinctions between real work and "non-real" work. The sexual division of labour resulting from the move of production outside the home made sense, in some ways, because it was often easier for women to take care of the home if they were already there nursing babies, for example. However, the move of production outside the home meant that housework was now constructed as "non-work" because it was viewed as necessary for subsistence: "Domestic labour, overwhelmingly women's labour, is unwaged; lacking the wage as a signifier of work, it becomes insignificant. It does not appear as 'real' work... It is a 'labour of love,' with all the attendant mystification that this involves," (Seccombe 1980b, 83). As a result of this shift, Seccombe argues, housework lost its value.

While all contributors to the debate seem to be in agreement that housework is a legitimate form of work, the question becomes whether or not this work is productive, or "real," in a Marxist sense. When we talk about productive labour from a Marxist perspective, we are talking about whether or not this work produces surplus value. In *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Dalla Costa talks about the view of housework vis-à-vis wage labour, where it has come to be regarded as non-productive because it is work that does not receive a wage:

¹⁷ The domestic revolution is a transitional period connected to the rise of industrialization, and its characteristics give the appearance of a continuity of gender relations in the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

It is often asserted that, within the definition of wage labor [sic], women in domestic labor [sic] are not productive. In 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. (Dalla Costa 1972, 33)

For both Dalla Costa and James, housewives produce the labour power necessary for capitalist development. Labour power, the commodity produced by housework, is difficult to conceive as a commodity because it is not a tangible or easily perceptible thing: "The ability to labor [sic] 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" (James 1972, 11). For Dalla Costa and James, therefore, unwaged labour performed by women in the home produces value as well as surplus value. Indeed, for Leopoldina Fortunati, reproductive labour produces labour power as a commodity and also produces surplus value.

Fortunati's book, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital*, was first published in 1981, and was not translated into English until 1995. The themes Fortunati explores in her text are connected to the domestic labour debate, even though Anglo scholars may not have come in contact with her work until much later. In this text, Fortunati examines the manifestation of reproductive labour under capitalism. She also provides a critique of the shortcomings present in the work of Marx and Engels, as they were unable to account for the issue of gender oppression in their analyses of the working class. According Fortunati, reproductive labour is an umbrella category separated into housework and sex work; the two forms of labour are connected and

interdependent, but they are also talked about in contrasting ways. In this examination, housework is a general form of reproductive labour, while sex work is more particular and is distinct from the sex that occurs within domestic or romantic partnerships. In other words, sex work (sex with sex workers) is presented as a form of labour through which the male worker is physically and emotionally reproduced, making up for any shortcomings in the domestic sexual relationship. Sex work as a form of reproductive labour is further complicated by the fact that money is exchanged for services. We see this complication when we consider that many continue to view this exchange as non-waged reproductive labour because it is invisible, or immaterial, labour. Nevertheless, it reproduces the male worker and therefore increases the value of his labour power.¹⁸

Moving beyond an abstracted discussions of housework in the domestic labour debate, Meg Luxton's *More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home* (1980) animates theoretical issues related to housework through an empirical case study of housewives in northern Manitoba. Based on a series of questionnaires, observations, and interviews with 100 women from her time spent in Flin Flon between 1976-1977, Luxton examines the productive nature of housework, which she argues produces labour power. Labour power is reproduced on a daily basis, while the human beings possessing this labour power are reproduced on a generational basis. In other words, "life itself" is reproduced both daily and generationally on an ongoing basis (Luxton 1980, 21).

For Luxton, housework is "one of the most important and necessary labour processes of industrial capitalist society" (13), and is necessary to support wage labour.

¹⁸ Sex work was connected to the WfH struggle through the establishment of groups like Wages for Prostitutes in England.

For Fortunati, housework supports the worker while also raising the value of his labour power. This function is important to capital, even if the male worker himself does not recognize it. This work includes the nine months of gestation, child rearing, feeding and clothing members of the family, etc. As Morton also argues, housework produces labour power, and surplus value is extracted from the housewife's labour because she receives less than what is actually necessary for her subsistence in the husband's pay. In the male-breadwinner model, the money received indirectly through the husband's pay is less than what she would have received for doing similar work for a wage in the paid workforce. For Wally Secombe (1974), Emily Blumenfeld and Susan Mann (1981), the production and reproduction of labour power is a form of petty commodity production, which is a form of self-employment. According to Silvia Federici and Nicole Cox, "It remains to be clarified that by saying that the work we perform in the home is capitalist production, we are not expressing a wish to be legitimated as part of the 'productive forces,' in other words, it is not a resort to moralism" (Cox and Federici 1975, 6). Cox and Federici, as well as other feminists sharing the WfH perspective, argued that, though necessary, having housework recognized as real work was not an end in and of itself:

But when we say that housework—still our primary identification as women is a moment of capitalist production we clarify our specific function within the capitalist division of labour and, most important, the specific forms our attack against it must take. Our power does not come from anyone's recognition of our place in the cycle of production, but from our capacity to struggle against it. (6)

Recognition as an end would only result in being exploited in the same way that all waged workers are exploited under capitalism within the relations of production.

Christine Delphy's *L'Ennemi principal* was originally published in 1970, and is a work she revisited multiple times in coming to understand the oppression of women vis-à-vis housework. In this text Delphy argues that the only difference between housework and similar work performed in the waged labour market is the lack of wage. Her focus on the wage here is very much in line with certain elements of the WfH perspective, particularly as articulated by Cox and Federici in *Counter-Planning from the Kitchen: Wages for Housework, a Perspective on Capital and the Left*. She diverges from Cox and Federici, however, when she asserts that it is their husbands, not capital, that exploits women because they are doing this work for free in the home.

For Gardiner (1975) and Holmstrom (1981), housework is necessary for the production of surplus value, even though it does not actually produce surplus value and is not productive. Gardiner views it as necessary for the production of surplus value because it minimizes the amount of labour and the value of labour power necessary for production. The housewife achieves this minimization by making up for any shortfall in wages needed to fulfill the subsistence needs of workers. In other words, the housewife is essential, especially in times of capitalist crisis, because housework can be increased in order to make ends meet (Gardiner 1975, 51). For Holmstrom, housework is a form of surplus labour necessary for the production of surplus value: "Surplus value could not be produced without a whole army of people whose function is, in Marx's words, to exercise despotic control over the workers. It does not follow that this control produces surplus value. Rather, it 'belongs to the incidental expenses of production... occasioned by the circulation process'" (Holmstrom 1981,189). This surplus labour is performed without a wage, and as a result, the housewife is exploited (200). For Secombe the housewife

produces value, even though she is not a productive worker (1974). He makes this distinction because of her indirect relationship to capital. This indirect relationship means that, while she produces value (in the form of labour power), there is no surplus value extracted from the housewife's labour because her work is not waged. From a Marxist perspective, the exploitation of workers under capitalism takes place in the extraction of surplus value inherent in the wage relation. Like Seccombe, Holmstrom also argues that housewives are not exploited as workers because they are not directly involved in the production of surplus value, even if they are oppressed as women. Both Seccombe and Holmstrom have some inconsistencies in their analyses. Holmstrom argues that housewives both are and are not exploited as workers. Further, she does not elaborate on the role of the circulation process, so we are not able to see how surplus labour exists without producing surplus value. Similarly, Seccombe argues that housework produces value, while at the same time denying that it is productive labour. I contend that it is precisely the lack of wage that masks this work as non-productive.

According to Vogel, housework produces use-values, but it does not produce value (1981, 205). This point is supported by Coulson et. al., who argue that housework does not create value "because its immediate products are use values and not commodities; they are not directed towards the market, but are for immediate consumption within the family" (Coulson et. al. 1975, 62). For example, when a housewife purchases groceries and transforms them into something edible through the process of cooking, it is for her family and not to be sold on the market. According to Briskin, this transformation does not change the value of these goods because their consumption is limited to the family unit. While housework is responsible for creating

and maintaining a reserve labour force, Briskin denies that this work is productive: “Labour power is reproduced in the sphere of production, insofar as the value of labour power is a portion of the commodities produced in the sphere of production. In the aggregate, the reproduction of labour power is the reproduction of the dominant class relations of capitalist society” (Briskin 1980, 155). In other words, housework is not productive, but is merely reproductive. Coulson et. al. take this argument one step further, arguing as Secombe does that housework is not productive because it is not waged. However, housework is uniquely exploitative precisely because of the lack of wage. In other words, housework mirrors productive labour while at the same time appearing to exist outside these relations as production's "other" because this work is not recognized with a wage.

The Family Unit: Gendered Relations in the Home

One seemingly mystifying aspect of housework is the fact that it has come to be viewed as women's work. Rather than accepting this as a given, much of the literature of the domestic labour debate considers the theme of gendered social relations, questioning how housework came to be viewed as women's work. In the following pages, I begin by looking at the emergence of gendered relations in the home connected to the rise of capitalism. I then look at the implications of the nuclear family ideal, how systems of capitalism and patriarchy present themselves in the home, and how race and colonialism further complicate these systems.

A unique feature of housework is its location in the home, which means the work performed in this space has unique characteristics. In light of these unique characteristics,

we should examine the household or family unit rather than individuals because this allows us to see the way gendered social relations have been shaped by capitalist imperatives. In *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Dalla Costa accounts for the way the family structure was altered with the rise of industrialization and production for capital:

In pre-capitalist patriarchal society the home and the family were central to agricultural and artisan production. With the advent of capitalism the socialization of production was organized with the factory as its center. Those who worked in the new productive center, 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 labor, which was seen to be social and necessary. (Dalla Costa 1972, 23-24)

The gendered division of labour and relations in the family are directly connected to the rise of capitalism. In "The Housewife and her Labour Under Capitalism," (1974) Secombe contends that relations of production and reproduction in the home appear unrelated to capital because they were built into the gendered relations of the family, where housework as gendered work came to be viewed as a natural fact.

Briskin's contribution to the debate is incredibly valuable in the way she names the process of reification. It is precisely through the process of reification that gendered relations came to be established as "natural." She presents us with a concrete way of understanding how the normatively conceived "nuclear family" ideal came into being and why the gendered division of labour appears as natural: "Women's oppression is not simply a function of free-floating sexist ideas; rather it is firmly rooted in the material

conditions of women's lives, primarily in the institution of the family" (Briskin 1980, 137). In other words, we must think about the oppression of women and gendered divisions of labour as they emerged from changes in the material conditions of the family. In his 1923 essay "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," Lukács explained Marxian reification as the process of social relations being turned into objects, and subsequently appearing to exist naturally outside of those relations and as the source of those relations (1971, 83). The "nuclear family" unit as we know it came into existence as production moved outside the home, creating a gendered division of labour. In other words, post-industrial gendered social relations created the family unit so that it now appears as a natural object existing outside of capitalist production. Federici and Cox highlight the role of the wage in the process of reification:

...measuring work by the wage also hides the extent to which all our social relations have been subordinated to the relations of production, the extent to which every moment of our lives functions for the production and reproduction of capital. The wage, in fact (and that includes the lack of it), has allowed capital to obscure the length of our working day. Work appears as one compartment of life, which takes place only in certain areas. The time we consume in the social factory, preparing ourselves for work, or going to work...appears as leisure, free time, individual choice. (Cox and Federici 1975, 9)

The family and its corresponding gendered division of labour have been constituted through and maintained by these relations, and divisions continue to exist insofar as we allow these relations to exist.

As I discussed earlier in this section, the gendered division of labour in the family

is connected to the rise of capitalism, where so-called productive labour moved outside of the home and into the factory. This shift, therefore, is responsible for the public/private dichotomy. Because the nuclear family ideal is predominantly white and European, it is also connected to the rise of white, colonial supremacy. In the division between public and private spheres, men become workers while women are domestic labourers. For Sheila Rowbotham (1973), this public/private division means housewives have a different relation to the means of production than waged male workers. For Delphy, marriage and the family are the primary source of oppression for women; while this claim is similar to that presented by WfH, the rationale and basis for this argument is different. Delphy's examination of housework outside of the capitalist mode of production is meant to account for what she sees as an inherent bias in the Marxist labour theory of value; that is, because Marxism is primarily concerned with surplus value and relations of production, it is not able to move beyond an analysis of the (male) waged worker. However, as others contributing to the debate have illustrated, it is possible to expand Marx's labour theory of value beyond the (male) waged worker.

Secombe views the relationship between men and women resulting from the gendered division of labour as one existing between equals. He likens housework to the petty commodity production of tailors and shoemakers, suggesting that if a housewife is unhappy with the arrangement, she can simply find another arrangement. Gardiner highlights Secombe's failure to recognize the power imbalance in this relationship; the power imbalance is created by the housewife's economic dependence on her husband's wage (Gardiner 1975, 51). Gardiner further rejects the analogy of the tailor and the shoemaker because, while they may change positions if they are not happy with the

money they receive for their work, this is not the case for the housewife: "It seems misleading to apply this same analysis to housework where women do not, in any straightforward sense, have the option of moving to another occupation. Women are tied through marriage to housework and housework is therefore not comparable to other occupations" (Gardiner 1975, 49). If a woman is dependent on her husband's wage for survival, she cannot simply leave him and change her situation. Rowbotham describes the relationship between men and women resulting from the gendered division of labour as one that mirrors capitalist social relations. In other words, the male wage earners become the bourgeoisie while women, who are engaged in private household production, become the proletariat. However, unlike capitalist social relations, the housewife maintains an indirect relationship to the wage, and it is the husband who appropriates her labour power. Others, like Dalla Costa, argue that men are simply acting as intermediaries of capital; capitalism is what expropriates women's labour power. As women have increasingly gained entry into the workforce, we should extend this argument to say that some women are also acting as intermediaries of capital because the transnational neoliberal economy has allowed wealthy women to exploit poor women's labour power.

As I have discussed, the rise of the so-called "nuclear family" ideal, which is a white, European, heterosexual ideal, is connected to the gendered division of labour in the home. In this idealized family structure, gendered characteristics like passivity are attributed to the housewife. Certain gendered characteristics reinforce the housewife's role as the discipliner of the male worker, the outlet for the male worker's frustration, and the reproducer of hegemonic societal ideologies. In his examination of the white, Western, heterosexual family of the 1970s, Secombe argues that the nuclear family is

characterized by private relations in the household that occur between husband and wife, and any of their children. It is a limited family unit consisting of only two generations (1980a, 60). For Morton, the family structure serves as the primary unit of socialization. Within these relations, female sexuality is repressed, as it is limited to its biological function; men exert control over women and children as a way of expressing their feelings of repressed alienation, and girls are socialized to be wives and mothers (Morton 1971, 211). The emergence of the family wage system was advantageous to men and patriarchy because it ensured that women would not "serve two masters," and it was advantageous to capitalism because it meant men were less likely to resist the terms of their employment if they were responsible for the economic survival of the family (Hartmann 1979, 15-16). In addition, the family wage system assumed men were providing for their dependents, which also justified paying lower wages to women. The family wage, therefore, disciplines both the housewife and the male wage earner because of dependency.

By the time Heidi Hartmann entered the domestic labour debate in 1979, feminists in North America had come in contact with the work of Italian Marxist-feminist Mariarosa Dalla Costa. According to Hartmann, Dalla Costa ignored relations between men and women, and therefore had not sufficiently incorporated an analysis of patriarchy as an institution into her account of the oppression of women: "Dalla Costa argues that what is socially important about housework is its necessity to capital. In this lies the strategic importance of women" (Hartmann 1979, 6). Dalla Costa, however, does address the difficult relations existing between men and women in relation to the rise of capitalism: "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" (Dalla Costa 1972, 24). Later, Dalla Costa elaborates on this point and looks at the position of the male wage-earner to 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" (31); from this subordinate position, women were conditioned to be passive beings "whose function is essentially that of receptacle for other people's emotional expression, who is the cushion of the familial antagonism" (42). Here we can see that while Dalla Costa does talk about relations between men and women, she is not explicitly spelling out the manner in which patriarchy benefits from housework. Hartmann's look at the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism is connected to an analysis of housework, demonstrating how capitalism supports patriarchy by limiting a woman's opportunities for financial independence. In turn, patriarchy supports capitalism by ensuring that all the needs of subsistence are met within the confines of the nuclear-family structure.

Luxton highlights the relationship between economic dependency and economic responsibility within the family unit as a disciplining force for the male worker: "One result of the economic relationship between women and their husbands is to bind men to their jobs" (Luxton 1980, 66). This relationship is articulated by one of the women interviewed in her study: "I know he hates his job. It's a terrible job. But he can't quit 'cause of me and the kids [sic]. We need his wages" (qtd. in Luxton 1980, 66). The family wage allows us to see the way emotional and economic aspects of the family are connected: the male wage meant to cover two or more people within a single family unit,

which then fulfills the emotional needs of the male worker. Because the family is dependent upon this wage, the male worker is less likely to withhold his labour power. The stability of the family, therefore, creates a stable workforce. The family wage, however, was reserved mainly for white families. Some Black men and men of colour may have had more economic power than some women, but they were prevented from accessing the family wage (Carty 1999, 42). Black women and women of colour often did not have the choice of being materially dependent on their husbands in the same way as white, middle class women, and so their relationship to the family structure was different; in some ways, the family can serve as a source of protection against the forces of colonialism and capitalism.

Another aspect of the production that takes place in the social factory is the production and reproduction of hegemonic ideologies. In other words, we are socialized to view heterosexuality, white supremacy, capitalism, the subordination of women, etc. as the norm. Female passivity reinforces and reproduces normative, hegemonic ideologies as a way of further disciplining workers. According to Luxton,

Structured into the household relations therefore is a 'petty tyranny' which allows the man to dominate his wife and children. Such male domination derives partly from the fact that domestic labour is predicated on wage labour and therefore caters to the needs of the wage worker. It is reinforced partly by societal norms of male dominance and superiority. (Luxton 1980, 65-66)

Because the housewife relies on her husband's wage, her own needs are subsumed within the needs of the husband first and the family second. Dalla Costa examines the way hegemonic capitalist and patriarchal ideologies are maintained through forms of social

reproduction that take place in the home, which she names the productivity of passivity and discipline. The "productivity of passivity" refers to the repression of female sexuality, where female sexual desire is denied at the same time as women's bodies are used as tools of reproduction. Dalla Costa elaborates on the role and construction of female passivity, identifying two of its major functions:

Now this passivity of the woman in the family is itself "productive". Firstly 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. (Dalla Costa 1972, 42)

On the former point, as women are constructed and socialized as passive beings, they lose a sense of themselves as individual subjects, and try to find fulfillment through their housework and by being "good" wives. Luxton reflects on the experiences shared by the housewives she interviewed, noting, "Sex traditionally revolves around the man's advances, his schedules, his rhythms, his climax – his needs... Women often subordinate their needs and wants to ensure family harmony" (Luxton 1980, 64). Striving to be a "good" wife, therefore, is meant to create harmony within the family. In addition, the moral construction of the "good" wife/mother was also used to curb feelings of guilt,

inadequacy, insignificance, and dissatisfaction while at the same time disciplining the housewife. The construction of the “good” wife/mother extended beyond the home and the relationships of the family, and has come to pervade other aspects of our lives. The emotional aspects of housework that have come to be associated with idealized notions of femininity extend beyond the home because of the way women have been socialized, and the way men have been socialized in relation to us.

For Dalla Costa, the “productivity of discipline” refers to the way women have become an outlet for male frustration. There is a beautiful scene in the film *Salt of the Earth* where the female protagonist, Esperanza Quintero, explains this relational phenomenon between male workers and their wives:

The Anglo bosses look down on you, and you hate them for it. 'Stay in your place, you dirty Mexican' - that's what they tell you. But why must you say to me, 'Stay in your place'? Do you feel better having someone lower than you? Whose neck shall I stand on to make me feel superior, and what will I have out of it? I don't want anything lower than I am. I am low enough already. (Biberman 1954)

This passage illustrates the way gendered social relations are used to discipline workers. As long as the male worker is given an outlet for his frustrations, he will remain a well-disciplined worker. Dalla Costa further explains the way the idea of discipline is used as a tool of production: "Women, responsible for the reproduction of labor [sic] 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 [sic] power to be reproduced" (Dalla Costa 1972, 47-48). In other words, another way that women serve as a disciplining force is through the socialization of children. Children are socialized in

the home to be future members of a disciplined workforce with a "good" work ethic, and male workers are disciplined in the sense that they must continue their participation in the labour force because of the family's reliance on the wage. Part of the productive labour Dalla Costa talks about, therefore, is the maintenance of social relations between men/women and parents/children as part of the reproduction of hegemonic ideologies of heterosexuality and the white, nuclear family.

WfH is premised on the idea that all women, waged or unwaged, married or unmarried, are housewives: "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" (Dalla Costa 1972, 21). This assertion highlights the multiple aspects of our lives that are made up of housework, especially different forms of emotional labour that we sometimes don't realize we are burdened with. Margaret Coulson, Branka Magaš, and Hilary Wainwright caution against reinforcing the notion that housework is women's work. These authors criticize Benston, Dalla Costa, James and Secombe for their assumption that women and housewives are synonymous. However, Dalla Costa and James' assertion is meant to highlight the different ways housework proliferates in our lives, rather than trying to establish housework as women's work. Furthermore, we must remember that Benston and Secombe write about housework as women's work in order to challenge and demystify the appearance and construction of housework as women's work, not to reify this position.

In *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* James and Dalla Costa describe the home as the social factory in, where they connect it to the operations of the larger community outside of the workplace:

The community therefore is not an area of freedom and leisure auxiliary to the factory where, by chance there happen to be women who are degraded as the personal servants of men. The community is the other half of capitalist organization, the other area of hidden capitalist exploitation, the other, hidden, source of surplus labor [sic].... And this social factory has as its pivot the woman in the home producing labor power as a commodity, and her struggle not to. (James 1971, 11)

For Dalla Costa, who came from the tradition of *operaismo*¹⁹, the social factory is viewed as an essential component of capitalist production, rather than the mere "other" of the factory. From this perspective, women play a central role in the production that occurs in the social factory, demonstrating that they are indeed involved in capitalist production. Even if we consider the social factory as a location in which capitalist production and reproduction occur (whether directly or indirectly), I argue that we must think about the impact the increased presence of middle class women in the paid workforce has had on relations of production. The white nuclear-family ideal persists, and is propagated through the media and changing state regulations (i.e. the legalization of same sex marriage means that homosexual relationships must also conform to normative standards). The increased presence of middle class women in the workforce since the 1970s, therefore, should not be viewed merely as a matter of choice or a success of the women's rights movements; rather, we should also look at the different factors that would impact

¹⁹ Autonomist Marxists connected to the tradition of *operaismo* in Italy began referring to the home and the community as the social factory, which is the place where the production and reproduction of human life takes place. Mario Tronti developed the notion of the social factory in his 1963 essay "Social Capital" (originally published in the *Quaderini Rossi* journal in 1963 as "Il piano del capital," and reprinted as part of his book *Operai e capitale*). For Tronti, society is organized to support the ideology of the factory system, and therefore it is all part of the process of production.

the decision of whether or not to stay at home. In other words, we must consider factors like race, ability, a partner's income, etc. For Bonnie Fox the increased presence of women in the waged labour market in the 1970s reflects capital's rising need for wage labourers on one hand, and the changing conditions of women's production in the home. Next I look at what this change in the needs of the labour market and the changing conditions of housework means in terms of women's dual-identity.

Waged and Unwaged Work: Women's Dual Identity

At the core of the WfH movement is the notion that capitalism creates hierarchical social relations whereby the population is divided according to who produces and who does not, who is waged and who is unwaged. Many of the contributors to the domestic labour debate have argued, as I do, that housework is devalued precisely because it does not receive a wage. Whether we think this work is productive or not in a Marxist sense is not entirely relevant to the oppression women experience as a result of the gendered divisions of labour in the home and in society. For those who also work outside the home there is the extra burden of the double day or "second shift," a notion popularized by Arlie Hochschild in 1989. In the following pages, I look at the way this dual identity was conceived, and what this has meant for the development of women's consciousness.

Rowbotham has characterized the division of labour in capitalist society according to work concerned with commodity production vs. family production (1973). Women increasingly inhabit both of these spheres, but only one is viewed as a legitimate form of work. The "other," the private sphere of housework, retains an invisible characteristic for reasons I have already outlined. In looking at the dual identities women

inhabit, I contend that we must consider how the separation of women's waged and unwaged labour affects their consciousness. Indeed, as we have seen all too well, the increased entry of women into the waged labour market has only worked to exacerbate their oppression rather than eliminate it, because now women are increasingly both waged and unwaged workers. To be clear, women would still be oppressed without this contradiction. The contradictory, dual identity, however, is what sets women apart from male workers.

While we are told we can be both workers and wives/mothers, that is, “have it all,” the notion of primary and secondary roles persists: "The second job outside of the home is another boss superimposed on the first; woman's first job is to reproduce other peoples labor power and her second is to reproduce and sell her own" (James 1972, 13). In other words, a woman's primary responsibility is to the family. According to Luxton, once more women began leaving the home to work, the social relations in the home began to shift:

Once she is doing wage work, a woman frequently begins to assert her needs simply out of necessity... One of the first to be cut is that work which is least conscious and therefore most hidden. Tension managing and catering to the husband's needs is often drastically reduced. This may occur because she is too tired... Sometimes the strains make women conscious of the inequalities in the sexual division of labour, and they refuse to cater to their husbands' needs as readily. (Luxton 1980, 190-191)

In Luxton's text, one woman comments on her experience of the double day “We both work and we both get home tired. He gets to lie around having a beer and relaxing. I pick

up the kids and then rush home and get supper and clean up and put the kids to bed and then he wants me to be all loving and happy and spend time with him” (qtd. in Luxton 1980, 191). While Luxton’s analysis is important in and of itself as a contribution to discussions on domestic labour, the words of the women interviewed as part of her project stand as clear articulations of the relationships that exist between men and women in the home vis-à-vis housework. While there may have been a shift in consciousness stemming from the increased presence of women in the waged labour market, women – in the context of normative, heterosexual relationships – continue to be viewed as secondary wage earners. Benston was one of the first to highlight the dominant ideology of women as secondary wage earners in 1969; this idea persists today, though under pressure, while women are increasingly becoming primary wage earners.

The division between the factory and the home, or work time and leisure time, does not apply to women because the home is a place of production whether or not she also works outside the home:

The community therefore is not an area of freedom and leisure auxiliary to the factory, where by chance there happen to be women who are degraded as the personal servants of men... It becomes increasingly regimented like a factory, what Mariarosa calls a social factory... And this social factory has as its pivot the woman in the home producing labor power as a commodity, and her struggle not to. (James 1972, 11)

For some, however, the oppressive nature of women's dual identity is what creates revolutionary potential. As Dalla Costa and James argue, "The very unity in one person of the two divided aspects of capitalist production presupposes not only a new scope of

struggle but an entirely new evaluation of the weight and cruciality [sic] of women in that struggle" (James 1972, 13). In highlighting the role of women in various forms of unwaged work, we are exposed to a number of new points of struggle. For women in Italy connected to WfH, for example, this meant engaging in actions like rent strikes or self-reduction of utilities in order to highlight and struggle against the different ways we are exploited by capitalist social relations.

Conclusion

While all theorists engaged in the domestic labour debate seem to agree that housework is exploitative and may be the core issue in the oppression of women, the nature of productivity and the value (or non-value) of this work becomes the major point of contention. In the end, the majority of contributors to the domestic labour debate concluded that work performed in the private sphere of the household does not produce surplus value. Yet it is the lack of value that gives us an entry point to begin understanding the exploitative nature of housework.

One important aspect of the domestic labour debates is the way various contributors offered generous examinations of gendered relations between men and women in the home. As these theorists have demonstrated, these gendered relations, must be examined according to their historical contexts, lest we should begin making reductionist or essentialist claims about the "natural" division of labour that exists between men and women. Rather than assuming the production of human life under capitalism is universal and has gone unchanged, it is important to consider specific material, social and historical factors that determine the nature of housework and the

relations of production and reproduction in the home. To this examination we must also consider the way colonialism and imperialism have impacted the gendered division of labour in the home in terms of race, and how this complicates the family and the home as a site of work.

During the transitional period from feudalism to capitalism, alternative family structures were ruptured as a result of migration, the rise of diaspora communities, and implementation of policies of assimilation. For example, there were several periods of Italian migration, beginning with the period of the unification of Italy in 1861, with its peak coming in the post-WWII period. The main reason for Italian migration was poverty, particularly in the rural and underdeveloped *Mezzogiorno* (Southern Italy). As usually happens with migration, families were often split up. Many male workers from the South, for example, went to North and South America, other parts of Europe, or to Italy's industrialized north to look for work. Until these male "heads of households" returned or plans could be made for reunification, many women were left on their own to care for their children and aging parents. In Canada, the construction of the nuclear family was tied to notions of bourgeois morality. Social reforms were used to make First Nations and immigrant families conform to normative standards of bourgeois morality (Dua 1999, 241). Different family forms in First Nations communities were identified as problematic from the time of colonial contact, and colonizers sought to destroy "gender, sexual and familial relations in First Nations communities...[and] replace them with an alternate set of relationships organized around monogamy, patriarchy, and bounded by discipline and dependency" (Dua 1999, 243). European ideals were further foisted on First Nations communities through the implementation of the Indian Act of 1876, which regulated all

aspects of life in First Nations communities by legislating policies of assimilation (244), including stripping First Nations women of status if they were to marry a non-Indigenous person. In addition, the establishment of residential schools and stringent enforcement of child welfare policies effectively destroyed many First Nations families. We see the continued legacy of colonialism, imperialism and the globalization of the labour market today. Migrant farm workers and live-in caregivers, for example, have been forced by economic circumstances to live apart from their families for extended periods of time. Racial oppression is not the same for Indigenous people as it is for immigrants in Canada; the relationship to the land also informs the way gender is experienced filtered through colonialism, imperialism, and racism. While many Second Wave feminists identified the nuclear family and the home as the sources of women's oppression, immigrant women, Black women, Indigenous women, and women of colour have long been denied access to the normative family structure: "people of colour and immigrants have often been denied the right to live in a family context, or the right to have the 'family' form of their choice..." (Dua 1999, 242). The exclusion of certain women from the nuclear family structure occurs because the normative family structure is white, Western, and heterosexual; whoever does not fit this structure is either excluded or compelled to assimilate. The construction of the nuclear family ideal, therefore, is connected to policies of inclusion and exclusion because only some families are permitted to exist within this framework.

One of the consequences of the 1970s mainstream women's movement is that middle class women were increasingly told they could, and should, "have it all." Instead of liberating women, I contend this change in ideology has meant that an ever-increasing

army of women has joined the “working poor.” The notion of the double-day was new to middle class women who were only beginning to enter the workforce in large numbers, but had long been familiar to poor and working class women. Criticisms of the male-breadwinner model often miss the fact that lower income families have always needed a supplementary wage. When we factor in race, we must remember that the male-breadwinner model was a white supremacist model, and that Black men and men of colour were not given access to this form of family wage. This means that racialized women often did not have the choice to stay at home because a second wage was necessary.

One of the key characteristics of housework I think we must focus on is the element of emotional relationships that occur within the family. Housework is invisible because it is a series of tasks we take for granted, but it is also invisible because of the emotional aspects of this work. In other words, the relationships in the home serve to meet our emotional needs, and contradictions arise in this context. While different strains of the Women's Liberation Movement have called for the abolition of the family as a precondition for liberation, I contend that we must understand some of the contradictions that exist within the family. The family unit is imagined as the place and set of relations in which all of our needs are met. On the other hand, the family is also used to fulfill an economic role, meaning the relations produced within can be oppressive. Further, the idea of love places limits on forms of resistance against the oppression of housework. The degree of struggle is checked by the relationships of love that exist within the family. Women have not been able to fight completely against housework because there is a risk of threatening the well being of the family and the interpersonal relationships that exist

within this unit. The emotional stability of the family creates a stable workforce, because the existence of a "family wage"²⁰ meant male workers were less likely to withhold their labour power. However, we should not abolish the family altogether, because though it is a source of oppression, the family also remains the unit through which, for many of us, the basic needs for love, support, and companionship are met. The emotional complexity of housework is a theme that continues in the work of WfH, and which has largely been ignored in the more economic writings of the domestic labour debate. The most significant contribution of WfH to the domestic labour debates was to highlight the different elements of housework (including emotional labour) as work. Going forward in my dissertation, I highlight a major aim of WfH, which was to dispel the myth of liberation through work. I begin this exploration of the aims of WfH by looking at the emergence of the movement in Italy, which is the birthplace of WfH.

²⁰ I talk about the "family wage" in the past tense because, increasingly, it seems impossible for most families to subsist on a single income.

"The problem is not abortion. The problem is having the possibility of become mothers every time we want to become mothers. Only the times that we want but all the times we want."

Colletivo di Lotta femminista, 1972

Chapter 3

Wages for Housework in Italy:

Padua and the *Comitato Tri-Veneto per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico*

In this chapter I look at the *Salario al lavoro domestico* (*SLD*) groups in Italy, focusing specifically on the chapter that emerged in the Tri-Veneto area. Looking at some of the circumstances surrounding the emergence of *SLD* allows me to consider the contextual framework that contributed to the development of a Marxist-feminist perspective on the oppression of women for certain feminists in Italy. Before laying out some contextual groundwork, I begin by briefly talking about a split in the group *Lotta femminista* (*LF*) in order to avoid confusion as I later talk about *SLD* and *LF* interchangeably. I then look at some of the changes in Italian society in the decades following WWII in order to contextualize the emergence of feminist groups during this period. I also look at some of the regional differences between northern and southern Italy. Looking at these differences allows me to better understand the national and international scope of the movement, which, as I discuss in Chapter 5, would become a point of contention within the broader WfH movement. In order to explain the group's particular political orientation, I look at some early connections to Autonomist Marxist groups in Italy like *Potere operaio* (Worker Power) and *Lotta continua* (Continuous Struggle). My examination of Autonomist Marxism, in addition to my examination of the larger social and cultural context of the period, highlights the particular formation of feminist consciousness *SLD*

feminists cultivated through articulating common experiences of oppression and engaging in shared forms of struggle. Once I have laid the contextual foundation for the emergence of *SLD* groups in Italy, I then look more closely at some of the struggles engaged by *SLD* feminists. Specifically, I examine the issue of autonomy, looking specifically at struggles for access to abortion and changes in divorce legislation in order to demonstrate the way the international WfH perspective was translated locally. Finally, as I consider the development of a feminist standpoint amongst these women, I look at constructions of femininity: how were motherhood, feminine identity, and bodily autonomy conceived in the Italian context?

Salario al Lavoro Domestico (SLD): Emerging from the Split in Lotta Femminista

While this chapter is focused on the growth of *SLD* groups in Italy, I must first begin by talking about *LF* because *SLD* emerged from a split within *LF*. Throughout the rest of the chapter I sometimes talk about *SLD* and *LF* interchangeably because there were many overlaps between the two groups in terms of political ideology, membership, and action. In this section, however, I look at some of the major points of contention that lead to a split within *LF*.

