"*Archive of the Feminist Struggle for Wages for Housework. Donation by Mariarosa Dalla Costa*"

The archive contains various materials collected from the 1970s of the twentieth century to date by Mariarosa Dalla Costa thanks to her work as a militant of the Feminist Movement and scholar of the condition of women. The materials are related to a strand of the Feminist Movement which, in Italy, first called itself *Movimento di Lotta Femminile* (Women's Struggle Movement), then later *Lotta Femminista* (Feminist Struggle) and finally *Movimento dei Gruppi e Comitati per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico* (Movement of Groups and Committees for Wages for Housework), henceforth SLD. In English-speaking countries it is called the network of Wages for Housework (henceforth WFH) although, undoubtedly, groups aimed at claiming pay for housework have used other names. One example is the Power of Women Collective in London. Even in Italy there have been variations on the name, such as the *Collettivo Femminista Napoletano* (Neapolitan Feminist Collective) for the SLD in Naples, the Feminist Group *Immagine* (Image) for the SLD of Varese. A separate case is the Feminist Group of Pescara which, having always collaborated on initiatives of the SLD circuit, was included in the directory of the SLD circuit in the newspaper "*Le operaie della casa*" (Houseworkers). Since it was impossible to continuously update the lists, there were groups for the SLD that arose which did not appear in the directory of the paper, such as the Feminist Group for the SLD of San Dona di Piave and others. Also in Milan there was an SLD presence which then became part of a broader Collective at the city level; and in Rome there were two groups for the SLD which strangely did not appear in the newspaper. Even more so, it was almost impossible to keep track of the WFH groups that arose abroad. The paper did, however, take into account the principal groups. Many other groups became known when, with the repression of the late '70s, numerous telegrams of solidarity arrived which, along with other supporting documents in the archive, constitute an important source, giving an idea of the real expansion of the SLD / WFH network. In Padua, *Lotta Femminista* would in time constitute the moment for launching the formation of other feminist groups that were organizing themselves autonomously; one such example is *Gruppo Femminista Medie* (Middle School Feminists Group).

It was, therefore, a feminism of an international, militant, anti-capitalist dimension, leading to big struggles in view of a radical change of the existing condition. The materials contained in the archive are mainly related to the '70s, having been designed for immediate use in the work of practical intervention (leaflets and brochures); but there are also more analytical materials which were for the political formation of activists (small books), as well as more thorough study materials concerning issues considered crucial. Even after the '70s, this overall production continued along

the various paths of the exponents of the network, modulating with the new evolutions of the discourse of its initiatives and the nodes considered important. Collected here is what was possible to attain up to now, with the intention of integrating it further. The archive also includes paper documents produced after the '70s that testify to militant activity in various countries, even though, as the era of new information technologies takes over, the flyer and brochure tend to disappear. There are also multimedia materials.

In Italy, the foundation and the start of *Lotta Femminista* took place in June of 1971, when Mariarosa Dalla Costa who, with her experience of years in *operaismo* (the workers' movement), and having begun a political relationship with Selma James in London, convened a meeting in Padua. She asked some of her female companions to come to this meeting and put to their attention a document she had drafted. Her writing dealt with unpaid housework as work that affects the lives of all women and invited women everywhere to launch various forms of struggle to make it cost. The perspective in which the subject matter was treated corresponded with that of other struggles for wages that were led in factories, in universities and throughout the territory by workers and students. The latter group was fighting against the authoritarianism of professors and parents, against the cost of studying, and was also asking for a grant for the work of training their workforce. This archive also contains documents about the struggles of the students as well as those of temporary employees of the university. With regard to housework, women wanted to make it cost; they would require a system of services that allowed time off for the housewife, not just for the woman employed outside the home; they would require a halving of outside work time so that everyone, men and women, could devote time to reproduction, time for duties but also for an emotional exchange.

Within the Italian area of interest, from which most of the material archived here comes, some things should be clarified. The SLD strand of which we speak represents one of the two great souls of feminism, the other being that of *autocoscienza* (raising consciousness). This one shared significant feelings with the American practice of raising consciousness and favored small groups of women who recounted and compared their stories in the first person. Baring one's personal experience to others was a way of denying an imposed identity, fixed in the role of wife and mother, and trying to build another identity. One of the aspects that emerged more dramatically through the experience of the small group was the discovery of violence that women experience. In the strand of raising consciousness there were groups with different names which were particularly strong in Milan and in other large cities. In the early '70s this strand was also in touch with *Psychanalyse et Politique* (Psychoanalysis and Politics) a psychoanalytic group in Paris headed by Antoinette

Fouqué. The raising consciousness strand had little sympathy for demonstrations and, even on large issues of the Feminist Movement such as abortion, it sometimes preferred not to participate. It rejected what it called "external commitments."

That is how the two great characterizations in the Italian Feminist Movement were delineated, often labeled as the "psychoanalytic" strand and the "political" strand.

They did, however, find common ground in the break with the discourse of emancipation, in not having any interest for the discussion on equality since it was tainted by the vice of homologation, and in their refusal to have anything to do with the institutions.

"Liberation," not "emancipation" (a tiring and limited conquest of previous generations) was the new standard that was always being filled with new content as women advanced in their journey and claimed their human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as their citizenship rights. They wanted to be free from male authority, free from economic dependence on man, free from having to suffer violence, free to decide about sexuality and procreation, free to exercise self-determination in every aspect of their lives.

The "difference" was the other big statement against the discourse of equality. The difference being the specificity of the condition of women, a difference that should emerge and which required specific answers.

The SLD strand of *Lotta Femminista* saw the difference as it fit into the capitalist sexual division of labor. Men were paid for their work in the production of goods, women were not paid for the work of production and reproduction of labor power. This was the unbearable contradiction: an unwaged worker in a wage economy. This was the hierarchizing difference between man and woman. This was the unbearable condition, being a housewife (Italy at the time had a particularly high rate of housewives) obliged to continuously supply work to reproduce the entire family but dependent on a man for support, and by this dependency hampered in all her life choices.

Breaking this contradiction meant launching struggles everywhere in order to make housework cost. But it was also a great cultural awakening. The theme of housework asserted itself across the Feminist Movement in place of emancipation through work outside the home, even in those circuits that did not seek to require its salarization. Women increasingly rejected a femininity made of endless willingness to reproduce others for free.

If the first signs of a feminist awakening date from the second half of the 1960s, undoubtedly, in Italy, a Feminist Movement that saw thousands of women take to the streets, demonstrate, organize fights, dates to the beginning of the 1970s in a context already characterized by other struggles waged forcefully by workers, students and technicians, with the very active presence of an extra-parliamentary left. From this context came numerous militant feminists who were soon joined by many others that had no previous experience of militancy. Various women from the strand of *Lotta Femminista* came from years of militancy in *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power). They knew that a great change that offered new and consistent solutions to the problem of human reproduction could not take place unless women's determination could be heard. Their path, therefore, would tend to build struggles on housework and its conditions, not only in homes and neighborhoods, but also at workplaces outside the home where they wanted to make visible the existence of housework, which all other work depends on. So there were actions like bringing young children to the office, or struggles like those of the secretaries of professional firms in Trieste who refused to continue to perform additional tasks that were asked of them only because they were women. Or struggles like those in the Solari Factory in Udine which sought to reduce the time of reproduction that women had to spend on themselves for treatment and medical check-ups. They asked the management to organize a service with a doctor who would come into the factory. This would save the workers work-days that otherwise would have been lost to bureaucratic paper-work and medical visits. And they got what they asked for. The example then spread to other factories. Of course these, like many other struggles and moments of mobilization, were documented first and foremost in the newspaper "*Le operaie della casa*" and in other archived materials.