At a very basic level, the split within *LF* resulted from divergent views regarding strategies for struggle. At the beginning of the 1970s in Italy, many feminists were interested in building a movement attacking the oppression of women focused on unwaged housework after the formation of the International Feminist Collective in Padua in 1971. While I talk more about the formation of this collective later on in this chapter, for now it is important to state that this collective would also be the basis for the

formation of *LF*, which was a group of feminists interested in examining the oppression of women from a Marxist-feminist perspective.

LF had an official split in 1974 after a series of clashes over the political perspective of the broader WfH movement. One such area of divergence was the usefulness of *autocoscienza* as a tool in the movement. As a practice, *autocoscienza*²¹ was present in Carla Lonzi's group *Rivolta Femminile* (Feminine Revolt), and was a largely self-directed process. Translated to mean "self-awareness," *autocoscienza* "is a process of the discovery and (re-) construction of the self, both the self of the individual woman and a collective sense of self: the search for the subject-woman" (Bono and Kemp 1991, 9). This process stressed reaching self-awareness or new consciousness in a self-directed manner, mediated through meetings of small groups of women; the goal was to shift or alter one's self as a response to the new consciousness and awareness that emerged.

To be clear, *Rivolta Femminile* was a separatist group, and did not share a Marxist-feminist perspective regarding the oppression of women. The women's movement of the 1970s in Italy was split between two major trends: those focused on consciousness and those focused on political action: "In the 1970s in Italy there were two major animating spirits within feminism: one was self-awareness, the other the workerist feminism of Lotta Femminista that would become the groups and committees for wages

²¹ I talk more about the emergence of *autocoscienza* and its relationship to the practice of consciousness-raising in Chapter 5, "Wages for Housework in a Comparative Perspective," which compares the movements in Italy and Canada.

²¹ See Libreria delle donne di Milano (1990) *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*.

for housework" (Dalla Costa 2002).²² Based on this difference between the foci of the major feminist trends in Italy, therefore, we see the split within *LF* resulted in one camp following the trend of self-awareness identified by the Milan Women's Bookstore and *Rivolta Femminile*, while the second camp chose to focus on social and political struggles, as exemplified by the later aim and orientation of *SLD*. By 1974, it was clear that the idea *autocoscienza* did not fit in with the political line that had been solidified by *LF* in Padua and some of the other groups (Calabrò and Grasso 2004, 183). As *LF* ceased to be a national group in 1974 (188), *SLD* officially emerged with a solidified and distinct perspective that looked to the material conditions of women's lives in order to imagine forms of struggle and alternatives to their marginalized position in male-dominated, capitalist society.

In addition to the divergent ideas regarding consciousness and political action, another point of discrepancy within *LF* was on the issue of the formation of a national movement. The division over the issue of a national struggle is best exemplified by looking at the struggle for abortion, which would take centre-stage in much of the organizational work of *SLD* in the years to come. On June 5, 1973 in Padua, feminists organizing from the broader WfH perspective took to the streets as part of a large-scale action to demand access to abortion, which I discuss more later on in this chapter. This action began debates within *LF* about the appropriateness of carrying banners related to the WfH perspective at an abortion demonstration. For those that would emerge as part of *SLD* groups, it was impossible to separate the issue of abortion and family planning from the struggle for wages for housework. *SLD* emerged from a desire to be able to unite

²² "Negli anni '70 in Italia vi erano due grandi anime nel femminismo: l'una l'autocoscienza, l'altra il femminismo operaista di Lotta Femminista che poi divenne i gruppi e comitati per il salario al lavoro domestico." Translation by C. Rousseau

women in a shared political perspective that envisioned a unified but nuanced road to struggle: "[SLD] showed a progressive growth of the movement for women's wages in the North as in the South, in the countryside as in the metropolis..."²³ (Movimento per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico #0 1975, 3). For those that would emerge as part of *SLD*, there was a desire to be able to consider the shared experiences of women across the country, while at the same time accounting for regional differences.

The division over a national movement grew as certain *LF* groups sympathetic to the international WfH perspective proposed national political action in Italy to demand wages for housework from the state. The *LF* Group 2 in Padua (or the "via dei Tadi" group) was opposed to the national approach to action because they felt any local efforts would have to cede to the national (and international) movement. The three groups who had originally proposed a national approach to action, the *LF* group 1 in Padua, the *LF* group 2 in Venice, and the *LF* group in Trieste, would form the *Comitato Tri-Veneto per il Salario al lavoro domestico* (Tri-Veneto Committee for Wages for Housework). This committee served as the point of reference for the other groups in Italy that would be involved with WfH, as they had been organizing with this perspective since the summer of 1973. The need to split officially from *LF* stemmed not only from the fact that *LF* did not see the need to create a joint, national strategy, but also because *LF* was no longer able to exemplify a cohesive analysis and therefore precluded the ability to move forward working for a common political project. It was important to move forward with a mass, cohesive political action because "...only a massive clash on such demands from all of us women in confronting the state can give us a new level of power in the daily struggles

²³ "[SLD] ha registrato una crescita progressiva del movimento femminile per il salario al Nord come al Sud, nelle campagne come nelle metropoli..." Translation by C. Rousseau.

which we always...conduct against the conditions of domestic labour itself, external labour, services, procreation and sexuality”²⁴ (Collettivo Internazionale Femminista 1975,14). The official split came after the dissolution of *LF* in 1974, and was further solidified by October of that year when the group changed to the Tri-Veneto committee to reflect the growth of the groups in the area. Tri-Veneto (Three Venices) refers to the three Italian regions of Veneto, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, and Trentino-Alto-Adice (though this group was also connected to others outside this immediate geographical area). It is the Tri-Veneto committee (among a few other collectives in Italy) that continued forward with the WfH perspective. Emerging from a struggle for women on social assistance and government benefits, the group proposed coordinating a common, national mobilization effort to demand wages for housework from the state.

Contextualizing the Growth of Wages for Housework in Italy

A rise in feminist consciousness in the post-WWII period can be attributed to both changes in attitudes about women, as well as shifting expectations women themselves had based on both legal and societal changes. Changes in access to education, for example, meant that women coming of age in the post-war period had more access to higher education than any other generation of women before them, and therefore had different expectations of what their life could be like. Another major change was women being legally enfranchised in 1945; this meant that women emerging as activists in the late 1960s and early 1970s had greater access to educational opportunities, and they were

²⁴ "...solo uno scontro di massa su tale richieste da parte da tutte noi donne nei confronto dello Stato può darci un nuovo livello di potere nelle lotte quotidiane che da sempre...conduciamo sulle condizioni del lavoro domestico stesso, del lavoro esterno, dei servizi, della procreazione e della sessualità." Translation by C. Rousseau.

also raised with the expectation that they would have access to full political citizenship (Ergas 1982, 259). Scholars like Bianca Beccalli have described the 1970s as a dynamic period for the Italian women's liberation movement: "The first wave of that movement was made up of students, intellectuals, and in general middle-class women who had participated in the 1968 movement and in the subsequent New Left political formations" (1994, 92). However, the existence of women's activism and forms of resistance in Italy were not new phenomena by the 1970s. In fact, women had played a significant role in the resistance against Mussolini and the Fascist regime during WWII. Part of the resistance these women engaged in was also against forms of social reproduction, namely the reproduction of future generations. The Italian birthrate fell under Mussolini, which was certainly far from the doubling of the birthrate that Mussolini had called for as a test of support for his fascist military regime. The rate of abortions also rose during Mussolini's reign, with some claiming that upwards of 30% of all conceptions resulted in abortion, despite the illegality of both contraception and abortion at the time (Birnbaum 1986, 38). Unlike other European countries (and North America) there was no baby boom in Italy after WWII (Saraceno 2000), in spite of the fact that men were returning from war or concentration camps, marriage rates were increasing, and the general sexual repression of the war was beginning to fade. The relatively low increase in birthrate in the post-war period, therefore, reflects the action women were taking to prevent pregnancy and births (Fortunati 1976). This was also a period of mass migration (both within Italy and to other parts of the world), which contributed to limiting the size of families as husbands were away seeking work (particularly men from the South, which had long suffered from economic depression). While the declining birth rate under Mussolini

signalled a fight against fascism, stagnant or declining birth rates in the post-war period reflected anxieties about impending war in the Cold War period (Federici 2012b) and a lack of desire on the part of women to support the destructive forces of capital (Dalla Costa and Fortunati 1976). Federici describes the way the hierarchically divided family structure was beginning to lose its hold in the post-WWII period:

...in fact, the war, and this is more or less true in all the European countries, had wholly torn the fabric of class reproduction that had irreparably increased for women the “convenience” of sacrificing themselves to family interests. In this way, that type of pre-war family remained quite buried beneath the rubble. Or better to say, what survived did so undermined by a disease that would reveal itself to be incurable: the ever more widespread and pressing war of women against what the capitalist family represented at that time in terms of unpaid work, personal dependence on a man, family discipline, oppression and isolation.²⁵

(Fortunati 1976, 74)

Women in Italy were no longer satisfied to continue working for capital in producing and reproducing the working class. There was a refusal of unwaged labour, the family structure, and idealized notions of femininity on the part of feminists in Italy.

According to Yasmine Ergas, “Autonomous women's movements have often emerged in the wake of sweeping mass mobilizations and at moments of general social crisis; yet their ‘political’ lifespan has usually been brief” (1982, 254). Coming out of the

²⁵ "... la guerra infatti, e questo è vero in misura più o meno diversa per tutti i paesi europei, aveva talmente lacerato il tessuto della riproduzione di classe che era saltata in modo irreparabile per le donne la 'convenienza' a sacrificarsi per l'interesse familiare. In questo senso il tipo di famiglia pre-guerra era rimasto abbastanza sepolto sotto le macerie. O meglio ciò che di essa sopravviveva, sopravviveva minata da un morbo che si sarebbe rivelato inesorabile: la lotta sempre più massificata e incalzante delle donne contro ciò che per esse la famiglia capitalistica rappresentava allora in termini di lavoro non pagato, dipendenza personale da un uomo, disciplina familiare, oppressione e isolamento." Translation by C. Rousseau.

turmoil of WWII, two major women's associations formed in 1945: the *Centro di iniziativa femminile (CIF)*, founded by *Democrazia Cristiana (DC)*, the Christian democratic party, and the *Unione donne italiane (UDI)* founded by the *Partito Comunista Italiano*, or the Italian Communist party (*PCI*). Women were granted the vote the following year, showing that they were beginning to have more of a political presence. According to Ergas, however, there was some pushback to this political presence during the 1950s and early 1960s, as Cold War paranoia placed Left-wing political parties in a defensive position. In turn, the *PCI*, through the *UDI*, sought to suppress the formation of autonomous women's groups. The *CIF*, through its connection to *Democrazia Cristiana*, also saw a decline in membership because of the general move away from the Catholic Church that resulted from increased urbanization and major changes in the Italian economy in the post-war period (Ergas 1982, 257-58). Women's organizing on both the Left and the Right, therefore, saw some decline in the two decades following the war, despite seemingly fleeting promise of a growth in feminist activism that emerged immediately following the war. While there was some resistance to this newly emerging public visibility during the 1950s and 1960s, by the mid-1960s it was becoming clear that the young generation of women who were growing up in the post-war period were beginning to have increased opportunities that differed from those of the previous generation of women. Some of the pushback against the growing women's movement, therefore, was now less effective. For women who came of age in the aftermath of WWII, the struggle against housework became a defining characteristic of feminist struggle (Federici 2012a, 9). The post-war period signalled major changes in the social and political landscape in Italy, which was reflected in increasing levels of politicization:

Many people of my generation grew up political in a way because this was the post-war period; we were the first generation after the war. When we were growing up, Italy was coming out of a major schism; there were many changes... Politics were all around us; it was very difficult not to have a sense that you were born in the middle of a very important political history. From the time I was an adolescent I was already thinking politics. (Federici 2012b)

For many Italian women, therefore, the post-war period meant a continuation of the struggles that they – or the generation of women before them – had engaged in leading up to and during WWII as part of the fight against Fascism.

There was a growing climate of resistance and political fervor building throughout the 1960s in Italy, which Federici describes:

In Italy, since the early 1960s, there had been a process of political awakening. In the period after the war, until the early 1960s, was a period of great repression. The 50s were extremely repressive in Italy. It was a whole attack on the Left and, on the whole, there was a tremendous attack on workers... But by 1962, 1963, the climate of repression and paralysis that had prevailed broke. There was a famous episode in Torino in 1962 in the Piazza Statuto. For 3 days, people from Fiat basically fought with the police. It was the beginning of a whole cycle of factory worker struggles that eventually culminated with the Hot Autumn in 1969. (Federici 2012b)

This series of wildcat strikes, occupations of universities, and general working class protests grew out of several years of unrest and emerged independent of unions and political parties, including the *PCI*, which had a legitimate presence at various levels of

government, but who often failed to meet the needs of workers. In many ways, this period of unrest in Italy was part of a larger period of unrest amongst both students and workers, with the most celebrated being a series of strikes and university occupations in France culminating in the period known as May '68. I talk more about this connection in Chapter 5. The young women that were involved in these movements and actively participating in this climate of revolt were amongst the first generation of women in Italy to be emancipated in terms of access to education and the promise of greater opportunities in their lives. This shift in attitudes within Italian society would become more apparent with the somewhat surprising outcome of the 1974 referendum on divorce and related changes in family law.

As I discussed earlier, there was a refusal of social reproduction in the form of reduced birth rates that occurred under Mussolini and during the Cold War period. A move towards refusing other forms of social reproduction for women in Italy can also be seen when we look at the housework used as a measure against capital's attempts at creating a hierarchical division within the family mirroring the organization of work in the labour market, where the husband was the boss and the woman sacrificed herself for the good of the family. The clearest example of this resistance to oppressive relations in the family is with the increase of marital separations in the 1960s, even though divorce law would not appear in Italy until 1970. While rates of new marriages remained steady during this period, increases in marital separations reflect two changing trends: the increased education of women meant that expectations of marriage changed, and marriage was increasingly secularized (Saraceno 2000).

Divorce in Italy was made more accessible for women with a new divorce law, known as the Baslini-Fortuna law, which was voted into existence on December 1, 1970. There was an attempt to repeal this law through a referendum on May 13, 1974. Many feminists rallied against this referendum and sought to show what this law meant for women in Italy, fighting against even the *PCI*, who were not in favour of divorce. While the Catholic Church had been able to grant annulments on the grounds that a marriage was not “real” for a number of reasons, such a decision meant that a woman was denied access to alimony. Separation was not a viable option because women had no legal rights when it came to her children, even when she had raised and nurtured them for years. With divorce, on the other hand, a woman could potentially be granted full custody rights to her children. This legislation signaled a major shift in attitudes about gender expectations, which is also reflected in failed attempts to overturn the new divorce law with a referendum in 1974. Though many feminists organized against the referendum, we should not assume that there was complete agreement with the divorce law. In fact, many feminists were not fully satisfied with the divorce law as it stood, but they nevertheless saw it as an important first step towards establishing equal rights between spouses. In light of the importance of this law, they called on women and their allies to vote no to the referendum. The referendum was, in fact, defeated, despite enormous pressure from the Catholic Church. There was a voter turnout of 87.7%, with 59.3% voting against the referendum. The “no” vote in the 1974 referendum to repeal the divorce law, and the unexpected defeat of the *Democrazia Cristiana*, was a testament to the changes occurring not only amongst women in Italy, but also in Italian society more largely (Ergas 1982, 270; Beccalli 1994, 93).

Further changes in societal attitudes regarding the family in Italy are reflected in changes to legislation concerning family rights in 1975 with the passing of Law 151 (Riforma del Diritto della Famiglia, or Family Rights Reform). Former legislation related to family rights framed the family in terms of a male head of household, or the *pater-familias*, who was legally (as well as ideologically) the main figure of authority and power in the household. Drawing from the Italian Constitution of the First Republic, this new legislation “asserted the equality of partners within the family, the recognition of the wife’s domestic labor [sic], the right to equal payment in the workplace, women’s electoral status and their full entitlement to take up public and elective office, the duty of holding property in common and the equal contribution of partners to the maintenance of the family” (Malagrecia 2007, 60). From a legal perspective, therefore, there was recognition of some form of equality between a husband and wife.

Looking at the structure of family allowance offers us additional insights into some of the changes in societal attitudes in Italy. During earlier decades, family benefits like family allowance intended to provide a financial cushion for working-class families. Family benefits, which included fertility bonuses, were also used to support and promote the Fascist state under Mussolini. Family allowance was originally established in Italy in 1934 as an agreement between unions and employers, and was originally established as a measure to protect Italian citizens against poverty. However, “it soon acquired the status, beyond its pro-natalist objectives, of being one of the main instruments by which the state could implement the idea of a family wage” (Naldini 2000, 71). Though there might be an inclination to view some form of family wage as a positive thing, legislation ensure that the wage went directly to the head of the household. Because of the ideology of

pater-familias I described earlier, this meant the head of the household was a man, both legally and ideologically. Women would only be granted the family allowance benefit in cases where they either did not have a husband, or if their husband was unable to perform as a breadwinner (ibid.). Family allowance was restructured in 1940, and soon expanded to include extended family members – like parents and in-laws – as dependents. The expanded scope of family allowance is a unique feature that sets it apart from the structure of family allowance in Canada, which I discuss in the next chapter. The issue of family allowance became a major point of discussion for Italian feminists in the 1970s who thought the money should be paid "directly to the woman, married or unmarried... and then, in our opinion, it would more properly maintain the husband (if married), herself, and their children"²⁶ (Collettivo Internazionale Femminista 1975,14). Though there would be no reforms to the family allowance system until 1988, this view amongst many Italian feminists recognized the importance of financial autonomy for women.

While there were certainly many changes in Italian society after WWII and into the 1960s and 1970s, I have emphasized the points above as a way to begin to understand the social and political climate *SLD* activists emerged from. In the following section, I look at some regional differences in Italy. Looking at some of the differences between northern and southern Italy better illuminates the cultural and economic contexts for the rise of feminist consciousness and the emergence of *SLD* in Italy.

Regional Differences

²⁶ "... anziché corrispondere direttamente soldi alla donna che, sposata o non sposata...e quindi, a nostro avviso più propriamente 'mantiene', il marito (se sposata), se stesse ed i figli." Translation by C. Rousseau

Before I look at the organizing strategies *SLD* feminists engaged with, it's important to understand some of the differences that exist in different parts of Italy and how these differences impacted the development of feminist consciousness. Since the majority of the *SLD* network was located in the industrialized northern part of the nation, these feminists were interested in examining and accounting for some of the regional differences in the country's southern region. This interest stemmed from the recognition that organizational strategies that were effective in an urbanized area of the north, for example, might not translate for a rural, less developed location in the south because of a difference in the development in feminist consciousness. Here I want to pause to say that I illustrate difference not to suggest that the development of feminist consciousness was "better" or "worse" in either area, but rather to emphasize the fact that not all women share a universal experience of oppression or what it means to be a housewife, for example.

Southern Italy, or the *Mezzogiorno* (Midday) as it is called, has long been plagued by poverty and underdevelopment, partly due to lack of desire from the bourgeoisie or those with financial and political power to make modernizing and technological improvements. Outside of major cities like Naples, "there was virtually no internal market to stimulate local investment, outmigration of labor, a lack of roads, transportation, and other forms of economic and social infrastructure, and the predominance of traditional values leading to a widespread rejection of technological innovation" (Hellman 1987, 163). In the post-WWII period, there were some attempts at industrialization in areas of the south, with a goal of economic advancement. While some of these measures were successful in the short term, some of the new industries in the

area employed many women; ultimately, however, these initiatives largely failed. The lack of universities in the south also meant that many women missed an opportunity for early politicization, which differs from the experience of many young women in northern parts of the country. For one female union activist in the south,

There's been no development of 'class culture' to accompany the new economic growth of Caserta. There's new material prosperity to be sure, but it does not correspond to the growth of class consciousness. Here a woman will marry and work until she has saved enough to provide the basics for family life, and then she quits. Women here have few illusions about the emancipatory nature of work. They think of it as a double burden, and of course, they're right. (Hellman 1987, 165-166).

This account illustrates the way wage labour was viewed as a temporary stepping-stone for many women in the south, particularly in parts of the region with higher unemployment rates. Further, this account also shows how many women recognized the double-burden of wage labour outside the home and unwaged labour inside the home, which is one of the themes I identified in the literature of the domestic labour debates.

This recognition of the double-burden also connects with the analyses of Marxist-feminists who recognized the limitations of a feminist movement that sought emancipation for women with work outside the home.

Areas of southern Italy, particularly around Naples and Sicily, have long been connected to a subculture of violence and corruption (namely the *camorra* or the mafia). For many women in the south, struggles against oppression were also waged against these corrupted forces (Sinagra 2012). The economic landscape in the south meant that

Left activism in the area was also shaped by agrarian struggles, agricultural revolts, land occupations, agricultural wage-worker strikes, and mass demonstrations by landless veterans of WWII. In the north, on the other hand, the fight against fascism was more influential on the development of the Left, particularly in the period of Mussolini's dictatorship. The nature of Left activism in the north and south, therefore, would also have different impacts on the development of feminist consciousness.

According to *LF* feminists in Gela, the family in Sicily - and in other parts of Southern Italy - is typically extended, with multiple generations living under one roof (*Sottosopra* 1973).²⁷ This family structure is in line with the way family allowance was legislated, as I described earlier in this chapter, where “dependents” included parents and in-laws, as well as spouses and children. Such an extended family structure is contrasted with a “nuclear family” structure that was more typical in the north and in more urbanized centres, where single and immediate family households were the norm. This difference in family structure accounts for a divergence in the experience of what it meant to be a housewife for women in Italy. This did not mean that there was a difference between women in terms of exploitation and oppression; rather, the difference was in the access to alternatives and the ability to move outside the confines of the family. In other words, there was a strong mentality in these areas that supported parental and fraternal controls (Singara 2012), and the divisions between men and women were more apparent when compared to what women in the north or in developed cities experienced. In addition, women in southern Italy had to contend with greater rates of emigration, gross underdevelopment, and lack of basic social services. With men emigrating to the industrialized north or to other countries, women were often left to care for family

²⁷ This has also been my family's experience in a rural town in southern Italy, near Naples.

members on their own. Widespread unemployment meant little to no opportunity for women to have employment outside the home, therefore limiting their possibility for autonomy. For example, Naples in 1975 had close to 200,000 unemployed people enrolled with placement agencies (Colletivo Femminista Napoletano 1975). For women seeking jobs outside the home, their options were limited to working as a shop clerk, secretary, wash lady, or other similar kinds of low-paying work. Because the south was relatively poor and underdeveloped, a family's survival often depended on the wife/mother being able to make ends meet on a tight budget and stretch food or money beyond their capacity. In cases where there was no plumbing, a situation common to rural areas, women had to work even harder to ensure that everything was kept clean, that water was available, etc. A general lack of infrastructure (hospitals, ambulances, etc.) meant minor illnesses could be fatal, so women in the home dealt with most of these. The burden of underdevelopment and lack of social services fell to women, and as a result, their experience of patriarchy was different from that of other women who might not have all of these compounded issues to contend with.

In addition to struggles within the family, women in Southern Italy faced additional barriers when it came to participating in public life. One woman from Caserta describes the difference in barriers for women in the south compared to women in the north: "This place... is not like the North or Emilia-Romagna where politics is a fundamental part of life - even for women. There's no 'democratic fabric' in a city like Caserta" (qtd. in Hellman 1987, 169). While participation in public life was certainly not welcome in either case, disapproval for this participation on the part of women in the south often meant they were spat on in the street, with attacks coming from both

conservatives and male "comrades" on the Left alike. Areas of the south, unlike the north, were much more conservative and had stronger ties to the Catholic Church, making Left activity in general difficult. Despite these barriers, feminist groups developed in the south. In 1974, for example, feminist collectives began to form in Caserta. Like feminist collectives in the north, these groups were formed with women coming from existing extra-parliamentary groups. Unlike groups in the north, however, many remained involved with mixed groups on the Left in addition to their feminist work, engaging in a form of double militancy (176).²⁸ Feelings of ostracism from the larger conservative population often meant more tolerance for the chauvinism of male "comrades" on the Left.

While women from the south faced additional barriers, both inside and outside the home, it is important to remember this was a relative experience: "Women from the north can appear privileged in respect to us, because they enjoy at minimum formal liberty. In reality even they, like us, are oppressed and exploited even if it is at different levels. *Because our struggle is winning we need to meet, women of the north and the south, and find common objectives*"²⁹ (Colletivo di Lotta femminista 1973, 4). An understanding of difference is important to the development of feminist standpoint where experience presents a problematic that must be analyzed and considered within a larger context of hegemonic social relations (Smith 2004). While there was a deep awareness of different effects of patriarchy and capitalism for women in the south and in the north, there was

²⁸ While double militancy was the case for many women in the Left in Southern Italy, there were those who organized autonomously as women. The *Colletivo Lilith*, for example, was the first completely autonomous women's group in Caserta.

²⁹ "Le donne del nord possono sembrare privilegiate rispetto a noi, perché godono di un minimo di libertà formale. In realtà anch'esse, come noi, sono oppresse e sfruttate anche se a livelli diversi. *Perché la nostra lotta sia vincente bisogna ritrovarsi, donne del nord e del sud, e cercare obiettivi comuni.*" Translation by C. Rousseau.

also an understanding that this oppression and exploitation was a relative but common experience. Such an understanding also relates to Antonio Gramsci's (1971) recognition that, in order to establish counter-hegemonic culture in Italy, the north needed to have an understanding of the issues facing those in the south. Not only was recognition of difference necessary, but also taking on these issues as though they were their own was key to the development of a working class strategy of solidarity that would create new social relations. Cross-regional solidarity, then, looks at the oppression of women as something that is common but experienced differently; it was important for all women to join together, in spite of the different degrees of exploitation. The case of women in southern Italy cannot simply be interpreted or explained vis-à-vis external relationships or generalizations. Indeed, when we look at the way the experience of women in the south has been constructed, we do not see anything new or unique about the divisions created through the whore/Madonna dichotomy, for example. In order to understand the distinct experience of women in the underdeveloped south, it was important to look at relationships within the family and the lack of alternatives and access to social services that women were presented with. In looking at the experience of relationships within the family as the primary point of oppression for women, feminists in the industrialized north were fighting for cross-regional solidarity, rather than simply fighting for their own interests.

Connection to Left Politics and Struggles for Autonomy

While *SLD* grew to develop a Marxist-feminist perspective, the women involved came from different sections of the proletariat and had political developments rooted in liberal,

anarchist, communist, and socialist tendencies. Many of these women had their first experience of politicization through work with extra parliamentary groups and the student movement. Left ideology held a hegemonic position in Italy's political scene in the 1960s and 1970s, meaning Left feminist organizing was able to emerge in a dominant, mainstream position. Women who joined *SLD* collectives largely came from the tradition of Autonomist Marxism, also known as *operaismo*, groups like *Potere operaio* and *Lotta continua*, or from leftist extra-parliamentary groups more generally. The strategy of *operaismo* (workerism) was to fight against capitalist oppression through the refusal of work.³⁰ The strategy of refusal, as articulated by Mario Tronti, was characterized as absenteeism, the refusal of work, and any other action undertaken by workers that would slow down or undermine the process of production. Feminists, like Mariarosa Dalla Costa and others, left these groups to form collectives on the basis of female autonomy, like *LF* and later *SLD*.

The issue of autonomy presented itself in several ways within the Italian feminist movement, particularly for *SLD* feminists. In the following pages I talk about autonomy in two main ways: autonomy from the mainstream Left, and bodily autonomy. I present autonomy from the mainstream Left as a form of political and organizational autonomy, while struggles for bodily autonomy were connected to struggles for access to abortion and imagining roles for women beyond a narrow, patriarchal view of femininity. In a political and organizational sense, autonomy meant that women wanted to organize with

³⁰ The spontaneous emergence of *operaismo* in the 1960s would eventually become more structured as it was taken up by the extra-parliamentary Left moving into the 1970s (Jackson et. al. 2011, 134-139). Here classical *operaismo* shifts to autonomist-Marxism, or a more general form of *autonomia*, and would remain within Europe's counter-cultural political margins. For more on this history of *operaismo*, see: M. Dalla Costa (2002), "La Porta Dell'orto E Del Giardino"; J. Jackson et. al. 2011. *May 68: Rethinking France's Last Revolution*; M. Tronti (2006), *Operai e capitale*.

other women, independent of men, the state, and political groups. Former male comrades from extra parliamentary and student groups reacted poorly to the shift towards autonomous organizing:

I was part of a process where women in Padua put out a journal, which was, in part, a response to some of these attacks that different groups, different parts of *autonomia*, were making on the feminist movement... The anomaly of the situation in Italy was that they had to deal not only with the right, but also with the Left in a much more serious way because it was very prominent in the social scene. It was not like the radical movement in the U.S., which was not in the mainstream. (Federici 2012b)

By the mid-1970s the Left was growing increasingly hostile to the feminist movement because it was seen as bourgeois and divisive. This dynamic was unique to Italy because of the mainstream presence of radical-Left ideology (Federici 2012b). Picchio elaborates further about some of the backlash and resistance, showing that the increasing autonomous feminist activity in Italy was viewed as a threat:

Padua was a very difficult town because there was strong *autonomia*, a strong feminist movement that was challenging the *autonomia*, and Mariarosa was in the same department so that wasn't easy. And the main Left was really behaving badly ... Then at a certain point, within the *autonomia* groups feminists started to be women of autonomy... (Picchio 2012)

While feminism was not something new in Italy, it had been historically impeded because of the interference and undermining of men. This is why women organized not only to define their own exploitation, but also to set the terms of their struggle; they believed

men would only create obstacles that would neutralize the struggle and divide women. Further, *SLD* feminists argued that entering the organized male labour market was itself a source of exploitation and oppression. *SLD* feminists actively positioned themselves with other autonomous women's groups and reframed the notion of class struggle in a way that accounted for an expanded conception of what it meant to be working class, which is connected to the tradition of *operaismo*. Another point of inspiration drawn from *operaismo* was a consideration for regional differences between northern and southern Italy, which I discussed earlier. According to Federici,

The real connection with the south begins with the development of extra-parliamentary groups, particularly with the development of *Potere operaio*, *Lotta continua*, and *Il Manifesto*. *Lotta continua* was the one that really made the connection with the movements in the south. *Lotta continua* was the first extra-parliamentary group that was organized on a national level, and that also had a journal specifically for the south - it was made and produced mostly in the south, and looked at issues particular to the south. It was called *Mo che il tempo sei vicino* [Now that the Time is Coming]. (Federici 2012b)

In their own organizing, *SLD* feminists similarly tried to frame parameters for struggle in a way that would account for these regional differences. As the notion of who constitutes the working class expanded, the terrain for struggle similarly expanded to look at issues beyond the factory and focus on the community and issues related to housing, education, healthcare, daycare, etc. One of the central themes to the organizing of *SLD* feminists was the issue of bodily autonomy, which connected to struggles for abortion, as well as to

other struggles that would give women more freedom and options in their lives. I talk about these struggles in the following pages as I discuss the presence of *SLD* in Italy.

Salario al lavoro domestico in Italy

In this section, I begin by looking at the emergence of *SLD* in Italy, illustrating some of the defining characteristics of the movement by highlighting two major actions connected to the official “coming out” of the *SLD* perspective: International Women’s Day in 1974, and May Day in 1975. I then consider some of the defining characteristics of *SLD*, and how these feminists saw themselves as distinct from other feminist movements that emerged during a similar time period. Finally, I look at some of the concrete struggles engaged by *SLD*, and how the particular feminist standpoint they developed related to conceptions of motherhood and femininity.

The “Coming Out” of *SLD*

As I discussed earlier, the seeds of *SLD* had been planted at the meeting of the International Feminist Collective in Padua in 1971. Antonella Picchio, who was part of the *SLD* group in Modena, describes her experience at this meeting:

Padua called a meeting that was in September '71. I had met Selma [James] in York, in England where I was studying, so I was called to go to the meeting. And I remember - I had two children - and they called me in the afternoon, and I said yes I am coming. We put a car together; we were about five women and we organized the children and went to the meeting. At that meeting were the men of *Potere operaio* - Toni Negri, Ferrari Bravo and others - and we asked them to

leave. I remember very well. The discussion on the document *The Power of Women* started. (Picchio 2012)

Through this recollection, we can see several things. First, Picchio's prior connection to Selma James in England shows us that relationships between different feminist tendencies existed prior to the formation of the WfH network, and that these connections existed across borders. Second, it shows us that the call for the establishment of the WfH movement appealed to women who were both wives and mothers, and that there was a strong desire for an autonomous women's collective. Finally, based on discussions around *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, members of these newly emerging feminist collective were interested in investigating the material conditions of women's lives, and viewed a national struggle against unwaged housework as the route towards addressing the capitalist division of labour within the home.

Though the perspective had been in existence for a few years by this point, the official "coming out" party for *SLD* was at the 1974 International Women's Day rally in Mestre at the Piazza Ferretto. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, *SLD* feminists had split from *LF* by this point, and used this occasion to circulate flyers and posters outlining some of the points of their political perspective. The images on the following pages are examples of some of the materials that were circulated at the International Women's Day rally. Both the poster and the flyer illustrate the pervasive nature of housework while highlighting the demand for the wage as the key to refusing this work.



Image 1: Poster from the Comitato Veneto per il salario al lavoro domestico
 From online archive Femminismo: Gli anni ruggenti. Documenti femministi 1971-1978

The poster and flyer advertise March 8 as International Women's Day, and the accompanying text for the poster (see Image 1 above) reads: “Too much free labour! Wages for housework to struggle against our primary exploitation!” The flyer (see Image 2 on the next page) begins with a similar slogan, “Too much free labour!” It then continues with, “Let’s take on the campaign for wages for housework to struggle against our ultimate exploitation. With wages we will be stronger in our struggle to determine the conditions of: housework, work outside the home, services, our health, procreation, our sexuality.”

8 Marzo 1974
Giornata Internazionale
della Donna

troppo lavoro gratis!

Apriamo la **CAMPAGNA PER IL SALARIO AL LAVORO DOMESTICO**
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PROGRAMMA

Venerdì 8 marzo	(mattino - pomeriggio) MOSTRA FOTOGRAFICA in Piazza Ferretto - Mestre
sera - ore 21	2 film: L'AGGETTIVO DONNA - LA LOTTA NON E' FINITA - Ca' Foscarini, Venezia
Sabato 9 marzo	(mattino - pomeriggio) MOSTRA FOTOGRAFICA in Piazza Ferretto - Mestre
Domenica 10 marzo ore 10 veglia	2 film: L'AGGETTIVO DONNA - LA LOTTA NON E' FINITA - Cinema Excelsior, Piazza Ferretto - Mestre RADUNO SIT-IN (dibattito - musica - canzoni)

Image 2: Flyer from Comitato Veneto per il salario al lavoro domestico
 From online archive Femminismo: Gli anni ruggenti. Documenti femministi 1971-1978.