If, in Italy, the claim to have housework cost, to expect retribution for it starting with the most burdensome part, that is raising children, seemed unrealistic, abroad, instead, there were substantial examples to which the militant SLD-WFH network looked: primarily the Family Allowances in England, the Family Allowance Funds in France, the allowances given to Welfare Mothers in the United States, all of which represented a first concrete level of retribution for this long fatigue.

But mobilization on the matter of housework was intertwined with mobilization on all those aspects, those rights denied to feminine life that prevented the woman from emerging as a person. This, in fact, was the great process that was set in motion with the Feminist Movement. Wanting to emerge as a person meant wanting to emerge as an autonomous subject, with all rights and fundamental freedoms, a subject who claimed the ability of self-determination in all areas of her life, starting from sexuality and procreation, affirming that female sexuality is not

only in function of the needs of man and is not only in function of procreation. It was a hot topic in those years, one that was constantly intertwined with that of the right of women to knowledge of their bodies, with that of health, with that of violence, with that of abortion. In Padua, a trial on abortion held on June 5, 1973, was used for the first time as a moment of political mobilization in which the whole Movement participated. It was the first act over a course of years that would lead to the legalization of abortion (Law 194/1978).

The opening of the discourse on sexuality, including the right to be able to live one's sexual orientation, contributed, both in Padua and on a national level, to creating a terrain for debate where it became easier to take the floor for the male homosexual movement as well. A full set of their magazine "*Fuori*" (Out) was donated to the Augusto Finzi Archives at the public library in Marghera by Mariarosa Dalla Costa a few years ago when the possibility of building this archive in Padua had not yet materialized. However, even in the discourse on sexuality with people of the same sex, what mattered to the SLD network was to highlight that even a gay lifestyle, although in this case the division of labor is less fixed and hierarchical than in a heterosexual couple, does not solve the problem of housework.

There was also a broad commitment to promoting women's information on what today would be called "reproductive health" and urging the State to do it. The amount of work that was dedicated to building knowledge about everything related to women's health which was spread through small pamphlets, mimeographs and books is amazing. In truth, the books are small and this shows that there was little time to write them and little time to read them, since much of the time was devoted to organization and action. And publishers could not make big investments so the books had to be of limited size and essentially sold. Two such examples are the Marsilio series entitled "*Salario al lavoro domestico – strategia internazionale femminista*" ("Wages for Housework - International Feminist Strategy" and the book *Un lavoro d'amore* (*The Work of Love*), by Giovanna F. Dalla Costa, a fundamental essay on the relationship between physical sexual violence and the gratuity of housework, published by *Edizioni delle Donne* in Rome in 1978. Keep in mind that this building of another knowledge by the Feminist Movement was part of a horizon of construction of other knowledge conducted in the '70s by various movements. In Padua in 1974, the Committee for the SLD that had taken over from *Lotta Femminista* opened the first self-managed family planning clinic which would be followed by others in other cities. In this clinic many women and doctors willingly provided their services for free. The law (no. 405) establishing family planning clinics would come in 1975 while previously, in 1971, the legislation (art. 553 c.p.) prohibiting the advertising of contraceptives had been declared unconstitutional by

the Constitutional Court. The number of these clinics, however, would always remain far below what was expected and deficient in their functions of providing information and prevention. Much effort was made on the issue of childbirth to return it to the condition of a natural event, as opposed to its excessive medicalization, and to return to the woman the lead role with the right to have at that event the comfort of a trusted person. The Movement paid particular attention to the maternity wards in hospitals and the struggle at the St. Anna of Ferrara hospital remains famous. But overall, the whole field of gynecology was indicted, being still largely in the hands of male doctors, often authoritarian and rough in their relationships with patients. Inquiries were also held in public clinics where women, often posing as patients, went to test the quality of the service. All around maternity there was a hum of feminist research: the Movement for active birth was outlined; Andria, a national coordination of obstetricians, gynecologists and midwives who were particularly attentive to the lesson of the Feminist Movement, was formed; Andria's mouthpiece Istar, a multidisciplinary journal on birth, was established. The same circuit would be very important later in the '90s when the question of hysterectomy abuse was raised.

In 1974, the referendum on divorce was won, thereby allowing this relatively new institution to be part of Italy's legal system. In 1975, the new family law focusing on equality between spouses entered into force. In fact, the institutional response to the needs of the Feminist Movement was articulated according to the classic form of emancipation and, from 1972-79, the number of women involved in paid employment would increase by 1,500,000. Things were more functional now that women could decide everything regarding their family and employment outside the home on an equal footing with their spouse.

The other major issue addressed was that of prostitution. In 1958 the Merlin Law (no. 75) had abolished the regulation of prostitution. Henceforth, prostitution would not be a crime while the exploitation of the prostitution of others was. Consequently, the State could no longer profit from this activity. In the '70s, prostitution itself was no longer a crime in many European countries, but in practice it was criminalized in various ways. Furthermore, male violence was often a common practice that was rather taken for granted by the institutions. In 1975, the murder of yet another prostitute in Lyon induced her street companions to occupy churches and begin to organize themselves as a movement. On June 16th, 1976, the prostitutes held their first meeting at the theater "*La Mutualité*" in Paris. In the same year in the United States, in New York, frequent raids led public opinion to think that locking up prostitutes in Eros Centers would be the ideal solution. Frequent raids also occurred in San Francisco, so even there the prostitutes rebelled and, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, began to assert their rights, first of all to not be exploited by others,

to not suffer violence from clients and police, and to keep their children with them. The big breakthrough that happened was that prostitutes decided to speak in the first person, appearing in public, refusing invisibility, victimization and ghettoization. But above all, they refused letting others discuss their choice in only moral terms and instead insisted discussing it as a job. Since then the term *sexworkers* was coined and used universally. Even in Italy there would be meetings in which prostitutes spoke in the first person and, through their initiative, committees for the rights of prostitutes would be born. But above all, speaking of prostitution in terms of work would put more light on the poor choices of women forced into being either economically dependent on a man or having to hold two jobs for very low pay. So much so, that some international circuits of prostitutes would pronounce themselves in favor of wages for housework. And there is documentation of all this in this archive. But compared to the situation in which this assertion of rights was given, first among which the right not to be exploited by others, neoliberal globalization would put women from poorer countries, in conditions of weakness and blackmailed by criminal organizations, on the streets of the first world.

In 1975, the ever more impetuous growth of the Feminist Movement in various countries led the United Nations to proclaim 1975 the International Women's Year, to announce a conference in Mexico City on "Women, Development and Peace" and to devote the new decade to the same topic. At that Conference, Northern women would meet with Southern women and discover they had different priorities. Poverty, not discrimination, was the first problem for those who came from "developing" countries. But even this conference would be perceived with a certain indifference by the Feminist Movement which was never enthusiastic in front of institutional events, especially if a high institution was involved. So there is almost no trace of this in the literature of the Movement.

In 1979, the General Assembly of the United Nations approved the Convention Against All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which would go into effect in 1981. Conceived in only "negative" terms, that is, by listing the areas in which there must not be discrimination against women and, on the other hand, committing states to take action if it does happen, CEDAW covers every aspect of a woman's life and remains the most important charter on the subject of discrimination. But for the Feminist Movement, even this charter would remain a dead letter, virtually unknown, although later it would be the charter that obligated signatory states, including Italy, to take a series of steps regarding this discrimination. Its fault, if anything, is that it did not expressly contemplate violence as a form of discrimination.