The language on the flyer is an example of the way the language used by *SLD* connected housework to other areas of struggle that were key to improving women's lives. The day of the rally, the groups circulated a document, "*Salario per il Lavoro Domestico come*

leva di potere" ("Wages for Housework as a Lever of Power"), to outline the perspective of Wages for Housework:

On March 8 '74 in Mestre at the Piazza Ferretto, we were many women demonstrating for the first time for wages for housework taken directly from the State, and this first demonstration for wages for housework, with its songs and debates in the square, with the slogans shouted by a thousand women, with all the strength they expressed, was *the first massive and public destruction of the feminine role*.³¹ ("Soldi Alle Donne!': Salario per Il Lavoro Domestico Come Leva di Potere")

In outlining the WfH perspective on this flyer, the group also emphasized the destruction of the so-called female role that had been mandated by patriarchal society. The public nature of this rally also shows us that the growth of feminist consciousness was connected to the act of groups of women coming together, sharing experiences of oppression, and organizing against this oppression.

SLD gained momentum as a national movement, and expanded in terms of both aim and membership. May 1st, also known as May Day, is an international day of celebration for workers' struggles in many countries. May Day also became a day of struggle for *SLD* in Italy, and celebrations for the occasion in 1975 marked the first time the issue of wages for housework was officially raised in connection to the day of solidarity with all workers, showing the desire on the part of *SLD* feminists to have housework recognized as work. In Italy, as in other European countries, there is a

³¹ "L'8 marzo '74 a Mestre in Piazza Ferretto eravamo molte donne a manifestare per la prima volta per il salario al lavoro domestico preso direttamente dallo Stato, e quella prima manifestazione sul salario al lavoro domestico, con i suoi canti e i suoi discorsi in piazza, con gli slogan gridati da migliaia di donne, con tutta la forza che esprimeva, era *la prima distruzione pubblica e massiccia del ruolo femminile*." Translation by C. Rousseau.

tradition of giving women mimosa flowers for International Women's Day. *SLD* feminists addressed this tradition as they also called attention to the fact that women continued to be burdened with housework as a form of free labour, despite the otherwise "progressive" aims of the Italian Communist Party (*PCI*): "... we were all in agreement that the mimosas, like the *Pci*, stink after a while..."³² (*Movimento per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico #0 1975*, 5). The decision to hold demonstrations for *SLD* on May Day, therefore, clearly expressed the view that housework was *work*, and should also have a commensurate wage. That year, thousands of women took to the streets on May Day not only in Italy (where there were demonstrations in Mestre, Naples, Emilia, and Florence), but also in England, the U.S., Canada and Switzerland. The decision to hold demonstrations on May Day instead of International Women's Day also reflected the growth and development of the group since their March 8 celebrations in Mestre the previous year; this move also signalled the fact that women were no longer satisfied to have their issues sidelined. On the difference between March 8, 1974 and May 1, 1975, the collective expressed the following:

We can say that it is precisely in this: that the slogan 'wages for housework' began to function not only in homes, but also in workplaces outside the home where women know a second exploitation. On May 1 '75 in the square in Mestre there were all these women who had struggled and struggled to bargain everywhere for the total hours that we are spending on work.³³ (*Movimento per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico #0 1975*, 5)

³² "...tutte eravamo d'accordo che le mimose, come il P.C.I., dopo un po' puzzano." Translation by C. Rousseau.

³³ "Possiamo dire che sta proprio in questo: che la parola d'ordine 'salario al lavoro domestico' ha cominciato a *funzionare non solo dentro le case* ma anche nei *luoghi di lavoro esterno* dove noi donne

There was a call for women to struggle against the work they did, both waged and unwaged. This call to struggle against all forms of housework was accompanied by a call for women to struggle against the larger system of capitalist and patriarchal oppression, which was also reflected in the discrimination they faced in the factory. The effects of these larger systems of oppression were also apparent in the deterioration of daycares, schools, and social services, and the attacks against democratic freedom marked by the liberalization of abortion, which I discuss later in this chapter.

A Distinct Feminist Perspective

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Italian feminism in the 1970s grew out of a turbulent decade that saw, amongst other things, large-scale student movements and mass factory strikes in the 1960s. According to Dalla Costa, the women that would become involved with the struggle for wages for housework experienced feelings of frustration, disillusionment and a "lack of representation as political subjects" in their involvement with student activism, the workers' movement, unions, and extra-parliamentary groups (Dalla Costa 1988, 24). The issue of autonomy, therefore, was central to both the political perspective and organization strategy of *SLD*.

For many feminists in the 1970s, it was important to start from the home and the family as the site where women's oppression was rooted. A rejection of the family structure presented itself as controlling the number of children one had as a measure against "overwork," and sometimes also rejecting marriage and procreation all together.

Reproduction was the main terrain of struggle for many feminists, something that would

conosciamo il secondo sfruttamento. Il 1 maggio '75 in piazza a Mestre c'erano tutte queste donne che avevano lottato e lottavano per *contrattare ovunque tutte le ore di lavoro che complessivamente spondono*." Translated by C. Rousseau.

also present itself as a limitation to struggle when women were forced to make difficult decisions in the face of the "biological clock." For *SLD* feminists, a rejection of unpaid social reproduction gave women in Italy the opportunity to define themselves outside of their role in the family, where they were able to consider options for work outside the home and building a capacity for struggle. A key, defining characteristic of the WfH and *SLD* perspectives was to view all women as housewives, with social reproduction and housework being broadly defined.

Another key characteristic of the WfH and *SLD* perspectives was the centrality of the wage as a point of struggle because it was viewed as a social relation. According to Federici:

The wage doesn't make you independent from capital, but at least independent from individual men... And my mother always encouraged me, and told me all the time: make sure you can support yourself. She had seen the experience of so many women during the war that had depended on men, and then the men died or were prisoners. She saw it from that angle - men are not reliable because they might die, they might not be there for you tomorrow, etc. You always have to be able to figure out how to take care of yourself. So there's the idea that if you have a wage then your relations with men will be completely different...The wage is not a lump of money. The wage is political; it is a way of organizing society. It is a social relation. (Federici 2012b)

From a Marxist point of view, the wage serves as a social relation that exists between workers (as producers) and employers (as owners of capital). For *SLD* feminists, the wage relation also determined other social relations because of the hierarchy that existed

between waged and unwaged workers. In the context of the family, for example, the power relation was one where the waged male worker had more power than the unwaged housewife. Looking at the way femininity seemed inextricably linked to housework meant a shift to push the costs of reproductive labour to the state and to break the structure of the family as the organizational unit through which the expropriation of women's labour power takes place (Dalla Costa 1988, 24). The goal here was to demystify the notion of housework as women's work. For Dalla Costa, "This was a novelty and a big break with both the Catholic tradition, which imposed housework..., and with the Communist tradition, which ignored housework or stigmatised [sic] it as an expression of backwardness, urging the woman to find an outside job...as the path to emancipation" (24). The potential for social subversion was imagined beyond a narrow vision on the Left that saw struggles limited to the factory or workplace. This perspective also distinguished itself from other feminist movements, which saw a demand for work outside the home as the ultimate form of women's liberation. As *SLD* feminists developed their consciousness and filtered Autonomist Marxism through a feminist lens, the community and the family were identified as sites of resistance where women could move their struggle from the margins and fight for change in their lives.



Image 3: Abortion poster from the Italian feminist movement, from Donazione Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Cassa 9 (Manifesti). Biblioteca Civica del Comune di Padova.

Struggles for Bodily Autonomy and Access to Abortion

One major point of struggle that I have alluded to in this chapter is the struggle for access to abortion, which would become one of the defining struggles of the broader feminist

movement of the 1970s in Italy. The issue of abortion was expressed as an issue of bodily autonomy, as illustrated by the poster on the previous page (see Image 3 on the previous page). This poster is from the Italian feminist movement, showing the demand for free and accessible abortion. Part of the torso is marked in red, representing the violence inflicted upon women's bodies by the church and medical institutions. The text of the poster reads as follows:

To whom does this woman's abdomen belong? The church? The state? The doctors? The bosses? No, it's hers! We want free and accessible abortion with medical assistance because 5,000,000 women each year, in Italy alone, are forced to abort and 20,000 of them pay for it with death. Above all, we no longer want to be forced to abort. We want control of our bodies; to have kids when and if we want them, secure contraception, healthcare that is not harmful and free of charge, consultations under our control. Control of our bodies also means sexual liberation and living without being destroyed by the exhaustion of work inside and outside the home.

Calls for free and accessible abortion connected to the multiple ways women's lives have been constrained. The emphasis was on autonomy and choice when it came to having families and women controlling every aspect of their lives.

In *Aborto di stato: strage delle innocenti* (Abortion of the State: Massacre of the Innocent) by the International Feminist Collective, abortion in Italy is described as "the extreme means of the rejection of motherhood that is, first and foremost, an intensification of the exploitation of women ... to try to lower the pace and reduce the amount of that housework which, because it is not paid, comes to be demanded without

limits, and also to make the male wage sufficient"³⁴ (qtd. in Movimento per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico #2-3 1976, 29). Here the link between access to abortion and the oppression and exploitation of women based on their position in the home emerged as an issue that took centre-stage in the Italian struggle, particularly for *SLD* feminists. One of the significant moves made by *SLD* was to bring taboo subjects, like abortion, into public discourse through publications like *Basta Tacere!*³⁵ The title of this booklet translates as "Enough, be quiet!" and speaks to the silence around abortion and medical violence enacted on women's bodies. This call to break the silence also speaks to the voicelessness of women when it comes to issues that affect their lives: work, health, maternity, mental health, etc. One of the aims of *LF* and later *SLD* was to break this silence and allow women to define and express their oppression in their own words. The testimonials collected in this booklet illustrate the development of a feminist standpoint that connected women's oppression in Italy to issues like health, maternity, abortion, etc. In talking with a group of friends, one woman recounts a humiliating experience at the gynaecologists: "The negative experience I had with gynaecologists seemed at first trivial and personal. I was talking to other friends who had been through similar experiences to mine, I figured out what was behind what had happened to me"³⁶ (Movimento di Lotta Femminista Ferrara 197?, 2). Sharing such experiences allowed women to see that problems were not

³⁴ "l'aborto è stato ed è il mezzo estremo di rifiuto di una maternità che è anzitutto un'intensificazione dello sfruttamento delle donne... per cercare di abbassare i ritmi e ridurre la quantità di quel lavoro domestico che, proprio perché non pagato, viene da loro preteso illimitatamente, e anche per far bastare il salario maschile." Translated by C. Rousseau.

³⁵ *Basta Tacere!* was put out by the Gruppo Femminista per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico of Ferrara in the early part of the 1970s, though the exact date is not known. This group would later publish a tract denouncing the abusive and barbaric practices used against women obtaining abortions at the Santa Anna de Ferrara hospital, an issue that would gain attention as it was picked up by the press.

³⁶ "L'esperienza negativa che ho avuto con i ginecologi mi è sembrata in un primo momento banale e personale. È stato parlando con altre amiche, che avevano vissuto esperienze simili alla mia, che ho capito che cosa stava dietro a quello che mi era successo." Translation by C. Rousseau.

their own, and also allowed them to come together and share in the development of feminist consciousness and to develop strategies to resist their oppression. This expansion of personal problems into a political arena, therefore, allowed women to organize against the systemic issues that contributed to their individual oppressions.

In *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* there is a chapter that deals with abortion and maternity. This chapter is an elaboration of a document that had been developed by *LF* Padua in 1971, and talks about what was a new trend at the time: self-reporting. In the early 1970s, women in France, Germany and other countries were self-reporting their experiences of having had abortions. Self-reporting was a new form of struggle that the feminist movement had been experimenting with as a way of removing the taboo and dissolving the secrecy that have hidden the history of abortion. For *LF* and later *SLD*, the necessity to clarify the terms of their participation in the struggle for abortion was just as important as demystifying the way the history of abortion had been hidden and obscured. The importance of clarification on both these fronts reflects the importance of women reclaiming their history and asserting their voices in order to move their struggles from the margins.

The greatest example of moving the issue of abortion centre stage, from private to public, is the case of Gigliola Pierobon. Women in Italy who sought abortions had been harshly persecuted (and some prosecuted), and this case stood out as one of the most widely known in Italy at the time. On June 5, 1973, feminists who would adopt the *SLD* perspective participated in a large rally in Padua in opposition to the criminalization of abortion. This demonstration centered on the case of Gigliola Pierobon, a young woman who, at the age of 17, had her abortion on the kitchen table of a country nurse in 1967

(*Time* 1973, 13). Pierobon's trial became an example that Italian feminists used in their fight for free and legal access to abortions. This case spoke to the hypocrisy of a country that declared abortions illegal on moral grounds, while at the same time allowing the black market to thrive in providing women with unsafe and illegal abortions, with many dying as a result. On February 15 of the same year, thousands of women (and some men) took to the streets of Trento to demand access to abortion, showing the swelling of the movement as it rallied around an issue that most women could relate to. For feminists that advocated the *SLD* perspective, abortion was promoted as a key area of struggle for women because of its urgency and its controversial nature: it was an issue that would grab a lot of attention, whether positive or negative. It was able to unite women because: "...working women, the students, the employed, married or single women, elderly and young, all have aborted or will abort and know they are at risk"³⁷ (Toro and Colletivo di Lotta Femminista 1972, 1). From a point of pragmatism, almost all women could relate to unwanted pregnancies, making abortion an issue that would be able to bring many women together. The need to organize for access to abortion was also key for women in the face of a lack of research into methods of contraceptives, which makes it difficult to simply call for open and free access to birth control: "*The problem is not abortion. The problem is having the possibility of becoming mothers every time we want to become mothers. Only the times that we want but all the times we want*"³⁸ (Toro and Colletivo di Lotta Femminista 1972, 86). The issue of abortion was nothing new in Italy; the

³⁷ "... le operaie, le studentesse, le impiegate, le sposate o le nubili, le anziane e le giovani, tutto hanno abortito o abortiranno e sanno di essere esposte al rischio." Translation by C. Rousseau.

³⁸ "*Il problema non è abortire. Il problema è avere la possibilità di diventare madri tutte le volte che vogliamo diventare madri. Solo le volte che vogliamo ma tutte le volte che vogliamo.*" Translation by C. Rousseau.

difference in the struggle for abortion in the context of *SLD* was to bring the discourse into the public sphere, calling for free and accessible abortion for everyone.

In the end, the tribunal in Padua closed quickly and granted Pierobon judicial forgiveness on the basis that she had been a minor at the time of her abortion, but categorically refused to hear defense testimony that would have made this case stand as a burning example of the condition of women in Italy. The persecution for abortion continued, and so did the growing support for legal and accessible abortions. In 1974, 263 women in Trento were charged with having had abortions. In response and in a show of solidarity, 2,500 women took to the streets and publicly declared their own abortion experiences. Similarly, there is a case of 40 women being arrested in Florence for having abortions in 1975, and a mass rally was organized in response, with 5,000 women taking to the streets in Florence on January 12, 1975, and an even larger protest with 10,000 women taking to the streets on February 15, 1975 in Trento:

From Sicily to Trentino many beds remained unmade, much pasta was not prepared, many men who returned from work were not consoled; much money that was taken from shopping or set aside with the auto-reduction of bills was held by women for themselves and used to take the train and organize the struggle.³⁹

(Movimento per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico #0 1975-76, 10)

The number of women participating in these rallies continued to increase, with 20,000 women present in Rome on December 6, 1975, and 50,000 present at a similar rally in Rome on April 3, 1976 (Bracke 2014, 86). To counter the excuse that abortion was

³⁹ "Dalla Sicilia al Trentino molti letti sono rimasti sfatti, molti pasti non sono stati preparati, molti uomini al ritorno dal lavoro non sono stati consolati; molti soldi strappati dalla spesa o accantonati con l'autoriduzione delle bollette sono stati tenuti dalle donne per se e usati per prendere il treno e organizzare la lotta

criminalized as a means to protect the moral integrity of the nation, feminists responded that ensuring the health and safety of half the country's population was itself a moral good.

Bill 194 was introduced in Italy in 1978 as an attempt to regulate abortion practices. However, two major limitations remained with the introduction of Bill 194. First, healthcare providers could refuse to perform abortion for religious reasons as conscientious objectors. Second, women who were not the age of majority needed permission from a parent to have an abortion. Bill 194 eventually passed into law in 1981 (after a series of other attempted referenda), with abortions now legal within the first 90 days of pregnancy. The legalization of abortion in Italy once again reflected a change in attitudes and behaviours that were once deeply rooted, though the issue of conscientious objection persists as an obstacle (Picchio 2012). Despite these limitations and issues surrounding legalization, this struggle and victory signalled the emergence of a critical mass of women who were no longer content to have their bodies used by capital and the state; the shift towards reclamations of bodily autonomy meant that women saw the necessary changes that had to be made not only in their lives, but also in society more generally.

Resisting Patriarchy: Reframing Motherhood and Femininity

As I have discussed earlier, part of my interest in examining *SLD* groups in Italy stems from a desire to consider how identity and consciousness are formed and shaped through experience, and how women understand their “femininity” as constructed both by themselves and by external forces. A common idea that I found in many of the stories of

personal experience in the archival documents and interviews is that young women had a strong desire to live lives that were different from that of their mothers:

I always assumed that I would have an independent life, that I would have some autonomy. I would not repeat my mother's life, who was a housewife. I would not be dependent on a man... There were many women of my generation who didn't want to marry or have children, and whose lives were significantly different from their mothers' lives. I think in a way the war was a watershed between generations. It really changed the expectations. (Federici 2012b)

The wage was viewed as essential in accounting for this difference in power, as it would allow for more autonomy and would change power relations in the home. For example, Angela, a student, reflects on the difficult relationship between mother and daughter in the context of her political awakening (Colletivo di Lotta femminista 1973, 7-8). This relationship was especially strained when one has emulated their mother for so long, only to have her turn around and say that being involved in a feminist group would only lead to ruin and upset the natural relationship between men and women. In light of these pressures, it was important to have a strong, collective movement so that women would have support in the face of these difficult relationship and family dynamics, which could otherwise deter political action. While a strong, collective movement was key to the struggle against oppression, the potential for the struggle of this movement was somewhat confined and limited because of family structures and social relations in the home:

I think many years passed before I resented doing housework...It was really because of feminism, in a way, when I began to do a reflection on the question of

housework that I also began to readjust myself in relation to the work... My sister and I used to have a fierce battle about who was clearing the table - we used to think this was the worst kind of work that we could do. But it was because the experience of my mother was a fulltime housewife. My mother was very dependent on my father, and my father was a good man, but the power relation was very clear... I just needed somebody to give it a name and say 'this is connected to this history of capitalism.' That's what the book [*The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*] did... And then I began to see that I too was a housewife, even if I didn't do housework. That experience is so deep; it has roots. It shapes you in a way, even if you don't do the dishes every day, or you don't cook or have a husband. There's still a whole way that your relation to men, your relation to sexuality, your social identity, is still the experience of a housewife. (Federici 2012b)

The family is a complicated unit because it is the place where some of our most intimate relationships exist, while at the same time serving as a source of oppression for many women. A discussion of women inevitably becomes a discussion of family and how she operates within that institution. Federici's words show us how women's identities are constructed through external influences that are, in turn, internalized.

Earlier in this chapter I talked about the different opportunities that were present for women coming of age during the post-war period. Federici elaborates on some of the impact that changing attitudes about gender and patriarchy had on women:

I was coming out of a period in Italian history in which women had undergone major change, because the war was a revolution. All the men were at the front.

And it was not like in the United States - men were on the front here too, and women went into the munitions industry, etc. But in Italy it was different because the towns were being bombarded... So what was demanded of women, what women had to do, what women had to put up with... I grew up in a period in which there were many women there in the whole history of the resistance. I had an image of strong women. I was in a patriarchal town, in a patriarchal culture, but nevertheless a culture that had been challenged, where there were all the events of the war, which were still very present. This really undermined the balance of power between women and men. (Federici 2012b)

While patriarchy was certainly a prominent force in Italy, women were beginning to resist the roles that had been envisioned for them. Further, Federici's words also show us that the experience of patriarchy for women in Italy was different than it was for women in North America. In some ways, women inhabited a contradictory position because they were seen as strong figures that nevertheless were expected to submit to patriarchal control. Resistance to patriarchal ideas about women, however, were beginning to be more public. For example, *Le Operaie della casa* was an important publication for *SLD* feminists because it was a vehicle through which women could publicly share different forms of resistance. This magazine-style publication was framed as a collective piece of writing that used images to spread the struggles women were waging in their homes, communities, schools, workplaces, etc. In Padua, a sub-committee within *SLD* called the *Gruppo Redazionale* (Editorial Group) was in charge of the production and distribution of the magazine, and invited women to "write news, information of all kinds, personal

letters, proposals, testimonies, poems, reflections, send stories, documents, articles ... "⁴⁰
(Movimento per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico 1975d, 3). While the majority of pieces were written from a collective perspective, this broader invitation demonstrates an attempt to collect the lived experiences of women as a way of sharing common understandings of oppression.

Some of the resistance to patriarchy in *Le Operaie della casa* is connected to Italian folklore. The figure of La Befana, for example, was re-examined in light of the violence Italian feminists faced from both the state and from former male comrades. La Befana is a witch-like figure in Italian folklore, and on the evening of the Epiphany she visits towns and leaves toys and treats for good children, and lumps of coal for bad children. Following from this tradition, *SLD* feminists reclaimed the figure of La Befana. In the middle of the night of January 5, 1975, feminists from *SLD* went around town to put up signs and posters with the feminist symbol and different messages protesting against priests, doctors, the *PCI*, etc. One example of a message left for doctors is "Gynecologists sadistic assassins," "Happy Holidays for all sides, for each abortion among physicians let's make at least one death;" for the *PCI*, "Abort the *Pci* - culture of criminology"⁴¹ (Movimento per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico 1975d, 12). Messages were left for these institutions and figures because they were seen to be complicit in the abuse of women's bodies as sites of control; there would be no treats for them. In addition to using La Befana to resist patriarchal institutions, *SLD* feminists also recognized the need to engage women in struggle more broadly: "This year La Befana will no longer

⁴⁰ "scrivete notizie, informazioni di ogni tipo, lettere personali, proposte, testimonianze, poesie, riflessioni, mandate, racconti, documenti, articoli..." Translation by C. Rousseau.

⁴¹"ginecologi; assassani sadici;" "Buone feste per ogni parte, per ogni aborto fra i medici facciamo almeno un morto;" "PCI abortologo - cultura da criminologo." Translation by C. Rousseau.

have broken shoes and has thrown away the broom. Like all women, and we rebelled against the command of each type of boss on their own lives"⁴² (12). For *SLD* feminists, patriarchy was so deeply embedded in Italian culture, and struggles therefore had to be waged against both explicit and implicit forms of oppression.

Another resistance to patriarchal ideas about women is connected to constructions of motherhood. *SLD* feminists challenged the exaltation of motherhood on the basis that the role of mothers and wives as unpaid servants is often ignored. Further, exaltations of motherhood often overlook the reality of many women who have become mothers or wives against their will because of unwanted pregnancies, the shame of unwed mothers, and the persecution and prosecution of women who abort (like the case of Gigliola Pierobon). *SLD* cites the family as the main site of oppression for women; the home and the family were described as a prison where women worked without end, and where there was no autonomy of any kind (Lotta Femminista 1973a). Women were also the outlet for the frustrations of other family members who worked outside the home for the capitalist labour market.

SLD feminists also used song and poetry to question the idealized feminine role. Some women from the *SLD* group in Padua formed a singing group, and produced an album called *Canti di donne in lotta: il canzoniere femminista (Songs of Women in Struggle: The Feminist Song Book*; see Image 4 on the next page). Some of the songs on this album included: "Aborto di stato," "Stato Padroni," and "Noi donne" ("Abortion of the State," "State Bosses," and "We Women"). This group also went on a singing tour across France, stopping in various cities to share their songs and make connections with

⁴² "Quest'anno la Befana non aveva più le scarpe rotte e aveva gettato la scopa. Come tutte noi donne e si era ribellata al comando di ogni tipo di padrone sulle propria vita." Translation by C. Rousseau.

women and feminists in these different locations (Movimento per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico #1 1976, 10).



Image 4: Album cover for the *Canti di donne in lotta: il canzoniere femminista*, from Donazione Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Cassa 8 (4.1). Bibliotvbeca Civica del Comune di Padova.

The songs produced by the group, which contained strong political content, were used to spread the political perspective of the broader WfH movement in a form that was different from the various publications and pamphlets they produced, though the content was the same. Here I turn for a moment to do a close reading of one of the songs produced by the *SLD* group in Padua on the album *Canti di donne in lotta: il canzoniere femminista*. The song is called "avete mai guardato" ("Have you ever seen"). I look at this song because it further demonstrates the variety of approaches *SLD* feminists used in examining the issue of housework. The song opens with a lament:

Have you ever looked into the eyes of a woman
who, at fifty-one years old, remains alone
the children gone away one by one
the house empty.⁴³

Here is where the woman in the song begins to question her purpose in life. Now that there are no children to care for, what is her purpose? She continues to talk of motherhood from a point of exaltation, where the sacrifices made by women in the home are seen as a form of virtue:

So as they said, I have always done everything
sacrifice is a virtue
for the sake of my children I sacrificed myself
I never asked for anything more
and now that I am alone I would do anything
but it's late and I still want my children.

Here we are presented with an image of womanhood that invites us to make distinctions between good/bad wives and mothers, which I also discussed in the literature review. This imagery is reminiscent of the 19th century ideals of femininity resulting from the Cult of True Womanhood. The Cult of True Womanhood has been described by Barbara

⁴³ "Avete mai guardate negli occhi di una donna/che ha cinquant-anni resta sola/i figli andati via uno ad uno/la casa vuota.../ Così come hanno detto, ho sempre fatto tutto/il sacrificio è una virtù/per il bene dei miei figli mi sono sacrificata/non ho mai chiesto niente più/ed ora che sono da sola qualche cosa farei/ma è tardi e mi resta la voglia dei figli miei./ Ma un giorno mia figlia mi disse: "mama sai"/nel mondo le donne han capito e stan lottando ormai/La vita che hai fatto tu/dovremo vendicarla sai/il tuo lavoro ha un prezzo/che a te non è pagato/è un costo tutto risparmiato/a te reste l'inganno/il mito della madre/chi ci guadagna è il capitale." Translation by C. Rousseau.

Welter as a series of attributes "by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbours and society... divided into four cardinal virtues - piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife - woman" (Welter 1966, 152). The connection to the "true womanhood" that comes from this song is mainly connected to the virtue of domesticity, though from this lament we can infer other so-called "virtues" that would be used by women and society in order to legitimize the position of women in the home. This lament is soon contrasted with a shift in attitude, mirroring the shift among women that was taking place with the rise of feminist struggle in the 1970s:

But one day my daughter said to me: "You know mama"
women in the world have understood and are now struggling
The life that you have done
we will avenge, you know
your work has a price
that to you has not been paid
it's a cost everyone has been spared
with you remains the deception
the myth of the mother
from which capital benefits.

Here the oppression of women in the home is connected to the WfH and *SLD* perspective, where the unpaid work of women in the home is presented as directly beneficial to capital. This song also highlights the way in which housework as work has been obscured by the lack of wage, and further obscured by the myth of "motherhood." The song leaves us

hopeful of the possibility for change going forward, and was able to work as a uniting tool on the level of emotional connection and the development of a deeper consciousness of the position of women within the working class.

When 1975 was declared the International Year of the Woman in Italy, the feminist movement used it as an opportunity to speak out about the obfuscation of women's issues and to further mobilize and expand the struggle of *SLD*. For example, there was a national conference in Italy on November 26, 1976 focused on the issue of female employment. At the conference, there were proposals for legislation that promoted parity between men and women in the workplace, which was criticized by *SLD* feminists. They argued that such legislation was limited because it would exclude a large portion of the population that did not receive a wage for their work, including the elderly, students, people with disabilities, and housewives (Movimento per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico #2-3 1976, 3). In addition, aims to increase the pensionable age of women to 65 and eliminating the restrictions of night time work for women would not help them; this would only hurt all workers because it would mean longer days, more years working, competing for lower wages, and fewer jobs for young people. These ideas show us that, as feminist struggle at the grassroots level gains momentum, we often see it adopted and subsumed by institutional structures. As a result, women's issues become depoliticized and largely symbolic.

As an alternative, *SLD* envisioned a relationship between the rejection of work practiced as a form of political struggle and resistance, and the problem of availability/unavailability of women for work. While these aims hold merit, the *SLD*

movement in Italy faded away by the end of the decade, due in large part to violent repression that was taking place in Italy:

All of our struggles for autonomy were faded, in a sense, at the end because the political environment was very repressive. The Padua group decided to dissolve, and the other groups didn't like to dissolve, but I remember the meeting in Venice where we decided to dissolve and to dismantle the network [sometime between July and September of 1979]. And I remember that we thought we could join Selma in London, but then saw that didn't make sense to have this kind of division because the whole experience was a collective experience. The situation with the Left was important in that decision. (Picchio 2012)

The fear of persecution pushed many activists underground for years, and we should not underestimate the impact this violent repression had on activists from the Left more broadly, and on feminists specifically.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at the emergence of the *SLD* groups in Italy within the context of the post-WWII era. Though feminism was not a new phenomenon in Italy, I have highlighted the ways in which the growth of a new feminist consciousness resulted from shifting attitudes and the changing expectations women had. In addition to these changes, the growth of *SLD* also resulted from the frustration of women involved with extra-parliamentary groups on the Left. As they focused on autonomous women's organizing, they turned their attention away from a narrow view of struggle focused on the workplace and the factory to one that looked at the family and the community. The

post-war period was a continuation of the practice of refusal women in Italy had been engaged in, and also resulted from a desire to undermine the fascist state. The practice of refusal in this instance was connected to the issue of bodily autonomy, and within the context of feminist struggle in the 1970s, focused on struggles for access to abortion. The struggles engaged in by *SLD* feminists were informed by the way motherhood and femininity were constructed and the way the experience of patriarchy was understood; the focus on the material conditions of women's lives recognized the need for a national strategy that could account for regional differences between women in the urban north and those in the underdeveloped south. In the following chapter, I look at the history of the movement in Canada, highlighting certain parallels – like the development of an autonomist strategy and the similar divisions within the Toronto WfH group – in order to begin considering the translation of notions of patriarchy and feminist struggle across borders.

"I'm a production line all by myself,
Only the wages are missing"

Peggy Seeger

"What do you do all day?" from *Different Therefore Equal*

Chapter 4

Wages and Housework in Canada:

A Focus on the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee

This chapter looks at the emergence of the Wages for Housework committee in Canada, with a focus on Toronto. I discuss the breadth of WfH activism in Canada, highlighting the struggles connected to social wages, lesbian struggles for child custody, and housework performed by live-in caregivers in order to illustrate the broader objectives within the Canadian and international contexts. I begin by building a contextual framework for the growth of WfH in Toronto, looking at some of the major ideological changes in Canadian society in the post-war period that led to a growth of feminist consciousness. I then look at the emergence of WfH in Toronto, highlighting some of the differences in political perspective and organizational practice that led to divisions in the movement. I consider the regional differences between English speaking Canada and Quebec in order to refute the notion of a cohesive, national feminist identity; I consider how these differences became an obstacle to the movement taking hold in Quebec amongst Francophone women. From here I explore the way the group translated the WfH perspective in the Canadian context. I begin with the group's focus on the emotional aspects of housework, which I argue was one of the most important contributions made by WfH feminists to discourses related to housework and social reproduction. In this

section I also look at the focus on wages, the relationship between lesbianism and child custody, and the connection WfH feminists made with domestic workers.

The Growth of Feminist Consciousness in the Post-War Period

Though geographically removed from conflict in Europe, WWII had a major impact on Canadian families. These changes are most apparent in the years that followed the war. Immediately prior to the war, Canada had also gone through the Great Depression of the 1930s. The end of WWII, therefore, meant the end of decades of social, political, and economic upheaval and uncertainty in Canada. In the post-war period, things were finally starting to look up for many Canadian families. The government gave returning soldiers free education and subsidized mortgages for new homes, both of which are examples of some of the provisions put in place to try and restore ideals of masculinity and the family in the post-war era. For the first time in a long time, a majority of men could support a family and buy a home without having to rely in the earnings of other family members. This change in the nation's economic circumstances, therefore, saw the return of the male-breadwinner model in many Canadian households, which meant that many women were no longer "required" to be in the workforce.

During WWII, many Canadian women had been employed in a variety of jobs that replaced male workers overseas; others worked in jobs that directly supported the war-effort, for example, doing munitions and aviation manufacturing. After the war, however, many women left the workplace, either by force or by choice. During this period, Canada experienced a baby boom, where the nation's population saw a drastic increase relative to the stagnant or declining birth rate of previous decades. This boom in

population stands in stark contrast to the decline in birth rates in Italy. To put the numbers of the baby boom in perspective, Canada's population increased by 50% from 12 to 18 million between 1946 and 1961 (Statistics Canada, 2012). The average family size did not increase drastically, which tells us that people at all levels of society were having children. A major incentive for promoting family growth was the implementation of Family Allowance in 1945. Also known as the Baby Bonus, this was a sum of money paid to families by the federal government for each child, regardless of income. Later in this chapter I talk about the symbolic significance of Family Allowance and how it was connected to the struggles of WfH. The Baby Bonus was a means of ensuring that lower and middle-income families could maintain purchasing power in order to keep the post-war economy strong, and was implemented because there was a fear of large-scale unemployment after the war, as had been the case after WWI.

After WWII, an increased emphasis on national security due to the Cold War created a culture of fear and uncertainty. In the face of this uncertainty, families were encouraged to reassert hegemonic gender dynamics in the home and retreat into consumerism as a way to defeat the threat of communism. The emphasis on hegemonic family structures mirrors the way Richard Nixon described the superiority of the American way of life in the Cold War period, which

rested not on weapons, but on a secure, abundant, family life of modern suburban homes. In these structures, adorned and worshipped by their inhabitants, women would achieve their glory and men would display their success. Consumerism was not an end in itself; it was the means of achieving individuality, leisure, and upward mobility" (qtd. in Kinsman, Buse and Steedman 2000, 57).

Similarly, an idealized version of Canadian life focused on the white, middle class, suburban family where family roles were redefined and reconfigured according to normative gender roles and focused on consumption. However, despite the attempts to reassert traditional gender roles in the family, many women resisted these normative ideals and the attempts to push them out of the workforce and back into the home because they either needed to work, or simply wanted to.

The growth of the public sector in the 1960s in Canada led to two major changes in Canadian society. First, the growth in social services was meant to provide more Canadians with some sense of economic security. Second, this growth increased presence of women in the workforce and in unions, because women largely occupied the new clerical positions associated with social service work. This meant women were entering the workplace in larger numbers than ever before in Canada. This increase in the presence of women in the workplace, and the growth of the public sector itself, also led to a new wave of public sector organizing that continued to reflect growing discontent among Canadian workers. Women became active and vocal critics of inequalities not only in the workplace, but also within union structures themselves. In challenging the patriarchal culture within union structures, women began to assert themselves as rank-and-file members, and created women's committees and caucuses. As women gained an increased presence in unions, they also began to assert issues of importance to women when it came to the bargaining demands of the union, winning provisions over the next few decades like: childcare, maternity leave, equal pay, employment equity, etc.

Government and Legislative Responses to Feminist Issues

Some changing attitudes in Canadian society regarding gender are also evident when we look at government responses to feminist issues. Beginning in 1966, 32 different women's organizations, headed by the *Fédération des femmes du Québec* (FFQ) and the Committee for the Equality of Women (CEW), put pressure on the government to address the issue of women's equality. In February of 1967, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson responded to these lobbying efforts by creating the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, chaired by journalist Florence Bird (Newman and White 2013, 662-64). The commission had a mandate to study all issues that were considered important to women and the status of women in Canada. Over a period of six months, the commission held a series of public hearings and also received testimony in the form of letters. The issues they investigated gained some mainstream attention, was discussed on television, and even appeared in the pages of *Chatelaine*, a popular Canadian women's magazine. The commission tabled its final report of 488 pages in 1970, with 167 recommendations related to issues like birth control, equal pay, maternity leave, childcare, family law, the Indian Act, etc. The recommendations of the commission were aimed at achieving equality for men and women. In addition to some important legislative changes that would occur, the commission was also important in the way that it brought conversations about women's issues into mainstream media sources, challenging both men and women to engage with the debates surrounding women's issues. In other words, the report revealed the *systemic* barriers facing women, and how these barriers contributed to their continued inequality. By 1980, many of the 167 recommendations had been implemented, which has certainly helped a large number of women. The implementation of paid maternity leave, for example, was an important gain. Changes to the structure of

Unemployment Insurance (UI) in 1971 granted Canadian women 15 weeks of paid leave at 66% of their previous salary (Marshall 2003). Prior to this change in UI, women were expected to leave work without pay after the birth of a child. Men were granted an astonishing 1 day of leave for the birth of a child, demonstrating the persistent ideology that raising children was viewed as a woman's responsibility. Shortly after the implementation of this provision through UI, there was a great moment of solidarity between the labour movement and the women's movement as unions began negotiating longer paid maternity leave with higher levels of benefits for their members that topped up the portion of salary paid by UI benefits. Unions began negotiating guarantees that women could return to the jobs they held before their maternity leave, and also began negotiating paternity leave for fathers, and parental leave for parents adopting children. The major turning point for maternity leave benefits came with the 42-day strike by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers in 1982, where they won 17 weeks of paid maternity leave. This victory set the precedent for maternity benefits in Canada, and longer periods of leave with employer-paid top-ups soon became mainstream for unionized workers in Canada. Some areas of concern to women outlined in the commission's report have still not been addressed adequately, however, including poverty and the issue of childcare.

Between 1967-1969, then Minister of Justice Pierre Elliot Trudeau sought to liberalize laws around abortion, birth control, and homosexuality, famously claiming "The government has no business in the bedrooms of the nation." The Criminal Law Amendment Act passed in 1969, which decriminalized birth control, abortion, and homosexuality. The latter years of the 1960s also saw reforms within Canadian family law. As of 1968, divorce was permitted on the basis of marital breakdown, as well as for

adultery and mental or physical cruelty. I talk more about the implications of both the Criminal Law Amendment Act and divorce reform later in this chapter. Changes to abortion legislation, while seemingly a victory, still maintained restrictive barriers that prevented women from accessing abortion services.

Under the 1969 Criminal Law Amendment Act, abortions were decriminalized as long as they were performed for "therapeutic" reasons. A committee of four doctors determined eligibility for therapeutic abortions, and women were usually required to undergo a psychological evaluation and obtain a note from a psychiatrist to say that she was not mentally/emotionally capable of having a baby. For one feminist from the period, "At that point the law was interpreted in such a way that you had to say you were not together emotionally to get an abortion. You had to go to a psychiatrist. A law doesn't mean much unless you change the climate" (qtd. in Rebick 2005, 37). Under these conditions, of course, access to abortion was limited and unequal across Canada. For many Leftist Canadian feminists, including women from WfH, abortion was viewed as an essential service that went hand in hand with addressing the material conditions that made it impossible (and continues to be a struggle) for most people to raise children without access to other essentials, like daycare, paid maternity leave, the collectivization of housework, etc. (O'Leary and Toupin 1983). Ultimately, the right to choose was connected to the larger struggle to give women control over their own bodies and to fight state control of women's sexuality.

One major response to the continued regulation of women's bodies was the abortion caravan of 1970. During part of that year, 17 women from the Vancouver Women's Caucus (including Ellen Woodsworth, who would later be part of the WfH

movement) traveled across Canada to protest the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act. This was the first unified action for the newly emerging women's movement in Canada in the 1970s, with women involved in the caravan coming from existing New Left groups and the anti-war movement.⁴⁴ This action received a lot of public attention in the media, and was part of a series of public feminist-led actions that changed the public discourse on abortion as part of the fight for bodily autonomy and control over reproductive rights. Often this meant that women were putting themselves at risk - legally and socially - because of both the legal status of abortion and issues of morality connected to it.

Activism to gain free, open, and accessible abortion took similar forms of struggle in Anglo-Canada and Quebec. The abortion struggle in Canada, as in Italy, was undertaken by a coalition of feminist groups, but women and women's groups assumed the leadership in these struggles. While there was support for Dr. Henry Morgentaler and his struggles to legalize abortions, many feminists decided by 1975/76 to turn their efforts away from his struggle in the courts; his was a judicial fight, while feminists wanted to wage struggles on political and ideological grounds. These struggles took the form of public demonstrations, petitions, open letters, etc. In addition to public declarations of abortion experiences,⁴⁵ feminist activism also took very practical directions, with illegal abortion clinics and referral centers, and caravans being arranged to take women to the

⁴⁴ When the caravan reached Ottawa for their protest, 300 men and women marched on Parliament Hill. When the Prime Minister and other leaders did not meet their protest, they left a coffin - which had been transported across the country as part of the caravan - on the PM's doorstep. The following day, they chained themselves to the chairs in the galleries of the House of Commons. There is a fuller account of this action in Rebick's *Ten Thousand Flowers*.

⁴⁵ One example of public declarations is a campaign in Quebec called *Déclaration des 100 femmes*, or the Declaration of 100 Women, whereby 100 women put forward their names to say that they had either undergone an abortion or had assisted in one. This public declaration with 100 names was then published in a full-page ad in *Le Devoir*, a major newspaper in Quebec.

United States to have abortions, including Chantal Daigle (who I talk about in the next paragraph). In 1978 Quebec was the first province in Canada to open illegal, feminist-influenced health centers to perform abortions, beginning with the Québec City health center⁴⁶ (Michaud 2000, 33).

The 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms was meant to protect the rights of citizens, and any laws that violated one's freedom would be overruled. While many have framed access to abortion as a right, laws prohibiting access to abortion were only deemed unconstitutional in 1988 with the case of *Morgentaler vs. the Queen* at the Supreme Court of Canada. While this decision was certainly groundbreaking, there was still a question about the rights of the fetus vs. the rights of the mother. In the case of *Tremblay vs. Daigle*, Tremblay (Chantal Daigle's boyfriend at the time) obtained an injunction to prevent Daigle from having an abortion in order to protect the life of the unborn fetus, as he argued. By the time the case reached the Supreme Court of Canada in 1989, Daigle had already fled to the U.S. to have an abortion. Nevertheless, *Tremblay vs. Daigle* was important in the fight for women to have free access to abortion because the ruling meant that the fetus was not a legal person; only once a baby has been born did it have legal rights. The rights of the woman, therefore, take precedence over the hypothetical rights of the unborn fetus.

Wages for Housework in Canada

The emergence of WfH in Canada was a response to the perceived limitations of existing groups (including feminists, lesbian separatists, and various mixed groups on the Left) in

⁴⁶ By 1985, a total of 6 similar centers would form the *Regroupement des Centres de santé des femmes du Québec*.

addressing oppression in a way that accounted for gender, class, and race. WfH was also reacting against an imagined homogeneity, of women on one hand and the working class on the other; they sought to develop a theoretical perspective and political practice that would fight against oppression rooted in patriarchy, capitalism, and the global division of labour. Because of the limitations they recognized in their previous involvement in different activist groups, women in WfH began to develop a feminist consciousness oriented towards political activism that could address core social and economic structures that fostered gender inequalities. There was a belief that addressing these core structures was paramount in changing social relations, rather than looking to a radical emancipation of work outside the home that could only be achieved for a few at the cost of someone from a more marginalized position. In recognizing the place of marginalized women in hierarchical social relations, the WfH perspective connected the devaluation of housework in the home to the subsequent devaluation of similar work outside the home:

When we first read and heard about the Wages for Housework perspective in Montreal, all of us experienced a "click"; for, we recognized in this perspective the solution to our malaise with the feminist movement of the '60s and saw in the perspective an analysis which at last linked the liberation of women from their 'feminine role' and so-called 'biological destiny' to their critical role in the overthrow of capitalism. (Montreal Power of Women Collective 1975)

For WfH, therefore, the housewife was positioned as the prototype for all women. As I have discussed, Dalla Costa originally expressed the view of housewives as the prototype for all women in *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, reflecting the idea that the capitalist division of labour along lines of gender has put us all - in one

way or another - in a position of servitude. This analysis developed from a growth of feminist consciousness that was deeply rooted in a class-based analysis of oppression. In addition, the WfH analysis highlighted the power of the wage as a dividing force between men and women and amongst the working class, a perspective that was missing from mainstream feminist movements in North America generally and Canada specifically in the 1970s.

The increasing number of women entering universities in Canada in the 1960s had been promised upward mobility, but they soon realized that female graduates faced a particular form of proletarianization where they were highly trained and educated but continued to receive a low wage (Toronto Wages for Housework Group II 1974). The frustration women experienced as a result of their educational experiences was one factor that contributed to the feminist consciousness developed in the context of WfH. Another frustration came from a constant dismissal by male comrades in student movement or former anti-war groups; these frustrations also served as a catalyst that led women to begin organizing autonomously. By the time WfH emerged officially in the fall of 1974, many feminists already had some familiarity with the idea of Wages for Housework from having attended a talk that was part of Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James' speaking tour in 1973. These women, therefore, were receptive to the WfH perspective. As Francie Wyland, one of the main organizers with the Toronto WfH group, states:

And then Selma just made so much sense. This whole thing about the origin of women's weakness was a major issue of discussion in the early women's movement. From lack of an analysis women fell on men as the enemy, and

that spoke to a lot of our experience as well. For a lot of good reasons, it was important to cut out women's space to establish a movement of our own and to explore these things. But I did not want to sever myself from my own past. I loved my dad; I loved boyfriends that I had had... I wanted a movement that would knit this stuff together. (Wyland 2012)

While some feminist activists had an initial identification with the idea of WfH, there was some early reluctance to join because the focus seemed to be on a *campaign* for wages for housework, rather than a *perspective*. This difference between campaign and perspective is important to distinguish. A *campaign* for wages for housework would reduce the demand to a single issue, thereby limiting the scope of the struggle. When we consider these potential limitations, it is easy to see why women involved in feminist struggles with a working class perspective would be reluctant to focus on winning a single issue without addressing the other intersecting needs of working class women (and the working class more generally). A *perspective* focused on wages, on the other hand, would be connected to a larger set of ideas that looked at housework from a nuanced point of view and similarly envisioned struggles against this particular form of capitalist and patriarchal oppression.

As an alternative form of Left ideology, Autonomist Marxism also had an influence on WfH feminists, many of who had been involved with The New Tendency before focusing on autonomous organizing. The connection to Autonomist Marxism and the refusal of work allowed Wyland and others to see the effects of wagelessness: "I didn't have to be raising kids to feel it and to see it affecting everyone around me. And it made so much more sense than the historical accident of men having more power than

women" (Wyland 2012). Here we see the connection between ideas of the wage as they relate to power; specifically, lack of wage has meant lack of power. Similarly, those who have a wage have more power to fight against and refuse work, unlike those who do not have a wage. The more these issues became clear, the more it was apparent that a feminist perspective would not be able to develop in the context of organizing with male-dominant groups like The New Tendency in any meaningful way. Many feminists from The New Tendency, therefore, left to join the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee.

In 1973, Dalla Costa and James went on a speaking tour across Canada, which culminated at a Feminist Symposium in Montreal. At this symposium, 800 women met and a unanimous resolution was passed to demand wages for housework from the state (The Other Woman 1975, 6-7). Women in Canada (mostly in Toronto and Montreal) began working to spread the perspective through pamphlets, videos, talks, etc. In October of 1974, there was a conference and planning meeting in New York City, where 50 women from 6 countries met and an informal network was set up. Around this time, the "Cora Bookmobile"⁴⁷ was also established, spreading the WfH perspective and bringing feminist literature to women in more rural communities. Working with the Montreal Power of Women Collective and WfH in New York City, much of the early work of the group in Toronto was to collect and edit English language materials through the series *Women in Struggle* and *The Wages for Housework Notebook*. As the network grew, this series would expand to translate materials from Italian to English. The translation of work from Italian into English shows us the influence Italian feminists had on the growth of the movement in Canada, emphasizing the cross-national connections that existed between these feminists.

⁴⁷ The "Cora Bookmobile" was named after journalist and feminist pioneer Cora Hind.

Once it was firmly established, WfH in Toronto had a core group of about 20-30 women who came from different segments of the New Left, women's movements in Toronto, the lesbian movement, anti-war movements, and student movements. The work of the core group grew as the movement developed and expanded, leading to increased involvement of women in groups like Wages Due Lesbians, the Lesbian Mother's Defense Fund, and groups comprised of immigrant women and domestic workers. In the following pages, I talk about some of the ways the group translated the international WfH perspective into local struggles, including a focus on social wages and welfare, lesbianism and child custody, and solidarity with live-in caregivers.

Divergent Tendencies: Organizational and Political Perspectives

The Toronto Wages for Housework Committee originally had two groups: Group 1 and Group 2. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to Group 1 as the "Book Group" and Group 2 as the "Main Group."⁴⁸ The Book Group was largely made up of women from the University of Toronto, with people like Angela Miles, and would eventually be expelled from the network. The Main Group was more closely connected to the network and remained active doing work in Toronto under the auspices of WfH, with members like Judith Ramirez, Francie Wyland, Dorothy Kidd, Frances Gregory, and Ellen Woodsworth.

Group 1 was sometimes referred to as the Book Group because of the perception that it was comprised mainly of women from the University of Toronto and was therefore mostly interested in theorizing about housework, rather than developing a form of political action (Kidd 2012). The difference between the rhetorical style of the two

⁴⁸ I use the designation "book group" because some women in the WfH network to refer to this particular group used this.

groups may have been minor and insignificant in the larger context of the movement, but other divisions emerged that were not so easily reconciled. The Main Group had divergent views from the book group, as well as the Montreal Power of Women (POW) Collective,⁴⁹ on the organizational and political perspectives the group should develop. This division mirrored a similar situation in Padua, and resulted in the expulsion of the latter two groups from the International Wages for Housework network. The differences in perspective are complex: for the Book Group and the Montreal POW Collective, a difference in organizational practice did not necessitate a difference in political perspective. This means they saw the two as separate, and that the way they organized as a group did not reflect on the theoretical framework and political analyses that were developed. The Main Group, on the other hand, was adamant that a difference in organizational practice was *necessarily* a difference in political perspective. As a paper written by the Montreal POW Collective asserts: "The structure of the organization we build expresses the politics of those who build it" (Montreal Power of Women Collective et al. 1975). This link between political and organizational perspectives prompts us to think about the relationship between form and content, and what this ultimately says about the political perspective in the context of WfH. While divisions appeared as structural, in actuality they revealed core political differences.

A Stalled Emergence in Quebec

During its early days, WfH in Canada had connections with different groups of feminists in Quebec, amongst both Anglophone and Francophone women. Despite an interest in the

⁴⁹ The Montreal Power of Women Collective was a group of Anglophone women in Montreal, formed in 1974.

WfH perspective, however, the movement did not take hold in Quebec. In this section I explore some of the reasons WfH did not take off in Quebec, which contributes to the contextual framework I have constructed.

Emerging in 1969, the *Front de libération des femmes du Québec (FLFQ)*, or Liberation Front of Québécois Women, was an autonomous feminist group based in Montreal interested in exploring issues of exploitation without the involvement of men. While this group was short-lived, the *Centre des femmes* emerged soon after, with some continuity of members and similar political objectives. Many of the women who would be involved with the *Centre des femmes* were also part of extreme-Left organizations like *En lutte!*, a Marxist-Leninist group. *Centre des femmes* defined itself as radical because of its autonomy from men, and also because it aligned itself with extreme-Left politics more broadly. While they also had socialist tendencies, they defined themselves as feminists first and foremost. Comprised of francophone women, their struggle was connected to Québécois sovereignty⁵⁰: "We were for the independence of Quebec. One of the slogans we used was "no liberation of women without the liberation of Quebec, and no liberation of Quebec without the liberation of women.' We always saw the two together⁵¹" (Toupin 2012). Feminists who had originated with the *FLFQ*⁵² were involved with putting together the journal *Québécoises debouttes!*, whose title translates to "Quebec women, stand up!" The call to stand up suggests that a struggle for independence, and not just liberation, was necessary. In other words, liberation in this

⁵⁰ For more about the political orientation of the FLFQ, see *Québécoises debouttes!* V.1, pp. 22-27.

⁵¹ "On était pour l'indépendance du Québec. Un des slogans qu'on disait est 'pas de libération des femmes sans la libération du Québec, et sans la libération du Québec pas de libération des femmes.' On voyait les deux ensemble." Translation by C. Rousseau.

⁵² While women of the *FLFQ* only put together one issue of *Québécoises debouttes!*, the journal continued as the group shifted to become *Centre des femmes*.

context would be Québécoise women breaking away from both men (patriarchy) and from Anglo Canada, whose hegemony would remain intact. Independence, on the other hand, implied creating new counter-hegemonic structures apart from Anglo Canada and the social relations imposed by capitalism and patriarchy.

Sympathetic to the WfH perspective after attending the 1973 conference in Montreal where Selma James spoke, Louise Toupin, Nicole Lacelle and others who formed *Les Éditions du remue-ménage* in 1976, initially did so in order to translate and publish texts from WfH so that francophone women could discuss them. As part of the speaking tour in 1973, Dalla Costa went to Quebec to talk to a group of Québécoise women, including the *Centre des femmes*.⁵³ These series of meetings with Québécoise feminists included sessions that were open to the public, and others that were more private. For Québécoise women interested in the WfH perspective, what resonated the most was the way the perspective brought seemingly disparate issues together:

What hit me most about their analysis is that everything that seems to be separated in the oppression of women made sense in the Wages for Housework analysis. Contrary to the usual claims that we had on the issue - raise wages, get better working conditions - the perspective of wages worked like a conducting wire that connected all these aspects that seemed incomprehensible if we kept them separated... It made us realise that, at the root, women were working for free, and so it's an extortion of our labour power.⁵⁴ (Toupin 2012)

⁵³ This series of meetings was separate from James' later appearance at the Montreal Feminist Symposium in 1973, which was largely represented by Anglophone women.

⁵⁴ "Moi, ce qui me touchait beaucoup dans leur analyse c'est que tout se nous semblait séparer dans l'oppression des femmes trouvait un sens dans l'analyse de Wages for Housework... Contrairement à la revendications de la pièce qu'on avait d'habitude - augmenter les salaires, obtenir des meilleurs conditions de travail - le perspective du salaire a fonctionné comme un fil conducteur qui reliait tous ces aspects-là qui étaient incompréhensibles si on les gardait séparé... Ça nous a fait réaliser que dans le fond les femmes

Here we see a realization that the essence of women's oppression was the unwaged labour they performed on a daily basis; women all around the world have been at the service of men, of their families, their children, their parents, in-laws, etc. The analysis provided by Dalla Costa and James was also important in the way it was able to provide a better understanding of women in the global south and the invisible labour of women in agriculture.

Most of the women who were sympathetic to WfH in Quebec were not housewives in the traditional sense, though would be considered housewives from the WfH perspective. They were among the first women in their families to have a post-secondary education, to have jobs outside the home, to remain unmarried, etc. Despite their relative freedom and autonomy, they had the understanding that all women were housewives: "I was not a housewife, but I was looking to understand where my place was, but especially how not to cut off my class of origin... it reconciled me."⁵⁵ (Lacelle 2012). For many of the women in Quebec, the wage was appealing when they looked to their mothers, aunts, grandmothers, etc.:

My mother was a real housewife, and my father prevented her from working because of the old mentality that a man who was incapable of supporting his family was less than nothing. If my mother had had a salary, it would have changed her life. She would have had autonomy from my father⁵⁶. (Toupin 2012)

travaillaient pour rien, et donc c'est une partie d'extorsion de notre force de travail." Translation by C. Rousseau.

⁵⁵ "Je n'étais pas ménagère, mais je cherchais à comprendre où ma place était, mais surtout comment ne pas me couper de ma classe d'origine. ... ça m'a réconciliée." Translation by C. Rousseau.

⁵⁶ "Ma mère était une vraie ménagère. Mon père l'empêchait de travailler. C'était la vieille mentalité qu'un homme qui n'est pas capable de faire vivre sa femme, c'est un moins que rien... Si elle avait un salaire, mon Dieu – ça aurait changé sa vie! Elle aurait eu l'autonomie de mon père..." Translation by C. Rousseau.

In theory, housewives seemed to be mostly in favour of receiving a wage. Some feminist groups argued against WfH because they thought it would chain women to the home, as though they weren't already. For Lacelle, "Everything starts somewhere. You begin, then you advance, and the twenty years later you have a piece..."⁵⁷ (Lacelle 2012). The demand for wages was important, because the revolution that would be needed to make this happen would transform society. Indeed, for Toupin, "The road that we would have to follow to get there, that would revolutionize our lives"⁵⁸ (Toupin 2012). Talking about the wage led to a discussion of many aspects of women's exploitation, why they were at the service of men, why they receive lower wages, etc.

Sympathy for the WfH perspective, or certainly for the idea of wages for housework more generally, is further evident when looking at some documents put out by other francophone feminist groups in Quebec. While the *Centre des femmes* was open to the WfH perspective, a group never formed in French-speaking Canada. As the *Centre des femmes* ceased to exist, women from this group went on to form a series of other autonomist feminist groups that would align in a coalition called *L'Inter-groupe*⁵⁹. *L'Inter-groupe* formed in order to debate common political ideologies, to debate strategy, and to engage in actions together. Though the coalition eventually parted ways by 1977 due to a difference in priorities, their last collective statement presented a clearly Marxist-feminist analysis of the relationship between class-based politics and feminist analyses of oppression. In their statement for International Women's Day in 1976, *8 Mars 1976*:

⁵⁷ "Tout commence quelque part. Tu commences, puis t'avances, puis vingt ans plus tard t'as un morceau...." Translation by C. Rousseau.

⁵⁸ "Le chemin qu'on va devoir parcourir pour y arriver, ça va révolutionner notre vie." Translation by C. Rousseau.

⁵⁹ Some of the groups in *L'Inter-groupe* include: *Théâtre des Cuisines*, the *Comité de lutte pour l'avortement et la contraception libres et gratuits*, the *Centre de santé des femmes du quartier Plateau Mont-Royal*, and *Éditions remue-ménage*.

Journée internationale des femmes, these women drew connections between worker and women's struggles, noting:

For us, March 8, is, of course, the opportunity to remember the struggles of textile and clothing workers in New York in 1857 and 1908. But it is also an opportunity to draw from oblivion the struggles of our mothers, trapped by the Church and the State in their kitchen, responsible for producing in their belly the future, indispensable labor force for the benefit of capitalists and responsible to see to its maintenance 24 hours a day.⁶⁰ (O'Leary and Toupin 1982, 209)

They go on to describe the work in the home as *work*, though done without a wage: nurturing, feeding, clothing, birthing, cooking, etc.

While material related to WfH was printed in the pages of *Québécoises Deboutte!*, the editors were clear to say that they did not fully endorse the perspective. Certainly, they were convinced that housework and the unwaged work of social reproduction were at the root of the economic exploitation of women, but they had questions regarding how this issue could be effectively addressed: "It is important to clarify that we have never called for wages for housewives; we truly don't believe that this is the solution. A wage for housewives would only institutionalize women's domestic "destiny"⁶¹ (O'Leary and Toupin 1983, 118). Most of the women involved with *Les Éditions remue-ménage* were, in fact, in line with the full WfH perspective. However, when it came down to a vote to

⁶⁰ "Pour nous, le 8 mars, c'est, bien sûr, l'occasion de rappeler les luttes des ouvrières du textile et du vêtement à New-York en 1857 et en 1908. Mais c'est aussi l'occasion de tirer de l'oubli les luttes de nos mères, enfermées par l'Église et par l'État dans leur cuisine, chargées de produire dans leur ventre la future main d'oeuvre indispensable au profit des capitalistes et chargées de voir à son entretien 24 heures sur 24." Translation by C. Rousseau

⁶¹ "il est important de préciser que nous n'avons jamais réclamé le salaire à la ménagère; nous ne croyons justement pas que ce soit la solution. Un salaire à la ménagère ne ferait qu'institutionnaliser la 'destinée' domestique des femmes." Translation by C. Rousseau.

officially endorse the perspective, the answer was always no. There were those who refused to endorse it because other groups they were aligned with in the larger *Inter-groupe* did not want the debates to have a public presence (12). Further, disaccord arose when the solution presented was the socialization of housework, marked by the demand for: equal pay for equal work, full paid maternity leave, free daycare (controlled by the users, open 24/7, in communities and in workplaces), and free abortion and contraceptives (O'Leary and Toupin 1982, 212).

The refusal to adopt the WfH perspective was a frustrating experience for those sympathetic to the perspective because, for them, it was one of the best articulations of the exploitation of women. The WfH perspective, therefore, was not just badly received amongst men, political groups, socialist and other Left groups, but also amongst the general population of women:

When the first autonomous women's groups arrived, they were very poorly received everywhere. Not just with men, not just in political groups, but in the general population. It was viewed as something that didn't make sense. What's wrong with these women? They're frustrated. Deep down it's because they haven't found good men. They're badly kissed; they have an inferiority complex... We had to break the glass and say, yes - there is a male/female problem, and it's a problem that is central in our society.⁶² (Toupin 2012)

⁶² "Quand les premiers groupes autonomes de femmes sont arrivés, ça a été vraiment mal-reçu partout. Pas juste chez les hommes, pas juste dans les groupes politiques, mais dans la population générale. C'était comme quelque chose qui n'avait pas de bon sens. Qu'est-ce qu'elles ont, ces femmes là? Ce sont des frustrées. Dans le fond, c'est qu'elles n'ont pas trouvées des bons hommes. C'est des mal-baisées; on avait un complexe d'infériorité.... On a dû briser ce glass là et dire, oui - il y a un problème homme/femme, et c'est un problème qui est centrale dans la société." Translation by C. Rousseau.

To say that there was simply an issue between men and women would be to underestimate and play down the issue that was present in society at large at the time. The negative reaction lasted all throughout the decade of the 1970s in Quebec. For the International Women's Day marches, for example, there were sometimes two competing contingents - one that was socialist and one that was feminist; sometimes there would be confrontations between the groups. Throughout the decade of the 1970s, this division and opposition prevented women's groups from moving forward.

Another issue responsible for the lack of movement for WfH in Quebec was that of language. Because many of the feminists interested in WfH in Quebec were also in support of Québécois sovereignty, it was important for them to prioritize French as a primary language of engagement. Many of the WfH feminists based in Ontario, on the other hand, did not speak French, resulting in a language barrier. In the context of feminist organizing, Québécoise women were expected to speak English because it was the dominant language in Canada more broadly. The fact that conferences and meetings in Canada were only conducted in English (even those in Montreal) was a major roadblock to the growth of the movement in Quebec. For Lacelle and Toupin, it was important to resolve some of the cultural differences between Anglophone and Francophone feminists, particularly when it came to being able to translate feminist theory into connected struggles. In addition, there was disaccord within radical québécoises feminists regarding the adoption of the WfH perspective; while there was agreement regarding the role of housework in the exploitation of women, there were divisions regarding the best way to struggle against this exploitation. One side called for the abolition of housework through the demand for the wage, while the other side called

for the socialization of housework; the latter perspective would emerge as the dominant discourse in the Quebec context.

Translating the Perspective in Canada

From the WfH perspective, all women are housewives; whether they are married, single, or divorced, with children or without. Since housework was defined beyond the vulgarized set of tasks needed to keep a home or family in order, the designation of who qualifies as a housewife was also an expanded one. In this section I look at the way the WfH perspective was translated into several key areas of analysis and struggle. First, I look at the way the identification of the emotional aspects of housework allowed for a broader definition of the category of “housewife.” I then look at the emphasis the group placed on wages, highlighting their struggles connected to welfare and family allowance. From here I look at the emergence of Wages Due Lesbians, and the way child custody struggles for lesbian mothers was also connected to a broader critique of hegemonic gender relations. Finally, I look at the group’s connection to domestic workers as a group of women who know what it means to receive a wage for housework. The connection to domestic workers also serves to further highlight some of the problematic elements of housework connected to its location in the home.

Emotional Labour: Caring is Work

The major reason the housewife was defined broadly from the WfH perspective is the emotional aspect of housework and social reproduction present in all aspects of our lives, both inside and outside the home. The issue of emotional labour, sometimes referred to as

the work of caring, was developed by WfH and highlighted as a significant aspect of housework:

Housework was not only domestic tasks; it's the education of children, the socialization of adolescents, medical care, the mental task of the organization of the home; the immaterial aspect of the work as well... When we reflected on the question of housework, it made us discover what we call 'care' today. It's really the work of care.⁶³ (Toupin 2012)

The demand for emotional labour extends beyond the work of care in the home for the family, and exists because of the "natural" role that has been constructed for women. As women, we are expected to make people - men especially - feel good. Most women can probably recount instances where random men on the street have asked them to smile, a request that most men have probably not encountered. This demand for emotional labour extends to every facet of women's lives, and is also present in many different kinds of jobs. One clear example of the demand for emotional labour that takes on certain gendered dimensions is within the service industry. Serving, or "waitressing," as a job was identified by WfH as a clear extension of the role of women as housewives. Ellen Agger, a WfH activist who was also a waitress, shared her employer's description of a waitress. She was to be responsible for the emotional needs of the customers and to make them feel "at home" (not to mention making sure they're fed). For this reason, according to the employer, they should be called hostesses and not waitresses, because "she's a HOSTESS in every sense of the word" (Agger 1977). The term hostess conjures images

⁶³ "'Housework' ce n'était pas seulement les tâches domestiques: c'est l'éducation des enfants, la socialisation des adolescents, les soins médicaux, la charge mentale de l'organisation de la maison; l'aspect immatériel du travail aussi... Quand on réfléchissait sur la question du travail ménager ça nous faisait découvrir ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui 'care.' C'est vraiment le travail de soin." Translation by C. Rousseau.

of a good wife/mother who ensures that everyone who enters her home is made to feel comfortable, and that all of their needs are met. For Agger, this kind of work was angering and degrading:

What makes me most angry about this type of work is the unrecognized part, the part that is supposed to come naturally to us. You feel the anger first when you go for the interview and the manager asks you to take off your coat and turn around. You feel it when you put on your uniform and have to listen to all the comments about how nice your legs are or your ass is. You feel it when the customer says "smile honey", like you were a dog doing a trick for money. And you are. (Agger 1977)

Wages in the service industry, particularly in restaurants and bars, continue to be based on tips and the amount of money you earn is therefore dependent upon the level of emotional labour you are able to perform and your ability to make customers feel good. Emotional labour in this context is not viewed as work, and is instead taken as a given. There is also the added burden of presenting yourself in a certain way; it is not enough to "care," you must also make customers feel good by adhering to normative standards of beauty.

The issue of care is most evident when we consider the way housework – particularly the care of children – is described: a labour of love. Whenever there was talk of giving a wage for housework, the question that came up again and again was: how can you put a price tag on love? However, the injustice of housework and the constraints placed on resistance by its emotional aspects was clear to WfH feminists:

Men go out and work all day long and get paid for it. Nobody would dare suggest that they should do that work for free. And yet we are expected to do all this housework as *an act of love*. And because we aren't paid for this work, many of us are forced to get a second job outside the home. And for most of us this means 'women's work' at the lowest wage around. (Toronto Wages for Housework Collective and Wages Due Collective)

This excerpt from a WfH bulletin demonstrates an understanding of housework as a labour of love that extended beyond the home; that is, the majority of jobs that were available to women in the 1970s were viewed as extensions of housework, or as “women’s work.” So while a woman received a wage for this work, the pay was low: "And it's not well paid because of this, because they're supposed to do this for free in the home. In fact, it made me see the invisible labour of women everywhere, and that we work all the time but are not paid"⁶⁴ (Toupin 2012). One WfH flyer has a split-screen image comparing the life of a working mother and the life of a mother who works (see Image 5 on the next page). The image on the next page shows us the pervasive nature of housework, from morning until night, and that women who worked outside the home were not able to escape their work in the home. The simple language and clear images were able to convey the WfH perspective in a meaningful and impactful way, connecting to women across language and educational barriers. At the height of the WfH movement in the mid-to-late 1970s, the wage gap was such that women earned 50% less than men. Waitresses in Ontario recognized this issue and fought to keep up with minimum wage. The devaluation of women's work inside and outside the home was connected to the low

⁶⁴ "Et ce n'est pas bien payé à cause de ça, parce qu'elles sont supposées de le faire gratuitement à la maison. En fait, ça me faisait voir le travail invisible des femmes partout, puisqu'on travaille tout le temps mais on n'est pas payées." Translation by C. Rousseau.

wages women have received compared to male workers, and, as I show later, was connected to the lack of legal protection faced by temporary foreign domestic workers.



Image 5: image from a Wages for Housework bulletin, from Wages for Housework: Wages due Lesbians; Lesbians Mothers' Defence Fund Fonds. Series 1.4: WFH - Other Organizations, Box 624.19. Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa Library.

Focus on the Wage

The Toronto WfH group used rallies, meetings, and publications to share their perspective, showing an expanded view of housework that highlighted the importance of the wage. While women might feel they were being exploited for the work they did in the home on some level, highlighting the lack of wage for their work helped to view and articulate these feelings of exploitation and oppression more concretely. To demonstrate what women were experiencing on an economic level, the issue of the wage was connected to the national economy. When WfH started in 1974, there were cries from feminists and the Left alike that this kind of accounting could not be done. How could you put a price tag on love? However, one article in the *Wages for Housework Campaign Bulletin* talks about the role of the housewife measured in economic terms, showing that

free housework accounted for 1/3 of Canada's Gross National Product (GNP), and that women in the workforce earned 60 cents for every dollar earned by a man. According to Sangster, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women measured housework in relation to the national economy as early as the 1960s. According to their report, housework contributed 11% to Canada's GNP, an amount that totalled \$8 billion (Sangster 2010, 26). By 1971, Statistics Canada released a report that said housework made up an astounding 41% of Canada's Gross Domestic Product (PEI Advisory Council 2003, 1). In 1978, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of women announced that housework in Canada was worth \$26 billion for the economy, or \$6,000 for every household (Ramirez 1978a). According to the 1978 report, which was called Five Million Women, the housework of those 5 million women accounted for about 27% of the country's GNP. These reports show us that you can put a price on the different kinds of work that are included under the rubric of housework, including care work. These numbers show us an ideological disconnect that persisted; even though there were numbers to show the economic value of housework in relation to the nation's economy, housework continued to be classified as a labour of love.