Yet violence, after housework, was the other big issue that emerged in the feminism of the ‘70s, in particular sexual violence that women experience. In Italy, the Rocco code still ranked sexual violence among the offenses against public morals and decency. It was a difficult pregnancy, that of the Movement, that wanted to give birth to the woman as a person and then expected that violence against her be counted among crimes against the person. Various bills have been presented since 1979 when the first popular initiative was presented. Even the Communist Party in 1977 presented one but the House did not initiate discussion on it. The Feminist Movement, however, was a bit embarrassed because it did not want to help define penalties. Instead, it mobilized in conferences defined as international tribunals like the one on crimes against women held in Brussels from March 4-8, 1976, involving about 2,000 women from all over the world. And in that conference a resolution presented by the activists of the SLD / WFH network from Italy, Canada, the United States, Great Britain was voted almost unanimously in the final general assembly. The resolution says: “that unwaged housework is robbery with violence; that this work and wagelessness is a crime from which all other crimes flow; that it brands us for life as the weaker sex and delivers us powerless to employers, government planners and legislators, doctors, the police, prisons and mental institutions, as well as to men, for a lifetime of servitude and imprisonment. We demand wages-for-housework for all women from the governments of the world. We will organize internationally to win back the wealth that has been stolen from us in every country and to put an end to the crimes committed daily against us all.” (Document 01467, May 1976)

The Feminist Movement also mobilized around the trials of men who used violence against women. Its presence ensured, first of all, that the victim was not transformed into the accused. In 1975, the mobilization around the trial for the Circeo massacre, the case of two women who had been raped and tortured, one of whom died while the other survived by pretending to be dead, marked the start of this mobilization and being present in trials for violence. But obviously the Movement took a number of other initiatives on this issue, from publicly reporting the names of rapists, to torchlight processions, to much more. It also took the initiative of solidarity by offering its homes as a first source of shelter for women who wanted to leave their homes because they suffered violence. In Italy, it wasn’t until the early ‘90s that there were institutional initiatives such as the first anti-violence centers or homes for women (who suffer violence), while in different European countries they arose at the end of the ‘70s.

As for the law on sexual violence, 20 years would pass before it would go into effect. It would be law no. 66 of 1996. Finally, the crime of sexual violence redefined and articulated in the

case studies that considered this would be placed in the context of crimes against the person and no longer against public morals and decency.

Here, too, a passage that took place at the level of the United Nations three years earlier must be remembered. At the Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna from June 14th to 25th , 1993, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women was produced, which would be approved by the UN General Assembly in December 1993. It was the Charter that gave the most comprehensive definition of gender violence to which national standards refer.

Articles 587 and 544 of the Criminal Code were repealed in 1981, the former referring to the so-called "honor killing", the latter to the "shotgun wedding". But the Feminist Movement deserves credit for having first discovered and brought to light the extraordinary courage of Franca Viola in Alcamo (Trapani), who, in 1965, having been kidnapped by her rejected suitor, refused a "shotgun wedding". In 1968, the Constitutional Court established the unconstitutionality of Article 599 of the Criminal Code which considered adultery as an offense when committed by the wife, but not by the husband. In the same way, in 1971, the same Court, as mentioned above, would declare the unconstitutionality of Article 553 of the Criminal Code which prohibited the advertising of contraceptives.

In 1965, Socialist deputy Loris Fortuna presented a bill to parliament introducing divorce in Italy, which would go into effect in 1970. These flashes in the second half of the '60s and the dawn of the '70s indicated that some willingness to change the rules and customs that regulated the sphere of reproduction was brewing in the Italian social and institutional fabric. In this context, the behavior of Franca Viola could be seen as a forerunner of a behavior that would be multiplied with feminism. But we would have to go through the explosion of 1968, in which young people achieved a new lifestyle, and through the mass struggles of the late '60s and early '70s, for the condition of women to be thrown into question within a project of great transformation of which the Feminist Movement was the herald.

The great transformation ... this was the project that underlay all the action of the Feminist Movement of the '70s, just as it underlay the action of the other movements of the period. On the one hand, it was a demand which aimed to achieve better working conditions, more free time, a widening of the sphere of welfare; on the other hand, there was an ambition to gather such force as to cause a great change.