Whenever the idea of paying a wage for housework was presented, a common question was: who will pay this wage? Would it be the husband, employer, or state? For those advocated the WfH perspective, the idea was to have the state pay for the wages because they recognized the way the nation's economy benefited from unwaged labour in the home, as the numbers connected to Canada's GNP and GDP reflect. From the WfH perspective, the wage was conceived as both a literal and ideological demand, meaning it was able to highlight the unwaged work women perform in different ways. This multiple

view of the wage allowed it to be viewed not just as a demand for cash, but also as a way to demand what we call the social wage: access to social services like healthcare, welfare, daycare, etc.

Feminists involved with WfH in Toronto connected with existing groups like C.A.S.H., the Committee to Advance the Status of Housework, a grassroots, non-profit educational group for women that was founded in 1975. Similarly, WfH became involved with the Mother Led Union (Wyland 1976), a group that was associated with the welfare struggles originally developed in the U.S. in the 1960s. This group demanded a guaranteed annual income for everyone, regardless of work or marital status, and demanded that mothers on social assistance be granted the same amount of money as those doing foster-care (Roach Pierson and Griffin Cohen 1993, 270). The Mother Led Union (MLU) in Canada is an example of a push towards autonomous struggle for welfare, particularly amongst single mothers. WfH joined easily with the MLU because the message was the same: women, whatever their specific situation, needed more money and to work less. There had long been a perception in society that mothers on welfare led meaningless lives and contributed nothing to society. There was a belief that they should either find a man or get a job, or both. Black mothers fighting for welfare in the U.S. in the 1960s were viewed by WfH as the forefront of the feminist movement: "...welfare mothers have challenged the role women must perform in capitalist society, because in refusing their motherhood as a natural given to be paid for with their lives they have refused the alternatives capital forces upon women, i.e. marriage or the factory, unpaid work or extra work" (Federici 1975a). The position of welfare mothers amplified and clarified the position of all housewives. Rather than co-opting the work of Black

feminists engaged in welfare struggles, there was an effort to organize with these women who were already organizing. For example, some WfH groups based in the U.S. had sub-groups within their networks that organized around the issue of welfare.

Another example of the WfH network's linking to the issue of social wages is evident when we look to the early work of WfH in Canada connected to Family Allowance. As I discussed earlier, Family Allowance, or the "baby bonus," was a program that started in Canada in 1945⁶⁵ as an incentive for women to have more children in the post-war period. It was universal, meaning it went to all families with children, regardless of income. The most important aspect of the Family Allowance is that it came as a monthly cheque paid to the mother in the family. This was often one of the only forms of money women received in their own name if they were not employed outside the home. Because it was paid to women, it valued housework - at least symbolically. For the "Hands Off The Family Allowance" campaign, women went door to door, to schools, community groups, etc. getting people to sign a petition demanding that the Trudeau government not claw back these programs as part of the larger cutbacks to social services (see Images 6 and 7 on the following pages):

We went to work early fighting against cuts to the baby bonus. We took petitions door to door in Regent Park. Through that, women came into the movement from those situations. Then later I helped start the Lesbian Mother's Defense Fund, which were all women with kids. Most of them had left their husbands, but not all of them. (Wyland 2012)

⁶⁵ Family Allowance underwent many changes since its introduction in 1945, and was eventually replaced entirely with the Child Tax Benefit in 1992.



Image 6: image from Hands Off the Family Allowance Campaign petition, from Wages for Housework: Wages due Lesbians; Lesbians Mothers' Defence Fund Fonds. Series 1.6: WFH - Clippings, Box 625.9. Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa Library.

CALLING ALL WOMEN CALLING ALL WOMEN

Hands Off the Family Allowance

No increase in Baby Bonus

The \$220,000,000, Baby Bonus increase we were all expecting has fallen victim to the government's "anti-inflation program". Why have they seen fit to make one of their biggest cutbacks from the pittance they give mothers? As always, we women are the ones expected to do without, to put ourselves last, and sacrifice "for the good of others". WHAT BETTER WAY FOR TREDEAU TO LAUNCH HIS "LOWERED EXPECTATIONS WAY OF LIFE" THAN BY TAKING MONEY AWAY FROM MOTHERS, THE SYMBOLS OF SELF-DENIAL!

We refuse to be a good example

We know it means EVEN MORE WORK, AND LESS FOR OURSELVES AND OUR CHILDREN. It also means we are more of a discipline on the men so many of us depend on. Nurses said "dedication won't pay the rent" and have fought for well-earned increases across the country. Teachers are refusing the blackmail of paying for cutbacks in education and are going on strike. All around us others are demanding their share of society's wealth which OUR UNPAID WORK IN THE HOME HELPS CREATE.

We want our increase too

And we need it more than most. Many of us are sole-support mothers and \$36.00 a year per child- little as it is- does make a difference. Much more than anyone with a 10% surtax on their \$30,000 salary can begin to imagine! And for those of us with husbands, the Family Allowance is often THE ONLY MONEY WE CAN CALL OUR OWN, the only recognition that we WORK in our homes.

**Our house work is worth money
like any other work**

Image 7: text from the Hands Off the Family Allowance Campaign petition, from Wages for Housework: Wages due Lesbians; Lesbians Mothers' Defence Fund Fonds. Series 1.6: WFH - Clippings, Box 625.9. Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa Library.

The WfH committee in Toronto fought with women to keep welfare benefits and to increase and facilitate access, and also worked to educate women about their rights to specific social assistance programs through different pamphlets and publications dedicated to this topic (Kidd 2012). Welfare was presented as a wage that, in some ways, “valued” housework (though certainly not at a rate that was adequate). In one campaign bulletin the Toronto group exemplified the welfare mother having power because she had put a price tag on raising a family (Editorial 1977). Between 1961-1973 in Ontario, there was a 302% increase in the number of single-mother headed families on welfare, which represented 1/3 of the welfare caseloads in Ontario for 1973 (Gavigan and Chunn 2007, 754). This increase in single mothers can be attributed to two main factors. First, the 1968 Divorce Act created a uniform divorce law in Canada, and widened the scope of reasons for divorce, including desertion, abuse, and adultery. This made it easier for women to leave undesirable relationships. Second, in light of the federal government’s 1966 Canada Assistance Plan (CAP)⁶⁶, the Ontario government introduced new legislation in 1967 that consolidated existing forms of social assistance (for single mothers, elderly widows, people with disabilities, etc.) into a single long term social assistance program with liberalized eligibility requirements (ibid.). The struggle for welfare was important for lesbians or women wanting to leave abusive or otherwise undesirable partnerships because they now had the option of raising their children without relying on a man's wage for survival. According to WfH feminists, the struggle for welfare also contributed to

⁶⁶ With the CAP, the federal government shared the eligible costs that provincial, territorial and municipal governments incurred in providing provincial social assistance and welfare services to persons in need. This includes contributing to provincial healthcare and educational costs. The CAP was implemented in 1966, and by 1967 all provinces had signed on. CAP was eliminated in 1995 by the Liberal government in favour of a decentralized approach, where provinces were given discretionary power. This effectively meant they could divert funding away from social services and implement mandatory "work for welfare" programs (Bako 2011).

increases in minimum wage amounts, showing how the access to welfare provided women with more power and leverage in the labour market (Editorial 1977). Between 1970-'75, minimum wage rates in Canada increased by 58%, from \$1.65/hr in July 1970 to \$2.6/hr in July 1975. In Ontario, the rates increased by 60%, from \$1.50/hr in October 1970 to \$2.40/hr in May 1975 (Government of Canada 2016). If welfare is a viable alternative, women are not forced to fight for crumbs in the labour market.

Lesbianism, Child Custody, and Struggles for Autonomy

Wages Due Lesbians (Wages Due) grew out of the Toronto WfH Committee to advocate on behalf of lesbians, taking forms of gender, class, and race-based oppression out of heterosexual relationships. The main focus of the group in Toronto would be custody rights for lesbian mothers, resulting in the development of the Lesbian Mother's Defense Fund (LMDF). While some skepticism remained about WfH's relevance to the struggle for rights for lesbians more broadly, there was much respect for Wages Due and the struggle for lesbian custody rights. The analysis that grew out of Wages Due recognized that lesbians were not just visible women who were out; lesbians were also women who were still closeted, sometimes trapped in heterosexual relationships. Lesbians also had children, which meant that there were great obstacles to overcome when it came to family law and custody rights. The Lesbian Mother's Defense Fund (LMDF) was developed in an attempt to answer the question: How do we struggle against the homophobic court system? The LMDF was able to provide financial and emotional support during custody battles, but was also able to establish a social network for lesbians (M. Smith 1999, 30), creating the conditions that would make it easier for those who remained closeted to

come out; this meant they were creating options for women outside of heterosexual social relations.



Image 8: Cover of *Motherhood, Lesbianism, and Child Custody*, from Toronto: Wages Due Lesbians. Wages for Housework: Wages due Lesbians; Lesbians Mothers' Defence Fund Fonds. Series 2.1: WDL Organization and Mandate, Box 625.27. Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa Library.

One difficulty in organizing lesbian movements has been the lack of resources available to women generally, which was especially true in the context of Wages Due. Some of the issues related to strategies of organizing were outlined in Wyland's pamphlet on *Motherhood, Lesbianism, and Child Custody* (see Image 8 above). One solution was

to join with gay men's movements in order to have better access to resources. However, joining with gay men's organizations proved to be as troublesome to lesbians as it was for women generally to join with male-dominated Left groups. In other words, "the price we pay is the subordination of our interests to those of the men, whose power over us does not disappear when they are sleeping together" (Wyland 1976, 22). While women were granted space to advocate for lesbian rights, they had to do so "from behind the men's shoulders - constrained and defined by their struggle for equality with straight men" (23). There were equal frustrations with organizing in the context of the broader Women's Liberation Movement, where there was often a desire to have lesbians remain closeted for fear that open expressions of lesbianism would undermine the credibility of "women's rights." Finally, there were the limitations of the struggle for lesbian separatism. The issue of lesbian separatism was debated at great length within Wages Due. The main issue with separatism is that it did not recognize that men themselves were not the problem; instead, the "power invested in men" was the enemy. A focus on lesbianism in relation to the WfH perspective meant fighting for choices around sexuality, for both gay and straight women. This response went against two main arguments in the gay right's movement at the time. On one hand, it was a response to the gay men's movement that saw homosexuality not as a choice, but as something that was socially constructed. On the other hand, Wages Due countered lesbian separatism, which saw men as necessarily the enemy.⁶⁷ Instead, lesbianism was viewed as a terrain of struggle under capitalism. This meant that there was recognition that relationships between men and women would not disappear if a woman was not involved in a romantic partnership with a man; both

⁶⁷ Lesbian separatism was so dogmatic in seeing men as the enemy that in some circles, there were even debates about whether or not women should be able to bring their male children to gatherings.

straight and lesbian women were oppressed by the combined forces of patriarchy and capitalism. WfH and Wages Due contended that sexuality was not a choice in the sense that none of us is free to choose under capitalism; all of our relationships are constrained in this context (Kidd 2012). The idea they advocated was: if women had access to money, they would have more options to make choices and to create alternative lifestyles for themselves. Without nuance, however, this colour-blind idea ignores the fact that many women of colour have not been given access to the same choices and alternatives.

Lesbians involved with struggles for custody rights connected themselves to other oppressed groups of people: "Like prostitutes, welfare women, immigrants, disabled women, prisoners and mental patients - we have our children taken away every day. Almost anyone who comes along can label us 'unfit'" (Wages Due Lesbians 1977). The label "unfit" was foisted upon these women for their various forms of refusal when it came to following the rules of capitalism and patriarchy. For lesbians, the refusal was to have sex with men; for prostitutes, the refusal was to have sex with men for free. For lesbian mothers, there was a risk of having their children taken away because of the supposedly damaging nature of homosexuality. Prior to the 1970s, many lesbian mothers did not fight for custody of their children through the homophobic court system because of a fear of being "outed," shamed, or viewed as delinquent because of their homosexuality. Even in the wake of the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1969, many lesbians who had previously conceived and raised children in heterosexual relationships feared being viewed as deviant because of persisting the "regulation" of homosexuality; this meant that many of them would choose to remain in the closet for fear of being denied custody or access to their children. At this time, the courts had a

broadly negative view of homosexual parents, so a lesbian mother fighting for custody was almost guaranteed to lose, making the LMDF essential in fighting these restrictions.

The LMDF (see Image 9 on the next page) was set up in 1978 to help women fight for custody and visitation rights in the court system, and actually lasted until 1987, which was long after WfH ceased operating in Toronto. In the 1970s and 1980s, judges had two main approaches to child custody cases with homosexual parents. First, there was the idea that a parent's homosexuality necessarily posited an un-rebuttable presumption that the parent was unfit. Regardless of all other circumstances, a parent was considered unfit by virtue of their homosexuality. The pamphlet *Motherhood, Lesbianism, and Child Custody* contains the testimony of women who had various issues navigating the judicial system to fight for custody. A theme common to all of them is the difficulty navigating the system, with no guarantee - no matter how "fit" a parent - that lesbian mothers would be granted custody of their children. There was one case of a mother who, fit in every other way, was denied custody even though her husband kidnapped one of their children while she had temporary custody. This same father was unable to care for his children because he worked as a farmer, so when the children were not in school they were in the care of a relative, rather than being able to stay with their mother (Wyland 1976, 16). Based on the circumstances of this case, the only reason for the denial of custody would have been the mother's sexual identity. The booklet outlines issues that were weighed in the context of Canadian Family Law when making decisions about child custody, including: who already had the children, the age and sex of the children, the conduct of the parents leading to the breakdown of a marriage, etc. In cases where one of the parents was homosexual, however, none of these factors mattered. In many cases,

lesbianism had been the explicit reason child custody was not granted to a mother (Radbord 1999).



Image 9: Fundraising poster for the Lesbian Mothers' Defense Fund, from personal archive of Gary Kinsman.

The second approach within Canada's Family Law system also looks at a parent's homosexuality, but here would have to consider what factors related to homosexuality would put a child at risk. Lesbianism could be deemed acceptable if certain conditions or restrictions were met. The idea of “acceptable” forms of lesbianism connects to what Mariana Valverde (2006) has called the “respectable same-sex couple,” which reminds us that queer individuals are accepted according to their ability to adhere to heteronormative criteria of citizenship, or what some have termed “homonormativity” or “homonationalism” (Puar 2007; Duggan 2003). Assumptions connected to homonationalism and homonormativity are rooted in notions of class respectability and white privilege. With child custody cases in the 1970s a parent would have to convince the court system that they would not influence a child towards homosexuality. This

effectively meant that a lesbian mother had to keep her relationships with women closeted, even from her children. Because homosexuality was viewed as abhorrent, testimony had to be obtained from "experts" like psychiatrists to prove that a woman was "normal" in every other way. In this way, some of the potential "damage" could be mitigated. Since the 1980s, family courts have taken the approach of considering what is best for the child.

Forcing lesbian mothers to either live alone and support themselves or return to their heterosexual relationships was not a real option when we consider the kinds of jobs available to women in the 1970s: low waged, precarious, and in feminized job ghettos. Lesbian mothers struggled with choosing between raising children alone (on a low income), or remaining in an undesirable marriage until children are older. When lesbian mothers attempted to fight for custody in the court system, they would often lose. These "choices" were constrained (Rousseau 2015). Welfare was not a viable alternative because of cuts to social services, restrictions to access, and the general low standard of living it provided. Wages Due and the LMDF were both crucial to ensuring that lesbian mothers were able to enter child custody court battles with some support in an attempt to level the playing field in some way.

The struggle for wages appealed to lesbians who joined Wages Due because they were able to see how free labour in the home (performed by straight women and lesbians alike) undermined their work outside the home, in terms of both wages and job security. At a 1976 May Day demo fighting for the Family Allowance, one woman gave a speech about her relationship to the wage as a lesbian who was open and out:

Right now a lot of lesbians and other single women find themselves being forced to look for a man. Women who want to come out as lesbians can't afford to abandon what little security marriage offers. Why should we have to depend on a man? None of us, lesbians or straight, want to be pushed into a relationships because we can't afford to be on our own. (Toronto Wages for Housework Committee 1976a "Hands off the Family)

The situation for lesbians, like other women, was that there was trouble being hired for a job. At the same time, a lesbian faced being fired simply for her sexuality. The choices seemed to be remaining closeted and relying on a man, or remaining closeted and taking your chances in a job market that discriminated against women. Because a lesbian mother was often forced to be a sole-support parent, her financial options were limited.

Wages Due operated autonomously within the WfH network, which led to some accusations of lesbian separatism. Positioning themselves in relation to straight women in the movement, Wages Due viewed the direction of their struggle differently,

I am an average woman. I am a housewife. A woman who has swept floors, smiled to get jobs, served tea, worked in offices, serviced men and others in a million and one different ways... I am a woman who gets whistled at on the streets, a woman who can only get poor-paying jobs, finds food prices too high, and can't find a place to live that I can afford. I am a woman who wants to have children but who doesn't have the money to support them... (Woodsworth 1975, 22)

For lesbians, many areas of struggle were the same as their heterosexual sisters. With this recognition, they were able to stay connected to and work in solidarity with the broader

WfH movement. Wages Due operated on a semi-autonomous basis, meaning they developed an analysis for the position of lesbians within the larger struggle against capitalism and patriarchy. Separatism, therefore, would mean placing the struggle of lesbians in a priority position in the movement, without regard for the WfH perspective.

The issue of lesbianism and separatism was discussed at great length on several occasions throughout 1975 and 1976 within WfH. Frances Gregory offered some clarification on the issue of lesbianism, separatism and wages for housework, and how it all fits together. For Gregory, separatism was not compatible with WfH. In the WfH perspective, lesbianism was defined as a struggle and not a strategy.⁶⁸ For Toupin, "Lesbians also made us understand that heterosexuality is also work. It's within that sphere that exploitation produces itself... Heterosexuality is not only sexual relations; it's all a social organization⁶⁹" (Toupin 2012). Heterosexuality is structured and determined by capitalism, and affects the way men and women are able to relate to each other. Within this relationship, there is an implicit (sexist) assumption that women will provide emotional labour to the men with whom they interact. Further, capitalism imposes heterosexuality as it ensures that the needs of workers will be met within the confines of the family, so that capital or the state can absolve itself of any obligation to ensure these needs are met elsewhere. In a WfH framework, lesbianism was "a struggle against the work of relations with men; it is an attack on the institution for the organisation [sic] of that work, the family... It is an attack on capital's power to say what is natural to us" (Wyland 1975, 3). It was also a struggle against the discipline of capital, which prevents

⁶⁸ This perspective was also spelled out in "Fucking is Work" and "Why Lesbians Want Wages for Housework".

⁶⁹ "Les lesbiennes aussi nous on fait comprendre que l'hétérosexualité c'était aussi du travail. C'était dans ce cadre là que l'exploitation se produisait... L'hétérosexualité ce n'est pas seulement des relations sexuelles; c'est toute une organisation sociale." Translation by C. Rousseau.

us from having loving relationships with each other outside of relations of power and control. A separatist framework, on the other hand, viewed lesbianism as a necessary alternative to heterosexual relations between men and women; heterosexuality was inherently oppressive in this view (Gregory 1975b, 2). The focus on lesbianism in the context of WfH recognized the complex relationships between men and women, showing how capitalism and patriarchy structure and complicate these relationships. Lesbianism was not viewed as the only alternative to heterosexuality; instead, it was presented as an alternative. In this way, *Wages Due* was committed to the goal of the larger WfH movement and maintaining cohesiveness in its political perspective.

Solidarity with Domestic Workers

The analysis of housework provided by WfH linked the unwaged work of women in the home to the devaluation of that same work on the market. WfH feminists saw a connection between housework and devalued wage labour was with domestic work, particularly for live-in caregivers. A problematic element of housework is the fact that the location of this work is also the home. This is a problem because it means women work in isolation, and also because home as the workplace means it is not easy to distinguish where work starts and ends. As trends show us, it is most often (im)migrant women who are doing domestic work because it is work that is not viewed as requiring any special skills (aside from those that are, of course, supposedly biologically determined) and where language barriers do not present a great challenge. Pamphlets, flyers, posters, and newspapers were used regularly as part of WfH organizing in Canada. The *Wages for Housework Campaign Bulletin* was a newspaper-style publication put together by the

Toronto group, and featured mostly single-author pieces. A substantial amount of the WfH campaign bulletins and other materials were dedicated to the situation of (im)migrant domestic workers (see Image 10 below). The majority of these women were racialized, and therefore subject to discrimination through Canada's Live-In Caregiver Program. Throughout these pages, I use the term (im)migrant to talk about these women because of the precarious status many had in relation to the work they did. While some women doing domestic work had permanent residency status, many were in Canada on temporary work visas, and therefore did not enjoy the benefits of citizenship.⁷⁰



Image 10: Cover of special issue of the *Wages for Housework Campaign Bulletin* on domestic workers, from *Wages for Housework: Wages due Lesbians; Lesbians Mothers' Defence Fund Funds*. Series 1.5: WfH - Outreach, Box 625.4. Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa Library.

⁷⁰ Much has been written on the changing nature of Canada's Live-in Caregiver Program, and what this means for restrictions against immigrant, racialized women coming to work in Canada. See: A. Bakan and D. Stasiulis, eds. (1997) *Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada*.

For (im)migrant women, most of the jobs available were in sweatshops or other kinds of work that no one else wanted because of the low pay and poor working conditions. The clearest example of the kinds of undesirable work available for (im)migrant women was domestic work. WfH connected to these women because they had no legal protection, and they were subject to a 60-80 hour workweek with a pay of \$275/month recommended by the federal government, which amounted to \$1/hr (or 1/3 of Ontario's minimum wage rate at the time). Looking at these figures from 1979 to account for the rate of inflation, this translates to approximately \$860/month, which on the low-end of 60 hours a week is \$3.60/hr (or just over 1/3 of Ontario's current minimum wage of \$11.00). The women doing this work felt the weight of their situation, and many shared their experiences in the pages of the WfH bulletins or at public rallies and demonstrations. Maria, a domestic worker from Portugal, talks about needing job experience for other kinds of work when she came to Canada in 1975. Seeking work as a domestic, she was told that she had experience because she had a husband and a son, and because she had been helping her mother clean house since she was small (Gregory 1979a). With domestic work, the employer set the wage, and women doing this work were often powerless to negotiate. Maria also shares her experience of dangerous working conditions, no worker's compensation in the case of injury, and having to provide her own protective equipment and pay her own medical expenses related to workplace hazards:

Now when they go on holiday, I get a holiday too - unpaid. If you lose your job you can't get UIC. Now we just get money for cleaning houses and that's all. And the pay is so low for no benefits. So many times I hurt myself on the job, but with

no Workman's Compensation, I just have to keep on working. And the go to the doctor on my own time and pay everything out of my own money. And the money I make just isn't enough. I get paid \$20 a day, and go to the grocery and spend \$25.
(Gregory 1979a)

The work was precarious, and not regular, which meant that the wage was also not regular and could not be counted on. Working through a domestic employment agency, she was paid for the day instead of the hour, so any extra work was put in for free.

Looking at paid domestic workers in Canada, we see a workforce of women who actually know what it means to receive a wage for housework. WfH in Toronto was especially connected to (im)migrant domestic workers because of the work of Judith Ramirez, who was the founder of The Toronto Organization for Workers' Rights (INTERCEDE), The Immigrant Women's Health Centre, and Employment Rights for Immigrant Women. In October of 1979, 75 women came together to a forum called "A View from the Kitchen: Immigrant Women Speak Out on the Value of Housework," open to women from a broad-based coalition. By 1981, the coalition had grown to include 39 immigrant, community, and women's groups. The work of INTERCEDE was often featured in the pages of the WfH bulletin, showing how the group was able to expand the WfH perspective by connecting it to the situation of immigrant domestic workers and other community groups. At this time, 80% of domestic workers were immigrants (Toronto Wages for Housework Committee 1981, 3), so it was important to have this kind of coalition to fight for better protections for a large segment of precarious workers who were not protected by legislation and who did not have the same rights as citizen-workers. The demands of INTERCEDE were laid out in the bulletin, asking for:

domestics to be included under minimum wage legislation; work contracts to also be signed and approved by workers, with the employer being legally bound by the contract; have independent community agencies to ensure that employers are treating domestics fairly; all women in Canada on temporary work permits to be allowed to apply for landed immigrant status; welfare rates to be raised to a living wage and immigrant women to be allowed to apply without threat of deportation. The publication of these issues in the campaign bulletin helped to frame the demand of wages beyond the narrowly conceived "single issue" demand, connecting the wage to precariousness, giving women financial independence from men through welfare, limiting the exploitative nature of housework, and generally giving all women more stability and control over their lives.

Conclusion

Many dismissed WfH because of the unrealistic nature of the demand, and because they felt this wage would further entrench women in the role of housewife and reproducer of the working class. In Toronto, the group linked together disparate areas of women's struggle in order to show that these areas of struggle could not be won in isolation. Social wages, reproductive rights, sexuality, etc. were all viewed in relation to one another. In spite of the criticisms levelled against the group and some of the limitations their dogmatism imposed, the greatest impact the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee had was on lesbian mothers, particularly when it came to child custody cases and building communities that would serve as alternatives to heterosexual relationships. Further, while the group's connection to immigrant women and domestic workers did not

get far beyond the discussion level, the discourses they developed continue to be present today when we talk about the work of care, particularly with live-in caregivers.

While there were attempts by the Toronto WfH Committee to reach out to women in other parts of the country, the movement in Canada was mostly limited to Toronto. While limited resources can partially account for the lack of growth, the lack of support from other segments of the growing feminist movement and the Left was a larger issue. In addition, the analyses WfH produced regarding live-in caregivers did not account for the ways in which government policies supported white nuclear families as part of building the nation through exclusion:

White women were racially gendered as mothers of the nation whose participation in the nuclear family was crucial for the (re)production of the nation. In contrast, women of colour were racially gendered as posing a triple threat to the racialized nation as they could not reproduce a white population, allowed for the possibility of interracial sexuality, and challenge, by their presence within the nation-state, the very racialized moral order that the nuclear family was to protect. (Dua 1999, 255)

The structure of the white nuclear family was imposed upon Indigenous and immigrant communities, which also served to exclude them. WfH's connection to immigrant domestic workers, as well as their connection to groups of women from the Caribbean and the Philippines, shows that, while the group in Toronto was largely made up of white women, the perspective attempted to provide an analysis of housework that accounted for race and immigration status.

As I discussed in this chapter, the major points of departure between the various factions within the network stemmed from questions about the role of leadership, what it meant to be an autonomous women's collective, whether the wage was a literal demand, and local autonomy vs. an international perspective. In the following chapter, I compare the WfH movements in Italy and Canada. Looking at the contexts and conditions from which these groups emerged will give a better understating of the parallel situations in Toronto and Padua.

"Wages for Housework is not three little words but a revolutionary perspective for action to build women's autonomous power against the State in all its forms in an international scale,"

Power of Women Collective, England, 1974

Chapter 5

Wages for Housework in a Comparative Perspective

An interesting aspect of WfH, and also one of its major strengths, was the international focus of the movement, which was rooted in the recognition that capitalism is global. Since the formation of the International Feminist Collective in Padua in 1971, feminists who shared a view of the oppression of women and a common strategy for struggle were united in attacking the capitalist/patriarchal family and unwaged labour as the roots of oppression. In the following passage, Federici talks about some of her initial impressions of joining with other feminists who shared the same perspective on the relationship between capitalism and the oppression of women:

In July [1971] I went to meet Rosa, and there was a meeting going on. It was a big meeting, and that was the meeting of the formation of the International Feminist Collective. At the meeting there were many women, women from *Lotta Femminista*, but there were also women from England like Selma James... There was a lot of discussion for a couple of days, and there was a decision to form this collective and that each of us in it would promote the campaign for Wages for Housework in our own place with the idea that we would collaborate with each other. This would be a common network; we would build a network and cooperate in different ways in terms of exchanging materials, translating,

circulating and also creating as much as possible moments of coming together.
(Federici 2012b)

In this passage, Federici talks about the original vision for the WfH network, which was to organize around a common perspective with each group taking up struggles in their respective locations. As I have mentioned already, and as I will elaborate further later in this chapter, the issue of struggles would become a major point of contention within the WfH network. Specifically, there was disaccord regarding international vs. local organizing. Some, like Federici, did not see a contradiction in organizing local struggles according to an international perspective, while others saw these two forms of organization as incompatible. In this chapter, I examine the international organization of WfH, comparing the development of feminist consciousness with the group in Padua and the group in Toronto. I begin by briefly presenting some political and historical contexts in order to position the emergence of feminist campaigns in both locations. Here I focus on the role of the family, the influence of increased access to education for women, and the connection feminists in both contexts had to the New Left and workers' movements. I then consider the development of the particular feminist consciousness associated with WfH in relation to some in relation to a broader feminist context and look at some of the ways WfH distinguished themselves from other feminist groups. Looking at the development of feminist consciousness related to WfH, I also consider some of the divisions within the movement, which led to a series of splits. Considering some of the differences and similarities between WfH groups in Canada and Italy, I ask: How do these differences inform the terrain of struggle, and what does it mean when an

international framework determines local struggles? Finally, I look at some of the major differences between Italy and Canada when we consider the translation of struggles.

Historical and Political Contexts

In Chapters 3 and 4, I presented a contextual framework in which I could discuss the emergence of WfH in both Italy and Canada. In the following pages, I want to look at some of this context more closely with an emphasis on several key areas. I begin by examining the way family structures were conceived in Italy and Canada, focusing on some of the changing attitudes that arose in the years following WWII and leading up to the 1970s. I then look at the role that greater access to education and the involvement in student activism played in the development of feminist consciousness in both locations. Finally, I consider the connection that feminist groups in both Italy and Canada had to Left activism and the labour movement. In examining these contextual areas more closely, I attempt to account for some of differences in the way these two groups developed, despite their shared political perspective and organizational aims.

The Role of the Family

One of the key points of the WfH perspective was a critique of the family under capitalism. Though idealized visions of family in Italy and Canada both stem from hegemonic systems of capitalism, patriarchy, and white colonial supremacy, there are some nuanced differences between these two locations that I unpack in the following pages.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I looked at some of the changes in family structure in the post-WWII period. For example, in Canada the period following WWII was marked by a baby boom, while Italy saw a decline in birth rates during this period. In both cases, these trends are connected to attitudes of national identity connected to the Cold War. As I argued in Chapter 3, a hegemonic family structure was reasserted as a protection against communism. There was a general belief that the way to prevent communism from taking hold in North America was by retreating into the family and focusing on consumption. This period is also where we see the re-emergence of the family wage system, where male-breadwinner ideology becomes dominant. The situation in Italy, however, evolved differently. In *Revolution at Ground Zero*, Federici talks about the rise in feminist activity and a general fight against fascism in Italy in the post-WWII period. In this same period, many women were actively trying to avoid having babies because they did not want to contribute to the state war-machine as the Cold War provided a climate of uncertainty and imminent upheaval. Italy's decline in birth rate in the post-WWII period (Dalla Costa and Fortunati 1976, 111), therefore, stands in stark contrast to the baby booms that were occurring in other Western countries, including Canada.

The structure of family allowance in both countries can also reveal some of the differences in the way the family was viewed. In Italy, reforms to family allowance legislation in 1937 stipulated that child benefits would be paid to the head of household. Money would only be paid to a woman if she was widowed, or if her husband was unable to provide financially for the family. Family law at this time operated in line with the notion of *pater-familias*, where men were the automatic heads of household, legally as well as ideologically. The way family allowance was distributed in Italy beginning in

1937 stands in stark contrast to the way family allowance was structured in Canada. In Canada, beginning in 1945, family allowance (also known as the “baby bonus”) was paid directly to the mother. Though family allowance in Canada was by no means a sufficient amount of money to give women financial autonomy, it at least symbolically recognized the value in raising children. For this reason, the fight to maintain family allowance benefits became one of the key issues for WfH feminists in Canada, as I discussed in Chapter 4. The structure of family allowance in Italy, on the other hand, mirrors the family wage system that began to emerge more fully in Canada in the post-WWII period. In both cases, the idea that men were the *de facto* heads of household persisted.

A further distinction we can make by looking at family allowance is to consider what “family” meant in both contexts. In Canada, family allowance was given to any family regardless of income, and the amount you received was determined by the number of children you had. In Italy, family allowance was restructured in 1940 to also cover members of the extended family beyond children and spouses (Naldini 2000, 71). This difference in how the family unit was conceived in both locations troubles the idea of the “nuclear family,” which became a common point of critique for Second Wave feminists in the 1970s, whose focus was on sexual liberation and reproductive rights, the family structure, and entry of women into the workforce. In light of these distinctions between conceptions of the family unit in Italy and Canada, we must reconsider what it means to resist and refuse housework. When we think of special reproduction as it relates to the family, therefore, we see that “family” means something different in Italy than it did in Canada. The extended family structure in Italy, with multiple generations living under

one roof, meant there was a difference in the understanding of what it meant to be a housewife.

The Role of Education

A rise in political action in the 1960s and 1970s in Italy and Canada can be attributed to a number of factors, like increased attendance in post-secondary institutions. As Sheila Rowbotham states:

Historically, education has always been a key factor in encouraging aspirations of emancipation among women, for it has secured a degree of economic independence along with greater self-esteem. In the late 1960s higher education encouraged the expectation that opportunities would increase for everyone to live a fuller life. (Rowbotham 2009, 258)

In addition to the argument put forward by Rowbotham, I emphasize increased access to education because many of the women I interviewed from the WfH movement were single, university or college-educated, and were often the first members of their families to attend post-secondary institutions (Wyland 2012; Toupin 2012). The greater access to education experienced by these women had an impact on the development of consciousness:

For me, when you study for a long period of time, you change class. And it's an incredibly important, emotional rupture. It's very difficult. You're a traitor to the working class... You no longer have the same expectations of salary level, even if your salary is lower than others. But the prospect - if you said yes to x, y, z, you would have it. You don't have the same vocabulary. All of that causes a change in

class. It wrenches your heart. But you don't have a choice, because your parents push you and want you to have financial autonomy. And at times they suffer to see you change. And yourself, same thing. So it's not simple.⁷¹ (Lacelle 2012)

As these women were gaining more opportunities than their mothers and aunts before them, their level of consciousness shifted. A rise in post-secondary education in both Italy and Canada meant that young people were presented with more opportunities than their parents (especially those from working class families), and in turn they achieved a certain level of politicization.

Education reforms in both Italy and Canada were partially responsible for allowing greater access to education. Education reforms in Italy addressed the class-inequalities that had previously barred working-class students from entering universities. A reform in 1963 made secondary education mandatory until the age of 14. Two other reforms, one in 1961 and one in 1969, allowed all students in upper-secondary tracks (both the academically focused *liceo* and the skill-focused *istituti*) to sit for the admission exams to qualify for university (Shavit and Westerbeek 1998, 33-47). These changes, therefore, increased attendance to post-secondary institutions for both men and women. Working-class students could now enter the university system more easily, but tuition rates remained high. In order to be able to access schooling, many students worked in factories and in other jobs in order to support themselves and to be able to pay tuition. This created an overlap between workers and students, and exploration of these

⁷¹ "J'imagine, moi, facilement quand t'étudies longtemps tu changes de classe. Et c'est une rupture émotive extrêmement importante. C'est très difficile. Parce que tu trahis le métier.... Tu n'as plus la même espérance du niveau du salaire, même si ton salaire est plus bas que les autres. Mais la perspective - si tu disais oui à x,y,z, tu l'aurait. Tu n'as pas le même vocabulaire. Tout ça là, fait en sorte que changer de classe. Ça te crève le cœur. Mais tu n'as pas le choix, parce que à la fois tes parents te poussent à t'instruire pour avoir l'autonomie financière. Et à fois ils souffrent de te voir changer. Et toi-même, même chose. Alors, ce n'est pas simple." Translation by C. Rousseau.

connections became part of the work *operaismo*, which I talk about later in this chapter. Italian universities had a hard time keeping up with enrolment demands because of the large influx of students between 1962-68, and students would occupy universities to protest increased tuition and plans to reform admission requirements.

While young women were included amongst the working class students being granted increased access to Italian universities, they were still burdened with familial obligations at home and were dismissed by male students and faculty at the universities. For young women, housework and family obligations remained a primary responsibility: "Women at school have always, being first and foremost responsible to the family, have had to implement various forms of 'absenteeism' for shopping, to arrive in time to look after their siblings, etc."⁷² (Comitato per il salario al lavoro domestico di Padova 1976). These young women were growing tired of this dismissal and of having no time for themselves outside of school and housework, and began demanding accountability from heads of schools that shamefully permitted absenteeism from young women in the name of housework. Female students in Italy had to combat the normative structures of the university while also challenging sexist ideas and oppressive social relations in society at large. The opposition they faced came from university officials, family members, and so-called male "comrades," who responded with disdain and even violence in certain instances.

⁷² "Da sempre le donne nella scuola, trovandosi responsabilizzate prima di tutto verso la famiglia, hanno dovuto attuare 'assenteismi' di vario tipo per fare la spesa, per arrivare in tempo a badare ai fratelli, ecc.", Translation by C. Rousseau

Canada also saw an increase in post-secondary attendance during the period, which can similarly be attributed to a series of education reforms.⁷³ The biggest change was compulsory secondary education; this change meant adulthood was delayed as more young people entered colleges and universities instead of immediately joining the workforce. In the 1960s, half of Canada's population was under the age of 25 because of the post-WWII baby boom, and a growing number of these young people were pursuing post-secondary education (Clement 2009, 365). This politicization contributed to the increased participation of youths in social movements, which were generally gaining prominence during the late 1960s. For example, the Aboriginal rights movements (like the American Indian Movement) emerged in the 1950s and 1960s; feminist groups had renewed action from the 1960s to the mid-1970s, and gay rights movement organizing began to have a large presence in the 1970s (364). The overall increase in youth participation in these social movements meant that there was an increase in the number of women who were becoming politically involved.

For many Left feminists, it was important to maintain ties to their class of origin in the face of increased educational opportunities and shifting consciousness. According to Lacelle, increased education and emerging politicization could be used advance the working class: "...the way to remain loyal is to find intellectual and political ways to serve your class of origin"⁷⁴ (Lacelle 2012). It is important to recognize the involvement

⁷³ Compulsory education legislation in Canada underwent many changes in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, but certain exemptions remained in place that prevented mandatory education from being fully implemented. In Ontario, for example, the Schools Administration Act in 1954 made education mandatory until a child reached the age of 16, but exemptions still applied to adolescents over the age of 14 who were required to work in order to help with the family's subsistence (Oreopoulos 2005, 8). By 1970, however, these exemptions were removed. In Ontario, for example, schooling is mandatory for students until the age of 18, or until they receive a secondary diploma.

⁷⁴ "... la façon de rester fidèle c'est de chercher intellectuellement and politiquement à servir les intérêts de ta classe d'origine." Translation by C. Rousseau.

of women in political action and the subsequent formation of autonomous groups because, as Rowbotham suggests, this helps to fight against the conservative notion that women are a moral force outside of political action (Rowbotham 2009, 257). Here I am not arguing that only those who received more education were politically engaged. Rather, I look at the increase in post-secondary attendance in order to highlight the overlap between worker and student movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and to better understand the importance of this new period of politicization, especially for women.

Role of Workers' Struggles and the New Left

In the 1970s, it was not uncommon for women involved in activist or extra-parliamentary political organizations to experience alienation from their male comrades, a problem expressed across the board by the feminists I interviewed. As a result, small feminist collectives formed,⁷⁵ emerging from unions, student groups, and political groups. WfH grew largely out of the New Left and student movements with a particular critique of the family as the site of oppression for women. This move to struggle towards female emancipation was connected to the building of a larger political movement that could battle the systemic inequalities fostered by patriarchy, capitalism, etc.

WfH developed as an autonomous feminist group because many women had grown tired of having women's issues subordinated to the class struggle. The New Left was an international movement that emerged in the 1960s, and was comprised mainly of students and youth who criticized the "Old Left" because of its hierarchical and bureaucratic structures. As an alternative to what they saw as centralized power, the New

⁷⁵ Tamar Pitch wrote about the formation of feminist collectives in the 1970s, speaking as someone located within that context. See T. Pitch, "Notes From Within The Italian Women's Movement: How We Talk of Marxism and Feminism," *Contemporary Crises* 3 (1979): 1-16.

Left advocated participatory democracy. The emergence of the New Left in Canada and Italy shared some similarities. They were critical of capitalism, and connected to struggles against the Vietnam War, in support of Third World liberation, in support of women's liberation, etc. Part of this emergence was characterized by an increased overlap between students and workers, which had an influence on the development of student movements. Conversely, the presence of young people in the workplace had an impact on the way workers' struggles developed in the 1960s and 1970s. A common sentiment amongst the feminists I interviewed in both Italy and Canada was that men on the Left had a tendency to either dismiss women's issues (particularly those of "housewives"), or to conflate the specific oppression of women with the exploitation of factory workers, as though the working class was somehow a homogenous group. As Toupin recounts, "Women should submit... We were of the same class as our husbands, our boyfriends... There were women who were saying this as well"⁷⁶ (Toupin 2012). These objections continued even after the feminist groups had formed: "They ideologically contested our place"⁷⁷ (ibid.), with Lacelle adding: "We were little bourgeois abortionists... We were dividing the working class"⁷⁸ (Lacelle 2012). The sentiments coming from groups with the New Left reflected the dominant idea that the working class (which was envisioned as homogenous, male, and white) held the true revolutionary potential.

As I discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, Autonomist Marxism, which was part of the New Left, had a major impact on the development of WfH in both Italy and Canada. In both cases, Autonomist Marxism reflects changing attitudes about the working class,

⁷⁶ "Les femmes devaient subir. On était de la même classe que nos maris, nos chums. ... il y avait des femmes qui disaient ça aussi." Translation by C. Rousseau.

⁷⁷ "Ils contestaient idéologiquement notre place." Translated by C. Rousseau

⁷⁸ "On était les petites bourgeoises avorteuses... On divisait la classe ouvrière." Translation by C. Rousseau.

which resulted from the relationship between workers' and students' movements. In many ways, a radical shift in ideology in Canada reflects a larger context of unrest that was building in Europe and other parts of the globe: "The militancy of the era certainly gave us a lot of energy¹" (Lacelle 2012). In Canada, New Left ideology was dominant in a number of student organizations, like the Student Union for Peace Action, the Canadian Union of Students, Students for a Democratic University and the *Union générale des étudiants de Québec*. The New Left in Canada organized around nuclear disarmament, community organizing, working class issues, Québécois separatism, and sexual inequality. In the 1960s, young workers were at the forefront of demonstrating growing dissatisfaction with the post-war labour compromise⁷⁹ with a series of strikes between 1964-66. In fact, 1966 was the peak year in labour disputes in Canada up until that period, with a total of 617 strikes that year (Palmer 2009, 211-41), 1/3 of which were illegal, wildcat strikes. The emergence of wildcat strikes in this period reflects the growing dissatisfaction that workers had with the government, employers, and even union leaders who, because of the post-war compromise, tended to attempt to quell any unrest amongst their members. Part of this peak period of labour activism in the 1960s in Canada is also connected to the growth of the public sector, which, as I discussed in Chapter 4, increasingly employed large numbers of women.

⁷⁹ The post-war compromise is a term used to describe labour relations in Canada based on P.C. 1003 and the Rand Formula. Order-in-Council P.C. 1003 was passed in 1944 as a way of stemming labour unrest in Canada, which had reached a peak in 1943. P.C. 1003 granted workers the right to organize a union in a workplace where the majority of workers were in accordance, and more importantly forced employers to actually recognize these unions and to negotiate them. The Rand Formula, also known as automatic dues check-off, comes from Justice Ivan Rand's ruling in the contentious labour dispute between Ford Windsor and their employees (members of the United Auto Workers local 200) in 1945. The post-war compromise placed an emphasis on bargaining multi-year contracts that were meant to guarantee labour peace. In exchange, workers got union, dues check-off, and some wage increases tied to production. While there were some good gains for workers with the post-war compromise, it also resulted in a hierarchal, bureaucratic, and legalistic union model that replaced the militant, rank-and-file, class-based model of organizing.

From the various women involved with WfH in Toronto, there were connections to a range of groups on the Left, of different Marxist tendencies like Big Flame in England, The New Tendency in Southern Ontario, etc., and they had influence from a number of important Left activists and scholars. Influence from the likes of C.L.R. James and Grace Lee Boggs in North America was informed by a focus on marginalized groups in the working class, specifically women, youth, and people of colour. Selma James, one of the founders of the WfH perspective, had her early politicization with the Johnson-Forest Tendency, founded by C.L.R. James (her partner), Grace Lee Boggs, and Raya Dunayevskaya. This influence would spread to Southern Ontario with the development of the New Tendency, a group from which many WfH activists in Toronto emerged. A key part of WfH in Toronto was made up of former members of the New Tendency, which grew out of the student movement. The New Tendency organized and struggled mainly with postal workers in Toronto, where university students took on jobs within post offices in order to organize and agitate from within. There was a similar worker's group in Windsor - Out of the Driver's Seat – that organized with auto-plant workers.

Many of the women involved in The New Tendency felt there was too much focus on male workers; this was a major point of contention for the women because they saw community organizing being subordinated to workplace organizing, which would limit the potential to organize the broader working class in Southern Ontario. While operating in mixed groups like The New Tendency was viewed as limiting, there were nevertheless important pieces taken from the worker's autonomy perspective that were later applied to WfH. First, while Autonomist Marxism did not take housework into account, WfH feminists were interested in the refusal of work, or the general struggle

against work that characterized *autonomia* (Autonomist Marxism), because it helped challenge the belief amongst many on the Left that work outside the home was somehow liberating for women. Second, the housewife's struggle against capital in the social factory was viewed as essential to its destruction, much like the struggle of the working class in the workplace more generally (Toronto Wages for Housework Group II 1974). Though the focus was women-centred, the autonomous organizing of WfH also recognized that men could play a supportive role outside the movement. For example, Pay Day emerged as an auxiliary men's group that took direction from WfH in supporting their position. The influence of Autonomist Marxism in Canada, therefore, came from activity both in the United States and in Italy.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, *LF* and *SLD* emerged as a result of the proliferation of the ideals of *autonomia* and *operaismo*, where there was a turn from focusing solely on the factory and waged production to looking at the social factory and unwaged work as sites of struggle. *Operaismo* and Autonomist Marxism were popular in Northern Italy because of its industrialization and the worker unrest that was building in the factories, and spread to other areas that were being included in a broader definition of the working class. The broader definition of the working class connected to *operaismo* also accounted for those who were not receiving wages, including women, the unemployed, and students. In the mid-to-late 1960s, there was a large influx of migrants from Southern Italy to the factories in the north. Many of the migrants from the south had been involved in peasant uprisings in the post-WWII period, and their revolutionary attitude towards struggle could account for a surge in support for strikes. The general feeling of unrest in Europe,

marked by the events of May '68⁸⁰, soon spread to other European countries. Italy had its own "Hot Autumn"⁸¹ of wildcat strikes and university occupations between 1968-1969, with revolutionary groups emerging to support the striking workers. Students who were being politicized by their university experiences were also working in factories in order to pay their increased tuition fees; these students brought with them different ideas about struggle, and their experiences in the factories also translated back to the university struggles. It was in this context that groups like *Potere Operaio*, *Lotta Continua*, and later *LF* and *SLD*, emerged in Italy. The perspective developed by *SLD* feminists was closely aligned to the re-imagining of the working class that had originally developed with the traditions of *operaismo*:

...all through the post-war period, the communist party moved more and more to the right, and more and more trying to appeal to the middle class. By the early to mid '60s, you begin to have a wedge between the industrial proletariat (the workers) and the Party. Around the beginning of this new struggle, a bunch of new groups begin to form... They began a critique of the communist party, and they began an analysis, very empirical, of the transformation and organization of production: the new kinds of demands, the new forms of organization that workers were expressing in the struggle. (Federici 2012b)

The emergence of *SLD*, therefore, was connected to a broader move away from the institutional structure of the *PCI*. A key characteristic of *operaismo* was the idea of

⁸⁰ May '68 is largely associated with activism in France, which was marked by a series of general strikes and the occupation of factories and universities.

⁸¹ In 1969 Italy, a series of wildcat strikes, occupations of universities, and general working class protests grew out of several years of unrest and emerged independent of unions and political parties, including the *PCI*, which had a legitimate presence at various levels of government, but who often failed to meet the needs of workers.

moving beyond a narrow conception of the working class to include various unwaged workers, including students and the unemployed. Class struggles that began with waged workers and ignored others would result in limitations, because more than half the world is unwaged. For WfH feminists more broadly, expanding the view of the working class also meant considering unwaged workers in the home and looking at the refusal of housework as a strategy for emancipation.

The rise of workers struggles in Canada and Italy both demonstrate growing frustrations with the bureaucratization of unions and extra-parliamentary groups, who were both seen as incapable of addressing the needs of workers. In Canada, we see this frustration reflected in the upsurge in strike activity in the mid-to-late 1960s; in Italy, there was a similar increase in strike activity, culminating in the Hot Autumn of 1969. Federici describes the shift in consciousness that occurred in Italy during this period:

...the women's movement grew in a period of intense social struggle. So you have the factory struggle, and then starting in '73 you have the big struggle of the unemployed. The movement of the unemployed in Napoli was huge. Then you have the self reduction movements in the neighbourhood, with neighbourhood committees deciding how much they should pay for electricity, how much to pay for the home, how much to pay for train tickets, etc. The right price, *il prezzo giusto*: We decide what we pay; we pay what we can pay. (Federici 2012b)

Here Federici talks about the relationship between the emerging women's movement and the climate of political unrest in Italy. As women were becoming more actively involved in these struggles, they were building the capacity that would ultimately empower them to move towards autonomous organizing.

Because of their connection to the New Left, WfH feminists identified with the broader struggles of other groups on the margins because, in many cases, they represented those who had been placed outside the wage relation:

In the U.S. there was the other part of the experience relating to the wage. There was the experience of the black movement here, and the experience of the wageless: the people who had been outside of the guaranteed job, who had always been at the margins of the wage relation. In the 60s there was a big theoretical move, coming particularly from the colonies, saying it's not just the waged workers. It's the wageless. The slaves. The colonial subjects, the sharecroppers, etc. The 60s was a period in which the question of the wage in different terrains, in different countries, really came to the foreground. There was a great interest...

All these influences became part of our discourse. (Federici 2012b)

The connection between feminist activism and the growing political fervour of the 1960s and 1970s is most apparent when we look at symbolic elements of the movement. For example, the feminist emphasis on women's autonomy drew from the symbolism and ideology of the Black Power movement. They likewise took to the streets to highlight the way that different forms of oppression are interconnected, and adopted similar organizational practices that focused on autonomous struggle that was apart from the mainstream Left. The clenched fist associated with the Black Power movement was merged with the Venus symbol that is typically used to characterize "woman." With these two images merged together, this symbol is widely accepted as representative of feminist struggle and female power. This symbol of feminist power was further altered by WfH to

include a fist clenching cash, highlighting the importance of the wage in their struggles (see Image 11 below).

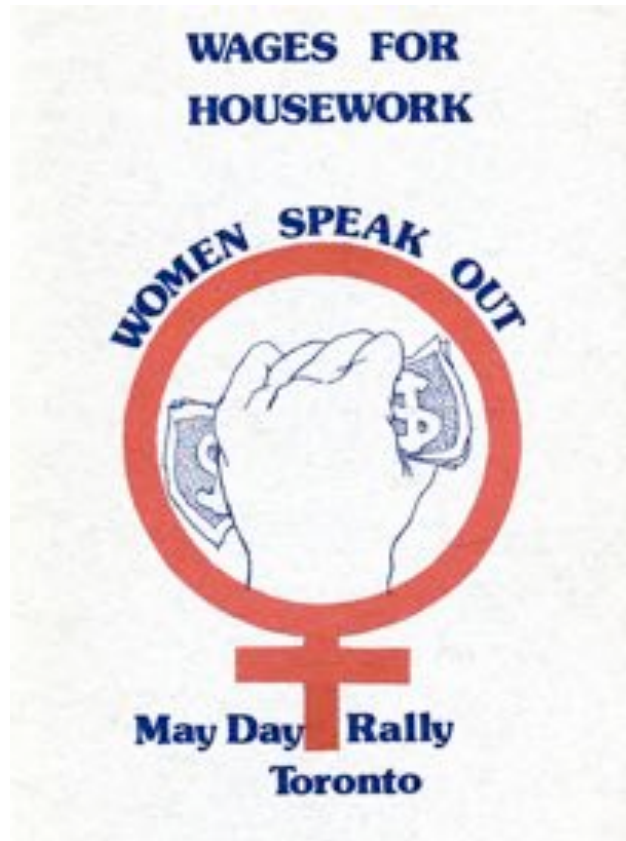


Image 11: image from the booklet *Women Speak Out: May Day Rally*, from *Wages for Housework: Wages due Lesbians; Lesbians Mothers' Defence Fund Fonds*. Series 1.2: WFH Conferences, Box 624.8. Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa Library.

The connection between WfH and workers' movements is their adoption of May Day as a day of struggle for housewives. With a view towards global patriarchy and housework as *work*, May Day and International Women's Day (IWD) emerged as symbolically and politically important days for WfH feminists in both Italy and Canada. When feminist struggles moved from small collectives to public demonstrations, we can see how women's issues moved from the margins and asserted centre stage. For example, an IWD demonstration was held in Mestre's Piazza Ferretto, a public square that had

previously been associated with demonstrations from the male-dominated workers' movement. In Toronto, feminists took to the streets and occupied the City Hall Square. There was a broad range of women gathered in this space, and "8 of us spoke from different situations. As nurses. As waitresses. As office and factory workers. As welfare mothers. As lesbians. Each of us linking ourselves to one another..." (Toronto Wages for Housework Committee, 'Progress Report'). There was even some media coverage at this rally, meaning the group's efforts were able to reach a larger audience than the rally itself. The image for the May Day rally booklet from the Toronto WfH group (see Image 11 on the previous page) is sub-titled "Women Speak Out," demonstrating the fact that women were no longer content to be silent and wait their turn. Taking to the streets, feminists were beginning to respond to the view of women as appendages to men and to working class struggles.

Women were no longer content to be viewed as marginal figures that had been "divided first of all into mothers, wives, daughters, fiancés, single women, etc." (Wages for Housework International Network 1975, 1). The idea was, if women were defined according to the work they did as housewives, then all women would be defined as workers: "there exists a condition of weakness common to all women, that is a *lack of power of their own* such that can provide a common ground of struggle for all" (ibid.). Similarly, a pamphlet for May Day celebrations in Toronto declared: "if women were paid for all we do, there'd be a lot of wages due; women are workers too" (Wages for Housework: May 2 Rally). This re-definition of struggle and the position of women were central to WfH's fight against patriarchy.

Feminist Context

The Women's Liberation Movement of the early 1970s was characterized by consciousness-raising, where feminists were working to develop analyses of the role of women in the family, while working towards practical and immediate goals like providing birth control counselling and access to abortion. Though WfH feminists did not come from a homogenous political background, the current of feminist consciousness and theory that emerged in relation to WfH was concerned with housework specifically and social reproduction more generally. As I have discussed in earlier chapters, concerns about housework, reproductive health, social assistance, etc. were not new to women at this time; instead, feminists began thinking about these issues differently in the 1960s and 1970s while working towards developing a strategy to oppose the oppression they were experiencing. In this section, I look at the development and growth of feminist consciousness connected to WfH in Italy and Canada as it was connected to the growth of a broader feminist movement.

Feminist Consciousness

Working with feminist standpoint theory, I am interested in exploring consciousness developed in relationship with political practice and the growth of feminist movements. According to feminist standpoint theorists, this kind of consciousness is cultivated rather than raised (Weeks 1989; Smith 1997). Consciousness comes out of one's experiences in the context of relations as well as one's social and political environments. In other words, the relationship between theory and practice is crucial to the development of feminist consciousness, where one's view of oppression is connected to political orientation and

actions undertaken in the context of a social movement. In WfH, the relationship between theory and practice would prove to be a contentious issue, leading to splits within the movement.

The political framework developed by women in WfH looked at the way society was structured according to the needs of capitalism, trying to show how women were used for capitalist development and to envision a change for women and for the working class more generally. While a shared political framework was developed, there was not a move towards a collective or essential female identity. Marxist-feminist consciousness developed in the context of the international WfH network through a process that closely resembles, consciousness-raising, though none of the women I interviewed shared this articulation of the experience. With the Italian *SLD* groups there was opposition to the notion of *autoconscienza*, which is a distinct process that reflects some of the political and cultural differences between the feminist movements in Italy and Canada. While the notion of *autocoscienza* is most often associated with Lonzi, she was certainly not the only one to espouse these ideas. For example, Lea Melandri and other Marxist-feminists connected to collectives in Milan also used and developed these ideas (Parati and West 2002). In addition, Serena Castaldi has been credited with bridging these ideas between North America and Italy with the group *Anabasi* in the early 1970s. The bridging of ideas related to *autocoscienza* occurred mainly through the translation and publication of feminist writings centered on consciousness-raising from North America with a collection called "Donne è bello" (Women is beautiful). As I discussed in Chapter 3, the issue of *autocoscienza* in Italy would prove to be a point of debate and division in the Italian feminist movement, leading to a split that reflected this difference.

Both consciousness-raising and *autocoscienza* relate to cognizance or awareness, and both were fundamental aspects of the broader women's movements of the 1970s in Italy and Canada. The practice of consciousness-raising in North America was part of a reaction against the anti-woman line that attributed women's oppression to some inherent psychological lack or weakness (Hanisch 2009). Consciousness-raising was a political act that ran contrary to the idea that feminists needed to present themselves as strong and emotionless; it reflected the acceptance and exaltation of so-called feminine qualities that had previously been dismissed. The goal was not to aspire to "male" qualities of stoicism and emotional detachment; instead, personal feelings were useful in connecting individual issues to collective problems. The consciousness-raising that Hanisch describes in "The Personal is Political" occurred when women would get together in small groups and talk about different topics or questions, going around the room and sharing their own personal experiences: "I went to consciousness-raising groups - I think it was just independent women's groups meeting in an exploratory way" (Wyland 2012). From these conversations, women realized that their personal problems at home, etc. were actually common to many women and were a result of systemic issues.

The distinctly Italian practice of *autocoscienza* that developed with Lonzi⁸² and others was completely different not only from the Marxist-feminist analyses put forward by *SLD* in Italy, but also from the North American practice of consciousness-raising. Rooted in psychoanalysis, *autocoscienza* focused on the relationship between the conscious and unconscious life in order for women to be able to imagine alternatives to patriarchal structures (Bono and Kemp 1991, 82-108). The development of feminist

⁸² See: C. Lonzi (2011). *Sputiamo Su Hegel E Altri Scritti*.

consciousness within *SLD* in Italy was distinct from the practice of *autocoscienza* because of the difference between building self-awareness and developing feminist consciousness oriented towards political action. For *SLD*, the development of feminist consciousness was more closely related to the North American version of consciousness-raising articulated by Hanisch because of its emphasis on connecting one's own oppression to larger political structures.

While talking about shared concerns and common points of oppression was essential in developing feminist consciousness, it had its limitations: "Consciousness-raising is just the sharing of the conflict," (Picchio 2012). In other words, while women uncovered their oppression through this process, power relationships did not simply go away in light of this discovery, resulting in frustration and anger. Though WfH feminists were not practicing consciousness-raising in name, there was a process of looking to one's individual situation and connecting with others to see the common oppression faced by women, turning it into political action. Through the discussions that took place, there emerged an understanding that relations between men and women were socially constructed and mediated through capitalist social relations: "...human domination is fundamentally cultural and structural, and...the social construction of identities, ideologies, and symbolic systems is intimately embedded in the major systems of domination structuring a society" (Morris and Braine 2001, 25). Consciousness raising was also used by Black feminists in the United States, and helped women to articulate and understand the systemic nature of the racial oppression they faced (hooks 2000). This recognition of systemic forms of oppression was important because it allowed women to see that the issues they were facing were a result of the dominations within the capitalist

form of patriarchy; this recognition informed the way struggles against oppression were conceived.

Politicizing the Personal

Here I want to expand upon my discussion of the development of the idea that "the personal is political," moving beyond its origins in radical feminism. My aim in doing so is to further highlight the way the development of feminist consciousness and feminist movements politicized the private, and made visible issues that had previously been masked and invisible. In her 1969 essay, Hanisch connects this idea to the process of consciousness-raising:

These analytical sessions are a form of political action. I do not go to these sessions because I need or want to talk about my 'personal problems.' In fact, I would rather not. As a movement woman, I've been pressured to be strong, selfless, other-oriented, sacrificing, and in general pretty much in control of my own life. To admit to the problems in my life is to be deemed weak. So I want to be a strong woman, in movement terms, and not admit I have any real problems that I can't find a personal solution to (except those directly related to the capitalist system). It is at this point a political action to tell it like it is, to say what I really believe about my life instead of what I've always been told to say. (Hanisch 2009).

So-called male comrades saw consciousness-raising groups as "navel gazing" or "personal therapy," rather than being a political act. However, this process was a political act in two ways. First, the process of consciousness-raising allowed women to connect

with each other and form feminist collectives that would build towards the creation of a feminist movement centered on the wage: "There are a lot of social relations that circulate around a piece of money. It makes a lot of difference in the relation between two people. And that's where the personal becomes political. You cannot simply say, 'oh - it's common money.' There is a power relation there if the money is yours..." (Federici 2012b). The women active in WfH emphasized this process of identifying the root causes of women's oppression within capitalist social relations, where the personal was politicized towards feminist struggle:

When capitalist imperatives - material constraints- are absent, an organisational [sic] strategy is bound to end in the politics of life-style... From a conviction of the identity of the personal and the political comes the collapse of the political into the personal, the quest for an alternative, for a personal solution.... The constraints on our lives are seen as products of our minds, self-imposed.

(Wyland 1975).

In other words, WfH feminists viewed politicizing the private lives of women as a measure against the all-too-easy practice of seeking individual solutions to systematic forms of oppression.

Second, the practice of collective, group discussions amongst women was a political act because it was a conscious refusal of the idealized female role of the self-sacrificing woman whose needs and desires were pushed aside in service of others. It was a refusal of the emotional labour identified by WfH feminists, as well as others who have described the emotional aspects of housework from a materialist perspective. These examinations served to expose and make visible the emotional aspects of housework that

have been hidden or taken for granted. For Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner (1989), the role of women as caretakers was based on particular notions of love and feminine virtue, and not recognized as work or as part of the “marriage contract.” The marriage contract or the romanticized heterosexual relationship gives the illusion of a fair and mutual exchange between men and women.⁸³ For Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa, a hegemonic view of romantic love emerged with the development of the working class during the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, and was solidified and deeply rooted by the middle of the 20th century and the height of the idealization of the so-called “nuclear family” (G.F. Dalla Costa 2003). This romanticization of the family and unquestioning exalting of romantic love has its problems under capitalism where “Our role as women is to be unwaged but happy, and above all in love, with male workers... In the same way as God created Eve to pleasure Adam, so did capital create the housewife to serve the male worker physically, emotionally and sexually” (Federici 1975b, 43). This idea of emotional sacrifice, therefore, was rejected in favour of movements that would eradicate the unequal relationship between men and women fostered by capitalist social relations.

WfH and other feminist groups, therefore, deliberately moved away from anti-woman ideologies through the development of feminist consciousness. Anti-woman ideologies attempted to explain the oppression of women as resulting from some kind of psychological or emotional deficiency, while this process of forming identity and consciousness around the oppression of women focused on rethinking notions of equality and liberation. Here we should question, for example, whether working in a masculine

⁸³ There are, of course, marriages of convenience. And we cannot ignore arranged marriages. In western society, however, we are presented with a certain expectation that marriages are based on mutual love and attraction.

framework or aspiring to "masculine traits" is useful as a feminist strategy. Thinking outside of this restrictive framework offers us new possibilities for struggle. Recognizing the power imbalances between men and women is a crucial starting point for female liberation:

'The personal is political,' that means that all that is considered private was political at its roots. That means that everything women experienced at home was political. When we say political that means there are relations of power present... Relations of power of men over women... There are relations of power inside, in the private sphere. And that was political. It had to be taken out of the home and denounced. It's denouncing the power of men over women... It's not normal, and it must change.⁸⁴ (Toupin 2012)

Imagining new possibilities for feminist struggle connects with the autonomous nature of WfH, which advocated that women should work apart from men towards restructuring society from the position of a working class female struggle, while at the same time working to elevate the entire working class. However, the WfH perspective was not one that advocated separatism. Selma James offers a clear articulation of the position of autonomy when she writes: "We strive to be autonomous from men to the degree that capital uses men as instruments of... exploitation" (James 1983, 80). In other words, the fight for autonomy was not necessarily waged against men, but against capital. While (most) women may be exploited to a greater degree than (most) men, capital does not

⁸⁴ "Le personnel est politique,' ça veut dire que tout ce qui est considéré comme privée était dans le fond politique. Ça veut dire que tout ce que les femmes vivaient à la maison, c'était politique. Quand on dit politique c'est qu'il y a des rapports de force qui s'installent... Les rapports de force des hommes sur les femmes... Il y avait des rapports de pouvoir à l'intérieur, dans le privé. Et ça, c'était politique. Il fallait que ça sorte de la maison pour dénoncer ça. C'est dénoncer le pouvoir des hommes sur les femmes... Ce n'est pas normal, et ça doit changer." Translation by C. Rousseau

discriminate in its exploitation. The struggle against capitalist and patriarchal social relations was therefore waged in order for men and women (or women and women, or men and men) to be able to come together in a way that was not determined or constrained by hierarchical and divisive social relations.

The widespread adoption of the idea "the personal is political" in feminist movements shows that consciousness-raising groups were not only useful, but also necessary for the political aims of women's movements:

If we don't begin to transform our day-to-day lives, we cannot have a powerful movement. This is one of the most important lessons of feminism as a whole, in terms of personal/political. To have a movement that is strong that is capable of reproducing itself, you have to begin to address the question of how we reproduce ourselves. (Federici 2012b)

There is a danger in oversimplifying the concept of the personal as political. As the concept spread and proliferated mainstream feminist movements of the 1970s and beyond, it has often been taken up in a depoliticized manner that moves it away from its original meaning and intent. For example, I have heard and seen this phrase used to suggest that any decision or action undertaken by a woman is necessarily feminist because it is her personal choice, and must therefore be supported. We must be conscious of countering this depoliticization by reinforcing "the personal is political" in a way that highlights this notion as a radical, political act, and not as an empty saying. This reassertion is necessary in countering policies and practices that hurt women (like restricting access to abortion), which are supported in the name of some perverted view of women's best interests. In

these cases, "feminism" is connected to a gross misinterpretation of the notion "the personal is political."

Broader Feminist Context

As I discussed earlier, autonomy in the context of WfH meant women defining the oppression they experienced, as well as determining the terms of struggle against this oppression. While autonomy was adopted generally by various Italian women's movements, how autonomy was defined was seen as a characteristic that set *SLD* apart from other feminist groups:

In that sense the groups of ... *Salario* [*SLD*] were together with the other feminist groups. But the other feminist groups thought that autonomy meant consciousness raising, philosophy, culture, and *then* you organize with the Left. *Salario*, from the beginning, said no, you need your own perspective and your actions, and we are not a separate group from the Left... we want to be a movement... Wages for Housework were always more radical because they were also challenging the Left on their discourse on class. The others [women's groups] wouldn't challenge class; they just talked about women's issues and consciousness... (Picchio 2012)

Here Picchio has distinguished the perspective from other women's groups who started out as autonomous groups, only to connect their struggles to those of the male-dominated Left. Feminists connected to *SLD*, on the other hand, were interested in building a women's movement within the Left. The idea was to develop an autonomous, class-based perspective with an eye towards political action, while at the same time challenging the Left for their narrow vision. Because of this different view of autonomy, *SLD* feminists

distanced themselves from existing feminist groups. For example, they were clear in setting themselves apart from the *UDI*, which for a long period of time was closely connected to *PCI*. There was a view amongst *SLD* feminists that the influence of the *PCI* interfered with autonomous women's organizing. Similar to this is a distancing from Christian/liberal feminist groups that would have been tied to the patriarchal structures of the Catholic Church. In both the Italian and Canadian contexts, one major point of distinction from other feminist groups was WfH's view that full liberation, and not simply emancipation from the home in the form of a paid job, would free women from the bonds of domestic servitude and patriarchal oppression.