The territory as a social factory, struggles on wages by the various entities that inhabit it, all this was already a fundamental assumption of workerism. But the Feminist Movement revealed that women work behind the closed doors of the home; that the home is a production center, it produces and reproduces labor power daily; that capitalist accumulation passes through two great poles, the factory and the home. Therefore, the woman is the main subject of the social fabric. But there is no housework in Marx. This was the discovery of those most accustomed to handling *Capital*.

Also keep in mind that it was workerism which had promoted the direct relationship between militants and the works of Marx. At the University and in other places, continuous lectures were made on *Capital*; chapters 8, 24 and 25 of the first book were highlighted, dealing with the workday, original accumulation and the modern theory of colonization (or theory of systematic colonization) respectively. Such issues would come back to the forefront with the attack on common goods deployed around the planet by neoliberal globalization. Numerous studies on the various stages of capital were carried out. The discovery that there was no housework in Marx led to that set of analyses, by this circuit of scholars, which aimed to reveal the hidden phase of capitalist accumulation, that of the production and reproduction of labor power. Here we should mention, above all, the text *L'arcano della riproduzione* (*The Arcane of Reproduction),* by L. Fortunati, (Marsilio, Padua, 1981). So, also, we should mention the essay *Il grande Calibano* (*The Great Caliban),* by S. Federici and L. Fortunati, (FrancoAngeli, Mlano, 1984) that, relative to the period of original accumulation, rereads and reinterprets the trials of the witch hunts from a political point of view. This is just a first, brief mention of the fundamental texts but there are many others, representing stages of the analytical effort that was sustained, that are in the archive, representing essential components of the theoretical patrimony of the feminist strand we are dealing with.

For completeness with respect to the type of material donated, it must be said that the archive also houses a remarkable collection of feminist magazines from other groups, as well as newspaper sheets or journal issues or other papers coming from different subjects. This is explained by the fact that other active organizations felt that a mutual understanding of what was produced was interesting and so sent us their materials.

In the same way, it should be mentioned that some companions formed the Musical Group of the SLD Committee of Padua which composed and sang at events. These beautiful songs that they wrote and recorded on two albums, recently reproduced on CD, are kept in both versions at the archive. A theater group, which belonged to the same Committee, was also formed and performed the show "*L'identità*" (*The Identity*), adapted from a text by Maria Vittoria Arciero. The creativity,

the need to express themselves in new forms, was in fact an essential need that exploded across the movement, even among men. The struggle was accompanied by joyful gatherings; it was accompanied by a sociality without boundaries.

The repression in the late ‘70s ended a decade of activism on the part of various subjects, including feminists. Equal opportunity policies as an institutional response to the needs of the Feminist Movement replaced the problem of capitalist development with that of discrimination between men and women, directing the younger generation to circumscribe their analytical effort to that effect. The ‘80s were years of social normalization, the launch of neoliberalism, the drastic application in many countries of structural adjustment policies. For various members of the feminist circuit in question, the impossibility of continuing a discourse in the advanced areas pushed them toward the other end of development, to spending periods of time, working even, in countries of the southern part of the world where the neoliberal globalization of the ‘90s would bring new crucial nodes to their attention: first and foremost, the relationship between the expansion of capitalist relations and subsistence economies, the question of land, water and seeds as fundamental common goods, the policies of food, the global operation of proletarianization and lowering the cost of labor, of which globalization and restratification of the work of caring is an extremely significant outcome.

Renewed studies on the theme of original accumulation therefore return in the readings of neoliberal globalization. Reproduction, in a broader sense, is investigated not only for how it depends on human activities and the supplies of the state, but also for how it depends on the health of the planet Earth.

In a context in which all kinds of disasters that open lethal wounds in the balance of life on earth and in the sea are becoming more and more dramatic and frequent, not only are studies being conducted but new initiatives are being taken. The overall work of the members of the Feminist Movement that was the subject of this illustration thereby meets new generations and helps to create new circuits of analysis and militancy. A good witness to this is the online magazine *The Commoner* (www.thecommoner.org) and the complex of materials housed in this archive.

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