There was a similar distancing from other feminist groups in Canada, though in this case it was not necessarily intentional. While WfH was able to develop ties with other feminist groups in Canada, there were criticisms of dogmatism levelled against the group because of the expulsion of the Book Group and the Montreal POW Collective that had occurred. Because of this perception, WfH alienated itself from other feminist groups like The Other Woman Collective, who had previously been supportive of the WfH perspective (The Other Woman 197? "A Question of Structure"). For Lacelle, "It was dogmatic in the sense of having to have the same strategy. It was not enough to share the same conviction and the same analysis"⁸⁵ (Lacelle 2012). This criticism reflects the belief on the part of the main WfH network that adopting similar strategies was necessary to the perspective. Countering accusations of dogmatism, we must remember the group was working to bridge the gaps between the Left and the feminist movements. For Kidd, "I remember many occasions when we were not allowed to speak [in the context of other

⁸⁵ "C'était dogmatique en ce sens qu'il fallait d'avoir la même stratégie. Tu ne peux pas seulement partager une même conviction et une même analyse." Translation by C. Rousseau.

groups], or our views were characterized in ridiculous ways. On a few occasions, there were rare individuals who stood up for us (some from the Left). On many occasions it was scapegoat or bullying type behaviour - we were treated as outcasts" (Kidd 2012). In other words, WfH was accused of dogmatism in a context where all groups on the Left were fighting for territory and presenting the most perceptive analysis of the working class and working class struggles. If the WfH perspective was concretely defined, they were certainly not alone in this practice in the broader context of the New Left. While this rigid adherence to this political and organizational perspective lead to accusations of dogmatism, it was necessary in connecting the issue of wages and housework to issues that were important to women.

Divisions Within the Movement: The Post-Montreal Conference Debates

While there was a common view of the necessity of an autonomous struggle against the oppression of women focused on the role of unwaged labour in the home, conflict arose when thinking about how it was operationalized and what the details of this meant. Here I look at the relationship between theory and practice, and how this factored into the conflicts arising within the movement. As I discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, there were parallel splits within the movement that took place in Padua and Toronto over a number of issues that can be reduced to the issue of how to operationalize the international perspective. Another split occurred when the Montreal Power of Women Collective (Montreal POW) was expelled from the network, which I discuss in the following pages. Many viewed the seemingly endless debates on these details as stifling to the progression of the movement; others viewed these conversations as necessary. The differences were

brought fully to light at the 1975 Montreal conference. They would later be played out and elaborated in what was known as the "Post-Montreal Conference Debate," characterized largely by a series of letters and statements from the different groups and individuals within the international network.

Organized by the Montreal POW, this conference had a lot of publicity both among women's groups and in the media. It was not made explicitly clear that this conference was related to WfH, nor was it clear that it was open only to women (which, as it turns out, it was not). For the Montreal group, this conference was intended to clarify the WfH perspective, but for other groups in the network (for whom the perspective was already clear), this conference was intended to solidify an international strategy for collective political action (Toupin 2012). For the majority groups in the network, the political perspective had already been set out and solidified, and now it was a matter of refining strategy. Political discussions were important on one hand, but if there was a constant need to redefine and re-establish a political perspective, then there was little ability to move forward with a strategy. The conflict that arose at this conference mirrored many of the same conflicts between the two groups in both Padua and Toronto. Here I focus on the debates that played out within the network as part of the Montreal Conference Debate in order to provide further context for the splits that occurred in Toronto and Padua. This examination of the broader debates within the network highlights the place of local groups within the international context. The divisive issues that arose at this conference and that played out within the network can be summarized as: the role of men in WfH, discussions of the demand for the wage, questions of

leadership, and local autonomy vs. international organizing. I will look at each of these in turn, beginning with the presence of men at the conference.

In weighing local autonomy against the larger network's perspective (as well as questioning what it means to be an autonomous women's group), the central issue for the Montreal POW seemed to be the local group's ability to make decisions about local meetings. This is where the presence of men at meetings became an issue. WfH operated as an autonomous feminist group; therefore the very act of inviting men to the meeting (especially without prior consultation of other groups in the network) was contradictory to the fundamental principles of self-directed women's organizing. The issue was presented as a minor difference of opinion regarding the structure of meetings, though, in fact, a complete departure from the network's perspective regarding autonomy from men. This is not to say that men did not have a place in the group's strategy, only that the groups in the network should determine their role. For example, in Toronto, there was a men's "auxiliary" group called Pay Day that functioned in a supporting way, taking direction from the main Toronto WfH group.

Similarly, the issue of the wage and the way it was discussed moved away from the analysis of and demand for the wage as core to the WfH perspective. The issue of wages was one that would result in criticisms from outside the movement, because there was a notion that this would further entrench women in housework. Within the movement, the core divisive issue for regarding wages was whether it was a literal or idealistic demand. On one side, the demand for the wage was presented as an ideological matter. For others, like Toupin, "It's a big debate: was it a perspective or was it cash? For me, it was cash, because I knew that the revolution needed to get it would completely change

society..."⁸⁶ (Toupin 2012). Elaborating on this point, Lacelle adds: "I was for a real salary, without imagining that because we were asking for it we'd have it in a few years... And it's a wage for housework, not for women... It's real work that, when we do it, ought to be paid"⁸⁷ (Lacelle 2012). The other side of the debate, therefore, identified the literal demand for wages as necessary for the creation of a counter-hegemonic culture and for restructuring society and relations of production. While other changes were important to the advancement of struggle (i.e. access to abortion, childcare, etc.), they were intermediary steps that could only be transient and temporary within existing systems of domination.

The next contentious issue within the network was the role of leadership. For the majority of the network, leadership was not a negative thing: "The leader is the person in the room that makes the most sense, who helps you get to where you want to go. That's how we felt about Judith [Ramirez] here for many years" (Wyland 2012). In other words, leadership was necessary to address the immediate needs of the movement as the political perspective developed. For some, however, leadership was viewed as contrary to non-hierarchical, collective organizing. This negative view of leadership was based on the belief that democracy can only be ensured if a movement is leaderless; in this way, the collectivist structure would not be threatened. The fetishization of leaderless, collective democracy ignored the inevitable emergence of leaders in movement organizing, formal or otherwise. If we assume there are no leaders, we risk ignoring the potential for power

⁸⁶ "C'est un grand débat: Est-ce que c'est un perspective ou le cash? Pour moi c'était du cash, parce que je me disais que toute la révolution qu'on va devoir faire pour l'obtenir ça va faire cheminer toute la société..." Translation by C. Rousseau.

⁸⁷ "Moi j'étais pour le vrai salaire, sans imaginer que parce qu'on le demandait qu'en quelques années on l'aurait... Et c'était un salaire au travail ménager, pas aux femmes... C'est un vrai travail que, quand on le fait, devrait être payé." Translation by C. Rousseau.

imbalance or misdirection. In other words, if leaders are explicitly known, it is easier to hold them accountable and to ensure that leadership reflects the needs and desires of the movement. If leadership was defined in this way, it could be quite useful in steering a developing movement and organization as directed by the will of the people. In this way, the collective would remain the main decision making body, with the leadership being accountable to the needs and desires of the collective. Within the WfH network, leaders were referred to as "points of reference," meaning they were seen as having a more developed political analysis of the WfH perspective that could be used to steer and grow the development of counter-hegemonic ideology: "The strategy was one thing, and it radiated from Selma and Mariarosa and Silvia and Judith through the rest of us. They were great leaders. The rest of us stuck around and learned as much as we could because it all made so much sense and we wanted to be making a difference" (Wyland 2012). The idea of points of reference could be limiting if these "points" presumed to take leadership for groups of women who were more than capable of leading themselves, or if they tried to steer the group in a direction in which it was not able - or willing - to move. However, in the case of WfH, leadership was conceived as a means of empowering women to do the work they could and must do for themselves, providing guidance, but not necessarily dictating the terms of struggle.

Here it is worth considering what role the points of reference (i.e. Silvia Federici, Judith Ramirez, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James) played in the international context. What role did they play in determining the starting point of the movement? Their role was to help articulate and steer the international perspective in local contexts. For the Toronto WfH Committee: "We have learned the hard way what a critical error it is to try

to mechanically reproduce or run the Campaign in other cities, and that what a point of reference can accomplish varies greatly with distance" (Toronto Wages for Housework Committee 1979d, 2). This shows us that women in the network were conscious of the need to translate the international perspective so that it could address local needs, rather than trying to simply implant struggles happening in other parts of the world. This vision of adapting struggles for local contexts came from the recognition that social, economic, political, and cultural climates vary across (and even within) borders; what might be successful in one area might not work elsewhere. In addition, WfH organizing looked at the composition and capabilities of groups in order to grow and build an effective movement. One example is the campaign for welfare. In October 1975, Federici proposed a focus on welfare, something the Toronto group initially resisted. The Toronto group hesitated to take on this struggle because of a) a fear that none of these women had much experience with welfare issues, and b) there were other groups in Toronto already working on welfare, like the Mother Led Union (MLU). Instead of taking off with this issue from a point of authority, the Toronto WfH group worked with existing groups "to strengthen and transform the already existing networks of welfare women (lesbians, immigrant women, etc.), and connect them to each other on the foundation of everyone's common need for money and autonomy" (Toronto Wages for Housework Committee 1979d, 3). Action and organizing were geared towards what could be done at the time, rather than taking on too much and focusing on what needed to be done in the long-term. Similarly, in Italy, women connected their struggles to those they had been engaged with prior to formal involvement with WfH. Struggles for daycare, price controls, rent

reductions, against wage discrimination, etc. were built upon and incorporated into WfH organizing, rather than taking a complete departure starting from scratch.

As the final point of division, the issue of local autonomy vs. international organizing was connected to questions of leadership and the direction of struggle, encompassing all the points mentioned above. The international perspective was privileged by the majority of women in the network as a means of starting from a common point of struggle. In other words, rather than building links between separate struggles, there was a focus on understanding the connections that objectively exist between all women.

While WfH acknowledged that the experience of oppression was different for women, they saw that it had common roots and therefore needed a common approach to struggle. The goal was "to break down the divisions that capital has imposed on us by making that connection clear and giving it concrete form" (Hall 1975, 2). The connection became clear through the examination of housework, which reflected the objective unity between women (waged and unwaged). The struggle for wages, therefore, was a means through which to give that unity a form and sense of direction. While there was not be a universal link between struggles, there was a common strategy with which to approach struggles:

...there was a natural kind of...splintering of focus in different places so that we would translate this somewhat abstract perspective into actual organizing work without becoming a social service. But really using the perspective to change people's lives, and to really let people know what the perspective was - the idea of women's wagelessness - informing all this so that in England and in a couple of

other places there was a big focus on prostitution.... Our perspective was more on domestic workers and immigrant women in Toronto, and the Lesbian Mother's Defense Fund. (Wyland 2012)

Here we can see that the international focus did not preclude local groups taking up this perspective in the way that worked best for their particular situation. For many who aligned themselves with the WfH perspective, the focus on an international perspective did not mean the needs of local groups were being abandoned. Rather, the international focus was translated locally: "That's how it felt for me. It wasn't a conflict. How do we translate this, you know? Who are we in this little group? What have we got in the way of connections and needs [amongst] ourselves to reach out with?" (Wyland 2012). In the chapters on struggles in Canada and Italy, I highlighted the ways in which the international perspective for struggle was taken up locally.

As a result of the differences outlined above, the Montreal Power of Women Collective was expelled from the international network. While many of the women I interviewed did not have a clear memory of how these debates played out, it was clear that there was an emotional impact on those involved: "... it was all complicated and intermingled with personal relations... It was complicated, and everyone hurt everyone else"⁸⁸ (Lacelle 2012). At the time, there was a sense of urgency to have issues settled that, in retrospect, may not have been necessary:

I think there were some rivalries... I was coming from outside at that point, and I didn't understand what happened at the Montreal conference debate. I'd heard it described. I attended it, and I voted with Selma, but I was really none the wiser. I

⁸⁸ " ...c'était tout compliqué et tellement entremêlé avec les rapports personnels... c'était d'une complexité, et tout le monde avait fait une peine énorme à tout le monde." Translation by C. Rousseau.

think it was probably a mistake to try and draw lines about who pledged allegiance to the concrete wage at that point when we hadn't built up an understanding of what we were doing. (Wyland 2012)

Some have characterized this move as evidence of the rigid dogmatism of WfH, signalling their inability and unwillingness to work with others on the Left: "It was dogmatic in the sense of having to have the same strategy. It was not enough to share the same conviction and the same analysis⁸⁹" (Lacelle 2012). This raises an important issue and prompts me to consider how groups can work towards common goals through different perspectives. What is to be done in the case of a difference in political perspective? Where do we draw this line? Is the objective to grow the group, or to potentially limit the scope of the group in favour of maintaining a rigid political line? These questions were not unique to WfH, and continue to plague different social movements across the globe. While the group's rigid dogmatism may have been responsible for their inability to grow and continue its struggles, WfH would have been something completely different if they had a different view of struggle and organizing.

During the years WfH was active, they held a series of international conferences.⁹⁰ These conferences were used to discuss the business of the movement, but they were also able to draw attention to the work of the network and give them visibility. The conferences would also be part of the construction of the group, functioning in a dialectical relationship. On one hand, the groups needed the capacity to be able to organize the conferences; on the other hand, the conferences could be used to grow the network. While it was a lot of work to organize these conferences on an international

⁸⁹ "C'était dogmatique en ce sens qu'il fallait avoir la même stratégie. Tu ne peux pas seulement partager une même conviction et une même analyse." Translation by C. Rousseau.

⁹⁰ I have listed the international conferences as part of my timeline, which can be found in the appendices.

scale, this work was seen as necessary. By the time the Toronto conference took place in the fall of 1975, the network had been firmly established (and non-functioning elements expelled from the network). This gave the women involved the conviction that they could grow and develop the movement into something more (Toupin 2012). The level of discussion at this conference was more nuanced because the points of debate that had stymied organizing up until this point were no longer an issue. Instead, there was now a better understanding of the significance of the wage and the different ways it could be attained: "And there, we saw it... It made me understand so many things... In fact, it made me see the invisible labour of women everywhere, and that we work all the time but are not paid,"⁹¹ (Toupin 2012). There was also an emerging understanding that the wage was important not only for women, but it also highlighted the way in which the international issue of wagelessness was used as a means to divide the working class.

Decline of the Movements

By the end of the 1970s, both WfH and *SLD* declined in momentum, and were soon reduced to a footnote in the history of women's liberation movements in Italy and Canada. Though there is no single reason for the disappearance of these movements, I want to reflect on the role the repression of Left activism played in both cases. Despite the presence of Left politics in mainstream apparatuses in Italy, the late 1970s saw a campaign of repression against Left activists. Much of this repression stemmed from the arrests of those believed to be part of the Red Brigades and responsible for the

⁹¹ "Mais là, on le voyait... Ça me faisait comprendre tellement de choses... En fait, ça me faisait voir le travail invisible des femmes partout, puis qu'on travail tout le temps mais on n'est pas payées." Translation by C. Rousseau

kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro in 1978, a member of the *Democrazia Cristiana* and Italy's Prime Minister at the time:

In many ways, Italy was an anomaly from that point of view because across most of the world the radical movement peaked in the early 1970s and then went down. In Italy you actually have a movement that remained very strong... until '79 when you have the mass arrests. For most of the '70s you have a strong Left movement and in some cases, after the mid '70s, some parts of the Left were quite hostile to the feminist movement because they believed that a kind of revolutionary situation was developing in Italy and that feminists were bourgeois. (Federici 2012b)

In this passage, Federici describes the culture of repression that led to the general decline of Left activism, and how that impacted feminist activism in Italy. Many of those arrested were from the Political Science department at the University of Padua, where Mariarosa Dalla Costa was also affiliated. Left activists, including feminists, were forced underground for fear of persecution. During our interview, Dalla Costa described the process of hiding *SLD* documents in cellars and attics, because being caught with these documents could potentially lead to imprisonment (Dalla Costa 2012). The situation in Canada was not as dire as it was in Italy, but a decline occurred nonetheless. While there was not active repression against activists, a culture of fear fostered by the Cold War meant that groups who were perceived to be a threat to national security came under surveillance. According to Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile, feminists and lesbians drew special attention, and as a result *WfH* and *Wages Due* came under surveillance by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The surveillance of the *WfH* committee in

Toronto “quickly led to the discovery that (surprise, surprise!) there were many lesbians amongst the supporters of Wages for Housework” (Kinsman and Gentile 2010, 288). The RCMP reports also describe the Toronto WfH group as “isolated and alienated from society as a whole and are unable to work with, or relate to, other groups or organizations” (ibid. 292). Certainly the dogmatism of the Toronto group also played a role in the group’s inability to sustain itself as a movement. Further, though the surveillance of these groups was not discovered until many years later, the language used in these documents reveal the state’s anti-poor and anti-working-class attitudes. The fact that WfH and Wages Due were under the scrutiny of the RCMP reveals a culture that was growing increasingly distrustful of what was perceived as radical ideology connected to Left activism.

Translating Feminist Struggles

WfH operated within an international context, and though there was a common view of the exploitative nature of housework and reproductive labour, the ways in which this was experienced and articulated varied. In this section, I begin by looking at the translation of feminist ideas across borders, focusing on female sexuality as an area of struggle that was taken up differently in the Italian and Canadian contexts. I then look more broadly at the international focus of WfH as one of the group's defining features, and how women involved within the movement viewed the translation of the international focus into local struggles.

The translation I am talking about was both literal and more figurative. In other words, there was the obvious translation of documents into different languages as

information was shared across the network, as well as a broader translation of ideology and struggle from one cultural context to another. Looking at the WfH groups in Padua and Toronto, one clear example of the translation of ideas of feminism was the way female sexuality and struggles related to sexuality were taken up. This focus on sexuality was two-fold. First, there was the focus on the issue of lesbianism and its impact on child custody battles, access to welfare, employment opportunities, etc. The group in Toronto focused on the issue of lesbianism in their local implementation of the international perspective, most notably marked by the emergence of the group Wages Due. Second, sexuality was seen as a terrain of struggle in that women ought to be able to have control over their own reproductive rights. In this way sexuality was connected to better divorce legislation and access to abortion, which were viewed as means of controlling working conditions.

In Canada, the emergence of Wages Due was central to the Toronto WfH movement. Wages Due's pamphlet *Motherhood, Lesbianism, and Child Custody* was sent to Italy, where it was translated and published for women involved with *SLD*. The content of this pamphlet talks about the different ways children have been socialized according to gender, and also talks about implications of race and sexuality in this socialization process. Within the process of socialization, needs and desires are moulded to serve the needs of capitalism and patriarchy; we are heterosexual until proven otherwise, a designation that is assumed and preferred because of its service to capitalist development. For Toupin, "Lesbians made us understand that heterosexuality is also work. It's within that sphere that exploitation produces itself... Heterosexuality is not only

sexual relations; it's all a social organization”⁹² (Toupin 2012). Relations between men and women are socially imposed and carry with them unequal power relations. For WfH and Wages Due, lesbianism was a form of struggle against socially imposed relations with men.

Francie Wyland and Mariarosa Dalla Costa received some criticism for sending the pamphlet on lesbian motherhood to Italy. The London group, including Selma James, thought the pamphlet undermined the work of lesbians organizing in Italy. In a series of letters within the network, it was further argued that promoting the work of Wages Due would lead to lesbian separatism (James 1979). When we compare lesbian activism between Canada and Italy, we should not assume that the culture of hetero-patriarchy, nor the responses to it, was the same. In Italy, we cannot underestimate the influence of the Catholic Church in determining the nature of debates on sexuality. While issues of sexuality in Italy were focused on struggles for abortion and divorce law, we cannot (and should not) assume that there was no regard for lesbian activism there, even if it was not central to the demands being made. In fact, as I discussed in Chapter 3, looking at the fight against the divorce referendum in 1974 allows us to see how regressive changes to divorce law could negatively impact lesbians. For feminists involved with *SLD* in Italy, the issue of sexuality was not viewed as an intrinsic point of one's identity, and was therefore not a focus of activism. However, the prospect of all-women organizing, and even lesbian-specific spaces, appealed to the women of *SLD*.

Though lesbianism did not factor largely into the *SLD* movements in Italy in an obvious way, it was certainly present. One reason for the lack of an overt focus on

⁹² “Les lesbiennes nous ont fait comprendre que l'hétérosexualité c'était aussi du travail. C'était dans ce cadre là que l'exploitation se produisait... L'hétérosexualité ce n'est pas seulement des relations sexuelles; c'est toute une organisation sociale. « Translation by C. Rousseau.

lesbianism in discourses about sexuality was the generally sidelined history of LGBTQ+ struggles in Italy. In organizing together, lesbian and heterosexual women alike, there was recognition of the solidarity and care that existed between women, even when it was repressed. Sexuality in Italy was viewed in a way that challenged the presumptions about women's bodies and its limitations to procreative sexual relations, but was not emphasized as an essential part of one's identity. For Dalla Costa and others of *SLD*, the emerging gay movement provided potential for subversive power in a capitalist system that exalts heterosexuality while denying tenderness at the same time (Dalla Costa 1975, 27). This view must be distinguished from a lesbian separatist claim, which viewed heterosexuality and men as inherently oppressive. Instead, the WfH view emphasized the fact that capitalism has not equipped us to enter into equal relationships from a loving and nurturing position.

Another reason lesbianism in Italy was not separated out from a broader feminist struggle as it was in Canada was a difference in the approach to gay liberation in both countries. For example, the cultural emphasis on "coming out" was much more prevalent in North America in light of the gay right's movement stemming from the Stonewall Riots of 1969. According to Alan Sears, the gay liberation movement that grew out of the riots differed from previous homosexual movements in its emphasis on "visibility (centering around the importance of coming out), militancy (mobilizing to confront power) and an end to sexual regulation and the monopoly of the compulsory family system (through which the state assumes a monopoly on defining sexual relations)" (Sears 2005, 96). The aim was to bring sexuality itself out of the closet, and to get state control out of peoples' bedrooms. When looking at the WfH movement in the Canadian

context, the struggles of Wages Due and the establishment of the Lesbian Mothers Defense Fund both highlight the importance and the cost of coming out, particularly as it related to wages and family structure.

In Italy, the official emergence of *SLD* was connected to a division over whether or not the group should ally itself with struggles demanding access to abortion. The case of Gigliola Pierobon, which I talked about in Chapter 3, would serve as a rallying point for *SLD* feminists to connect the issue of unwaged labour to reproductive rights and access to abortion. In Canada, the 1969 Criminal Law Amendment Act partially decriminalized abortion, but women still had to fulfill a certain set of criteria approved by a panel of doctors in order to have an abortion granted, often requiring a psychological evaluation to diagnose them as unfit or unable to care for children. The struggle for abortion was viewed as an essential service that went hand in hand with addressing the material conditions that made it impossible (and continues to be a struggle) for most people to raise children without access to other essentials, like daycare, paid maternity leave, the collectivization of housework, etc. (O’Leary and Toupin 1983). Having access to abortion and contraceptives was merely the first step in ensuring that women would be able to have control over their lives. Ultimately, the right to choose was connected to the larger struggle to give women control over their own bodies and to fight state control of women’s sexuality. Sexuality and control over reproductive capacity, therefore, was a common arena of struggle across borders for WfH feminists, even if it was taken up in different ways. Canada’s history as a settler-colonial state, for example, meant that Indigenous people were excluded from citizenship and denied access to the normative “nuclear family” structure. These exclusionary politics are evident in a history of forced

sterilization of Indigenous women and the forced adoption of Indigenous children. A woman's control over her own sexuality and reproductive rights was central to the struggle for wages and against housework because it was one of the only ways that women could control their working conditions:

For us, the issue of abortion was also a labour issue. It was the question over the control over your body... From the perspective we took, this kind of demographic politics tells us something about the capitalist plans for production.... And when we talk about the control over your body, it's not just a question of aborting, but also of being able to have children and having access to resources to have children. (Federici 2012b)

In both cases, the issue of abortion was viewed in a nuanced way, and is closely aligned with what we now call reproductive justice. The notion of reproductive justice recognizes the role that racialization and other forms of marginalization play in our conception of reproductive rights:⁹³

Capital *depends* on being able to tell us who we should sleep with and when, which of us should have children and who will be sterilized, how many children we should have, and under what conditions they will be brought up. Some of us are denied birth control and abortions, while others of us have childlessness imposed on us by forced sterilization and abortion, child custody laws and poverty. But whatever our situation, we are fighting for the

⁹³ The notion of reproductive justice originated in 1994 in the United States, and came from interventions from the Black Women's Caucus at a Pro-Choice Alliance meeting. The work of groups like INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence and of scholars like Andrea Smith and Rickie Solinger offer a good introduction to reproductive justice. See: INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (2006), *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* and R. Solinger (2013), *Reproductive Politics: What Everyone Needs to Know*.

power to control our own sexuality and our reproductive capacities.
(Wyland 1976, 7)

The perspective of reproductive justice views reproductive health as a human right and acknowledges the unequal access women across the globe have to birth control and contraceptives, and the different restrictions placed on women's bodies globally. This focus on control of sexuality and reproductive rights translated internationally in terms of the struggle for wages as well as expressing solidarity with women across the globe in the face of patriarchal domination.

Conclusion

In this chapter I began by examining the emergence of WfH in the context of the historical and political climate of the 1960s and 1970s in Italy and Canada. Focusing on the politicization of young people through increased presence in post-secondary institutions and connections between worker and student movements, I highlighted the development of feminist consciousness emerging from these experiences. The feminist consciousness that developed in relation to WfH and *SLD* movements recognized the systemic forms of oppression common to women, and used their individual experiences to come together through the process of consciousness-raising in order to build a larger political movement. The family, mediated through capitalist social relations, was identified by WfH feminists as the primary point of oppression for women, and was therefore viewed as a common point of departure for struggle within an international framework.

Divisions within the international network were played out at conferences and through a series of correspondence. These divisions resulted largely from the question of local autonomy vs. international organizing, and included questions related to the role of men in the network, the demand for the wage, and the role of leadership. A common point of struggle – the wage as a lever of social subversion – was prioritized by the majority of women in the network, with those who disagreed being expelled from the network. While I am critical of the group's dogmatism on the matter of political perspective, I think a looser approach to the issue of local autonomy vs. international organization would have made the group into something else entirely. The demand for the wage as a common strategy, therefore, was necessary for the group.

A simple translation of feminism and struggles against patriarchy did not define the international aspect of the WfH perspective across the globe. Rather, a unified perspective allowed for local situations to be viewed in a global context, thinking of the ways in which capital plans and exploits on an international scale. Struggles in Italy could not simply be transplanted in Canada, and vice versa. Instead, feminists struggling in Canada were able to look at what was happening in Italy and elsewhere, identifying with the WfH perspective, implementing struggles in their own communities in a way that made sense and was able to effect change within their local context. The issue of sexuality and control over reproductive rights, for example, was taken up differently in the Italian and Canadian contexts, demonstrating the translation of larger ideas into local struggles.

“Capitalist development has always been unsustainable because of its human impact. To understand this point, all we need to do is to take the viewpoint of those who have been and continue to be killed by it. A presupposition of capitalism’s birth was the sacrifice of a large part of humanity - mass extermination, the production of hunger and misery, slavery, violence and terror. Its continuation requires the same presuppositions.”

Mariarosa Dalla Costa, “Capitalism and Reproduction,” 1995

Conclusion **The Perspective of Winning: Starting at Point Zero**

As the name of the perspective obviously suggests, housework was central to the WfH perspective. Rather than ignore or dismiss housework, WfH identified social reproduction as the starting point from which to connect to the broader, working class movement. Using an analysis that looks at individuals as part of larger systems of domination, feminists could come to understand the impacts of capitalism and patriarchy on both women and men. The aim of the WfH campaigns was not to further entrench women in housework, but rather to highlight the widespread proliferation of housework in multiple aspects of women's lives.

I began by identifying the feminist standpoint as the theoretical approach I used to inform the writing of this dissertation. In my literature review, I situated the writings of WfH within the broader context of the domestic labour debates of the 1970s. Situating the WfH perspective in this context was a way of highlighting the way feminists have regarded housework differently. As I argued, the issue of emotional labour and intimate relationships within the family is an important element of housework that deserves more explicit discussion; emotional labour is a major component of housework, which is one of the reasons this work remains invisible. In this chapter I also argued that we must consider some of the complexities that arise when we consider the emotional aspects of

housework, which is a consistent theme present in the work of WfH, even though the more economic writings of the domestic labour debate have largely ignore this issue.

Using feminist standpoint theory, I have prioritized the experiences and perspectives of feminists involved with the WfH movements. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, I situated WfH, *SLD*, and the experiences of feminists involved with these movements within the broader social, economic, and cultural contexts of Italy and Canada. In presenting this contextual framework, my aim was to provide a greater understanding of the emergence of these movements and the development of feminist consciousness focused on the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism. In providing a contextual framework, I also highlighted some of the parallels and differences in the development of feminist thought and activism in Italy and Canada. As a point of commonality, the particular Marxist feminist perspective of WfH emerged when feminists in both Italy and Canada engaged in dialogue with other women; the perspective further developed through the organization of ensuing forms of struggle that were intended to attack the oppressive nature of housework, to challenge normative gender roles that have been constructed and restricted under capitalism, and to subvert social relations through the demand for the wage.

Throughout my dissertation, I have highlighted a key objective of WfH, which was to dispel the myth of liberation through work. Instead of focusing on gaining work outside the home as a form of emancipation, they were concerned with working towards the refusal of work and the destruction of the role of the housewife. In beginning to acknowledge housework and social reproduction as work, the consciousness of feminists involved with WfH was further developed and articulated resulting in a fundamental

recognition that despite a lack of wages, women are already part of the working class: “We have worked enough... every time they have 'let us in' to some traditionally male enclave, it was to find for us a new level of exploitation" (Dalla Costa 1972, 49-50). It is precisely the lack of wages for housework and social reproduction that makes this work uniquely oppressive. I also explored the ways in which the role of the housewife, the nature of housework, and the strategy of refusal were conceived by WfH feminists. For WfH, destroying the role of the housewife meant refusing the idealized role of women, the work of emotional labour, heteronormativity, biological reproduction, and sexual relations with men. Rather than having the refusal of the idealized feminine role dismissed as personal, a sign of frigidity or psychological defect, the aim was to subvert the traditional role assigned to women as a means to destroy the family as a pillar of support for capitalist exploitation. For Dalla Costa, James, and others involved within WfH, this was the first step in breaking down the divisions between men and women resulting from the rise of capitalism.

The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community remains an important text because it is an entry point that allows us to see the importance of the strategy of refusal. While the refusal of work movement as an anti-capitalist strategy was originally conceived within the extra-parliamentary Left in Italy, it is conceived differently when we consider it from a feminist perspective. Looking at the refusal of work from a feminist perspective, connected to the refusal of housework, means looking at both the family and (waged) work as sites and objects of refusal (Weeks 2011, 110). This means recognizing that housework is socially necessary, while also rethinking the relationship between waged and unwaged forms of labour. A major contribution of the WfH perspective within

the larger context of the domestic labour debates was to highlight the different elements of housework (including emotional labour) as work. The recognition of housework as *work* was the first step in building towards a strategy of refusal.

The WfH perspective was fraught with conflicts related to both the theory and organizational practice of the groups, as I have highlighted in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the dissertation. The major theoretical tension within the movement was related to the idea of wages. For the members that would be expelled from the network, the idea of wages for housework was limited to a symbolic demand. For the core of the network, on the other hand, the demand was both symbolic and concrete; the symbolic demand for wages would highlight the unwaged work performed by women, while the concrete demand for the wage was meant to subvert capitalist social relations. For all of the feminists I interviewed, the issue of wages and wagelessness remains an important area of struggle. For example, when I asked whether the demand for wages for housework is still relevant, Wyland answered emphatically: "Absolutely. I sometimes forget to use it in reading the newspaper and thinking for myself, but women's poverty, women's wagelessness, is key. The women's movement at large, to the extent that it failed to come to grips with money, really undermined itself" (Wyland 2012). The call to recognize reproductive work as real in all its elements must be viewed as a wide-reaching perspective that starts with women and extends to the entire working class. The compulsion to limit this struggle to a single demand - that of a literal demand for cash - serves to discredit and misrepresent what WfH was and to limit its possibilities. The question of wages, therefore, is only one aspect of building a movement that places social reproduction at the centre; we must also begin to reclaim common spaces and put our energies towards activities that promote

each others' ability to participate, and which allows movements to grow and be self-reproducing.

Other theoretical tensions arose around reproductive labour and the politics of reproduction. Specifically, a major pull within the WfH perspective was examining the housewife versus examining housework. WfH is premised on the idea that all women, waged or unwaged, married or unmarried, are housewives: "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" (Dalla Costa 1972, 21). However, this element of the perspective turned many people off of WfH because of its perceived reductionism or essentialism, as I have discussed in the dissertation. However, this tension within the perspective recognized that, on one hand, women have been linked to housework because of the separation between productive and reproductive forms of labour with the rise of capitalism. On the other hand, the WfH perspective used the demand for wages as a way to highlight invisible forms of labour and to critique the structural position of women within social reproduction. Paid domestic work is an example of receiving wages for housework, and also shows us a stratified relationship that exists between women on the basis of class and race. Since many women employ domestic workers, they are often responsible for the exploitation of these workers as well.

The rigid dogmatism of WfH, exemplified by the splits and expulsions, was a major point of criticism levelled against the movement and was one of the reasons it did not have greater growth, particularly in Canada. The splits and expulsions are indicative of the organizational tensions that existed within the movement. The expulsion of the

Montreal Power of Women Collective, for example, reveals the divisions that arose within the network regarding the relationship between theory and practice; within the broader network, there was a belief that constant discussion and re-definitions of the political perspective would inhibit the movement's ability to act and to grow. These tensions, which mirror the tensions between the Toronto WfH and the Padua *SLD* groups respectively, also reflect the disaccord regarding the capacities local groups had in the context of an international organization. The divisions related to the issue of local autonomy vs. international organizing was also connected to questions of leadership and the direction of struggle, and encompassed theoretical divisions like the demand for the wage. In the end, the hardline members of the network won out. While WfH recognized the varieties of experiences of oppression amongst women, they saw great value in taking a common approach to struggle from an international perspective.

Despite all the tensions surrounding the WfH movement amongst feminist activists and scholars in the 1970s, it is difficult to find even scarce traces of this important movement (Toupin 2014, 15). While talk of WfH is not overt, I argue that it is present today in the works of activists and scholars, even if it is not always apparent or even conscious.⁹⁴ In spite of the tensions and limitations in organizational power, WfH feminists nevertheless made important contributions to the development of discourses related to social reproduction. In the remaining pages, I look at some of the influence the WfH perspective has had and continues to have on the development of feminist thought.

⁹⁴ Today there are many activist groups and movements in different parts of the globe whose work is focused on issues related to social reproduction. In *Revolution and Point Zero*, Federici talks about movements like Occupy in North America as examples of activists who are attempting to address the issue of social reproduction and reclaiming common spaces. In Spain, the feminist collective GynePunk seeks to decolonize the female body by developing gynecological tools for prostitutes, refugees, and other women who are socially and economically disadvantaged. These are just two examples, and I am excited to learn about more groups and movements who are creating communities that seek to address social reproduction.

Specifically, I focus on the way feminists connected to this perspective continue to explore themes present in the WfH analysis. I then look at the way the WfH perspective has contributed to discourses on: work and wages, social reproduction in a global context and, finally, care and emotional labour.

Revisiting Wages for Housework

Since 2012, there have been three books published revisiting the history of the WfH movement and the writings of some of the women involved in developing the group's analyses. In *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (2012), Silvia Federici identifies the sphere of reproduction as the point zero for revolution because it is the central point of exploitation for women. Similarly, in her recently published collection of essays *Sex, Race, and Class* (2012), Selma James calls WfH the "perspective of winning" because it is able to provide a more total account of the subjugation of women, and therefore offers a point of departure that moves beyond the narrowly-defined "working class" of traditional Marxists and the class-blind perspective of Liberal feminism. Finally, Louise Toupin's *Le salaire au travail ménager: Chronique d'une lutte féministe internationale, 1972-1977* (2014) is an historical account of the International Feminist Collective, revisiting these feminist groups as a way to recover some of the foundational ideas related to housework and social reproduction. Toupin's book also helps to dispel some misconceptions about the movement. According to Toupin,

Wages for Housework...has never been thought of, among groups that made up the International Feminist Collective or who were at its periphery, in terms of a

political platform of demands with data and negotiating strategies, or lobbying. Rather its symbolic potential lay in its ability to reveal the extent of the invisibility of private and public reproductive work on Earth, its unwaged nature, and the profit taken from it by the capitalist economy. In a word, it revealed the hidden face of wage society.⁹⁵ (Toupin 2014, 311)

As James and Federici bring new, evaluative perspectives to their works, we gain a better understanding of the way the earlier work of WfH contributed to our understanding of gender and class based oppression. For James, revisiting the WfH movement serves to re-emphasize the importance of looking at the way capitalist and patriarchal social relations continue to be embedded in our most intimate relationships: "When feminism asserted that 'the personal is political' it usually conveyed that women's personal grievances were also political. I wanted to use this occasion to show that the political was profoundly personal, shaping our lives, and that applying Marx's analysis of capitalism to the relations between women and men illuminates them" (James 2012, 143). Similarly, Federici revisits older works, beginning with writings on WfH, in order to clarify the way her analyses have deepened and developed over the years while continuing to emphasize reproduction as a series of activities and social relations. It is through these activities and social relations that labour power, as well as our very *lives*, are reproduced daily.

Work and Wages

⁹⁵ "Le salaire au travail ménager...n'a jamais été pensé, au sein des groupes qui composaient le Collectif féministe international ou qui se situaient à sa périphérie, en termes de platform politique de revendications, avec données chiffrées et strategies de négociation ou de lobbying. Son potentiel symbolique résidait plutôt dans sa faculté de dévoiler l'étendue de l'invisibilité du travail reproductive privé et public sur Terre, sa gratuité, et le profit qu'en tirait l'économie du capitalisme. En un mot, il dévoilait la face cache de la société salariale." Translation by C. Rousseau.

In addition to her role in the development of feminist standpoint theory, Dorothy Smith is also credited with developing institutional ethnography as a methodological approach to research. In writing about institutional ethnography, Smith has credited WfH feminists for their development of an expanded definition of housework, which she uses as a model for looking at the way gendered relations are used to sustain labour power (Smith 1987, 165). In her practice of institutional ethnography, Smith takes some inspiration from WfH as she re-defines work in a way that considered all the activities individuals are engaged in:

that requires some effort, that they mean to do, and that requires some acquired competence... By locating institutional ethnography in the work people do we are not concerned so much to mark a distinction between what is work and what is not work, but rather to deploy a concept that will return us to the activities of what people do on a day-to-day basis under definite conditions and in definite situations. (165-166)

Like WfH feminists, Smith is not concerned with what is viewed or valued as work; in her investigations, she is concerned with all aspects of our daily lives that are essential to the economy and to the functioning of capitalist society. Traditional Marxists look at labour as a means of recognizing the conflicting and sometimes contradictory nature of class and social relations under capitalism; using feminist or women's standpoint theory, Smith looks gender relations under capitalism in order to understand how relations of domination and subordination come to be. Therefore Smith, like WfH feminists, looks at the way both class and gender come to be shaped through a series of complex social relations that permeate all aspects of our lives, both inside and outside the home.

Further influence from the WfH perspective can be seen in Kathi Weeks' *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (2011). In this text, Weeks highlights the WfH perspective as she revisits Marxist feminist analyses of work, centering her arguments around two key demands: a shorter work week (limited to 30 hours) for those engaged in waged labour, and a guaranteed minimum income for everyone regardless of formal or informal work status. According to Weeks, both liberal economic policies and traditional Marxist theories present a productive bias when talking about work. In other words, only waged labour, which is seen to support the capitalist economy, is acknowledged and valued as work. Weeks' criticism of the productive bias is similar to criticisms present in the writings of WfH feminists, showing us that the issue of productive vs. reproductive labour continues to be of importance. For Weeks and WfH feminists, productive as well as reproductive forms of labour are integral to supporting capitalism; for this reason, both advocate a refusal of work. For WfH feminists, a wage for housework was necessary in the refusal of work, something that Weeks describes as valuable because it serves as a "force of demystification, an instrument of denaturalization, and a tool for cognitive mapping" (Weeks 2011, 129). While she sees value in the WfH perspective, however, Weeks argues that a basic income for all is a better strategy than demanding wages for housework because a basic income would move beyond what she sees as the limitations brought about by reinforcing gendered divisions of labour in the demand for the wage.

Social Reproduction on a Global Scale

While Federici's work has evolved from her early pieces directly connected to WfH organizing, she still espouses certain elements of the WfH perspective, continuing to place an emphasis on the struggle for wages and making social reproduction visible. Housework acknowledged as "real work" through the implementation of a wage is a classification that could revolutionize how our society normatively conceives of housework, both inside and outside the home. For Federici, struggles against oppression should also be linked to environmental movements and reclaiming common spaces for our own subsistence, fighting against the ongoing process of primitive accumulation. In Marxian terms, primitive accumulation explains how capitalist relations first came into being, namely with the closing of the commons and the rise of private property. As the number of women working in agriculture or in subsistence farming is ever increasing, women have been engaging in land struggles across the globe, connecting with environmental movements to reclaim communal access to land and redistribute natural resources for non-capitalist uses.

For scholars like Federici and Maria Mies, viewing social reproduction on a global scale is necessary in ensuring that a "First World" women's movement is not imposed globally (Federici 2012a, 74) because of the social capital and availability of resources afforded to women in the global north. Similarly, Mies argues that a gulf between women in the global North and those in the global South will not be resolved unless we are able to look at the exploitation and oppression of women in relation to global capital accumulation and the international division of labour:

Starting with the recognition that patriarchy and accumulation on a world scale constitute the structural and ideological framework within which women's reality

today has to be understood, the feminist movement worldwide cannot but challenge this framework, along with the sexual and the international division of labor, which are bound up with it. (Mies 1986, 3)

Thinking about feminist struggle from an international perspective was key to the WfH perspective. The widened lens they attempted to utilize allows us to see that because capital is organized globally, struggles and responses must be planned accordingly. For this reason, it is important that an analysis of social reproduction considers struggles on a global scale. Agricultural and land struggles women are engaging globally are important "not only because thanks to them billions of people are able to survive, but because they point to the changes that we have to make if we are to construct a society where reproducing ourselves does not come at the expense of other people nor presents a threat to the continuation of life on the planet" (Federici 2012a, 127). While these efforts are connected to the exploitation of women's labour, they also fight to ensure that farming is safe, that workers have more control over their health and that of their family, and that we are able to sustain the planet. As climate change is more apparent every day, and as resources grow more and more scarce, expanded struggles centered on social reproduction are vitally imperative.

Similarly, Toupin emphasizes the importance of examining social reproduction on a global scale: "This is an opportunity to (re) discover the rich intellectual and activist resources that could serve us today as tools to understand the issue of social reproduction and its evolutions, as well as the key site that is occupied, again and again, by a majority of women on the planet"⁹⁶ (Toupin 2014, 21). In *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a*

⁹⁶ "C'est l'occasion d'y (re)découvrir de riches ressources intellectuelles et militantes qui pourraient nous servir aujourd'hui encore d'outils pour comprendre la problématique de la reproduction sociale et ses

World Scale, Mies challenges traditional Marxist historiography to look at the process of what she calls “housewifization,” where distinctions were made between productive and non-productive forms of labour, transforming women into unwaged housewives. In this text, Mies revisits the work of the WfH movement, and applauds Dalla Costa and James for their critique of orthodox Marxist theories in attempting to understand the oppression of women, questioning distinctions between productive and reproductive forms of labour. For both Mies and Dalla Costa, “one cannot understand the exploitation of wage-labour unless one understands the exploitation of non-wage labour” (Mies 1986, 32). Building off the analyses put forward by the WfH perspective, Mies uses analyses developed by Third World feminists looking at the impacts of colonization on subsistence economies. She explores the ways in which a global, capitalist economy is dependent on women’s unwaged work, which includes housework, subsistence farming, and other types of informal work. According to Mies, Dalla Costa’s work was important in the way it connected to youth rebellions and the struggles against imperialism waged by women in the Third World and black people in North America. For Mies, as well as Dalla Costa, these are categories of people who have been defined as being outside of capitalism because of their lack of wage. In the forward to the latest edition of *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, Federici emphasizes the importance of looking at the way both waged and unwaged work performed by women produces life itself, and how all other activities are dependent upon this labour.

Marilyn Waring’s 1988 book *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics* is widely acknowledged as the foundational text for the newly emerging discipline of

evolutions, de même que la place clé qu’y occupe, encore et toujours, une majorité de femmes de la planète.” Translation by C. Rousseau.

feminist economics, which seeks to overcome patriarchal biases by looking at issues that are relevant to women and that had previously been ignored. The most notable question feminist economics sought to address, and which is most closely connected to the work of WfH, is the work of care. Waring's text was one of the first to use feminist economics to look at the unwaged work of social reproduction in relation to national accounting systems. The 1995 documentary *Who's Counting? Marilyn Waring on Sex, Lies, and Global Economics* further exposes the way a traditional view of economics devalues housework and social reproduction, making these unpaid forms of work invisible. In the film, Waring talks about the development of the post-war economic system. According to Waring, anything with cash-generating capacity that passes through the marketplace under this economic system is regarded as valuable, including industries that promote war, environmental degradation, and different forms of sexual exploitation. On the flip side, however, this economic system ignores the importance of social reproduction, broadly conceived, including the reproduction of human life itself. According to Waring, "This system cannot respond to values it refuses to recognize. It is the cause of massive poverty, illness and the death of millions of women and children, and it is encouraging environmental disaster. This is an economic system that can eventually kill us all" (qtd. in Nash 1995). The analyses developed by Waring reflect the discourses developed by WfH feminists beginning in 1972, and which have evolved over time to offer new perspectives that still privilege social reproduction as a central point of analysis. The discourses developed by WfH feminists in the 1970s began a conversation that opened the door for the development of feminist economics, which has been used to try and measure many of the invisible aspects of housework, including care.

Care and the Crisis of Reproduction

As I have discussed, WfH was central in developing the discourse around emotional labour and the work of care, illuminating previously invisible and hidden forms of labour. Feminist scholars have been increasingly taking up the issue of care, which saw some of its earliest articulations with the work of WfH. As Antonella Picchio rightly states:

The feminist movement now is very interested in the research and discovery of care. And it seems that they just discovered care.... They don't want to talk about housework, so they talk about care. Care is always this nice word about housework. And I always have to say: look, you care with housework, through housework... You care cooking, you care cleaning the sheets...And the amount of hours we spend in housework that goes into care is enormous (Picchio 2012).

Care is important not only because it is present in housework, but because it also permeates other aspects of our lives. In addition to the exacerbated exploitation of women on a global scale, care is also an issue when sexist expectations dictate that women ought to be responsible for the emotional well-being of men, whether they are our bosses, co-workers, intimate partners, or just some random man on the street telling you to smile. Women increasingly bear the burden of emotional labour and the care of the family in order to mitigate some of the pressures of the restructured neoliberal economy.

For Toupin, the WfH perspective is crucial to understanding the crisis of reproduction that comes from the impacts of globalization and neoliberalism, particularly when we consider who is most impacted by austerity measures and the rise of the informal workforce. As unemployment rates rise, the growing informal economy is made

up of invisible forms of labour. Women, particularly those in the Global South, make up the majority of the informal workforce, engaging largely in the work of care. These informal workers remain largely invisible, and are subject to precarious work situations, exploitative conditions, and low wages. While we have seen an increase in the number of women in the labour market since the height of the WfH movement in the late 1970s, we have not seen a decrease in housework, though we have certainly seen it reorganized and shifted. The Global North's growing need for cheap reproductive labour is met by the work of women from the global South, who have been forced into this work by their economic circumstances:

To resolve the crisis of reproduction and of care services in the North, we turned to foreign female labour. Women from the South who answered the call had to, in turn, suffer the repercussions in the organization of their own family and in their own needs for care... In fact, the children left behind by migrant mothers see themselves entrusted primarily to other women who, if they themselves are working outside the home, must in turn find another resource, usually yet another woman, more available, and generally poorer, to care for children of the first.⁹⁷

(Toupin 2014, 319-20)

This vicious cycle described by Toupin highlights the way social reproduction has been privatized, and is increasingly only available to those who have a certain level of economic security. As Toupin shows us, the increased entry of women into the workforce

⁹⁷ "Pour résoudre la crise de reproduction et des services de soins au Nord, on a eu recours à la main-d'oeuvre féminine étrangère. Les femmes du Sud ayant répondu à l'appel ont dû, à leur tour, subir les contrecoups dans leur propre organisation familiale et dans leurs propres besoins en matière de soins... En effet, les enfants laissés au pays par les mères migrantes, se voient confiés essentiellement à d'autres femmes qui, si elles-mêmes travaillent à l'extérieur, doivent à leur tour trouver une autre ressource, généralement encore une femme, plus disponible, et généralement plus pauvre qu'elle, pour s'occuper des enfants de la première." Translation by C. Rousseau.

has been at the expense of women from the Global South. This is not to say that women should be pushed back into the home, as though that is where they belong. Instead, this crisis of reproduction further reinforces the need, first identified by WfH feminists, to have social reproduction socialized and to have this work made visible through the implementation of a wage. The analyses put forward by WfH are useful in looking at social reproduction, in both formal and informal sectors, as it is increasingly outsourced and commodified: i.e. surrogacy, sperm and egg donors, milk sharing, etc. These “jobs,” as well as more recognizable forms of social reproduction, are low-paid, precarious, exploitative, and often have poor working conditions with little worker protection. After all, if the work done in these feminized job ghettos have been done for free by women in the home, why should they be valued any more when someone else does them outside the home? Live-in caregiver programs, for example, are a major problem because they are used to capitalize on the economic inequalities of globalization while continuing to marginalize migrant workers or others with precarious status, particularly women of colour, reinforcing the systemic marginalization of all women through the continued devaluation of housework. As long as housework is seen as non-productive and as work that is unskilled, then women who work in this area will continue to be economically and socially disadvantaged.

Reproducing Movements and Moving Forward

My own interest in revisiting the WfH movement stems not only from the fact that social reproduction continues to inhabit a central position in the exploitation of women and working class people on a global scale, but also in WfH’s inability to sustain itself as a

movement. One current focus in Federici's work is to consider how the creation of collective reproductive structures will allow individuals to participate in social movements, and will also ensure that these movements are able to sustain themselves:

This is one of the issues that has most interested me during these last years and to which I intend to dedicate a good part of my future work, both on account of the current reproduction crisis—including the destruction of an entire generation of young people, mostly of young people of color, now rotting in our jails—and on account of the recognition growing among activists in the United States that a movement that does not learn to reproduce itself is not sustainable. In New York, this realization has for some years inspired a discussion about “self-reproducing movements” and “communities of care” side by side with the development of a variety of community-based structures. (Federici 2012a, 12)

The inability of WfH to sustain itself as a movement is not necessarily a criticism against the group itself, as there were many factors that contributed to the movement's disappearance. The failure of the International Feminist Collective and the WfH movement is a valuable place to look when we are thinking about how to build social movements that are self-sustaining and able to reproduce themselves.

In addition to focusing on building self-sustaining movements, we also need to rethink an anti-capitalist, feminist strategy. Capitalism continues to produce scarcity, as well as promote environmental degradation and different forms of servitude in the growing informal labour market. For Federici, “All of this is very structural; it's part of the DNA and keeps reproducing itself in different ways. That said, to me, I think a feminist perspective is still very important. One of the main instruments and aspects of

capitalist exploitation is the devaluation of reproduction” (Federici 2012b). The devaluation of social reproduction means continuing to render invisible all the different activities that produce life, and “women pay the biggest price of this devaluation. It’s not a matter of wanting to naturalize reproduction as a women's vocation, but it's a question of recognizing who is the subject of this work” (ibid.). As we have seen an increase in the number of women in the labour market since the height of this movement in the late 1970s, we have not seen a decrease in housework (that is still done predominantly by women), though we have certainly seen it reorganized and shifted with the growth of the service industry. The persistent perception of housework as a natural function performed for free by women continues to have consequences and repercussions for women in the waged labour market. The solution to this oppression should not be seeing equality with men, because that would mean reinforcing structures of patriarchy and white, heterosexual male hegemony. Instead, fighting against the so-called feminine condition that is embodied in reproductive labour means that we are opening a dialogue that will look at the value of reproductive work, rather than continuing to assume that this work is optional, natural, or a labour of love.

As WfH feminists fought for social wages through welfare, day care, family allowance, access to healthcare, etc., they were looking ahead to a time when housework could be recognized as "work;" here the struggle was to have this work recognized with a wage so that it could be refused and socialized. As Federici noted, "Wages for housework...is a revolutionary demand not because by itself it destroys capital, but because it forces capital to restructure social relations in terms more favourable [sic] to us and consequently more favorable [sic] to the unity of the class" (Federici 1975a, 19).

Looking even further ahead was the goal of having everyone work less and to abolish all forms of work and social relations under capitalism. The restructuring of social relations is the conduit through which the current system of patriarchal domination will be broken down. In moving away from this relational structure and building something new, we can begin to imagine new roles for both women *and* men.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Timeline

The feminist groups connected to Wages for Housework I consider in my dissertation went through multiple shifts and changes in name, reflecting the changes and solidification of political perspective and organizational practice. The following timeline is provided in order to mitigate some of the confusion that may arise as I talk about these different groups in my dissertation. This timeline is not entirely comprehensive, but should help in sorting through the different changes and different events taking place relevant to the activity of Wages for Housework.

1969

- The *Front de libération des femmes du Québec* forms. (Canada)
- Bill C-150 passes, decriminalizing homosexuality through the Criminal Law Amendment Act. (Canada)

1970

- Baslini-Fortuna Law makes divorce more accessible for women. (Italy)

1971

- *Lotta Femminista* groups emerge, interested in examining the oppression of women from a Marxist-feminist perspective, focusing on housework. (Italy)
- The earliest iteration of *Salario al lavoro domestico* emerges with the *Movimento di Lotta femminile* (a short lived group), which was connected to *Lotta Femminista*. (Italy)

1972

- Feminists meet in Padua to talk about feminist activism oriented around the issue of housework. A manifesto is published to outline the perspective of feminist struggle aiming at the family and unwaged labour as the root of oppression. The International Feminist Collective demanding wages for housework is officially formed. (Italy)
- Publication of *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James.
- Meeting of the English Feminist Movement, which was attended by women from across the globe, including Italy and Canada. (England)

1973

- Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa are on a speaking tour across North America, spreading the Wages for Housework perspective. (Canada/United States)
- Montreal Feminist Symposium, "A Change is About to Come" (June 2-3). Part of James' and Dalla Costa's speaking tour, this is the first time most women in Canada would hear about the WfH perspective. Dalla Costa left to return to Italy for the Gigliola Pierobon trial. (Canada)
- Gigliola Pierobon trial begins on June 5, 1973. (Italy)
- Disaccord builds in *Lotta Femminista* over the issue of political action on a national scale and how to build the movement. An abortion demonstration on June 5 led to

conflict about whether or not to carry banners promoting the WfH perspective at the demo. (Italy)

1974

- March 8: International Women's Day in Mestre is the official "coming out" party for the struggle for wages for housework from the state. (Italy)
- May 12: Referendum attempts to repeal the 1970 Baslini-Fortuna divorce law; the referendum ultimately fails. *Lotta Femminista* organized against this referendum. (Italy)
- Fall: Feminists in Toronto leave The New Tendency to start organizing for Wages for Housework. (Canada)
- Fall: Official split of *Lotta Femminista*: Group 2 (the via dei Tadi group) opposed a national strategy fearing it would draw attention away from local actions. Further divisions regarding the wage: was it literal or symbolic? Formation of the *Comitato Tri-Veneto per il Salario al lavoro domestico*. By October 1974, *Lotta Femminista* ceased as a national group, and *Salario al Lavoro Domestico* groups emerged. (Italy)
- October: Wages for Housework conference is organized by the New York Wages for Housework Committee. (United States)

1975

- February: Conference in Montreal organized by the Montreal Power of Women Committee. The Toronto Wages for Housework Group 1 is expelled from the network with a vote of 43-2, with 20 abstentions. (Canada)
- May 1: First time May Day is officially connected to the struggle of housewives in the form of mass action, affirming that housework is *work*. (Italy)
- July: Conference in London organized by the London Power of Women Committee. (England)
- October: Conference in Toronto organized by the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee. The Montreal Power of Women Collective is barred from attending the meeting as a result of political differences. (Canada)
- Fall: By this point, the International Wages for Housework network is firmly established.

1976

- Toronto Wages for Housework and Wages Due launch "Hands Off the Family Allowance," a petition campaign. (Canada)
- July: Conference organized by Wages Due Lesbians, "Toward A Strategy for the Lesbian Movement." Resolutions passed at this conference acknowledged that lack of money keeps women powerless, forcing many lesbians to remain in the closet; demanded for wages for housework from the government. (Canada)

1977

- Ontario Legislature debates the Family Law reform Bill, awarding 50% of assets to each spouse in divorce cases in an attempt to recognize the contribution of women to the family. (Canada)
- April: Conference in Chicago organized by the Chicago Wages for Housework group.

1978

- The Lesbian Mothers Defense Fund is established in Ontario to support lesbian mothers in custody battles and navigating the homophobic legal system. (Canada)
- May 22: Legalization of abortion through Law 194. There would still be restrictions in terms of criteria for access. (Italy)

**Appendix B:
Interview Subjects**

Name	Affiliation	Date of Interview	Location of Interview
Francie Wyland	Toronto Wages for Housework Committee; Wages Due Lesbians	March 11, 2012	Toronto
Dorothy Kidd	Toronto Wages for Housework Committee	May 27, 2013	Skype
Louise Toupin	<i>Les Éditions remue-ménage; Centre des femmes</i>	January 18 & 19, 2012	Montreal
Nicole Lacelle	<i>Centre des femmes</i>	January 19, 2012	Montreal
Silvia Federici	New York Wages for Housework Committee	April 13, 2012	New York
Mariarosa Dalla Costa	<i>Comitato Tri-Veneto per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico</i>	June 1, 2012	Padua
Franca Singra	<i>Comitato Tri-Veneto per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico</i>	June 1, 2012	Padua
Sonia Cavazzana	<i>Comitato Tri-Veneto per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico</i>	June 1, 2012	Padua
Giuseppina Sauffill-Paggi	<i>Comitato Tri-Veneto per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico</i>	June 1, 2012	Padua
Lucia Donalice	<i>Comitato Tri-Veneto per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico</i>	June 1, 2012	Padua
Antonella Picchio	<i>Gruppo Femminista per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico di Modena</i>	June 9, 2012	Venice

Appendix C:
List of Groups connected to Wages for Housework

Canada

Cora Bookmobile
Lesbian Mothers' Defense Fund
The Montreal Power of Women Collective
Toronto Wages for Housework Committee
Wages Due Lesbians
Winnipeg Coalition
[Short-lived groups in Kitchener and Windsor]

Italy

Collettivo Femminista Napoletana per il Salario al lavoro domestico (SLD)
Comitato per il SLD di Mestre-Venezia
Comitato per il SLD di Padova
Comitato per il SLD di Trentino
Comitato per il SLD di Trieste
Gruppo Femminista "Imagine" per il SLD di Varese
Gruppo Femminista per SLD di Bologna
Gruppo Femminista per SLD di Ferrara
Gruppo Femminista per SLD di Firenze
Gruppo Femminista per SLD di Modena
Gruppo Femminista per SLD di Ravenna
Gruppo Femminista per SLD di Reggio Emilia

England

England Power of Women Collective
English Prostitutes Collective

United States

Black Women for Wages for Housework
Boston Wages for Housework
Chicago Wages for Housework
New York Wages for Housework Collective
Oberlin Wages for Housework Collective
Wages for Housework Los Angeles
Wages for Schoolwork

Some Related Groups

Le Nemesiache (Italy)
Libreria delle donne di Milano (Italy)
Lotta Continua (Italy)
Lotta Femminile (Italy)
Lotta Femminista (Italy)
Mother Led Union (Canada)

The New Tendency (Canada)
The Other Woman Collective (Canada)
Potere Operaio (Italy)
Rivolta Femminile (Italy)
Wages for Schoolwork (United States)
Waitresses Action Committee (Canada)
Winnipeg Coalition (Canada)

Appendix D: Interview Format and Sample Interview Questions

My interviews were semi-structured. I sent the interviewees questions ahead of time, so they would have time to contemplate answers, and when needed, translated interview questions into either French or Italian. When possible, I conducted my interviews in person. For these, the location was determined by the interviewee, and I encouraged them to answer in whichever language they felt most comfortable expressing themselves.

Regarding my questions: I let my interview subjects know that I was interested in hearing about their own experiences with WfH, whether formally or otherwise. I used some of the following questions as a guideline to prompt thinking about participants' time with the movement, open to the possibility that these questions would lead to other discussions.

Questions in English:

1. Were you involved in any other movements or organizations prior to your involvement with WfH? If so, what was your experience of your time in these groups? What was the reaction when you left to join an autonomous women's organization?
2. There was a saying popular in the 1960s and 1970s in connection to the women's rights movement: The personal is political. What about wages for housework appealed to you? Were you a "housewife"? How did you view your relationship to housework? The wage?
3. How did the women involved in the collectives handle the every-day struggles of life? Were a lot of "housewives" involved? How were things like daycare managed? How were women supported?
4. How do you view Italian feminism? What were some of the concerns of the movement in the 1960s and 1970s? What were the major issues facing women at this time? How are they connected to housework?
5. Feminism in Italy seems to have had a lot contend with in the 1960s and 1970s (and continues, I'm sure). On one hand is the oppressive Catholic Church, which continues to hold some kind of authority in Italy. On the other hand is the strong presence of the Italian Communist Party, which has a history of also being fairly conservative. What was your experience of these tensions?
6. What issues were important for the struggle for women in Toronto? What kind of work was done to connect with other women in Canada? What do you think were some of the reasons the group did not have widespread support or growth in Canada?
7. There was a great amount of literature circulated regarding the split between the

two Toronto groups. Some of the issues that led to the expulsion seem to have stemmed from differences regarding questions of leadership, local autonomy vs. an international perspective, the inclusion of men at meetings, etc. Can you explain your position with regards to these conflicts?

8. WFH has been criticized - both by feminist groups and other groups on the "Left" - as being overly dogmatic. What do you think about this criticism? Is it valid?
9. The movement seemed to have a lot of activity in the 1970s, but seems to have died out. Why do you think this is? Did the nature of the group change after the 1970s?
10. What issues and strategies do you think are important going forward?
11. Any other information that you think is important?

Questions in French:

1. Étiez-vous impliquée dans d'autres mouvements ou organisations avant votre participation à WFH? Si oui, quelle était votre expérience dans ces groupes à l'époque? Quelle était la division du travail entre hommes et femmes? Quelle fut la réaction des hommes / autres femmes quand vous quittiez le groupe pour un groupe de femmes autonome?
2. Il y avait un slogan populaire dans les années 1960 et 1970 en rapport au mouvement des droits des femmes: « Le personnel est politique. » Quel aspect du WFH vous a interpellée? Étiez-vous un «ménagère»?
3. WFH a été un mouvement international qui a commencé en Italie et s'est étendu ailleurs. Quel était votre point de vue du mouvement international? Pensez-vous qu'il y avait beaucoup d'échange d'information entre les divers collectifs? Existait-il un partage de stratégies?
4. Vous avez dit qu'il n'y avait pas de groupe Salaire au travail domestique à Montréal en tant que tel, mais qu'il y avait des femmes qui s'intéressaient à cette réalisation de ce projet. De votre point de vue, pourquoi un tel groupe n'a jamais existé?
5. Comme femme francophone, quelle relation aviez-vous avec les femmes anglophones de l'Ontario? Voyez-vous une différence dans la façon dont le féminisme a été articulé? Pensez-vous qu'il y avait une différence dans les préoccupations ou les objectifs?
6. J'ai lu quelques déclarations de différents collectifs WFH où on a beaucoup fait mention d'une conférence qui a eu lieu à Montréal en Février 1975. Il semble que la collective « Puissance des femmes de Montréal » (Montreal Power of Women

Collective) a été expulsé pour des raisons diverses, comme les différences sur des questions de direction, d'autonomie locale vs une perspective internationale, l'inclusion des hommes aux réunions, etc. Faisiez-vous partie de cette conférence? Quelle a été votre expérience?

7. Le mouvement WFH semble avoir beaucoup d'activités dans les années 1970, et il y avait quelques sous-groupes qui se sont formés par la suite (des groupes de lesbiennes, de femmes noires, etc.) Au cours des dernières décennies, le mouvement semble avoir disparu. Pourquoi pensez-vous?

Questions in Italian:

1. Sei stato coinvolto in altri movimenti o organizzazioni prima del vostro coinvolgimento con questo movimento? Tal caso, qual è stato la vostra esperienza del suo tempo in questi gruppi? Qual è stata la reazione quando aveva lasciato unire un'organizzazione di donne autonome?
2. C'era una saggezza popolare negli anni 1960 e 1970 riguardo al movimento per i diritti delle donne che dice: il personale è politico (o almeno questo è com'è stata articolata in Nord America). Perché il movimento appello a voi? Qual è stato il ruolo di autoconsapevolezza? Eri una "casalinga"? Come hai fatto a visualizzare la vostra relazione al lavoro domestico? Il salario?
3. Come vede il femminismo italiano? Quali sono state alcune delle preoccupazioni del movimento negli anni 1960 e 1970? Quali sono stati i principali problemi incontrati dalle donne in questo momento? Come sono collegati al lavoro domestico?
4. Il femminismo in Italia sembra aver avuto molto confrontarsi negli anni 1960 e 1970 (e continua, ne sono sicuro). Da una parte è la Chiesa cattolica oppressiva, che continua a tenere qualche tipo di autorità in Italia. D'altra parte è la presenza forte del Partito comunista italiano, che ha una storia di essere anche abbastanza conservatore. Qual è stata la tua esperienza di queste tensioni?
5. Sono state molte "casalinghe" coinvolti? Come hai fatto a gestire tutte le cose come asilo nido e altre responsabilità? Come sono state le donne supportato?
6. Questo è stato un movimento internazionale, a partire in Italia e diffondendo altrove. Come ha fatto il movimento per iniziare? Pensi che ci fosse molto di condivisione di informazioni tra i vari collettivi? Sono state prestite le strategie?
7. Com'è stato il movimento articolato in vari luoghi? Cioè, c'era una differenza di come il salario o lavori domestici sono stati concepiti nel Nord (che è più industrializzati) rispetto al Sud (che è molto più rurale)? Erravano le questioni lo

stesso in questi settori? Come sono state gli slogan, ecc., scelto? Chi era il target di riferimento?

8. Ho sentito parlare di un conflitto a Toronto tra i due gruppi, e un gruppo è stato espulso dal movimento. Ho anche sentito dire che c'era una divisione simile e conseguente espulsione con il gruppo di Padova. Alcuni dei problemi sembrano provenire dalle differenze per quanto riguarda questioni di leadership, autonomia locale contro una prospettiva internazionale, l'inclusione degli uomini nel corso di riunioni, ecc. Pensa che questi conflitti esistevano? Cosa ne pensi sono stati i temi di divisione?
9. Il movimento sembra aver avuto molta attività nel 1970, ma sembra essere estinta. Perché pensi che sia? C'è stato un cambiamento nella natura del gruppo in Italia dopo il 1970?
10. Quali problematiche e strategie pensate sono importanti per il futuro?

**Appendix E:
Informed Consent Form for Research**

Title of Project:
Wages for Housework in Italy and Canada

Principal Investigator: Christina Rousseau
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Purpose of the Study:

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. The information that I collect from these interviews will be used to inform my PhD dissertation. The purpose of the research project is to examine the history of Wages for Housework in Italy and Canada, as well as the debates about housework that emerged within this movement. The people interviewed for this project have been involved in various Wages for Housework collectives either on a local or international basis.

Procedures to be Followed:

This interview should take approximately one hour. The interview will be recorded in order to review your responses in more detail.

Statement of Confidentiality²:

Your participation in this research is confidential, and your name will not be used without your explicit consent. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by

¹ At this stage in my dissertation work, Marlene Kadar was my supervisor. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Marlene stepped down as my supervisor and Jacinthe Michaud took over.

² While all my interviewees had the option of remaining anonymous, they all chose to be named. The statement of confidentiality proved to be unnecessary in the end.

law. The recording of this interview and the notes I have taken will be stored and secured in a locked cabinet until the dissertation project is completed (approximately 2 years). Only I will have access to the recordings and interview notes. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared without your explicit consent.

Risk and Benefits of Participation:

These interviews are important because they will be contributing to a larger collective process of critical reflection of women's movement organizing in Italy and Canada, particularly on the issue of women's unwaged labour in the home. A benefit for participants is that they will have the opportunity to contribute to the narrative and history of this important movement. Some of the questions might make you uncomfortable due to the sensitive nature of the questions asked. All steps have been taken to minimize discomfort and you may refuse to answer any question and to withdraw from the study at any time.

Voluntary Participation:

Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You may stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all data generated as a consequence of your participation shall be destroyed.

Right to Ask Questions:

Please feel comfortable to ask questions or raise concerns at any time during this process. After the interview you may contact my supervisor (Marlene Kadar) or myself with any questions or concerns about this study. Contact information can be found at the top of this form. You may also direct questions or concerns to the Department of Humanities (416-736-5158), or if you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University (Tel. 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Subcommittee of York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

Legal Rights and Signatures:

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign

your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records:

I, _____, consent to participate in *Wages for Housework in Italy and Canada* by Christina Rousseau. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Optional - Additional Consent:

Please sign your name to indicate your consent for the following (as applicable):

Waive Anonymity

Participant Signature

Date

Authorize the Use of Photographs

Participant Signature

Date

Appendix F:
Certificate: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans; Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)



**Appendix G:
List of Archives Consulted**

Canada

Archives and Special Collections, University of Ottawa Library:
Wages for Housework; Wages Due Lesbians; Lesbian Mothers' Defense Fund Fonds
Ottawa, ON

Italy

Archivi, Biblioteche, Centri Documentazione delle Donne.
Rome, RM

Biblioteca Civica del Comune di Padova:
Donazione Mariarosa Dalla Costa.
Padua, PD

Personal Archives:

Louise Toupin
Montreal, QC

Gary Kinsman
Sudbury/Toronto, ON

John Huot
Toronto, ON